THE RECRUITING OF CHINESE INDENTURED LABOUR FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOLD-MINES, 1903–1908

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The consolidation and initial development of European colonial empires in Africa, South East Asia and the Pacific in the last two decades of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth centuries was instrumental in initiating an international mobilization of labour. This contrasted strongly with concurrent patterns of predominantly European migration to countries and colonies of settlement. Seemingly endemic shortages in tropical or sub-tropical colonial labour markets stimulated interest in South and East Asia as sources of long-term contract labour capable of providing a scarce and essential factor in colonial economic exploitation. In the course of these movements, which were characterized by a high degree of state participation, Indian labour was imported into East Africa in the 1890s for work on the British-owned Uganda railway, Chinese labourers were shipped to Samoa for work on the German-owned plantations, whilst shorter migrations were encouraged by the French in Indo-China for work on the Yunnan railway.

One of the most important African episodes in this process of intra-continental labour mobilization was concerned with the importation of Chinese indentured mine labourers for work on the Transvaal gold fields after the South African War of 1899–1902. Actual importation

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The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes:

FLD Papers of the Foreign Labour Dept., 1904–10, Transvaal Archives
ATCM Archives of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines, Johannesburg
ARTCM Annual Reports of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines
Ch. Chinese Labour Files, in ATCM
CMLIA Chamber of Mines Labour Importation Agency
WNLA Witwatersrand Native Labour Association
ARSARCM Annual Reports of the South African Republic Chamber of Mines

2 For an elaboration of some of these points see Colin Newbury, 'Labour Migration in the Imperial Phase: An Essay in Interpretation', J. of Imperial and Commonwealth Hist., 11, 2 (Jan. 1975).

began on 19 June 1904 when the s.s. Tweeddale docked at Port Natal (Durban) with the first shipment of indentured labourers. Between 23 and 26 November 1906 the s.s. Cranley embarked the final shipment of 2,129 labourers, three women, and four children for the Witwatersrand. In the thirty-three months of recruiting in China for the South African mines, between February 1904 and November 1906, 63,296 men were contracted and shipped from north and south China, and a considerably greater number were actually mobilized. For a major part of this time the overall control of the recruiting and shipping sides of this indentured labour experiment was controlled by one company, the Chamber of Mines Labour Importation Agency (CMLIA).4

The CMLIA was formed as a limited company, registered in the Transvaal, in July 1904, taking over the activities of a Committee of Agents formed in October 1903. The agency was dissolved in February 1908 when it was merged with the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA). However, the organization of the agency, both in China and South Africa, remained in being until February 1910 as the Chinese Section of WNLA.5 The activities and functions of this company are of particular interest, for not only do they offer historians the chance to examine the mechanisms by which indentured labour was secured for colonial labour markets in the early twentieth century, but they also provide a basis for comparison of such techniques in Africa and Asia.6

4 Arrival Report of the s.s. Tweeddale, Durban, 18 June 1904, FLD 122, file 16/1; arrival Report of the s.s. Cranley, Durban, 5 Jan. 1907, FLD 124, file 16/34; Minutes of Representatives of Mining Groups, 16 Feb. 1904; Instructions to Perry at Tientsin, ATCM, Minutes of Representatives of Groups, 1904; Selborne to Elgin, 28 May 1906, Cd. 3038. Figures drawn from Shipping Returns of CMLIA, 1904–7, in CMLIA Circular no. 1029, 8 Feb. 1907, ATCM, Ch. 65. There is a lot of evidence to show that a number considerably in excess of the 63,296 men actually contracted and shipped to South Africa between 1904 and 1907 were mobilized in both north and south China. This is an important aspect of the Transvaal scheme for it shows not only the difficulties and policies of recruiting but also the very real impact which this experiment had on the dislocated areas of north and south China. For the discrepancy between the numbers recruited and shipped from the south, see the contract sheet for the East Rand Proprietary Mines, no. 14 of 1904 per s.s. Lothian in FLD 243; for north China see Brazier to Bagot 27 Mar. 1905; Brazier to Bagot 2 Apr. 1905; Chinese Engineering and Mining Company to CMLIA, 4 Apr. 1905 and William Forbes and Company to CMLIA 7 Apr. 1905: encl. 1 and 2 in Brazier to Bagot, 8 Apr. 1905, ATCM, 'G' Letters from China.

5 Articles of Association of CMLIA, 15 July 1904, ATCM, Ch. 66. Minutes of the Representatives of Mining Groups, 10 Oct. 1903, ATCM, Ch. 14. The following groups resolved to guarantee £100,000 for preliminary expenses, which was actually found by Wernher/Beit, London, and were represented by the Committee of Agents: H. Eckstein & Co.; Rand Mines Ltd.; Consolidated Gold Fields; Farrar Brothers/ Anglo-French Exploration Company; Barnato Brothers; J. B. Robinson; A. Goetz & Co.; G. & L. Albu; S. Neumann & Co.; Transvaal Goldfields; B. Kitzinger; Lewis and Marks; Compagnie Francaise de Mines d'Or et de l'Afrique du Sud; Memorandum of Agreement between WNLA and CMLIA, 3 Feb. 1908, ATCM, Ch. 63; Articles 3 and 7 of Memorandum of Agreement between WNLA and CMLIA, 3 Feb. 1908, op. cit.

