

Book Review

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The Origins of China's Awareness of New Zealand 1674-1911, by William Tai Yuen, published by New Zealand Asia Institute The University of Auckland, 2005, 202 pages, ISBN 0-473-10424-5

This is a pioneering work on the sources and processes of China's awareness of New Zealand from 1674 to 1911 and China's diplomatic drive for the establishment of a Chinese Consulate in New Zealand as a response to accumulated awareness of the plight of Chinese in New Zealand under an increasingly hostile anti-Chinese immigration policy. The book also examines Chinese immigration and settlement in New Zealand from the 1860s and contributions of New Zealanders in China from the 1890s as new and valuable sources for the Chinese decision-makers at the top and for the general Chinese population at the grassroots. In the development of Sino-New Zealand relations, the importance of Chinese tea trade which benefited both the New Zealand consumers and Chinese tea traders and exporters has been given due analysis. In the conclusion, William Tai Yuen hopes that his work "may help us understand that the enormous goodwill of the Chinese people towards New Zealand today has grown out of a long and tortuous process in which generations of New Zealanders have made their contribution" (p.130).

William Tai Yuen is exceptionally well-suited to pioneering such a historical study of Sino-New Zealand relations because of his various skills and his own life experiences. His ability to use both Chinese and English-language sources gives him an edge over mono-lingual specialists. Besides, his keen interest in geography, especially historical maps, has enabled him to use Ferdinand Verbiest's 1674 world map as a starting point for the origins of China's awareness of New Zealand. Moreover, his life experiences in Hong

Kong, Singapore and New Zealand have allowed him to write the early history of Sino-New Zealand relations with humility, sensitivity and poise. Finally, his analytical mind and lucid writing skills have made this publication a readable and enjoyable piece of work.

William Tai Yuen's work has broken new grounds in various areas of Sino-New Zealand history. First, the use of Verbiest's 1674 world map as a starting point has no doubt extended the history of Sino-New Zealand relations by at least 150 years. Second, a detailed account of the complex and protracted diplomatic drive to establish a Chinese Consulate in the late Qing is a contribution to the history of Chinese diplomacy. Third, the rise and fall of China's tea trade with New Zealand is a fascinating piece of good economics history analysis and writing. Fourth, a well-documented investigation into the role and contributions of New Zealanders in China since the 1890s is most fitting as a counterbalance to the Chinese endeavours in New Zealand. Alexander Don founded the Canton Villages Mission in 1898 to provide religious, educational and medical services until 1949, an effort greatly appreciated by the Chinese people.

However, there is one area which involves Chinese settlement in New Zealand and their living experiences that may need stronger amplification and higher profiling. For example, did the Chinese in New Zealand become Christian converts as did some of their Australian Chinese compatriots? Were there a political awakening and political disunity among New Zealand Chinese in the late Qing over political issues of reform, revolution and preservation of the monarchy? The issue of the emergence of a commercial elite in the 1880s in New Zealand (p.56) as posed by the author begs questions of capital accumulation, entrepreneurship, financial resources and areas where wealth was made. A more detailed profiling of Choei Sew Hoy, Chew Chong, Benjamin Wong Tape and Louis Kitt as the influential commercial elite may highlight the success story of some of the Chinese in New Zealand during the late Qing era. As opium trade and marketing were most lucrative among the Australian and Southeast Asian Chinese, to what extent were the New Zealand Chinese involved? Thus, some statistics of opium import from China, New South Wales and Victoria would be useful to shed light on New Zealand Chinese lifestyle and business experiences. As workers and businessmen, New Zealand Chinese contribution to the wellbeing of the New Zealand society should be acknowledged in the concluding chapter.

William Tai Yuen should be warmly congratulated for pioneering such a challenging historical project and producing such a delightful and colourful publication with numerous maps, illustrations and translated historical documents. Thanks to William Tai Yuen, his work will fill an important gap in the literature of Sino-New Zealand relations and of Chinese community in New Zealand.