

# CHINESE COOKS IN URBAN NEW ZEALAND - 1840 TO 1913<sup>1</sup>

*André Taber*

This article describes Chinese immigrants who worked as cooks during New Zealand's colonial era.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of Chinese immigrants to New Zealand during this period arrived to work on the South Island gold fields. As the gold fields depleted in the 1880s, Chinese immigrants preferred to settle in urban areas,<sup>3</sup> where to be a cook was a viable profession. Some became restaurant owners, and though their numbers were small by global standards, they were significant contributors to the hospitality<sup>4</sup> industry in a small colony.

<sup>1</sup> Research conducted with the aid of a grant from the Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust.

<sup>2</sup> This paper covers the period 1840-1913. New Zealand was officially a colony of Britain from 1840-1907, however the start of World War I is also a convenient place to end this period in New Zealand's social development. Sometimes, when necessary, the article will stray outside these years. The word 'colonial' carries connotations appropriate to this article: a new society controlled by a large population of permanent European residents, modern and capitalist, which marginalises *tāngata whenua*, other ethnic minorities and women. It also reminds us that contemporary written records are, by 21st century standards, biased; W. David McIntyre, 'Empire and Commonwealth - Government within the empire', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/empire-and-commonwealth/page-2>; Kohn, Margaret Kohn and Kavita Reddy, 'Colonialism', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/colonialism/>.

<sup>3</sup> This article does not discuss the goldfields, or Dunedin, which was a service town for the goldfields. These will be discussed in another article. However, from time to time people or events from these areas appear in this present article because they contribute to the topic at hand.

<sup>4</sup> The modern phrase 'hospitality,' which encompasses restaurants, bars and hotels, is a convenient catch-all for the hotels, restaurants, dining rooms, eating houses, coffee houses and boarding houses of the colonial era where these men worked.



*Heavenly Peace Street. Canton 1870s*