

From Banana Plantations to Schools: The role of remittances from Australia to South China

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Christopher Cheng

「有華僑就有匯款」是南中國僑鄉一句家喻戶曉的俗話。就連一些從沒踏出過村子的僑鄉老人，也很清楚外幣的對換率。在廣東肇慶的高要區這類偏遠地區，僑鄉店鋪都可以用澳幣進行買賣。匯款不但有金錢或物質的價值，其對於社會、情感和精神維度的意義其實遠超過經濟的作用。這些經濟以外的意義有助我們分析澳洲華僑的移民原因。其中一個龐大的動力是他們希望為改善本地社會和經濟而作出努力的。我的博士研究則旨在探索早期赴澳洲的廣東華僑如何引領南中國鄉村教育現代化的過程。

十九世紀中的淘金熱最初吸引了不少廣東農民到澳洲。淘金時期結束後，不少人開始從事更穩定的田園工作。^[i] 華工辛勤勞作，起早摸黑，甚至開闢出一些人們以前認為「不能開墾」的土地。儘管傳言他們浪費水，華人在建設灌溉系統方面的知識讓外國人印象深刻。雖然偷菜及破壞菜園的情況時有發生，不少外國人眼中的「無名漢」（外國人並不知曉或沒興趣學習一個個的中國名字）確保了薯仔、番茄^[ii]以及其他蔬果的日常供應。^[iii]在北昆士蘭州，大部分華工來自廣東香山（今天的中山）。他們清出地皮，開始蔗糖、荔枝等產業，還壟斷了香蕉貿易（如圖1）。最重要的是，這些農產品提供了新鮮食物的可靠來源，維持了澳洲早期殖民的生活。

“Whenever there are overseas Chinese, there are remittances!” This expression is widely heard in southern Chinese emigrant communities. Even today elders who have not even travelled beyond their villages rattle off the exchange rates for migrant destination countries from memory. In remote villages of Ko Yiu in Guangdong, one can also make purchases with Australian currency.

While remittances are conventionally associated with a monetary and material value, they perform more than economic functions. The social, emotional and ideological dimensions attached to the flow of remittances help us to understand the motivations which facilitated Chinese migration to Australia. One powerful force was migrants’ desire to contribute to social and economic reform in their native districts. My doctoral research shows how the early Cantonese migrants in Australia fuelled the modernisation of education in rural South China.

Let me begin with the mid-19th century’s “gold rush” that brought many Cantonese farmers to Australia. As the rush subsided, many left the goldfields and found stable incomes as market gardeners (Boileau 2017, 101-2). The Chinese toiled industriously, day and night, and even managed to cultivate land that was declared “un-farmable”. Despite rumours that they wasted water, their knowledge of installing irrigation ditches greatly impressed their Australian counterparts. Notwithstanding crop theft and frequent damage to their gardens, “John Chinamen” — a term used by many white Australians who neither knew or bothered to learn the names of individual Chinese — ensured that the Smiths got their daily mashed potatoes, tomatoes and greens (Ryan 1995, 11). In North Queensland, migrants mainly from Heung-san county in the Pearl River Delta, cleared land. They pioneered the sugar and lychee industries, as well as monopolised the banana trade (see **Fig 1**). Most importantly, they provided a reliable source of fresh produce that sustained the lives of early settlers in Australia.



位於昆士蘭北部因尼斯費爾 (Innisfail) 的華工在船上運送香蕉 (約翰·奧克斯利 (John Oxley) 圖書館, 昆士蘭州, 圖像編號60933, 無日期/ Cantonese banana traders on punts in Innisfail, north Queensland (John Oxley Library, Queensland. Image No. 60933, no date)

到了1901年澳洲聯邦成立, 州立法會員、貿易工會人員以及支持澳洲聯邦的人聯合反對華工入境。其中一批返回中國的人是在雪梨舊華人街的禧市 (Haymarket) 買賣昆士蘭和斐濟產香蕉的香山人。ⁱⁱ 離開時, 這批移民把財富及生意頭腦帶回了中國。他們沒有帶澳 (英) 幣回來, 而是都換成了金幣, 窮盡了澳洲的黃金儲備。他們複製在澳洲雪梨經營最大百貨公司可頓 (Anthony Hordern & Sons) 生意的成功模式, 在香港、廣州、上海開設了類似的分店。ⁱⁱⁱ 他們逐步把賺到的錢匯到中山家鄉, 完善基礎設施, 興建多層西式別墅和現代學校。學校的設計理念則受到了傳統私塾及歐洲風格的建築物啟發 (如圖2)。

By 1901, the actions of state legislators, trade unions, and advocates of federalism in Australia ensured that Chinese labour-migrants were not welcome here. Among those who returned to South China was a cohort of fruit vendors who traded at Sydney's Haymarket, wholesaling Queensland and Fijian bananas (Fitzgerald 2007, 159). These émigrés brought their wealth and business acumen back to China. Instead of taking Australian (British) currency back, they bought gold coins before leaving and exhausted Australia's gold bullion reserves. Replicating the commercial successes of Anthony Hordern & Sons' departmental store, the largest in Sydney, they established similar stores in Hong Kong, Canton (present-day Guangzhou) and Shanghai (Fitzgerald 2007, 191). Remittances and profits eventually travelled back into their hometowns in Heung-san (present-day Zhongshan), where multi-story "western-style" mansions, infrastructure, and modern schools were built. The designs of these schools were inspired by both traditional Chinese study halls, as well as European-style architecture (see **Fig 2**).



