

**THE MISSIONARY AS CULTURAL MEDIATOR: ALEXANDER DON AND THE  
CHINESE AND EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES IN NEW ZEALAND**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

Missionaries to China, by virtue of their positions and knowledge, frequently became important channels of information between cultures. They transmitted Christianity and Western learning to Chinese people while simultaneously describing China to home audiences through their writings and public speaking. This thesis examines how Alexander Don, Presbyterian missionary to the New Zealand Chinese in Otago from 1879 to 1913, performed similar functions as a “cultural mediator”. For most of his career, Don was one of the most significant links between Chinese and European people in New Zealand. He developed a relationship with the Chinese community while simultaneously describing Chinese culture to Europeans in his published reports. While Don’s missionary career has been extensively documented, there have been no studies of his significance from the perspective of cross-cultural dialogue and exchange.

In this thesis I will discuss the ways that Don acted as a cultural mediator, as well as the factors that impelled him to do so. I will make an in-depth investigation of Don’s presentation of Chinese culture to European readers through his mission reports, and how this image changed over the course of his career. The picture Don painted was both motivated and influenced by his mission aims, his growing understanding of Chinese culture, and his developing rapport with Chinese people. In order to demonstrate that Don was unique as a cultural mediator in New Zealand, I will compare him to other sources of information on Chinese culture. It will be shown that he provided very different data and opinions from those conveyed by secular writers and authors, and that his descriptions were generally more detailed than those of other missionaries to the New Zealand Chinese and New Zealand missionaries in China. Don will also be compared to more well-known China missionaries, in order to show that he was similar to them in terms of educating Westerners about the East. Finally, I will weigh the impact of Don’s cultural mediation activities. Although he gained few converts, he played a crucial role in improving Sino-European understanding and relations. In the final analysis, Don had a greater impact in these areas than he did in the field of evangelism.

*To Hannah*

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Abbreviations Used.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Interactions with the Chinese.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Don’s Presentation of Chinese Culture.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Don and Other Views of Chinese Culture.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Don’s Impact.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Conclusions.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>102</b>

## Abbreviations Used

<b>AJHR</b>	<b>Appendix to the Journal of the House of</b>
<b>Representatives</b>	
<b>CVM</b>	<b>Canton Villages Mission</b>
<b>MHR</b>	<b>Member of the House of Representatives</b>
<b>NZP</b>	<b><i>New Zealand Presbyterian</i></b>
<b>NZPD</b>	<b>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates</b>

## Introduction

When Chinese people began coming to New Zealand in the 1860s to find wealth on the Otago goldfields, they formed the first group of non-European immigrants in the country. There existed a high degree of social separation and cultural misunderstanding between the Chinese and European communities in New Zealand, due to strong cultural differences combined with prejudice and feelings of superiority on both sides. This situation had been already played out in other Western countries to which Chinese people had migrated, such as the USA, Canada and Australia. Most of the Chinese people coming to New Zealand had little, if any, knowledge of the English language or the physical, social and cultural environment that they entered. Their intention was not to settle permanently, but rather to save money and return to China as quickly as possible; therefore, they had little incentive to adapt to local society. Among New Zealand Europeans there was a high degree of ignorance and prejudice regarding the Chinese migrants, and public attitudes towards them became increasingly hostile by the end of the nineteenth century, when a campaign to restrict or totally prohibit their entrance into the country gathered momentum. One of the few people in a position to bridge the gap between Chinese and European New Zealanders was Alexander Don (1857-1934), Presbyterian missionary to the Chinese in Otago and Southland from 1879 to 1913. Don spent many years evangelising and forming relationships among the Chinese community and described their culture to Europeans through his reports.

This thesis argues that Don acted as a “cultural mediator” between the Chinese and Europeans in New Zealand. A “cultural mediator” is a person who links two separate and culturally different social groups, heightening each one’s understanding of the other’s culture. This may be done by communicating information between the groups, as well as by promoting social integration, which leads to freer cultural dialogue. It was Don's calling that led him to become a mediator, for in the course of

mission work he gained an understanding of Chinese culture, and had both the motive and opportunity to convey cultural knowledge to both Europeans and Chinese. I will examine how Don acted as a mediator during his missionary career (1879-1913), and analyse the factors that caused him to perform this role. I aim to show that Don's representation of Chinese culture was unique in New Zealand, and that he was therefore a significant cultural mediator in his local context. This study is relevant to the history of the New Zealand Chinese and relations between China and New Zealand, since Don was an important link connecting these countries.

For the purposes of this thesis, the meaning of the term "culture" is based on Geert Hofstede's definition: "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category from another."<sup>1</sup> I adopt a two-level model of culture based on Hofstede's framework. The outer level is "practices," comprising all visible evidences of culture, such as rituals, language or etiquette. The inner level is "values," which are "broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others," and include beliefs, morals and norms of behaviour.<sup>2</sup> The desirable values or ideals of one culture can contrast strongly with those of another. In this model "religion" is a part of "culture," and will be treated as such for the purpose of analysing Don's impact as a mediator; however, it must be noted that Don and most other missionaries saw Christianity as independent from culture. The term "Chinese culture," unless otherwise stated, will refer to the culture of the New Zealand Chinese. Since these were nearly all rural commoners originating from a few counties around Canton (Guangzhou 廣州) in Guangdong Province, some aspects of their culture were specifically Cantonese. However, there are several typically "Chinese" values which in general hold true across China and throughout all of its regional cultures, and would also have formed part of New Zealand Chinese culture. In *This is China: the First 5,000 Years*, Yuan Haiwang gives a number of "concepts uniquely Chinese", such as social harmony, the connection with the ancestral home, and *qingke* 請客 (the customs of hospitality).<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the term "Western culture" is used specifically with reference to the culture of New Zealand Europeans, but includes the values, beliefs

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<sup>1</sup> Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, rev. and expanded 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Haiwang Yuan, ed., *This Is China: The First 5,000 Years* (Great Barrington, Massachusetts: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2010), 119–123.

and customs that were common in Western nations during this period. This was the culture that Don presented to the New Zealand Chinese. Māori appear rarely in Don's writings, and the Chinese in Otago at this time had little recorded contact with them; therefore "Europeans" – meaning people of European ancestry residing in New Zealand – are focused on as the group with whom the Otago Chinese immigrants had the most contact. It was between New Zealand Europeans and Chinese that Don acted as a cultural mediator.

Though the life and work of Alexander Don is a key chapter in the history of the New Zealand Chinese, few scholars have studied his career in depth. Dr James Ng, a medical doctor and prominent expert on the New Zealand Chinese, has conducted detailed research on Don and devoted a chapter to him in *Windows on a Chinese Past* (1993-1999), his exhaustive history of the Chinese in New Zealand.<sup>4</sup> In a 1983 *Otago Daily Times* article, Ng presents a mainly positive picture of Don, saying that he forged a Sino-European link that contributed to the eventual assimilation of the Chinese into wider New Zealand society.<sup>5</sup> However, Ng later came to view Don as an enemy of the Chinese, claiming that he denigrated them in his writings, did not make the most of opportunities to defend them, and blamed them for not responding to Christianity. Ng argues that Don was fairly "racist" towards the Chinese until about 1896, and states, "I would class him and Premier R. J. Seddon as the two worst New Zealand detractors of the Chinese last century."<sup>6</sup> In *Windows*, Ng explains this statement further, saying that Don's social status and perceived knowledge of Chinese civilisation made his negative remarks more powerful than popular racist propaganda.<sup>7</sup> Ng does think that Don's attitudes to the Chinese softened after 1901, and points out the practical assistance he gave them. Overall, though, Ng concludes that Don did not support Chinese people as much as he could have, neither through words nor deeds. This assessment has an obvious bearing on Don's performance as a cultural mediator: if he behaved poorly towards his Chinese audience and presented a negative picture of their culture to

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<sup>4</sup> James Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past*, vol. 2, *Round Hill; Alexander Don; Missions; Mixed Marriages; the Opium Evil* (Dunedin: Otago Heritage Books, 1995), 136–191.

<sup>5</sup> James Ng, "Rev. Alexander Don: His 'Good Harvest' Being Reaped at Last," *Otago Daily Times*, September 24, 1983.

<sup>6</sup> James Ng, *The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand and the Chinese* (Dunedin: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1988), 6, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 2:142.



Europeans, he would have helped to promote prejudice and ignorance in both communities.

However, other scholars have offered different judgements of Don. Susan Chivers made an analysis of his career in her 1992 MA thesis on the results of Christian missions to the Chinese in Otago. Chivers disagrees with Ng's characterisation of Don as racist and hostile towards the New Zealand Chinese. She concedes that Don initially displayed negative attitudes towards Chinese people, but argues that the main reason for this was not racism, but religion; that is, Don became frustrated over his mission's lack of results and therefore represented Chinese people and culture in a poor light.<sup>8</sup> Chivers further notes that Don eventually adopted a more positive stance towards the New Zealand Chinese, and states that he later grew to understand and appreciate his audience, becoming "converted by those he sought to convert."<sup>9</sup> Chivers concludes that Don's overall impact as a missionary was beneficial: while not bringing many Chinese people to Christianity, he aided them in other ways – by defending them against discrimination, giving practical support, and establishing organisations like the Dunedin Chinese Church and Canton Villages Mission (CVM) – the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand's mission to China. All these activities, Chivers says, strengthened the bonds between Chinese and Europeans in New Zealand. More recently, Brian Moloughney and John Stenhouse have made an assessment of Don that agrees with Chivers' in many respects. They argue that, in the face of an anti-Chinese movement shaped by colonial nationalism, Don was a prominent supporter of the Chinese and conducted much humanitarian work on their behalf.<sup>10</sup>

While previous scholarship has looked at the conduct and results of Don's mission work, this thesis examines how and why he acted as a cultural mediator. In the first chapter, the means through which Don and the New Zealand Chinese interacted with and learned about each other will be examined. Don's understanding of Chinese culture in general, and the New Zealand Chinese sojourners in particular, developed in several ways – beginning with the study he undertook to prepare for missionary work,

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Chivers, "Religion, Ethnicity and Race: The Mission of the Otago Church to the Chinese 1860-1950" (MA Thesis, University of Otago, 1992), 140.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Moloughney and John Stenhouse, "'Drug-besotten, Sin-begotten Fiends of Filth': New Zealanders and the Oriental Other, 1850-1920," *New Zealand Journal of History* 33, no. 1 (1999): 61.

and continuing as he observed and communicated with New Zealand Chinese in person. This interactive process developed Don's awareness of Chinese culture, enabling him to convey information to other Europeans. On the other side of the coin, New Zealand Chinese were exposed to Don's presentation of Western culture. While remaining focused on preaching the Christian gospel to his audience, Don also attempted to educate Chinese people about other areas of Western culture. Don's position within the New Zealand Chinese community allowed him to both teach and learn from them, preparing the way for him to become a cultural mediator.

The second chapter examines the other side of Don's role as mediator: how he represented Chinese culture to New Zealand Europeans, mainly through mission reports and other articles published in church periodicals. Earlier studies have focused on Don's attitudes to Chinese people, but he did more than merely criticise, praise or defend them. His frequent writings built up an image of Chinese culture by offering detailed information on a variety of topics, accompanied by his own interpretations and judgements. By communicating his knowledge, Don aimed to gain European support for his mission and explain the lack of Chinese response to Christianity. Both Ng and Chivers have noted that Don's views of Chinese people and culture became more positive over time; I refine this observation, arguing that his attitudes were initially negative but clearly improved from about 1897 onwards. I also investigate the factors that shaped and altered Don's presentation of culture – a question hitherto not completely explored. His depiction of the New Zealand Chinese community was moulded by a number of related factors, including his mission aims, a growing knowledge of Chinese culture, and a deepening personal rapport with Chinese people.

Prior research on Don has failed to address properly the importance of his role as a channel of information between Chinese and Europeans in New Zealand. Moloughney has pointed out that Don was instrumental in beginning New Zealand's relationship with China and "Chineseness";<sup>11</sup> nevertheless, this issue has not yet been deeply investigated. In Chapter 3, I aim to establish Don's significance as a cultural mediator by comparing him with other sources on Chinese culture, in order to demonstrate that the image he conveyed was unique in New Zealand. Don's focus and

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<sup>11</sup> Brian Moloughney, "Translating Culture: Rethinking New Zealand's Chineseness," in *East by South: China in the Australasian Imagination*, ed. Charles Ferrall, Paul Millar, and Keren Smith (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005), 393.

tone contrasted sharply with the views of the Chinese that were expressed in secular arenas such as Parliamentary debates and newspapers. The reason for this was that Don and most other New Zealand Europeans had different attitudes and concerns, as well as a different level of understanding, with regard to Chinese people and society. I therefore argue against Ng's assertion that Don was similar to racist anti-Chinese campaigners such as Richard Seddon. In addition, Don offered greater detail about Chinese culture than other missionaries in New Zealand. After the CVM began in 1901, its workers described local culture and society in their letters home; however, they also usually focused on different areas to Don, and did not at first have as deep an understanding of Chinese culture as he had attained. Thus, Don was generally the most detailed and accurate source of information on Chinese culture in New Zealand during his career. In the last section of this chapter, I look at how Don's cultural mediation was similar to the activities of many other China missionaries. His motives for transmitting information and the factors that determined his views were typical of the China mission movement, for they stemmed from both the evangelical imperative and the cultural understanding that missionaries gained via their contact with Chinese society.

In the final chapter, the results of Don's work will be evaluated from the perspective of cultural mediation. Existing scholarship has mainly viewed him as a missionary, and has attempted to discover the reasons why the New Zealand Chinese generally did not respond to his Christian message. However, I argue that while Don's official aim was to convert the Chinese, he unintentionally became an effective cultural mediator – a common outcome of missionary work in China, as John King Fairbank has noted.<sup>12</sup> I will show that Don's failure at evangelism does not reflect poorly on his effectiveness as a mediator, because the New Zealand Chinese rejection of Christianity was caused by numerous factors that did not stem directly from his personal methods and attitudes. Furthermore, Don's most important achievement was improving Sino-European mutual understanding in New Zealand. He did this on the one hand by supporting the New Zealand Chinese community, defending them against discrimination and offering them humanitarian aid. This helped build social relations,

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<sup>12</sup> John K. Fairbank, introduction to *Christianity in China: Early Protestant Missionary Writings*, ed. John K. Fairbank and Suzanne Barnett (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Committee on American-East Asian Relations of the Dept. of History, Harvard University, 1985), 4.

which in turn led to better cultural dialogue between Chinese and Europeans. On the other hand, Don simultaneously educated Europeans about the Chinese immigrants and their culture (as Chapter 2 describes). Therefore, although he achieved relatively poor results in evangelism, Don's main impact was in an unplanned role as a cultural mediator.

## Primary Sources

From the beginning of his work in March 1882, Don wrote mission reports for the church's monthly newspaper, the *NZ Presbyterian*.<sup>13</sup> These were typically one and a half to two pages in length and appeared in almost every issue. They included not only mission statistics, but also copious information on all aspects of Chinese culture and society as it existed among the gold-diggers, from food and festival customs to philosophy and religious beliefs. Don's reports on his Annual Inland Tours among the Otago Chinese also appeared in the church periodicals and later in booklet form, and he published a book on his trip to various Chinese migrant destinations around the Pacific in 1897-98.<sup>14</sup> Apart from these writings for church newspapers, Don sometimes made submissions on Chinese topics to secular newspapers. The above works constitute almost the sole sources of information on the methods and results of his mission, and together form a rich and extensive image of New Zealand Chinese culture. They are the major primary materials used in my study of Don as a cultural mediator.

These important works will be supplemented with other materials authored by or otherwise related to Don. Unpublished materials such as Don's notebooks and language textbooks illuminate his early understanding and opinions of Chinese culture. Surviving sermon notes give some idea of how he presented Christianity to the Chinese and adapted his message to their worldviews. One source that demonstrates Don's close knowledge of the New Zealand Chinese community is his *Roll of the Chinese*, a notebook in which he recorded names and details of Chinese people living in Otago and Southland. In addition, he left several large collections of photographs, giving important information on the lives of the Chinese gold miners. Other published

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<sup>13</sup> This will be referred to in notes hereafter as *NZP*, and in the main text as the *Presbyterian*. It became the *Christian Outlook* in 1894 and the *Outlook* in 1899.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Don, *Under Six Flags: Being Notes on Chinese in Samoa, Hawaii, United States, British Columbia, Japan and China* (Dunedin: J. Wilkie & Co., 1898) (Hereafter, Alexander Don will be cited as "Don").

sources provide evidence for Don's language ability: he contributed two articles on the Taishanese dialect to the *China Review*, and compiled three books of hymns in Chinese, a few of which he had translated from English himself.<sup>15</sup> Following retirement, Don wrote a history of the Presbyterian Church in Otago, but unfortunately the manuscript was lost when he died in 1934 while travelling home with it by train. The book was reassembled from Don's notes by his son-in-law, William Bennett, and published in 1936 as *Memories of the Golden Road: a History of the Presbyterian Church in Central Otago*.<sup>16</sup> It begins with a useful biography of Don, but the remainder of the book seldom speaks of the Chinese mission, and it is impossible to know how it differs from Don's original manuscript.

This thesis will compare Don's depiction of Chinese people and culture against the views of other contemporary sources in New Zealand. Until about halfway through Don's career, there were few other missionaries to the New Zealand Chinese. One who did leave a record of his experiences was Timothy Fay Loie, Don's assistant at the Dunedin Chinese Mission Church and later a missionary among the Chinese community on the West Coast of the South Island. Some of Loie's writings appear in the *Outlook*. New Zealand Europeans gained another picture of Chinese culture after 1901, when the CVM officially began work in China and its missionaries began to send reports or letters home – many of which were published in the *Outlook*. The views of early CVM staff such as George McNeur (1871-1953), William Mawson (1874-1935), and others – those who were active before the end of Don's career – will be looked at in this thesis. Apart from Christian materials, the main primary sources about the New Zealand Chinese are contemporary newspapers. Those that had the most to say on the Chinese in early years were regional papers published in areas where Chinese immigrants settled, such as the *Otago Daily Times*, *Otago Witness*, and *Tuapeka Times*. Parliamentary debates and contemporary New Zealand histories will also be consulted.

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<sup>15</sup> Don, "The Llin-nen Variation of Cantonese," *The China Review, or Notes and Queries on the Far East* 11, no. 4 (January 1883): 236-47; Don, "The Llin-nen Variation of Cantonese," *The China Review, or Notes and Queries on the Far East* 12, no. 6 (May 1884): 474-81; Don, "Seven Pieces" in *Chinese-English and English-Chinese* (Dunedin: J. Wilkie & Co., 1897); Don, "Eighteen Pieces" in *Chinese & English Also English & Chinese* (Dunedin: J. Wilkie & Co., 1899); Don, "Twenty-Five" Pieces in *Chinese and English Also English and Chinese* (Dunedin: J. Wilkie & Co., 1902).

<sup>16</sup> Don, *Memories of the Golden Road: a History of the Presbyterian Church in Central Otago*, ed. William J. Bennett (Dunedin: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1936).

All these secular sources provide a gauge of prevailing views and knowledge regarding the Chinese community.

## Important Literature on the New Zealand Chinese and Missionary

### Mediation

Academic study of the New Zealand Chinese community made a belated start, and was slow in developing. Early work was done in the field of immigration studies, probably because of the formidable array of laws enacted to exclude Chinese from the country. The first discussions of the Chinese immigration issue were two 1927 papers by G. H. Scholefield and T. D. H. Hall,<sup>17</sup> and theses on the subject were produced in 1948 by Vernon Scurrah and Frances Fyfe.<sup>18</sup> The earliest general descriptions of the New Zealand Chinese were conference papers by CVM missionaries and the 1930 MA thesis “The Chinese in New Zealand” by Margaret Jean Moore (1907-1992), daughter of George McNeur and at one point a CVM worker herself.<sup>19</sup> Thus, initial study in the field was dominated by missionaries, just as early Western Sinology had been. The comparative lack of early interest in the New Zealand Chinese is indicative of most Europeans' negative attitudes towards them. The first books on the New Zealand Chinese did not appear until the 1950s, with the publication of George McNeur's *The Church and the Chinese in New Zealand* (1951), a history of the Chinese mission, and *The Chinese in New Zealand: A Study in Assimilation* (1959), by Ng Bickleen Fong (1930-1998).<sup>20</sup> Fong's book focused on the contemporary assimilation of Chinese people into wider New Zealand society. Stuart Greif further investigated this question in *The Overseas Chinese in New Zealand* (1974), finding that assimilation had progressed and

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<sup>17</sup> G. H. Scholefield and T. D. H. Hall, *Asiatic Immigration in New Zealand: Its History and Legislation* (Honolulu: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1927); T. D. H. Hall, “New Zealand and Asiatic Immigration,” *Asiatic Immigration in the Western Pacific* (1927): 228-38.

<sup>18</sup> Vernon Scurrah, “Asiatic Immigration into New Zealand, 1870-1920” (MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1948); Frances Fyfe, “Chinese Immigration to New Zealand in the Nineteenth Century” (MA Thesis, University of New Zealand, 1948).

<sup>19</sup> George Hunter McNeur, *The Fairer Britain of the Southern Seas: New Zealand and Her Chinese and Other Immigrants; An Essay Read Before the Canton Missionary Conference, March 15th, 1903* (Canton: China Baptist Publication Society, 1903); William Mawson, “The Chinese Immigrant in New Zealand” (paper, Second Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 1927); Margaret Jean Moore, “The Chinese in New Zealand” (MA Thesis, University of Otago, 1930).

<sup>20</sup> George McNeur, *The Church and the Chinese in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Presbyterian Bookroom, 1951); Ng Bickleen Fong, *The Chinese in New Zealand: A Study in Assimilation* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1959).

Chinese people were abandoning their original culture in favour of New Zealand customs.<sup>21</sup>

It was not until the 1990s that the first in-depth narrative histories of the New Zealand Chinese appeared. The most comprehensive is James Ng's aforementioned work, *Windows on a Chinese Past*. Ng had earlier written short pieces about the Chinese community, beginning with a 1972 *Otago Daily Times* article,<sup>22</sup> and continuing with his articles and talks about Don and the Presbyterian mission to the Chinese. *Windows* focuses on describing key events and people in New Zealand Chinese history, emphasising their often-forgotten contributions to the nation. It gives much information on the early Chinese immigrant community, and as already mentioned, one chapter is devoted to Don and his work. In summary, *Windows* is a useful source on the first generations of New Zealand Chinese. Another important scholar is Manying Ip, who concentrated on recording oral history in her first two books: *Home Away from Home* (1990), which narrates the life stories of several New Zealand Chinese women, and *Dragons on the Long White Cloud* (1996), a thematic history of Chinese families told through interviews with their members.<sup>23</sup> Scholarship on the New Zealand Chinese has flourished since the above works appeared. Brian Moloughney has been a prominent contributor, co-authoring an article with John Stenhouse on New Zealanders' reactions to their Chinese neighbours, and more recently advocating a reassessment of the impact of Chinese culture on New Zealand.<sup>24</sup> Nigel Murphy has focused on the legislation affecting the New Zealand Chinese, and has written a reference work on these laws and policies.<sup>25</sup> Other new works include Ip and Murphy's jointly written *Aliens at My Table* (2005), which tracks public attitudes to Chinese people through historical cartoons;<sup>26</sup> an essay collection edited by Ip entitled

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<sup>21</sup> Stuart William Greif, *The Overseas Chinese in New Zealand* (Singapore: Asia Pacific Press, 1974).

<sup>22</sup> James Ng, *Who Are the N.Z. Chinese?* (Dunedin: Otago Daily Times, 1972). This article originally appeared in: *Otago Daily Times*, July 22 and 29, 1972.

<sup>23</sup> Manying Ip, *Home Away from Home: Life Stories of Chinese Women in New Zealand* (New Women's Press, 1990); Ip, *Dragons on the Long White Cloud: The Making of Chinese New Zealanders* (Auckland: Tandem Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Moloughney and Stenhouse, "'Drug-besotten, Sin-begotten Fiends of Filth'"; Moloughney, "Translating Culture: Rethinking New Zealand's Chineseness."

<sup>25</sup> Nigel Murphy, *Guide to Laws and Policies Relating to the Chinese in New Zealand, 1871-1997* (Wellington: New Zealand Chinese Association, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Manying Ip and Nigel Murphy, *Aliens at My Table: Asians as New Zealanders See Them* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2005).

