Chinese PLACES: ETHNOGRAPHY AND LANDSCAPE

Chris McConville and Keir Reeves

Abstract

Chinese immigrants and especially the Chinese on the goldfields of Victoria, now figure centrally in history curricula and in heritage and tourist promotions most prominently of course, through Bendigo’s Chinese Heritage Precinct and the Gum San Heritage Centre in Ararat. These public representations of nineteenth-century diversity draw equally from a reflexive, culturally-informed historiography and a radically transformed popular culture in Australia, Victoria in particular (Waterhouse 2009: 11–14). No doubt, when heritage analysis of the central goldfields was first systematised, following the Victorian Historic Buildings Act (1974) and a subsequent sequence of municipal conservation studies, the Chinese appeared as something of a curiosity, on the margins of the enterprise of mining and peripheral to the heritage of goldfields towns (Davison 1991). Only after decades of research and widening perceptions of what could be properly classed as heritage, has Chinese settlement emerged as critical to assessment and interpretation, and of course heritage tourism, within townships as well as in state forests and national parks. Perhaps coincidentally this interest in Chinese heritage parallels a revival of Chinese immigration to Australia, in a broad view, comparable to the peaks of the nineteenth-century gold era. And yet, in part because so many remnants of the work of Chinese settlers have been erased, and their intricate mining systems fragmented, these sites unintentionally revert to the status occupied years ago by their creators – as eccentric curiosities.

Introduction

We are aware now that Chinese diggers were far more numerous on the goldfields than such a thin scattering of heritage sites would suggest. In 1866 more than a decade after the great rushes, 20 000 Chinese were still mining in Victoria (Mines Department, Victoria 1866). We know that the Chinese who came to dig for gold were able to carry out essential tasks in mining towns and farmlands, from paramedics (herbalists), labourers in farming and forestry, to entrepreneurs in storekeeping and market gardening. An admirable career was forged for example by Chun Kau (Ah Kau) who mined for tin in Tasmania, ran a general store in Launceston and then served the unwell as a herbalist in Melbourne. Two of his children were graduates of the University of Melbourne, in law and medicine (Tasmanian Cyclopedia 1931; Liew 1979). Kau and his tertiary-educated children thus completed a journey of upward social mobility delayed amongst European miners for additional generations. Rather than continuing on as fossickers into the 1860s and 1870s a few Chinese diggers progressed to become mining investors. They formed companies and worked to business principles, often with great success. The Chinese miners around Dunolly, where in 1861 a quarter of the mining population were Chinese, sought out lucrative deposits, especially in later rushes like that at Gipsy Flat. In 1868, according to James Flett (1956: 159), ‘one Chinese Company near Tweedale Street found so much gold there that they staged firework shows nightly for a week’.

As our accounts of heritage migrate from individual sites to broader ensembles of built and natural elements, it may be possible to see the Chinese in wider perspective – as figures in and creators of – the goldfields’ ethnographic landscape. In this way their brief but significant prominence in mining may be given appropriate recognition, a task impossible if we deal with Chinese heritage site by site – over a region in which the traces of Chinese activity have been aggressively erased. In bringing some appropriate recognition to Chinese settlers across diverse mining, agricultural and urban regions, we might ask: ‘How far can the concepts of ethnography and cultural landscape take us?’. This paper then pursues notions of heritage landscape, in particular the World Heritage sense of an associative landscape (Rössler 2000) and applies this to Chinese mining and other material remnants on the Victorian goldfields, reflecting on Heritage Victoria’s guidelines for cultural landscape (Heritage Victoria 2009). The article appraises the manner in which Chinese sites were introduced into heritage discussion by way of thematic analysis; it considers the relation of sites to the underlying pattern of historical themes critical to heritage and the utility of considering Chinese-related sites through ethnography and as a cultural landscape. It is argued here that the significance of Chinese migration, mining and settlement can be more prominently registered in goldfields heritage through an ethnographic response to cultural landscape assessment and interpretation, rather than by retaining an emphasis on individual sites.

