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# DRAGONS ON THE RAND : A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT INDENTURED WORKERS ON THE WITWATERSRAND MINES 1904 – 1910

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Between 1904 and 1907 just over 65,000 Chinese labourers were brought to South Africa to work on the Witwatersrand mines. All but those who had died or been executed, and perhaps a handful who had disappeared, were repatriated to China by 1910. In those short years they doubled production of the mines; were instrumental in bringing down the Conservative government in Britain, leading to Responsible Government in the Transvaal; and their presence led to a number of labour and race laws that were to blight the whole of the country for most of the following hundred years. The documentary tells their story, and attempts to read between the lines of the hundreds of official documents which are almost all the evidence that remains of their sojourn here.

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Gail MacLellan
18th November 2008

# Chapter 1

## 1.1 Introduction

The study of history brings the rewards of knowledge and understanding to those who undertake it. If there are any limitations to such study it is in the access to it. The mass media are important tools in disseminating information and are wonderfully placed to take history to a wider audience. Hence this current study of History and Documentary Filmmaking.

This Masters thesis is divided into sections which reflect the dual nature of the course. The thesis will consider the art of documentary filmmaking: specifically where historical documentary is placed, and, after a research study of the topic, will culminate in the paper edit of the documentary Dragons on the Rand.

The aim of the documentary subject is to investigate the history of Chinese workers on the mines and shine a light into this neglected corner of South African history. The thesis and film aim to explore the experiences of the indentured Chinese, from within the social and political framework of the time.

Why make a documentary about the Chinese workers? This fascinating, brief, rather unusual interlude in South African history is not well-known, and the potential for a very interesting film has never been exploited. Although the episode raised a furore in the country at the time, and had important international and domestic repercussions, it has been neglected by historians. There is only one book published which focuses on the

Chinese on the mines alone.[1] The impact of the Chinese 'experiment' usually warrants only a paragraph, or at most a chapter, in most histories of this country.

Because there is great public ignorance now about this episode, it makes a perfect subject for a documentary film which will be intriguing and fresh.

A documentary has to have a good story. Alan Rosenthal says:

> 'To make good documentaries, you need a strong narrative thrust and a tale that can be recounted in the most compelling, dramatic way possible.'[2]

The story of the Chinese on the mines has a strong narrative, and is certainly dramatic. The characters are removed from their own environment, which means that they behave as if at odds with the one they are in, and the narrative is at times bizarre. And even though few people in South Africa have any knowledge at all of this moment in history, it has affected all of their lives

The documentary will reveal the greed and hypocrisy at the heart of the experiment. It will explore the intentions of the mine owners; reveal the politics; expose the racism of all concerned. But the major thrust of the documentary will be to investigate the social aspects of the experiment. The film will be concerned with examining the human cost of Chinese indentured labour - for both the workers and the population at large.

Chapter One introduces both the thesis and the historical documentary. In this chapter will be located an overview of the documentary film, and specific analysis of

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[1] Richardson, Peter. *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal.* London, 1982
[2] Rosenthat, Alan. *Writing, Directing, and Producing Documentary Films and Videos.* Southern Illinois University Press 3rd Edition, 2002 p 10

where the historical documentary is placed within the genre. There will also be an examination of the formal filmic elements of the sub-genre.

This chapter also contains a 'treatment' of the proposed documentary, Dragons on the Rand.

Chapter Two begins with a literature review of work pertaining to the documentary subject, the Chinese mineworkers on the rand. That is followed by the historical research on which the documentary is based.

The paper edit of the documentary is in Chapter Three. Written in conventional shooting-script format all of the sound (voice-over, interviews, music and sound effects) is on the right-hand side of the page, and all the visuals indicated on the left. It must be noted that all of the still photographs and locations have been researched, and are accurately described.

### 1.2 Making the past present: representing history on film

History can be represented on film in two major ways: the feature film, or the documentary. The **feature film** can be either fiction or non-fiction but it tells the story in a different way to the documentary. The feature film may twist or ignore facts depending on the demands of the visuals or narrative.

People are interested in the past, largely because history is about them. There are an abundance of stories waiting to be told, and they will all add meaning to what it is like to be human. Stories from the past resonate in the present: they may have happened a hundred years ago, but there is much with which we can identify or empathise: at the very least our viewing of the past may give us the pleasure of schadenfreude - that we have lived beyond events.

John Sayles, film director and screenplay writer, sees the power of history in films.

> '…I've heard producers say many, many times that the only way a movie is going to work is if the ad says 'Based on a true story'. Audiences appreciate the fact that something really happened. Whether it did or didn't they're thinking that it did or knowing that it did. That gives the story a certain legitimacy in the audience's mind and sometimes in the filmmaker's mind, whereas if you make something up out of a whole cloth, it's not the same.' [3]

History has provided a mine of material for mainstream cinema since the latter began. The historical epic and the biographical tale have underpinned movies for decades, and they have been consistently popular.

> '… They often teach important truths about the human condition. They do not provide a substitute for history that has been painstakingly assembled from the best available evidence and analysis. But sometimes filmmakers, wholly smitten by their creations, proclaim them to be historically 'accurate' or 'truthful', and many viewers presume them to be so. Viewers should never accept such claims nor dismiss them out of hand, but regard them as an invitation for further exploration.'[4]

It is true that historical fact is often twisted or rearranged in feature films to accommodate the needs of the narrative or the visuals. For example, when Richard Attenborough was making the film Gandhi he sent the script to the historian Ainslie

[3] Sayles, John. *A Conversation Between Eric Foner and John Sayles* in Carnes, Mark C. (Ed) *Past Imperfect.* Henry Holt and Co: New York, 1995 p 17
[4] Carnes, Mark C. (Ed) *Past Imperfect*. Henry Holt and Co: New York, 1995 p 10

Embree, who was then teaching Indian history at Columbia University in New York. Embree found that it was full of historical errors, but the errors did not change the narrative of the story. He made a list of the mistakes and sent it back to Attenborough, but not one of them was changed in the final script. It is likely that changing the errors would somehow have got in the way of the story, and so the director decided to sacrifice a bit of truth for effect.[5]

> 'When the film Glory came out the producers called and asked me to come to a screening which I did and then they asked me to write a statement about the film. I wrote one saying that the film revealed a little-known feature of the American past and blah-blah-blah…. They called me back and said 'Well, this statement is of no use to us'. And I said 'Well, what do you want?' They said 'We want a statement that says the film is accurate from a historian's point of view.' And I said I couldn't do that because what *I* mean by accurate in not exactly what *they* mean by accurate. I thought the film was accurate in a general way, but there were many historical inaccuracies in it. I didn't necessarily want to criticise all of them, but I wasn't going to give the film my Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.'[6]

Some critics have been scathing about mainstream film's attempts to recreate the past. Dwight MacDonald writing in the 1950s said:

> '…Hollywood….gives us miracles in 'authenticity' of costume and furniture, all verified by experts, but doesn't bother about the authenticity

[5] Foner, Eric. *A Conversation Between Eric Foner and John Sayles* in Carnes, Mark C (Ed) *Past Imperfect* Henry Holt and Co: New York, 1995 p 16
[6] Ibid pg 17

> of the human beings who wear the costumes and sit on the period chairs, reversing Marianne Moore's famous description of the poet as one who creates 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them'. (In Hollywood, the gardens are real but the toads are synthetic and all of them are named Natalie Wood).'[7]

The film Marie Antoinette (WS van Dyke, 1938) is a good illustration of MacDonald's point. Variety magazine may have extolled the film's virtues ('Produced on a scale of incomparable splendour and extravagance, it approaches real greatness as cinematic historical literature') but, despite having spared no expense to recreate faithfully the décor and costumes of 18th Century France, the film glamorises and fictionalises the history.

In Michael Mann's The Last of the Mohicans (1992) the characters move through the film like modern people in an artfully re-created simulation of the past. Many movies dealing with real people and real events from the past have imbued their characters with the characteristics of the time in which the film was actually produced: sometimes this is to add a further layer to the film, often it's just the filmmaker's desire to capitalise on what is currently thought stylish. (see for example Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (George Roy Hill, 1969) or Bonnie and Clyde (Arthur Penn, 1967).

Some of the historical detail in The Last of the Mohicans is wrong; some facts have just been combined in a way that makes them wrong; and some scenes have been thrown in to reflect the modern view of multicultural, egalitarian American society.

> 'The movie portrays this happy, multicultural America in one particularly bizarre scene during which British recruiters seem to intrude on the first

[7] MacDonald, Dwight. *Against the American Grain.* Da Capo: New York, 1985 p 409

> Thanksgiving, which breaks up into an interracial lacrosse game involving the Mohawks and white settlers. Thanksgiving and athletics are, of course, currently our only two symbols of interracial harmony. Mann simply transports them back to the eighteenth century.'[8]

The director, Michael Mann, defended the historicity of the film -

> 'I wanted history to become as vivid and real and immediate as if it were being lived right now. I wanted people to be as intelligent, capricious, humane, venal, and libidinous as anybody else in any other time frame.'[9]

The question about historical feature films is whether in the end it matters that the facts are sometimes wrong, or that the psychology is anachronistic. Some critics have argued that such films have a place in raising public consciousness about events and people, even if the facts, or opinions expressed, are not particularly accurate. They argue that because of Spike Lee's film Malcolm X (1992) more Americans have a better idea about the civil rights movement. The fact that feature films might be seen by a huge audience makes them valuable to the pursuit of educating people about history. In the essay 'Picturing Apartheid', Vivian Bickford-Smith makes this point with regard to two films set in apartheid South Africa. She says:

'What, then, has been the popular impact and critical reception of Cry Freedom and A Dry White Season? Getting a sizeable audience was crucial if the main purpose of the films – beyond money-making – was to popularise an anti-apartheid

[8] White, Richard. *The Last of the Mohicans* in Carnes, Mark C. (Ed) *Past Imperfect* . Henry Holt and Co: New York, 1995 p 84
[9] Ibid p 83

message. Each undoubtedly reached more people than any individual written history of South Africa….'[10]

The counter-argument, of course, is that when feature films simplify history, or just get it entirely wrong, then they are no longer historical, but are fictional.

It may be that feature films could be forgiven for taking licence with the past. The same latitude, certainly with matters of fact, is not given to historical documentaries.

The **documentary film** aims to deal with fact rather than with fiction. The documentary filmmaker is motivated by any, or a combination, of the following ideals: to argue a point and substantiate it (at the extreme edge a polemic); to inform; to entertain; to replicate reality; to observe 'real life'.

The documentary film plays to a constituency that has certain expectations. The audience expects the film to explore real life, and their idea of what is real will be shaped by previous and personal experience of reality. They will also be expecting an attempt at objectivity - the further the film gets from what the audience accepts to be real and true, the more fantastical it will seem to them. Some will expect the film to present an argument which will back up their perceptions, others will welcome a new point of view. The audience also expects to learn something from a non-fiction film, and hopes to be entertained along the way.

Bill Nichols [11] has divided the genre into subtypes: the observational - where the camera becomes a fly-on-the-wall – most obvious in the cinema verite style; the expositional - where an argument is expressed, often with voiceover (see the films of

[10] Bickford-Smith, Vivian 'Picturing Apartheid' in *Black and White in Colour: African History on Screen*, edited by Vivian Bickford Smith and Richard Mendelson Double Storey Books: Cape Town 2006 p 277
[11] Nichols, Bill. *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994 p 95

John Grierson, but also brought up to date by Ken and Ric Burns); the interactive - where the subject and the camera interact – Molly Dineen's portrait of Geri Halliwell is a good example; the performative – see for example the films of Nick Broomfield (The Leader, His Driver, and the Driver's Wife) ; and the reflexive - in which the process of the filming becomes central to the film – an early example is Dziga Vertov and his Man with a Camera. Each of these styles has its own conventions, but at the same time many of the conventions overlap, making the distinctions complicated and ultimately questionable. Stella Bruzzi makes the same argument. She says that Nichols is wrong to see the development of documentary styles in a 'linear' progression.

> 'So, because the Expository mode is primitive and didactic, Nichols maintains that it is also the earliest, rather arbitrarily attributing it to the 1930's. It is simply not tenable to maintain that voice-over (the sine qua non of the Expository mode) is any less popular a device in non-fiction film now than it was; narration is everywhere, likewise observation – frequently in the same documentary.'[12]

Bruzzi points out that seeing the development of documentary as an attempt to get ever closer to finding a way to actually portray what is true and real is to suggest that it is possible to do so, collapsing, as she says, the difference between reality and representation altogether.

There are no hard and fast rules in documentary filmmaking. These films use many conventions and many styles, and categorising them may finally be a pointless exercise.

One of the most debated issues about documentary films is how 'real' they are.

[12] Bruzzi, Stella. *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction.* Routledge: New York, 2000 p 2

Authenticity is the documentary's greatest glory and its greatest source of controversy. There are often many legitimate interpretations of the same historical event. So no-one can claim they are writing history as objective fact, even though, as Simon Schama points out there are '…historians who persist in believing that somehow the archives write themselves and all they do is point their brains at the sources, exit, and write the history.'[13]

The issues of objectivity and subjectivity have plagued the documentary film movement almost since its inception. One of the early pioneers, John Grierson, defined documentary as the creative treatment of actuality. He insisted that the documentarist must be a political and social analyst, making a moral commitment, and scoffed at the concept of objectivity in non-fiction films.

Every filmmaker, like every historian, has an agenda. The minute someone sits down to edit footage, even in a documentary, choices are made. The footage itself, whether archive or specially shot, was captured for a reason, with a purpose, from a perspective. Add to this the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle from physics that says a person's very presence changes reality, and what is real becomes even more unclear.

Erik Barnouw suggests that the documentary seems to fail in its purpose:

> 'To be sure, some documentarists claim to be objective – a claim that seems to renounce an interpretive role. The claim may be strategic, but it is surely meaningless. The documentarist, like any communicator in any medium, makes endless choices. He selects topics, people, vistas, angles, lenses, juxtapositions, sounds, words. Each selection is an expression of

[13] Schama, Simon *Historical Documentary* in BBC History Magazine Autumn 2001

his point of view, whether he is aware of it or not, whether he acknowledges it or not.'[14]

Brian Winston goes further in his doubts when he considers the technological changes in filmmaking:

> 'It seems likely that the implications of this technology [for digital image manipulation] will be decades working themselves through the culture. However, it is clear that these technological developments, whatever else they portend, will have a profound and perhaps fatal impact on the documentary film. It is not hard to imagine that every documentarist will shortly (that is, in the next fifty years) have to hand, in the form of desktop personal video-image-manipulating computer, the wherewithal for complete fakery. What can or will be left of the relationship between image and reality?'[15]

But although there is no doubt that a documentary is a construct, that does not also automatically mean there is no value to it, or that there is no truth in it. Plato pointed out that a representation of a thing is not the thing itself, but the documentary maker can add that at least the representation gives us a starting point, a way in, to understanding human history and nature.

As Stella Bruzzi says:

> '…the pact between documentary, reality and spectator is far more straightforward than [these] theorists make out: that a documentary will never be reality nor will it erase or invalidate that reality by being

[14] Barnouw, Erik. *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film.* Oxford University Press, 1993 p 287
[15] Winston, Brian. *Claiming the Real: The documentary film revisited.* BFI: London, 1995 p 6

> representational. Furthermore, the spectator is not in need of signposts and inverted commas to understand that a documentary is a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other.'[16]

**Historical documentary: The subgenre**

> 'One area of mainstream work which has shown a continuing strength is the historical documentary. The combination of archive images (including still photographs) with interview testimony from those involved and with read documents (including letters and diary extracts) has frequently produced programmes which have had widespread popularity as well as being serious contributions to historical research.'[17]

The historical documentary has become very popular in the past two decades. So much so that an entire television channel is dedicated to it. (The History Channel). It could be argued that **all** documentary films are 'historical', in the sense that seconds after something is filmed it belongs to the past. But for the purpose of this thesis, historical documentary is assumed to be non-fiction films which aim to explain or expose the past – whether that past belongs to a group or an individual.

The historical documentary, like the historical novel or essay, has to concern itself with interpretation, voice, and perspective. But some historians find documentary more troublesome in that it also falls into the category of 'entertainment', and the criticism is that the facts are sometimes secondary to the drama. It is true that there are some bad or inaccurate documentaries, but it is just as true of the written word, and the fact that the

[16] Bruzzi, Stella. *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*. Routledge: New York, 2000 p 4
[17] Corner, John. *The Art of Record.* Manchester University Press, 1996 p 189

medium is film does not automatically make the content worthless. Rather, good documentaries can add much to the study of history by making the most of film's unique properties.

At the furthest end of the historical documentary is the **Docudrama**. [18] The docudrama is a scripted recreation of events in which actors are cast as real people and put into real events. Leslie Woodhead, a well-known British documentarist, sees docudrama as '…a way of doing things where ordinary documentary cannot cope – a way of telling a story that would be impossible by conventional documentary methods'. He lists his aims in using docudrama as:

> 'No invented characters. No invented names. No dramatic devices owing more to the writer's (or director's) creative imagination than to the impeccable record of what actually happened. For us, the dramatized documentary is an exercise in journalism, not dramatic art.'[19]

But not all docudramatists would agree, since 'what actually happened' is often a matter of opinion or conjecture. One of the most famous documentary dramas of the 1960's is Jeremy Sandford's Cathy Come Home, about homelessless and the care of children in England. In conversation with Alan Rosenthal, Sandford said he had chosen to make his film in the form of a drama rather than a straight documentary because:

> 'Real people are often inarticulate when disaster hits them. There can be flashes of emotion in a live documentary, but these flashes cannot be sustained throughout a film. An actor with an actual script avoids that problem. Also, at this time, cameras were not allowed in the homes for the

[18] A dramatised television film based on real events - OED
[19] Leslie Woodhead quoted in Rosenthal, Alan. *Writing, Producing, and Directing Documentary Films and Videos.* Southern Illinois University Press, 2002 p 278

> homeless. Even had I been able to get in and make a television documentary, I wouldn't have been able to do justice to the emotional reality of the people living there. Instead, I saw it all in the form of a play – a situation anyone with a social conscience just had to write about.' [20]

Of course, another reason for writing a script in which the dialogue is imagined, is that there is no record of what was actually said, though we know what was done. A good example of this genre is Band of Brothers (Producers Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks, 2001), a 10 hour series following the fortunes of Easy Company, a battalion of the US Army, during the Second World War. The series is based on a book by Stephen Ambrose. He interviewed the surviving members of Easy Company (506th Regiment, 101st Airborne Division) over a year, using the company's commanding officer to help iron out discrepancies. The resulting book, and film, is a narrative which follows the soldiers from training to D Day, to their liberation of Dachau and occupation of Berchtesgaden. Each episode focuses on the personal experience of one of the group.

The series was filmed in England with the set designer, Anthony Pratt, going to great lengths to recreate the devastated Europe through which the soldiers passed. Apart from the brief testimonies of survivors that preface each episode, the films are dramatised. The narrative seems to make an honest attempt to tell the viewer what really happened, but what is interesting is the tone. This series could not have been made in the 1970s or 1980s. If it had been, the tone would have been entirely different. In those decades there was great cynicism about military endeavour (even one generally considered to be a 'good war' like WW2 ), and a fear that film about heroic deeds would

[20] Jeremy Sandford quoted in Rosenthal, Alan. *The New Documentary in Action*. University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971

reek of jingoism. America's take on war in the 21st century has changed and that makes this tribute to the ordinary soldier palatable and popular.

Making this variety of historical documentary is a very expensive affair. Band of Brothers cost $120million, using hundreds of actors and extras, and creating authentic looking sets, props, and costumes.

Culloden (Peter Watkins, 1964) is a celebrated docudrama which gives an event in far-off history immediacy and realism by means of an unusual technique. Watkins imagines how a modern television news team would have covered this bloody engagement in the Scottish Highlands and he interviews the main protagonists as well as ordinary soldiers, and even has a contemporary war correspondent reporting from behind a wall during the action. He employs cinema verite type action to cover the combat and the subsequent atrocities committed by the government troops. The result is a film that, while explaining clearly what historical factors shaped the battle, makes clear the arrogance, stupidity, and cruelty that underlay this horrifying massacre.

> 'Culloden succeeded brilliantly in de-romanticising the rebellion, a misery without heroes or villains, just pawns and aristocrats. And the pre-Python danger of a parody of 60's style investigative documentaries disappears altogether in the utterly convincing battle sequences, edited virtually to real time (since Culloden lasted barely more than an hour). Those sequences were some of the bravest and earliest experiments in the poetics of television history. What that calls for is the sense of surrounding the viewer for at least some moments in a different world, and (even harder)

making the viewer forget, for the duration, that the outcome of that history is already known.'[21]

A director might choose to use reconstructions if archive footage of the event is not available: either because the story pre-dates film, or, if it was a modern event, because a camera was not present to record it.

**Dramatic reconstruction** differs from docudrama in that the action underlines or aids the narrative, it does not become the narrative itself. Actors or extras would be employed to recreate the situation as the narrator describes it. The 3-part series The Zulu Wars (BBC 1997, narrated by John Hurt) is carried almost entirely by such recreation. The only other technique is the use of commentary by experts. As the (off-screen) narrative voice is what holds the films together it is important that the voice is both commanding and sympathetic, and the choice of the narrator is a crucial one.

Many documentaries are based on **archive** footage. Researchers on the series The World at War (ITV : Jeremy Isaacs 1973) viewed three million feet of archive film to select the clips to be used along with specially-filmed interviews shot on 16mm. The process of viewing, logging, and clipping the archive took over three years. The aim of Isaacs' production was to tell the story of the Second World War through the memories of survivors and to back the history up with archive footage.

The aim of The Sorrow and the Pity (Marcel Ophuls, 1967) is somewhat different, though the mechanics are similar. Ophuls' film took a critical look at French involvement in the Second World War, and in so doing debunked the myth of the huge popular support given to the Maquis, the French Resistance movement. Ophuls uses

[21] Schama, Simon. *BBC History Magazine.* London, 2001

archive film often at counterpoint to the memories of his interviewees and in so doing pits documented fact against romanticised reminiscence, which finally explodes the myth.