*Unfolding History, Evolving Identity* (2003);<sup>27</sup> and Lynette Shum's book *Remembering Haining Street: With Both Eyes Open* (2002), based on her thesis about the Wellington Chinese community.<sup>28</sup>

As already mentioned, the function of cultural mediator was performed by many missionaries to China, and this phenomenon has been noted in many studies of the China mission movement. For the purposes of my thesis, one of the most important sources on this topic is *Christianity in China: Early Protestant Missionary Writings* (1985), edited by John King Fairbank and Suzanne Barnett.<sup>29</sup> This is a collection of essays analysing missionaries' interpretations of Chinese culture to the West and vice versa. Fairbank's introduction to this volume recognises the significance of cultural mediation as an outcome of mission work. Another useful book is Paul A. Varg's *Missionaries, Chinese and Diplomats* (1958), which is an investigation of developments in the American mission movement from 1890 to 1952, and includes an analysis of factors in the changing missionary presentations of China during that period.<sup>30</sup> Eric Reinders' 2004 work *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies* explores missionaries' ideas of Chinese religion, identifying common themes in their representations of Chinese beliefs and culture.<sup>31</sup> On a related note, the essay collection *China's Christian Colleges* (2009), edited by Daniel H. Bays and Ellen Widmer, investigates how Christian colleges in China were sites of cross-cultural exchange between Western missionaries and Chinese staff and students.<sup>32</sup> Apart from the above materials, histories of Chinese mission work frequently mention the theme of cultural mediation. These sources will be used to help identify the factors that led Don to become a mediator and shaped his depictions of culture.

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<sup>27</sup> Manying Ip, ed., *Unfolding History, Evolving Identity: The Chinese in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Lynette Shum, *Remembering Haining Street: With Both Eyes Open* (Wellington: Wellington Historical & Early Settlers' Association Inc, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> John King Fairbank and Suzanne Barnett, eds. *Christianity in China: Early Protestant Missionary Writings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Committee on American-East Asian Relations of the Dept. of History, Harvard University, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Paul A. Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958).

<sup>31</sup> Eric Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies: Christian Missionaries Imagine Chinese Religion* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Daniel H. Bays and Ellen Widmer, eds., *Cross-Cultural Connections: China's Christian Colleges, 1900-1950*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).



## Chapter 1: Interactions with the Chinese

The exchange of information between Don and the New Zealand Chinese took many forms, involving both conscious and unconscious teaching and learning. As with most missionaries, Don's ministry encompassed a range of different activities. Besides conducting direct evangelism through sermons, conversations, and literature, he offered various forms of aid to Chinese people, such as English classes or interpretation services. All these different aspects of Don's work helped to communicate Western culture to the Chinese community. Meanwhile, Don's Chinese audience also taught him about their culture – both the regional cultures of the districts from which the sojourners had come, and the values common to Chinese culture in general. Don learned directly through conventional study and conversations with Chinese individuals, as well as more indirectly by observing and interacting with Chinese communities in New Zealand, China, and other places. This chapter will examine the intercultural communication between Don and Chinese people, first describing Don's missionary career in its historical context, and then looking in greater detail at some of the channels through which the exchange of information took place.

### The Historical Background of Don's Contact with Chinese Culture

#### Protestant Missions to China

Alexander Don's mission to the New Zealand Chinese was carried out against the backdrop of the extensive Protestant missionary movement in China itself. Christianity was first introduced to China in AD 635,<sup>1</sup> and Catholics made a lasting impact there during the late Ming and early Qing; but it was not until 1807 that the first Protestant missionary to China, Robert Morrison, began his work.<sup>2</sup> At this time, Christianity was proscribed under Chinese law, and foreign traders were restricted to

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<sup>1</sup> N. Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China*, vol. 1, 635-1800 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Hancock, *Robert Morrison and the Birth of Chinese Protestantism* (London: Continuum, 2007), 37.

the trade port of Canton for four months every year. Traditional methods of evangelism were thus difficult and dangerous. Morrison and other pioneering missionaries erected what they termed a “wall of light”<sup>3</sup> around China by translating the Bible and other Christian literature, preaching to Chinese people at Canton and Macao, and sometimes undertaking prohibited mission trips along the coast.

A new phase in Protestant mission work began with the institution of the “unequal treaties” that were established between China and Western powers following the two Opium Wars in the middle of the nineteenth century. These agreements progressively opened China to Christianity in several ways. The treaties of 1842-1844 opened five treaty ports to foreign residence; removed the official ban on Christianity; and gave all foreigners the right of extraterritoriality (that is, they were subject to the laws of their own countries instead of China’s).<sup>4</sup> The second round of treaties in 1858-1860 was particularly important, for it permitted foreigners to travel anywhere in the Chinese Empire.<sup>5</sup> The result was a great increase in missionary activity, but this was accompanied by a rise in anti-foreign and anti-Christian sentiment among Chinese people, who linked Christianity with Western political power and saw both as a threat to Chinese society.<sup>6</sup> Though popular hostility was held in check by the imperial government (under pressure from European nations), it sometimes cascaded into action. A notable outcome of these tensions was the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, which was directed against Chinese Christians, missionaries and foreigners in general.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the obstacles posed by anti-Christian and anti-foreign sentiment, the early twentieth century saw renewed success for missions, with more workers in the field and a greater response from the Chinese people.<sup>8</sup> However, most remained either indifferent or hostile to Christianity. In the first decades of the twentieth century there was a growing move to make the Chinese Church indigenous in leadership and

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<sup>3</sup> Ralph R. Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 70.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Oxford and New York: Wiley and Blackwell, 2011), 48.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), 274.

<sup>6</sup> Paul A. Cohen, *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Antiforeignism, 1860-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 59.

<sup>7</sup> R. Tiedemann, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China, volume 2, 1800 to the Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 340.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

support, efforts that were partly motivated by the rise of nationalism in China and the growing tendency among Chinese to associate foreign-controlled mission institutions with Western imperialism. The indigenisation movement had an influence on the 1922 National Christian Conference in Shanghai, which created a National Christian Council with Chinese composing more than half its membership.<sup>9</sup> This important event also marked the end of Don's career: he represented New Zealand at the Conference on the eve of his retirement.

### **The Chinese in New Zealand**

By the time Don started his ministry proper in March 1882, there had already been Chinese people in New Zealand for sixteen years. Their presence originated in the mass emigration that took place from China in the mid-nineteenth century, principally from Guangdong province. At this time, economic hardship and political upheaval in China led many young Chinese men to seek a living for their families overseas – some in Southeast Asia, and the more ambitious in North America, Australia, and New Zealand. Most of the first migrants had no intention of settling permanently in Western countries. Their main aim was to earn money quickly, generally to contribute to their family's finances, and then return home.<sup>10</sup> Because of this attitude, the first New Zealand Chinese have been widely referred to as "sojourners," a term first defined by Ng Bickleen Fong to mean people who spend much of their lives residing in a foreign country without being assimilated by its society.<sup>11</sup> Moloughney and Stenhouse have supported the use of "sojourners" to describe the early New Zealand Chinese, while arguing against the implication that they were incapable of identifying with more than one home country.<sup>12</sup>

Just as in the USA and Australia, it was gold with its promise of quick wealth that initially attracted Chinese migrants to New Zealand. The 1861 discovery of gold in Otago led to explosive economic growth for the province, but this subsided following the departure of miners for new prospects on the West Coast. The Provincial Council therefore invited Chinese gold miners from Victoria, Australia, to come and work the

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<sup>9</sup> Sumiko Yamamoto, *History of Protestantism in China: The Indigenization of Christianity* (Tōhō Gakkai [Institute of Eastern Culture], 2000), 62.

<sup>10</sup> Greif, *Overseas Chinese in New Zealand*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Fong, *The Chinese in New Zealand*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Moloughney and Stenhouse, "'Drug-besotten, Sin-begotten Fiends of Filth,'" 55.

Otago goldfields.<sup>13</sup> The first Chinese immigrants arrived in New Zealand in December 1865, quickly settling at various mining sites around Otago.<sup>14</sup> Initially they travelled from Australia, but later waves came directly from China. Nearly all of this migrant community originated from several counties immediately surrounding Canton in Guangdong province. Most came from lower-class rural families, and were nearly always male. Traditional morals expected a woman to stay with her husband's family to care for his parents, and the risks and costs of migration prevented women from leaving China.<sup>15</sup> Thus the New Zealand Chinese community in the 1880s was mainly composed of lone men – many separated from wives and offspring in their homeland. Another effect of migration was that the boundaries of village, county and lineage were blurred as men from different places mixed together. The lineage – which united people by kinship and identification with a common ancestor, and usually by the same family name – was a particularly strong social construct in Guangdong. These groups built solidarity among their members, and frequently maintained rivalries with other lineages.<sup>16</sup> Many villages were dominated by a single surname. However, the New Zealand Chinese found themselves thrown together with people from other lineages and counties, which caused old conflicts to surface.

Early generations of Chinese residents in New Zealand remained a largely separate community, failing to integrate with the majority European society around them.<sup>17</sup> One reason was that they had little motivation to adapt, given their intention of staying only temporarily in the country. Equally important factors were the anti-Chinese hostility shown by European New Zealanders, the language barrier, and both communities' belief in their own cultural and ethnic superiority. Because of this segregation, the Chinese sojourners showed great solidarity. They maintained social networks, provided assistance to each other, and helped relatives in China to join them by providing funds and intelligence – a process known as chain migration.<sup>18</sup> Chinese mutual support networks fostered the growth of county organisations and benevolent

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<sup>13</sup> James Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past*, volume 1, *How the Cantonese Goldseekers and Their Heirs Settled in New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago Heritage Books, 1993), 125.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>15</sup> Chivers, "Religion, Ethnicity and Race," 11; Murphy, *Guide to Laws and Policies*, 205.

<sup>16</sup> Frederic Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 109–12.

<sup>17</sup> Greif, *The Overseas Chinese in New Zealand*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 1:90.

societies such as the Cheong Shing Tang 昌善堂, which exhumed bodies of Chinese men for return to their homeland.<sup>19</sup> Another result of the social gap was that the New Zealand Chinese maintained their original culture, particularly in terms of values. The immigrants adhered to their traditional religious beliefs, observing rituals such as at Qingming 清明 (the Grave-Sweeping Festival) and constructing makeshift shrines at home.<sup>20</sup> Traditional morals such as filial piety remained the basis of their worldview. The New Zealand Chinese also preserved many of their culture's outward practices, despite the cost of bringing the required commodities from overseas. They ate Chinese food, observed festivals like lunar New Year, used Chinese medicine, and played traditional gambling games such as fan-tan 番攤 or pakapu 白鴿票. The only major area in which they adapted to New Zealand European culture was in wearing the utilitarian dress of Western diggers.<sup>21</sup>

The New Zealand Chinese also maintained their religious traditions. Religion played an important role in the life of Chinese people: it helped maintain the coherence of the family, the kinship group, and society, and it provided assurance in the face of uncertainty. The basic features of Chinese religion were the worship of Heaven (done by the emperor), of its subordinate gods, and of ancestors.<sup>22</sup> Faith in China was generally syncretistic, with people following various religions and traditions simultaneously. Deities were worshipped and rituals performed according to their function, and not so much because they were identified with a specific religion.<sup>23</sup> Thus, religious faith took a very different form in Chinese society than in the West, where Christianity was more exclusive and institutionalised. While the “three teachings” of China – Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism – had distinct ideas and doctrine, they were all represented in the beliefs of the people.<sup>24</sup> Because of the syncretistic nature of Chinese beliefs, in this thesis the term “religion” will refer to the sum total of

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<sup>19</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 2:42. Don translated this society's name as the “Effulgent Goodness Board.” Don, “Chinese Dead, Yet Living,” *NZP*, December 1883, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, April 1885, 183. Here Don observes stones used to depict Buddhist bodhisattvas.

<sup>21</sup> Chivers, “Religion, Ethnicity and Race,” 13.

<sup>22</sup> C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Prospect Heights, New York: Waveland Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>24</sup> Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor* (Richmond, Virginia: Curzon, 2001), vi.

religious beliefs and practices that the New Zealand Chinese brought from their homeland (unless a particular doctrine such as Buddhism is specified).

Although the Chinese immigrants were at first broadly accepted in New Zealand, opposition to their presence gradually intensified. From the beginning, European miners voiced fears of unfair competition from their Chinese counterparts and demanded that they be excluded from New Zealand. Initially, this protest had little effect; a Government Select Committee on Chinese Immigration found in 1871 that the sojourners were not a threat to the country and that there was no reason for excluding them.<sup>25</sup> The question was thus dropped for the moment, but the agitation movement gained new force when, as the gold became scarcer, many Chinese people left mining to move into the cities. Here they came into closer contact with Europeans and entered new industries – chiefly market gardening, fruit and vegetable retail, and laundry.<sup>26</sup> Politicians and labour unions began calling for the restriction or wholesale prohibition of Chinese immigration, claiming that they were undercutting white business and forcing down wages. Other common criticisms levelled at the New Zealand Chinese were that they practised immorality (for which the absence of Chinese women was seen as evidence); they brought disease and endangered public health; and they were an inferior race that would degrade European racial purity through intermarriage.<sup>27</sup> By the late 1890s a “White New Zealand” had become the established national strategy, promoted by Parliament and supported by a large section of the general public.<sup>28</sup> This state of affairs continued well into the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup>

Modern studies have advanced a number of overlapping reasons for this increasing European opposition. Some scholars have emphasised that the anti-Chinese movement was driven by racism, while others have argued that its basic cause was colonial nationalism, with politicians seeing Chinese as one of many groups that

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<sup>25</sup> Appendix of the Journal of the House of Representatives of New Zealand (AJHR) (1871) H-5b, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Moore, “The Chinese in New Zealand,” 64.

<sup>27</sup> James Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past*, volume 3, *Larrikinism and Violence; Immigration Issues; 20th Century Assimilation; Biographies* (Dunedin: Otago Heritage Books, 1999), 105; Greif, *The Overseas Chinese in New Zealand*, 21–22; Murphy, *Guide to Laws and Policies*, 86.

<sup>28</sup> Scholefield and Hall, *Asiatic Immigration in New Zealand*, 10; Moore, “The Chinese in New Zealand,” 108–109.

<sup>29</sup> Ip and Murphy, *Aliens at My Table*, 16. These authors argue that a “covert” White New Zealand policy persisted into the late twentieth century.

endangered their future vision of New Zealand society.<sup>30</sup> Other important factors, such as economic fears, have been often noted.<sup>31</sup> Miles Fairburn has recently advocated that the best explanation is the sojourner mentality of the New Zealand Chinese and their resultant failure to integrate with European society, which aggravated the criticism that they were only temporary residents who did not contribute to the nation.<sup>32</sup> Without doubt, however, European hostility against Chinese stemmed from a combination of factors. Most of New Zealand's leaders from the 1890s onwards considered Chinese people unsuitable as citizens and potentially harmful to the rest of the country – an attitude based on nationalism, and partly but not wholly underpinned by racism. Although some Europeans supported the Chinese, the general public had a number of reasons for antipathy to them, as already mentioned: fear of economic competition, suspicions about immoral conduct, and ideas of racial superiority. These issues created a hostility that was fanned by politicians and the media, and further exacerbated by the sojourners' apparent unwillingness to adapt, leading to anti-Chinese attitudes among a large part of the New Zealand European community by the late nineteenth century. China's low international reputation at this time also helped give Westerners a poor opinion of the Chinese immigrants,<sup>33</sup> and antagonism was intensified by reports of anti-Chinese movements overseas.

From the 1880s, the growing anti-Chinese faction in Parliament began to produce a series of laws aimed at restricting or preventing Chinese immigration into New Zealand. The first of these was the Chinese Immigrants Act of 1881, introduced by Richard John Seddon.<sup>34</sup> A £10 poll tax was levied on all Chinese entering the country, and Chinese passengers on incoming ships were restricted to 1 for every 10 tons of cargo.<sup>35</sup> Further laws followed: the passenger-cargo ratio was decreased in 1888, and the poll tax raised in 1896 to £100 – a massive sum for the time.<sup>36</sup> In the early twentieth century, the legislative campaign against the Chinese intensified amid

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<sup>30</sup> For the former view, see Ip and Murphy, *Aliens at My Table*, 23; for the latter: Moloughney and Stenhouse, "Drug-besotten, Sin-begotten Fiends of Filth," 48; Fyfe, "Chinese Immigration to New Zealand in the Nineteenth Century," 81.

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Ng, *Windows*, 3:105.

<sup>32</sup> Miles Fairburn, "What Best Explains the Discrimination Against the Chinese in New Zealand, 1860s-1950s?" *The Journal of New Zealand Studies* 2-3 (October 2003-October 2004): 80-81.

<sup>33</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 1:86.

<sup>34</sup> Seddon was MHR for Nelson at the time, and became Premier of New Zealand in 1893.

<sup>35</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 3:96.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

growing nationalist sentiment, racism, and fears for the country's wellbeing – both in Parliament and among the public. From 1908, Chinese were refused naturalisation (that is, they could not become British subjects). Some laws of this period affected Chinese residents of New Zealand – one example was the 1898 Old Age Pensions Act, which specifically barred them from its benefits – but most were aimed at keeping them out of the country.<sup>37</sup> New Zealand's legislation against the Chinese was similar to that enacted in Australia and the USA. Here too, national and racial identity became a significant influence on immigration policy. The United States paved the way with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which established a ban on Chinese immigration.<sup>38</sup> Later, Australia's 1901 Immigration Act aimed to restrict all Chinese and other non-Europeans from entering the country.<sup>39</sup> Such measures had an influence on New Zealand's government, with anti-Chinese politicians claiming that the barriers erected by other countries would divert more Chinese people to New Zealand.<sup>40</sup>

As more restrictive legislation was directed against them, the New Zealand Chinese community dwindled but did not disappear. From a high of 5,004 in 1881, their numbers fell to 2,147 in 1916, but then rose again.<sup>41</sup> In 1920, the government responded to this by putting all immigration on a permit basis.<sup>42</sup> Each permit application would have to be granted individually by a government minister, who could thus easily prevent any Chinese from entering the country. Few were granted permanent residency after 1926. However, the situation changed in 1939, when the Government allowed Chinese resident men to bring their wives and children to New Zealand in order to escape the war with Japan. Although this was done on the understanding that the refugees were to return after the war finished, the Government was petitioned to let them stay, and granted them permanent residency in 1947.<sup>43</sup> After this, Chinese people started to integrate with the rest of New Zealand

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<sup>37</sup> Nigel Murphy, "Legal Restrictions on the New Zealand Chinese," in *Chinese in Australasia and the Pacific: Old and New Migrations and Cultural Change; Conference for the Study of Overseas Chinese, Hutton Lecture Theatre, 20-21 November 1998*, ed. Brian Moloughney and James Ng (Dunedin: Dept. of History, University of Otago, 1999), 205.

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1990), 215.

<sup>39</sup> C. Y. Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1975), 38–39.

<sup>40</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 3:98.

<sup>41</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 1:84; P. S. O'Connor, "Keeping New Zealand White, 1900-1920," *New Zealand Journal of History* 2, no. 1 (1968): 46.

<sup>42</sup> Murphy, "Legal Restrictions on the New Zealand Chinese," 201–202.

<sup>43</sup> Fong, *The Chinese in New Zealand*, 32.



society, as both Fong's and Greif's studies found.<sup>44</sup> Key reasons for this "assimilation" process included the establishment of normal family structures among the New Zealand Chinese and their obtaining the right to naturalisation in 1951.

From the beginning of Chinese immigration to New Zealand, Christian churches saw these new immigrants as a potential field for evangelism. The Presbyterians, who were strong in Otago, became the first denomination to evangelise among the New Zealand Chinese, and for many years were the major workers in this field. They viewed the Chinese influx as a golden opportunity for preaching the Christian message, and the prospect that these visitors might return to their homeland without knowing the Gospel was viewed as shameful. It was also seen as necessary to civilise the Chinese by converting them, so as to prevent them from becoming a detrimental influence on New Zealand society.<sup>45</sup> The main problem in evangelising the Chinese was, of course, the language barrier. The Presbyterian Church eventually found a Chinese catechist, Paul Ah Chin, who began working among his countrymen at Lawrence, Otago, in 1869.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately he resigned in 1874, and was replaced by Hugh Cowie, who had spent some years as a missionary at Amoy (Xiamen 廈門) in Fujian Province. Cowie soon found that the Fujianese language he knew was very different from the Cantonese that the New Zealand Chinese spoke, so he too departed.<sup>47</sup> The Foreign Missions Committee then decided that the best way of resolving the problem was to recruit a new missionary and send him to Canton in order to learn the language and customs of his intended audience. It was for this program that Alexander Don volunteered.

### **Don's Life and Career**

Don was born in Ballarat, Victoria, in 1857, the son of a miner from Scotland who had been drawn to Australia by the Victorian gold rush. From an early age Don worked in a mining battery at Bendigo, where he was converted to Christianity after hearing an itinerant preacher. He attended night school at fifteen, became a trainee teacher, and found a position at a Bendigo school. In 1877 Don heard the Rev. John

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 113–119; Greif, *The Overseas Chinese in New Zealand*, 48–76.

<sup>45</sup> Chivers, "Religion, Ethnicity and Race," 21–22.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 28.

Paton speak on the need for foreign missionaries, and was inspired to offer his help. Paton told Don that the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland in New Zealand was looking for a missionary to the New Hebrides (modern Vanuatu). Don therefore travelled to New Zealand in early 1879, taking a teaching job in Dunedin while awaiting word from the Presbyterian Foreign Missions Committee.<sup>48</sup> As the New Hebrides position had already been filled, Don volunteered for the vacant post of missionary to the Otago Chinese. He was accepted and went to Canton for training in late 1879.<sup>49</sup>

Don arrived in Canton on 29 October 1879 and remained there for 16 months, returning to New Zealand on 20 March 1881.<sup>50</sup> Canton had long been a major point of Sino-Western contact. It was the only part of China open to foreign trade from 1759 to 1842,<sup>51</sup> and its central role in the two Opium Wars gave rise to local anti-foreignism. Although the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing allowed foreigners to reside inside the city walls, the people of Canton prevented Westerners from entering until 1849.<sup>52</sup> Later, the city's occupation by the allied European armies during the Second Opium War (from 1857 to 1861) gave rise to a resistance movement. However, by the time of Don's stay in 1879-1881, Canton was relatively peaceful once more. Don himself observed little anti-foreign or anti-Christian feeling, though he did record stories of missionaries being chased away or prevented from planting mission stations. During his stay in Canton, Don seems to have lived on Shameen 沙面,<sup>53</sup> an artificial island created in the Pearl River by the British in 1859.<sup>54</sup> Intended as a foreign enclave, it was off limits to Chinese. Don associated himself with the American Presbyterian Mission, one of the many missionary societies flourishing in the city by that time.

Most of Don's time in Canton was spent in language study, though he was only able to devote about 10 months to this endeavour due to a serious illness and a series of five journeys that he took into the country. On the first three trips, Don accompanied local missionaries as they visited mission stations and gave out Christian

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<sup>48</sup> Don, *Memories of the Golden Road*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> "Address by Mr. Don at a Meeting of the Mission Committee Held to Receive Him on His Return from China," *NZP*, September 1881, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Valery M. Garrett, *Heaven Is High, the Emperor Far Away: Merchants and Mandarins in Old Canton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 76.

<sup>52</sup> Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, 71.

<sup>53</sup> McNeur, *The Church and the Chinese in New Zealand*, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Garrett, *Heaven Is High*, 125.

literature, his aim being to learn more about Chinese customs outside Canton and to observe evangelical work. Later, he returned twice to the city of Sanning 新寧 (modern-day Taishan 台山), southwest of Canton, in an attempt to learn the local dialect, as he believed that many New Zealand Chinese originated from that area.<sup>55</sup> In several accounts of his experiences in China, Don nowhere reports significant conversations or personal interaction with Chinese people, which is unsurprising given his rudimentary level of language ability at the time. He did employ Chinese servants, and engaged a scholar from Sanning to teach him the sounds of the Sanningese dialect. Apart from this, however, Don's contact with Chinese culture seemed limited to study and observations.

Upon his return to New Zealand, Don studied theology for a year at the Theological Hall in Dunedin, and continued working on his language skills under a Chinese teacher, Ng Ping Lun, who had been engaged for three years to tutor him in New Zealand. Don then began his mission work at the goldfield of Round Hill, Southland, on 18 March 1882.<sup>56</sup> Round Hill was selected because it was populated almost entirely by Chinese miners, whose numbers there had reached about 500 by 1882.<sup>57</sup> The small village at the centre of the Round Hill field consisted of 23 buildings at the time, including one two-storied hotel and several shops, teahouses, and opium houses, all Chinese-owned.<sup>58</sup> The remainder of the goldfield was dotted with Chinese huts and claims. Round Hill was the only mining settlement in New Zealand where the Chinese were in the majority for some time, and as such it provided an excellent opportunity for Don to reach many of them with the Christian message – as well as to learn about New Zealand Chinese culture. At first he resided in the nearby town of Riverton, but in early 1883 a mission house and church were constructed at Round Hill itself, with funds partially donated by the Chinese residents. Later that year, Don married Amelia Warne, of Bendigo, Victoria, whom he had met in a choir group there. The couple were eventually to have seven children.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> "Address by Mr. Don," *NZP*, September 1881, 46.