The Chinese: initial heritage responses

Heritage interest in the Victorian goldfields emerged from two directions: on the one hand it was driven by an industrial history perspective in which little space was available for cultural or social considerations. The technicalities of mining, in detailed inventories of sites (especially those with machinery relics) brought mining remnants directly into heritage discussion. On the other hand this interest in mining stemmed outwards from ideas about urban conservation and the designation by the National Trust of ‘notable towns’. The difficult process of locating and documenting mining machinery in often difficult forest terrain (and with no such thing as a hand-held GPS) no doubt exposed industrial historians to the inter-relation between natural and built heritage, whilst an emphasis on technical detail and industrial organisation continued to underscore identification and listing processes (for an example of these finely grained specialist reports, see Milner 1988).

Goldfields townships had already won interest and it was a mining town, Maldon, rather than mining itself which produced the National Trust’s major listing of a small town as an urban conservation zone (the Trust listed Maldon as a ‘notable town’ in 1966, after previous interest in Yackandandah; see Lewis & Morton 1983). When local historians turned to other towns that
had once supported waves of Chinese miners, they struggled to identify individual sites significant to the Chinese history of the place (Butcher & Flanders 1987). So in a detailed Trust-sponsored local study of a major goldfields town, Butcher and Flanders (1987: 47) were able to identify the offices of Lamsey, a Chinese doctor, in Farmer’s Lane Bendigo. Only on the very last page of their survey could they present readers with a second reference to the Chinese and this in a very broad and generalised statement about burning towers at cemeteries (155). In fact it was in metropolitan Melbourne rather than the goldfields townships that Chinese life won historical and heritage interest (McConville 1985; Melbourne City Council 1985; Butler 1989; Nicholas & Sheehan 2002).

Even in municipal conservation studies of areas once shaped by Chinese miners there were few remnants to be highlighted. The Ararat conservation study for example made clear in its historical survey that the region owed its mining successes to Chinese miners. The survey deliberately emphasised cultural diversity and migration – singling out the rich landscape and diverse structures created by European winemakers. It could do little more than point to sites of discovery rather than propose distinctively Chinese structures for heritage listing (Hubbard & Pawsey 1994). In fact Chinese immigrants seemed to figure more highly in the most unexpected places – areas some distance from the goldfields which had first drawn them to Australia. So in the Shire of Wentworth Heritage Survey, we find references to John Gegge a river steamship owner and Chinese emigrant who left the goldfields behind, went inland, and supplied vegetables to pastoral stations (Shire of Wentworth 2002-08).

**From town and machine to landscape**

In extending heritage concerns from mining machinery and notable towns to the wider landscape, practitioners eventually brought Chinese settlers into a marginally more consistent focus, often by way of thematic analysis. Drawing on knowledge of North American National Parks’ heritage presentation and Hoskins’ seminal interpretation of the English landscape, (Hoskins 1955) Jane Lennon staked a claim for a goldfields cultural landscape incorporating Chinese sites by way of historical themes. She noted at one of the more influential conferences on goldfields heritage that ‘the landscape appears to be written as a kind of code and deciphering that code can give great pleasure to the skilled historian and the sensitive traveller alike’ (Lennon 1989: 19).

Lennon emphasised routes through the landscape by which diverse sites such as commissioners’ camps, gold escort stops and Chinese market gardens could be thematically connected. Elsewhere at this conference, historians took up a range of goldfields themes. In none of them did the Chinese seem to figure highly. The emphasis on economic phases – mining and agriculture, themes of mobility, migration, social and cultural institutions, all provide scope for listing places representative of Chinese life. Between them the Victorian Heritage database and the Register of the National Trust include a number of places which directly reflected mining. One exception perhaps is the investigation of the Ironbark Camp precinct in Bendigo (Frost et al. 2007: 9-11; for an extended discussion of Ironbark Village see Valerie Lovejoy’s article in this edition). The historic themes regulating state heritage in Victoria make much of activities in which we might expect the Chinese to figure highly. The emphasis on economic phases – mining and agriculture, themes of mobility, migration, social and cultural institutions, all provide scope for listing places representative of Chinese life.