The choice of the **narrative** in documentaries is revealing of its purpose. When a narrator is seen on camera, it is suggested that the content is his opinion. An off-camera voice-over runs the risk of being seen as omniscient; of suggesting that there is no other perspective than this. Another narrative technique is to take the voice out completely and let participants speak for themselves, and the images tell the story.

Documentaries frequently use **oral testimony** to shape an argument. As Freud said, memory is inherently revisionist and any life story, written or oral, is in one sense a personal mythology, a self-justification. Memory involves complex processes: recall, selection, formation, framing and re-framing of the original experiences. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson believe that such complexities have made historians reluctant to pay too much attention to individual testimonies. But they say that, in fact, the manner of the telling of a life story is as important as what is told.

> 'As soon as we recognise the value of the subjective in individual testimonies, we challenge the accepted categories of history. We introduce the emotionality, the fears and fantasies carried by the metaphors of memory, which historians have been so anxious to write out of their formal accounts.'[22]

Documentary makers are well aware that the story is not just the facts. Ophuls does not warn us about the revisionist memories of his interviewees because their versions of the truth tell us more about them, and their experiences, than the straight facts might.

[22] Samuel, Raphael and Thompson, Paul (eds) *The Myths We Live By* Routledge: London, 1990 p 2

Oral testimony can add perspective to a documentary. It is often only the interviews with participants that give us, as Samuel and Thompson say, the perspective of the minority, or the marginalized, or the underprivileged who often do not feature in written history.[23]

Filmmakers do not avoid reminiscence because of its subjectivity. Take for example Andrew Jarecki's documentary Capturing the Friedmans (USA 2003). The main voice in the film is that of the eldest son, who does not believe in the guilt of his father or brother. The audience is aware that his side of the story is not the whole truth because of the juxtaposition of imagery and other testimony, but his skewed perspective tells us a lot about his own personality, and about the dynamics of the family that might not have been articulated in any other way.

Historical documentaries often make use of **pundits**. The learned expert is asked to fill in the gaps in what is known, or to interpret historical information - usually making it more understandable to a contemporary audience. Pundits can be used to back up a line of investigation, or can be pitted against one another to indicate the divergence of opinion about particular historical issues. For example, Ken Burns in The American Civil War uses experts to argue the causes and progress of the war, but the same filmmaker in The Life and Times of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony uses historians who have a unanimous voice about the contribution of these two figures to the emancipation of women.

An important visual tool for the documentary maker is the **location** shot. If a historical location still exists, the camera can be taken there and present-day location shots can be used in documentaries with great effect. If the actual site has gone, the

[23] Ibid p 3

filmmaker can make use of the contemporary landscape to add to the aesthetics or pace of the film. The subject, composition, and duration of these images combine direct aesthetic appeal with strong national and historical connotations. These shots allow the viewer time for contemplation, and provide a visualisation which both generates its own meaning and helps to connect and deepen those emerging from surrounding material.

**Archive film** is a treasure chest for documentary filmmakers. Where there are huge amounts of filmed material available the biggest problem becomes choosing the best. But there is also a need to be cautious with archive material. As we know, just about everything that is filmed is shot with a particular purpose or perspective. And if there is a preponderance of material from one point of view concerning a particular historical event then that material may distort the truth. For example, the Nazis shot thousands of feet of film of their invasions, but there is very little filmed material from the other side, for example, of the activities of the Maquis, or the Polish resistance. Using the Nazi footage on its own would make it difficult to get a balanced view of what happened during the war.

When no moving footage is available, the documentary maker may be able to use **still images**. Coupled with well-chosen sound the 'still' may be just that in name, but not in nature. Television documentary is an excellent place for the still photograph because television tends to favour close-ups and medium shots. Long and extreme long shots get lost on the smaller screen. Because of its greater effectiveness in the closer ranges, television tends to emphasise editing rather than mise en scene. Linking shots together is more effective in pointing out a sequence of specific details than mise en scene, which encourages the viewer to anaylse the contents of a longer shot on his own. Television

documentaries often do not have the same visual beauty as theatrical non-fiction films, but they are often more emotionally involving because of their dependence on close-ups.

A filmmaker who does not have the luxury of archive material in the making of the film has actively to create a visual universe. An example is the first four episodes of A History of Britain (BBC: Simon Schama, 2001). Starting with Britain in the year 3000BC, and ending in the year 1836, this part of the series used location shooting, small elements of dramatic reconstruction, historical artefacts, works of art, and the on-screen narration of historian Simon Schama to tell the story. They also made occasional use of dramatic motifs - 'metonymic' dramatisation which provided the narration with increased imaginative intensity.

There is always the danger with historical documentary that a technique used to evoke the past can quickly become a televisual cliché. The onus is therefore on the documentary maker to come up with new and interesting ways of presenting the past.

> '[Representing] History….is always a test of the creative imagination. And television history that aims at something more than costumed atmospherics wants to be something more than a consolation prize for vanished grandeur, needs to find a visual language which can pay its audience the compliment of arguing (not lecturing) through story-telling; debating, as it were, by stealth; punctuating recollection with provocation.'[24]

As with other types of documentary, the Historical Documentary will not always fit neatly into a type. Filmmakers increasingly use many different techniques in one film

[24] Schama, Simon. *BBC History Magazine.* London, 2001

in order to tell their story, and in historical documentary getting the story (and the argument) across is the crux of the endeavour.

### 1.3 Dragons on the Rand : The documentary project.

This documentary is primarily of the 'expository' style of documentary filmmaking. The idea is to make a documentary which will tell a (little-known) story – that of indentured Chinese mineworkers on the Witwatersrand – which will bring to the public's attention the contribution of the workers, as well as explain how their presence changed the history of this country. The expository style has been chosen over others (observational, interactive, performative, reflexive) because it suits the available material and the intention of the filmmaker.

Of course, it would be possible to make a different type of documentary on this subject – or to make use of several types. The choice rests with the filmmaker. A 'fly-on-the-wall' observational documentary **could** be made around this subject, but with a different purpose. If the aim of the filmmaker was to comment on the position of Chinese-South Africans post the Black Economic Empowerment decision of 2008, then the story of the indentured Chinese and the relevant archive could be used in parallel with cinema verite style filming to make a different point.

Dragons on the Rand is an expository documentary employing a voice-over and the use of different academic pundits. There is very little moving film archive available, and much use will be made of still photographs, locations, and imagery. It is an interesting, and often moving story.

At the beginning of the twentieth century 65,000 indentured labourers were brought over from China to work on the gold mines of the Witwatersrand. They arrived

between 1904 and 1907, and by 1910 all (barring perhaps a handful who had evaded capture and the three thousand odd who had died) were repatriated. They came; they worked; they doubled the production of the ailing mines. They were instrumental in bringing down the British government; they helped speed up the introduction of responsible government in the Transvaal; they terrorised farmers living around the goldfields; they tried to stay; but finally they went….. leaving no trace of their having been there. This is a forgotten chapter of South African history, and worthy of documenting in film.

This is a single episode documentary at 56 minutes in length, with a narrative voice-over. It will make use of original material specially shot on historical locations; archive photographs; archive film footage from both South Africa and Britain; archive sound; specially recorded dramatised sound; historical artefacts; partial dramatisation; iconic imagery.

At the heart of the film will be location shooting of historical sites, some of which will be in black and white and grainy, and angled to specific points of view. Archive moving and still pictures will be used, as well as newspaper cuttings from the period. The narrative will be aided by actors voicing historical figures, and interviews with both historians and members of the South African Chinese community who can flesh-out the history with human detail. Moving footage of artefacts and images suggestive of the people and the times will be incorporated to create atmosphere and style. Specially recorded sound will be used to dramatise newspaper articles, or recreate a heated public debate, with actors taking the parts of named players.

## Chapter 2

### 2.1 Literature Review

As Karen Harris points out in her doctoral thesis, of all of the history of Chinese South Africans, the story of the indentured labourers on the mines has attracted the most interest. That does not mean there is an abundance of literature, but at least researchers have spent time carefully sifting through the information available in archives. Unfortunately, and this is a problem that all of the researchers have acknowledged, the only documentary archive of the indentured workers contains official records, and very little written by the Chinese themselves. That means the factual information we have of the period is written almost entirely from the perspective of those who employed and controlled the Chinese, and thought little about what they might have felt.

Three doctoral theses have been written on the subject of the Chinese in South Africa, two of them before 1955. I.M. Meyer's work is acknowledged to be a faithful record of the official story of the miners, as documented by the people in charge.[1] As Reeves says, the topic from this perspective had been virtually exhausted by Meyer's detailed doctoral study.[2]

In his own thesis, Reeves suggests there may be alternative ways of dealing with the facts of the story as told by those whose job it was to record, and says there are still aspects of the story, particularly the Chinese side of it, which need to be explored.

[1] Meyer, I.M. 'Die Chinese Arbeidsvraagstuk van die Witwatersrand Goudvelde 1903 – 1910' Phd thesis University of Pretoria 1946
[2] Reeves, J.A. 'Chinese Labour in South Africa 1901 – 1910' Masters thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1954

Karin Harris[3] in her doctoral study puts the indentured miners into the context of the history of the Chinese in South Africa from their arrival in the 17th century. Her thesis concentrates on the part the small community has played in the country, and the story of the Chinese miners is the subject of two of her chapters.

She looks at the Chinese in South Africa from the initial movement of Chinese from their country during and after centuries of isolation, and traces their history in South Africa from the time they were free labourers at the Cape in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries up to 1912. Her discussion of the indentured Chinese is, by her own admission, limited by the resources. Despite research both in South Africa and in China, Harris could find very little that would add to our understanding of the experiment from the perspective of the miners. But she does investigate the cultural and social dimensions of the importation, and sets them against the background of political and legislative events in South Africa.

Harris' emphasis in the thesis is on the profound repercussions the importation of the indentured miners had on the racial status of the free Chinese. She contends that the presence of the miners led to a social stratification which in turn led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1904 in the Cape, and to Chinese involvement (in the initial phases at least) of Mahatma Gandhi's 'Satyagraha'. She says that her thesis is an attempt to redress the impression created in South African historiography that the role of the Chinese was confined to the few short years when the miners were brought to the Transvaal and then repatriated.

[3] Harris, K.L 'A History of the Chinese in South Africa to 1912' Phd thesis, University of South Africa 1998

Melanie Yap and Diane Leong Man cover much of the same ground in their book *Colour, Confusion, and Concesssions*.[4] A chapter is devoted to the Chinese on the mines. Yap and Man see this episode as a self-contained, discrete, and quite separate story to their narrative. They make the point that the indentured Chinese were mostly different ethnically from the Chinese who had already made their homes on the Rand, and that, apart from the political repercussions of the episode, the Chinese miners made little impact on the social history of South Africa's Chinese population. Unlike Harris, they make use of social evidence like anecdote and newspaper articles to flesh out the experience of the miners.

Dr Yoon Yung Park's book, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*[5], is an exploration of the identities of South Africa's Chinese community. He examines the community from racial, ethnic, cultural and national perspectives to answer the question he poses himself: how do Chinese South Africans identify themselves? The book is based on his doctoral research and deals with the general history of that group of South Africans. He refers to the "experiment" of the indentured labourers on the mines, and comes to the same conclusion that Karin Harris does: the episode hardened attitudes in the country to the Chinese who already lived here, and made their position much harder. Like Harris he points to the legislation that was put in place to specifically exclude the indentured workers, and the ramifications on the rest of the Chinese community. He also sees the importation of the indentured Chinese as a self-contained episode, pointing out that the current South African Chinese are not their descendents. He makes the interesting

[4] Yap, Melanie and Leong Man, Diane *Colour, Confusion, and Concessions* Hong Kong University Press 1996

[5] Park, Yoon Jung Dr *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa* Jacana, Johannesburg 2008 pgs 12 - 14

point that historians know more about the Chinese indentured labourers than they do about the rest of the history of the Chinese in South Africa, and he suggests that this is because the Chinese labourers had such a huge impact on the mining industry.

In his book, Peter Richardson puts the Chinese indenture system in the context of international capitalism.[6] He largely omits the social circumstances of the experiment and assesses the impact of the Chinese labour force from an economic perspective. There is little about the human experience of the experiment.

As Richardson himself concludes about his book:

> 'The tone of this book will not have universal appeal. The almost constant reiteration of batches, schedules, rates and prices is unfortunately the language of commodities labour under industrial capitalism. The more overtly human or individual elements of this process have deliberately been minimised in an attempt to understand the wider process. These omissions will hopefully be a spur to future investigations into one of the most fascinating and complex decades in the history of the Witwatersrand gold-mining industry.'[7]

Richardson's book is the only such publication to deal solely with the indentured miners, but several journal articles have dealt with different aspects of the experiment. All of the journals use the same official documentation as their starting point. In Richardson's 'Coolies and Randlords: the North Randfontein Chinese Miners' 'Strike' of 1905'[8] he makes clear the problem caused by the homogeneity of the source material:

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[6] Richardson, Peter *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal* Longman, London: 1982
[7] Ibid, Preface
[8] Richardson, Peter 'Coolies and Randlords: the North Randfontein Chinese Miners' 'Strike' of 1905' in *Journal of South African Studies* vol 2 no 2 1976

> ‘It will be evident from the material cited that the use of documents for the elucidation of certain aspects of the use of Chinese labour in the Transvaal gold mines is problematical. The overwhelming proportion of extant material is in the form of records of either the government or the mine owners both of which are obviously likely to give one-sided interpretations of events, particularly of labour disputes. Little or no evidence survives of the impressions which the Chinese themselves formed of these events.’

His article is focused on labour disputes involving the Chinese miners and goes on to chronicle the disturbance at the North Randfontein mine, which was the seventeenth such disturbance on a mine since the arrival of the Chinese only a year previously. He examines the capacity of the Chinese for mass action, and explains how most disturbances were based on their intolerance of the exploitation of management, and what they saw as the broken promises of the recruiting agents. He shows that the actions of the miners on the North Randfontein mine secured considerable improvements in the piecework system, which was passed onto the other mines.

Gary Kynoch of Dalhousie University in Canada investigates similar labour struggles in his article ‘Controlling the Coolies: Chinese Mineworkers and the Struggle for Labour in South Africa 1904 – 1910’[9] he explores the conflicts between management and labour and the strategies employed by both groups. He investigates labour practices, as well as the living conditions of the Chinese and the racist attitudes they encountered. He examines the structures of control, including the use of corporal punishment. His

[9] Kynoch, Gary ‘Controlling the Coolies: Chinese Mineworkers and the Struggle for Labour in South Africa 1904 – 1910’ in *International Journal of African Historical Studies* vol 36 no 3 2003

article also investigates the riots and disturbances caused by labour disputes. Once again the attitudes of the Chinese are assumed from the factual evidence of those in charge.

In a further article, 'Your Petitioners are in Mortal Terror. The Violent World of Chinese Mineworkers in South Africa 1904 – 1910'[10] Kynoch uses the official records to paint a picture of the violent clashes involving the Chinese on the mines. He also investigates the power of the Chinese police, and the results of the Chinese addictions to opium and gambling. He concludes that the failure of the official administration to protect the workers from the venal Chinese police, combined with the claustrophobic living conditions, and the addictions to opium and gambling, created a climate of insecurity and fostered crime and violence which sometimes spread from the mines to the neighbouring civilian areas. Although the only documents available to him are official ones, some are petitions from the workers themselves, and some court documents include the pleas of the Chinese and some of their arguments, all of which give an insight into how the Chinese viewed their situation.

Serious study of the Chinese on the mines struggles with the one-sided official documentation that exists. There is much archival material concerning the importation in the archives of the Transvaal, and also the archives of the Chamber of Mines and Barlow Rand. All of it, however, reflects the official position concerning the Chinese, and only infrequently is there a glimpse (a copy of a letter written by a worker for example) of the perspective of the labourers.

In the absence of Chinese memoirs or letters, a balance might be found in official Chinese documents, but my research, and the research of others, has uncovered no such

[10] Kynoch, Gary 'Your Petitioners are in Mortal Terror. The Violent World of Chinese Mineworkers in South Africa 1904 – 1910' in *Journal of Southern African Studie*s vol 31 no 3 2005

documentation in South Africa. It is entirely possible that official Chinese archives hold much interesting material about this period of South African history, but finding such an archive is entirely beyond the means of this thesis.

The shortcomings of the literature are caused by the paucity of information other than that which is official, and from the perspectives of the mining authorities. This thesis, and the documentary that follows from it, attempts to flesh out the Chinese experience by using all of the small number of documents originated by the miners, and by interpreting the official documents in the light of the 'orientalism' of the time, and the motives of those who planned and executed the indenture experiment.

### 2.2 The use of primary sources in 'Dragons on the Rand'

The most useful sources for the documentary film are the primary ones. The secondary sources help shape the information and give meaning to the facts, but the documentary relies, visually, on the existence of papers, photograph, newspapers, paintings, film, artifacts, and memorabilia.

The Transvaal Archive in Pretoria holds most of the official documents of the period. The official documents give us the facts but do not always add much visually to the documentary. However, contained within the numerous files of the Lieutenant General and the Foreign Labour Department are also a small number of original letters written in Mandarin, one of which has been used as the editorial 'brackets' for this documentary. There are also original petitions about working conditions, or punishments. This archive also has a large number of photographs from the period, including many of the indentured Chinese workers.

The Pearson Collection at the William Cullen Library of the University of the Witwatersrand also has a number of very interesting photographs which could be used most effectively. The library houses a collection of newspapers from the period too , as does the Johannesburg Library. Newspapers from the period, especially pertinent headlines, will be visually very important to the documentary.

The Herbert Strange Collection at the Johannesburg Library has a number of original pamphlets from the period concerning the importation of the workers, along with a collection of drawings made by the journalist Frank Bolland depicting the punishments meted out to the indentured Chinese.

The Barlow Rand and Chamber of Mines archives hold a huge number of documents, mostly written by the mine managers or owners. There are some interesting documents amongst them, including original telegrams of protest from foreign governments against the importation, and also original receipts pertaining to the purchase of goods for the Chinese, for example an invoice for a number of bunks giving the exact dimensions of each, or a schedule of wages to be paid to different categories of workers.

Amongst the collection that used to be housed in the Afrikaner Museum, and is now in storage at Museum Africa in Johannesburg, there are a number of artifacts from the period, including a silk sheath, signed by the employees on a mine at the end of the indentures in 1910 and given to the mine manager.

Film archives are obviously key resources. The South African archive, unfortunately, has very little from the period. There is a small amount of moving footage depicting the Boer War, and also some images from Johannesburg at the turn of the century. Some of the material shows mining activity and there are a few shots of Chinese

faces. The best source of footage will be the Pathe archive in London which has moving shots of some of the British players named in the documentary, as well as a substantial amount of contemporary London.

### 2.3 Historical Research – The history of Chinese indentured labourers on the Witwatersrand Mines 1904 - 1910

At the beginning of the twentieth century 65,000 indentured labourers were brought from China to work on the gold mines of the Witwatersrand. In six years they changed the fortunes of the mines, and inadvertently, of South Africa, its workforce, and the government of Britain. Most South Africans today are entirely ignorant of this episode in their history: there is nothing extant which would indicate that these Chinese were ever here. And it is not just in South Africa that they are forgotten. All of the people, mostly from China's northern provinces, belonging to the 65,000 families affected by the experiment have remained silent. No books have been written, no articles;

no films or documentaries made about the relatives who made such a huge impact on a country more than seven thousand miles from home.

Almost all we know about the workers comes from official records - documents created by administrators from the mines or the British or Transvaal governments. Just about nothing exists in writing now that would cast light on the experience from the perspective of the Chinese workers. As the acknowledged expert on Chinese indentured labour on the Rand, Peter Richardson, says there is little or no evidence of what the Chinese themselves thought of the importation.[11]

One of the controversies surrounding the introduction of the indentured labourers was, especially in Britain, the accusation that their employment was nothing short of slavery. Indeed, it was this raging debate that helped bring down the Conservative government. Winston Churchill famously said in parliament:

> 'A labour contract into which men enter voluntarily for a limited and for a brief period, under which they are paid wages which they consider adequate, under which they are not bought or sold and from which they can obtain relief… on payment of £17.10s, the cost of their passage, may not be a healthy or proper contract, but it cannot in the opinion of His Majesty's government be classified as slavery in the extreme acceptance of the word without some risk of terminological inexactitude.'[12]

He may well have been right in asserting that the labourers were not enslaved (even though it must be wondered where an indentured labourer earning less than 50 shillings a month would be able to find the £17.10s which would free him) but the

[11] Richardson, Peter 'Coolies and Randlords: the North Randfontein Chinese Miners' 'strike' of 1905' *Journal of South African Studies* vol 2 no 2 1976

evidence suggests that the labourers were dehumanised, literally becoming numbers, and as JH Hobson put it, turned into 'live tools'.[13]

Many supporters pointed to the fact that the Chinese were considerably better off working in indentures in Johannesburg than they would have been had they remained in impoverished China. And it is true that many of the workers themselves thought so too, because so many of them tried to extend their contracts beyond the three year limit. But this relativist argument cannot be taken as a justification.

They may not have been slaves in the strictest sense of the word, but they were indeed nameless, faceless chattels used for profit by the mines, and by all sections of society to flog whatever political point they had to make. Though they were used en masse by so many people, they were never given individual human faces and names, and this is probably why they have been so comprehensively forgotten.

The fact that bosses felt no need to communicate with them, to learn more about them or their culture, or to record anything about them other than that they had done this much work, or been guilty of this or that outrage, is evidence that they were considered barely human by those who had imported them. As late as 1906 only 27 of the 37 mines employing Chinese had a white intermediary who could speak some Chinese. (And often it was Cantonese, or southern dialect that they could speak, not the northern Mandarin.)