<sup>56</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, July 1882, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 2:11.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>59</sup> Don, *Memories of the Golden Road*, 7, 32.

In 1886, the decline of the Chinese population at Round Hill convinced the Foreign Missions Committee to move Don to the mining town of Lawrence in the Tuapeka District of Otago, where a large Chinese settlement had existed since the 1860s. Meanwhile, a Chinese catechist, Kwok Wai Shang, was recruited from Guangdong to replace Don at Round Hill. Kwok was a convert from Weichow 惠州 (Huizhou) county who had been trained at the American Presbyterian Mission's Canton Theological College.<sup>60</sup> After moving to Lawrence, Don realised that only a small proportion of the scattered Otago Chinese were being exposed to the gospel. He thus began conducting an annual summer tour around all the localities in the province where Chinese residents lived. These tours were carried out every year bar one until 1911, with Don himself doing most of them, and missionary colleagues helping in later years when necessary.

Don moved from Lawrence to Dunedin in 1889, the better to reach the increasing Chinese population there. He launched a campaign to build a Chinese Church in Dunedin, a project which was completed in 1897, and later that year embarked on a trip around the Pacific to examine mission work among overseas Chinese in other countries.<sup>61</sup> In Canton Don was given a warm welcome by returned New Zealand Chinese, and this inspired him with the idea of establishing a mission to China that would build upon the gospel work done among Chinese people during their stay in New Zealand. Based on his proposal, the Canton Villages Mission (CVM) was established in 1898, its target being the counties around Canton from which most New Zealand Chinese originated. George McNeur went to China as the first CVM missionary in 1901.<sup>62</sup> As for Don, he continued his urban mission to the Chinese of Dunedin until 1913, when the continuing move of the Chinese population to the North Island convinced him to transfer his headquarters to Palmerston North.<sup>63</sup> However, in 1914 he was made Foreign Missions Secretary of the Presbyterian Church, and returned to Dunedin.<sup>64</sup> Don retired in 1923, after one final trip to China to attend the 1922 National Christian Conference in Shanghai.<sup>65</sup> He moved with his wife to Ophir in

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<sup>60</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, January 1886, 123.

<sup>61</sup> Don, *Memories of the Golden Road*, 13–15.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

Central Otago, and died of heart failure in 1934 while travelling home from a conference by train.<sup>66</sup>

Apart from Don, there were few missionaries to the New Zealand Chinese until the late 1890s. Kwok Wai Shang's term as catechist at Round Hill ended in 1890, when he was discharged for reasons unknown. In 1897, the Presbyterian Church appointed Timothy Fay Loie, a Chinese minister who had been serving in Australia, to take over at the new Dunedin Chinese Church while Don went on furlough. Loie later worked among the Chinese on the West Coast and in Auckland.<sup>67</sup> Don's other Chinese assistants in Dunedin included William Chan, Paul Chan, and Fung Lai Law. Other denominations were also involved in mission activities: a Dunedin Baptist, Walter Paterson, made individual efforts to evangelise Chinese residents from the early 1880s,<sup>68</sup> and the Hanover Street Baptist Church established an urban Chinese mission in 1899.<sup>69</sup> After the numbers of Chinese miners on the West Coast began to increase, a Presbyterian mission was also begun there, though the work proceeded slowly until a Chinese catechist arrived in 1896.<sup>70</sup> McNeur notes that there were only "sporadic attempts" to evangelise the Chinese outside of the gold-mining areas until they began to move to the North Island around the close of the nineteenth century.<sup>71</sup> The Presbyterians opened the mission field in Auckland when Loie moved there in 1910; after his resignation, efforts in the city slackened until William Mawson, returned from the CVM, took over. Meanwhile, the first concerted work in Wellington was not undertaken until 1903.<sup>72</sup> It can be seen that for the first half of Don's career, he was the only long-serving official missionary to the New Zealand Chinese, and he remained the most significant figure in this field until his retirement.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>67</sup> Chivers, "Religion, Ethnicity and Race," 92–93, 102.

<sup>68</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 2:149.

<sup>69</sup> Chivers, "Religion, Ethnicity and Race," 77.

<sup>70</sup> McNeur, *The Church and the Chinese in New Zealand*, 42–43.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 49.

## Don's Study of Chinese Culture

### Preparation for Mission Work

Don's primary focus in early study was on learning the language. In China he began to study both written Chinese and the spoken Cantonese dialect by way of textbooks and tutors, while also receiving an introduction to classical Chinese. In spite of Don's claim upon his return to New Zealand that he had "no difficulty in conversing on ordinary topics in the provincial or Cantonese dialect,"<sup>73</sup> his language study was by no means over at this point. A study record shows that from June 1881 to July 1883 Don spent much time reading Chinese-language texts such as the Bible (in both the classical-style and Cantonese colloquial translations) and the Confucian canon (using the English translations of James Legge and others). He also practised Sanningese pronunciation under his teacher Ng Ping Lun's instruction.<sup>74</sup> In this way Don studied several regional Chinese dialects, as well as classical Chinese.

During his first stay in China and upon his return to Otago, Don studied not only the Chinese language, but other elements of culture as well – especially religion, philosophy, and literature. In fact, some of his language learning texts were also sources on Chinese culture. Among his surviving manuscripts is a notebook containing "Discussion Pieces" (*Tan lun pian* 談論篇), a series of one hundred conversations or monologues in colloquial Cantonese on a wide variety of topics.<sup>75</sup> The original source of this work is *Yü-yen Tzŭ-erh Chi* 語言自邇集, a collection of different Chinese texts for learning Beijing Mandarin. This was compiled and published in 1867 by Thomas Francis Wade (1818-1895), the British diplomat and Sinologue who helped to create the Wade-Giles romanisation system for Mandarin.<sup>76</sup> The "Discussion Pieces" in this book actually originated from an early Qing source, not a Western one.<sup>77</sup> As such, they present a view of Chinese life based on ideal Confucian values, generally promoting

<sup>73</sup> "Address by Mr. Don," *NZP*, September 1881, 46.

<sup>74</sup> Alexander Don, study record, June 1881 – July 1883, Canton Villages Mission Papers, Presbyterian Archives Research Centre, Knox College, Dunedin.

<sup>75</sup> Alexander Don, "Tan lun pian 談論篇 [Discussion Pieces]," Chinese language notebook, n.d., Canton Villages Mission Papers, Presbyterian Archives Research Centre, Knox College, Dunedin.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Francis Wade, *語言自邇集 Yü-yen Tzŭ-erh Chi: A Progressive Course Designed to Assist the Student of Colloquial Chinese, as Spoken in the Capital and the Metropolitan Department: In Eight Parts, with Key, Syllabary, and Writing Exercises* (N.p.: Trübner, 1867).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, x. Wade says that his texts came from a work written in the early Qing period for mutual language education between the Manchus and the Han Chinese.

the importance of personal integrity, diligent study and human relationships, while disparaging superstition and storytelling. This would have influenced Don's view of Chinese culture. As already mentioned, the young missionary progressed to reading English translations of the Confucian Classics, along with other ancient works such as the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Poetry) and *Shujing* 書經 (Book of History), all of which would have educated him about the philosophical bases of Chinese culture. For an accessible Western source on China, Don made use of Samuel Wells Williams' *The Middle Kingdom*, which he was reading as early as 1880.<sup>78</sup> Williams (1812-1884), a missionary of the American Board from 1833, had published this extensive survey of Chinese civilisation in 1848. Don's frequent quotations of Williams' book demonstrate that it had some influence on him.<sup>79</sup>

Making a broad study of Chinese culture was a typical strategy for Christian missionaries. The Jesuits in China particularly emphasised the importance of learning about Chinese literature, philosophy and customs. Later, Robert Morrison noted that in order to communicate the gospel to Chinese people, it was important to know their "language, opinions, and manners."<sup>80</sup> Most missionaries recognised that the foreign nature of Christianity was a barrier to its acceptance by Chinese. Therefore, many studied the culture of China and adopted its customs, both to build solidarity with their potential converts and to show the universal validity of Christianity by relating its principles to pre-existing Chinese concepts. Preachers would study the classics so that they could show harmony between the teachings of Christ and Confucius.<sup>81</sup> It is clear that Don was preparing to use this strategy, for one of his notebooks contains quotations from Chinese literature classified either by Chinese beliefs and values (such as "Confucius" or "Filiality") or by religious topics in general (such as "Death" and "Righteousness"), with many pages including relevant Bible verses.<sup>82</sup> The terms *Shangdi* 上帝 ("Heavenly Ruler" or "Emperor on High") and *Tian* 天 ("Heaven") receive a section each in the notebook. This shows Don agreed with the theory of most British missionaries that the Chinese had originally worshipped the one God of the Bible, but

<sup>78</sup> Don, "Two Trips," *NZP*, March 1881, 171.

<sup>79</sup> E.g., Don, reply to J. M. McLachlan, *NZP*, July 1889, 19.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Hancock, *Robert Morrison*, 74.

<sup>81</sup> Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 95.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander Don, notebook of Chinese aphorisms, n.d., Alexander Don Papers, Presbyterian Archives Research Centre, Knox College, Dunedin.

had degenerated into paganism and polytheism. Evidence for this came from the pre-Han Classics, which often referred to *Tian* as a force of cosmic justice, and also mentioned *Shangdi*, a deity whom some thought to be the Biblical God. From this starting point, it was thought that the Chinese could be led to Christianity through the witness of their own ancient beliefs.<sup>83</sup>

### **Learning about the New Zealand Chinese**

Don was able to gain extensive knowledge of Chinese culture through interacting with the New Zealand Chinese. One way he learned was from studying their outward behaviour and practices. Don was highly observant, and his knowledge of the Cantonese language and China's cultural heritage strengthened his ability to understand and interpret astutely the actions of the New Zealand sojourners. From these actions, Don often drew conclusions about the underlying values of Chinese culture – about what he called Chinese “character.” Sometimes Don's deductions were remarkably perceptive, such as when he noted religious syncretism: “Many of the Chinese are as much Buddhists as Taoists, and as much Confucianists as either.”<sup>84</sup> He did not, however, always draw accurate inferences about Chinese values or beliefs from their actions, as the following example shows. In this case, Don had recently been ministering to a dying Chinese man at Lawrence:

At Glenore I met an old man of the same name, and when I told him that his younger namesake lay dying of consumption, he said, without the least verbal or facial expression of sympathy, “He won £120 at a pakapu lottery.” ...Why the old fellow made such a seemingly irrelevant remark is unclear.<sup>85</sup>

It did not seem to occur to Don that the old man wished to avoid discussing the inauspicious subject of death, and changed the subject for this reason. While Don was familiar with the Chinese belief that talking about death or sickness was unlucky, he did not always recognise this idea underlying Chinese behaviour, particularly when their words or actions differed strongly from accepted norms in his own culture.

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<sup>83</sup> Archie C. C. Lee, “God's Asian Names: Rendering the Biblical God in Chinese,” Society of Biblical Literature Forum, accessed January 16, 2012, <http://sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?articleId=456>.

<sup>84</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, November 1882, 88.

<sup>85</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, March 1892, 164.



Don's individual conversations with Chinese people were a more direct means of learning about their culture – and in particular their values – than observations of behaviour. Through talks on religion and morals, Don discovered more about the beliefs of the average New Zealand Chinese immigrant, particularly the ideas associated with popular religion. The sojourners would talk about their faith in response to Don's propagation of Christianity, or to answer his questions, which were posed as an opening for preaching the gospel. For example, when Don asked one man his opinions about the afterlife, he got the response that a person's souls were dispersed after death. The man then explained there were twelve human souls, a mixture of rational and animal ones, and that these roamed the earth in various forms.<sup>86</sup> Don's learning was not restricted to religious matters, though. By entering into debates with his hearers, he would often learn their opinions on the culture, science and government of both China and the West. Moreover, he was able through his conversations with the Chinese to build up detailed pictures of their personal histories, and became familiar with the typical characteristics of the sojourners: their desire to save up money and return to China, separation from wives and parents, strong opinions on European discrimination, and so forth. In summary, then, Don gained much knowledge about Chinese culture from personal interactions with his Chinese acquaintances. Another source of information was Chinese texts that Don discovered in New Zealand, such as a Buddhist tract entitled "The Book of Exhortation to Good," which he translated into English (see chapter 2).

### **Don's Presentation of Western Culture to the Chinese**

Don's deliberate presentation of Western culture to Chinese people naturally focused on Christianity. Following the example of other Protestant missionaries to China, his methods of evangelism mainly involved gospel meetings, personal conversations, and the use of literature. While posted to Round Hill, Don would spend time distributing tracts to all the huts and claims, talking to the men about Christianity, and inviting them to a gospel service. These services generally included a sermon, prayer, and singing hymns. They were often held in a store or teahouse, until the mission house and church were completed at Round Hill in March 1883. Don's reports

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<sup>86</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, January 1885, 126.

show that his later methods, in Lawrence, Dunedin, and on the annual tours around Otago, did not vary significantly from this early pattern. The sermons on a particular Inland Tour would be simple and based on a single Biblical text, for which Don would create posters with a picture and the verses written in large characters.<sup>87</sup> The Christian literature that he used included tracts, Bibles, and Chinese-language newspapers published by mission organisations. As mentioned earlier, Don also printed his own English-Chinese bilingual hymn books, no doubt intended for use at the Dunedin Chinese Church. Despite Don's efforts, his Christian message was rejected by most New Zealand Chinese – he baptised only about 20 throughout his career.<sup>88</sup> Later chapters will examine the reasons for the poor response to Don's evangelism.

The religious message that Don preached to Chinese people accorded with orthodox Christian principles: he held that faith in Jesus Christ was the only way to salvation, and that other religions were false. Most contemporary Protestant missionaries to China had similar opinions, believing strongly in the exclusive truth of Christianity and opposing any Chinese ideas or customs that contradicted Biblical teaching. Like them, Don did not accept anything less than absolute commitment to Christianity. He therefore criticised his audience's religious beliefs to their faces, and expected would-be converts to give up all beliefs and practices that he viewed as counter-Christian (such as image worship or opium smoking). Indeed, Don tried to impose Christian moral maxims even on unconverted Chinese, often expecting that they should avoid working on Sundays.<sup>89</sup> He clearly understood that the New Zealand Chinese were religiously syncretistic, but believed that this could be changed. However, like most other missionaries, he also thought that China could become Christian without giving up its traditions and customs. Don remained theologically conservative and absolutist throughout his career, never moving towards religious pluralism or emphasising social work over evangelism, as some China missionaries did in the early twentieth century.<sup>90</sup> The matter of how Don's beliefs compare with developments in the China mission movement will be examined in Chapter 3.

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<sup>87</sup> McNeur, *The Church and the Chinese in New Zealand*, 22.

<sup>88</sup> James Ng, "Rev. Alexander Don: His 'Good Harvest' Being Reaped at Last."

<sup>89</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, October 1882, 67.

<sup>90</sup> Lian Xi, *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907-1932* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 14.

In his interactions with potential converts, Don used several different methods to explain Christianity and to argue against Chinese religious beliefs. We have seen that Don had followed the well-used missionary strategy of studying Chinese literature and philosophy so he could preach his message in terms familiar to his audience. From Don's mission reports and surviving sermon notes, it is clear that he put his accumulated knowledge to practical use. During one religious discussion with a Chinese man on the 1890-91 Inland Tour, Don attacked his opponent's adherence to image worship by appealing to the Chinese value of filial piety, arguing that God was the father of humanity and that it would therefore be unfilial to worship other deities. As the debate progressed, Don's final weapon was to ask for evidence of image worship in the Confucian classics.<sup>91</sup> Some of Don's surviving sermon notes provide further evidence that he made his preaching culturally relevant. For example, to attest to the necessity of being cleansed from sin, he quoted from Mencius: "Though a man may be wicked, yet if he adjust his thoughts, fast, and bathe, he may sacrifice to God."<sup>92</sup> Don also used scientific facts to argue against Chinese religious thought. For example, in another sermon he countered the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation by observing that men cannot be reborn as animals because each kind of creature can only reproduce itself.<sup>93</sup> The use of natural theology to promote the cause of evangelism was widespread in China missions: for instance, the Rev. Young J. Allen (1836-1907) combined science with the gospel in his Chinese-language periodical *Jiaohui xinbao* 教會新報 (*Church News*), in one instance using gravity as an analogy for Christian love.<sup>94</sup>

Though Don's primary focus was on communicating Christianity to Chinese people, he also educated them about other areas of Western culture. One concrete way he did this was by starting a thrice-weekly English class for the Chinese residents of Dunedin in May 1889.<sup>95</sup> The aims of this program, which often used Christian

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<sup>91</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, April 1891, 188.

<sup>92</sup> Don, sermon note, n.d., Alexander Don Collection, Presbyterian Archives Research Centre, Knox College, Dunedin. The original Chinese for this quote is "雖有惡人，齊戒沐浴，則可以祀上帝。" *Mencius, Li Lou Xia* 離婁下, *juan* 53.

<sup>93</sup> Don, sermon note, n.d., Alexander Don Collection, Presbyterian Archives Research Centre, Knox College, Dunedin.

<sup>94</sup> Adrian A. Bennett and Kwang-ching Liu, "Christianity in the Chinese Idiom: Young J. Allen and the Early 'Chiao-hui Hsin-pao,' 1868-1870," in *Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), 191.

<sup>95</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, July 1889, 3.

materials as texts, were both to improve English ability among the Chinese and to provide an opportunity for evangelism. It was not only through English classes that Don taught Chinese people about his culture, however. Occasionally, he would report being interrogated about Western customs or science, and tried to correct misunderstandings.<sup>96</sup> In one case Don was asked for confirmation of Chinese rumours about European family values – for example, that daughters inherited property before sons did. When Don clarified what European norms actually were, the inquirer concluded that Chinese and Western customs were not as different as he had thought.<sup>97</sup> Don would sometimes communicate scientific facts, such as when he answered a question on how telegraph cables worked.<sup>98</sup> In addition, some of the Christian literature that he disseminated covered secular topics as well as the gospel. In 1883 Don was signing up residents of Round Hill to receive the Chinese-language mission periodical *Wanguo gongbao* 萬國公報 (*Globe Magazine or Review of the Times*), published by Young J. Allen in Shanghai. This journal, which aimed at spreading the benefits of Western science and civilisation in China through literature, included not only Christian material but also articles on science, international issues, economics and so forth.<sup>99</sup> In communicating Western knowledge to the Chinese sojourners, Don's purpose was both to improve their moral, mental, and material state, and to make them more receptive to Christianity by demonstrating that European civilisation was not inferior to China's. Other missionaries conducted educational activities in China for the same reasons.<sup>100</sup> Don also frequently provided humanitarian aid and service to the New Zealand Chinese, both from compassionate motives and to improve their receptiveness to Christianity (as will be discussed in Chapter 4).

## Summary

Chinese migration to New Zealand in the nineteenth century created a markedly separate community within the country. The European and Chinese communities had very different cultures and harboured much mutual prejudice. By the

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<sup>96</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, April 1890, 182.

<sup>97</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, February 1884, 147.

<sup>98</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, February 1884, 148.

<sup>99</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, April 1883, 185.

<sup>100</sup> Irwin T. Hyatt, Jr., "Protestant Missions in China, 1877-1890: The Institution of Good Works," in *American Missionaries in China: Papers from Harvard Seminars*, ed. Kwang-ching Liu (Cambridge, Massachusetts: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1966), 94.

1880s, there was a general trend of increasing governmental and public hostility towards the immigrants, with little being done to bridge the social gap. This is why Alexander Don was significant. During his career as a missionary from 1882 to 1913, he was the most prominent cultural mediator between Chinese and Europeans in New Zealand. No others fulfilled this role to the same extent at that time, for during Don's ministry there were no other European missionaries to the New Zealand Chinese who had undergone specialised training in Chinese language and culture. It was not until about halfway through Don's career that other ministers and churchgoers started conducting official mission work, and even then they were often hampered by the language barrier. Meanwhile, Chinese catechists did not have as strong a relationship with the European community as Don did, nor did they focus as much on transmitting information about Chinese culture.

In order to become an effective missionary, Don studied Chinese language, literature, philosophy, and other elements of culture. He also learned through his observations and experiences among the New Zealand migrants, and the knowledge he gained made him a potential cultural mediator. The prime thrust of Don's cultural presentation to his hearers was of course Christianity, but he also educated Chinese people in secular aspects of Western culture – a line of work that was an integral element of the China mission movement at that time. Like other missionaries, although Don's primary aim was the conversion of the Chinese, he thought it his duty to benefit them materially as well as spiritually. The understanding of Chinese culture that Don acquired through interactions with the sojourners was later communicated by him to other Europeans – a process that I explore in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2: Don's Presentation of Chinese Culture

Throughout his missionary career, Alexander Don acted as a cultural mediator by presenting his understanding of New Zealand Chinese culture to other Europeans. The primary medium for this transmission of knowledge was the mission reports that he published in church periodicals (the *Presbyterian*, the *Christian Outlook* and the *Outlook* successively), although he also wrote for secular newspapers and spoke to church audiences on the subject of Chinese culture.<sup>1</sup> In his writings Don communicated large amounts of information about Chinese values, beliefs and customs, interpreting these from his own perspective and offering positive or negative evaluations of them. By conveying knowledge and opinions, he affected his European readers' understanding of and attitudes toward the sojourners. The most notable quality about Don's picture of Chinese culture was the change it underwent both in emphasis and tone. At the start of his career, the missionary concentrated on describing and criticising those elements of Chinese culture that he disagreed with – mainly religion and morals. However, from the late 1890s Don's attitudes seemed to improve, and he presented a more sympathetic view that focused on positive accounts of the New Zealand Chinese community. This change took place from about 1897, and Don's mission career can thus be approximately divided into early and later periods: from 1882 to early 1897, and 1897 to 1913 respectively. While previous scholarship has described Don's writings about the New Zealand Chinese from the perspective of his role as missionary, this chapter examines how he served the function of cultural mediator by depicting the Chinese community to New Zealand Europeans. Focusing on the early and later periods of his career respectively, I will analyse the image of Chinese culture that Don presented, identifying his motives for communicating information and the factors that shaped his opinions. Since the primary channel for

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<sup>1</sup> Don conducted publicity tours to raise funds for the Dunedin Chinese Church and Canton Villages Mission. On these tours, he spoke about China, its people, and its culture to European congregations. Don, "Lanterning Inland," *Outlook*, December 28, 1901, 8.

Don's views was his mission reports, these constitute the major source for this chapter.

### **Don's Earlier Presentation of Chinese Culture: 1882 – c. 1897**

In this early period, Don's mission reports in Presbyterian periodicals concentrated on the topics of Chinese religion and values, to which he adopted a generally critical attitude. Thus European readers often saw a dark picture of Chinese people and culture in Don's writings, but at the same time they learned in detail about the beliefs, ideals and customs of the sojourners, through the missionary's subjective viewpoint. Don's unfavourable attitudes probably reached greatest intensity in 1884-85 and again in 1894-95. Although his early focus on describing Chinese culture does not at first seem relevant to mission work, it was in fact mainly his aims and beliefs as a missionary that both motivated him to describe Chinese culture and shaped his judgements of it during this period. Because Don's primary goal was to convert the New Zealand Chinese, he naturally opposed their traditional religious beliefs, as well as those Chinese values that seemed to contradict Christian morals. His attitudes were determined not only by his religious convictions, but also by a belief that many aspects of his audience's culture were actual barriers to their conversion. Don hoped that Christianity would transform Chinese people and alter their values in line with Biblical commandments. However, the proportionally small number of conversions that he gained did not live up to his hopes. Because he viewed Chinese religion and values as responsible for this failure, Don focused on describing and condemning these aspects of culture in his published reports. Therefore, both the focus and the generally negative tone of Don's early depiction of Chinese culture were due primarily to his frustrated mission aims. Nevertheless, it was by no means the case that Don constantly attacked the Chinese in the early portion of his career. He also expressed some praise and admiration for them during these years, thanks to a growing cultural understanding and sense of tolerance. These latter factors contributed to the improvement in Don's attitudes from the late 1890s, which will be explored later in this chapter.

One of Don's major motives for presenting an image of Chinese culture to Europeans was his need to maintain support for his mission. This was especially

important in view of early Presbyterian scepticism about the New Zealand Chinese mission's potential for success. In 1885, the editor of the *Presbyterian* spoke for many by saying about the mission that "really nothing is being accomplished – scarcely, as far as we can see, an impression made."<sup>2</sup> Facing such doubt among his peers, Don's negative depiction of Chinese religion and values was intended to highlight the obstacles to Christianity that existed among Chinese people, thereby justifying his lack of results and emphasising the need for continued or additional backing. This was a common strategy among China missionaries, who often conveyed harsh images of Chinese culture to their home congregations so as to arouse pity for the heathen and gain further assistance.<sup>3</sup> Don was no different: in an 1890 speech to the Otago Sunday School Union, he outlined ten detailed reasons for the difficulty of Chinese mission work – most related to Chinese culture – and concluded by stressing the need for more workers in the field.<sup>4</sup> According to him, the lack of converts was due mainly to the barriers erected by heathen civilisation, and with further help the battle could be won. Thus, Don's negative portrayal of Chinese culture was linked to his advocacy of the mission cause. Another reason for his criticism was that it served as a means to vent his personal exasperation and disappointment, and it may also have been partially an attempt to convince himself that he was not responsible for the mission's seemingly poor outcome.