To appreciate the significance of the CMLIA in the development of the Witwatersrand gold mining industry’s labour policies, and the factors which moulded its organizational structure, it is necessary to examine briefly the role which Chinese importation was designed to play in the crisis after the South African War. The elements of this crisis were falling rates of gold production and rising costs, in which problems of labour supply played a major but not exclusive part. Falling, or stagnant, production levels may be seen in yields of gold for the Witwatersrand as a whole, and for individual companies. Not surprisingly, Witwatersrand annual output declined from a pre-war peak of 4,295,608 fine ounces in 1898 to 1,690,101 in 1902. Although production rose constantly thereafter, output only surpassed the 1898 level in 1905 when 4,706,433 fine ounces were produced.\(^7\) Thus, for example, the French Rand gold mine which resumed crushing in September 1902, only surpassed its 1899 monthly output of 4,290 fine ounces in 1905, after the addition of 1,703 Chinese labourers at the end of 1904.\(^8\) Rising costs may be identified in both of the main items of mine expenditure—labour costs and mine stores. The cost of African and White wages which had fluctuated before the war, rose constantly thereafter, despite attempts to use the war as an excuse to depress African wages: African wages reflecting the severe shortfall in numbers, White wages the changing ratio of White to non-White labour. Monthly wage rates for all Africans rose from 33s. in 1902 to an average of 54s. 4d. in 1903. Simultaneously the ratio of White to non-White labour contracted from 1:8 in July 1899 to 1:5:98 in April 1904,\(^9\) indicating an increased aggregate expenditure on White labour. The cost of mine stores was raised by the persistent decline in the value of gold relative to other commodities which became marked after 1900, and continued until the outbreak of the First World War. Government policy only partially ameliorated this by reducing and reorganizing railway rates and tariffs in the Transvaal, after the Bloemfontein Conference in 1903.\(^10\)

Such a generalized crisis became reflected in falling rates of profit and a flight of capital on the London money market, for this struck at the heart of the cost structure of Rand mining which made feasible a reasonable

\(^7\) ARSARCM for 1898, p. 430; ARTCM for 1902, p. 247; ARTCM for 1905, p. 190.
\(^8\) Monthly production totals of the Witwatersrand declared in ARSARCM for 1899; ARTCM for 1902–5. Shipping returns of the CMLIA, 1904, in CMLIA Circular no. 1029, 8 Feb. 1907; ATCM, Ch. 65.
rate of profitable return. A generally low average grade of ore, an internationally fixed price for gold, and high initial investment and overhead charges meant that profits could only be secured through a very low level of costs and a high level of output. These factors determined that the two fundamental imperatives of profitable gold mining were the minimization of costs and the maximization of output (and by the same token, that the two great dangers were cost inflation and falling output).11 The short lived post-war boom in gold mine shares collapsed at the end of 1902 under the impact of this squeeze, and mining houses sought to lay-off some of their losses on unsuspecting capital markets in Europe. It has also been calculated that the return on original capital invested in large mines between 1887 and 1905 showed a marked decline between 1903 and 1905.12

In this situation of rising costs, falling or stagnant output, and falling profits and investment, the Witwatersrand mining houses turned towards the idea of importing Asian labour from early 1903. The Chinese labour market was looked upon as a source from which sufficient labour at the right price might be acquired to break wage inflation, restore and maximize output by the most efficient deployment of labour, and thereby reduce working costs in order to restore the level of profitability and encourage capital back into the industry.13 As part of the British reconstruction programme the mining industry was actively encouraged and supported in this policy by Milner’s colonial government.14 Yet the use of Chinese


labour in the Transvaal mines was only part of mining capital's solution to the crisis outlined above. Thus, at the same time as they imported Chinese labourers, the mining houses sought to augment African supplies on a very selective basis in a general attempt to reverse the decline in the ratio of White to non-White labour. In addition, they tried to eliminate the competition between the mines themselves for the available supply of labour by the institution of maximum average wages and recruiting agreements. Simultaneously, they moved to increase their control over the labour force once it had been secured. They came out strongly against the use of unskilled White labour and decried the extension of mechanization. They searched out new capital markets as sources of funds and instituted a strong ideological campaign designed to win government and public support for policies favourable to the lower-grade mines. Further, they fought vigorously for favourable local and central taxation.

Chinese importation was then a part of a more general policy adopted by the mining houses to deal with the crisis of 1901-4. The CMLIA, as the recruiting and shipping agency, was, in turn, part of the larger context of Chinese employment. What specific contribution was it designed to make to this situation? First and foremost the CMLIA was designed to secure sufficient Chinese labour to offset a major shortfall in the industry's rate of production, at a price compatible with the cost structure of the industry and in the face of a decline in the average grade of ore mined. This would enable profitable production to be resumed at the same time as it would free other labour for deployment on developing properties. Thus the role of the CMLIA bore directly on the estimate of the Transvaal Labour Commission's Majority Report that there would be an immediate shortfall in the unskilled labour supply of 35,977 in July 1903 and of


16 See for example Chamber of Mines support for the repression of the Liquor Trade after the war—C. Van Onselen, 'The Randlords and Rotgut, 1886-1903', History Work-Shop, no. 2 (Autumn, 1976). This paper was first presented to the I.C.S. (London) Seminar on Southern Africa, in 1975.

17 Hennen Jennings, Chinese Labour on the Rand, Imperial South Africa Association Pamphlet (3 Feb. 1904), ATCM 'H' Series Pamphlets; Cf. 1895, Evid. of S. Jennings to the Transvaal Labour Commission, 8 Sept. 1903, no. 9,928, p. 454.

368,637 workers in the foreseeable future. Augmentation of the labour supply in this way also had important implications for future capital investment in the industry.