Most of the indentured labourers knew nothing of the work they had signed up to do, could not speak to or understand the people who employed them and spent three years living in a compound devoid of entertainment or female company. Their bosses cared so little about how the Chinese felt about their position that they never bothered to ask them,

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[12] Churchill, Winston. Hansard 22 February 1906 col 555
[13] Hobson, J. A. *Imperialism, a Study*. Constable: London, 1905 pp 240 - 245

or at least to leave for posterity, a record of what it had been like to be such an utter alien, albeit one that proved incredibly worthwhile to that foreign economy.

Slaves? Perhaps not. But almost completely forgotten, nonetheless.

**Conditions that led to importation**

There were many conditions, on both the Chinese and South African sides, that made the importation feasible. For it to have occurred, importation had to be beneficial to both the South African mine owners, and the Chinese workers, as will be shown below.

Most of the mines shut production down for the duration of the Boer War. When they stuttered into service after the war they faced a number of problems. Because of the nature of the mining, and in particular the retrieval of low-grade deep-level ore, they needed plentiful cheap labour. Before the war the mines had access to what appeared to be unlimited black labour, both from inside the two Afrikaner republics, and from Portuguese East Africa. After the war however, black men were reluctant to return to the mines. They could find employment on one of the many restoration projects underway: on the railways, the harbours, roads, and farms. They were put off the mining industry not only by the appalling and dangerous conditions they encountered underground, but by the fact that mine owners had decided to cut black wages to below the post-war rates.[14]

The mines tried to cut costs by bringing down the price of labour and improving the way it was recruited, by getting the expensive dynamite monopoly cancelled, and negotiating better rates for rail freight. They also tried to increase the efficiency of African labour through the control of alcohol.[15] The shortage of labour was exacerbated,

[14] Barlow Rand archive (from here 'BR') Box HE 250 File 139 *Proposed reduction of native wages, Printed for Managers* 21 Nov 1902 Barlow Rand archive (from here 'BR') Box HE 250 File 139
[15] van Onselen, Charles. 'The Randlords and Rotgut 1886 – 1903'. *History Workshop Journal* 2 Autumn 1976 pp 33 - 89.

as Donald Denoon says, by the fact that no new recruiting areas were being opened up in Africa as other countries were busy exploiting their own labour. Some Nyasa labourers did come, but because of the climate many died.[16]

The mines needed to encourage black labour to return. Some suggested forcing black labour off the land . Prescott Uplow of City and Suburban Mine wrote a report urging that taxes be imposed on blacks to compel them to work on mines. He enumerated the 'advantages' of their 'idle' lives and insisted they should be made to pay for them.[17] His view had much support. But there were other more moderate voices. Thomas H Leggett of S. Neumann and Co wrote to the Secretary of the Chamber of Mines in response to a query about his views that he believed native wages should be increased:

> 'If the native labourer on the mines is indifferent to the amount of money he earns, he is the only wage earner that I have come into contact with of whom this can be said.' [18]

Such views as the following by Edward Rose might make much sense by modern standards, but were at the time ridiculed:

> 'As far as the natives are concerned, the solution of the difficulty lies in better treatment, higher wages, healthier conditions of employment, and real supervision by government officials who will be actuated solely by considerations affecting the well-being of their charges. Given these, and there is no doubt that within a very short period of time the difficulty would solve itself by the gradually increased number of boys who would be attracted to the mines and the better conditions prevailing became

[16] Denoon, Donald. *Southern Africa since 1800*. Longman: London, 1972 p 141
[17] BR Box HE 250 file 139 no 89.)

know. '[19]

Ironically this view was partly endorsed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain. He is reported to have told H Ross Skinner in March 1903 that the mines could do a lot more to make conditions better for Africans on the mines and therefore attract more. He enumerates better housing, more variety in the diet and, quite laughably,

'.. providing amusements such as merry-go-rounds, small circuses etc.'[20]

The mine owners seemed to be unanimous about one issue: that they would not use white labour. They claimed the employment of white workers was not cost-effective. White labour remained the largest single item in working costs, representing 30.2 percent of expenditure incurred by the six main Eckstein Group companies in 1896.[21]

Here the mine owners had to fight an influential lobby. The Boer War had left a number of white British men in the former republics unemployed, and basically unskilled. Their numbers were swelled by 5,000 or so Australians who had either remained after the Boer War, or been attracted to the Rand by the downturn in Australian mining.

There were vociferous calls for these labourers to be employed on the mines as a priority and as a matter of loyalty to the British man who had served, and to the white race. It is also true that there was much appalling poverty amongst white people, both Afrikaners who had been moved off their farms by the war, and other white people who

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[18] BR Box 250 File 139 no 22 Thomas H Leggatt to the Secretary of the Chamber of Mines
[19] Rose, Edward. *Uncle Tom's Cabin Up-to-Date or Chinese Slavery in South Africa*. Pamphlet published by SA Free Press Committee London 1905, in Harold Strange African History Section, Johannesburg Library (from here HSS)
[20] Letter from H Ross Skinner in London March 1903 BR Box He 250 file 140
[21] Witwatersrand Chamber of Mines Archive: *The Mining Industry: Evidence and Report of the Industrial Commission of Enquiry Johannesburg 1897 iv - vi 200*

lived in the towns who had lost their livelihoods because of it.

In an article in the *Transvaal Weekly Leader*, a story headlined 'Death Before Starvation' told of a man called Johnston who was seen diving into the dam at the Knights Deep mine fully clothed. He had recently served with the Natal militia and had been out of work for several months.[22]

And Thomas Naylor tells the story of a white man found dead in a doorway near the construction of the Carlton Hotel. Michael Moynihan from Limerick, aged 25, died he says, from want and exposure. Naylor reveals the man had been unemployed for three months. In his article 'Yellow Labour - The Truth About the Chinese in the Transvaal' Naylor expresses outrage that such people should be unemployed only because, compared to 'coloured' labour, 'they're too expensive to hire'.[23]

But there were other voices who complained that white people should not be forced to work alongside other, 'inferior', races:

> 'Granting the difficulty, the impossibility of getting white men to work at manual toil alongside natives; granting that, it is undesirable that they should be asked to do so…'[24]

There were political and charitable reasons for the temporary employment of the demobilised soldiers who were congregating in Johannesburg. A mine manager admitted that, in certain types of unskilled work, white workers were very efficient. He particularly mentioned Afrikaners, whose economic predicament was possibly more severe that that of the British ex-servicemen. But he added that he nevertheless preferred to employ the

[22] *Transvaal Weekly Leader*, 16 March 1907
[23] Naylor, Thomas. *Yellow Labour - The Truth About the Chinese in the Transvaal.* Reprinted as pamphlet from the Daily Chronicle October 1904. HSS
[24] Evans, Maurice S. *The Chinese Curse: What it Means to Africa.* Pamphlet 1906. HSS

more tractable African labour force.[25]

White British workers were also perceived as lazy. In 1903 the railways imported British navvies to help construct the Springs - Ermelo railway. The mines supported this introduction of imported British white labour as it freed blacks to work for them. The experiment failed because the navvies were said to be lazy and inefficient. The chief engineer on the project claimed the labour cost four times as much as the African labour it had replaced. The experiment was terminated before the year's contract was up.[26]

But what convinced the mine owners against the use of white labour was the political dimension. Denoon says of the workers on the diamond mines:

> 'White workers were relatively well paid, and tended to make a great deal of trouble if their interests were ignored. Employers therefore tended to prefer African employees to whites, and often attempted to increase the proportion of African labour employed. Their motive was to increase profit rather than to extend industrial opportunities to an underprivileged group of workers…' [27]

The Manager of Village Deep Mine, H. Cresswell began an experiment at this mine to prove that unskilled white workers would be the answer to the labour crisis. The results of his experiment were dismissed by the owners who said his project was skewed by the geological peculiarities of the claim area around Village Deep. That was the official position of all the pro-Chinese who talked about Creswell's experiment, but Creswell maintained the experiment had been deliberately sabotaged. He read into

[25] Chamber of Mines Archive W.7a HB White to M Francke 10 August 1903
[26] Worsfold, I.P. Great Britain Parliament Command Papers (from here CD) 1895 nos 56 65 67 79 75 pg 288)
[27] Denoon, Donald. *Southern Africa since 1800*. Longman: London, 1972 p 138

evidence at the Labour Commission a letter addressed to him by Percy Tarbutt, the Chairman of the London board of directors of his company which said :

> 'With reference to your trial of white labour for surface work on the mine, I have consulted Messrs. Wernher, Beit and Co, and the feeling seems to be one of fear that, having a large number of white men employed on the Rand in the position of labourers the same troubles will arise as are now prevalent in the Australian Colonies, viz, that by combination the labour classes will become so strong as to be able to more or less dictate, not only on the question of wages, but also on political questions, by the power of their votes when representative government is established.' [28]

The battle against white labour, and for Asian labour, on the mines was a hard one. Internationally, white labour had begun to organize. The availability of white labour at the turn of the century coincided with huge movements of labour from Asian countries, particularly China and India. This led to what Jonathan Hyslop calls 'white labourism', a movement aimed at protecting such labour using as a justification the racial prejudices of Empire.

> 'Faced with potentially highly competitive labour markets one possibility for workers of European origin was to seek economic protection from the state by appealing to the idea that they were racial partners in empire.'[29]

Those who were for the importation of workers from Asia had to fight hard against the growing demand that white labourers be protected. Cornish miners – of whom

[28] Quoted by E.R Rose in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin Up-do-Date or Chinese Slavery in South Africa'. Pamphlet published by SA Free Press Committee London 1905 pg 7
[29] Hyslop, Jonathan 'White Labourism Before World War I' in *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1988 vol 12 no 4

there were around 7,000 on the Rand by 1905, were most vociferous, and their support for white labourism, this strange mix of racism and egalitarianism, would become crucial to the British Liberal party campaign in 1906.

It seems that the Chamber of Mines did make some effort to find labour other than that from China. They enquired of agents in other countries about the possibility of using people as disparate as Kanaks, Italians, Hungarians, Mappilas, Finns, and Moroccans. Spanish labour was suggested by Mr Finlay on 16th August 1902. The idea was not popular. The official reply to his letter from Wernher Beit was that it would be

> 'a dangerous step to introduce Spaniards, or any class of foreigner as white workers for these mines.'[30]

Despite this stance, Wernher Beit head office warned frequently in letters to its Johannesburg office that Chinese labour would only be acceptable to the British government if other routes were exhausted. It was Chinese labour that interested the mines more than any other kind. 912 Chinese already lived on the Rand - shopkeepers, servants, hawkers and laundry men - by 1904. A Select Committee recommended an investigation into the labour potential of the Far East and in February 1903 the Chamber sent H Ross Skinner and Herbert Noyes on a fact-finding mission to California, British Columbia, the East Indies and China. A few months later, in July 1903, the Transvaal Labour Commission was appointed to enquire into the labour situation on the mines, and the possibility of obtaining adequate supplies from central and southern Africa. It found (unsurprisingly, some said, considering the make-up of the commission) there was a pressing labour shortage which could not be met locally.

The public campaign to win support for importing Chinese labour began in March

1903 when Sir George Farrar chairman of the Anglo-French group emphasised the shortage of labour in Africa and the need to look elsewhere.

> 'These mines are the largest gold producers in the world, and it is absolutely absurd to think that they should be crippled for want of labour. Surely common-sense says that if you cannot get labour in Africa, you must get it elsewhere and get to work.' [31]

On the 31st of the same month, Farrar made a speech on one of his own mines in Boksburg. He assured the audience that efforts to find African labour would continue. Insisting that the mines must expand, he claimed that the introduction of Asiatic labour would only be temporary and made it clear that such labour would be limited to unskilled work. He noted that the workers would be indentured and compulsorily repatriated at the end of their contracts. He added that these migrants would lead to the employment of more skilled whites and to general prosperity.

In Sept 1903 Ross Skinner presented a comprehensive report in which he assessed the suitability of Chinese labour, subject to strict controls. He observed the problems with Chinese labour in the rest of the world were 'entirely due to the absence of restrictive legislation' and recommended the Transvaal adopt legislation to immediately begin recruitment. [32]

The Transvaal Labour Commission 1903 reported in favour of importation. On the face of it, it seemed that the population was in favour of indentured labour. The

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[30] BR Box He 250 File 139 Wernher Beit to Finlay BR Box He 250 File 139
[31] CD 1895 London HMSO 1904 pg 13 *Further correspondence relating to the affairs of the Transvaal and Orange River Colonies* CD 1895 London HMSO 1904 pg 13
[32] Ross Skinner, H. *Report Furnished to the Witwatersrand Labour Association: the Result of his Visit to the East to Enquire into the Prospects of Obtaining Asiatic Labourers for the Mines of the Witwatersrand.* BR 6 October 1903 (From here, Ross Skinner Report)

mining industry had a virtual monopoly of the media and the papers reported every pro-Chinese speech positively. Aided by favourable government opinion - the Governor, Alfred Milner, firmly believed the mining industry underpinned the future prosperity of the Transvaal[33] - and the growing depression in the country, the scene was set for the introduction of Chinese labour. The Chamber of Mines requested the government to sanction the introduction of an ordinance facilitating importation.

What would predispose a Chinese labourer to undertake this journey and employment under far less than comfortable conditions?

China had undergone an unprecedented population growth between 1750 and 1850, and economic growth had not kept pace. The poverty of interior China was exacerbated by the swelling of numbers, and by floods and droughts. Any change in weather patterns or accident of nature could destroy the crops of a huge region and send armies of people across the countryside searching for work or food.[34] As one observer wrote:

> 'The multitude of those who live merely from day to day is incalculable…Many fall down fainting by the wayside, and die before they can reach the place where they had hoped to find help. You see their bodies lying in the fields, and at the roadside, as you pass without taking much notice of them - so familiar is the spectacle.'[35]

British, Portuguese, and Dutch adventurers opened up China to the outside world, and by the end of the nineteenth century the country was being exploited commercially

[33] Richardson, Peter. *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal.* Macmillan: London, 1982 p 29
[34] Grasso, J., Corrin, J., Kort, Michael. *Modernisation and Revolution in China*. 1997 p 68
[35] Abbe Huc from Regis-Evariste Huc *The Chinese Empire*. London, 1855. As quoted in Schurmann, Franz and Schell, Orville. *Imperial China*. New York, 1986 pp 30 - 31

by foreign nations. It has been suggested that such exploitation destroyed the domestic economy, but it was never large enough to do that. The activity of the Europeans was concentrated around 'treaty' ports – areas in which western countries had secured privileges. In the treaty ports the Europeans built railways, western buildings, and churches and established European laws to protect their citizens. Being so localized, foreign investment cannot be held responsible for the collapse of the domestic economy, although it probably did undermine the traditional handicraft industries around the treaty ports.

Because of bad harvests and huge population growth, the number of people seeking work in towns increased. These labourers were nicknamed 'coolies', from the Chinese K'u Li meaning 'bitter strength and work'.[36]

China was also experiencing political turmoil at the time. In the first decade of the twentieth century no less than sixteen attempts were made to overthrow the Qing dynasty. The Manchu leadership did not see the need for full-scale reform. No attempts were made, even during the period where the country tried to emulate the West, to create a modern banking system. Prejudice existed against mercantile activity, no laws were drawn up to safeguard merchants, and Government officials often claimed the right to confiscate profits.

The Chinese were accustomed to migrant labour, having supplied workers on the Malaysian peninsula, in the United States, Canada, and in Australia. When the South African mines began their enquiries, the Wailuku (the equivalent of the Chinese foreign ministry) declared it would not deal with the colonial government, only the imperial government. Negotiations on an agreement between Britain and China were relatively

brief, lasting from February to May 1904 and were supervised by Alfred Lyttelton who was the Colonial Secretary at the time.

Because of the dire economic circumstances of many rural Chinese, many were prepared to make the trip to South Africa. The mines simply had to figure out a way to find and recruit them.

**Reaction to the planned importation**

The importation may have been mutually beneficial – at least in theory – to the mineowners in South Africa and the Chinese workers, but the plan drew much angry comment and demands for it to be scrapped.

Three themes recur in British objections to the importation of Chinese workers: white unemployment, Chinese slavery, and plain racism. The Chamber of Mines recognized the first two: the last was never a seriously considered issue. The British response generally was a product of mixed motives.

> 'The two chief objections raised in Britain against indentured Chinese labour in the Transvaal are that, firstly, British workmen will be deprived of work to make room for the Chinese and increase the profits of shareholders, and, secondly, that the conditions under which the Chinese will have to live in the Transvaal during their period of service would constitute 'slavery'.'[37]

A period of high unemployment enveloped Britain in the early years of the 20th century. Between 3.5 and 6 percent of registered trade unionists were out of work

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[36] Robottom, John. *Twentieth Century China*. 1971 p 20

[37] BR Box HE 251 File 138 no 490*Transvaal Chamber of Mines Memorandum on Position of Imperial South Africa Association re Transvaal Labour Question.* Dated 5th April 1904 BR Box HE 251 File 138 no 490

between 1902 and 1908.[38] The sizeable opposition to the experiment (stoked by the British media) cut across all political persuasions and classes. Many believed that the British working man had been betrayed by those who had readily accepted his labour when he volunteered to fight the Boers. As Sir Albert Spicer observed:

> 'I do not think it is sufficiently recognised in the Transvaal that the question of Chinese labour under existing Ordinances was taken up by the working classes of this country very firmly from the outset. They do not forget that they sacrificed over 20,000 of their fellow-workmen to fight the recent war on behalf of what they believed to be white men's rights. Directly the war was over they were informed of the reduction of the Kaffir wages, and they noted to observations of some of your chairmen with regard to the White proletariat.'[39]

In Britain a large number of eastern European, mostly Jewish, immigrants had recently arrived in great numbers. The influx began around 1880, and was met with increasing opposition, much of it xenophobic,[40] and culminated in the Aliens Act of 1905. In this climate it was no surprise that there were people who saw the Chinese as a pernicious evil to be kept out of a 'white man's country' at all costs.

Disputing the need for the Chinese to be brought to South Africa, Thomas Naylor says:

> 'I shall not attempt to make any detailed answer to these reasons, but even if they were proved up to the hilt, they would hardly afford a valid reason

[38] British Parliamentary Papers 1914 – 1916 LXI cd 7733 17th Abstract of Labour Statistics of the UK 1915.2
[39] BR Box HE 253 File 148 no 847 Letter from Sir Albert Spicer to Mr Chaplin 10th April 1906
[40] Richardson, Peter. *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal*. Macmillan: London, 1982 p 7

> for dumping 100,000 Chinese down in what is essentially a white man's country….' Watching Chinese rush off to work at a mine, he thought ' was if for this…. that the best and bravest blood of the whole Empire had been spilt?…. Were these undersized and badly nourished specimens of humanity - aliens in race, in tongue, in ideas, and in standards of living - to be the people of the new dominion?'[41]

Others thought Britain with its humanitarian tradition should have nothing to do with what was seen as the enslaving of workers. But even they rarely showed any real sympathy for or empathy with the lot of Chinese indentured labourers. The Chinaman was rarely portrayed as a human being, and in the majority of pamphlets issued by the dissenting voices, the Chinese worker was portrayed as an evil oriental menace.

The Liberal politician (and Prime Minister from 1908), HH Asquith, spoke out against the Chinese importation asserting that the experiment was nothing but slavery, but he also added in the same speech:

> 'When experiment was made in the first place it was perfectly well known that the introduction of Chinese to form part of the labouring population of South Africa, would be intensely repugnant to every colony in the British Empire. (Cheers) There is not one of them - Canada, Australia, New Zealand…who does not entertain the profoundest repugnance to the Chinese as an element in their working and living population…'[42]

Chinese labour was a cause espoused by a number of intellectuals. The Liberal politician William Vernon Harcourt launched a full-scale attack in the press and in

[41] Naylor, Thomas. *Yellow Labour - The Truth About the Chinese in the Transvaal.* Reprinted into a pamphlet from the Daily Chronicle October 1904. HSS

parliament largely on humanitarian grounds.[43]

The white labour movement came out very strongly against the use of the Chinese. As discussed above, they saw white labourers as the cornerstone of the colonial edifice, and were promoting a kind of 'welfare capitalism'.[44] At a demonstration in Hyde Park attended by 80,000 people on 26 March 1904 the Parliamentary committee of the TUC passed the following resolution:

> 'That this meeting consisting of all classes of citizens of London, emphatically protests against the action of the Government in granting permission to import into South Africa indentured Chinese labour under conditions of slavery, and calls upon them to protect this new colony from the greed of capitalists and the Empire from degradation.'[45]

For the Liberal party the issue became a useful stick with which to beat the Conservative government, but tension arose in the party between the Imperialists and Radicals. The leaders of the campaign appear to have comprised a small group of humanitarian liberals led by Herbert Samuel. A group of MPs including JB Seeley and TJ Macnamara was formed to publicise the issue of indentured Chinese labour. A meeting at the Queens Hall was so successful that others were held and the Liberal party took the issue up and began to use it for political propaganda.

The Imperialists in the Liberal party said the conditions to be imposed on the Chinese amounted to semi-slavery and a violation of British tradition of government. At

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[42] HH Asquith speaking at a public meeting in Leven reported in Glasgow Herald 13 November 1905
[43] Quoted from Hansard CXX p 102 – 110 by I.M. Meyer in 'Die Chinese Arbeidvraaagstuk van die Wiwatersrande Goudvelde 1905 – 1910' Phd Thesis University of Pretoria 1946
[44] Hyslop, Jonathan 'White Labourism Before World War I' in *Journal of Historical Sociology* vol 12 no 4 1988 p 401
[45] Official programme of the Great Demonstration in Hyde Park 1904 pg 3 quoted in Yap, M. and Mann, D. *Colour Confusion and Concessions*. Hong Kong University Press, 1996 p 107

the same time they registered fears that the restrictions placed on the workers to control them would not work and that they would spread throughout the community taking their 'nauseous practices with them'. That they expressed such distaste for the workers whose corner they were apparently defending displays the schizophrenic views of many opposed the experiment. As Samuel remarked - 'either the Chinese must be serfs, or a danger'. The Liberal message against Chinese slavery was, like the opinions of the British public, confused and contradictory.