## Religion

In this early period, Don's mission reports offered detailed information on Chinese religion. He would both describe it from his own knowledge and reproduce explanations given him by New Zealand Chinese. For instance, while discussing the difficulty of Chinese mission work in 1890, Don offered some general information regarding Chinese religious ideas. Here he wrote that Chinese people had an idea of a supreme God (possibly referring to the concept of Heaven or *Tian* 天), but regarded this God as approachable only through mediators such as minor deities and ancestors.<sup>5</sup> On another occasion, Don repeated what Chinese miners had told him concerning the Jade Emperor (*Yudi* 玉帝, the principal deity of Daoism). For his readers' benefit, Don

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<sup>2</sup> Note on "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, January 1885, 123.

<sup>3</sup> Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, 111.

<sup>4</sup> Don, "Chinese Mission Work in Otago," *NZP*, October 1890, 63.

<sup>5</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, August 1890, 23.



prefaced this account with his own brief explanation of who the Jade Emperor was.<sup>6</sup> In these two cases, Don's desire to report on his evangelical activities and the obstacles in his path prompted him to convey information on Chinese religious beliefs.

In addition to describing Chinese religion in his own words and through accounts given by Chinese people, Don also recorded observations of religious practices. On an 1890 visit to Round Hill, he reported on the Public Hall and temple that had been recently built by the Chinese residents there. This account was prefaced by the remark: "The attitude of indifference [to Christianity] struck me more forcibly on this visit than ever before..."<sup>7</sup> According to Don, this unresponsiveness was due to the Public Hall:

It may be that formerly there was some void in their [Chinese people's] souls which caused at least some concern and interest in the words of the preachers, but which has now been filled by the opening at New Year time of the Round Hill "*Kung Koon*" [公館] or Public Hall, with the usual idolatrous accompaniments.<sup>8</sup>

Here we see why the Hall was of interest to Don: it was an obstacle to his mission. His reports continued to give extensive detail on the Hall, its altar to Guan Yu 關羽 (a deity in Chinese popular religion), and its ancestral tablet and inscriptions. Because he mentioned religious objects strange to his European readers, Don had to include brief summaries of certain Chinese beliefs, such as ancestor worship. His missionary mentality emerged in his judgement of the Hall's artefacts as "idolatrous." Apart from this account, Don gave frequent attention to religious rituals and occasions: descriptions of Qingming ceremonies and Ghost Festivals (*Zhongyuan jie* 中元節) appeared multiple times in his writings from the 1880s.<sup>9</sup> Again, these reports were characterised by a focus on the religious beliefs underpinning the rites, and by a general negative tone.

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<sup>6</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, April 1886, 183.

<sup>7</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, August 1890, 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Qingming: Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, September 1882, 43; Ghost Festival: Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, November 1884, 84.

Don would sometimes publish English translations of Chinese texts on religious topics, particularly during his time at Round Hill. The most extensive of these translations was a lengthy “‘Confucio-Buddhisto-Taoist’ moral and religious tract” entitled the “Book of Exhortation to Good.”<sup>10</sup> Don’s English version of this work, which was a dialectic on ethics influenced by Confucian and Buddhist thought, was serialised in the *Presbyterian* from January to October 1885. To this Don added his own explanatory notes on religious doctrines, Confucian principles, and other culture-specific items. In one instalment, Don’s notes offered summaries of the Buddhist teachings of nirvana, reincarnation and vegetarianism.<sup>11</sup> Through both the main translated text and notes, the “Book of Exhortation to Good” made considerable information on Chinese religious and philosophical thought available to the readers of the *Presbyterian*. Don’s publication of this work was apparently intended to educate Europeans about Chinese beliefs, so that they understood the obstacles faced by Christianity. Other Chinese religious texts translated by Don included a tract giving an allegorical “prescription” for how to achieve long life by mixing virtues together, and the rules of the Cheong Shing Tang, which were of interest to him because of their references to Chinese religious ideas.<sup>12</sup>

Don’s missionary beliefs motivated him not only to present information on Chinese religion, but also to characterise it in a certain way. One common quality that he ascribed to Chinese beliefs was irrationality. This was a typical judgement made by Protestant missionaries, who often represented Chinese people as irrational because they rarely gave reasons for their faith (at least, not in accordance with Western logic).<sup>13</sup> Missionaries believed that Chinese religions were a collection of superstitions and meaningless rituals, practised merely for tradition’s sake. Don had a similar outlook, which was visible in his first description of ancestral rites at a Qingming festival. Having interviewed numerous participants, he commented: “Not one of the

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<sup>10</sup> Don, “Book of Exhortation to Good,” *NZP*, January 1885, 129. Don claimed that this tract had been written by Lin Zexu 林則徐 (1785-1850), the Imperial High Commissioner who attempted to stop European shipments of opium into China. Unfortunately, the original Chinese manuscript has not been identified.

<sup>11</sup> Don, “Book of Exhortation to Good,” *NZP*, October 1885, 71-72.

<sup>12</sup> Tract: Don, “Whisky, Medicine and Morals – A Strange Mixture,” *NZP*, May 1884, 208-9; rules of Cheong Shing Tang: Don, “Chinese Dead, Yet Living,” *NZP*, December 1883, 103-5.

<sup>13</sup> Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, 107.

lot had anything satisfactory to say as to the meaning of the sacrifice just made.”<sup>14</sup> Don often detailed what he viewed as unreasonable Chinese ideas, such as *fengshui* 風水, belief in ghosts, and ideas regarding luck and fate. He viewed all these as “examples of the many-headed monster, superstition.”<sup>15</sup> Don criticised the perceived irrationality of Chinese religion due to his view that reason and logic were important components of faith. He did, however, seem to think that Chinese genuinely believed in the existence of the spirit world, and that ancestral rites were motivated by sincere convictions, not merely tradition.<sup>16</sup>

Don also commonly assessed Chinese religion as materialistic. In this he agreed with most contemporary missionaries, who believed that Chinese people’s adherence to their traditional religions was motivated more by personal interests than true spiritual convictions.<sup>17</sup> Don became convinced that his hearers might become Christian for monetary gain, and claimed that participants in religious ceremonies cared more about worldly enjoyment than sincere worship. Having observed an offering of food and drink to the spirits at one Qingming festival, Don commented,

One would expect solemnity on such an occasion; but these worshippers interpreted the *Ts’ing Ming* [Qingming] by eating and drinking more in ten minutes than they left to the dead for a year.<sup>18</sup>

Several years later Don again attacked the Qingming festival, saying it had a “gorge and gamble” focus and was used by impecunious Chinese to take advantage of their countrymen’s hospitality.<sup>19</sup> Such criticisms were fuelled by Don’s perception of Chinese religion as materialistic, hedonistic and insincere, traits opposed to the devotion and soberness that he believed were characteristic of Christianity. This apparent dichotomy only intensified his frustration at the continued adherence of the New Zealand Chinese to their traditional faiths.

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<sup>14</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, September 1882, 43.

<sup>15</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, September 1891, 48.

<sup>16</sup> Don, “Chinese Mission Work in Otago,” *NZP*, October 1890, 64.

<sup>17</sup> Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, 64.

<sup>18</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, August 1884, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, May 1886, 202.

## Values

Don's early mission reports concentrated on describing not only Chinese religion, but also the morals or values of Chinese culture. He identified what he considered to be Chinese characteristics by appraising their ideas and behaviour against Christian and Western standards; if a Chinese value seemed to contradict Biblical morals, he would discuss and criticise it frequently. This was because Don saw these values as a barrier to conversion, and wished to transform them through Christianity. One example of this process is the way that Don represented Chinese as dishonest. According to him, they would often indirectly refuse his invitations to evangelical meetings – either giving reasons why they could not come, or promising to attend but never showing up. In one example from 1884, Don claimed at least 80 men had agreed to come to a meeting, but the eventual attendance was only three.<sup>20</sup> This conduct stemmed from the fact that Chinese culture places more importance on social harmony and saving face than on factual accuracy or frankness.<sup>21</sup> However, Don stated that it was “a variety of insincerity,” evaluating it against his own ideal of complete honesty.<sup>22</sup> Due to observing this kind of social strategy among the New Zealand Chinese and judging it from his own perspective, Don concluded early in his career that Chinese were intrinsically dishonest. He held to this opinion until at least the mid-1890s, when he said that they were rarely truthful except as a trick.<sup>23</sup> In this manner, Don ascribed to the Chinese a set of morals according to how their culture measured on the scale of Christian and Western norms. Where he identified Chinese characteristics that seemed immoral, Don would concentrate on describing and attacking them, thus producing a negative picture of Chinese culture for his European readers.

Another value that Don ascribed to Chinese people was materialism – not only in religion, but in their culture as a whole. Pragmatism and concern with material prosperity were common in Chinese society at the time, thanks in large part to widespread poverty, overpopulation and land shortages. The New Zealand sojourners clearly aimed to make money, having emigrated to escape privation at home and to

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<sup>20</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, November 1884, 84.

<sup>21</sup> Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, June 1893, 225.

<sup>23</sup> Don, “Among the Otago Chinese,” *Christian Outlook*, May 25, 1895, 196.

contribute to the well-being of their families. However, Don viewed their apparent desire for wealth as evidence of a materialistic nature, seeing proof of this in the widespread couplets or poems that were written by miners about the search for gold.<sup>24</sup> In his early career, Don made numerous generalisations about Chinese avarice: according to him, in China “three-fourths of the conversation one overhears is on the subject of money,”<sup>25</sup> and most letters sent by Chinese people either requested or sent it.<sup>26</sup> He also criticised some members of the Chinese community for being habitual gamblers.<sup>27</sup> Don did not oppose this seeming materialism merely because it conflicted with Biblical injunctions against loving worldly riches,<sup>28</sup> but even more since he considered it formed another obstacle to Chinese acceptance of Christianity. In his 1890 Sunday School Union address, Don listed “love of gain” as one of the reasons for the difficulty of mission work among the Chinese.<sup>29</sup> Here, he claimed that his hearers would usually not attend sermons if in difficult financial straits because they were too concerned with trying to earn money. At the same time, Don did understand some of the reasons why Chinese people seemed to pursue wealth. In the same 1890 speech, he explained how most of the immigrants were “poor farmers, many of whom have to borrow money at very high rates of interest,” and that they therefore aimed to make money so as to return to China as quickly as possible.<sup>30</sup>

A negative quality that appeared frequently in Don’s picture of Chinese culture was conservatism. It has already been shown that, like other missionaries, Don viewed most of Chinese religion as irrational and bound by convention. The persistence of the New Zealand Chinese community in holding to their traditions, despite prolonged exposure to Christianity and Western culture, led Don to conclude that they were inherently conservative. This opinion echoed those of his missionary peers and of Westerners in general.<sup>31</sup> Don found evidence for Chinese conservatism in not only religion, but other areas of culture as well. One prominent example was Chinese medicine, which was extensively practiced among the New Zealand immigrants. In the

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<sup>24</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *Christian Outlook*, June 26, 1897, 256.

<sup>25</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, November 1882, 88.

<sup>26</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, November 1885, 86.

<sup>27</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, February 1884, 147.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., Matthew 6:24.

<sup>29</sup> Don, “Chinese Mission Work in Otago,” *NZP*, October 1890, 65.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

early period of his mission Don often meticulously described the sojourners' medical practices and pharmaceutical items, focusing on what he considered strange, irrational or mistaken.<sup>32</sup> He believed that Chinese people's apparent enslavement to custom was evidence for a lack of reasoning power, and therefore began to call Chinese minds "turbid" or "torpid," conveying the meaning of "unclear" or "fogged."<sup>33</sup> Here Don had been influenced by the missionary Arthur H. Smith (1845-1932), whose popular book *Chinese Characteristics* (1890) included a chapter on Chinese "Intellectual Turbidity."<sup>34</sup> Don said that among Chinese people there existed "general mental torpidity amazing and deadness of soul appalling," clearly linking tradition-bound irrationality with the Chinese rejection of Christianity.<sup>35</sup>

Another value that Don often depicted among the New Zealand Chinese community was a strong pride in Chinese people and civilisation, along with a prejudice against those of foreign countries. He often referred to Chinese ethnic and cultural chauvinism, relating it to "ignorance" or "narrow-mindedness,"<sup>36</sup> and thus drawing a link between ethnocentrism and conservatism. Having discovered that the Chinese immigrants believed in their country's superiority to the extent that they scoffed at reports of its military defeats, Don wrote a long diatribe on "Chinese Self-Esteem," stating, "Contempt for non-Chinese shows itself in a thousand ways."<sup>37</sup> Don considered anti-foreign sentiment to be another hindrance to Chinese conversion, and therefore listed "Hatred of the European" first on his 1890 list of mission difficulties.<sup>38</sup> Most missionaries in China had similar opinions, and the "foreign" status of Christianity was indeed the reason for much of the opposition it met in China.

The importance of Don's evangelical concerns in determining his views is shown by the way he represented spiritual indifference as an intrinsic Chinese trait. In 1892, musing on his mission's numerically low results, he concluded that the Chinese in New Zealand had "absolutely no desire for and no interest in learning of the soul

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<sup>32</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, September 1890, 43-45.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, May 1893, 203.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur H. Smith, *Chinese Characteristics* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., c. 1894), 82.

<sup>35</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *Christian Outlook*, July 3, 1897, 268.

<sup>36</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, October 1882, 65.

<sup>37</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, June 1885, 224.

<sup>38</sup> Don, "Chinese Mission Work in Otago," *NZP*, October 1890, 63.

and its destiny.”<sup>39</sup> Several years later he commented regarding the typical Chinese miner: “The faintest gleam of interest in things spiritual is as rare in his eye as a speck of gold in a coal mine.”<sup>40</sup> The Chinese lack of interest in Christianity caused Don to view them as indifferent by nature. This hardness was Don’s chief concern, for he believed that once his audience softened towards the gospel, all the other apparent evils among them would be corrected. The idea that Chinese people lacked a yearning for higher spiritual matters was common among missionaries, due to the widespread resistance to Christianity in China.<sup>41</sup> It is possible that Don’s opinions in this area were again influenced by Arthur H. Smith, who condemned Chinese people for “absolute indifference to the profoundest spiritual truths in the nature of man.”<sup>42</sup>

Just as Don attacked Chinese values that were at odds with Christian morals, he also praised those which harmonised with them. However, he focused less often on the Chinese attributes that he viewed positively, for his priority was to convert and reform his audience. One set of Chinese values that Don frequently lauded was family morals, and especially filial piety. At Round Hill he mentioned an example of a son who sent money regularly to his parents in China, despite not having a reliable income himself.<sup>43</sup> Filial piety was praised by most missionaries,<sup>44</sup> who saw it as analogous to the Biblical injunction to respect one’s parents (although this Christian concept required submission to God above all, and was therefore different from the Confucian idea of filial piety). As Don’s understanding grew, he offered further insight into how filial piety motivated other behaviour – for example, he noted that the reason for the aversion of most Chinese to Western surgery was the traditional imperative to preserve the bodies their parents had given them.<sup>45</sup> Another positive element in Don’s picture of Chinese culture was the norms of etiquette: he said that “a Chinese digger’s manners are as much above the European digger’s (Irish excepted) as ten is above five.”<sup>46</sup> In Don’s writings, the Chinese whom he encountered consistently come across

<sup>39</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, December 1892, 103.

<sup>40</sup> Don, “Among the Otago Chinese,” *Christian Outlook*, May 4, 1895, 167.

<sup>41</sup> Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, 53.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, 313.

<sup>43</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, August 1885, 27.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., Samuel Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 1:810.

<sup>45</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, September 1890, 43. The value placed by Chinese culture on preserving one’s body was based in part on the *Classic of Filial Piety* (孝經). Don may have studied this in English translation, or more likely learned about the idea from a Western work on China.

<sup>46</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, August 1888, 26.

as scrupulously polite, generous and hospitable. He clearly approved of the spirit of friendship at Chinese New Year, highly praising the practice of visiting friends: “This is a custom most admirable and worthy of imitation by us.”<sup>47</sup> Other positive ideals that Don found in Chinese culture included industriousness and perseverance, a relatively high standard of sexual morality, and a respect for law. All the values that received Don’s approval were, as might be expected, fairly close approximations to Biblical moral standards.

In the early years of his ministry, Don frequently wrote not only of the New Zealand Chinese community, but also of China itself. The first writings of his career, which were published in the *Presbyterian* during his training period at Canton, included a brief summary of life in the city and two longer accounts of trips into the surrounding counties. Here, the young Don’s mission-minded zeal for learning about Chinese religion and values was already evident. He focused on describing religious ideas, ritual buildings, and the character of the people, alongside the normal travel observations of a European in foreign lands. Don was already expressing some of the opinions about Chinese beliefs and values that he would later develop more fully – for instance, he often criticised the concept of *fengshui* while in China.<sup>48</sup> After his New Zealand mission began, Don frequently took responsibility for contributing news of China to the Presbyterian periodicals, inserting clippings from missionary publications or colleagues’ letters. Between 1884 and 1885, he also wrote several articles about Canton for children. These were mainly observations of customs and living conditions, but in the first one Don revealed his primary focus by representing Chinese people as ignorant for believing superstitious myths and not accepting Christianity.<sup>49</sup>

Don’s religious aims and convictions were not the only influence on his early portrayal of Chinese culture. Although Christian doctrine was the basis for his worldview, he was unavoidably influenced by the secular culture in which he had been brought up – that of the West, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, to varying degrees. For instance, he often criticised what he saw as the attribute of “inaccuracy” in Chinese culture. He complained that Chinese were not exact in measuring distance, quantity or time, saying in 1895 that “[whether] a man uses ‘hundred,’ ‘thousand,’ or

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<sup>47</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, April 1883, 184.

<sup>48</sup> E.g., Don, “A Trip: Kwong Chau to Lin Chau,” *NZP*, October 1880, 70.

<sup>49</sup> Don, “On the Wall of Canton,” *NZP*, April 1884, 196.



'myriad [ten thousand],' is often a matter of chance."<sup>50</sup> Don commonly reported the lateness of Chinese hearers in coming to meetings, observing that the "Chinese as a people take things very leisurely."<sup>51</sup> Don's response to Chinese ethnocentrism was influenced by his own cultural and national chauvinism, which led him to feel frustrated over the failure of the New Zealand sojourners to admit their country's weaknesses or recognise Western accomplishments. Thus, Don came to depict Chinese people as proud to the extent of being delusional.<sup>52</sup>

Don's negative views of Chinese people and culture may have been exacerbated by initial tensions in his relationship with the Chinese community. During his first posting at Round Hill, the missionary was not broadly accepted by the local Chinese residents, and sometimes experienced unfriendliness or hostility. (The development of Don's relations with the New Zealand Chinese will be examined further in Chapter 4.) It is indisputable that these personal frictions influenced the way in which Don viewed Chinese culture and represented it in his writings. For example, after helping the police in a case where two Chinese people were prosecuted for illegal sale of alcohol, Don became involved in an altercation with supporters of the defendants. While describing the incident in his next mission report, he stated that "human depravity is a mighty pyramid, and the Chinese part is the apex," and "what a vile thing the Chinese heart must be."<sup>53</sup> Taken in context, these disparaging remarks were clearly fuelled by Don's recent personal conflict with Chinese people. This incident was unusual, as was the severity of Don's comments, but the hostility he sometimes met in early years no doubt contributed to his unfavourable attitudes.

We have seen that during the first phase of Don's career (1882-97), his frustrated mission aims were a major factor that both motivated him to present cultural information and shaped his attitudes. In order to maintain support from European Christians and to give voice to his disappointed ambitions, Don painted a largely negative portrait of Chinese culture. The more he laboured without visible results, the more his writings conveyed a sense of despair. By 1895 these feelings had

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<sup>50</sup> Don, "Among the Otago Chinese," *Christian Outlook*, August 24, 1895, 352.

<sup>51</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, May 1892, 205.

<sup>52</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, November 1884, 84.

<sup>53</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, June 1884, 224.

reached a nadir, as shown in one of the comments with which he opened that year's Inland Tour report:

And there is that other solitude, among companions inhuman, in the crowd born and bred anti-foreign, and often steeped in opium, debauch, and gambling – a surging sea of hate and antagonism... or what is even worse, a dead sea of unsympathy, where the calm, slimy surface of superstition makes one sick at heart.<sup>54</sup>

Here, the reasons for Don's negative attitudes are clear: lack of response to his message, personal hostility, and the persistence of beliefs and customs that he opposed. His reaction to these setbacks was to focus on and criticise them in his public writings. However, Don's mission was not the only factor shaping his early views, though it did play a major role. He might criticise Chinese values because they conflicted with his own culture, and personal tensions between himself and the Chinese community sometimes led him to make strongly-worded attacks on their morality.

### **Don's Later Presentation of Chinese Culture: c. 1897 – 1913**

While Don's published writings presented a mainly negative image of Chinese culture in the early part of his career, there was a marked improvement from about 1897 onwards. The shift occurred in his area of focus rather than the nature of his opinions. That is, although Don did not seem to change his mind about the elements of culture that he had formerly criticised, he rarely discussed these matters after 1897, concentrating instead on positive things such as accounts of kindness shown him by Chinese miners. In the early twentieth century, Don's affectionate descriptions of New Zealand Chinese life and his avoidance of attacks on their customs and values combined to create a much more favourable picture of Chinese culture than he had portrayed before. There were several connected reasons for this transformation. James Ng and Susan Chivers, who both note Don's change, attribute it partially to a greater understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture that was gained through his years of experience as a missionary.<sup>55</sup> This growing comprehension led him to take a

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<sup>54</sup> Don, "Among the Otago Chinese," *Christian Outlook*, May 4, 1895, 167.

<sup>55</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 2:155; Chivers, "Religion, Ethnicity and Race," 140.

more balanced view of Sino-Western cultural differences than most of his European peers did. In addition, by the 1890s Don had built considerable rapport with the New Zealand Chinese community, and felt increasing sympathy for them as many grew old and poor. From 1898, another factor was Don's need to maintain support for the Canton Villages Mission.

Although the improvement in Don's public attitudes to the New Zealand Chinese seemed to occur quite abruptly, it was partly the result of a process going back to the start of his ministry. One important factor was his understanding of Chinese culture, which grew throughout the first period of his career, despite the negative tone of his writings at that time. He continually demonstrated this cultural knowledge in his early writings, for example in the explanatory notes he appended to his translations of the "Book of Exhortation to Good" and the Cheong Shing Tang rules; his 1890 speech on the difficulties of mission work, which described various aspects of Chinese culture; and a two-page treatise on Chinese medicine that appeared in one mission report around the same time.<sup>56</sup> Returning from his second trip to China in 1898, Don said that while Chinese culture had once mystified him, now it "lay like an open book that one wanted to read 24 hours a day."<sup>57</sup> Thus, better understanding led to increased appreciation of things Chinese, even though Don still disagreed with beliefs and customs that contradicted Christian morality. In the later years of his mission, Don frequently demonstrated a close familiarity with Chinese culture and the New Zealand Chinese. For example, he opened the 1905-6 Tour report with an accurate history of the Otago Chinese community:

It [the arrival of Chinese in New Zealand] was in 1866... The first Chinese "rush" was from Victoria, when thousands of Europeans returned from Otago to Ballarat and Bendigo with rich stores and richer stories. 1200 Chinese were in Otago by the end of 1867; in 1871 they came by the shipload... 1596 for the year. These came direct from China, whither had spread the fame of the "New Gold Hills" in the far south.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, September 1890, 43-45.

<sup>57</sup> Don, *Under Six Flags: Being Notes on Chinese in Samoa, Hawaii, United States, British Columbia, Japan and China* (Dunedin: J. Wilkie & Co., 1898), 99.

<sup>58</sup> Don, "Annual Inland Tour 1905-6," *Outlook*, March 24, 1906, 8.