**Chinese miners and state heritage**

Historians may have successfully unearthed traces of cultural reciprocity, but when local councils or residents sought out Chinese sites for nomination to state registers, they were hard-pressed to find many such sites, especially places which directly reflected mining. One exception perhaps is the investigation of the Ironbark Camp precinct in Bendigo (Frost et al. 2007: 9-11; for an extended discussion of Ironbark Village see Valerie Lovejoy’s article in this edition). The historic themes regulating state heritage in Victoria make much of activities in which we might expect the Chinese to figure highly. The emphasis on economic phases – mining and agriculture, themes of mobility, migration, social and cultural institutions, all provide scope for listing places representative of Chinese life. Between them the Victorian Heritage database and the Register of the National Trust include a number of places whose significance rests on their connection to Chinese settlement on the goldfields. Several are funerary sites. A few are related to mining and some are agricultural sites. In suburban Melbourne, beyond Little Bourke St, there are also a number of prefabricated ‘Singapore’ cottages imported from south-east Asia. The most common sites both within and away

**Inter-cultural complexity**

Historians have spent a good deal of effort since the later-1980s, and more intensely since 2000, in correcting this normalised depiction of constant and unremitting antagonism between the Chinese and others on the goldfields - a search for what one group of researchers has called a more balanced interpretation, moving beyond fundamental antipathy (Goodman 2001; Mayne 2003; Rasmussen 2004; Roper, 1986; Reeves 2004; Reeves & Nichols 2008; Reeves & Wong Hoy 2008). These historians hardly reconciled themselves to Westgarth’s condemnation, although their efforts in painting a more nuanced relationship, worthy in itself, may have helped avoid engaging with fragmentation in the material form of Chinese life. For despite historiographical reassessment, heritage analysis has been left with few sites through which to take up Lennon’s suggestion and decode the environment thematically.

As mining populations declined and mining towns decayed, Chinese settlements were levelled and Chinese grave sites in local cemeteries abandoned. The shrunk Chinese ‘camps’ were set alight – Maryborough’s Chinatown – situated in a central position in town and whose ‘removal more than once has been suggested’ was set on fire in 1897 (Argus 1897); the Chinese camp at Rutherglen burned to the ground in 1914 (the twelve buildings were lightly built and fired speedily noted an unremotive reporter (Argus 1914)); the Beaufort camp in 1898.

Survivors from these waves of burnings were destroyed by the mid-20th century, to make way for urban ‘beautification’ – crudely landscaped parks in other words. Cantonese text on storefronts has been written over and shops passed on to Europeans. Often, around towns which once sustained large Chinese minorities, the last potentially distinctive elements of heritage are Chinese mines and even here there remain somewhat fruitless disputes about the originators of ‘round’ as against rectangular shaft digging. As these old mining districts emerge from a long twentieth century atrophy, and are metabolised into fashionable tourist destinations and distinctive heritage areas, new residents interested in diversity and cultural difference are too often disappointed in finding that Chinese heritage remnants are thin on the ground.
from the goldfields however are religious structures. Together these do not come however a picture of Chinese life. The mines where Chinese worked are too indistinct; the cemetery architecture was for Chinese who missed the essential theme of their migration – to garner wealth in Australia and return to China (Hu Jin 2005). The sites listed on state heritage registers reflect then a number of themes, but the majority have nothing to do with mining and about half are in non-mining regions. As seems often the case in thematic heritage frameworks, the very tabulation of ‘significant’ and influential themes may well serve to marginalise minority cultures and short-term, derivative economic activities – the Chinese reworking of abandoned leads being a prime example.