Few church leaders spoke out on the issue. In a letter to Jan Smuts, Emily Hobhouse wrote:

> "... In spite of the passing of the Ordinance, we are continuing with the fight. Not a day passes without meetings of protest all over the country, and petitions and resolutions against it come in to the Colonial Office at the rate of fifty a day.... The Bishops of Hereford [Rt Reverend John Percival] and Worcester [Rt Rev Charles Gore] have spoken out, and the Archbishop [the Most Rev Randall Thomas Davidson] first did so, but now is weakening.'[46]

Some churchmen were less sure about the morality of the issue and expressed the vague opinion that something positive could come from the experiment if the Chinese were open to conversion to Christianity.

The government in Britain was anxious to see evidence of approval from white opinion in the Transvaal before agreeing to a project that was likely to inflame British public opinion. Chamberlain was sensitive to such opinion and he felt the Imperial

[46] Hancock, W.K., and van der Poel, Jean (Eds) *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume II, June 1902 - May 1910* Cambridge University Press, 1966 pp 155 - 156

government should insist on a referendum in the Transvaal. But by the time the issue had to be decided Chamberlain had resigned, and his place filled by Alfred Lyttelton, who was less concerned about public opinion, and was closer to the Governor of the Transvaal, Alfred Milner.

The Colonial Office correctly foresaw that some of the restrictions imposed on the indentured workers would be difficult to defend in parliament. As a result they needed assurance about white opinion; reassurance that indentured labourers would not be exploited or paid less than Africans; and an agreement that various social activities would be provided for them. But despite the official line, Lyttelton was involved in a private correspondence with Milner and he wrote to him:

> 'I trust that now and again a private cable neutralises the falsetto which sounds along the public wires'.[47]

Not only did Milner assure the Colonial office that white people were in favour of the project, he also warned that the white community might demand immediate self-government if importation did not go ahead.

But far from the unanimously supportive portrait Milner painted of them, the whites in the Transvaal immediately began holding meetings to discuss the importation. Organisations such as the African Labour League, the White League, and the Witwatersrand Trades and Labour Council expressed strong objections. They feared the experiment would result in reduced wages and competition for jobs; that the Chinese would not spend the money earned on the mines locally; that the restrictions placed upon the indentured workers would break down; that they would not ultimately be repatriated;

and that what they saw as the unpleasant and alien customs the Chinese brought with them would spread.[48]

White reaction was influenced by their response to a previous system of indenture. In the 1860s a number of Indians were brought to Natal to work on the sugar cane plantations. After 10 years of servitude they were granted their freedom. Many stayed on and became farmers or retailers, putting themselves in direct competition with whites, who were not happy with this situation. The white population did not want another influx of foreign workers putting their jobs and livelihoods at risk.

Some white colonial angst was directed at the existing Chinese population. A deputation from the White League insisted to Milner that the local Chinese be forced to pay £10 on entering the colony, and an annual tax of £25 provided for by law. They complained to the Governor that many Chinese shops in Jeppestown and Fordsburg were in prime locations, giving them an unfair advantage over the white shopkeeper.[49]

In September, the African Labour League, which encouraged co-operation between Briton and Boer to keep South Africa white, first suggested that preparations be made for a referendum. Their suggestion was dismissed on the excuse that any decision on the proposed importation would be taken after the Labour Commission had reported its findings. Later, when the report was submitted, it was claimed that a referendum was an un-British procedure and that registering voters would take months that they did not have.

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[47] Lyttelton to Milner 14 April 1904. Headlam, Cecil (Ed) *The Milner Papers: Viscount Alfred Milner 1854 – 1925* Cassell: London, 1931 –33 vol 41 part 5 p 34

[48] Reeves, J.A. 'Chinese Labour in South Africa 1901 – 1910' Phd Thesis University of the Witwatersrand December 1954 p 87 - 88

[49] Deputation from the White League to Lord Milner. His Excellency's reply 3rd June 1903 pg 3 quoted in Yap, M. and Mann, D. *Colour Confusion and Concessions.* Hong Kong University Press, 1996 p 168

In wider South Africa, the Cape government opposed the importation. Milner disregarded their criticism because he suspected it was motivated by Bond (later the South African Party) interference. Bond cartoonist Boonzaaier made sure the public was kept conscious of the Chinese question with his series of cartoons which highlighted what were perceived as the unpleasant characteristics of the Chinese, the mine magnates, and Milner. (The series was called 'Mandarin Milner and the Magnates'.) Public agitation began in the Cape and by the end of 1903 an anti-Chinese immigration committee was formed which organised protest meetings.

In the Transvaal neither the White League nor the African Labour League enjoyed the support of white workers. Both opposition organisations collapsed during 1903 and by the end of the year no further organised opposition was mounted within the English speaking community. In fact it seems some of the workers now began to speak out in favour of the importation.

> ' I was present on the stage at the Old Wanderers Hall on the night of the agitation for Chinese labour for the mines in 1903... The hall was packed with miners from all along the Reef who were most vociferous in their demands for the Chinese….'[50]

Even though he played it down, Milner found the most vociferous of opponents in the Transvaal were the Afrikaners. They were bitterly opposed to Milner because of his attitude to the education of the Dutch, and their language. The issue of Chinese importation further inflamed them. In 1903 Louis Botha sent a memorandum to the Labour Commission (which was written by Jan Smuts) observing:

[50] MacDonald, F.J. 'The Chinese on the Rand: A Personal Reminiscence'. Unpublished. Herbert Strange Collection Johannesburg Library

> "...I look upon the present labour crisis as quite abnormal and temporary; and the danger is that, in endeavouring to remove this temporary evil, the Labour Commission may call into life a permanent evil which will weigh as a heavy incubus on the future industrial and social develpment of this land.'[51]

Botha and Smuts believed that native labour would return to the mines if wages were increased, and employers were patient. If labour had to be found for the mines then, Botha remarks:

> "...my conviction is that this should be white labour; and that the worst day's work that could be done for South Africa will be to add to its black population with its insoluble problems a yellow population with still more insoluble problems.....It must also be borne in mind that the great majority of the white population of South Africa are firmly opposed to the importation of Asiatic labour...."[52]

As a direct result of the importation plans the disaffected Boers became committed to political struggle. They refused to take part in Milner's Transvaal government, and instead established the Het Volk party in January 1905. Louis Botha was the leader of the party, Jan Smuts the brains behind it. Smuts wrote to Emily Hobhouse after a Boer congress in Pretoria in 1904 that:

> "..The anti-Chinese resolution was passed unanimously - no one even venturing to say a word against the resolution. So much for Milner's

[51] Hancock, W.K. and van der Poel, Jean (Eds) *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume II* p 126
[52] Ibid pg 130

valuation of Boer opinion.'[53]

The Transvaal and Imperial governments nevertheless maintained the fiction that Afrikaner opinion was favourably disposed towards importation. Articles in a government newspaper 'Land en Volk' argued that the importation would release African labour for farm work and suggested that Afrikaners were pro-Chinese. The secret service did its best to undermine the Afrikaners who had spoken out against it. It is, though, conveivable that Milner believed that the few Boer generals who spoke out against the Chinese were not backed up by public opinion and that they were motivated by political manoeuvring.[54]

Fifteen Boer generals signed a letter sent to Lyttelton criticizing the policy, but it was suspected that they may have been influenced by their contact with individuals in the British Liberal party. Lyttelton disregarded their complaint saying it was very late and probably only represented how they, personally, felt.

When Lord Selborne became Governor in spring 1905, he too expressed skepticism about the Boers' motives in opposing the Chinese:

> 'The Boers have passed as opponents of the Chinese only because they are such good party politicians. They know that to do so would please the [Liberal] radicals, who are their friends, and they saw at once the immense value of the question to them as a matter of bargain."[55]

Denoon says it was reasonable for Milner to believe the Boer Generals were adopting a posture in order to embarrass the British Government, and to suppose that the

[53] Ibid p 164 - 165
[54] Denoon, Donald. *A Grand Illusion: the failure of Imperial policy in the Transvaal during the period of Reconstruction 1900 – 1905*. Longman: London, 1973 pp 149 -150

ordinary Afrikaners had no particular point of view on Chinese mine labour. He suggests it was 'astute' of Milner to challenge the Generals and insist that the opinion of the Afrikaner legislators (who supported the importation) was representative of Boer opinion.

Despite the attitude of the Boer leaders, as Denoon says, the publication of the Labour Commission report at the end of the year, and the passing of the necessary legislation early in 1904 were widely accepted throughout the Rand as the last word on the subject, until revelations emerged of the treatment of the Chinese, and fears surfaced about their behaviour.[56]

Milner was convinced of the necessity for importing labour from Asia. He wrote on 5th April 1903:

> "I think there's very little doubt now that it will come to Chinamen in time. It would release an immense quantity of niggers for agriculture etc, which they much prefer, and I think it ought to be quite possible to keep the yellow men for unskilled labour pure and simple, and to ship them home again when they have done it."[57]

He believed that white opinion would agree with him when it was apprised of the facts. It was he who appointed the Labour Commission, and appointed its commissioners.

Milner despatched an urgent cable to the Imperial government alerting them to the financial predicament of the two new colonies. He asserted that their the economies were stagnating and in danger because of the labour crisis. He repeatedly emphasised that

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[55] Selborne to Winston Churchill April 8th 1906 as quoted in Churchill, Randolph S. *Winston S Churchill.* Houghton Mufflin Co: London, 1969 p 156

[56] Denoon, Donald. *A Grand Illusion* p 151

[57] Nimocks, Walter. *Milner's Young Men: the Kindergarten in Edwardian Imperial Affairs*. Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1970 quoting the 'Dawson Papers' – Geoffrey Robinson's family papers, April 5th 1903

pubic opinion was behind him, to satisfy Lyttelton's desire for the positive involvement of the white community.[58]

Sir George Farrar presented to the Transvaal government a petition in favour of the importation which he claimed was absolutely genuine, containing the signatures of 45 078 men over sixteen. As civil servants were excluded and the total adult white male population was only 90 000 the claim must be considered to be dubious.

Other countries in the Commonwealth with experience of Chinese labour condemned the plan. A telegram sent by the Premier of New Zealand to the Transvaal government on 19th June 1904 read :

> 'Government of New Zealand is convinced that practical prohibition of Chinese immigration imperatively required… government of New Zealand foresees grave perils, racial, social, political, and sanitary, induced by alien influx…'[59]

The protest was also signed by the Australian Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, under pressure from Labour MPs.

In response to such negative opinions about the importation, the Chamber of Mines issued a memorandum on the conditions the indentured worker would encounter. The memo insisted that before an agreement was entered into the labourer would be informed of the wages he would receive; the hours he would be required to work; the nature of the employment; and the restrictions to which he would have to submit. The memo stresses that the labourer would not be a slave because the contract would be

[58] Meyer, I. M. 'Die Chinese Arbeidvraagstuk van die Witwatersrande Goudvelde 1905 – 1910' Phd thesis University of Pretoria 1946 p 191
[59] Telegram from New Zealand government to Transvaal Government BR Box HE 251 File 138

entered into voluntarily.[60]

The above stipulations may very well have been intended, but it will be seen that it is doubtful that any of them were carried through. Whether through inefficiency or lack of will, the indentured Chinese labourer was finally afforded few of these considerations.

**The Importation Agreements**

The importation could not go ahead without official agreement between the Chinese and the Imperial Government, but this took time to achieve.

The co-operation between Milner and the mining industry was made manifest in the Labour Importation Ordinance (no 17 of 1904), the legal blueprint for the planned importation. This was largely the work of the Chamber of Mines, and agreed to by Milner and the Transvaal government.

The official sanction of the British government was sought through the Ordinance. It regulated the introduction of 'Unskilled Non-European labourers' into the Transvaal, and provided for the importation of non-white labourers from outside Africa on a three year contract with renewal for another three by mutual agreement. Labourers would be allowed to transfer from mine to mine with the permission of the Lieutenant Governor, on condition that no money changed hands. The workers were forbidden to hold various licences and to own or buy property. They were restricted to mine property, and could leave for a maximum period of 48 hours to a specific destination only with permission. Penalties were written into the Ordinance to ensure that the rate of production was maintained. Desertion, loafing, and inefficiency were not just offences, they were also criminal offences. At the end of the contract the labourer was to be repatriated at the

[60] BR Box HE 251 File 138 no 490 *Transvaal Chamber of Mines Memorandum on Position of Imperial South Africa Association re Transvaal Labour Question.* Dated 5th April 1904

employer's expense. To appease white labour, a special schedule was inserted into the Ordinance, listing 55 skilled occupations which the Chinese would not be allowed to perform.[61]

The Ordinance required a Superintendent to be appointed, and the Foreign Labour Department was established to administer the importation.

Lyttelton at the Colonial Office agreed to the terms of the Ordinance on the 16th of January. Lyttelton was concerned to make the Ordinance as defensible as possible because of the opposition it had encountered, particularly from the Liberal Party. He imposed conditions on the importation, notably that it was vital that the labourers knew what they were signing up to, and what conditions were like on the Rand.[62] While they were being transported to the country on ships they should also be properly provided for.[63] Employers whose mines registered a high mortality rate were to be penalized and wages of deceased labourers were to be paid to their relatives.[64] But the Ordinance did not specify a rate of pay, or the hours of work – a loophole that the employers immediately took advantage of.

In the House of Commons the opposition leader, Campbell-Bannerman, moved an unsuccessful motion of censure on the government for approving the ordinance. Of slavery he said:

> '..it is so like it that it is almost indistinguishable. Well, these are, at any rate, uncommonly like slave laws. 'Indentured labour' no doubt sounds better, but do not let us haggle over words; let us see what the thing itself

[61] BR Box HE 252 File 137 Government notice of 1904.
[62] CD 1895 no 112 1904; CD 1941 no 12; CD 2026 no 3
[63] CD 1895 no 112 1904; CD 2026 no 3; CD 1941 no 4
[64] CD 2026 no 110

is'.[65]

The Chinese government refused to negotiate with any colonial authority and would only deal with the Imperial government. They also wished negotiations to be based on the Anglo-Chinese Convention of Peking drawn up in 1860.

The final agreement, the Anglo-Chinese Labour Convention was signed in London on the 13th May 1904 by the Chinese minister at the legation in London, Chang The-Yih, and Lord Lansdowne, the British Secretary of State for foreign affairs.

**Recruitment**

The road to agreement may have been complicated, but organising recruitment of workers was to prove even harder.

As soon as the Treaty was signed, recruiting began, but preparations had already been underway in advance of the Treaty. Initially the finance and control of the operation in China was in the hands of a committee of agents representing the whole mining industry in the Transvaal. They delegated this authority to F Perry (who had formerly been one of Milner's Kindergarten) and JG Hamilton. The committee was dissolved in June 1904 and replaced by the Chamber of Mines Labour Importation Agency. JR Brazier was appointed as the agency's General Manager in China in October 1904. In Johannesburg it was run by Major Walter Bagot. This non-profit making company was dissolved in February 1908 - a year and a quarter after recruiting came to an end – though it continued to function until May 1910 overseeing the repatriation of the final group of labourers from the Transvaal.

All of the mining companies were supplied with labour on a quota system through

[65] Spender, J. A. *The Life of the Right Hon Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman GCB Vol 2*. London, 1923 p 145

the CMLIA.

H Ross Skinner had set out guidelines for recruitment in his report of 1903:

> 'The satisfaction that may be obtained from the labourer will much depend on the care exercised in the selection of the emigrants. Naturally the different villages and districts will endeavour to persuade the bad characters and the weaklings to emigrate….From a health point of view it is most essential that physically strong men be sent, as even using every precaution, it will be difficult to keep the death rate normal until the emigrants become acclimatised and used to their new surroundings. From an economical standpoint also, careful selection is imperative. The same initial cost applies to the unfit as to the fit, and the former has to be paid, fed and housed, for any three years, and returned again to his country, no matter what his capabilities for work may be. All this expense is a very serious matter, unless a fair return is given in labour. Numbers alone have not to be considered as representing the success or otherwise of the undertaking, but to numbers, must be added quality.[66]

It was important to the mine owners that the recruitment be handled quickly. Schumacher wrote to Wernher Beit that he did not think that Perry, the agent in China, grasped how quickly they had to move. He declared they have to have thousands of Chinese workers in South Africa

> 'before the radicals, or anybody else, could have the opportunity of interfering with us'.[67]

[66] Ross Skinner Report as before p 17
[67] BR Box HE 252 file 136 no 572-599 Schumacher to Wernher Beit May 1904

The Foreign Labour Department (created in March 1904) co-ordinated the functions of the various departments of the Transvaal government, and appointed Transvaal Emigration Agents and clerks, who were situated in Hong Kong, Chefoo in Shantung (now Shandong), and Chinwangtao in Chihli (now Hebei).

Considering which area in China to begin the recruitment H Ross Skinner said:

> 'The Southern Chinese are, and have been for many years, accustomed to leave home, in many cases for far distant countries, and the idea of South Africa as a field of labour for surplus population will not be in the nature of an innovation. It is from Southern China that the labour will have to be obtained in the first instance, especially if it is wanted at short notice.
>
> In northern China the idea of emigration to a far distance has to be brought home to the Coolie, but when this has been done ( a process taking time and money) many fine men will be obtained from the North, especially from the province of Shantung.'[68]

Recruitment was initially centred on Kwantung and Hong Kong in south China. The first superintendent of the FLD, William Evans, was chosen specifically for his knowledge of southern Chinese dialects. The FLD thought most of the labourers would come from south China and made Hong Kong the initial headquarters. But it was soon evident that there was opposition in the south to recruitment. The opposition took the form of posters and hostile newspaper articles. Some of it was inspired by the local landowners, but most of it originated with rival emigrant brokers.

> 'The coolie brokers for the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay

> Straits, also those for other countries, have strongly opposed emigration to South Africa. I can assure you that it has taken me all my time to maintain order in the Camp , and to prevent the Straits brokers from tampering and crimping our cookies for South Africa. I have been posted up with the latest tricks of the opposition recruiters.'[69]

The Chinese already resident in Johannesburg had also waged a newspaper campaign in Hong Kong and Kwantung to warn prospective recruits of the racism they would encounter and the dangerous conditions down the mines.[70]

Apart from the intense competition in the south for labour, some of the Viceroys of the provinces expressed open hostility to the idea of indentured labour in South Africa. In South China the opposition of the Viceroy of Liang-Kuang effectively destroyed the plans of recruiters Butterfield and Swire for the area. Recruitment operations were also made complex by the insistence of the Chinese authorities in some areas that native recruiters be used.

In July 1904, Law, the head of the Hong Kong branch of the firm wrote to the Chamber of Mines:

> 'We have several thousands actually booked in the interior but the men are not allowed to leave their homes.'[71]

Recruitment posed a financial risk borne by the recruiters in the rural area and often a sub-contractor was engaged, whose job it was to spread the risk. As the London and China Telegraph reported on 12 March 1906:

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[68] Ross Skinner Report as before p 17
[69] Foreign Labour Departmen (from here FLD) 132 f 2, Transvaal Archive Depot (from here TAD) - Cowan to Evans 13 Oct 1904
[70] BR HE 251 File 141 no 229

> ‘In order to obtain labourers, the contractors opened recruiting offices in all the large towns and villages, where a head recruiter had from ten to twenty sub-recruiters who visited the villages within a radius of fifty to sixty miles, and brought bookies to their central office, whence they were sent to the port of embarkation. Bands of recruits marched down to the coast, headed by recruiters with flags, accompanied by inspectors, who provided them with food at the usual ins. On arrival at the port they were received into the contractors’ depot, where free food and, of course lodging were provided.’

But in South China an eye-witness observed that recruiting was sometimes a different process:

> ‘Recruiters go to poverty stricken areas and speak first to the village elders and clan heads and the selection of individuals as applicants for mining service is made in family conclave.’[72]

The focus of recruitment shifted quickly to the north of the country. Eugenio Bianchini a railway contractor for the Chinese eastern Railway in Manchuria, and later compound manager at the Witwatersrand Gold Mine Co Ltd, was one of those who had emphasized the importance of the northern provinces from the outset. In his influential report to the board of Eckstein’s he had argued against the use of southern Chinese because of the colder climate the Chinese would encounter on the Rand.[73]

Recruitment in the north centred on the provinces of Chihli, Shantung, and

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[71] Chamber of Mines Archive SA ch 17 Butterfield and Swire to Transvaal Chamber of Mines 1 July 1904.
[72] Pearce, T.W. *Chinese Coolie Labour in South Africa*. Chronicle of the London Missionary Society September 1904
[73] BR Box 250 file 139 no 91 Eugenio Bianchini Report to Ecksteins’ Board

Honan. These regions were largely agricultural and poor, which made the job easier. Officials in the north were also more tolerant of the process. Because of the Russo-Japanese war, Manchurian emigration had ended, which would have been the biggest source of competition for labour. Another factor which improved the position for the recruiters was that the silk-spinning industry around Chihli, Shangtung, and Honan had collapsed. Good communications also existed between the interior and the treaty port of Tientsin. A powerful recruiting device was the allotment system in which a proportion of the labourer's wages would go immediately to a designated relative or creditor. This purported to guarantee families at home a regular income from the indentured labourer.

The one great disadvantage of recruiting in the North was that none of the Transvaal Emigration Agents either at Chefoo or Chinwangtao could speak the northern dialects of Chinese. This only changed with the appointment of Bernard Owtram at Chinwangtao in September 1906 – just three months before recruiting ceased.[74] In the end only 2000 Southern Chinese were brought in.