This was followed by a description of the Chinese miners' lifestyle and a profile of a typical migrant. Don's understanding of Chinese culture can also be seen in a series of comments he wrote for the *Otago Witness* in 1900, concerning the Boxer Rebellion. In one August article, when the foreign legations at Peking were still under threat, Don showed a comprehension of the anti-foreign sentiment behind the rebellion, saying that "the foreign missionary is killed, not because he is a Christian, for Chinese are perhaps the most tolerant of peoples, but because he is a foreigner."<sup>59</sup>

Don's growing understanding of Chinese culture gave him a greater sense of perspective, leading him occasionally to oppose the idea that Western civilisation was intrinsically better than that of China. The most remarkable early example of this more balanced attitude was an 1886 piece titled "As Others See Us," which gave a unique Chinese perspective on Sino-Western differences.<sup>60</sup> Here, Don began by pointing out that cultural superiority was subjective, and continued to explain the reasons behind certain Chinese behaviours, while appraising Western customs and morals from a Chinese perspective. The Chinese might seem greedy, but they saw Europeans as unfilial; their ideas of geography might seem laughable, but few Europeans had a basic knowledge of places in China. There were a couple of reasons why Don expressed such culturally tolerant opinions while still disagreeing with many Chinese beliefs and values. First, he knew more about Chinese culture than other New Zealand Europeans, and this gave him a desire to correct the ignorance of his compatriots. This attitude can be seen in his report of a publicity tour to European churches in aid of the CVM, in which he exulted over "the privileges of dispelling ignorance and prejudice, of imparting knowledge, of breaking down barriers, and bridging over chasms between East and West."<sup>61</sup> Second, like many other missionaries, Don made a distinction between religion and culture, maintaining in theory at least that Chinese could convert to Christianity without abandoning their traditions. For instance, Don disagreed with the widespread opinion of Western Christians that a Chinese convert should adopt European-style dress and shave off his queue. In response to such proposals, Don said

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<sup>59</sup> Don, "The Cables Criticised," *Otago Witness*, August 16, 1900, 51.

<sup>60</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, August 1886, 22.

<sup>61</sup> Don, "Lanterning Inland," *Outlook*, December 28, 1901, 8.

that “a Chinese man’s queue has no more to do with his religion than his shoes have.”<sup>62</sup>

Don’s early portrayal of the New Zealand Chinese was determined not only by his aim to convert them, but also by his interest in their culture. He would sometimes discuss a certain aspect of Chinese custom or lore merely because it was different and thus held fascination for him. As we have seen, for instance, he often published English translations of various Chinese texts he found among the New Zealand sojourners. This was sometimes to provide information on Chinese religious beliefs (as with the “Book of Exhortation to Good”), but at other times there appeared to be little motive for the translations other than to shed light on Chinese culture in general. This seemed the case when Don published an English version of a letter written by the leper Kong Lye to his mother,<sup>63</sup> and may have been one reason why he seldom missed an opportunity to translate an inscription posted on a miner’s wall.<sup>64</sup> In addition, Don’s depiction of Chinese activities was not confined to the rituals that he considered religious. He wrote extensive observations on several Chinese New Year occasions: in 1883, he described the customs of wearing new clothes, putting up red paper messages, presenting visiting cards, and letting off fireworks.<sup>65</sup> Other festivals that Don saw and reported among the New Zealand Chinese included the Mid-Autumn and Mid-Winter Days, Dragon Boat Festival, and Qixi 七夕,<sup>66</sup> along with the aforementioned examples of Qingming and the Ghost Festival.<sup>67</sup> Don’s writings are also replete with images of social life and everyday living conditions in the Chinese community.

One key cause of the positive transformation in Don’s attitudes was the rapport that had developed between him and the Chinese community by the late 1890s, and which continued to grow thereafter. These better relations were due in large part to the Inland Tours, which had accumulated much mutual goodwill since their inception in 1886. In late 1897, Don offered his own assessment of how the Tours had done this. He admitted that he had previously made a “rather unsympathetic study of Chinese

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<sup>62</sup> Don, “Notes Round the Pacific,” *Outlook*, March 26, 1898, 100.

<sup>63</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, October 1884, 65-66.

<sup>64</sup> E.g., Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *Christian Outlook*, June 26, 1897, 255.

<sup>65</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, April 1884, 184.

<sup>66</sup> Also known as Chinese Valentine’s Day.

<sup>67</sup> Mid-Winter Festival: Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, April 1885, 184; Mid-Autumn Festival: Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, November 1885, 85; Qixi: *ibid.*, 84.

character” which, among other things, had led him into depression by around 1890.

However:

The Annual Inland Tours then began in earnest, on which so much kindness from Chinese and Europeans was met, and so much better ground offered for studying Chinese character uncritically, that the crisis passed.<sup>68</sup>

According to Don himself, then, the Tours were instrumental in developing his regard for Chinese people and his understanding of their “character.” For their part, the Chinese saw the Tours as an act of friendship, since Don would walk long distances to see even a handful of isolated miners. Their response was to demonstrate ever-increasing kindness to the missionary, resulting in a growth of affection on both sides. The Dunedin Chinese Church (founded in April 1897) also contributed to good relations by allowing Don and Chinese people to interact and assist each other. Another source of goodwill was the humanitarian work that Don did for the Chinese, which will be examined in Chapter 4.

Because of his stronger rapport with the New Zealand Chinese community, Don was more likely to represent Chinese people and culture positively in his writings. Thus he began to relate many personal stories of friendship. For example, in 1906 Don recalled the welcome earlier shown him by Chinese friends in one locality:

Here once lived “Settled Victory” – so full of kindness to me on my visits, and so warm in welcome when I called eight years ago at his home in China. At hut here and home yonder, the same loving spirit.<sup>69</sup>

Before the mid-1890s, Don had rarely described any non-Christian in such glowing terms. His better relations with the Chinese in later years motivated him to offer such praise frequently, while abstaining from his former criticism. During these years, Don also related many intimate personal profiles of New Zealand Chinese, as in the following example:

The old man [named “Exhilaration”] was at breakfast when I called. He came over in 1870 with the “rushers” from Victoria. His father died when he was

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<sup>68</sup> Don, “Notes Round the Pacific,” *Christian Outlook*, December 4, 1897, 527.

<sup>69</sup> Don, “Annual Inland Tour 1905-6,” *Outlook*, April 14, 1906, 13.

four; his mother three years later. He is 61, and the only one of the family left. His two uncles intended educating him, but just then Kom Sin rebelled and they joined him. In two years the rebellion was quashed, and the two uncles executed. So he got no schooling. In Otago he has “tried his luck” at many places, but never got more than enough to live on, and often not enough.<sup>70</sup>

Don’s detailed knowledge of the histories and circumstances of the New Zealand Chinese are further proof of his close relationship with them.

Sympathy was another reason for Don’s changing opinions. In the later part of his career, he often expressed deep pity for the Otago Chinese miners as they grew old and lonely and were relegated to poverty. With the decline of the gold era and rocketing inflation in Guangdong, many of the immigrants were unable to earn enough to return home.<sup>71</sup> As Chinese were unable to draw a pension under an 1898 law, they frequently lived in miserable conditions. Don saw their afflictions at close range on his later Inland Tours, and his resulting feelings of sympathy helped to bring about the improvement in his attitudes towards Chinese people and culture. He now frequently discussed the sojourners’ plight: his introduction to the 1909-10 Tour report compared the Chinese community’s contemporary situation with former prosperity.<sup>72</sup> The way in which Don’s sympathy impacted his attitudes is clearly shown in the contrast between two reminiscences that he wrote about the Chinese miners’ heyday. Visiting Round Hill in 1893, Don recalled the vices of gambling and opium that had prevailed when he was first there, saying the Chinese settlement’s atmosphere on holidays had been “unspeakable”;<sup>73</sup> however, upon returning to the goldfield in 1908, he wrote that the sight of elderly men and empty dwellings made him “inexpressibly sad.”<sup>74</sup> There is a strong contrast in tone between these two Tour reports. In 1893, Don was still attacking Chinese immorality, while in 1908 his pity for the sojourners had altered the way he portrayed them.

It was the establishment of the CVM that was perhaps the most important cause of the improvement in Don’s public attitudes from the late 1890s. On his 1898

<sup>70</sup> Don, “Annual Inland Tour: 1905-6,” *Outlook*, May 19, 1906, 13.

<sup>71</sup> Greif, *The Overseas Chinese in New Zealand*, 41.

<sup>72</sup> Don, “Annual Inland Tour XXIII,” *Outlook*, June 14, 1910, supplement, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Don, *Annual Up-Country Tour Among Otago Chinese: 1893-94* (Dunedin: n.d., 1894), 2.

<sup>74</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *Outlook*, May 16, 1908, 8.

trip to Guangdong, Don was pleasantly surprised at the welcome given him by the former Chinese migrants who had returned from New Zealand.<sup>75</sup> Another missionary there told him that if all he had done in New Zealand was to build relations with Chinese people, thereby giving him the ability to mingle and communicate with them freely, then his work had not been for nothing.<sup>76</sup> This was a significant realisation for Don. He could now view his mission work as having been successful in a way, for the rapport he had built up with the New Zealand Chinese would open the way for continued evangelism among them once they had returned to China. This idea was the basis for the CVM, which became Don's greatest achievement. George McNeur claimed that Don's work among the New Zealand sojourners had opened a door of gospel opportunity for the CVM.<sup>77</sup> As we have seen, Don's frustrated mission goals had previously led him to describe Chinese culture in mainly critical terms; however, with the CVM now helping to satisfy his aims, his attitudes became more favourable. Another crucial reason for the improvement in Don's views was his need to maintain support for the CVM. Since the mission was based on the idea that Don's years of work had built up a reservoir of goodwill among the New Zealand Chinese, it was in his best interests to present European readers with a picture of warm relations between himself and the sojourners. This is why his focus shifted so abruptly in the late 1890s, from criticising Chinese culture to relating positive anecdotes of his personal interactions with Chinese people. It is no accident that this change occurred around the time that the CVM was founded in 1898.

All the above factors contributed to a shift in Don's presentation of Chinese religious beliefs. While he never overtly praised these, his earlier criticism of them notably quietened from 1897 onwards. For example, after an old friend of Don's had died, another man said his spirit had returned home to China. While Don might have previously attacked such an idea as superstitious, this time his report made no comment.<sup>78</sup> Years later, he gave a factual description of a homemade shrine without adding any subjective assessment.<sup>79</sup> We have seen that he considered Chinese beliefs a barrier to Christianity, and that this led to the negative opinions characteristic of his

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<sup>75</sup> Don, *Under Six Flags*, 92.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>77</sup> George McNeur, "The Canton Villages," *Outlook*, May 30, 1903, 14.

<sup>78</sup> Don, "Annual Inland Tour 1905-6," *Outlook*, May 26, 1906, 13.

<sup>79</sup> Don, "Inland Tour XXIII: 1909-10," *Outlook*, September 27, 1910, 13.



early career. Given that there was no increase in conversions after 1897, what changed Don's attitudes to Chinese religion? We have seen that stronger rapport and sympathy with the Chinese community made Don less willing to criticise them, and that furthermore he began to present a positive image of his relations with them so as to maintain support for the CVM. Though Don still naturally disagreed with "pagan" ideas, he was able to portray a relatively favourable picture of the New Zealand Chinese by generally avoiding discussion of their religious beliefs altogether.

## **Summary**

One important aspect of Don's role as a mediator was his presentation of New Zealand Chinese culture to Europeans, largely through the medium of his published mission reports. Don's picture of the Chinese community was clearly shaped both by his goals as a missionary and the cultural understanding and relationships with Chinese people that he gained over time. In the first part of his career (1882-97), Don's writings concentrated on describing Chinese religious beliefs and values, which he usually judged negatively. The main reason for Don's criticism was his desire to convert the Chinese. Their failure to accept his message led him to attack the areas of their culture that he viewed as obstacles to Christianity – that is, religion and values. By this means, Don attempted to justify his lack of success and maintain the support of other European Christians for a mission that many thought a waste of time, while simultaneously expressing his own frustration and disappointment. From about 1897, Don started to focus less on Chinese beliefs and morals, and more on his personal relationship with Chinese people, often relating stories of kindness and giving biographical profiles of the sojourners. There were a number of interlinked reasons for this change in attitude. First, Don's understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture was growing, causing him to adopt a more balanced perspective on Sino-Western differences. Furthermore, a strong rapport had developed between Don and the Otago Chinese by the late 1890s, thanks to the Inland Tours and Don's humanitarian work. In addition, the missionary felt a growing sympathy for the Chinese immigrants as they grew old and fell into hard circumstances. Finally, Don's depiction of Chinese culture was heavily influenced by the establishment of the CVM, showing that his missionary role remained a key factor determining his views. The CVM not only gave Don the sense that his ministry had been in some measure a success, but also motivated him to

present a more positive image of the New Zealand Chinese and his relations with them, so as to gain support for the new mission.

## Chapter 3: Don and Other Views of Chinese Culture

This chapter compares Alexander Don's portrayal of Chinese culture with those made by other writers and commentators, both before and during his career. Don will first be measured against other New Zealand sources of information on Chinese culture, such as the secular media, Parliamentary debates, and other missionary writings. By examining how Don differed from other local writers in terms of his attitudes and the volume of information he conveyed, I aim to demonstrate that he was unique as a cultural mediator in New Zealand. Second, I will compare Don's mediation activities to those of some more well-known China missionaries. It will be argued that insofar as Don fulfilled the same functions as these missionaries – disseminating large amounts of information on Chinese culture and helping to improve social relations and mutual understanding – he was a cultural mediator in the same way that they were. This comparison also reveals that Don's depiction of Chinese culture was motivated and shaped by factors that played a typical role in missionary accounts of China.

### Don Compared with Other New Zealand Sources

#### Secular New Zealand Sources

During Don's career, the secular media often discussed the New Zealand Chinese. The topic was of special interest to Otago regional papers from 1865, when news emerged that Chinese miners were coming to the province. Information and views on Chinese people and culture were provided in the *Otago Daily Times*, *Otago Witness*, *Tuapeka Times* and other newspapers from the arrival of the first immigrants onwards, and these representations can be compared with Don's writings. Descriptions of the New Zealand Chinese can also be found in other media publications, particularly after the turn of the century, when the balance of the Chinese population shifted to the North Island. In Parliamentary debates, politicians would publicise their viewpoints on the immigrants. Meanwhile, historical works demonstrate something of European attitudes through their sheer silence on the Chinese question. It must be noted that the views expressed by New Zealand political

leaders and newspaper writers do not necessarily match those of the general public. Most of the evidence we possess with regard to European attitudes consists of sources created by the proponents of a “White New Zealand,” and there were certainly many people in the country who supported the Chinese.<sup>1</sup> However, the framework for comparison here is published opinions that had a potentially widespread influence on New Zealand Europeans’ understanding of Chinese culture. Both Don and secular commentators painted this kind of public image, and it will be shown that there was a clear contrast between their portrayals of Chinese people and culture, in four related aspects.

The first major point of difference is in the area of attitudes. It was shown in the previous chapter that Don’s views of the New Zealand Chinese were quite critical in his earlier career, but became markedly more positive from about 1897. As has already been shown, however, New Zealand public opinion regarding the sojourners worsened over time, fuelled by an accelerating anti-Chinese campaign on the part of politicians and newspaper writers. This trend of increasing hostility is visible in media attitudes towards the Chinese community. When the Chinese immigrants started coming to Otago, both journalists and the public (apart from miners) generally agreed that while the newcomers might have strange customs, they were an asset to the province’s economy. Following the arrival of the Chinese pioneers, a reporter for the *Otago Witness* stated, “It is now a universally acknowledged fact that the introduction of Chinese labor [sic] is most beneficial to the interests of the district.”<sup>2</sup> By the 1880s, however, the tone had changed. Another *Witness* writer contradicted the earlier positive stance:

The State is continually depleted by Chinese colonists, for where one Chinaman departs others come in, with the renewed vigour of so many leeches.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to “leeches,” the sojourners were now referred to as “yellow locusts”<sup>4</sup> or a “yellow evil”<sup>5</sup> that had to be guarded against. As more Chinese people moved north, local media there attacked them as well. In Wellington, where the large numbers of

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<sup>1</sup> Moloughney and Stenhouse, ““Drug-besotten, Sin-begotten Fiends of Filth,”” 63.

<sup>2</sup> Editorial, *Otago Witness*, October 18, 1867, 6.

<sup>3</sup> “Sparks and Gleanings,” *Otago Witness*, March 20, 1880, 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Mt Ida Chronicle*, September 2, 1882.

<sup>5</sup> “Wellington Notes,” *Tuapeka Times*, July 13, 1895, 3.

Chinese entering the fruit-selling business in the 1890s alarmed their European competitors, the *Evening Post* condemned the newcomers as insanitary and immoral creatures who would prey on young girls.<sup>6</sup> Writers wishing to excite public opinion would print accusations that were strongly worded, general and unsubstantiated. One 1906 editorial in the *New Zealand Truth* opened by referring to a typical Chinese man as the “foulest, filthiest beast on earth,” and continued with a range of further sensationalist criticisms.<sup>7</sup> While such attacks were often rather vague, they did help to build an impression of negative values and practices linked with “Chineseness,” for instance by making accusations of dishonesty or uncleanness. Naturally, this tide of vilification was not universal, and defences of the Chinese would sometimes appear,<sup>8</sup> but by the early twentieth century the public arena was dominated by negative assessments of Chinese people and culture.

The development of worsening attitudes was also evident in Parliament. Most New Zealand political leaders initially had a favourable view of Chinese people, as shown by the 1871 Select Committee’s conclusions that they posed “no special risk to the morality and security of the community,” and that they were “industrious and frugal.”<sup>9</sup> From the late 1870s, however, the stiffening campaign for exclusion of the Chinese was accompanied by increasing numbers of disparaging or racist remarks directed at the immigrants. For example, during debates over the 1881 Chinese Immigrants Act, Richard Seddon notoriously commented that there was “about the same distinction between a European and a Chinaman as that between a Chinaman and a monkey.”<sup>10</sup> As already mentioned, a major reason for political opposition to the sojourners was that they did not fit into the ideal nation that government leaders were planning to build. Therefore, it was commonly claimed that Chinese values were incompatible with European ones, or that they would not properly integrate with New Zealand society. For example, William Hutchison, MHR for Wellington City, attacked the Chinese for knowing nothing of democracy and being of a “lower caste,” while another member concluded that “these people are in every way alien to us.”<sup>11</sup> At this

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<sup>6</sup> Editorial, *Evening Post*, May 15, 1896, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Editorial, *New Zealand Truth*, December 29, 1906, 1.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., “The Week,” *Otago Witness*, April 13, 1904, 43.

<sup>9</sup> AJHR (1871) H-5b, 4.

<sup>10</sup> New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (NZPD) (1880) 36:97.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-92; NZPD (1881) 38:212.

point there were still many pro-Chinese members in Parliament; however, by the mid-1890s the majority of politicians were voicing negative opinions, particularly in the House of Representatives.

Another indicator of European attitudes is the treatment of the Chinese in histories of New Zealand that were published during Don's career. In this case, it is the silence of most authorities on the topic of the New Zealand Chinese that speaks volumes. The first general work on the country's history was Edward Wakefield's *New Zealand after Fifty Years* (1889), which discusses the Chinese population only once, in a section on religious persecution.<sup>12</sup> It is notable that the Chinese are absent from Wakefield's account of the New Zealand mining industry, not even rating a mention in a list of different ethnicities on the goldfields.<sup>13</sup> Later works ignored the Chinese community in a similar manner. William Pember Reeves, an anti-Chinese MHR and social activist, barely referred to them in his 1898 profile of New Zealand, *The Long White Cloud*.<sup>14</sup> Nor had this trend changed after Don's day: amazingly, A. H. McLintock's exhaustive 1949 history of Otago did not give the Chinese a single passing mention, despite their prominent role in the province.<sup>15</sup> Recent scholarship has argued that Chinese people were not mentioned in New Zealand histories because they did not fit into the European concept of the nation's identity.<sup>16</sup> Whatever the case, it is clear that until recently New Zealand historians did not view the Chinese as an important element of the country. Unlike Don, they did not think it worthwhile to describe these immigrants or their culture.

It is clear, then, that the majority of New Zealand's political leaders and secular writers had very different attitudes to Chinese people and culture than those expressed by Don. The two underwent opposite transformations: while Don's comments were at first often critical but later grew more sympathetic, newspapers and politicians went from tolerance to hostility, becoming more negative in tone and making increasingly frequent attacks. This led to a majority atmosphere of Sinophobia

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Wakefield, *New Zealand after Fifty Years* (New York: Cassell, 1889), 31.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>14</sup> William Pember Reeves, *The Long White Cloud (Ao Tea Roa)* (London: Horace Marshall, 1898).

<sup>15</sup> A. H. McLintock, *History of Otago: The Origins and Growth of a Wakefield Class Settlement* (Christchurch: Capper Press, 1975).

<sup>16</sup> Tony Ballantyne, "Writing Out Asia: Race, Colonialism and Chinese Migration in New Zealand History," in *East by South: China in the Australasian Imagination*, ed. Charles Ferrall, Paul Millar, and Keren Smith (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005), 93.

by the early twentieth century, although many ordinary New Zealanders supported the Chinese. Don's condemnations differed in some other respects from those made by his secular peers. While the missionary did engage in highly negative remarks, exaggerations and generalisations, he did not make wholly false claims or express racist opinions. Unlike many other prominent New Zealand Europeans, Don never painted the Chinese people as an inferior race, emphasised their physical uncleanness, or engaged in unsubstantiated mud-slinging in order to prove a point. Instead, Don believed that Chinese people had equal status and rights to his own, albeit with some reprehensible traits and beliefs that could be changed by Christianity. This outlook was true of evangelical missionaries in general, and stemmed from the ideals of humaneness and egalitarianism in Christian teaching. We have seen that even in his early years Don expressed some positive opinions of Chinese people and culture, and that his writings were dominated by a favourable perspective after 1897, even while national anti-Chinese sentiment was growing. We can see, then, that Don's attitudes towards Chinese people contrasted strongly with those of his non-missionary peers in New Zealand. It is therefore inaccurate to rank him together with Richard Seddon as "the worst detractor of the Chinese" in the nineteenth century, as James Ng has done.<sup>17</sup>

Don's presentation of Chinese culture also had a different area of focus to that of his secular counterparts. As we have seen, Don's earlier reports concentrated on Chinese values and religious beliefs, and later on anecdotes and information about the Chinese community. On the other hand, discussions in the media and Parliament were mainly related to the effects that Chinese people might have on New Zealand. Both their supporters and detractors focused on discussing their potential economic impact, morals, and social integration. For instance, even before the first Chinese miners arrived, letters to newspapers claimed they were a threat to European livelihoods, as well as being insanitary and given to crime.<sup>18</sup> In response, their admirers said they would be "a valuable accession to the country."<sup>19</sup> The media's assessments of Chinese people were often based on how they measured up to the standards expected of settlers: an 1886 *Tuapeka Times* editorial praised Chinese miners for their hard-

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<sup>17</sup> Ng, *The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand and the Chinese*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., "The Chinese," *Otago Daily Times*, April 11, 1865, 5.

<sup>19</sup> "Among the Celestials," *Otago Witness*, September 18, 1869, 11.

working nature and submission to law, while simultaneously arguing that they did not integrate with New Zealand society.<sup>20</sup> In Parliament too, debates about immigration centred on economic issues, social morals or submission to legal authority. For example, political supporters of the Chinese pointed out they were hard-working,<sup>21</sup> while their detractors alleged that they were a law unto themselves and had highly unhealthy habits.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, the New Zealand media and politicians focused on different issues with regard to the sojourners than Don did. This contrast was due to differing areas of concern: Don chiefly discussed religion and values because of his mission aims and beliefs, while secular voices were primarily interested in the potential impact of Chinese immigration on New Zealand. Over time, more New Zealanders saw the immigrants as a potential threat to their lifestyle and national identity, which made their antagonism more severe than Don's.

Another way that secular presentations of Chinese culture contrasted with Don's was in the depth of their observations. It will be remembered that in Hofstede's model, values are the deepest level of culture, while the outer levels are made up of practices. Whereas Don often identified and discussed Chinese values and beliefs, secular descriptions of Chinese culture tended to focus on practices and activities. One typical example was this eyewitness account of a gambling room in the Chinese Camp near Lawrence, printed in the *Tuapeka Times*:

The atmosphere from the reeking fumes of a score of pipes, was simply intense. The room was very small, but you could hardly see to the other side of it. There was a large deal table in the centre, covered with heaps of Chinese coins and surrounded by about a dozen eager faces, each with an expression alternating between happiness and misery. The banker was at the head of the table with his little hooked stick, directing the destinies of fan-tan... When we entered the den, a few "brokers" scanned us as if they would borrow for a fresh start.<sup>23</sup>

Accounts of Chinese festivals were common in newspapers, as in this report on Qingming:

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<sup>20</sup> Editorial, *Tuapeka Times*, November 3, 1886, 2.

<sup>21</sup> "N.Z. Parliament," *Otago Witness*, August 29, 1895, 19.

<sup>22</sup> NZPD (1880) 36:100; NZPD (1881) 38:214.

<sup>23</sup> "The Chinese Camp," *Tuapeka Times*, March 27, 1886, 3.