The CMLIA was designed to put a brake on cost inflation in five other ways. Firstly, by providing a sufficiently large additional external supply of labour, it was intended to reduce aggregate demand for African labour inside British South Africa and thereby lower the average wage rate. Secondly, it was intended to provide the mining industry with the means of by-passing the effects of continuing African access to productive land, which also bid up wage rates by creating relative scarcity. Both these functions of the CMLIA were ultimately dependent upon maximizing the supply of Chinese labour and subsequently ensuring an optimum pattern of efficient employment. Thirdly, the Chinese labour force was designed to be sufficiently cheap and docile so that importation was a more economical remedy than either changing the pattern of unskilled employment or altering the degree of capital intensity in the practice of winning gold. Such a labour force had the additional advantage of further fragmenting and dividing the working class in its struggle for higher wages. Fourthly, the CMLIA was also designed to give the mining industry some leverage in its fight against inflation in the cost of mine stores. The relative fixity of the proportion of mine stores as a percentage of mine expenditure, and the difficulty experienced by the mining houses in controlling their cost, meant that it was upon the wage bill that most of the pressure to lower costs had to fall, and more particularly upon the unskilled African sections of that bill. The pressure applied by the CMLIA's activities on this particular area, meant a relative freedom for the mining houses from the problems of inflation in the costs of stores. Lastly, the CMLIA was designed to ease pressure in the Portuguese East African labour market which had occurred concurrently with a crisis in the labour market in British South Africa.

Labour shortage was more or less endemic in the Transvaal mining industry. The cost inflationary effects of such a situation had been met in several ways, one of the most important of which was the importation of long-term contract labour from Portuguese East Africa and elsewhere. This system had been established well before the war and was re-established soon after. From 1902 to 1907 the percentage of unskilled mine labour provided by the Portuguese East Coast territories averaged 48-76 per cent per annum of the total numbers distributed by WNLA. This source of labour, in particular, not only provided an increase in the apparently finite South African supply of labour, but did so on highly

20 For a general discussion of some of these points see Johnstone, op. cit. 32–4; for the crisis in Portuguese East Africa see D. Denoon, 'The Transvaal Labour Crisis, 1901–1906,' J. Afr. Hist., viii (1967), 481–94.
21 See Cd. 1895, evid. of S. Jennings to the Transvaal Labour Commission, 8 Sept. 1903, no. 9,923, p. 454.
favourable terms. The effective recruiting monopoly exercised by WNLA in the Portuguese territories under the terms of the 1901 *modus vivendi*, and the degree of state support which adherence to its terms secured, meant that increasing demand for labour from South African sources and the cost inflationary effect of internecine competition for labour could be avoided to some extent. Furthermore, the effect of unpopular minework amongst British South African Africans and the high economic and political costs of the employment of White unskilled labour could also be avoided by the importation of Africans from Mozambique.\(^{22}\) Such importation under contract tended to stabilize the work force, increasing its efficiency and reducing turnover costs at the same time. Importation also rationalized the quota system by reducing the element of choice in the distribution of the work force as well as keeping it suitably fragmented. These elements were obviously highly desirable at all times, but at no time more so than when the industry was faced with the wholesale crisis of the reconstruction years.

It was, however, at this most vital moment that the reliability of this source of labour began to waver. The 1901 *modus vivendi* had the desired effect of re-establishing Portuguese East Africa as the largest single source of African labour on the mines. In 1902 'East Coast Natives' accounted for 67.36 per cent of the unskilled workforce distributed by WNLA.\(^{23}\) In 1903, however, the proportion of East Coast Africans declined by 14.05 per cent, although the annual numbers distributed by WNLA rose from 57,312 to 84,324. In 1904 the situation became acute, for the annual number of Africans distributed by WNLA rose by a mere 582, whilst the proportion of East Coast Africans declined


\(^{23}\) The number of Mozambican Africans in the Rhodesian mines might have had some effect on the absolute numbers distributed by WNLA between 1902 and 1904: see Van Onselen, *Chibaro*, 86–90; Annual Report, WNLA, 1902: Table Showing Geographical Origins of Africans distributed by WNLA. This figure includes Africans from Portuguese East African territories north of Lat. 22° S. *Annual Report*, WNLA, 1903; *Annual Report*, WNLA, 1904. The number of short-term contracts also showed an alarming tendency to rise, posing a threat to the quota system and raising the prospect of increased turnover rates: the average of 'locals' in the numbers distributed by WNLA between 1902 and 1907 averaged out at 27.08 per cent of all Africans distributed annually; *Annual Reports*, WNLA, 1902–7: Tables of Geographical Origins of Africans Distributed by WNLA. British Central Africans accounted for 0, 1.10 and 1.31 per cent of Africans distributed by WNLA between 1902 and 1904. Locals, including a significant number of non-British South Africans, offset this decline somewhat, but the unreliability of local numbers meant that a shortage in recruited Africans in Portuguese East Africa was still very serious. See Jeeves, op. cit. 17–18.
again by 17-27 per cent, to account for 36.04 per cent of those distributed. The absence of any substantial numbers of labourers from British Central Africa or elsewhere aggravated the situation still further. Some of the factors in Mozambique were considered by WNLA to be temporary. Yet it was the all-important coincidence of crisis inside British South Africa and out which drove WNLA to endorse the drive for an additional external labour supply. The CMLIA was charged with the further task of providing both the means of outlasting the Portuguese crisis without involving a recourse to higher wage rates, and of adding to the proportion of non-British South African mine workers.