Recruitment was not a rapid affair. Once the candidates arrived at the port they were examined and held in camps to ensure they did not have infectious diseases. If they passed the final examination they were made to bath in disinfectant and given clothes, which consisted of a straw hat, towel, wadded jacket and trousers, money belt, socks and shoes. The outfit cost $8 and was taken from their advance wages. They were also provided with a metal disc bearing a number. Finally the candidate was interviewed and asked whether he wanted to go to South Africa. After his fingerprints were put on a document a Chinese clerk put a cross through them, at which point the candidate became an indentured labourer. The worker was then allowed to give money to his family and

creditors, and he was moved to the awaiting ship.

There can be little doubt that many of the recruits were employed with no understanding of what work they would be required to perform in South Africa. Brazier was forced to admit in 1906 that :

> 'It is more than possible that among the first shipload or two, in the haste and confusion in which they were engaged and embarked, some of the coolies did not fully understand the object of their going over, other than that they were going to get food, housing and good wages in exchange for work (I-Kung).'[75]

The emigrants were only asked one question on the nature of their work at Chinwangtao to test their knowledge of the contract: Q: What kind of work is it? A: mining.[76]

H H Asquith asserted in a speech in 1905 that:

> '..not one in ten would have understood his contract when he signed it about the type of labour to be performed.'[77]

There were others who agreed with Asquith's sentiments.

> ' 'The Ordinance,' said Mr Lyttelton, 'will be explained carefully to each labourer before he consents to embark for South Africa'. Now, the Ordinance is a long and complicated document. It would be impossible to explain it to the most intelligent Chinaman in under an hour. Actually it would probably take him a whole day to completely understand the sort of

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[74] Richardson, Peter. *Chinese Mine Labour is the Transvaal.* pp 66 – 67, 73 - 74
[75] TAD FLD 131 f 20/8 Brazier to Bagot 4 Oct 1906 enclosed in Bagot to Jamieson 19 Nov 1906.
[76] TAD FLD 133 List of questions given to Intending Emigrants at Chinwangtao depot 8 June 1906
[77] H H Asquith speech delivered at Leven and reported in Glasgow Herald 13 November 1905

> life he was going to lead on the Rand. For one man to explain the ordinance to 40,000 of them would have taken about nine years.'[78]

Whether or not the recruits understood the terms of their contract or the type of work they would be expected to perform was a moot point, as none of the Transvaal Emigration Agents either at Chefoo or Chingwantao could speak the northern dialects

The first shipload of miners left Hong Kong on the 25th May 1904. 1055 men boarded, all from southern China. Behaviour on the first ship was not good, and the workers were characterised as 'a lot of pirates'.[79] It was difficult to prevent theft, gambling, drunkenness, opium smoking, suicides and fighting.

By the end of the experiment, 34 shiploads of workers arrived, a grand total of 63 695 men. The journey from North China to Durban took around 30 days by chartered steamship. Britain hired steamers from reputable companies, which raised the price. At first the ships took a route across the South China Sea, stopping in Java. Two reasons induced them to change the route to the longer journey via Singapore. The first was that the SS Swanley struck a coral reef in the South China Sea, the other was that if they stopped at Singapore they could offload any mutinous Chinese at the British port.

Behaviour on all the ships was closely monitored.

> 'Gambling, quarrels, and fights arising out of gambling, petty thefts, acts of dishonesty of a more aggravated kind, opium smoking or the possession of opium smoking appliances, violation of sanitary regulations, were the principal offences on account of which disciplinary measures had to be adopted. The forms of punishment varied according to the gravity of the

[78] Herbert Strange Collection Johannesburg Library'An Eyewitness: John Chinaman on the Rand' p 49 Anonymous Pamphlet London 1905

misdemeanour. They were deprivation of food, a spare diet for a ay or party of a day, being tied or locked up for a period, with or without full diet, or a number of strokes with the bamboo.'[80]

On arrival in Durban the workers were taken to Jacob's camp, formerly a British concentration camp where they were once again checked over by doctors before being sent by train direct to the mines on which they would be working.

**The Chinese on the mines**

What the Chinese encountered on the mines in the way of living and working conditions is carefully documented by the Foreign Labour Department. How the Chinese felt about those conditions can only be discovered from their reactions to them.

Accommodation arrangements for the Chinese miners varied from mine to mine. In the compound dormitories their beds were either concrete or wire mesh bunks. They had to keep their belongings with them in the small bunk.[81] They were fed rice, dried or fresh fish or meat, nut oil, salt and vegetables. They were usually given two meals a day, and sometimes provided with tea and bread underground. In each dormitory a certain amount of air space was stipulated for each worker. On at least one mine a kitchen was provided where they could to their own cooking. There seems to be agreement that the living conditions were not bad – their situation was certainly better than that of the Africans who had a less healthy diet and were housed in older buildings.

Lord Selborne undertook a study of 18 mines considering conditions in September 1905. He compared the conditions for Blacks and Chinese and found the

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[79] Meyer p 236 citing FLD 9/147/30/1 Evans to Lieutenant General 18 June 1904
[80] TAD FLD 122 f 16/4 Journals of Surgeon Superintendent aboard the SS Sikh November 1904 and Lothian January 1905
[81] BR Box HE 252 File 137 no 530 Quote for bunks size 2'6" by 6'3" metal double tiered.

Chinese had the better deal. But he recommended that every compound should employ a Chinese speaking white.

Each shipment of workers contained headmen, and Chinese police. Because the Managers (known as Controllers) spoke no Mandarin they could not communicate adequately with the labourers. The responsibility for the behaviour of the workers was often left to the Chinese police, who frequently used their position to withhold information, misrepresent facts, accept bribes, deal in opium, and benefit from gambling.[82]

Foreign Labour Department Superintendent Jamieson admitted in August 1905 that because so few Controllers spoke Mandarin, too much power was vested in the Chinese police.[83]

Many examples can be found in archives of complaints against the police, which themselves have to be seen in the context of how much they were feared. Workers would be careful not to be identified as someone who had complained against the powerful Chinese police. Many of the Chinese made complaints against the police when they were safely away from them, being held in prison for various offences. The records show variations on a theme: workers complained that police beat them; that police had extorted money from them. One worker who made a complaint of extortion against a policeman asked not to be sent back to Wits Deep on his release from prison where the head policeman, he said, was squeezing money out of them and he feared for his life.[84] Complaints boxes were situated near the policemen's quarters which made it even more

[82] Report of the Special Committee appointed to inquire into the recent conditions in regard to the control of Chinese indentured labourers in the Witwatersrand district. Pg 8
[83] TAD GOV 209 CON 33/05 Memorandum regarding the steps that ought to be taken in order to place the working of the FLD on a proper footing. 7 August 1905

difficult for threatened workers.

From the beginning, systems used to control the Chinese were problematic. Issues like refusal to work, desertion, changing employer without permission, and conducting trade or business became criminal charges, the penalties for which were fines, imprisonment or even deportation. The Chinese had little comprehension of the legal system under which they now fell. They found its intricacies very confusing: how could it be that the innocent were often convicted, the guilty freed? The idea of a prisoner on remand was totally alien as were the concepts of cross-examination, or pleading guilty or not-guilty.

It was also obvious that in many cases the Chinese would not get a fair trial. FLD Inspector E.C. Mayers expressed his frustration:

> 'On July 3 [1905] coolie No. 21696 of New Modderfontein came to make a complaint to me: he had one eye and cheek bruised and discoloured and the skin had been torn in several places on his head: he stated that this had been done by his white boss, one Stewart. On July 4 Stewart charged No. 21696 with assault: after hearing the case I found 21696 not guilty, and the same day laid a charge against Stewart, also for assault. On July 6 the case came on for hearing before the Assistant Resident Magistrate at Boksburg: although the coolie No. 21696 had two witnesses who swore to witnessing the assault, and although coolie No. 21696 bore considerable marks of violence, the case was discharged. This is by no means an isolated instance: my experience here for

[84] TAD FLD 240 76/1

one year has convinced me that it is impossible to obtain justice for a Chinese coolie in the Court at Boksburg.'[85]

The FLD was set up in March 1904. Evans was the first superintendent. He stayed only just over a year. His was not a successful regime. But he was faced with problems: everyone had been expecting southern Chinese, and they were also understaffed. Evans assented to the use of corporal punishment under the supervision of the compound manager in August or September 1904. Evans claimed Lawley or Lyttelton approved it. A proper inquiry had to be undertaken before it was administered. His successor was JW Jamieson who made drastic reforms. He and his new inspectors had northern experience. Every mine was inspected once every two days. But because the FLD, after 1905, was charged with providing both judgement and punishment it was mistrusted by the miners. Also, miners were intimidated by the process of enquiries. Eugenio Bianchini describes an enquiry into alleged grievances attended by Mr Child, an inspector, and three other officials. Every labourer giving evidence was compelled to kneel down when questioned. Bianchini points out that this would make them feel disinclined to make their complaints.[86]

In the beginning mine managers took the law into their own hands and tried to bend the Chinese to their will by using flogging – this despite assurances that corporal punishment would not be inflicted without legal recourse. A journalist, Frank Boland, wrote sensational descriptions of the methods of punishment used on the Chinese in the *Morning Leader* newspaper, and a public outcry ensued. The Lieutenant Governor wrote to the Chairman of the Chamber of Mines:

[85] TAD FLD 7 147/20/17 E C Mayers Inspector to Superintendent FLD 7 July 1905
[86] Report for Governor Selborne by Eugenio Bianchini Oct 28 1905. CD 2819

> ‘From the facts which have been brought to my notice I have come to the conclusion that this permission to inflict slight corporal punishment has been abused both by the white mine officials and the Chinese police, and especially by the latter…. I must request you to be good enough to take immediate steps to put an end to this practice.’[87]

But managements could conceive of no alternative to corporal punishment. Selbourne wrote later about corporal punishment:

> ‘Prior to June 1905 [when he arrived on the Rand] illegal corporal punishment, after trial by the mine authorities, was widely resorted to… it was administered… in a manner borrowed from the practice of the Chinese courts of justice… I am convinced that [these incidents] have entirely ceased since Mr Jamieson’s assumption of office as Superintendent of foreign labour.’[88]

But such optimism was proved to be false when, in another context, Selborne admitted that the practice probably continued underground where managements could not control the activities of the white artisans.[89] The practice of flogging was stopped in June 1905, but not before it had caused an uproar, especially in Britain.

Chinese convicted of crimes were sent to prison where they were often badly treated. A Mr ASH Cooper wrote an affidavit about an assault on a Chinese prisoner at Krugersdorp prison on the morning of 5th December 1905.

> ‘On the 4th December I was sentenced to one day’s imprisonment without hard labour. I was improperly taken to the prison and forced to serve one

[87] FLD 224 no 62 May 1905 L-G to Chairman Chamber of Mines
[88] CO 291/83 Selborne to Lyttelton 17 July 1905

day with hard labour. About 8.55am on the 5th instant I was standing at the doorway of the reception room waiting my discharge when four Chinese coolie prisoners were called from a number of others to carry water. One moved slowly and muttered in Chinese whereupon the warder rushed at him and kicked him then hit him repeatedly in the face. When the coolie squatted down to protect his head with his hands the warder caught him by the queue twisted it and shook him by it.'[90]

Chinese pigtails were collected as souvenirs from executed prisoners. In an affidavit in 1906 a prison official testified that Chinese prisoners had been scalped after they had been hanged. Their pigtails were taken by highranking officials.

'At a later period two more Chinamen were hanged together. After the post mortem examination of the bodies, one of the Chinamen, whose pigtail was very small hand had not been removed, was buried without being interfered with. The other Chinaman, who had a better pigtail, which also had not been removed before execution, was completely and entirely scalped…. On coming out of gaol I went to the Chinese consul at his private house in Johannesburg. I hold him the whole story as told in this affidavit. He said 'I will not believe you; this is not an act of England, it is a barbarous act. Tell your story to the people of this country, and then it will be an international question….'[91]

**Labour relations**

[89] CD 1906 (lxxx) 2819 No 14 Selborne to Lyttelton 20 November 1905
[90] TAD FLD 225 62/29
[91] LD vol 1435 ref AF 4304/06 Affadavit by AP Mooney published in The Prince on 22 Sept 1906 cited in Yap, M. and Mann, D. *Colour Confusion and Concessions*. Hong Kong University Press, 1996. p 128

From the outset, relations between the workers and their bosses were poor. When the Chinese arrived on the mines they found they could not communicate with those in authority and they were set to work without much comprehension of what was expected of them. The regulations they had to follow seemed arbitrary, irrational, and often unfair – especially as they were not specified in the labour contract (which of course they may never have seen anyway).[92]

Hamilton warned the owners before recruitment began about the importance of fair treatment of the workers. In a letter dated 20th April 1904 he said

> 'Above all you must see that the Europeans treat them with the greatest forbearance. Physical violence is an abhorrence to the Chinese and anyone offering it to them at once loses cast in their eyes, and becomes to them a despicable barbarian, and unworthy of respect. Further, an exhibition of violence might lead to the whole of the men on any mine refusing to work, and to general trouble. It will be necessary to have this fact thoroughly impressed upon the European employees, especially the miners.'[93]

This was a warning that the white miners did not heed. The FLD reported that white miners often thought ' a blow or the application of a heavy boot… to be the most efficient means of conveying to a coolie an idea of what his white boss wants.'[94]

Eugenio Bianchini felt strongly that such treatment was entirely counterproductive. In a report to Lord Selborne he said:

> 'I feel convinced, and this conviction is backed by twelve months'

[92] Denoon, Donald. *A Grand Illusion* p 151
[93] BR Box HE 251 File 138 no 138From: 'Extracts from Letters on Treatment and Management of Chinese Coolies'.
[94] FLD annual report 1904 - 05 pg 15

> experience in a Chinese compound, that the tactless handling and bad treatment which the Chinese receive from most of the white miners are mainly responsible now, as it happened to be a year ago, for the dissatisfaction existing amongst the coolies. Cases of desertions of coolies from compounds, and isolated cases where the Chinese react against their white overseers, are also due to abuses and ill-treatment. If some of the coolies stand patiently abuses and undesirable treatment, it is because they look forward to their compound manager for redress, but I regret to say that this desired redress, this natural satisfaction due to any free human being, irrespective of his race or colour, was in most cases never granted by the general Manger.'[95]

Accidents led to many casualties, such as that reported in *The Star* in 1906 of 23 Chinese men killed when a cage rope snapped.[96] Their inexperience, and desire to get a bonus, also put the new miners in the way of trouble – they would frequently, for example, drill into holes in which there were unexploded charges.

In the first six to eight months some 14 riots and disturbances took place on various mines. But the most serious discontent was caused by disputes over pay.[97] In April 1905 a strike began at the Princess Mine. The manager had decided that to weed out loafers he would not pay tickets for those who drilled fewer than the statutory inches. The Chinese came out on strike, and eventually gathered on top of a minedump in a standoff with police. On this occasion there were no casualties.[98]

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[95] CD 2819 Report for Governor Selborne by Eugenio Bianchini Oct 28 1905
[96] *The Star Xmas Annual* 1906 pg 30
[97] CD 2401 Further Correspondence in relation to labour in the Transvaal mines no 28 p 32 - 40
[98] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 29 April 1905

Disputes broke out constantly over minimum payment levels. Because of the vagueness of the agreement, mines interpreted labour arrangements loosely. They all resisted the promise to increase rates of pay after the first six months work. Complaints were also made by the workers that they were not paid for shifts, or that money was given to the wrong person, or that payments were short. In many cases violence was resorted to, for example, when two Chinese were accused of assaulting a miner who refused to give them their daily ticket.[99]

Eugenio Bianchini, Compound Manger of the Witwatersrand Gold Mining company, asked for workers' wages to be increased but nothing was done, and that there had been a strike as a result. He pointed out that they were promised increases in accordance with the ordinance, in his presence, but that had not happened. And he said administrative bungles added to the situation.

> 'Cases where coolies do not receive tickets for 2, 3, 4, and 5 shifts are, at the Witwatersrand Gold Mining Company, unfortunately, so numerous that it is impossible for me to enumerate them all…Since the monthly pay system has been introduced in the mine, monthly tickets are handed by the coolies into the time office at the end of each month to be written up. It has unfortunately frequently occurred however that some of these monthly tickets…. have been returned by the time office to the wrong coolies, and the wrong coolies have been consequently paid.'[100]

Mine managers constantly sought reasons for reducing the rates of pay. The clause in the contract relating to wages was badly drafted and left loopholes which were

[99] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 9 March 1907
[100] CD 2819 Report for Governor Selborne by Eugenio Bianchini Oct 28 1905.

easily exploited. At the end of six months the labourers were receiving substantially less wages than the contract appeared to guarantee. The labourers were supposed to have recourse to the FLD for complaints, but the FLD had a double function in that while it was supposed to protect the workers, at the same time it aimed to help mine managements control the workers.

The department agreed that managements were entitled to a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, and that the management should also lay down the criteria for a fair day's work. They also allowed that managements were empowered to administer corporal punishment to workers who consistently failed to perform that work. Employers therefore had total power over their Chinese employees.[101]

The workers were prohibited from organising in their own defence. The Chamber of Mines had induced the government to rule that any protest by labourers constituted a strike and was therefore illegal. If the Chinese did hold protest meetings, police were immediately called in to disperse them. Bringing in the police led to confrontation. Since the Chinese had grievances that were not being addressed, it was clear from the outset that violent confrontation was a possibility.

The mine managers were unprepared for the level of mass action with which they were faced, especially in the North Rand Mine strike. The 1988 Chinese on the mine were all northern Chinese from the province of Chihli. The majority were probably urban, from the city of Tientsin, and were regular wage earners.[102] It was reported that

[101] Denoon, Donald. *A Grand Illusion* pp 152- 153
[102] FO 228/1594 Consular Intelligence Report from Tientsin for the December quarter 1905; and *London and China Telegraph*, 8 August 1904

they were all of good health.[103] W. Evans, formerly protector of Chinese in Perak, reported that

> 'The men look well and strong… they were very orderly and respectful to their headmen.'[104]

Evans did not mention, or did not know, that the men from this area had already been involved in mass action. During the recruiting and embarkation at Tientsin a serious dispute had broken out between two groups of Chinese - one of which later formed the whole complement on the North Rand mine.[105]. The groups had been recruited by different agents working for the CMLIA and had been housed in different parts of the city. The death of one of the prospective workers resulted in a brawl during which another man was killed. The unity of the group was probably cemented by the fact that they came from the same place, and also because they had bonded while waiting for embarkation together for six or seven weeks.

This group of 1988 men arrived in Durban on 1st August 1904, together with one child around 9 years old who was accompanying his father, a headman. The group was 34 workers short. 32 had deserted on embarkation, one had died of pneumonia, and another had disappeared. The journey had been peaceful. After a few days at Jacobs the men travelled by rail in groups of 400 directly to the North Rand mine. They worked a 10 hour day, six days a week, day or night shift, Sundays and specified holidays excluded.

The management at the mine instituted an incentive of a shilling a day for holes hammered that were deeper than 24inches. But it was also decided that as a penalty a

[103] CO 879/85/755 Report of the Surgeon Superintendent of the SS Stanley 1 Aug 1904 in Milner to Lyttelton 5 Aug 1904
[104] Report by Evans on the arrival of the SS Swanley 1 Aug 1904 in Milner to Littleton as before
[105] CO 879/85/755 Walter to Lyttelton 20 July 1904

halfpenny would be deducted for every hole drilled under 9 inches. The penalties seem to have been instituted around February 1905, possibly because the Chinese New Year had fallen in that month and the workers had already been given 3 days off, or because the level of loafing had increased. The penalties flew in the face of the agreed minimum of one shilling and sixpence a day that the workers were still receiving, even though they had already been at the mine for 7 months.

Until the action on 1st April, the discontent of the workers had been manifested in desertion and loafing. Now they decided to sign a mass petition in response to this breach by management, insisting that they should all be receiving a minimum monthly wage of 50 shillings. Management replied claiming that the stipulation in the contract was that the average wage of a GANG should be 50 shillings, not that of each worker. The workers did not understand the concepts of individual and average - another sign that they had not been properly informed about the working conditions when they signed their contracts. But they semed to accept the manager's word and worked for the next six days pending settlement of their claim for a shilling and sixpence a day, which the manager had to refer upwards. On 28th March the manager offered the head boys a penny for each hole of 24 inches and a bonus of 6d per shift if all in the gang drilled 36 inches or over. No mention was made about other members of gang. The offer united, rather than divided, the workers. The headmen all resigned, and requested to be given the positions of hammermen. The management declined to accept their resignations. From the night shift of 29th March until midway through the day shift of 1st April no Chinese hammer men drilled more than 13 inches or less than 12. There was total solidarity - though enforced in a small number of cases with violence. On 30th March management tried, without

success, to negotiate a return to normal work. On the 31st they called in the general manager of the CMLIA, Bagot, and the Chinese adviser, Baldwin. The latter had accompanied the workers on their journey from China on the SS Swanley. But these mediations failed to reach a settlement. Management refused to pay those who had drilled less than 13 inches - which was in effect all of them, and arrested the ringleaders. They were arrested for refusal to work, which was not strictly true and would not have stood up in a court, so it must be seen as a provocation. To make matters worse, the management called in the European mounted police to effect the arrest.

The police and the miners clashed and the Chinese made off towards the Lancaster mine, possibly with the aim of enlisting the help of the Chinese miners there. The police brought in reinforcements and forced the workers back to the mine, arresting 53 ringleaders who were given sentences of 3 months of hard labour for the public violence, and 6 months for assault.

What is incredible is that this was the 17th disturbance since the arrival of the Chinese. It made clear to management the Chinese capacity for mass action and was probably this fact that secured for the workers considerable improvements to the piecework system. Selborne himself said these improvements should be passed on to all mines where the piecework system applied. Labour management became more sophisticated in response to the North Rand rebellion.