From every part of the district the Chinese collected at the Camp on Saturday, where feasting was kept up for two or three days with great gusto. Tremendous cooking operations were going on all the time, but the miscellaneous method of boiling beef, mutton and pork in the one pot would not quite suit European tastes... to Celestials [Chinese] it is a time of great feasting and fan-tan playing.<sup>24</sup>

From these examples it can be seen that the media's descriptions of Chinese culture usually focused on actions, behaviour, living arrangements, and other observable customs. Little information on Chinese beliefs or values was offered. The reason for this shallowness of vision is that most New Zealand Europeans understood little of Chinese culture and could not speak the language. It was therefore difficult for them to learn about Chinese values or beliefs, whereas they could easily observe external behaviour. This is why, in contrast to Don, few secular authors report personal interactions with Chinese people.<sup>25</sup> They would more often use gestures and facial expressions to interpret Chinese feelings or intentions, as in the above article on the Chinese Camp.

Finally, secular commentators had a poorer understanding of Chinese culture than Don did. We have seen how Don eventually gained an extensive knowledge of Chinese values and customs, which he offered to the public in the form of detailed and generally accurate reports. Contemporary secular writers, on the other hand, did not often describe Chinese culture in detail, and what information they did present could be misinterpreted or mistaken. Common errors stemmed from characterising Chinese beliefs and customs in European terms, as when the *Tuapeka Times* said that Qingming was an "annual holiday, corresponding to our Good Friday."<sup>26</sup> Don never made such a comparison, but rather described the Qingming rites on their own terms, despite his missionary bias. Secular writings in New Zealand rarely mentioned the beliefs or values that motivated Chinese people's behaviour. For instance, in a 1902 newspaper article on the exhumation of Chinese bodies for return to China, the only mention of the reasons behind the project was that it was "in accordance with ancient Chinese

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<sup>24</sup> "Local and General Intelligence," *Tuapeka Times*, April 8, 1885, 2.

<sup>25</sup> The main exceptions are where the Chinese people in question could speak some English.

<sup>26</sup> "Local and General Intelligence," *Tuapeka Times*, April 5, 1884, 2.

religion or national obligations.”<sup>27</sup> In contrast, Don explained a similar disinterment in 1883 as follows:

Instead of being unnatural it is for the Chinese a most natural proceeding. Once a year, for the well-being of the dead, friends visit the tombs, which are swept and repaired while food and drink are presented to the departed spirits. With firm belief in the efficacy of the custom, is it not quite natural that the Chinaman shrinks from the idea of his bones being left in a foreign land “alone, alone, all alone”?<sup>28</sup>

Due to his greater cultural understanding, Don’s explanations of Chinese behaviour were more accurate than those offered by non-missionary authors. It is possibly due to secular commentators’ lack of knowledge that they attached a much stronger sense of Otherness to Chinese people and culture than Don did. One reporter visiting the Lawrence Chinese Camp described spoken Cantonese as “outlandish gibberish” and said that the written characters “perplex the eye.”<sup>29</sup> When secular writers did offer details on Chinese culture, they would usually borrow from expert sources such as missionary writings or overseas periodicals; however, this meant they often presented more information about Chinese in other countries than on the unique immigrant community in New Zealand.

### **Other Missionaries to the New Zealand Chinese**

There were few other missionary representations of the New Zealand Chinese during Don’s ministry, since he was the main worker in the only significant domestic Chinese mission until the late 1890s. Don’s first assistant Kwok Wai Shang left little public record of his activities or views; nor did most of the later catechists who served Chinese populations around the country. Timothy Fay Loie was, after Don, the first missionary to the New Zealand Chinese who conveyed some information about the immigrants to European readers. Mission reports from Loie began to appear in the *Outlook* from 1905, when he was working among the West Coast Chinese community. Another missionary viewpoint on the New Zealand Chinese came from William Chan, an elder at the Dunedin Chinese Church, who stood in for Don on the 1906-7 Inland

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<sup>27</sup> “The Disinterment of Chinese Bodies,” *Evening Post*, September 5, 1902, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, April 1883, 185.

<sup>29</sup> “Among the Celestials,” *Otago Witness*, September 18, 1869, 11.

Tour. These men were to some extent cultural mediators, in that they educated Europeans about Chinese culture through their published reports (which incidentally were usually translated into English by Don). However, the degree to which they integrated with either culture is unknown. Since they were partially Westernised Christians, they were seen by their countrymen as not entirely Chinese, while their status as ministers did not remove all European discrimination against them. Loie reported one incident in which his wife was rebuffed when attempting to buy milk – because she was Chinese, according to the milkman.<sup>30</sup> In terms of interpreting Chinese culture to Westerners, neither Loie nor Chan were as influential as Don, since he was a European and had a greater reputation. Nevertheless, they were some of the first evangelists apart from Don to describe New Zealand Chinese life.

Loie's and Chan's mission reports in the *Outlook* did not offer much detail on New Zealand Chinese culture, other than as background information to the record of their mission activities. They sometimes assessed Chinese beliefs and attitudes: for example, Loie commented on Chinese religious syncretism,<sup>31</sup> and both he and Chan related superstition to rejection of Christianity.<sup>32</sup> However, neither of these missionaries ever gave much information on what Chinese values and beliefs actually were, as Don had in his earlier career; nor did they recount detailed profiles of the New Zealand sojourners, as he did later on. One of Loie's only characterisations of Chinese culture was an indictment against materialism: "My countrymen have two characteristics that excel the men of other countries – these are crowding to feast and crowding to gamble."<sup>33</sup> Like other missionaries, they wished for a reform of Chinese culture, and believed that it could only come from Christianity.<sup>34</sup> Thus their attitudes were similar to Don's, but unlike him they did not endeavour to paint a detailed picture of the New Zealand Chinese or their culture.

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<sup>30</sup> T. F. Loie, "West Coast Chinese Mission," *Outlook*, August 7, 1909, 12.

<sup>31</sup> T. F. Loie, "Mr. T. F. Loie at Home," *Outlook*, July 25, 1903, 13.

<sup>32</sup> William Chan, "Annual Tour XX: 1906-7," *Outlook*, March 16, 1907, 11; T. F. Loie, "West Coast Chinese Mission," *Outlook*, July 10, 1909, 13.

<sup>33</sup> T. F. Loie, "Auckland Chinese Mission," *Outlook*, April 11, 1911, 27.

<sup>34</sup> T. F. Loie, "West Coast Chinese Mission," *Outlook*, August 7, 1909, 12.

## New Zealand Missionaries to China

When the Canton Villages Mission began work in 1901, its missionaries became a new source of information about Chinese culture for the European public, via their letters and reports printed in the *Outlook*. As was typical of missionaries in general, the CVM staff believed that the Chinese people were in a state of spiritual darkness and moral degradation for which the only solution was Christianity. They were therefore similar to Don in terms of having a mission-centred worldview. However, an examination of the CVM reports that were published up to the end of Don's ministry in 1913 reveals a markedly different focus from the Otago missionary's writings. In this period, the CVM workers did not discuss Chinese beliefs or values in depth, but instead concentrated mainly on recording evangelical activities. Where details about Chinese religion and values did appear in CVM writings, they were usually general references to superstition and unbelief intended to raise home support.<sup>35</sup> The early CVM depictions of China are more comparable to Don's later writings, in which he lessened his former focus on the deep levels of Chinese culture. However, while Don did not discuss Chinese beliefs or values as often after 1897, he generally recorded more personal information about Chinese individuals than his colleagues in Canton were doing. Furthermore, CVM writings criticised Chinese religion and values more readily than Don did in his later career. These contrasts were probably because Don at this stage had greater rapport with Chinese people and deeper understanding of their culture, a consequence of his longer experience as a missionary. Over time, the CVM workers' knowledge and perspective also developed. McNeur's 1951 book *The Church and the Chinese in New Zealand* gave a relatively objective assessment of Chinese culture and painted a positive image of the sojourners, displaying attitudes similar to those Don had in his later career.<sup>36</sup>

Although the first CVM reports seldom examined Chinese beliefs or values, they did communicate large amounts of information about observable practices and customs. George McNeur told of observing rituals such as a ceremony to appeal for rain, but rarely educated his readers about Chinese religious beliefs.<sup>37</sup> William Mawson, who joined McNeur in 1904, wrote about the structure of a traditional family

<sup>35</sup> E.g., George McNeur, "The Canton Villages," *Outlook*, May 30, 1903, 14.

<sup>36</sup> McNeur, *The Church and the Chinese in New Zealand*, 3–4, 6.

<sup>37</sup> George McNeur, "Darkness and Light in Our Canton Villages," *Outlook*, December 13, 1902, 13.

after visiting a Hakka household, but did not explain ethical ideals such as filial piety.<sup>38</sup> In other words, CVM missionaries tended to describe customs rather than values, and one reason for this may be that they saw more tangible aspects of Chinese culture than Don did in New Zealand. Even allowing for this, a comparison of public writings seems to show that Don was simply more interested in Chinese culture than the CVM missionaries were. One potential reason for this may lie with Don's personality: he was highly analytical and enjoyed problem-solving,<sup>39</sup> which could have motivated him to search for the reasons behind Chinese resistance to Christianity.

### **Don Compared with Missionary Mediators in China**

Christian missionaries to China often acted as cultural mediators. The pattern we have seen in Don was a common one: a missionary would gain expertise in Chinese culture through study and practical experience, often later publishing his or her discoveries in the West. Seen as China experts by other Europeans, many of these missionaries became active in facilitating cross-cultural communication and learning. As Reinders notes, "their subject positions made them a unique and influential group of agents in the history of 'East-West' interactions."<sup>40</sup> By becoming a cultural mediator, therefore, Don was following a precedent established by his forebears in the China mission movement. Here, Don will be compared with specific Protestant missionaries who had a significant impact on mutual understanding and relations between China and the West, in order to illustrate how he performed similar functions within New Zealand.

The first Sino-Western missionary mediators were the members of the Jesuit mission to China between the mid-16<sup>th</sup> and mid-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were post-Renaissance Europe's major source of information about China: many of their number wrote books on China for popular consumption, mainly in order to raise support for the mission.<sup>41</sup> In the nineteenth century, Protestants became another influential group of cultural mediators. Robert Morrison (1782-1834), pioneer of Protestant missions in China, helped to raise Western knowledge of Chinese culture in many ways. Apart

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<sup>38</sup> William Mawson, "CVM Extension," *Outlook*, April 29, 1905, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 3:130.

<sup>40</sup> Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, xiv.

<sup>41</sup> D. E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), 13–14.

from authoring a Chinese-English dictionary and other language texts, he also wrote about Chinese values. For example, his 1817 vocabulary book *A View of China for Philological Purposes* included a discussion on culture.<sup>42</sup> While on furlough in England, Morrison spoke about China to numerous audiences, becoming “as much Ambassador for China as he was Ambassador for Britain and Christ in Canton and Macao.”<sup>43</sup> Due to their knowledge of China, missionaries often became pioneers in educating Westerners about Chinese culture. They wrote many of the most popular and authoritative nineteenth-century works on Chinese civilisation in general, a good example of which is Samuel Wells Williams' *The Middle Kingdom* (1848). Missionary James Legge (1815-1897) made the first English translation of the classics of Chinese literature from 1861-72. Don's role as a cultural mediator was therefore typical of missionaries to the Chinese; like them, he became an important Sino-Western channel of communication.

Missionaries to China acted as cultural mediators for the same reasons that Don did. As in his case, their representations of Chinese culture to the West were primarily motivated by their goal of converting Chinese people, and were usually intended to maintain support for their ministry from churches at home.<sup>44</sup> They criticised those Chinese beliefs and traits that disagreed with their own religious worldview, and viewed these aspects of culture as responsible for the broad Chinese rejection of Christianity. We have seen that Don had similar aims and attitudes, leading him to present a comparable image of Chinese culture. As with Don, there were also other influences on missionaries' views. Some wished to educate the West about China, and would attempt to use the knowledge they had gained to combat European ignorance and prejudice.<sup>45</sup> Don did this when he presented a Chinese perspective on the West in his 1886 piece “As Others See Us.” In addition, many missionaries distinguished between religion and culture, maintaining the ideal that Chinese could convert without giving up their traditions. Morrison set a precedent for this, saying, “A

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Morrison, *A View of China for Philological Purposes: Containing a Sketch of Chinese Chronology, Geography, Government, Religion & Customs, Designed for the Use of Persons Who Study the Chinese Language* (London; Macao: East India Company Press; Black, Parbury, and Allen, 1817), 120–126.

<sup>43</sup> Hancock, *Robert Morrison*, 183.

<sup>44</sup> Fairbank, introduction, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, 107; Latourette, *History of Christian Missions in China*, 842.

Christian Missionary from England is not sent to India or any other part of the world to introduce English customs, but Christ's Gospel."<sup>46</sup> This distinction, which Don also made throughout his career, meant that a missionary need not attack customs or beliefs that were not in conflict with Christianity. In practice, it was difficult for Western missionaries to avoid criticisms that were based on their own cultural identity and secular knowledge rather than purely on Christian theology. Nevertheless, the culture-religion distinction did give some missionaries, such as Don, a certain cultural tolerance. In summary, the motives for Don's description of Chinese culture were typical of his peers in the China mission movement. Missionaries' goals led them to make often negative assessments of Chinese beliefs and values, while at the same time their knowledge and cultural egalitarianism meant that they "presented China more soberly than most popular media."<sup>47</sup>

Don's opinions about Chinese culture were highly similar to those of two other missionary mediators, both of whom had a profound influence on him. One was Samuel Wells Williams, whose encyclopaedic work *The Middle Kingdom* became one of the most widely read nineteenth-century Western books on China in both missionary and secular circles. While it treats most topics informatively and with great objectivity, the author's worldview is revealed by his condemnation of Chinese values on the basis of Christian morality. For instance, Williams states that there existed among Chinese people "a kind and degree of moral degradation of which an excessive statement can scarcely be made, or an adequate conception hardly be formed."<sup>48</sup> In this respect Williams' attitudes resemble Don's: both opposed mainly those areas of Chinese culture that conflicted with Christian teachings. It has already been mentioned that Don was reading Williams' book as early as 1880, and he cited it during the first part of his career to support his views on Chinese beliefs and morality,<sup>49</sup> as well as to provide background information on rituals and customs.<sup>50</sup> Clearly, Williams' views helped to shape Don's perspective on China.

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Hancock, *Robert Morrison*, 153.

<sup>47</sup> Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies*, 206.

<sup>48</sup> Williams, *Middle Kingdom*, 1:836.

<sup>49</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, October 1889, 79.

<sup>50</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, September 1882, 44.

The other missionary who had an impact on Don was Arthur H. Smith, an American serving in Shandong Province. Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* (1890), which became the most popular US book on China until the 1920s,<sup>51</sup> aimed to identify, analyse and appraise various basic "characteristics" of Chinese culture. These were mainly values or social customs that Smith assessed from a Western perspective. Each chapter deals with a different trait: for example, "Conservatism" or "Indirection and Dishonesty." Thus, the focus of Smith's book clearly resembles that of Don's early writings on the New Zealand Chinese (a similarity already examined in Chapter 2). Smith's assessment of Chinese values was based on his own cultural ideals as well as his religious beliefs.<sup>52</sup> Like Don, for example, he attacked the apparent lack of accuracy and punctuality in Chinese culture.<sup>53</sup> Although both Smith and Don tried to make a culture-religion distinction, they unconsciously expected that Christianisation would be accompanied by Westernisation in China. Don obviously agreed with many of Smith's opinions, and in the 1890s he often cited his American colleague's ideas to explain the behaviour of the local Chinese community.<sup>54</sup>

The transformation of Don's views on Chinese culture can be compared with contemporary developments in missionary opinions. Throughout his career, most mission organisations in China focused on traditional evangelism, and therefore saw Chinese religion and values as barriers to Christianity.<sup>55</sup> The 1920s saw the rise of liberal missionaries in China, who emphasised social reform over the salvation of souls. Inspired by Christian ethics, their main aim was reforming Chinese society and improving living conditions, through medical, educational, and other branches of work.<sup>56</sup> Liberal missionaries saw many points of agreement between Christianity and Chinese beliefs, and were thus usually more tolerant of those beliefs than conservatives were, to the point that some advocated religious pluralism.<sup>57</sup> By these standards, Don ranked as a conservative missionary. Although he did humanitarian

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<sup>51</sup> Charles W. Hayford, "Chinese and American Characteristics: Arthur H. Smith and His China Book," in *Christianity in China: Early Protestant Missionary Writings*, ed. Suzanne Barnett and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Committee on American-East Asian Relations of the Dept. of History, Harvard University, 1985), 153.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, 41–55.

<sup>54</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, May 1893, 204.

<sup>55</sup> Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, 74.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 215–16.

<sup>57</sup> Lian, *The Conversion of Missionaries*, 15.



work, he consistently focused on direct evangelism and held to the conviction that Chinese religion was mistaken. In this regard he followed the majority opinion in the China mission movement during his career, perhaps partially because liberalism did not become widespread until after his retirement. There were indeed some liberal missionaries active during Don's ministry, such as Timothy Richard (1845-1919), but they were a minority in the nineteenth century.

While Don did not alter his opposition to those Chinese values and beliefs that contradicted Christian morality, it has also been shown that his attitudes did change, thanks in part to the growth of his cultural understanding and his relationship with the New Zealand Chinese community. He was not unique in undergoing this process; as Fairbank has pointed out, missionaries to China in general were "profoundly... influenced by their growing appreciation of the Chinese cultural tradition."<sup>58</sup> One example of this was Edward H. Hume (1876-1957), a medical evangelist in Changsha, whose burgeoning friendships with Chinese individuals helped to change his opinions of their character.<sup>59</sup> Another transformation can be seen in James Legge, who served with the London Missionary Society in Malacca and Hong Kong and later became Professor of Chinese at Oxford. Through his studies, Legge's initially negative attitudes towards Chinese culture turned into admiration; for example, he criticised Confucius in the first edition of his translation of the Chinese Classics (1861), but expressed much more favourable views in the revised edition thirty years later (1892-93).<sup>60</sup> A recent study has also pointed out that Christian colleges in China were sites of extensive cross-cultural exchange, and that many foreign missionaries gained a deeper understanding and a new perspective on China through serving on their staffs.<sup>61</sup> Clearly, Don was not alone among his colleagues in being transformed by contact with Chinese people and culture.

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<sup>58</sup> Fairbank, introduction, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Lian, *The Conversion of Missionaries*, 41.

<sup>60</sup> N. J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 461.

<sup>61</sup> Daniel H. Bays, *Preface: China's Christian Colleges as Cross-Cultural Ventures*, in *Cross-Cultural Connections: China's Christian Colleges, 1900-1950*, ed. Daniel H. Bays and Ellen Widmer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), xvi-xvii.

## Summary

Through comparison, it has been shown that Don's presentation of Chinese culture was unique in New Zealand. His knowledge and experience enabled him to offer more accurate and detailed information, and to observe deeper levels of culture, compared to any secular source in the country during his career. While Don's missionary aims led him to focus on describing Chinese religion and values, secular commentators – whether in government, the media or published histories – were more concerned about the Chinese migrants' impact on New Zealand, and therefore concentrated on issues relevant to this question (such as whether Chinese people were industrious or insanitary). Don's improving attitudes after 1897 were the inverse of the growing hostility in Parliament and the media. Meanwhile, his picture of Chinese culture was also different from those given by other New Zealand missionaries who were active during his career, such as his Cantonese assistants or the initial CVM evangelists. These generally focused less on Chinese values or beliefs than on reporting the progress of their work. The early CVM writings often described customs and practices, but did not usually discuss Chinese values at length (as Don had in the first phase of his ministry) or give personal profiles (as he did later). For all these reasons, Don was highly significant as a cultural mediator between the European and Chinese communities within New Zealand. As Brian Moloughney has pointed out, it was he and the Chinese sojourners who “really mark the beginning of New Zealand's engagement with China and Chineseness.”<sup>62</sup>

We have also seen that by becoming a cultural mediator, Don was similar to many others in the China mission movement. People such as Robert Morrison, Samuel Wells Williams and Arthur H. Smith served as important channels of information between China and the West, publishing influential books about language and culture. Don can be regarded as a cultural mediator just as these men were, for he communicated his knowledge about Chinese culture to European audiences in New Zealand. He had similar reasons for doing so as did other missionaries, whose aim to evangelise and convert China was a major factor that both motivated them to depict China and determined their attitudes. Like Don, most missionaries wrote about China

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<sup>62</sup> Moloughney, “Translating Culture: Rethinking New Zealand's Chineseness,” 393.

to gain home support for their work, and would naturally focus on Chinese religion and morals as barriers to Christianity. They also often attempted to educate other Europeans about Chinese civilisation, and their understanding of and relationship with China would sometimes lead them to adopt a balanced perspective in assessing it. We have seen that Don was known to do the same, even during the first part of his career. The improvement in Don's attitudes to Chinese culture also followed an established trend, for many other missionaries underwent a similar change as they developed rapport with Chinese people and learned about them.

## Chapter 4: Don's Impact

Most of Alexander Don's activities involved some form of intercultural communication, such as preaching Christianity or publishing information on Chinese culture. With regard to the New Zealand Chinese community, he focused mainly on spreading his religious message, as has been shown. In this chapter, I argue that although Don's evangelism was largely unsuccessful, this does not mean he was ineffective as a cultural mediator. The reasons for his low conversion rate included cultural differences, Western activity in China, and the immigrants' situation in New Zealand. However, Don's non-evangelical work achieved better results. He frequently spoke out against anti-Chinese discrimination or prejudice, and did various forms of humanitarian work for Chinese people. By pursuing these avenues of effort, Don was helping to improve relations and facilitate communication between Chinese and Europeans, thereby promoting cultural dialogue. Meanwhile, his presentation of cultural knowledge to Europeans became more influential as his reputation grew. By serving as both a channel of information and an important social link, Don helped to increase mutual understanding and strengthen relations between Chinese and Europeans in New Zealand. I therefore argue that although Don largely failed in his goal of converting Chinese people to Christianity, he was nevertheless a successful cultural mediator. This was not his main aim, but rather an outcome of his missionary role.

### Impact of Don's Evangelical Work

Throughout his career, Don's religious message was almost always resisted by the New Zealand Chinese. Very few showed interest in Christianity as a result of Don's work, and only about 20 converted, as mentioned in Chapter 1. In most cases, the sojourners' opposition would not be displayed openly, due to the importance of maintaining social harmony in Chinese culture. It has already been noted that a miner

invited to one of Don's sermons would often give a reason for nonattendance, or promise to come but fail to do so. If Don attempted to engage a Chinese person in conversation about Christianity, they might change the subject, or even claim belief in Jesus Christ merely to satisfy the missionary.<sup>1</sup> However, Don's persistence sometimes led to debates in which his audience would express more overt opposition to Christianity, adopting attitudes that ranged from disagreement to hostility. Since Don's evangelism represented a communication of cultural knowledge, an analysis of his mission's outcome is important from the perspective of cultural mediation. James Ng has attributed Don's relatively poor results in large part to his negative attitudes and behaviour towards Chinese people.<sup>2</sup> However, I argue that Don's failure was due not primarily to his own attitudes or methods, but rather to a number of factors that caused the rejection of Christianity by most Chinese people at the time, both in China and elsewhere. Thus, the low rate of conversions that Don gained does not reflect negatively on his ability to communicate cultural information.

One of the key issues that arose in the communication of the Christian gospel to the Chinese was that although missionaries attempted to distinguish between religion and culture, Chinese society did not. Missionaries viewed Christianity as free to the human race and not chained to Western culture, but Chinese religious beliefs, along with all other parts of their culture, formed an inseparable part of Chinese identity. Don discovered this when he talked to a group of miners who possessed homemade images of Buddhist bodhisattvas (Cantonese *p'o-saat* 菩薩):

When I spoke of the uselessness of these *p'o-saat*, they said, "They are of use in China."... They said, moreover, "Chinese *must* have *p'o-saat* – they are different from Europeans."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, being Chinese meant that one had to follow Chinese religious traditions. Because their own society did not possess a religion-culture distinction, Chinese people usually found it difficult to differentiate between Christianity and Western culture.<sup>4</sup> They linked religion to ethnic identity, believing that Europeans practised Christianity as

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, April 1890, 182.

<sup>2</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 2:77–79.

<sup>3</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, April 1885, 183.

<sup>4</sup> Ssu-yu Teng and John King Fairbank, *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839-1923* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), 135.

naturally as Chinese practised their traditional faiths. From this perspective, Chinese people did not need Christianity unless they adopted Western culture or nationality. Don reported one New Zealand Chinese man who thought that he should convert merely because he had obtained British citizenship.<sup>5</sup> Because Chinese people viewed religion as part of culture, Christian missionaries were seen as teachers of not just a foreign faith, but also foreign customs; they were asking the Chinese to give up not only “pagan” beliefs, but their traditions as well. This led to much of the Chinese resistance to Christianity, both in China and overseas Chinese communities such as the one in New Zealand.