**CHINESE HERITAGE SITES: VICTORIAN STATE REGISTERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funeral burning towers cemetery architecture</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/community/religious structures</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business commercial premises</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilns brickworkings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential/camp sites</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming/market gardening/gardens</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining related</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>59</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1* Source: Heritage Council of Victoria 2010

Figures here have been adjusted where there are sites with two or more types of place: market gardens and kilns on the same listing for example.

In most cases the non-metropolitan heritage sites in this table could not be supported by any detailed historical anchoring or a persuasive and direct statement of significance. To take one example, the Buckland cemetery is presented in the most general terms, with some account of siting and natural vegetation and then an admission that little is known about the history of the place. As described by its citation:

The site is a steeply sloping block with a vegetation cover combining grass, mature eucalyptus trees and blackberry/scrub. There are no surface indications of archaeological features, but remote sensing has identified the location of approximately 50 potential burials associated with 19th-century Chinese miners ... Little is known of the history of the site. The only documentary evidence of it is a note on an 1882 Lands Dept. Map referring to ‘Chinese graves’. The cemetery had apparently already fallen into disuse by that time, and probably dates to the 1850s and 1860s when the gold rush was at its height in the Buckland. Local residents state that there were once Chinese burial markers on the site, but these were removed in the 1960s (Heritage Victoria 2010).

**A Chinese landscape in the goldfields**

How might a notion of landscape help us with this impasse – of demonstrating the significance of Chinese mining whilst having no more than a handful of fragmented sites and minimal historical data so as to present this significance through material form? For it does seem that distinguishing sites by thematic category serves only to demonstrate how little of Chinese life is represented on registers. The problem is compounded at local level, where themes like mining, farming; town building etc. must inevitably marginalise the activities, economic and cultural, of minorities. An exception in goldfields regions is perhaps the heritage (and tourist) representation of German, Italian and French viticulture of the Grampians region. And yet in highlighting this theme, heritage conservation and interpretation diminish the critical role of Chinese miners, some of whom went on to work in vineyards (routinely described as ‘harvest workers’) around Great Western and Ararat.

The Victorian Heritage Council has developed its own substantive guidelines on landscape assessment. These begin with standard references to UNESCO and the Burra Charter and the UNESCO division between designed landscape, organically-evolved landscape and associative landscapes (Heritage Victoria 2009). The initial difficulty we face in using these guidelines is that the sites of Chinese settlement span all three categories. If considered within one of these, they are almost certainly insufficiently robust to meet threshold standards for registration, even at a local level. Cemeteries for example are listed by Heritage Victoria as ‘designed landscapes’; goldfield mining sites fit within the organically-evolved (otherwise vernacular) landscape type and sites associated with cultural activities which may include Chinese camps or other places where material evidence has vanished are best designated as associative. The surviving material elements in these locations do not make for very sturdy associations.

Helpfully, the 2009 guidelines now have a list of criteria appended. We have a starting point here from which to go on and distinguish a landscape from any other heritage item. The principle manner in which this idea of landscape can be differentiated occurs in the suggestions that ‘cultural landscape heritage assessment should recognise the holistic nature of landscapes as part of a larger environmental system’ and that a broader scale ought to be the starting point, from which analysis is scaled down to localities (Heritage Victoria 2009).

**Ethnography and gold**

In similar vein, a few historians have turned to ethnographic history as a way of understanding the landscape of the goldfields. Alan Mayne, in a recent book chapter, proposed ethnography as the best way of reading the goldfields and their landscape (Mayne 2007: 13-20). Drawing in particular from Charles Tilly, Mayne pictured mining sites as ‘potent cultural landscapes because their forms were shaped by the diverse human interventions that took place within them like a palimpsest, or ancient parchment which has been written upon, erased, and overwritten’ (Mayne 2007: 15). He noted in addition that even where there were few dramatic remnants, mining sites ‘invite us to probe the social practices through which historic landscapes such as the Mount Alexander Diggings were fashioned into places of belonging and networks of social interaction’ (Mayne 2007:15).