The first protests were violent and often violently suppressed. But after 1905 workers seemed to have resigned themselves to a degree of oppression. Management itself was also more aware of the potential of collective action and large scale protests

diminished, with only four significant episodes recorded after 1905.[106]

In August 1907 four men were killed in a riot at the Cason Mine. Management had illegally imposed a new piecework contract on the Chinese labourers insisting that anyone who drilled less than thirty inches would not be paid. A worker failing to drill 24 inches would have his rations restricted – he would be given only bread and rice, but denied meat, fish, or vegetables. It appears that this punishment was sometimes also inflicted on those who had not reached the 30 inch target. It also came to light that the controller punished hammermen who failed to drill thirty inches by forcing them to stand for hours outside his office. He also humiliated "loafers" by forcing them to wear a hat with an emblem of disgrace and allegedly compelled offenders to assume undignified poses whilst loudly proclaiming themselves to be sodomites and bastards.

The FLD inquiry was told by nominated spokesmen that the workers had rioted to protest the imposition of the new contract, and the punishments meted out by the controller. Numerous Chinese witnesses corroborated the statements.

> ' 'Coolie' No. 4351 asked, "How can a man be expected to do heavy manual labour if the food is insufficient, if one is tired with standing and one is an object of ridicule?" No. 56331 made the following reply when asked about the labourers' grievances: "We wish to complain about the footage. If we drill under 30 inches we receive no money; unless we drill over 30 inches we get no food ticket."[107]

Witness after witness insisted that they resorted to violence only after management blocked their attempts to bring their grievances to the FLD.

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[106] Kynoch, Gary. 'Controlling the Coolies' p 324
[107] TAD LD 1487 AG 3168/07 Cason Riot Enquiry and enclosures

The incident that was the immediate cause of the riot was the controller's arrest of a labourer who was handing out a pamphlet calling on the Chinese miners to unite. No. 56331 pointed out that

> "A man named Sung did wish to complain on behalf of the coolies, but he was sent to the police room by Mr. Foxcroft... the Controller shut this man into the police room and the coolies got angry." Foxcroft confirmed this account: "I asked the man with the pamphlet what his reasons were for distributing it; he replied: that the meeting was to discuss the recent alteration in the inches drilled. He was very cheeky so I put him under arrest and confined him in the police room." A general riot ensued and in the fighting between labourers and the Chinese police four men were killed.[108]

Despite all the Chinese witness statements, the Chief Inspector of the FLD, R.I.Purdon who was conducting the enquiry, dismissed the possibility that the riot was connected to the grievances of the labourers.

> 'With regard to graver charges which have been laid by coolies No. 4351 (page 56) and 54484 (page 63), which statements appear to be substantiated by No. 54525 (page 67), No. 62651 (page 69), and No. 62667 (page (71), I can only say that I believe these statements to be untrue... I cannot believe Mr. Foxcroft would be so inhuman as to punish coolies in this manner... Having carefully considered the evidence... I have come to the conclusion that the

[108] Kynoch, Gary. 'Controlling the Coolies' p325

> riot was stirred up by bad characters for the purpose of paying off old scores against the compound police and others... The question of inchage was used as a pretext to riot.'[109]

With four dead and fifteen seriously injured, neither the Chamber nor the FLD could ignore the conditions that caused the riot. Superintendent Jamieson eagerly accepted Purdon's interpretation of events, but he added that he could not

> '..help thinking that the Management played into the hands of the disaffected coolies, by their extremely ill-advised action in connection with the new piecework agreement.'[110]

Jamieson said his office had received the proposed contract but that it was sent back to the Cason management making it clear that the workers would not be compelled to accept the new terms. He said it was agreed that only those who agreed to work for no pay and less food if they did not drill the required thirty inches per shift would be bound by these conditions. Jamieson said he was shocked to find that the new contract was then imposed on the entire workforce.

> 'It was not unreasonably supposed that the Management would loyally carry out these directions, but so far from having done so, they would appear to have endeavoured to bluff, both the coolies and myself, the former by saying that they must accept, and the latter by saying that the coolies had accepted, the published terms.'[111]

As Gary Kynoch says:

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[109] TAD LD 1487 AG 3168/07 Cason Riot Enquiry and enclosures, Chief Inspector Purdon FLD to Superintendent FLD 23 August 1907
[110] Ibid Enclosure Superintendent FLD to Honourable J de Villiers Pretoria 26 August 1907
[111] Ibid Enclosure Superintendent FLD to Secretary to the Law Department Pretoria 20 September 1907

> 'At best, the FLD was easily circumvented by mining officials determined to subvert the terms of the contract. At worst it was complicit in this oppression. Whichever applies, it is telling that the institution charged with the protection of the Chinese labour force summarily dismissed the complaints of Chinese labourers even when it knew their concerns were legitimate and instead attributed the riot to some shadowy vendetta within the compound population.' [112]

The last of the major disputes also saw the largest number of people killed and injured. In January 1909, management at the Village Deep mine asked labourers to work over the three day Chinese New Year holiday – Thursday 21 to Saturday 23 January – days which they were legally entitled to take as holiday. (Labourers at the inquest that followed testified that they were ordered to work and never given a choice in the matter.) While they were trying to sort this out in their mess hall with the Controller, a white guard called Evans came in and yelled at them to return to work, hitting several of them with a stick. The labourers were incensed and started to break windows and shout – which made the Controller and Evans retreat, and brought more labourers to the mess hall, determined to join in. The police were called in and they turned fire hoses onto the Chinese. They responded by throwing missiles at the police who decided to wait for reinforcements. Whey the extra police arrived they burst in the compound and opened fire killing seven men and wounding ten others.

Purdon, (who was then Acting-Superintendent in place of Jamieson) wrote in his report of the events:

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[112] Kynoch, Gary. 'Controlling the Coolies' p 326

> ‘Last year the Village Deep lost a lot of money through their mill and everything being stopped for the three New Year days. It is clear that notwithstanding my warning they were endeavouring this year to prevent the stopping by making the coolies work. They could have got [FLD Inspectors] Rushton or Sir John Walsham on the telephone but evidently preferred to call in the police to aid in coercing the coolies... On the police action I think their position is absolutely accurately summed up by Johnston the manager to me after the Inquiry: 'They completely lost their heads, blazed away with their guns.’[113]

Once again management used coercion to squeeze extra labour from its Chinese employees. Resistance was met with deadly force and seven men lost their lives, including one whose contract had expired and was due to leave for China the next day.

**Responses to the importation**

The Chinese were regarded by Europeans as ‘alien’. Not only were they believed to look alike, it was believed that they all practised the same religion and belonged to a homogenous culture. The voices raised about the importation, whether in support or in opposition, were almost all guilty of ‘orientalism’. Edward Said, talking about the attitude to the Arab world and to Islam, suggests that orientalism is a ‘kind of intellectual authority over the orient within western culture’.[114]

There were those who saw the Chinese as the ‘yellow peril’, as heathen, unclean

[113] TAD LD 1696 file 194/04 Confidential interview Purdon re: Report of Village Deep Inquiry 3 February 1909

savages, and wanted to stop them coming to work in South Africa for those reasons. But even the people who supported the Chinese and spoke of 'celestial virtues' not just the usual 'celestial vices' saw them as foreign and other. The virtue of honest industry became a mark against, not for, the Chinese in some eyes.

> '…their narrow, tireless industry, pushed beyond a virtue to the level of a defect, coupled with their excessively low standard of living, render them competitors in the labour market specially unwelcome to European peoples who endeavour tomaintain the level of comfort…essential to happiness under conditions of civilization.'[115]

Even the most humanitarian voices speaking out against the importation on the grounds that it was slavery also subscribed to racist and stereotypical characterizations of the Chinese.

Those voices, and those attitudes, are very loud in the story of the Chinese workers, but what is missing is the voice of the Chinese themselves. Their responses to the situation can only be assumed from reading the facts of their behaviour. But often those facts say more about the writer than the subject.

When they were not working, the Chinese had few outlets for entertainment. It seems that window-shopping was a popular past-time, and once the correct permit had been applied for, some would visit friends on other mines. Some companies organised sports days for the workers, but such organised activity was the exception rather than the rule. Chinese theatre was a popular entertainment, until that was banned sometime in 1906 because of another pastime - seen as not quite so innocent - sodomy.

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[114] Said, Edward W *Orientalism* London 1978 pp 26 - 27

Although the indentured miners were free to bring their wives and families with them, almost none did. Only two women and 12 children came from China to join the miners in 6 years. William Evans, the first Superintendent of Foreign Labour explained their absence:

> '...the fact remains that it is not their custom to bring their women folk with them on such occasions. Countries where the coolies are allowed to settle, buy land, trade and manufacture, such as the Straits Settlements, are very different.'[116]

The fact that the men did not have women in their lives exercised the mine owners considerably. L. Reyersbach wrote to Wernher Beit discussing the problem and the fears that the Chinese would associate with black women. In the letter he mentions an idea Perry had, to import a shipload of Chinese women. Reyersbach adds that he does not think this is popular idea.[117]

During 1906 specific allegations were made about the miners' sexual practices. It was said that they freely associated with white women; that sodomy was practised on a large scale; that there were a great number of professional male prostitutes; and that the authorities turned a blind eye to these practices. The Bucknill Commission was established to look into these complaints, and its findings were kept a secret from the public. The inquiry found that the'…offence prevailed at most compounds….grosser parts of the accusations were not substantiated.'[118]. 150 male prostitutes were sent home

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[115] Samuel *The Chinese Labour Question* p 459 as quoted in Harris, K.L. 'A History of the Chinese in South Africa to 1912' p 123
[116] Memorandum on Wives and families of Chinese Indentured Labourers by W Evans December 1904 cited in Richardson, Peter. *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal*. Macmillan: London, 1982 p 127
[117] BR HE 252 File 136 no 646 L Reyersbach to Wernher Beit May 1904
[118] TAD LTG 167 TEL 3767

and the Chinese theatres were closed as they were seen as the main source of male prostitution.

Some evidence suggests that workers struck up relationships with black or mixed-race women, but such was the outcry at this that every attempt was made to halt the practice. Many of the workers visited brothels, until attempts were made to put these out of reach too.

In one infamous case, a brothel at number 8 Fox Street was raided. Police found between 200 and 300 workers waiting in the yard. They were being admitted two at a time to the room of one white woman, and one coloured woman. One of the Chinese was given 12 months hard labour and 10 strokes, the other was not prosecuted as he was fully clothed.[119] The Transvaal government was enraged by the incident. It considered repatriating those arrested, including the one who had been acquitted, and taking action against the hundreds waiting in the yard. But better sense prevailed.[120]

Secret societies were a feature of Chinese culture, and they found fertile breeding grounds on the mines. Not surprisingly the mines were nervous of the societies. Simmer and Jack suspected a Chinese secret society operated on the mine when a man (not belonging to Simmer and Jack) was found with a letter which translated as follows:

> 'This is about Kuan Ching and Pao Su, who have been very good friends, also Lui Kuan Chang. These men had always to fight with others. As we are not together in the same place, we must keep together as good friends the same as brothers. If you will be injured or you will die, we will die with you.We have a contract not to speak false amongst ourselves. If there

[119] TAD ILD vol 1433 AG 1544/07
[120] TAD LD 1453 AG 1544/07

> are any differences our God will look down upon us'. The letter he was distributing said: ' All must come to Germiston on Sunday and everyone must bring three dollars. Secretary Li Yon Jin.' The names of all the members were on the list and the ringleaders arrested.'[121]

Other mines complained of the societies, the TWL reports on an attack allegedly by Chinese secret society members on Chinese police on the Lancaster mine.[122]

But by far the two most popular leisure activities were opium smoking, and gambling, both of which often had grave repercussions. Opium was available to labourers who had obtained medical permits, and illegal dealers made it freely available. Opium smoking was the cause of many deaths amongst the indentured workers, and it sparked much complaint from people in Johannesburg who reported that thousands of Chinese frequented the opium dens in the Ferreirastown area. Deliberate opium overdoses were also responsible for deaths on the mines, and were used as a way of escaping gambling debts. The *Transvaal Weekly Leader* on 18th August 1906 reported two such deaths from inquests held in that month. Evidence led at an inquest held on 13th August 1906 into an overdose death suggested that the deceased owed money and was being pressed by creditors.

The workers spent much of their free time gambling. The FLD became concerned at the practice, blaming it for assaults and fights in the compounds. A subsection of the 1906 Labour Importation Ordinance was added to ban gambling and games of chance, but it had little effect. A gambler who could not pay his debts could only avoid his creditors by committing suicide, becoming a criminal and getting himself jailed, or

[121] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 4 February 1905
[122] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 2 December 1905

deserting.

A report from a Chinese court said someone given a short sentence plunged a knife into his chest because he was terrified of being freed. Magistrates were apparently often asked for longer jail sentences to keep the offender out of the way of creditors.[123]

One defaulting debtor had his clothes removed and was left to stand nearly naked (thought to be a terrible insult) near a dam. He was later found drowned in the dam, and it was believed he committed suicide.[124]

Desertion became a serious issue. Chinese were found wandering in far-flung rural areas, even as far as Swaziland. One was found in Newcastle.[125] According to the *Transvaal Weekly Leader* a group of Chinese was seen begging for food in Hekpoort. Eight Boer farmers tracked them down. They were found in a deep kloof in a large cave, where they seemed to have stayed for a fortnight, surviving by stealing chickens from black people. Each of them was armed with a butcher's knife and a pick handle.[126]

Some of the deserters were following train lines to get to the sea, while one man sold maps to prospective deserters showing them an 'easy' route to Tibet.[127] Some people deserted because of ill-treatment on the mines, or a general confusion about why they were there and what they were supposed to be doing. But the most prevalent cause of desertion was the debtor fleeing his creditors. Because desertion from the mines was a criminal offence, the deserter became an outlaw, and usually desperate. He had little option but to turn to crime for a living. Gangs of deserters began to roam the countryside.

'Hiding in dongas by day, slinking across the farms by night, dodging

[123] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 18 August 1906
[124] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 20 April 1907
[125] *Rand Daily Mail* 7 November 2005
[126] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 2 December 1905

> SAC patrols, chivvied by Boer farmers, chased by Kaffirs, stealing fowls, robbing lonely homesteads, barefooted, half-starved, desperate, with an Asiatic contempt of life in their blood and Chinese cruelty and callousness in their hearts. No one understands them, they understand no-one.'[128]

Almost from the outset, whether because of xenophobia, or from exaggerated accounts of Chinese law-breaking, the white community began to articulate fear of the indentured workers. The pamphlet,' John Chinaman on the Rand', voiced the opinion of many of the Transvaal whites:

> 'The yellow man has made his name a terror. He has murdered, raped, robbed, and committed every offence against law and morality. He has literally terrorized - and still terrorizes - the Rand. The plutocrat Jew walks the familiar streets in a state of trepidation; the Boer farmer sleeps with a rifle by his side, and his farm house is surrounded by spring guns and alarums. The life of no white man is safe, and the honour of no white woman.'[129]
>
> 'It cannot be that they [the government] really are in favour of retaining on the Rand 50,000 Chinamen who commit the most loathsome outrages on the white population. It is almost passing belief that they should bind themselves to the fact that the womenfolk of the Transvaal are absolutely unprovided with any adequate protection against these hordes of

[127] TAD FLD Annual Report 1904 – 1905 pg 13
[128] *Rand Daily Mail* 25 September 1905
[129] 'An Eyewitness: John Chinaman on the Rand' London 1905 Anonymous Pamphlet p 99 Herbert Strange Collection

Chinamen.'[130]

The newspapers at the time were full of sensational stories of the crimes the Chinese were accused of committing, and often had committed. Examples show how lurid the newspaper stories were:

> 'In Bezuidenhout Valley six or seven Chinese were caught housebreaking. One was shot and the others fled. The wounded man was found later at Rose Deep with a huge wound to his face.'[131]
>
> ALARMING OUTRAGE! Three Chinese and two blacks attacked a plot outside Roodepoort. They beat an Italian family and robbed their house. 'Not content with violently assaulting the inmates of the hut, the scoundrels then laid hand upon the woman and outraged her'.[132]
>
> ROVING CHINESE: AN EXCITING CHASE! In Luipardsvlei four Chinese who deserted from the Princess lived in a deserted stope. They stole money and bought a tin of rice. There was a standoff. Both the Chinese and the police were shooting and after the gun battle and attempts to smoke them out the Chinese surrendered.'[133]

The *Transvaal Weekly Leader* reported on crime figures for 1906 - 1907. It asserted that the crimes began with several outrages in the Witwatersrand area by Chinese at the beginning of the period, but then the outrages slowed down. The newspaper gave two reasons for the change. In 1906 regulations changed to allow the FLD to try Chinese for crimes on the mine. Also, white people began to arm themselves

[130] Ibid pg 106
[131] *Transvaal Weekly L*eader 25 November 1905
[132] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 14 July 1906
[133] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 14 July 1906

and the numbers of Transvaal Town Police was increased.[134]

Lord Selborne believed that there were a number of Chinese scoundrels, but that the overwhelming majority were law-abiding. Most of the deserters, he said, were simply stragglers. However, under pressure from all sides, he issued instructions for a widespread distribution of arms and allowed summary powers of arrest:

> '…any white man will be empowered to arrest without warrant any Chinese labourer found outside Witwatersrand district, and to hand him over to nearest police station. He will be refunded reasonable expense incurred in doing so… I have authorised all farmers living in or near Witwatersrand district to possess firearms of any kind, except magazine rifles, and have made arrangements by which anyone who cannot afford to buy firearms can be lent a Martini-Henry rifle by the government on application to the resident magistrate.'[135]

The new regulations seemed to have worked because the number of outrages dwindled. Lionel Philips wrote to F Eckstein on 22nd January 1906:

> 'The outrages, on the whole, have been much reduced, but it is certainly imperative to stop them entirely, because the boers in the neighbourhood of the Rand are certainly frightfully hostile to the employment of Chinese because of the anxiety it gives them at home. Baily started an idea which I do not think is a good one, namely to subsidise say fifty Boers living in different places all round the Rand for £1 a week to drive in any chinaman

[134] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 16 March 1907
[135] CD 2786 Further correspondence. No 16, p 11.

they may see wandering about the veld.'[136]

Selborne did not think much of Baily's plan and refused to implement it.

Many Chinese were incarcerated or fined for crimes. Some were even hanged. Incomplete records for two years of the workers' stay note that 28 miners were executed. The newspapers reported some of the executions:

> 'Four Chinese, Liu Hua Jih, Wang Tung Meng, Shua Ho Lang, Tsue Sha Shung were hanged on Monday 20th November for the murder of farmer Joubert at Moabsvelden in August 1904. Present at the hanging were the governor of the jail, the district surgeon, a Roman Catholic priest, a Swiss missionary, a Chinese interpreter, and 8 Chinese at the request of the condemned. Before ascending the gallows they asked which direction China lay and all went down on their knees and made obeisance.'[137]

Selborne was right to believe that the majority of the workers were law-abiding. Many of them tried to distance themselves from the criminals. An item in the Barlow Rand archive gives poignant testimony to how desperate many of them were to keep their jobs and contracts. It is a translation of a petition to the Manager of the Witwatersrand Deep mine, dated September 1905, asking for forgiveness for their transgressions. Unfortuntately there is no original of the document, which was written in Chinese, just a translation. It reads:

> 'Head boys petition:
>
> To the Manager
>
> The boys have had much punishment. We are all sorry for our past faults

[136] BR Box HE 253 File 134 no 736 Lionel Philips to F. Eckstein
[137] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 25 November 1905

and ask the manager to be easy with us and forgive the past, but in future all evildoers should be severely punished.

Coolies petition:

We all beg for forgiveness. All the boys have signed this petition, and ask that in future they may be beaten severely for all the transgressions; and even if beaten to death this clause holds the manager free and guiltless. (Signatures of nearly all the coolies employed on the mine appended.)'[138]

Doubtless the Chinese were responsible for a crime wave, but no-one stopped to ask why. Most people assumed the Chinese were living up to their reputation amongst white people as savage barbarians. Sometimes, when trying to work out how to deal with the problem of their Chinese workers, the mine bosses would show some insight. A cable headed BK to LP - Johannesburg to China in the Barlow archive reads:

'…it was suggested that to some extent the store-keepers were responsible for such outrages [one man killed, several injured in attack on a shop] as they are selling opium to the Chinese at exorbitant prices, and when the Coolies find out afterwards that the article supplied is a very inferior one… they naturally feel revengeful.'[139]

There is no evidence of an attempt by the authorities to tackle the causes of the criminality, although they were aware of problems with the indenture system they created. The FLD and the special committee of Enquiry into the control of Chinese labourers in 1906 admitted that the cause of much of the crime could be found in the conditions of life within a compound. Desertion from mines could be attributed to

[138] BR Box HE 253 File 134 no 712
[139] BR File number HE 136 7 October 1905

opportunities for gambling, opium smoking, and ill-treatment by those in power or authority.[140]

As Peter Richardson concludes:

> 'Crime on this scale was indicative of a serious crisis of control which was related to the totality of conditions under which the Chinese were forced to live and work.'[141]

In British politics the Chinese importation had become the main issue in by-elections and questions were often asked in the House of Commons. The Independent Labour Party held a conference in Manchester in April 1905 and many of the speeches denounced the Ordinance permitting importation. A cartoon appeared in 1905 which showed British soldiers killed in the Boer war staring at a gang of Chinese workers manacled together being driven down a mine. The cartoon was used by the Liberal party, in a modified form, as part of their campaign. The outrages proved to be helpful for protestors, who used the facts, and the fiction, to bolster their demands for the end of the importation. The Liberals saw the outrages as proof of ill-treatment. The racists used the sensational stories to justify their view that the Chinese were barbaric foreigners.