The Chinese sojourners’ ethnic and cultural pride was a key reason for their resistance to Don’s evangelism. Most Chinese people viewed their civilisation as superior to that of the West, and therefore believed that Western customs (including religion) were unnecessary or useless for them. Thus, early missionaries to China had met queries as to how the new faith could provide them with something Confucianism did not.<sup>6</sup> This attitude was also true of the overseas Chinese, who “have carried the light of their culture with them and have resisted cultural absorption by other countries.”<sup>7</sup> The New Zealand immigrants had a similar worldview: most rejected Don’s preaching on the basis that Chinese culture was greater than that of the West.<sup>8</sup> One man said to Don that “Chinese literature is perfect, including everything in heaven and earth, therefore it is quite unnecessary for me to read that book [the New Testament].”<sup>9</sup> This statement demonstrates the common Chinese opinion that there was nothing worthwhile or useful for them outside their own culture. Because of this attitude, Don’s Chinese acquaintances sometimes advised him that his audience would be far more pleased and better profited by an exposition of orthodox Confucian doctrine rather than a Christian sermon.<sup>10</sup> It is evident that the cultural pride of the New Zealand Chinese – a sentiment fostered in their homeland – was one of the major factors in their rejection of Don’s message. It was of course not only Christianity that

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<sup>5</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, October 1887, 63-64.

<sup>6</sup> Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 77.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> One common proof given to Don of China’s superiority was the great age of its civilisation compared to that of Europe. E.g., Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, December 1888, 105.

<sup>9</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, September 1891, 48.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, July 1886, 2.

they failed to adopt, but also most other aspects of the foreign culture that they encountered in New Zealand.

The New Zealand Chinese responded to Don's message with not only a defence of their own culture, but also direct opposition to Christianity. It has already been mentioned that because most Chinese people saw Christianity as part of Western culture, they believed that conversion was equivalent to giving up Chinese customs in favour of foreign ones. This was considered unacceptable and a loss of one's Chineseness, for Chinese people's identity was linked to both their culture and ethnicity.<sup>11</sup> Ralph Covell states, "The supreme heresy for the Chinese was... acceptance of any ruler other than the Chinese emperor or recognition of any culture other than Chinese culture."<sup>12</sup> This worldview, which was naturally related to the belief in the superiority of Chinese culture, is visible in the New Zealand sojourners' reactions to Christianity. For example, the catechist Kwok Wai Shang encountered surprise and opposition at Round Hill because he was an educated Chinese man who taught that Christianity was greater than Confucianism.<sup>13</sup> In 1911 Don reported that a recent convert, Joseph Luey, had been told that by becoming a Christian he had "discredit[ed] the sages of China."<sup>14</sup> Luey's family believed that he could not simultaneously be Chinese and a Christian, and since he would always be Chinese by birth, he should follow Chinese religions.<sup>15</sup> These reactions show that in New Zealand Chinese eyes, Christianity was an element of foreign culture that was both incompatible with and threatening to their identity. This view among the immigrants was an expression of popular sentiment in their homeland.<sup>16</sup>

Christianity was not rejected by the New Zealand Chinese merely because it was Western. Another problem was that its teachings differed strongly from those of existing Chinese religions, and conflicted with many fundamental Chinese values and beliefs. The novelty of Christian doctrine made it hard to understand for some of the

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<sup>11</sup> S. A. Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses: Nationalism and Labor in Shanghai, 1895-1927* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002), 39.

<sup>12</sup> Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, August 1886, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *Outlook*, October 3, 1911, 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Similar attitudes were reported by CVM missionaries in the home counties of the New Zealand Chinese. In one case, McNeur stated that a female Christian was considered a "traitor" to ancestral rites and was castigated for following a foreign faith. George McNeur, "Canton Villages Mission: Bitter Persecution of a Woman," *Outlook*, June 24, 1905, 13.

sojourners,<sup>17</sup> while others interpreted it in terms of their own cultural norms, as with those who believed that conversion was equivalent to entering a clan association or guild.<sup>18</sup> As already mentioned, Chinese culture took a syncretistic approach to religion, and the New Zealand sojourners were thus willing to synthesise Christian concepts with their existing beliefs: for example, one man thought Jesus Christ to be the son of the Jade Emperor.<sup>19</sup> Like other conservative missionaries, however, Don demanded that prospective converts give up any beliefs or rituals that did not accord with Biblical doctrine. He realised that the religious syncretism of Chinese culture hindered his audience from making this absolute commitment to Christianity:

The assertion [by Chinese people] “I believe in Jesus” is more easily made than the negative: “I do not believe in the god of war.” To us the one implies the other; not so to most Chinese.<sup>20</sup>

To the Chinese in general, the most objectionable part of the missionaries’ message was not the actual tenets of Christianity, but rather their demands for converts to abandon many of the values and beliefs central to Chinese culture. This exclusivism was a major cause of the Chinese resistance to Christianity, both in their home country and New Zealand.<sup>21</sup> Don recognised this issue, saying of one man who was interested in Christianity that “the ancestral worship sanctioned by Confucianism is keeping him at a standstill.”<sup>22</sup> In China, much anti-Christian feeling was caused by the refusal of Chinese converts to participate in traditional social obligations such as the ancestral rites or local temple upkeep.<sup>23</sup> This was less of an issue in the New Zealand sojourner community, where the absence of many Chinese social institutions removed some of the potential for conflict. However, a convert’s abandonment of Chinese customs could still lead to hostility: Don reported that Ah Ming, a Christian in the Lawrence

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<sup>17</sup> E.g., after one sermon, a man was overhead saying he had no idea what Don had been talking about. Don, “Among the Otago Chinese,” *Christian Outlook*, May 11, 1895, 179.

<sup>18</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, May 1886, 201.

<sup>19</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, April 1886, 184.

<sup>20</sup> Don, *Annual Up-Country Tour among Otago Chinese: 1893-94*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Yamamoto, *History of Protestantism in China*, 382.

<sup>22</sup> Don, *Annual Up-Country Tour among Otago Chinese: 1893-94*, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Paul A. Cohen, “Christian Missions and Their Impact to 1900,” in *Cambridge History of China*, ed. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, vol. 10, *Late Ch’ing, 1800-1911, part 1*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 567.



region, was reviled by other Chinese for not contributing to the incense and firecrackers used in religious rituals.<sup>24</sup>

The resistance of the New Zealand Chinese to evangelism was also due to Christianity's established status as a heterodox cult in China. During the Qing dynasty, certain religious teachings and secret societies that undermined the Confucian status quo were classed as heretical and outlawed. Christianity had been officially proscribed on this basis by the emperor Yongzheng in 1724, and although this ban was lifted in 1844, the Western religion continued to be viewed as heterodox by most classes of Chinese society. Official opposition to Christianity had been driven by Yongzheng's publication of *Amplified Instructions on the Sacred Edict* [*Sheng yu guang xun* 聖諭廣訓] in the same year that he outlawed the Western religion. The Sacred Edict was a set of sixteen moral tenets written by the Kangxi Emperor, and to this Yongzheng appended a commentary in which he attacked the Catholic Church as a heterodox sect that could corrupt the people.<sup>25</sup> The imperial ban on Christianity was enforced by the gentry class, who were meant to teach the Edict to commoners.<sup>26</sup> Even after the ban was lifted, the gentry still viewed the Protestant mission movement as a threat to society and to their power base, and therefore staged a counter-campaign by writing and disseminating anti-Christian literature. The hostility of the Chinese government and gentry to Christianity had an impact on the opinions of commoners,<sup>27</sup> including the New Zealand Chinese migrants, who sometimes suggested that Don should teach them the Sacred Edict instead of the Bible.<sup>28</sup> On one occasion, Don reported a Chinese "preacher" who spoke at Round Hill in opposition to Kwok Wai Shang, initially advertising the Edict as his text.<sup>29</sup> Because of the Edict's associations with the previous imperial censure of the Christian religion, the New Zealand sojourners held it up to repudiate Don's message and show that Chinese culture was sufficient for them. In addition, Christianity's heterodox status in China may have led to the common idea

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<sup>24</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, May 1887, 204.

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, "Christian Missions and Their Impact to 1900," 563.

<sup>26</sup> Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 11–12.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, July 1886, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, June 1889, 223.

among the New Zealand immigrants that it caused injury or ill luck, as when Don's activities were held responsible by local Chinese for bad weather.<sup>30</sup>

Another factor in New Zealand Chinese resistance to Christianity was anti-foreign feeling. This attitude among the sojourners had been fostered in China itself, where an anti-foreign movement had developed from the mid-nineteenth century in reaction to Western imperialism and the unequal treaties. Antiforeignism produced opposition to Christianity, which was seen as part of the Western threat to China, since it was a Western religion that was protected by the treaties and European military power.<sup>31</sup> Christianity often bore the brunt of anti-foreign hostility due to the widespread nature of mission activities; moreover, both Chinese gentry and commoners considered it a particularly intolerable barbarian influence because of the challenge it posed to traditional cultural values and the fact that it brought a proliferation of "religious cases" (*jiao'an* 教案) – legal disputes arising over the rights of missionaries and Chinese Christians under the treaties.<sup>32</sup>

The New Zealand Chinese of Don's time had absorbed anti-foreign and anti-Christian sentiment in their homeland, and generally maintained these attitudes throughout their time overseas, partly due to their comparative social isolation in New Zealand and the discrimination they sometimes encountered from Europeans. The Chinese sojourners' hostility to the West was most evident in their reactions to news of threats against China. For example, during the Sino-French War (1884-85), they emphatically defended their country's greatness and belittled its Western antagonists. Don's attempts to convey accurate information about China's defeats to the Round Hill Chinese seemed to intensify their feelings, and the news he disseminated was rejected and condemned for besmirching China's reputation.<sup>33</sup> Anti-foreign feeling amongst the New Zealand Chinese was clearly linked to their resistance to Christianity. This can be seen in Don's story of an encounter in 1900 with a Chinese shopkeeper who verbally attacked Christianity for causing millions of deaths in China, apparently believing that mission work was responsible for the violence that Western powers had inflicted

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, July 1886, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 59.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel H. Bays and James H. Grayson, "Christianity in East Asia: China, Korea, and Japan," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 8, *World Christianities, 1815-1914*, ed. Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 497.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, December 1883, 105.

during the Boxer Rebellion.<sup>34</sup> In this case, resentment at foreign aggression caused opposition to Christianity. These two attitudes were connected among the New Zealand Chinese, just as they were among the people of China.

During Don's career, the New Zealand Chinese were influenced by ideals of nationalism, which had begun to develop in China around the end of the nineteenth century as a response to foreign encroachment and China's perceived infirmity, and which addressed the need for political, social and cultural reforms.<sup>35</sup> Chinese nationalism was linked to the anti-Christian movement, for Christianity was seen as a tool of Western imperialism – especially since many educational institutions in China were controlled by foreign missions.<sup>36</sup> The writings of Don and other missionaries demonstrate that nationalist ideas were spreading to the New Zealand Chinese from the early twentieth century onwards. Evidence for this can be seen in the way the sojourners began to express shame or anger at China's weakness, reflecting a desire for the development and strengthening of their country. For example, in 1908 George McNeur reported meeting a Fujianese man in Hamilton who thoroughly criticised China, saying that its government was "rotten" and its people "ignorant."<sup>37</sup> These comments reflected the opinions of many reform-minded Chinese at the time, who thought there was an urgent need for improvement in Chinese government and society.<sup>38</sup> Another indicator of New Zealand Chinese nationalism was their involvement in organisations that promoted change or revolution in China, such as the Reform Party or the Tongmeng Hui 同盟會 (Revolutionary Alliance), which later became the local branch of the Kuomintang 國民黨 (Nationalist Party).<sup>39</sup> Nationalist sentiment affected Chinese attitudes to Christianity in New Zealand, just as it did in China. For instance, in 1909 a Chinese man expressed the following opinion of missionaries to Timothy Fay Loie: "Most men say that they wish to win the hearts of the people, others that they wish to take away Chinese territory."<sup>40</sup> Here, Chinese

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander Don and George McNeur, *Chinese Mission Work in Otago, N.Z.: Annual Inland Tour (1900-1901)* (Dunedin: Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1901), 31, 35.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses*, 38.

<sup>36</sup> Yamamoto, *History of Protestantism in China*, 115.

<sup>37</sup> George McNeur, "Among Chinese Friends in the North," *Outlook*, August 1, 1908, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses*, 41.

<sup>39</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 3:165.

<sup>40</sup> T. F. Loie, "West Coast Chinese Mission," *Outlook*, September 13, 1909, 12.

nationalism provided a basis for opposition to Christianity, on the grounds that it was a form of Western aggression against China.

Differences between the environments of China and New Zealand affected the sojourners' attitudes. One factor particular to New Zealand was the prejudice and discrimination that Chinese people there often experienced from Europeans, which intensified their anti-foreign sentiment and their hostility to Christianity. Cases of injustice or violence against Chinese people in New Zealand gave rise to much heated feeling among their countrymen. This was especially the case in 1905, when Lionel Terry notoriously murdered Joe Kum Yung in Haining Street, Wellington, in order to publicise his racist views. A significant display of public sympathy for Terry showed the extent of New Zealand's contemporary anti-Chinese feeling.<sup>41</sup> At around the same time, a miner called Haam Sing Tong was murdered at Tapanui, and those accused of the crime were acquitted on circumstantial evidence.<sup>42</sup> On the next Inland Tour, Don discovered that the New Zealand Chinese felt deep outrage at these cases, and reported that this caused a reduced attendance at his sermons in some places.<sup>43</sup> Sometimes a Chinese man pointed out European misdeeds or discrimination as a reason why he did not accept Christianity. Don related encountering this kind of objection during one sermon:

I had got as far as "Men of all nations are alike," with an unfinished sentence, when a hearer interjected, "It is not so, teacher." When asked what he meant he replied, "Chinese are not the same as Europeans, for Chinese who come here are taxed, while Europeans are not."<sup>44</sup>

In another case, after Don had entreated a sermon audience to believe the Christian Gospel, a man responded: "Yes, if Europeans believed it they would not so illtreat us Chinese [sic]."<sup>45</sup> Thus, the failure of nominally Christian Europeans to observe Biblical morals was seen as hypocrisy by Chinese. As Don himself recognised, European behaviour was one of the main reasons for the resistance of the New Zealand Chinese

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<sup>41</sup> Lynette Shum, "Representing Haining Street: Wellington's Chinatown, 1920-1960" (MA Thesis, Victoria University, 2007), 108.

<sup>42</sup> Don, letter to the editor, *Otago Daily Times*, March 2, 1906, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Don, "Annual Inland Tour: 1905-6," *Outlook*, May 26, 1906, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, April 1890, 182.

<sup>45</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, May 1892, 204.

to Christianity.<sup>46</sup> While Western imperialism and the unequal treaties were major causes of anti-Christian sentiment in China, in New Zealand the main Chinese grievances against Europeans were discrimination and legislative injustice.

Another hindrance to the acceptance of Christianity by the New Zealand Chinese was their generally pragmatic attitude to religion. Most Chinese religious practices had a concrete function in everyday life, and people would often worship certain deities in order to gain material benefit or protection.<sup>47</sup> It was therefore natural that the New Zealand immigrants had little interest in a faith that focused on eternal rather than temporal blessings, especially as they often experienced difficult living conditions. Many Otago Chinese who featured in Don's writings seemed to prioritise practical matters above consideration of an afterlife, and therefore cited poor circumstances as a reason for their unwillingness to consider Christianity. For example, one man answered when invited to a sermon: "I have no heart to hear, on account of my poverty."<sup>48</sup> Others saw returning to China as a higher priority than listening to the Christian message, as Don found:

An old man on whom I urged the importance of the world to come said: "The most important thing is to get back to China, and I have not got that yet, though I am over sixty years old."<sup>49</sup>

As the gold-seeking era came to a close, the Chinese miners who had failed to return home or enter other occupations lived on in hardship and isolation around Otago. Don, who often met such men on his Inland Tours, mused on why they still resisted Christianity: "Perhaps there is a certain bitterness of spirit caused by hope long deferred and unattained (the hope of wealth and home)..."<sup>50</sup> In other words, the unfulfilled desires of the Chinese sojourners had left them with no interest in the Christian gospel.

The majority opposition created another barrier to Christianity, namely that Chinese who were interested in Don's message might fear that conversion would bring

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<sup>46</sup> Don, "Chinese Mission Work in Otago," *NZP*, October 1890, 63.

<sup>47</sup> Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 25, 76.

<sup>48</sup> E.g., Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, August 1884, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Don, "Chinese Mission Work in Otago," *NZP*, October 1890, 65.

<sup>50</sup> Don, "Inland Tour XXIII: 1909-10," *Outlook*, October 4, 1910, 13.

repudiation or even ostracism by their countrymen. Examples that Don offered included Peter Ah Bing, a convert at Round Hill who had been expelled from his clan group;<sup>51</sup> Ah Ming at Wetherstones in the Tuapeka district, a Christian whom Don said had been forced by his colleagues to sell his share of their claim;<sup>52</sup> and a man who received no business from other Chinese after joining the Salvation Army.<sup>53</sup> The threat of exclusion by one's peer group was especially serious for the Chinese in New Zealand, who depended on their social networks for mutual support.

Don's personal behaviour and attitudes towards the New Zealand Chinese affected his mission's results, but were not the primary reasons for his failure to gain many converts. It is significant that Don's conduct, while sometimes tactless in his early years, improved notably after the mid-1890s. In the first part of his career, and particularly during his Round Hill posting, some of Don's actions may have provoked hostility from Chinese people and thereby increased their resistance to his message. His missionary convictions led him to express direct criticism of Chinese beliefs and customs, especially with regard to religious ideas. In addition, during his first posting at Round Hill, Don seemed to side with foreigners against Chinese in a number of instances. These included his involvement in the 1884 prosecution of Chinese for illegal liquor sales, and his determination to proclaim the truth about the Sino-French War. Both incidents led to the Round Hill Chinese expressing direct hostility towards him.<sup>54</sup>

However, after the mid-1890s Don became less likely to engage in the kind of behaviour that could be destructive to his mission. This change is naturally related to the improvement in Don's rapport with and understanding of the New Zealand Chinese during this period, along with his recognition that good relations with the sojourner community were necessary both to support the CVM's work and ensure a better reception for his own preaching. Therefore, Don started to avoid antagonising the Chinese and strove instead for accord and friendship. The relative lack of debates recorded in Don's later writings indicates that he learned to pick his battles, directly

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<sup>51</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, March 1891, 166.

<sup>52</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, February 1888, 147.

<sup>53</sup> Don, "Among the Otago Chinese," *Christian Outlook*, August 31, 1895, 363.

<sup>54</sup> Liquor prosecution case: Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, June 1884, 223; Sino-French War: Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, December 1883, 105; Don, "Our Chinese Mission," September 1884, 44.

attacking his audience's beliefs and customs less often as time passed. He also learned not to rub salt in the wounds of Chinese national pride: on the 1894-95 Inland Tour, he decided to avoid mentioning the Sino-Japanese War in order to forestall conflict.<sup>55</sup> Don not only exercised greater diplomacy in later years, but also befriended more Chinese people, and aided them in many practical ways (as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter).

The effects of Don's improved attitudes can be seen in the corresponding increase of Chinese regard and affection for him – even though the sojourner population's response to the gospel message itself did not perceptibly change. As already mentioned, most of Don's Chinese contacts seemed to have a negative opinion of him by the end of his first year at Round Hill. During the remainder of his time there, Don often experienced unfriendliness and had few attendees at sermons, thanks in part to his own somewhat insensitive behaviour. After he moved to Lawrence in 1886, relations seemed to thaw slightly. James Ng thinks that Don did not become respected until late in his career,<sup>56</sup> but Susan Chivers has pointed out that he was welcomed by local Chinese upon his transfer to Lawrence.<sup>57</sup> Despite this disagreement, both scholars agree that the relationship between Don and his Chinese acquaintances improved over time. This process accelerated on the Inland Tours, which not only deepened Don's regard for the Chinese but also increased their friendship for him. Accounts such as the following became common in Don's Tour reports from 1897:

Deep in a winding tunnel I met "Thinking of Ancestors," who seemed delighted to see me, and said so... I asked him – when we had come out to his hut – to call six men beyond a low ridge... He agreed most heartily, saying: "I shall tell them that the teacher has come far to preach to us, and the least we can do is go to hear."<sup>58</sup>

Clearly, Don's efforts to befriend Chinese people and the distances he travelled to see them strengthened their regard for him. This was even more the case by the 1900s. George Mawson, who accompanied Don on the 1903-4 Tour, noted how "the faces of

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<sup>55</sup> Don, "Among the Otago Chinese," *Christian Outlook*, August 3, 1895, 324.

<sup>56</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 2:156.

<sup>57</sup> Chivers, "Religion, Ethnicity and Race," 137.

<sup>58</sup> E.g., Don, "Among the Otago Chinese," *Christian Outlook*, July 3, 1897, 268.

the men would light up when they recognised ‘Teacher Don,’”<sup>59</sup> and William Mawson described how Don’s name was a “household word” among the Chinese in Guangdong who had returned from New Zealand.<sup>60</sup>

In order to evaluate Don’s responsibility for the failure of his presentation of Christianity to the New Zealand Chinese, it is necessary to put his results into perspective by examining the outcome of Christian missions to China as a whole. Protestant Christianity made relatively little impact on China during the nineteenth century, with its most rapid growth in popularity coming during the early 1900s. Even then, however, the ratio of converts to China’s total population was minuscule. Protestant missions had a total of 178,261 baptised communicants in 1905, at which time China’s population was about 400 million – a proportion of approximately 0.04%.<sup>61</sup> As already mentioned, most sources state that Don baptised around 20 converts in his whole career. This was 0.76% of the New Zealand Chinese population in 1911, which was 2,611 (at the closest census to the end of Don’s ministry).<sup>62</sup> These figures are necessarily general, for many of Don’s converts would have died or returned to China by 1911; on the other hand, he had stricter requirements for conversion than even some of his fellow ministers, and thus some Chinese whom he declined to baptise may have been Christians by his denomination’s standards.<sup>63</sup> If Don’s results were indeed higher than those of missions in China, two potential reasons could be that Don had relatively easy access to his audience, and that fewer social barriers to conversion existed among the New Zealand Chinese, since they were living in a foreign country. In any case, it is clear that the poor response to Don’s evangelism was not a problem unique to him, but rather was experienced by most other missionaries to Chinese people at the time. This indicates that Don’s individual behaviour was not the main reason for his failure.

It has been shown that Don behaved more positively towards the New Zealand Chinese after the mid-1890s, and that their personal regard for him grew as a result. However, this closer relationship did not produce a markedly greater acceptance of

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<sup>59</sup> George Mawson, “Some Impressions of the Inland Tour, 1903,” *Outlook*, February 13, 1904, 15.

<sup>60</sup> William Mawson, “C.V.M.: Among the Villages with the Camera,” *Outlook*, June 8, 1907, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Tiedemann, *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 2:961.

<sup>62</sup> New Zealand Census, 1911.

<sup>63</sup> Chivers, “Religion, Ethnicity and Race,” 119.



Don's Christian message. Chinese people were more willing to listen than previously, but there was no dramatic increase in the number of conversions. This indicates that Don's attitudes towards Chinese people and his relationship with them were not strong factors in their response to Christianity. While it is true that some of Don's earlier behaviour did not help his cause, the New Zealand Chinese community had deeper reasons for resisting Christianity, as we have seen. These included cultural pride, the exclusive requirements for Christian conversion, the traditional classification of Christianity as a heterodox cult, and the anti-foreign and nationalist movements, among others. However, although Don's evangelism was largely a failure, he clearly had better success at building the interpersonal and intercultural relations that are essential for effective cultural mediation. It could be argued that Don's increased sensitivity to his Chinese listeners' beliefs and values in later years represented a development of mediation skills. He came to exercise more tact partially as a conscious attempt to win converts, but the actual result was stronger rapport between him and the Chinese community, resulting in more openness on both sides to new cultural ideas.

### **Don's Secular Work for the Chinese**

Although Don's official goal was introducing Christianity to the New Zealand Chinese, he also performed secular work on their behalf. Such work included addressing anti-Chinese agitation and discrimination in New Zealand, and providing humanitarian aid and services to the Chinese community. All of these efforts on Don's part represented acts of cultural mediation. In one sense, this was because they drew on his knowledge of the Chinese community and Chinese culture. More important, however, was the outcome of Don's work for the sojourners. His stance against discrimination and his benevolent work for Chinese people promoted better Sino-European social equality and integration in New Zealand, which in turn encouraged greater cultural communication and understanding between the two groups.