Literary travellers through the goldfields sometimes noted the connection between landscape and social networks. The Ararat goldfields, as some saw them, differed in landform and in social characteristics from the quartz mining regions of Ballarat or the rich indicator fields around Dunolly. One visitor remarked on a consistency between the irregularity of the mining landscape and the fairer treatment of Chinese on this field than elsewhere:
Unlike … other goldfields at least this side of the Murray … the situation is a sort of natural basin, the diggings consist of several leads but of a multitude of patches, discontinuous indeed … as he (the Chinese miner) goes about prospecting and sinking and behaving like an orthodox digger and keeping his fossicking propensities in check, he is admitted on more friendly terms in Ararat than elsewhere (Geelong Advertiser 1857).

Chinese miners were claim-jumped here as on other fields, but within a decade of these expulsions, Ararat was the site of public displays of inter-ethnic mutual respect. So when the town staged a public dinner in honour of the political radical (and future Victorian premier) Graeme Berry in 1864, leading Chinese miners and traders sat at the table with European town dignitaries, toasting each other and the future of their shared colony. ‘We imagine’ noted a chuffed reporter for the local press, ‘it is the first time in the colony at which the health of the Chinese was proposed and drunk’ (Ararat Advertiser quoted in Argus 1864).

In looking closely at the Ararat Chinese experience, this particular example draws out more general themes. Finely-grained evidence of mundane practices and the ritualised markers that defined them, bring about a certain symmetry in landscape analysis. At the same time, characteristic research techniques of the ethnographer direct us away from the thematic frameworks typical of heritage analysis. The ‘palimpsest’ is no longer a differentiated and tabulated landscape analysis. At the same time, characteristic research techniques of the ethnographer direct us away from the thematic frameworks typical of heritage analysis. The ‘palimpsest’ is no longer a differentiated and tabulated thematic framework. And yet there remain difficulties in consistently adapting ethnographic technique to heritage. Ethnography as employed by sociologists and then played on by historians has its own ambitious romanticism. The holism central to ethnography for example tends to diminish conflict. It elevates the historian or sociologist to the organiser of space, people and cultural identity. In the circumstances of small-town mining it can bring a normalising systemic order, to what were experienced as unstable social relations and unpredictable, chance-driven economic competition.

There survives always an element of invention in ethnographic analysis, as of course there is in landscape assessment. It is for this reason that a more critical ethnography has emerged in recent years. In this sociologists and anthropologists have tried to observe and write from a more self-aware position and challenge holistic accounts by reminders of economic inequality and social division. So Gillian Hart reminds us that metropolitan authorities are always altering the static, integrated ethnographic form through which historians and others can often artificially freeze sets of dynamic, insecure regional identities (Hart 2006). In such critical ethnographic studies, the notions of primitive accumulation, production of space and the commodification of nature are brought into play. With these in mind we can take up Mayne’s point about ethnographic history, though in a manner which exposes processes shaping the environment and its European and Chinese ‘Exploitors’ (in Hart’s sense they are both equally the ‘Exploited’).