The CMLIA was clearly designed to fight cost inflation in the exploitation of the Chinese labour market. This was of crucial importance, for failure to control importation costs could make the remedy worse than the disease. The Chamber of Mines and WNLA were not unaware of this, as the Chamber’s agent, Ross Skinner, had made clear in his preliminary report on Chinese labour the not inconsiderable dangers posed by rival recruiters, particularly those working for the Straits Settlements and South East Asia generally. This necessity for organized cost control was underlined by the desirability of acquiring the respectful tolerance of the British and Chinese governments. For their acquiescence in the scheme was a sine qua non of access to the market in the first place and of its continued exploitation. The days of uncontrolled and unregulated labour recruiting in China were long over, as the 1904 Emigration Convention made very clear. Only the pooled resources of the mining companies could hope to meet these requirements satisfactorily enough to maintain state support without hopelessly escalating recruiting and shipping costs. The desire to maximize the supply of Chinese labour by exploiting as large an area of China as possible was also an important force making for cost control. Diverse and dispersed activities could easily weaken the industry’s bargaining position in relation to the various contractors connected to the whole process of emigration, and expose the mining houses to expensive local difficulties. These factors alone would

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25 For an elaboration of the complementary roles of Chinese and Portuguese East African Labour, see F. Perry, The Transvaal Labour Problem, a paper read before the Fortnightly Club, Johannesburg, 1 Nov. 1906, in the Archives of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.


27 Brazier to Bagot, 15 Aug. 1905, encl. in Bagot to Jamieson, 14 Sept. 1905, FLD 131, file 20/1.
have made for strong, centralized control over importation. When considered together with the other functions of the CMLIA, they made it imperative.

II

The basis for the organizational structure of the CMLIA was its financial framework. The company, like WNLA, was designed to be non-profit making and represented a form of self-subsidy for the industry. It was designed to rationalize and stabilize investment in Chinese importation, at the same time as it provided the means of maximizing the supply of labour. Shareholders in the company were the individual mines of the Witwatersrand district only—unlike WNLA whose members were drawn from all parts of the Transvaal, and whose main means of revenue was not necessarily confined to the winning of precious metals. Shares were of a nominal value of £3, allocated to each company according to their unskilled labour complement determined on an industry wide basis. Shares in the CMLIA were never fully paid-up, 18s. being the first and only call on members. All of the 158,649 shares were issued in July 1904, giving the agency a nominal capital value of £475,947, and a paid-up capital value of £142,794 2s. The board of directors, which was identical with that of the executive committee of the Chamber of Mines, was empowered to raise capital to the value of £1,000,000, although this facility was never utilized. Capitation fees were an additional charge to members actually requiring Chinese labour complements. On average these charges worked out at £17 5s. 2d. per man for the whole expense of recruiting, importation and repatriation. The total cost of importation was actually higher than this if capital costs and advances are included.28

The vertical integration of power in the CMLIA was achieved also

28 For a list of shareholders in the CMLIA see CMLIA Circular no. 1097, Draft Minutes of Special Meeting of the Board of Management, 26 June 1907, ATCM, Ch. 65; Articles 5, 6, 9, 33, 34 and 59 of the Articles of Association of CMLIA, op. cit.; Memorandum of Agreement between WNLA and CMLIA, 3 Feb. 1908, Preamble, Ch. 63. The capitalization compares with a nominal capital for WNLA of £39,486 divided into 39,486 shares of £1 each, all issued, paid up to 12s. per share, realizing £23,691 12s. (ibid.). Thus the original investment in Chinese labour was six times as great as in African labour. Between 1902 and 1904 the mining industry invested £166,475 14s. in its recruiting companies—a sizeable investment. Walter L. Bagot, 'Chinese Labour on the Witwatersrand', unpubl. MS. dated 1906, ATCM, Ch. 26. If advances on wages and repatriation allowances are included, the initial expenses of importation comes to £21 10s. Capital charges against compound and other alterations (incurred by the individual companies and not chargeable by the CMLIA) raised the overall costs to £31 10s. per head. To secure African labour cost, on average, only £4 10s. Bagot wrote 'Even when it is borne in mind that the renewal of capital outlay is less frequent with the Chinese who work for three years as against the Kaffirs average of fifteen months (i.e. presuming each Kaffir works ten months and 40–50 per cent old hands re-engage each time) yet the balance of expense against the Chinese is at least £7 18s. (i.e. £17 10s.—£9 12s.)'.
through a hierarchy of managerial control, which had a strong geographical basis. Thus, the head offices of the CMLIA were located in the Chamber of Mines building in Johannesburg. The day-to-day running of the agency was in the general charge of Walter L. Bagot, General Manager, and a former member of the British administration of Johannesburg. All employed personnel of the CMLIA were ultimately responsible to the general manager, who was answerable in turn to the board of directors. Regular monthly meetings were held throughout the company’s existence, so that the policy of the CMLIA was fully integrated with the policy decisions of the Chamber of Mines. After the general manager in Johannesburg, the most important employee of the CMLIA was undoubtedly the Chinese adviser—a European recruited directly from China to provide a wide range of information based on extensive first-hand experience. Also employed in Johannesburg were a number of clerks and accountants, and a small number of Chinese who acted as writers and interpreters. Subordinate to Johannesburg were the general managers of the other two main concentrations of CMLIA organization in Natal and China. The local manager at Jacob’s Camp, the former British concentration camp outside Durban which was turned into a receiving depot for the Chinese, was responsible for the management of all aspects of Chinese immigration from the time the ships were cleared by the Port and Immigration restriction officers at Port Natal, until the trains were despatched from the camp direct to their respective mines on the Witwatersrand. This process could take up to four or five days per shipload, depending on the size of the shipment and the complement allocations.29

The general manager in China was the key man in the importation procedure. He was responsible for procuring, on the most favourable terms, the largest possible supply of labourers in the least possible time. These were complex operations and the general manager thus controlled a considerable staff of Europeans and Chinese dispersed over a wide area of the country. The general manager in China was based at the agency’s Chinese headquarters in the British Concession in Tientsin City, although he moved regularly from there to Ch’inhuangtso in Chihli and Chefoo in Shantung, the main ports of emigration. Also based in Tientsin was the organization designed to deal with all aspects of shipping, and in the