Lai Wor School financed by the Choy brothers in 1930. They once wholesaled fruit in Sydney before returning to establish The Sun Department stores across China (Photo by author, 2017, Waisha village)

of Tangjiawan Town, Zhuhai)/ 蔡興、蔡昌兩兄弟在1930年興建禮和學校；他們曾經在澳洲雪梨經營水果批發，後來回國開辦大新百貨（2017年作者在珠海唐家灣外沙村拍攝）

華僑的經歷使他們深深體會到，沒受教育在澳洲的日子是多麼艱苦。他們在艱辛奮鬥中明白文化對公司銷售記錄以及家人書信往來的重要性。雖然他們有匯款並寄家書回鄉，信中也細述匯款的用途，但其實這些信大部分都不是他們本人所寫。同樣地，他們在澳洲也看不懂家人的回覆。於是，少部分有文化的「寫信佬」就幫他們讀信及寫信，讓國內和國外的家人都可以互道思念。由於這些信件是隨水果貿易網絡傳送的，有時候信封上會有死果蠅和果汁的痕跡。^[1]

值得一提的是，華工離開家人的溫暖來到國外，能夠寄錢養家成為他一人在外的生存價值。華僑匯款將以前沒有學校的村落轉成新的地方中心來為男孩女孩們提供教育。這改變了珠三角以往只許富家子弟入學的傳統教育系統。

在晚清政治改革至民國初期，教育也帶動了國內移民。當時，新開張的百貨公司大量招聘員工。從二十世紀初起，一批又一批有文化的村民移居到國內的主要城市打工。時至今日，華南許多鄉村都已在改革開放後城市化，我們可以想像農村不再是一片片香蕉園，而是偶爾在移民人家的後院看到一兩棵果樹。幾百年來一直種植稻米的地方變成了標榜「中國製造」的成衣和高科技產品工廠區。華僑匯款加速了農村發展的步伐，但百年來華僑留下的教育遺產仍在。

Their struggles in Australia made Chinese migrants deeply aware of the severe handicaps of being unschooled. They realised that education was essential to keeping abreast of business dealings as well as corresponding with family. Letters arriving in South China were seldom penned by migrants themselves, notwithstanding their seemingly personal nature and their descriptions of how to use the money. Likewise, whenever there were replies, few could read them in Australia. The educated few, working in the remittance business in the hometown or as scribes in country shops in Australia, were called upon to read out the letters that captured the hearts and imagination of migrants and their families, in China and elsewhere. Some replies arrived in crates imprinted with residues of dead fruit flies and juice stains as it passed along trading networks (Loy Wilson 2014, 417). Despite being away from home and family, a migrant's ability to send money to support the aging parents, wife and children made their absence worthwhile. The money that accompanied the letters transformed villages without schools into new centres that provided schooling for both boys and girls. This departed from the traditional education system in the Canton Delta that was restricted to only sons of elites.

During the political reforms of the late Qing and early Republican era, schooling greatly contributed to internal migration. The large-scale recruitment of service personnel required for the burgeoning department stores effectively saw one generation after another of educated villagers being transplanted into the major Chinese cities since the early 20th century. Today, much of the countryside in South China is engulfed by urban sprawl that has exploded in the decades since Mao's rule. Instead of finding swathes of banana plants as one may expect in rural regions, in the backyard of many emigrant houses today, there are hardly any fruit trees. The farmlands that had, for centuries, produced rice have become "Made in China" factories of garments and hi-tech innovations. The remittance economy has quickened the pace of development. Still, a century on the educational legacy of emigration lingers.



Beneficiaries outside a classroom recalling their memories of the school benefactor (Photo by author, 2017, Caobian School in South District, Zhongshan)/ 僑捐學校受益者在教室門前回顧創校人物的故事 (2017年作者在中山南區曹邊學校拍攝)

僑捐學校佐證了澳洲華僑白手起家的故事。以僑捐名義而建的教室（如圖3），提醒了華僑的後代其祖先是如何在澳洲靠種植香蕉重塑華南農村面貌。一名僑捐學校的校長也提及了捐款的意義超越經濟和物質的價值：「在我看來，最重要的是華僑樹立的無私榜樣。他們不辭勞苦地為公共事業付出，但願這種精神能激勵下一代的學生。」這一切都歸結於華僑當初勇敢地出國謀生匯錢回鄉，才惠澤鄉里，改變生活。

Migrant-endowed schools bear testimony to poverty leading to triumph. Classrooms dedicated to emigrant-benefactors (see **Fig 3**) remind generations of beneficiaries of how Cantonese banana growers who toiled in Australia also enriched village life in South China. A school principal of a diaspora-funded school articulated the importance of the remittance culture beyond its economic value and material footprint: "In my mind what mattered most was the selfless example set by emigrants. They strove relentlessly to provide for a common good. I hope this spirit inspires generations of students to come." The leaps taken by Cantonese emigrants in Australia, and their remittances, helped communities to rebuild their lives.

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Christopher Cheng is a PhD candidate at ICS. He can be reached at christopher.cheng@westernsydney.edu.au

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