**Boundaries and connections**

Heritage Victoria’s cultural landscape guidelines do make specific suggestions for a focus on environmental context, boundaries and cultural patterns, and the distribution of elements. It remains uncertain just how far this helps us with Chinese heritage places. For a critical ethnography may lead us towards a different set of building blocks. Boundaries for example may not be as significant as suggested in these guidelines since there remained fluidity and an accretion of cultural values between Chinese settlements and the remainder of the goldfields (Reeves & McConville 2011). Westgarth and generations of writers after him made a point of criticising the Chinese for their use of pre-existing European mine shafts. The mining fields and the Chinese encumbrance formed ‘borderlands’ where identities were enmeshed. The hybridity of these locations then might lead us to place less stress on the distribution of elements and rather seek out the gradual and accidental integration of Chinese places into a surrounding Europeanised urban form and mining scene. It might aid us in reflecting on the accommodations which Europeans made in the face of Chinese population numbers, mining success and agricultural and medical prowess. Just as the Chinese camp and the mining fields formed an enmeshed landscape (regardless of whether European miners enjoyed this integration, it was a real aspect of mining) so in the towns, the Chinese county societies could be the site of Chinese business networks, in particular Masonic societies. At least two of whose buildings have found their way onto Victorian heritage registers. The Christian mission churches also indicate this syncretism of culture as well as of working life on the goldfields (Young 1868). So even though Westgarth wanted to remind us of the Chinese as an ‘indigestible mass in the system of the colony’, the exigencies of mining, the proselytising endeavours of Christian missionaries and the cool business sense of Chinese merchants in Masonic Societies, forced socio-economic relations in a different, more hybridised, direction.

If heritage is to reflect this hybridity then the issue of the vernacular must figure less prominently in discussions of Chinese sites and in landscape analysis (for discussion of differences between ‘vernacular’ and ‘hybrid’ see Heath 2006-7: 79). Rather than the vernacular assumed in Heritage Victoria’s guidelines, we might, following Heath, read Chinese and European connections as ‘the amalgamation of two fixed identities into a third identifiable thing’ – rather than as vernacular (or indeed palimpsest) – layers of collective change over time’ (Heath 2006-7: 79). Chinese sites fit readily into a sense of ‘borderland’ in which identities can be erased and reinvented and in which cultures necessarily engage across what might otherwise be assumed as insurmountable demarcation lines. For in mining, especially in recurrent and erratic rushes, economic and other relations may be competitive but become connected through an indeterminate set of fluid identities and mutual reliance.

Again in this approach to landscape, the identification and isolation of critical elements remain less significant than the connections between elements. By seeking out linkages between places, perhaps in the form of routes (as suggested by Lennon), sequence of rushes, the lifecycle of settlements and mobility patterns, we may have an approach which allows us to overcome the essentially fragmentary nature of Chinese sites and the unrepresentativeness of many of them, cemeteries included. Underlying landscape assessment for example is a sense of places as combining natural and humanised elements. On the goldfields the constant rivalries between Chinese and others, stemmed from the use of a scarce natural resource – water. Watercourses and the networks of races and dams provide one potential linkage.
system, demonstrating the unavoidable connection and ongoing tension amongst Chinese and others and between Chinese and the natural environment of the Victorian goldfields regions.

In identifying landscape heritage places then, we can take Heritage Victoria’s guidelines as a starting point. Their emphasis on a holistic approach is reflected in ethnographic literature; we can recognise power relations and, with a critical eye to an excessive acceptance of harmony via holism, we can also register starting points in linkage, mutual connection and amalgamated identity and function. By such means, we can link fragmented and sometimes unrepresentative sites of Chinese life on the goldfields.

Such an ethnographic and landscape analysis would also take us away from archaeological interpretations of mining sites. For a number of years now archaeologists have sought to change the sorts of questions and evidentiary systems used by historians of both migration and mining (Jack 1993). No doubt the intensive analysis of small-scale sites uncovered in archaeological surveys does extend our understandings in a number of directions – but without bringing much to discussions of heritage landscapes. There are practical and theoretical reasons for this. One consequence of an archaeology survey is to remove surfaces and landforms to expose built elements: the very antithesis of landscape interpretation which seeks an integration of the natural and the built. Archaeological digs result in the removal of remnant artefacts to museums rather than their retention in situ. The very preciousness of the dig site prevents the circulation and interpretation which seeks an integration of the natural and the built. Archaeological digs result in the removal of remnant artefacts to museums rather than their retention in situ. The very preciousness of the dig site prevents the circulation of the answers already given to heritage tourism and the environmental interest and move towards concepts of ‘socionature’, that sense of an intertwined dynamism of society and nature by which ‘socionatures are always in a state of dynamic change and transformation’ (White 2006: 74).