29 Articles 2 and 63 of the Articles of Association of CMLIA, op. cit.; L. V. Praagh (ed.), The Transvaal and Its Mines (London, 1906), 534. For the appointment of expert advisers, see for example the appointment of A. W. Child as Chinese Advisor to CMLIA, Brazier to Bagot 4 May 1905, ATCM, ‘G’ Letters from China: ‘For seventeen years he [Child] has been at Sir Robert’s [Hart] beck and call at Peking—his “fidus achates”—and his knowledge of the Northern people, their ways, customs, manners and spoken language is unequalled’. Report by Mr Raleigh on Landing Facilities at Durban and Delagoa Bay, 1903, in Barlow-Rand Archives, H. Eckstein Papers, HE65B. For examples of travel arrangements see Principal Immigration Restriction Officer, Port Natal, to Superintendent of FLD at Natal, 5 Jan. 1907; W. L. Bagot to Chief Traffic Manager, Central South African Railways, 16 Dec. 1906, CMLIA Circular No. 1007; W. L. Bagot to Chief Traffic Manager, CSAR, 5 Jan. 1907, CMLIA Circular No. 1007a; FLD 124, file 16/34; also FLD Annual Report, 1904–5, appendix IV of Cd. 3025.
Chinese or Native City, the agency’s Allotments Office. The choice of Tientsin as headquarters, a curious one in the light of the pattern of embarkation, was dictated by several factors. Not least of these was the city’s strategic position in relation to the routes taken by recruits and recruiters making for the embarkation ports in Chihli and Shantung. Thus Tientsin had easy access to the main receiving depot at Ch’inghuangtao, by virtue of a branch railway off the main Tientsin-Manchurian Railway at Tongho, provided by the Chinese Engineering and Mining Company. Chefoo, in Shantung, also had easy access to Tientsin through the coating vessels making the journey from the Taku Bar to Chefoo and beyond to Weihaiwei. Thus the general manager could reach both receiving depots, whilst remaining poised at the funnelling-in point for the great majority of recruits, as it was at Tientsin that the largest number of recruits bound for Ch’inghuangtao were accepted or rejected in the first instance. The presence of a British consulate-general in the city through which representations could be made to the Chinese provincial governor, who was based in the city for the summer months, further facilitated emigration. The proximity of Tientsin to Peking, the seat of the central government and particularly of the Waiwpu (the Chinese Foreign Office), was an added advantage. There might also have been a historic reason for the siting of the CMLIA offices at Tientsin in that the first two shipments from north China to South Africa were recruited in the city and shipped from the Taku Bar.

In addition to the staff at Tientsin, the agency had a nucleus of staff at Ch’inghuangtao and Chefoo for the management of the depots, together with a shipping adviser at Hong Kong, and, for a short time, some depot personnel at Laichikok near Kowloon in south China. Throughout the period of recruiting operations the receiving depots were under the direct control of the Transvaal emigration agents, the CMLIA being responsible for the provision of the accommodation, the conduct of recruiters, and the integration of the private requirements of the industry, like a provision of advances on wages and uniforms, with the official routine of embarkation.

the Transvaal government considered handing over the complete control of procedure to the CMLIA, the Transvaal emigration agents being relegated to purely inspecting and supervising both embarkation and repatriation. Although this raised the prospect of increased financial liabilities for the CMLIA, it was based on an estimate of cheaper unit costs as a result of higher overall efficiency. The British government refused to sanction this change, however, and so the dual nature of Chinese emigration to South Africa remained: a combination of private mobilization and official embarkation. Not that the network of the CMLIA’s China interests ended at the receiving depots. The agency played a crucial part in securing medical personnel for the mines, which ensured, to some extent, that the investment on recruiting would not be wasted by inordinately high disease and mortality rates. Central to this process was the Transvaal mines medical school for Chinese personnel, run at the Tongshan Coal Mines under the supervision of the consulting mine doctor, Dr Moorhead. The number of students retained at Tongshan at the CMLIA’s expense was eighteen, at a total cost of £300 per annum.31

It has been emphasized that the circumstances prevailing in the Chinese and South African regional labour markets, and the high cost of Chinese importation, made a centralized and vertically integrated organization like the CMLIA imperative for the mining industry if Chinese labour was to alleviate the crisis in the Transvaal. Yet the CMLIA was not a recruiting or shipping company in the strict sense of these terms, for in both aspects of the importation process, the agency acted as a contractor or middle man for the individual mining companies. Thus in South China the agency contracted with the British firm of Butterfield and Swire at Hong Kong to provide them with recruits, ships and provisions for the trip. Their agency was deemed to include the area up to and including Swatow. The central provinces were divided, for recruiting purposes, between Jardine Matheson & Co., and Gibb, Livingstone & Co. For the northern provinces, four firms were chosen, based on Chefoo and Tientsin: namely Cornabé Eckford & Co., and Silas-Schwabé & Co., at Chefoo, and William Forbes & Co., and the Chinese Engineering and Mining Company at Tientsin.32 Like the recruiting contracts, shipping