The cause of the Liberals was given a boost in the middle of 1905 when it was revealed that Lord Milner had sanctioned the practice of flogging, breaching the terms of the Ordinance, thereby outraging the British public. Balfour, the Prime Minster, described Milner's acton as one of'extraordinary stupidity'.[142] Milner eventually received

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[140] TAR Annual Report FLD 1905 - 06 p 11 BPP 1906 LXXX, CD 3025 report of the Special committee appointed to Consider and Report upon the Present Conditions in Regard to the Control of Chinese Indentured Labourers on the Mine Premises of the Witwatersrand area. Pg VI enc 5 in Selborne to Elgin 7 May 1906

[141] Richardson, Peter. *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal*. Macmillan: London, 1982 p 174

[142] British Library/Balfour papers ADD MSS 49771 pg 75 Balfour to Alexander Acland-Hood 21 Sept 1905

a parliamentary censure, though many, not just his supporters, thought he had been made a scapegoat.

The Conservative government fell in December 1905, and Campbell-Bannerman became the new Liberal Prime Minister. The Liberal victory in the election was the largest majority in parliamentary elections since 1832, and there can be no doubt that the Chinese issue contributed a fair number of those votes.

The new government decided they would not demand that the Chinese be repatriated immediately. They would respect the importation licences that had already been issued, and provide a state-aided repatriation scheme to allow workers to apply if they could prove that they had been recruited under false pretences. Later Lord Elgin, the Colonial Secretary, ordered that all recruiting, and importation should cease on November 30th 1906, pending the decision of a Responsible Government.

In a decision that the Boer generals had hoped for, the Liberals also decided on full self-government for the whole of South Africa. The plans made by Milner and his supporters were finally at an end. It would take 4 more years until the Union of South Africa was born, and the Liberals were still faced with what to do about the Chinese workers. Lord Elgin reformed the conditions the Chinese laboured under. He was criticised for not ending the practice immediately and sending the Chinese home, but Elgin replied they had never actually called the Chinese slaves. He objected to fines being deducted from wages, and to certain other penalties, and insisted that trials be held in public outside of the compounds, and re-considered the powers of the mines to arrest and detain workers. He also instituted state-aided repatriation, which brought him into conflict with Selborne. Because of the arguments, the posters advertising the offer were

very slow to go up, but it made little difference. Only 800 workers ever made use of the opportunity.

**The end of the 'experiment'**

News of the Liberal victory must have caused the Boer Generals much glee. The Transvaal was granted responsible government and held a general election in February 1907. The mine owners attempted to scare farmers into voting against Het Volk and those against the importation. A pamphlet produced by the Chamber of Mines was translated into Dutch and issued to farmers. It warned the farmers that if the Chinese were sent away the wages of black workers would increase and they would be able to buy farms from the Boers.[143] .

Despite such scare-mongering tactics, Afrikaners and British workmen joined forces against the mine owners and those they regarded as capitalists. They voted into power the Het Volk party, which had declared that it would end importation and repatriate the labourers as soon as their contracts expired. The new Transvaal cabinet consisted of Botha, Hall, E Solomon, Smuts, de Villiers, and Rissik. The victory of the Het Volk/Labour and Nationalist Parties coalition on a predominately anti-Chinese ticket in the Transvaal elections of Feb 07 effectively ended the Chinese question in British politics.[144]

In keeping with the bizarre mix of hypocrisy and confused motives that made up the response to the importations, the Transvaal press decided that repatration was a bad

[143] BR Box HE 253 File 134 no 811 July 1906

[144] Hyam, loc.cit.; Halevy, E. *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century: Volume 6, the Rule of Democracy, 1905 - 14* 2nd Edition London, 1952 pp 29 - 32; Campbell, P.C. *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire.* London, 1923 pp 161 -216; Garson, N.G. 'Het Volk, the Botha Smuts Party in the Transvaal 1904 – 11' *Historical Journal, IX no 1* 1966 pp 113 - 116; Trapido, S. 'Landlord and Tenant in a colonial economy: The Transvaal 1880 – 1910.' *Journal of Southern African Studies* V no 1 Oct 1978 pp 52 - 5

thing. Despite the years of headlines screaming about Chinese outrages, the *Transvaal Leader* called it a grave policy. It had taken some time, they said, for the workers to get up to speed, but now the Chinese were experienced and had restored the confidence of foreign investors, and there had been talk of more mines being developed along the Rand.

> 'It is difficult to assign any good and sufficient reason for the action which the government have decided to adopt. We have on these fields 50,000 Chinese, docile, industrious, and, as the comparative criminal statistics have shown, law-abiding workers.'[145]

Their sentiments were echoed by (or an echo of) the mine owners, but there were also several public bodies who protested.

Despite their arguments repatriation began in June 1907 and continued until January 1910.

The majority of Chinese workers did not want to be repatriated. Up until January 1906, 1956 workers had been repatriated; of those 1233 tried to re-engage at Chingwangtao, but were prevented, 222 tried at Chefoo, and 100 are estimated to have succeeded and come back.[146] When the new order was issued, many wanted the right under the Ordinance to apply for another three year contract. Others wanted to stay permanently. It might sound surprising, considering the conditions under which they had toiled, but the work they had in the Transvaal was well paid - relative to what they could earn in China, if they managed to find work in China at all.

The mines were inundated with requests that workers be allowed to stay. Groups of workers sent ornate petitions to plead their cases. The Barlow Rand archive holds

[145] Transvaal Weekly Leader 4 May 1907
[146] CD 2819 Report for Governor Selborne by Eugenio Bianchini Oct 28 1905

translations of workers petitions. 400 workers coming up to the end of their contracts at French Rand Mine wanted to be allowed an extension, but this was refused in August 1907. 1500 workers at Simmer and Jack were similarly refused. Almost 800 of the 1000 employed at Angelo section of East Rand Premier Mine asked to stay from November 1908 till January 1910. The Attorney General refused their request.

Some of the petitions speak of good relationships built between workers and managers. Mrs DC Garner of Linden wrote to the *Rand Daily Mail* in 1965 that her father TH Clayton-Garner was compound manager of Rand Mines from 1904. He had learnt Chinese and when they were repatriated, they gave him an illustrated satin panel. One side had signatures of all the Chinese headmen, the other extolled his virtues. The panel was given to the Africana Museum.

By January 1910 all the workers had been repatriated. There were stories that some had escaped and hidden out in the veld, or in black areas, and avoided repatriation, but they were never confirmed.

One of the problems of the blanket repatriation was what to do with criminals. Some of them had sentences to serve that would see them languish in Transvaal prisons long after the last ship had sailed. A large number were pardoned and repatriated. The rest were taken to China, or Malaysia, on a special ship. The policeman who effected the repatriation wrote of the event in an unpublished memoir. It is one of very few accounts which breathes life into the skeletons of archive records of Chinese importation.

> ‘ With a detachment of six men from Marshall Square, I was sent about the end of 1909 with three large pantechnicon vans…. To the Fort at Johannesburg from which I surreptitiously removed more than a hundred

convicted Chinese prisoners to the railway yard at Braamfontein where a special train for Durban was awaiting us.... We sailed on the SS Heliopolis…With the exception of the European officers and engineers we had on board more than a thousand Chinese and Manchus in addition to the convicted Chinese criminals from Johannesburg Fort. We sailed close to the west coast of Madagascar keeping a sharp look-out for any signs of wreckage from the Waratah and afterwards through the Straits of Malakka as the Straits of Sunda were still, at the time, considered to be unsafe for navigation since the volcano of Krakatao had blown its head off in 1883 when more than 36,000 Javanese lost their lives. We put in at Singapore for supplies of fresh fruit and vegetables. After leaving Singapore, all went well until we reached the Fokien Strait between Taiwan (Formosa) and the mainland when an alarm one night frustrated an attempt on the part of the unsegregated Chinese to seize the ship. On arrival at Tshifu, we found that many of our passengers were ex-bandits and pirates under sentence of death that had been allowed to go to South Africa on the understanding that they should not return. Before we disembarked our passengers at Tshifu, a Manchu appealed to me to save his life as he was a pirate under sentnece of decapitation, that he had fought against the Japs on the side of the Russians at Port Aurthur and that I, a whiteman, could now help him if I cared to do so. ….(I told him) that I would take him ashore at Tshinwangtao as my personal servant. It was midwinter and, as we entered the Bay of Tshili, we found several ships frozen fast in the ice, but an

> icebreaker had prepared a passage for us to Tshingwantao. When our ship drew alongside the jetty we found a company of Manchurian Infantry armed with mauser rifles drawn up on the quay so as to prevent unauthorised persons from entering or leaving the ship. With my pirate protégé close at my heels, I walked boldly through their ranks and as a couple of them were about to stop my supposed servant, I indicated to them that he was coming with me, and so they allowed us to pass….. I turned to my protégé and said "Well, do you think you are quite safe now?" He clasped his hands in front of me and replied: "Master, you have saved my life, come I will give you my sister!" I told him that I was not indulging in any matrimonial adventures that day and advised him to find honest work to do and give up piracy.'[147]

3192 Chinese workers had died on the rand between 1904 and 1910, one in twenty of the total number.[148] 986 deaths were due to conditions of work. (611 workers had been partially or totally disabled resulting in the repatriation of 523). Deaths not related to work were put down to execution, disease, opium overdoses, accidents, homicides, and suicide, but there were many unaccounted for or incorrectly assigned.

The Chinese did not want to leave the bodies of their dead colleagues behind, and so many of those who had been buried were exhumed and cremated, and the ashes taken back to China.[149]

**Conclusion**

[147] MacDonald, F.J. 'The Chinese on the Rand: A Personal reminiscence.' Bath 30/4/61 Unpublished. Herbert Strange Collection
[148] FLD 177/36/15 Report FLD 8 March 1910
[149] *Transvaal Weekly Leader* 10 August 1907

The impact of the Chinese labour experiment was considerable, and wide reaching. Although there were obviously other economic factors working in the mines' favour over those years, it is not overstating the case to say the Chinese were responsible for turning the mines round. Within two years South African gold production was the world leader. The output of the Rand increased from £12 million in 1904 to £30million in 1910.

The mine owners had got their way on the subject of labour; for one thing, the use of white unskilled labour was no longer a consideration. The importation had boosted white labour in another way. Chinese labour had created employment for whites. From March 1904 to March 1905 the number of British on the mines increased from 10, 240 to 13, 255 and by 1906 18,000 Europeans were employed there.[150]

But the most dramatic impact was made on African labour. As Denoon says:

> 'The migrant labourers, whose withdrawal may be said to have initiated this train of events, were ultimately ensnared in one of the golden laws of South African affairs, which states that every white bargain must be sealed by an African sacrifice.'[151]

By the middle of 1905 they had lost whatever bargaining power they ever had; many were now being turned away from mines. In February 1905 Reyersbach of H Eckstein was able to report that African labourers

> 'See now that there is a danger of there not being sufficient work for them or at least that we are not going to 'kow-tow' to them any longer to the

[150] Worsfold, B. *Lord Milner's Work in South Africa.* London, 1906 pp 366 – 367 quoted in Reeves, J.A. 'Chinese Labour in South Africa 1901 – 1910' Thesis University of the Witwatersrand December 1954 pg 201

[151] Denoon, Donald. *A Grand Illusion* p 158

> extent that this has previously been the case; that we have freed ourselves to a very large extent from the necessity of having them in the large numbers given in our official records, by importing Chinese coolies to fill the gaps and they are beginning to see that they will have to come to work freely and voluntarily, in order to collect any money they wish to have over and above the meagre livelihood rendered by their own vocations.'[152]

It was worse than that. Black workers would henceforth be required to work for lower wages and at the mercy of the mine owners and WNLA. The Chinese experiment had refined the migrant labour situation, and mine bosses now had a clearer idea of how to control workers. The job reservation that had been introduced in the Ordinance, reserving 55 professions for whites only, was kept, and expanded outside of the mines. Job reservation became the cornerstone of apartheid and an accepted feature of employment practice for almost a hundred years.

The importation had made life difficult for the Chinese who already lived in South Africa, and was responsible for the first and only specifically anti-Chinese legislation in the country, and for adding to the growing list of racist laws. The Cape passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1904 imposing strict control over them, and Natal passed the Transit Immigrants Act of 1904 which confined labourers to compounds in Natal, and required free Chinese to carry documents to prove that they already lived there. The outrages in the Transvaal had made white people suspicious of anyone Asian.

Politically the Chinese importation had been very significant. The issue played a large part in toppling the Conservative government in Britain. Solidarity against the Chinese had brought Boers and working men in the Transvaal together, and when the

[152] BR HE 252 file 136 no 652 20 Feb 1905 Reyersbach to Wernher Beit

new Liberal government granted the colonies the status of Responsible Government, this meant that they voted against the status quo and brought in Het Volk, which returned the Boers to power in South Africa.

It is probable that the Chinese mineworkers never knew how significant they were. There is no record of what happened to any of the workers when they returned to China, and as the next forty years were to be ones of extreme upheaval in that country, it is perhaps not surprising that they disappeared so comprehensively.

Where records were kept, in South Africa, nothing speaks of the human experience of the experiment. Finding a heartbeat in the cold documentation extant requires some extrapolation. When Lord Selborne undertook his study of the 18 mines in September 1905 he did not canvass the opinions of the Chinese workers themselves, and what proportion of suicides and desertions was attributable to living and working conditions can only be guessed at because the labourers were never given a forum in which they could express their feelings. The Chinese workers were not seen as people, but as machinery. And that brings us back to the question of slavery.

When they were first approached about the importation, the Chinese said they would not allow their citizens to be used as slaves. They defined slavery as using a man as a thing, as an article of commerce. As that was exactly how the Chinese migrant labourers on the mines of the Witwatersrand was treated, then we can conclude that they were, indeed, slaves.

## Chapter 3

### Dragons on the Rand

This chapter contains the script of the documentary, ‘Dragons on the Rand’. If this documentary were for broadcast, then the final script would follow a long production process, and be different to what is written here.

In pre-production the filmed archive would be researched and permission sought for use of all still photographs. The moving material would have to be transferred to tape and arrangements made for the still images to be captured, either digitally or by rostrum camera. All locations would have been reconnoitred, and all experts pre-interviewed to find out exactly where their comments would fit editorially.

The production process would have involved the filming of all locations, the capturing of all archive images, and the actual interviews with experts. As the style of this expository documentary is for voice-over, there would be no need to finalise the script narrative before production, as there would have been had an on-screen narrator been used.

In post-production all of the elements would be brought together, including archive and newly created sound, music, and narrative. During this process the narrative would be refined.

This script has been written as an academic exercise, and there is no production budget for filmed archive to be sought, far-flung experts interviewed, or locations reccied. In a documentary the voice-over is frequently guided by detail in the images, and, concomitantly, the images frequently take the place of voice-over. Since this is a

written submission, the narrative sometimes differs from what it would actually be, should the documentary be made.

The subject matter of the film is so dense and compelling that it would be possible to create a series of episodes. But for the purposes of this thesis, the material has been shoe-horned into one episode. That, of course, leads to several dangers. The first, and most important, is that the lack of time means that several crucial episodes or incidents in the history may not be dealt with in the sort of depth they deserve.

This 56 minute stand-alone documentary is meant to intrigue, and tell the story of people utterly forgotten. Facts and opinions will be offered, along with visual material, both old and new, and the aim is that the audience is told the unusual and affecting tale of a group of people who had a huge effect on their lives, politically and socially, but who have subsequently been erased from popular history.

The fact that the workers were Chinese and not, for example, Cornish, is absolutely central to the story, and widens the relevance from Johannesburg in 1904 to reflect attitudes in the British Empire in the first few years of the 20th century. At the same time it is still a South African story, and in October 2008, the idea that workers from different countries are unwelcome in South Africa has particular resonance.

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| 1 | CU blue sky with white clouds moving across. The shot widens to include mining headgear from low angle. As the shot continues to widen, something flaps quickly in and out of vision. Slowly it is revealed as a kite, moving in and out of shot, zigzagging. It is a colourful Chinese dragon.<br>The camera cranes up above the kite and the headgear and reveals the city skyline. | FX wind, whipping sound. Plaintive, unusual solo instrument begins to play. For the brief moments the kite is whipped into view the plaintive, Chinese, sound is replaced by a forceful Zulu chant - a single sound. |
| 2 | The shot continues to widen to include the Johannesburg skyline as it is today. At its widest, the shot tilts down the headgear until it zooms in at the bottom onto the kite, now lying abandoned on the | <FX CONTINUE UNDER><br>**VOICEOVER:**<br>**Sometime in early 1910, Liu Shu Hai was executed at the Johannesburg jail, almost seven thousand miles from his home. It's possible he never quite** |

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| | ground.<br><br>Strap: DRAGONS ON THE RAND | **understood why he was being hanged;**<br><br>**it's certain he is not remembered anywhere in the place he died. This is the story of 65000 Chinese labourers forgotten to history. This is the story of how a group of poor workers in tunics and plaits who travelled thousands of miles across strange seas saved Johannesburg's mines, helped bring down the British government, and caused a panic that opened the way to home rule in South Africa.**<br><CHINESE MUSIC FADES><br>**No doubt Liu Shu Hai and his fellow workers never knew that in 5 short years they had changed the course of South African history.** |
| 3 | Archive moving footage of South Africa during the Boer War, and still photographs. | <FADE UP BOERE MUSIEK CIRCA 1900><br>**VOICEOVER:** |

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| | | **The Boer War, which ended in 1902,**<br><br>**made the fortunes of a few, but impoverished thousands of others. Black people had been exploited by both sides; many Boer farmers lost their farms and moved to towns; and British working men, once demobbed, found they had no way to make a living.** |
| 4 | Archive moving footage/stills of the Johannesburg mines<br><br>Stills of black workers on mines | **The only real business in Johannesburg had been the mines, and after the War, mine owners struggled to re-establish them. Most mines had been closed for the duration, and as they stuttered back into production, the Black labour force had disappeared. Reconstruction work, above ground, proved more attractive to workers than the dangerous and** |

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| | Group shot of mine owners from Chamber of Mines | **unhealthy conditions in the mines.**<br><FADE OUT MUSIC><br>**Besides, the mine owners had made the puzzling decision to cut African wages to below the rate offered before the war, 3 years previously, confounding people like Thomas H Leggett .** |
| 5 | Portrait of Thomas Leggett. Zoom into the face as he speaks | **LEGGETT:**<br>**“If the native labourer on the mines is indifferent to the amount of money he earns, he is the only wage earner that I have come into contact with of whom this can be said.”**<br>**VOICEOVER:**<br>**He was right, and black labour voted with its feet. There was much debate about how to solve the problem, some people even coming up with the answer.** |
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| 6 | Still photograph of Edward Rose<br><br>plus move | **EDWARD ROSE:**<br><br>**“As far as the Natives are concerned, the solution of the difficulty lies in better treatment, higher wages, healthier conditions of employment, given these there is no doubt that within a very short period of time the difficulty would solve itself.”** |
| 7 | Moving archive of Chamberlain at the Colonial Office in London | **VOICEOVER:**<br>**But no-one was inclined to listen to voices like Edward Rose’s. Even Joseph Chamberlain, then the Colonial Secretary, avoided the obvious and suggested some pretty odd solutions.**<br>**CHAMBERLAIN:**<br>**“The mines should provide a better diet, and amusements, such as merry-go-rounds, small circuses etc.”** |
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| 8 | Stills of white workers on the Rand, including mineworkers<br><br>Transvaal Weekly Leader articles about poor white men<br><br>Stills of white workers | **VOICEOVER:**<br><BRITISH ARMY MUSIC UNDER><br>**In fact, there was one absolutely available group of workers which could have filled the labour gap in the mines: white workers. Despite the stories of suicide and starvation and the hardships endured by ex-soldiers that appeared regularly in the Transvaal newspapers, mine owners were determined they wouldn't use white labour.**<br><PAUSE TO ABSORB HEADLINES, MUSIC UP><br>**They offered a number of excuses, but they all boiled down to this:**<br>**PERCY TARBUT:**<br><MUSIC FADING OUT><br>**"The feeling seems to be one of fear that, having a large number of white men employed on the Rand in the position of labourers the same troubles will arise as are now prevalent in the** |

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| | | **Australian colonies, viz, that by**<br><br>**combination the labour classes will become so strong as to be able to more or less dictate, not only on the question of wages but also on political questions, by the power of their votes when representative government is established."**<br>**VOICEOVER:**<br>**Percy Tarbut, Chairman of the London Board of directors of the Village Deep Mine. And so the mines started to look farther afield for their labour.** |
| 9 | Archive footage from China from the beginning of the 20th Century | <CHINESE MUSIC UP><br>**With the smart money on the Chinese, H. Ross Skinner was despatched by the Chamber of Mines to the Far East on a fact-finding mission.**<br><MUSIC UP FOR VISUAL |

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| | | MONTAGE><br><MUSIC FADES><br>**He found that Chinese labour would suit their purposes very well. Rural China had been pitifully impoverished by a series of natural disasters and a huge population surge.** |
| 10 | In vision interview<br><br>Strap: HERBERT WAN, SOAS | **HERBERT WAN:**<br>**“The Manchu regime was not able or willing to institute reforms and there was much political agitation. In the first decade of the twentieth century there were 16 attempts to overthrow the Qing dynasty. The Chinese weren’t strangers to indentured labour, they went to the Malay peninsula, and also Britain’s other colonies. Many leaders in the rural areas saw indentures in a foreign country as a welcome opportunity to relieve poverty in their areas.”** |

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| 11 | Stills of meeting between Chinese officials and British government officials | **VOICEOVER:**<br>**Because the Chinese government would not negotiate with a colony, but only with an imperial power, Britain's conservative government became involved. Had they known where this would lead them, they may very well have opted out from the beginning. News of the mines' interest in Chinese labour began to leak out and it wasn't universally welcomed.** |
| 12 | Mix through 3 stills of George Farrar | **The mining magnates began a campaign to win public support for the importation of Chinese labourers. Sir George Farrar said:**<br>**GEORGE FARRAR:**<br>**"These mines are the largest gold producers in the world, and it's absolutely absurd to think that they** |