There is a range of opinion regarding the degree to which Don supported the New Zealand Chinese against contemporary discrimination and racism. He was seen as their ally by most of his contemporaries: Rev. William Hewitson said in 1906 that "Mr Don is the warm friend of the N.Z. Chinese," pointing to Don's *Otago Daily Times* letter

about the Chinese community's reactions to violence against them.<sup>64</sup> Hewitson's positive assessment was echoed more recently by Susan Chivers, who stated that Don defended the Chinese against racism and promoted Sino-European relations through his writings and public speaking.<sup>65</sup> On the other side, James Ng has argued that Don was not a true friend to the Chinese in this respect, since he did not stand up for them as often as he could have.<sup>66</sup> It is true that Don's defences of the New Zealand Chinese were rather infrequent – more so before 1897. As pointed out in Chapter 3, however, he never expressed approval of discrimination in any form, and did not make racist remarks. Furthermore, when Don did speak out on the subject, he was one of the strongest and most coherent supporters of the New Zealand Chinese. This will be seen through an examination of his public writing and speaking.

From the beginning of his missionary career, Don often opposed New Zealand European prejudice and discrimination against Chinese people. In 1888, he included a section entitled "Exclusion of the Chinese" in one mission report.<sup>67</sup> This piece highlighted the injustice of recent legislation, gave general Chinese reactions to incidents of agitation, and pointed out that fears of a Chinese invasion of New Zealand were baseless. In another case, after the *Tuapeka Times* ran an anti-Chinese editorial in 1886, Don responded with a letter countering the newspaper's exaggerations and stressing how much Chinese miners contributed to the nation.<sup>68</sup> When the Chinese population of Alexandra was subjected to a notorious series of attacks in the mid-1890s, Don wrote a detailed account of the incidents in the *Christian Outlook*, especially deploring the "apathy with which these fiendish outrages were viewed by the European community in general."<sup>69</sup> He had also condemned the Alexandra episode in a speech at the Presbyterian Synod of 1895, outlining one particular crime and emphasising the unjust lightness of the culprits' punishment.<sup>70</sup> Although James Ng has highlighted Don's initially negative attitudes to Chinese, the above examples show that

<sup>64</sup> William Hewitson, "Mr Don Goes North," *Outlook*, March 17, 1906, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Chivers, "Religion, Ethnicity and Race," 142-44.

<sup>66</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 2:157.

<sup>67</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, December 1888, 106-7.

<sup>68</sup> Editorial, *Tuapeka Times*, November 3, 1886, 2; Don, letter to the editor, November 10, 1886, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *Christian Outlook*, June 5, 1897, 227. A correspondent styling themselves "Manuherikia" later wrote to the *Christian Outlook*, criticising the apparent bias against the community of Alexandra in Don's account, but not denying his version of what had happened (Manuherikia, letter to the editor, *Christian Outlook*, June 19, 1897, 247). Don then rebutted these arguments (Don, letter to the editor, *Christian Outlook*, June 26, 1897, 256).

<sup>70</sup> "Missionary Meeting," *Otago Witness*, November 14, 1895, 20.

he spoke out for them throughout his early years. Don became one of the most prominent critics of anti-Chinese agitation and the White New Zealand policy as these trends intensified towards the latter part of his career. For example, in 1907 he attended an anti-Chinese meeting addressed by activist W. A. Lloyd, where he and his colleague Dr John Kirk moved that restricting Chinese immigration to New Zealand should be recognised as against Britain's interests. Their amendment was rejected, and both missionaries faced strong criticism for their stance.<sup>71</sup> Don then rebutted Lloyd's arguments in a letter to the *Otago Daily Times*.<sup>72</sup>

Don often used his knowledge of the New Zealand Chinese community and their culture in order to defend them. One way he did so was through providing a Chinese perspective on European behaviour. As already mentioned, Don wrote to the *Otago Daily Times* in 1906 to relay some Chinese views on the recent murders of their countrymen in Wellington and Tapanui. One example of these is the following opinion of the Lionel Terry case:

Supposing a Chinese had deliberately shot a European at Shanghai, would not all the English newspapers throughout China have demanded vengeance? The notion of insanity would have surely been scouted as ridiculous. [Terry's death sentence had been commuted on grounds of insanity.]<sup>73</sup>

Don reported his Chinese contacts saying that the courts had mismanaged these cases, and that this revealed a racial bias in the New Zealand justice system. He made it clear that he shared their concerns. On other occasions, Don used facts to refute propaganda and misinformation. In the 1907-8 Inland Tour report, he wrote: "To hear ignorant agitators raving about 'The Yellow Peril' and 'A White New Zealand,' it might be supposed that the number of Chinese is increasing."<sup>74</sup> He then gave population figures to disprove this assertion, showing that there had been a constant decline in the number of Chinese people in New Zealand over the preceding decades. He concluded that "the agitating gentry do not play upon facts; it suits their purpose better to play upon race-hatred, and the tune they raise is composed in Inferno."

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<sup>71</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, July 25, 1907, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Don, letter to the editor, *Otago Daily Times*, July 25, 1907, 8.

<sup>73</sup> Don, letter to the editor, *Otago Daily Times*, March 2, 1906, 8.

<sup>74</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *Outlook*, May 16, 1908, 7.

Although Don's support for the New Zealand Chinese against discrimination was perhaps not voiced as frequently as it could have been, the above examples show that he consistently defended the Chinese community, opposed prejudice and criticised European injustices – even more strongly as popular antipathy against the immigrants increased. Don had a number of motives for offering this support. These included the concern and sympathy that, as a missionary, he felt for Chinese people; his view that discrimination and racism were counter to Christian ideals of charity and equality; and his belief that mistreatment of the Chinese increased their resistance to evangelism.<sup>75</sup> He could therefore criticise both European prejudice and Chinese culture simultaneously, for in his view neither of these accorded with Christian morality, and both posed an obstacle to his mission work. By standing against discrimination and racism, Don became an advocate for better Sino-European relations and thereby for greater mutual understanding. Any success on his part at improving Europeans' attitudes towards the Chinese would make them more willing to learn about Chinese culture and to accept differences. Thus, Don's defence of the sojourners represented an act of cultural mediation.

Don supported the New Zealand Chinese not only by standing against discrimination, but also through doing humanitarian work on their behalf. He often gave practical help and service to the Chinese, drawing on his understanding of Chinese culture and New Zealand society, his ties with the sojourner community, and his language skills. One major way Don helped the New Zealand Chinese was in relation to the poll-tax. According to Ng, Don's diaries reveal his involvement in 37 poll-tax cases, starting from 1892; on many occasions, he successfully obtained refunds or exemptions for Chinese immigrants.<sup>76</sup> In another example, Don offered his aid when several Chinese homes in Walker Street, Dunedin, were scheduled for demolition in 1900 due to public hygiene concerns.<sup>77</sup> The missionary helped a group of Chinese people to petition successfully against this decision, and his language skills were obviously useful in facilitating communication between the Chinese petitioners and the mayor. In addition, Don interpreted for Chinese on many occasions, and at least

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<sup>75</sup> Don, "Chinese Mission Work in Otago," *NZP*, October 1890, 64.

<sup>76</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 3:130.

<sup>77</sup> "Eviction of the Chinese from Walker Street," *Otago Daily Times*, June 19, 1900, 7.

once helped miners prepare an appeal in a court case.<sup>78</sup> Charles P. Sedgwick has stated that the Chinese community actually used Don as a “mediator” between themselves and Europeans.<sup>79</sup> It is certainly clear that he was a valuable channel of communication. An outstanding example of Don’s aid to the Chinese was his organisation of a nationwide relief campaign for a 1907 famine in east-central China.<sup>80</sup> With support from the *Outlook*, he collected donations, arranged transport of funds, communicated news from missionaries in China, and so forth. A total sum of £2,650 was raised.<sup>81</sup> This feat, which earned him an award from the Chinese Government, increased the mutual goodwill of European and Chinese people. In sum, “Christian humanitarianism” was part of Don’s mission, as Moloughney and Stenhouse have noted.<sup>82</sup> Don’s benevolent work helped to improve relations between Chinese and Europeans in New Zealand, and these stronger ties would tend to promote better cultural dialogue. Therefore, by aiding the sojourners in practical ways, the missionary was acting as a cultural mediator.

The institutions that Don founded – the Dunedin Chinese Church and Canton Villages Mission – became channels for cultural mediation in their own right. These organisations promoted mutual learning and closer social links by bringing Chinese and European New Zealanders into contact. Hofstede says, “Establishing true integration among members of culturally different groups requires environments in which these people can meet and mix as equals.”<sup>83</sup> For New Zealand Chinese and Europeans, one such environment was the Dunedin Chinese Church. Here, the annual socials and Chinese New Year services were usually well attended by both Chinese and European people, and the church was in general a place for these two groups to intermingle.<sup>84</sup> This created an environment whereby both communities could exchange ideas and learn about each other. The CVM served as another avenue for intercultural communication: it brought new generations of missionaries into contact with Chinese

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<sup>78</sup> Don, “Our Chinese Mission,” *NZP*, August 1882, 27.

<sup>79</sup> Charles P. Sedgwick, “The Politics of Survival: A Social History of the Chinese in New Zealand” (PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1982), 8. Sedgwick did not develop this argument further, however.

<sup>80</sup> See “The Famine in China,” *Outlook*, April 27, 1907, 1, 5-6; “A Grateful Response,” *Outlook*, May 4, 1907, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 2:158.

<sup>82</sup> Moloughney and Stenhouse, ““Drug-besotten, Sin-begotten Fiends of Filth,”” 61.

<sup>83</sup> Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, 212.

<sup>84</sup> For an example of a social gathering at the church see: “Chinese Church, Walker Street,” *Outlook*, September 25, 1909, 11.

culture, and they transmitted their knowledge to New Zealanders through frequent reports and home speaking tours. By promoting interaction and the spread of cultural information, these two institutions helped to build bridges between New Zealand Chinese and Europeans.

Through the church and mission he established, Don had an indirect impact on cultural and social integration that was not felt until after his death. In 1947, it was the Dunedin Chinese Church that asked the Presbyterian General Assembly to petition the Government on behalf of Chinese war refugees in New Zealand. Furthermore, CVM veteran George McNeur was a member of the deputation that brought the issue before the Prime Minister. As we have seen, the Government granted the refugees resident status, and this contributed to the integration of the Chinese community into New Zealand society. This positive outcome has been partially credited to the influence of the Presbyterian Church,<sup>85</sup> and Chivers argues that it was an indirect result of Don's work, since the Dunedin Chinese Church instigated Presbyterian action concerning the refugees. Don's contribution to social unity in this respect is a reflection of his significance as a cultural mediator. The adoption of New Zealand Western culture by the Chinese community led an increasing number to convert to Christianity from the 1950s.<sup>86</sup> As Ng has pointed out, it could therefore be said that Don did have an unforeseen evangelical legacy.<sup>87</sup>

Don's motives for doing humanitarian deeds on behalf of the New Zealand Chinese should be examined in light of the various related fields of missionary endeavour in China. When Don started his ministry in the early 1880s, China mission work involved three main spheres: evangelism, education and medicine.<sup>88</sup> The latter two areas were developed extensively in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, with more resources and personnel invested in them.<sup>89</sup> Thus, during Don's career it was generally accepted that missionary work extended to more than preaching the gospel. There were differing opinions about the place of good works and secular education within the mission movement, however. Some missionaries, such as Hudson

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<sup>85</sup> Ng, *Windows*, 2:162; Chivers, "Religion, Ethnicity and Race," 110.

<sup>86</sup> Greif, *The Overseas Chinese in New Zealand*, 77–78.

<sup>87</sup> Ng, "Rev. Alexander Don: His 'Good Harvest' Being Reaped at Last."

<sup>88</sup> Latourette, *History of Christian Missions in China*, 617.

<sup>89</sup> See Hyatt, "Protestant Missions in China, 1877-1890," 93-126.

Taylor (1832-1905), saw conventional evangelism as the top priority, while on the other side of the spectrum figures such as Timothy Richard (1845-1919) and Gilbert Reid (1857-1927) proposed that the church's duty was not only to bring Christianity to China, but also to raise living conditions through Western knowledge and humanitarian aid.<sup>90</sup> While most nineteenth-century missionaries focused on gospel preaching, they also believed that their Christian duty included improving the state of China. The primary means to this end was converting Chinese people, but secular work was also important, such as providing education and health services or campaigning against opium. These areas of effort were of course related, since a school or mission hospital would afford opportunities for evangelism, and indeed many conservative missionaries saw good works primarily as a way to reach Chinese people with the gospel.<sup>91</sup> By around 1910, the focus in the mission enterprise had come to rest more on social work than traditional preaching,<sup>92</sup> but this was towards the close of Don's Chinese ministry.

Don's opinions on the position of humanitarian aid within his mission followed the general contemporary views in the China mission movement. In other words, while his chief aim was to make conversions, he also saw it as his moral obligation to improve the living standards of the Otago Chinese and give them practical help where needed. Naturally, Don hoped that his good deeds for Chinese people would encourage them to listen to his religious message and soften their attitudes towards Christianity. He intended that the Dunedin English classes would bring the gospel to Chinese people who might not normally attend services, and upon beginning study of medicine in 1890, he mentioned that medical work was seen by China missionaries as useful in preparing a way for evangelism (in the end, illness prevented him from completing this degree).<sup>93</sup> However, Don's mission aims were not the only reason for his provision of aid and service to the New Zealand Chinese. Another motive was his benevolent concern for the immigrants, based on his Christian morality and the desire to improve his audience's material circumstances as well as save their souls. For example, it was partly with the aim of bringing information and enjoyment to local

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<sup>90</sup> Mingteh Tsou, "Christian Missionary as Confucian Intellectual: Gilbert Reid (1857-1927) and the Reform Movement in the Late Qing," in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel H. Bays (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 78–79; Tiedemann, *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 2:187.

<sup>91</sup> Hyatt, "Protestant Missions in China, 1877-1890," 94–95.

<sup>92</sup> Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, 68.

<sup>93</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, September 1890, 42.

Chinese residents that Don set up and maintained a Chinese library – including secular as well as religious titles – at the mission hall in Dunedin.<sup>94</sup> An attitude of sympathy clearly incited much of the help that Don gave to Chinese people in difficult circumstances. In 1884, he continually reported on the situation of a leper named Kong Lye, and aided him by obtaining food, interpreting for a doctor, and so on.<sup>95</sup> Such concern for the Chinese increased as Don's rapport with them grew and many former miners descended into poverty.

## The Influence of Don's Presentation of Chinese Culture

We have seen that while Don preached Christianity to the Chinese community, he simultaneously portrayed Chinese culture to his New Zealand European peers. Their reactions to Don's presentation give an idea of how much impact the missionary had on their views, although this cannot be exactly measured. To be influential, Don's depiction of Chinese culture would have had to be extensively disseminated. An examination of European responses to him bears out this hypothesis, showing that his writings were indeed widely read from a relatively early point in his career, at least in Otago. In 1885 the editor of the *Presbyterian* wrote that numerous letters were received concerning Don's mission reports.<sup>96</sup> Most of these criticised the large amount of information he offered about Chinese culture as unnecessary or tedious, but they do indicate that his writings were being read. Several years later, an Auckland correspondent wrote to the *Presbyterian* asking for an opinion on Chinese immigration restrictions from either Don or the editor, which demonstrates that the missionary's articles were read outside Otago.<sup>97</sup> Meanwhile, the secular media also began to use Don as a source of information on the Chinese community. For example, in 1886 the *Tuapeka Times* reproduced an assertion the missionary had made that Chinese people had an "intense carnal appetite."<sup>98</sup> In 1905, the Wellington *Evening Post* printed a letter Don had sent to the Council of Churches regarding the immigration of Chinese women.<sup>99</sup> It can be seen that Don's presentation of Chinese culture reached a large

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<sup>94</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, July 1889, 3.

<sup>95</sup> Don, "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, March 1884, 163.

<sup>96</sup> Editorial note on "Our Chinese Mission," *NZP*, January 1885, 123.

<sup>97</sup> J. M. McLachlan, letter to the editor, *NZP*, July 1889, 18-19.

<sup>98</sup> Editorial, *Tuapeka Times*, November 3, 1886, 2.

<sup>99</sup> "The Wifeless Chinese," *Evening Post*, February 28, 1905, 5.



audience within New Zealand, and that he therefore had the potential to influence Europeans' understanding and opinions of the Chinese community.

Over the course of his career Don gained increasing respect and admiration from other New Zealand Europeans. This gave added weight to his representations of Chinese culture, and thus made him more effective as a mediator. The response to Don's views was initially ambiguous. As mentioned above, a number of the *Presbyterian's* readers complained about his early mission reports from Round Hill, due to the level of detail he offered about the Chinese community and their customs. In 1891, the editor of the *Presbyterian* commented that some of Don's speeches at the church's Synod meeting had been encumbered with "foreign learning," thus implying that the missionary focused too much on speaking of Chinese culture.<sup>100</sup> However, New Zealand European attitudes to Don improved from the late 1890s onwards. During this period, not only did his superiors and colleagues express admiration for his labours, but he also gained a formidable reputation in both church and secular spheres as an expert on everything Chinese. The *Christian Outlook*, interviewing Don after his 1898 tour of China, explained that his views on that country were highly significant due to his "utmost knowledge of the Chinese."<sup>101</sup> The *Otago Daily Times* echoed this sentiment when it printed comments from Don about the 1911 Revolution, saying that the missionary's "personal knowledge of China makes his observations on the present situation of particular interest."<sup>102</sup> His election as Moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1907, and the accolades he received from colleagues at that time, demonstrates the high respect he had earned.<sup>103</sup> The regard that Don gained among New Zealand Europeans in his later career gave him progressively greater influence over their opinions and attitudes concerning Chinese people and culture. Indeed, Chivers argues that Don's representation and advocacy of the Chinese community helped to improve social ties between them and Europeans in New Zealand.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Editorial, *NZP*, July 1891, 2.

<sup>101</sup> "Interview with Rev. A. Don on His Return from China," *Christian Outlook*, June 11, 1898, 233.

<sup>102</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, November 25, 1911, 6.

<sup>103</sup> After being elected Moderator, Don was praised in the *Outlook* by three of his colleagues. See William Hewitson, "Teacher Don: An Appreciation," *Outlook*, November 9, 1907, 3-4; Rutherford Waddell, "The New Moderator – Rev. A. Don: An Appreciation," *Outlook*, November 9, 1907, 21-22; George McNeur, "The New Moderator: A Biographical Sketch," *Outlook*, November 9, 1907, 23-25.

<sup>104</sup> Chivers, "Religion, Ethnicity and Race," 144.

## Summary

The results of Don's mission show that while he mainly failed to convert the New Zealand Chinese, he was nevertheless an effective cultural mediator. Don's audience had a number of reasons for rejecting Christianity, which were related to their own cultural values, the conflict between Christian doctrine and Chinese traditions, and contemporary events in China and New Zealand. Don's attitudes were not a major cause of his poor results, since while his behaviour at the start of his career was sometimes tactless, from about the mid-1890s he began to treat Chinese people in a more sensitive and friendly manner. This was partly an attempt to win converts, but its actual effect was that Don gained a strong rapport with the Chinese community, allowing him to serve as an important connection between them and Europeans. Meanwhile, Don's humanitarian concern for the Chinese led him to defend them against discrimination and give them practical aid. These were acts of cultural mediation that depended on Don's knowledge of Chinese culture and New Zealand society, as well as his relationships with the sojourners. By supporting the Chinese community publicly, facilitating their communication with Europeans, and doing charitable work on their behalf, Don promoted closer social ties between Chinese and European people. These better relations led in turn to greater cultural understanding on both sides. The institutions that Don founded – the Dunedin Chinese Church and CVM – provided a particularly useful channel for Sino-European contact and dialogue. Meanwhile, Don also conveyed his knowledge in both directions, with his presentation of Chinese culture to Europeans becoming more influential as his reputation grew. In all these ways, Don acted as a cultural mediator. Like most missionaries, he saw it as part of his duty to serve as a link between East and West, improving Chinese living standards through Western knowledge while simultaneously educating Europeans about China. Naturally, becoming a cultural mediator was not Don's primary aim – his main focus remained on converting people to Christianity. However, it turned out that his historical role was in the area of cultural mediation.

## Conclusions

From this examination of Alexander Don's work, we can conclude that while officially serving as a missionary, he also fulfilled the de facto role of cultural mediator. Don communicated his own cultural values and knowledge to the New Zealand Chinese, and simultaneously taught local Europeans about Chinese culture through mission reports and public speaking, thus contributing to closer relations and higher mutual understanding between the two communities. As a missionary, Don studied China's history and culture and interacted frequently with Chinese people, thus giving him the knowledge and experience to be a mediator. While preaching to the New Zealand Chinese, he also taught them about some non-religious aspects of Western culture, partly to improve their receptiveness to Christianity. Meanwhile, Don's description of Chinese culture to New Zealand Europeans was motivated by the need to gain support for his mission, as well as a desire to educate others. In these respects, Don followed an established missionary pattern: his position and goals led him to become a cultural mediator.

Don's mission not only enabled and motivated him to be a mediator, but also played an important part in determining the images of Chinese culture that he presented to New Zealand Europeans. My analysis of his writings has shown that his publicly expressed attitudes to Chinese people and civilisation changed quite dramatically around 1897, and his career can thus be divided into early and later phases. In the first period, Don's reports focused on describing Chinese religion and values, which he usually judged negatively. This was because his mission had gained very few converts, causing him to concentrate on describing those aspects of Chinese culture that he viewed as obstacles to Christianity. The critical focus and tone of Don's early writings was largely due to his need to justify the mission's lack of success and maintain support from the Presbyterian Church, as well as a desire to express frustration or simply analyse the reasons for his apparent failure.

The improvement in Don's views from around 1897 represented a shift in focus rather than a substantial change of opinion. After this point, Don tended not to mention aspects of Chinese culture with which he disagreed; instead, he presented a positive image of the New Zealand Chinese by relating personal stories and biographical profiles. This change was due to a number of related factors. From the start of his career, Don's growing understanding of Chinese culture enabled him more and more to adopt a Chinese perspective when discussing cultural differences. Over the years, he also slowly built rapport with the Chinese community, and developed feelings of sympathy due to their increasingly difficult circumstances. The closer relationship between Don and the Chinese was especially fostered by the Inland Tours, which had already helped to produce much mutual regard by 1897. A significant cause of the improvement in Don's attitudes was the establishment of the CVM in 1898. This institution satisfied some of Don's mission aspirations and compelled him to present a more favourable picture of the New Zealand Chinese community, since the CVM was founded on the premise that his work in New Zealand had built friendship with the Chinese sojourners there. In sum, Don's presentation of Chinese culture to Europeans was shaped by both his evangelical aims and the knowledge, experience, and relationships he developed through mission work.

During his career, Don was unique as a cultural mediator between the New Zealand European and Chinese communities. His views were clearly different in several aspects from secular representations of the New Zealand Chinese. While his attitudes to Chinese people were generally negative at first, he did not criticise them on racial grounds or make unsubstantiated claims, as was common in the contemporary media. His tone became more positive in the late 1890s, just as public hostility towards the sojourners increased. Don and secular sources also had different areas of concern, which were reflected in the topics they discussed. As a missionary, Don concentrated on Chinese beliefs and values, while politicians and the media were more interested in how Chinese immigration would affect New Zealand's society and economy. Finally, Don had a better understanding of Chinese culture, allowing him to focus on its deeper levels. Furthermore, he was a more prolific transmitter of cultural information than other New Zealand missionaries. His fellow evangelists among the New Zealand Chinese seldom wrote in detail about Chinese culture, while early CVM missionaries

made relatively shallow observations, without much discussion of beliefs or values. Because Don's portrayal of Chinese culture was unique in New Zealand, he was a highly significant mediator. In this respect he was similar to many other China missionaries, who also helped to educate the Western public about China, and who were motivated to do so by the same factors that drove Don – chiefly the need to gain support for mission work and a desire to communicate knowledge.

Examining the fruit of Don's career, it can be seen that while he did not have great success as an evangelist, he was an effective cultural mediator. Don's own conduct was not the primary reason for the low numbers of converts he gained, since the New Zealand Chinese had many reasons for rejecting Christianity. These included their ethnic and cultural chauvinism, the opposition of many Christian teachings to Chinese beliefs, and the anti-foreign and nationalist movements in China. In New Zealand, discrimination and prejudice against the sojourners was another cause of their hostility to Christianity. Despite the resistance to his message, Don built friendship with many Chinese people throughout his career. His humane concern for the sojourners also motivated him to defend them against European discrimination and to give them practical aid. At the same time, the picture of Chinese culture that Don presented in mission reports became more influential as his reputation grew. Thus, while attempting to convert Chinese people, Don assumed the unexpected role of helping to improve Sino-European relations and cultural understanding in New Zealand. Fairbank has noted how the most significant results of mission work in China were often in the realm of intercultural communication: "Their [missionaries'] personal aim was to influence the Chinese religiously, but their historic function, as it turned out, was to transmit ideas and images in both directions."<sup>1</sup> In the same manner, though Don's goal was to convert the New Zealand Chinese, his primary success was in cultural mediation.

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<sup>1</sup> Fairbank, introduction, 4.

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