32 For a history of the Swire empire in the Far East, and particularly their connexion with the Holt, Blue Funnel Line, see F. E. Hyde, Blue Funnel: A History of Alfred Holt & Co., 1865–1914 (London, 1956); see also Sheila Marriner and F. E. Hyde, The Senior: John Samuel Swire, 1865–1898 (London, 1967). Gibb, Livingstone & Co., had by the end of the nineteenth century a very large share in the organization of the emigrant traffic to the Straits, as well as the lucrative shipping agency for the CMLIA: see Hong Kong Telegraph, 18 June 1904. For Jardine, Matheson & Co., see E. LeFevour, Western Enterprise in Late Ch'ing China. A Selective Survey of Jardine, Matheson and Company's
arrangements were initially made with western firms: Butterfield and Swire in the south, and Livingstone, Halton & Co., chartering brokers, in the north. The provision of the Chinese labour supply to the Transvaal mines was thus a complex and risky business, which necessitated certain institutional checks to ensure a degree of cost control. In the first place, it was essential to ensure co-operation with local representatives of the British central and colonial governments, to provide contractors with uninterrupted access to the labour market. Secondly, it was important to institutionalize a degree of competition between contractors so that the delivery price of labour to the agency was kept as low as possible. Thirdly, it was important to insure against unforeseen problems in the labour market by contracting for a fixed price in advance of recruiting activities. This not only provided the agency with a means of budgeting the costs of each shipment fairly accurately, but also put the burden of effecting the cost reduction on the western contractors.

This pattern of labour market exploitation, which often meant that the agency operated at two or three stages removed from the actual recruiting process, was a product of the nature of the requirements of the mining industry and of the peculiar form which western capitalist penetration of China had assumed since the 1840s. As Perry, the chairman of WNLA charged with establishing these contractual links for the Committee of Agents in 1903, had observed, the necessity of securing indentured as opposed to ‘free’ labour for the Transvaal mines, had meant the employment of reputable western firms to give the whole operation a semblance of bonâ fides. This fact, together with the Chinese government’s insistence that contracting and embarkation take place from the open

operations, 1842–1895 (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); Cornabé, Eckford and Company were a large locally-based general trading firm: see Report on a Journey through Shantung by E. Silas-Schwabé, Dec. 1904, app. III: Present Position and Future Prospects of Emigration of Coolies from Shantung to the Transvaal, encl. 5 in Brazier to Bagot, 19 Apr. 1905, ATCM, ‘G’ Letters from China. Silas-Schwabé and Company were experienced brokers for the emigrant traffic from Shantung to Vladivostok to work on the Trans-Siberian Railway and with the Russian Army, Silas-Schwabé to Satow, 26 Oct. 1904, F.O. 228/1531. William Forbes and Company were one of the largest export companies north of Shanghai in 1904, with extensive interests in the hide, skin, and wool trades, Perry in the Standard, 25 Jan. 1905. The Chinese Engineering and Mining Company were the central actors in one of the more notorious of late Ch’ing imperialist scandals—the seizure of the K’ai-P’ing Coal Mines. See Ellsworth C. Carlson. The K’ai-P’ing Mines, 1877–1913, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 57–151.

33 Butterfield and Swire to the Secretary of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines, 1 July 1904 and 9 July 1904, ATCM, Ch. 17; H. Sheppard, Attorney for Livingstone, Halton & Co., London, to Brazier, 5 Nov. 1904, encl. 1 in Brazier to Bagot, 8 Nov. 1904, ATCM, ‘G’ Letters from China. See also Lloyd’s, Register of Shipping, 1904–6.

ports,\textsuperscript{35} meant that the CMLIA was bound to follow the pattern of western economic expansion in China, based on the Treaty Port system and the use of a local comprador bourgeois class.\textsuperscript{36} It is not exactly clear, however, from the available evidence whether in this particular instance the Chinese compradors used by the western firms contracted to the CMLIA were acting as compradors in the technical sense or as agents of these firms chosen for their convenience and power.\textsuperscript{37} It seems that Butterfield and Swire were using their comprador in the technical sense in that he used money provided by the firm to secure recruits and took a portion of the profits of the acceptance price paid by the CMLIA. On the other hand, Cornabé Eckford & Co., recruiting in Shantung Province, seem to have used their comprador, Sing-tai, as an agent through whom recruits were procured at a per capita rate.\textsuperscript{38} Whatever the individual arrangements for western firms, it is clear that in every case the CMLIA was relying on Chinese and western intermediaries, the latter often acting as sub-contractors to Chinese recruiters. Shipping arrangements were only marginally less complicated, although they remained an entirely European operation throughout. As has been mentioned, Livingstone, Halton & Co. acted as chartering brokers for the CMLIA in north China. They acted through Gibb, Livingstone & Co., Shanghai, as facilities for the direct chartering of emigrant ships of the necessary capacity did not exist in north China. Gibb, Livingstone & Co., in their turn acted for the London managing agents of the majority of the Transvaal steamers, Harris, Dixon & Co. Even after the closure of the southern recruiting grounds in November 1904, ships came on charter at Hong Kong, having been inspected jointly by the CMLIA’s shipping adviser, Lt Wells, and the Hong Kong colonial registrar, for conformity with the provisions of the schedule to the 1904 Emigration Convention.\textsuperscript{39}

It is clear from the evidence available, that despite this plethora of contractual obligation, the CMLIA managed to dictate the rhythm and pace of recruiting operations as necessitated by the labour requirements of the individual mining companies, acting in conjunction with their controlling groups. Only in one notorious case, that of the southern recruiting


\textsuperscript{36} For a discussion of the notion of a comprador bourgeois class see M. Barratt Brown, \textit{The Economics of Imperialism} (Harmondsworth, 1974), 261–2, 274–5.

\textsuperscript{37} For an elaboration of this point see Hao Yen-p’ing, \textit{The Compradore in Nineteenth Century China: Bridge between East and West} (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), Ch. 1.