In many ways a starting point in cultural heritage actually aids recognition of the manner in which human land use protects rather than destroys biodiversity (Phillips 1998). Landscape, as we are often reminded, is an aesthetic and intellectual construction; a reading of material remnants and patterns from a human position of observation. As Sarah Whatmore pointed out, all landscapes are cognitive, with varying meanings for different groups of people. The way in which the physical surrounds, whether of natural or human provenance are structured and shaped in people’s minds begins with the naming of landscape features and faces itself a very culture-specific practice. Hence cultural landscape is more a perspective than a thing (2002: 32).

To identify and then interpret humanised remnants of mining in areas highly prized for natural values, can too easily result in little more than a surface gloss, a bit like the remnants of the first diggers’ scratchings. Distinguishing Chinese elements in this ‘socionature’ becomes even more difficult. Perhaps after all it is simpler to return to clearly-demarcated urban sites and work from these, in displays and cultural activities, for which built heritage is secondary (see, for example, that carefully differentiated commentary by Frost 2005 and Frost et al. 2007). The concepts of critical ethnography and cultural landscape are not going to allow us to by-pass easily tensions inherent in marketing urban precincts and between cultural and natural heritage in parks. But across the broad expanse of the central goldfields region it is possible that such ideas can make up for some of the fragmentation of the once immense material reminders of Chinese life in nineteenth-century Victoria. By emphasising fluid borders rather than fixed boundaries; in seeking out hybridity rather than the vernacular and in following an ethnographic reading, informed by a critical sense of commodification rather than a thematic hierarchy, we can do justice to the vast enterprise of Chinese miners. Such techniques can remind us both of the antipathies defined by Westgarth, and the integration reiterated by historians and heritage workers in the 21st century, and strive for by Chinese settlers themselves.

Landscape, ethnography, nature

It may well be that this different construction of landscape can strengthen the place of cultural identity in natural-humanised places. Sociologists have come recently to try to interpret landscape and the environment in terms of social-natural interaction, a parallel journey it seems to that undertaken by heritage practitioners. As a case in point, the first Historic Park in Australia, the Mount Alexander site, was given a clear set of management principles in 2007 (Parks Victoria 2007). Whilst the site is referred to as the Castlemaine Diggings National Park the document is established curiously on a detailed analysis of the natural environment and its threatened species (Swift Parrot, Powerful Owl, Eltham Copper Butterfly). It takes indigenous knowledge of the park seriously and makes mention of the ‘cultural landscape’ of alluvial and quartz mining activity. It registers the current forest cover’s genesis in mining practices. However, historic cultural heritage is treated in one chapter and separated from indigenous heritage. There is little sense here of the work carried out by sociologists as they reprise an environmental interest and move towards concepts of ‘socionature’, that sense of an intertwined dynamism of society and nature by which ‘socionatures are always in a state of dynamic change and transformation’ (White 2006: 74).

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the generosity of Damien Sheehan of Mt Langi Ghiran winery, Andrew Reeves and Kirsty Marshall. Reeves would thank Department of Management, Monash University for its support. Research towards this article was enabled by the ARC Linkage project Layers of meaning: Historical studies in central Victoria's regional heritage 1834-1950 and the Monash Fellowship Project Heritage tourism and the historical landscapes of Australia, Asia and the Pacific.
References

Advertiser, 4 October 1857, Geelong.

Argus, 8 September 1864, Melbourne.

Argus, 27 April 1897, Melbourne.

Argus, 28 February 1864 Melbourne.


Melbourne City Council (with Victoria Tourist Commission). 1985, Chinatown action plan, Aldine, Melbourne.


Parks Victoria 2007, Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park, management plan, Parks Victoria, Melbourne.


Westgarth, W. 1857, Victoria and the Australian gold mines in 1857; with notes on the overland route from Australia via Suez, Smith Elder, London.