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| | | **should be crippled for want of labour. Surely commonsense says that if you cannot get labour in Africa, you must get it elsewhere, and get to work."** |
| 13 | Moving archive of a gold mine<br><br>Transvaal Weekly Leader headline | **VOICEOVER:**<br>**There was no time to waste. The mines were crucial to the economy of the Transvaal, and the profits of the Randlords. So it's no surprise that the Transvaal Labour Commission, stacked with supporters of the mine owners, reported in favour of the importation. On the face of it, it seemed that many people were in favour. After all, the mining industry had a virtual monopoly of the media.**<br><BOERE MUSIEK UP><br>**There was one group, though, vehemently opposed to the importation. The Boer Generals.** |
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| 14 | Archive of Boer Generals in the field | **These old soldiers, bitterly resented the British government, and foreign capital.**<br><MUSIC UP FOR FILM MONTAGE, THEN FADE> |
| 15 | Interview in vision<br><br>Strap: PROFESSOR PHILIP BONNER, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND | **PROFESSOR BONNER:**<br>**"The Afrikaner Generals were already on the defensive against the Governor of the Transvaal, Alfred Milner. It seemed to them that he was aiming to completely destroy the Dutch language, and the education of the Afrikaners. It's possible that the Generals were out on a limb here. There's some evidence that ordinary Afrikaans farmers thought the importation had little to do with them. But, of course, the Generals had the ear of important opposition politicians in the British Parliament."** |
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| 16 | Still of Boer Generals. Shot pans across to find Louis Botha them zooms into him | **LOUIS BOTHA:**<br>**"My conviction is that this should be white labour, and that the worst day's work that could be done for South Africa will be to add to its black population with its insoluble problems a yellow population with still more insoluble problems….It must also be borne in mind that the great majority of the white population of South Africa are firmly opposed to the importation of Asiatic labour."**<br>**VOICEOVER:**<br>**Louis Botha who would, in a few years time, and partly because of the Chinese, become the Prime Minister of the whole, united, country.** |
| 17 | Mix through selection of Boonzaaier cartoons from 'Mandarin Milner and the | **There certainly were a lot of voices raised against the importation. The Cape Colony, then a separate entity to** |

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| | Magnates' | **the Transvaal, deplored the idea and later went on the enact laws to ensure that no Chinese people could be employed or live in the Colony.**<br>**Even other countries became involved.**<br>**The premier of New Zealand sent a telegram to Milner:** |
| 18 | Pan across telegram from archive | **PREMIER:**<br>**"Government of New Zealand is convinced that practical prohibition of Chinese immigration imperatively required STOP Government of New Zealand foresees grave perils, racial, social, political, and sanitary, induced by alien influx STOP"** |
| 19 | Archive of Milner | **VOICEOVER:**<br>**But Milner was unstoppable.**<br>**MILNER:**<br>**"I think there is very little doubt now that it will come to Chinamen in time. It would release an immense quantity** |

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| | | **of niggers for agriculture etc, which they much prefer, and I think it ought to be perfectly possible to keep the yellow men for unskilled labour pure and simple, and to ship them home again when they have done it."** |
| 20 | In vision interview<br><br>Strap: PETER STANSKY, STANFORD UNIVERSITY | **PETER STANSKY:**<br>**"The British public and political parties had three responses to the planned importation: that it was a betrayal of the white working man; that it was cruel slavery of the Chinese; that it would expose the colony to the dreaded 'yellow peril'. And sometimes all three at once. For a section of the Liberal Party, it became a good stick to beat the government with. Plans to use the Chinese strengthened the temporary friendship of the British opposition and the defeated Boers."** |
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| 21 | Specially filmed footage of Emily Hobhouse statue | **VOICEOVER:**<br>**Emily Hobhouse, who had returned to Britain after becoming a heroine to the Afrikaners during the war, wrote to Jan Smuts after the Transvaal government had passed the Ordinance allowing the importation:**<br>**EMILY HOBHOUSE:**<br>**"In spite of the passing of the Ordinance, we are continuing with the fight. Not a day passes without meetings of protest all over the country, and petitions and resolutions against it come in to the Colonial office at the rate of fifty a day."**<br>**VOICEOVER:**<br>**But despite all objections, the importation began.** |
| 22 | In vision interview<br><br>Strap: MELANIE YAP, SOUTH | **MELANIE YAP:**<br>**"Workers were brought in on a three year contract. They were restricted to the area of the mine and could leave** |

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| | AFRICAN CHINESE AUTHOR | **for only a maximum of 48 hours to a specific destination, and only with permission. They could only work on the mines, and only in selected occupations. In fact, to appease white anger, 55 skilled jobs were reserved for white people. What the contract didn't do was specify a rate of pay, or the hours of work, a loophole that would be taken advantage of by the employers."** |
| 23 | Chinese archive of activity at a Treaty port, slow mix through to the map of China with the names of the major recruiting centres animating, first in the south, then in the north. | <CHINESE MUSIC UP><br><MUSIC FADES><br>**VOICEOVER:**<br>**Recruitment was initially concentrated on the southern areas of China, but it soon ran into trouble. The southern Chinese were targets of recruiters from many different industries and countries, and the South Africans had little luck. They accused rival firms of spreading rumours about them, and** |

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| | | **writing bad reports in the press. But it wasn't just the recruiters – Johannesburg's established Chinese community had posted warnings in newspapers.** |
| 24 | In vision interview | **MELANIE YAP:**<br>**"There were already around 900 Chinese in Johannesburg at the time, working as shopkeepers, or laundrymen. They were opposed to the importation because they saw it wouldn't be good for their own position in the society. So they sent letters back to China, and posted adverts in the press back home to warn prospective miners of the racism they would encounter. They also emphasised the dangers of the goldmines."** |
| 25 | Stills of Chinese recruits | **VOICEOVER:** |

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| | CU of detail on photographs | **So the focus for recruitment shifted to the north. The one great disadvantage of this was that none of the labour agents employed by the mines could actually speak the northern language, Mandarin.**<br>**Recruitment was not as fast as the mines would have liked. The recruits were held at the ports for several examinations by doctors. The wait could be as long as weeks.**<br>**Once it was confirmed that the prospective workers had no infectious diseases, they were bathed in disinfectant and given their clothing – a straw hat, wadded jacket and trousers, socks and shoes. The outfit cost eight dollars, and that was taken out of their first advance wages.**<br>**Workers were then interviewed, asked to sign a contract, and taken to the ship. They were only asked one thing:** |

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| | | **Question: What kind of work is it?**<br>**Answer:**<br>**Mining. There's no doubt that many of them had no idea of what work or conditions awaited them in Johannesburg.** |
| 26 | Stills of Chinese awaiting embarkation | <FX BOAT HORN><br>**BRAZIER:**<br>**"It is more than possible that among the first shipload or two, in the haste and confusion in which they were engaged and embarked, some of the coolies did not fully understand the object of their going over, other than that they were going to get food, housing, and wages in exchange for work."**<br>**VOICEOVER:**<br>**J R Brazier, General Manager of the Importation for the Chamber of Mines, writing in November 1906.** |
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| 27 | Stills of steamers | **The first shipload of miners left Hong Kong on the 25th of May 1904. On board were 1055 men. Behaviour on the ship was bad, leading the ship's surgeon to call them 'a lot of pirates'. The crimes they committed included gambling, drunkenness, opium smoking, fighting, and suicide. It was quickly decided to alter the route the ships took in order to make a stop at British controlled Singapore so troublemakers could be offloaded.** |
| 28 | Specially shot footage Jacob's camp today | <SOUTH AFRICAN MUSIC> |
| 29 | Archive stills of Jacob's camp | **The ships docked in South Africa at Jacob's Camp in Durban. The huts had originally been built as a concentration camp for Boer prisoners during the Boer War. The miners were once again checked out by doctors before making their way, by train, to** |

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| | | **the gold fields of the Witwatersrand.** |
| 30 | Specially shot travelling shots from steam train as it travels from Durban to the Witwatersrand | <HYBRID SA/CHINESE UPBEAT MUSIC> |
| 31 | Specially shot location footage of Simmer and Jack mine today. Last shot is the sign over the entrance. Mix through to still of same entrance taken in 1904. | <MUSIC FADES> |
| 32 | Archive stills of living conditions | **Living conditions on the mines were very basic but, ironically, better than those provided for Black miners. They were housed in dormitories where the bunks measured 2'6" by 6'3". In those bunks they were to store all their belongings, and sleep. They were fed rice, dried or fresh fish or meat, nut oil, and vegetables. Two meals a day were provided, and sometimes tea and bread underground.** |

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| 33 | Mix through archive stills from underground | <FX DRILLS AND MINING SOUNDS> |
| 34 | Archive stills of Chinese underground | **Conditions down the mines were not so convivial. The Chinese were contracted to work 10 hours a day, 6 days a week, and they weren't welcomed by the miners already working underground.**<br>**The Foreign Labour Department reported that white miners often thought a blow or the application of a heavy boot was the most efficient means of communicating. The fact that no white people could speak Mandarin made communication very difficult.**<br>**Poor understanding often led to tragedy. Many of the Chinese had never been down a mine before, never drilled into hard rock, and never used dynamite.**<br>**There was often no escape from violence above the ground either.** |

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| 35 | In vision interview<br><br>Strap: GARY KYNOCH<br>DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY | **GARY KYNOCH:**<br>**“The mine managements relied heavily on Chinese headmen and police, who often used their position for their own benefits. There’s evidence that the police dealt in opium, were paid-off by gambling rings, took bribes. They were generally feared by the workers. Many complaints were made against the police, despite the fact that the petition boxes were placed near the police quarters. Most complained the police beat them, or extorted money from them.”** |
| 36 | Drawing of worker in dock | **VOICEOVER:**<br>**One worker convicted of a crime begged the court to send him to jail. Han Woo pointed to a policeman, and saying that the policeman owed him money and has threatened to kill him, he asked not to be sent back to the** |

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| | | **mine. He would rather spend the rest of his indentures in jail. Such was the fear the Chinese police inspired.** |
| 37 | Frank Boland's pamphlet, and his drawing of punishments | **Mine managers took the law into their own hands. Despite assurances that corporal punishment would not be inflicted without recourse to the courts, workers were flogged. A journalist, Frank Boland, published sensational descriptions of the methods of punishment in the Morning Leader, which sparked and outcry, especially in Britain. Lord Milner, who by then had returned to the UK, was blamed for the practice, and censured in the House of Commons – though the censure was cushioned in the mildest terms.**<br>**The Chinese weren't familiar with the workings of Western courts and were confused by the idea of prosecution and defence. They often didn't** |

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| | | **understand the charges against them.**<br><br>**And they seldom got a fair trial.** |
| 38 | Mix through drawings of Chinese prisoners in chains | **E C MAYERS:**<br>**"Coolie number 21696 came to me to make a complaint: he had one eye and cheek bruised and the skin had been torn in several places on his head: he said this had been done by his white boss, one Stewart. I laid a charge against Stewart for assault. The case was heard by the Assistant Resident Magistrate at Boksburg, and though collie number 21696 had two witnesses who swore to witnessing the assault, and though coolie number 21696 bore considerable marks of violence, the case was discharged. This is by no means an isolated instance: my experience here for one year has convinced me that it is impossible to obtain justice for a Chinese coolie in** |

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| | | **the Court at Boksburg."**<br>**VOICEOVER:**<br>**E C Mayers, who was supervisor and controller of the Chinese workers on one of the mines.** |
| 39 | Specially shot footage of Chinese graveyard | <MOOD MUSIC UP> |
| 40 | Graveyard shots continue | **Many workers were executed – though the records are sketchy as to numbers. Even in death the Chinese weren't safe from the attentions of those who saw them as exotic. An affidavit from a white prisoner says:**<br>**PRISONER:**<br>**"Two Chinamen were hanged together. After the post mortem examination of the bodies, one of the Chinamen, whose pigtail was very small, was buried without being interfered with. The other Chinaman, who had a better pigtail, which also** |

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| | | **had not been removed before execution, was completely and entirely scalped. On coming out of jail I went to the Chinese consul at his private house in Johannesburg. I told him the whole story. He said, I will not believe you. This is not an act of England, this is a barbarous act."**<br><MUSIC FADE OUT><br>**VOICEOVER:**<br>**The Chinese were also involved in frequent labour disputes with mine management.** |
| 41 | Interview in vision | **GARY KYNOCH**:<br>**"Mine managers constantly sought ways to lower wages, which led to strikes and violence. One of the last confrontations, in 1909, was amongst the bloodiest. While miners were negotiating with the manager about the Chinese New Year holidays to which they were entitled, a white** |

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| | | **guard called Evans started hitting**<br><br>**bystanders with a stick. This inflamed the miners. Police tried to disperse them with fire hoses, but the Chinese fought back. When police reinforcements arrived, they stormed the compound and opened fire. Seven miners were killed."** |
| 42 | Archive stills of Chinese at leisure | **VOICEOVER:**<br>**When they weren't working, the Chinese had little to amuse themselves with. They enjoyed window shopping, and were often seen in the streets around the mines on bicycles. Some festivals and competitions were organised, especially around the Chinese New Year.**<br><MUSIC UP TO COVER MONTAGE> |
| 43 | Specially shot footage of Fox | **Although they were allowed to bring** |

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| | Street as it is today, mix through to archive still | **their wives with them to South Africa, only 2 did. As a result there was much anxiety about the Chinese corrupting local women. One notorious incident saw 200 Chinese men waiting in a courtyard of the house at number 8 Fox Street for the attentions of two women. Police broke up the party, and the resulting righteous indignation kept the Chinese on a tight lease from then on.** |
| 44 | Archive stills of Chinese theatre | <CHINESE OPERA MUSIC> |
| 45 | Archive stills of Chinese theatrical performances on mines | **On festivals the workers entertained each other with traditional Chinese opera. But because of rumours that circulated about homosexual activity, the theatres were closed, and over a hundred 'actors' were repatriated to China.** |
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| 46 | Archive stills of gambling | **The most popular pastimes by far were gambling and opium smoking. Both ruinous hobbies. Opium overdoses counted for many deaths, and gambling led to debts that could never be paid.** |
| 47 | In vision interview | **PROFESSOR BONNER:**<br>**“There were only a few ways to escape the creditors. They could get themselves sent to prison, or commit suicide, or desert from the mine. One miner who owed a lot of money managed to get himself into jail, but on the day he was to have been freed he plunged a knife into his chest so he didn’t have to go back to the mine. Records, which are incomplete, give the number of suicides in four years as 124. But many deaths that were recorded as opium overdoses or accidents could very likely have been** |

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| | | **related to gambling debts."** |
| 48 | Specially shot location – veld around a mine, starting at headgear and then circling out from there | <VELD MUSIC UP> |
| 49 | Tracking shots across veld | **VOICEOVER:**<br>**Large numbers of Chinese deserted. Some tried to make their way home – in fact, one miner made money from selling maps which he said showed the overland route back to China. Some deserters just could not stand life on the mines, many of them were avoiding creditors. They were difficult to miss out on the veld, and so they tended to sleep by day, and at night would steal from farms or houses.**<br>**Their criminal activities soon prompted an hysterical reaction in the community. A pamphlet, 'John Chinaman on the Rand' whipped up the fright.** |

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| 50 | 'John Chinaman on the Rand' pamphlet and illustrations | **JOHN CHINAMAN ON THE RAND: "The yellow man has made his name a terror. He has murdered, raped, robbed, and committed every offence against law and morality. He has literally terrorised – and still terrorises the Rand. The plutocrat Jew walks the familiar streets in a state of trepidation; the Boer farmer sleeps with a rifle by his side. The life of no white man is safe, and the honour of no white woman."** |
| 51 | Montage of newspapers headlines from the *Transvaal Weekly Leader* and *Rand Daily Mail* | **VOICEOVER: The newspapers soon printed headlines which screamed Outrage! 'ROVING CHINESE – AN EXCITING CHASE!' 'ALARMING OUTRAGE!' The reaction was out of all proportion to the crimes. In the entire period of six years only 4 white people were killed,** |

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| | | **along with a few Indians and Blacks –**<br><br>**whose numbers the newspapers didn't feel it necessary to reflect.**<br>**Nevertheless, such was the outcry that people in outlying areas were provided with rifles to protect themselves, and a number of Boers formed vigilante groups which scoured the veld looking for any wandering Chinese.** |
| 52 | Miners' petition | **The truth was not quite so exciting.**<br>**The vast majority of Chinese were law-abiding, and afraid that all the bad publicity would lose them their jobs.**<br>**On one mine the miners desperately signed a petition, which they gave to the manager.**<br>**MINER:**<br>**"We beg for forgiveness. All the boys have signed this petition, and ask that in future they may be beaten severely for all transgressions; and even if** |

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| | | **beaten to death, this clause holds the manager free and guiltless."** |
| 53 | Cartoons from the period about the Outrages | **VOICEOVER:**<br>**The well-publicised outrages played straight into the hands of the Boer generals and the workers who had opposed the importation. They held public meeting and encouraged people to call for an end to the experiment.**<br><FX OF ANGRY CROWDS> |
| 54 | Cartoons from Britain, including the famous image of dead British soldiers watching a line of Chinese workers chained together | **In this they were helped by the Liberal party in Britain. The opposition party to the Conservatives in power, they had won several by-elections on the strength of their stance on the Chinese miners. They claimed the importation was nothing more than slavery, and at other times berated the mine-owners for bringing in foreign labour when there were plenty of British ex-soldiers** |

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| | | **in the Colony who had no work.**<br><br>**The outrages were the last straw.** |
| 55 | Archive moving footage of the new government in Britain 1905 | **The Conservative government was ousted, and the Liberals were back in power in Britain with the largest parliamentary majority since 1832.**<br><FX REACTION TO CHANGE><br>**The change of government in Britain, partly caused by the Chinese question, had huge ramifications for South Africa, and for the Chinese miners.**<br>**The Liberal party granted the South African colonies 'Responsible Government', and they immediately suspended the Chinese importation.** |
| 56 | Archive stills of the new Transvaal government | **The Boer generals no doubt rubbed their hands with glee. They only had to wait a year, until 1907, before they found themselves in government in the** |

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| | | **Transvaal. And one of the first acts of that government was to order that all Chinese contracts be cancelled, and the workers repatriated as soon as possible.** |
| 57 | Montage of Chinese workers looking at proclamations | <CHINESE MUSIC UP> |
| 58 | Archive stills of miners in groups | **The workers did not want to leave. They knew finding work back in China would be very difficult, and so the mines received petition after petition asking for contracts to be completed, for extensions to be granted. All requests were turned down.** |
| 59 | Article in the Transvaal Weekly Leader | **At this point, the newspapers did a surprising about face. The editorial pages were no longer full of Chinese crime. Now the editors rushed to condemn the hasty repatriation, and** |

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| | | **filled their pages with astonishing new sentiments.**<br>**TRANSVAAL WEEKLY LEADER:**<br>**"It is difficult to assign any good and sufficient reason for the action which the government have decided to adopt. We have on these fields 50 000 Chinese, docile, industrious, and as the comparative criminal statistics have shown, law-abiding workers."** |
| 60 | Archive stills of the Chinese preparing to go home | <MOURNFUL CHINESE MUSIC UP> |
| 61 | Archive stills of Chinese leaving | **VOICEOVER:**<br>**The mine-owners didn't fight very hard to keep the Chinese. They had done their job. In seven years the indentured workers had turned the mines around. They doubled production, increasing profits enormously. And while they were** |

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| | Archive stills of Blacks on the mines | **working, something else had happened which made them less than necessary. Blacks had started to return to the mines. And this time they had no bargaining power, and had to accept the lower wages the mines were offering. As the South African historian Donald Denoon said in 1956, the black migrant labourers were ultimately ensnared in one of the golden laws of South African affairs, which states that every white bargain must be sealed by an African sacrifice.** |
| 62 | Archive stills of Chinese boarding trains | **The Chinese were shipped home. Just as the last shiploads were being prepared, the authorities realised that there were convicts in prison serving terms which would release them after the last boat had sailed. So keen were they to rid themselves of all the Chinese that all prisoners were sent** |

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| | Archive stills of exhumation and cremation | **back on the second last ship, some pardoned, others bound for jail in Malaysia.**<br>**By February 1910 all the miners had been repatriated. There were rumours that a few had managed to escape notice, and lived out their lives hiding in non-white areas around the city, but the rumours have never been proved.**<br>**Almost all 65 000 are accounted for, including over 3000 who had died on the Rand, and whose bodies were exhumed and cremated so their ashes could be returned to China.**<br>**What happened to them all when they got home to a land that would, for the next 40 years, be in a state of chaos and upheaval, is not known.** |
| 63 | Specially shot location – deserted mine | <PLAINTIVE MUSIC UP> |
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| 64 | Specially shot location – camera<br><br>moves through dereliction of mine | **They effectively disappeared. They**<br><br>**travelled almost seven thousand miles from home and saved the Transvaal economy, forming the basis for the most stable economy in Africa. They helped bring down a British government, and create home rule in South Africa.**<br><WIND FX IN><br>**Their employment brought 'job reservation' into the business vocabulary in South Africa – a system that was to blight the country for the next 100 years, and helped refine the procedure of migrant labour, under which black miners were to toil for the rest of the century.**<br>**We never knew their names, only the numbers they were given. In China they are great-grandfathers, probably vaguely remembered, whose endeavours have been lost in the mists** |

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| | | **of time.** |
| 65 | Slow mix through stack on individual faces in archive photos<br><br>As the last few photos remain the shot widens and the wind blows the last few photographs away and out of shot, leaving the camera looking down at the bare ground. | **Perhaps Liu Shun Hai's ashes were returned to his family, perhaps not. Maybe they never knew what became of him, their brother and nephew, hanged so far from home.**<br>**LIU SHUN HAI:**<br>**"This with bent head from the humble brother Liu Shun Hai. To my uncle and aunt: May ten thousand blessings of peace and happiness render your precious persons strong and robust. This with bent head is the humble entreaty of your unfilial nephew Lui Shun Hai. May peace be divided between all my family. My nine brothers do not grieve when you hear the news: tell all to the leader. The gratitude felt will move my heart although in Hades."**<br><WIND FX UP><br><CHINESE MUSIC UP> |

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