\textsuperscript{38} Law (Butterfield and Swire) to Campbell (British Consul, Canton), 19 Aug. 1904, encl. 2 in Campbell to Satow, 24 Sept. 1904, F.O. 228/1547; Report on a journey through Shantung by E. Silas-Schwabé, Dec. 1904, encl. 5 in Brazier to Bagot, 19 Apr. 1905, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{39} H. Sheppard, Attorney for Livingstone, Halton & Co., London, to Brazier 5 Nov. 1904, encl. 1 in Brazier to Bagot, 8 Nov. 1904; Brazier to Bagot, 22 Mar. 1905 and Brazier to Bagot, 27 Apr. 1905. ATCM, op. cit.
operation, did they succumb totally to the market pressures generated by
the multiplicity of subordinates. As a result of this, recruits were booked
per ship chartered, rather than ships being chartered as the recruiting
proceeded. This explains the rather bunched pattern of early shipments
between July 1904 and March 1905, when the labour requirements of the
Transvaal mines were at their height, and a more extended pattern
thereafter, as the labour force on the Rand stabilized at an average of
140,000 unskilled non-European workers per month in 1905. The Liberal
government’s ban on the issue of further importation licenses had a dis-
orting effect on this pattern.40 The South African determination of
timing and numbers not only gave the CMLIA considerable control over
shipping costs, but also gave it some control over recruiting costs over
and above those imposed by contract. This was achieved by the CMLIA’s
being made the determinant of the number and quality of men chosen
for each ship’s complement. Thus the CMLIA only paid recruiting fees
on men contracted and embarked, recruiters being responsible for the
costs of returning rejects to the place of their engagement. This principle
was never surrendered by the CMLIA throughout the period of recruiting
and was the cause of considerable ill-feeling. In their control of com-
plement numbers, quality and costs, the CMLIA was aided by the
provision of multiple supply points. In 1904 there were no less than
four: Ch’inghuangtao in Chihli, Chefoo in Shantung, Wuchow in
Kwangsi, and Laichikok in Kowloon, Hong Kong. Even after the closure
of the southern operations, the two northern supply points provided
labour from recruiters operating under a system of institutionalized
competition in reasonably favourable market conditions.41

III

It is necessary to examine the apparent effectiveness of the CMLIA in
the wider context of the crisis in the mining industry which had necessitat-
it formation. In conjunction with the activities of WNLA in Portuguese
East Africa, there can be little doubt that the CMLIA went far towards
providing the Chamber of Mines with the means of augmenting its
labour supply and that the cost inflationary competition for labour inside
British South Africa, and the continuing African access to productive
land, could to a large extent be by-passed. Thus, by January 1907, there

40 Encl. in Cowie, Sec., Transvaal Chamber of Mines, to the Pte. Sec. of the Gov.,
29 Dec. 1905, op. cit.; See Tables in Ch. 9 of S. Moroney, op. cit.; Shipping Returns of
CMLIA, 1904–7, in CMLIA Circular No. 1029, 8 Feb. 1907. 59 per cent of all Chinese
labourers had been landed by 30 Apr. 1905, 11 months after the embarkation of the s.s.
Tweeddale.

41 Brazier to Bagot, 8 Nov. 1904; Brazier to Bagot, 8 Apr. 1905, op. cit.; P. Richardson,
‘Recruiting Activities of the Chamber of Mines in South China, 1903–5’, op. cit.; F. Perry
were 53,856 Chinese on the Witwatersrand fields, or 34.44 per cent of the total unskilled workforce, nearly all of whom had been directly contracted by the CMLIA.42 Such an aggregate increase together with East Coast labourers was steadily reducing the necessity of recruiting inside British South Africa: the number of Cape Africans in the mines declined from 3,023 in February 1905 to nil in December 1905.43 The total number of British South African Africans showed a similar decline, falling from 30-60 per cent of the total distributed by WNLA to 9.16 per cent in the two years between 1904 and 1906. Furthermore, the Chinese actually began to replace Portuguese East Africans as the largest single source of external labour, thereby permitting the Chamber of Mines to outlast the effects of the shortfall in 1903–4 supply levels and avoid the possibility of damaging wage rises in the East Coast labour market. In 1906 Chinese accounted for 35.46 per cent of the total unskilled labour force throughout the year, as against 30.80 per cent for Portuguese East Africans and other external labourers. East Coast Africans declined by 50 per cent between 1903 and 1906 as a proportion of the total of non-British South Africans employed. Thus, by reducing the aggregate demand for British South African labour at the same time that it was reducing reliance on Portuguese East Africa, the CMLIA contributed substantially to the continued reduction of African wage rates which began in mid-1904, reversing the post-war trend for the first time.44

African wage rates fell constantly from a monthly rate of 55s. in June 1904 to 51s. 11d. in December 1905/January 1906. At the same time as this was being effected, the increased fragmentation of the working class in the mines was also going ahead. The introduction of a strikingly isolated group of workers, differentiated in race and language, held out important longer term cost-structure implications for the mining industry as well. This was to be seen fairly rapidly in the course of the White miners' strike of 1907, particularly at the Witwatersrand (Knights) Gold Mine where Chinese miners virtually sustained production during the stoppage.45

The contribution of the CMLIA in these developments was noticeable, but it is important to be precise about them. They came from the direct effects of a new external labour supply of manageable proportions, deliberately controlled in size as well as cost. The CMLIA did not, in other words, provide the means to totally replace African labour: there were greater advantages to be secured by a combination of the two. It did

42 Reports of the Transvaal Government Mining Engineer, 1906–7; 1907–8.
45 Denoon, A Grand Illusion, p. 156; Annual Report, Transvaal Government Mining Engineer, 1905–6. For a discussion of the role of cheap Black and Chinese and White scab labour in the 1907 strike see Davies, op. cit.; also ATCM, W9–1907.
achieve the beginnings of a permanent supplement to African labour. It appears, further, that there were sound cost considerations in this limited strategy. The high costs of Chinese importation made it an inequitable solution for the whole industry, with its mines of variable grade and working costs. The industry's appreciation of this may be seen in the financial structure of the CMLIA. Although the agency had the same features of self-subsidy as WNLA and the Chamber itself, and was fully integrated with the industry in terms of managerial control and policy, financially it remained a separate entity. Unlike external African labour supplied by WNLA, Chinese labour was not supplied at a cost representing the average cost of all unskilled labour. Thus capitalization and per capita rates for WNLA and the CMLIA remained separate—the latter charging more highly in both cases. All Witwatersrand mines contributed capital to both companies, which marginally lowered the differential cost for those using Chinese labour, but separate scales of paid-up share capital and capitation fees kept a balance in favour of the limited adoption of Chinese labour. Not that a limited adoption was incompatible with a general appreciation in the industry of its necessity. It was more a reflexion of the realities of the constraints of the Witwatersrand cost structure. The decision to capitalize and charge for Chinese labour on an individual company, as opposed to group, basis probably indicates the greater sensitivity of such a financial arrangement to these realities. In addition, this system did not stand in the way of differential group commitment to Chinese labour, or to subsidy by groups for those member companies taking the more expensive labour as a means of complement rationalization.46

The limited strategy also derived from the difficulty of ensuring the relative cheapness of Chinese labour. To ensure that Chinese labour was not prohibitive in cost, it was necessary to ensure four things: an absence of competitive recruiting by the mining companies to avoid raising the

46 Memo re Importation Costs, probably Jan. 1904 in ATCM, Ch. 16 as to the possibility of an average importation cost for African and Chinese labour. This was a matter of considerable debate: see Minutes of the Representatives of Mining Groups, 16 Feb. 1904 on the appointment of a sub-Committee to determine whether members should be groups or companies, op. cit.; CMLIA Statistical Return of Chinese Labourers in Employment of Members for July 1907, in ATCM, Ch. 66. The following is the group breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>% of group unskilled labour as Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farrar/Anglo-French</td>
<td>48.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Mining</td>
<td>34.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Goerz &amp; Co.</td>
<td>24.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. B. Robinson</td>
<td>10.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rand Mines Ltd.</td>
<td>42.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCI</td>
<td>24.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neumann &amp; Co.</td>
<td>27.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Eckstein &amp; Co.</td>
<td>23.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidated Gold Fields Ltd.</td>
<td>35.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
contract price of labour; control over elements of recruiting costs other than wages; stabilization of the workforce sufficient to reduce turnover costs and to maximize the acquisition of skill and productivity; and the provision of suitable devices to balance importation costs against productivity. This wide range of cost controls indicated that success for the scheme depended to a considerable extent upon the active support of governments, both in China and the Transvaal. Yet this assistance could only be bought at quite a high price: in the Transvaal, agreement to a minimum wage for Chinese miners; in China, agreement to a schedule of shipping conditions which substantially raised the cost of ship’s charter. Thus one of the paradoxes of the Transvaal experiment with Chinese labour was that devices contemplated to make it profitable actually raised the unit cost of employment and restricted its application.

This paradox put a premium on the efficiency of CMLIA in exploiting state support and intervention. In the Transvaal, the advisory services of the CMLIA played an important role. The provision of the services of the Chinese advisor to the individual mining companies, the extensive provision of circularized information and the provision of specialized advice and lobbying on the industry’s deputations to the government and in negotiations with the Foreign Labour Department, all had important effects on the restraining of Chinese labour costs. Nevertheless these activities depended upon the devices of social control of the industry as a whole and the provision of judicial, police and executive powers of extra-economic coercion by the state.

It was in China that the CMLIA could and did make its most valuable contribution to cost control. Administration was undoubtedly cheapened by the centralized character of the company. The expensive failure of the southern operations between February and September 1904, which took place largely outside the agency’s auspices, was a constant reminder of the price of insufficient organization and weakness in this new enterprise. Further, by ensuring that recruiting was regulated by the pace of South African demands, the agency ensured that complement allocation

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48 For an example of the role of the Chinese Advisor see P. Richardson, ‘Coolies and Randlords: The North Randfontein Chinese Miners “Strike” of 1905’, JSAS, (Apr. 1976), 168-71; for an example of the importance of circularized information see CMLIA Circular No. 116, 7 Aug. 1907 re Disturbance on the Cason Gold Mine, 5 Aug. 1907, ATCM, Ch. 66; for the presence of the CMLIA on an industry deputation to the Government re reduction of Passport fees for Chinese labourers, see Minutes of Deputation from the Transvaal Chamber of Mines to the Acting Lt-Governor, 27 Jan. 1905 in ATCM, Ch. 59. See also Minutes of Conference between Consulting Engineers and the Superintendent of FLD re Fair-day’s Work, Efficient and Inefficient, Minimum Average Wage, 3 Feb. 1905, ATCM, Ch. 59.

49 For further discussion of this point see Richardson, ‘Coolies and Randlords’, pp. 176-7.

50 See Richardson, ‘Recruiting Activities of the Chamber of Mines in South China, 1903-5’ for elaboration.
could be rationalized and that WNLA's functions were not duplicated. Yet centralization was not only an administrative convenience—it was essential if the highly expensive competition between individual companies or groups was to be avoided. At no time does it appear that the CMLIA was threatened in this respect in the way WNLA was between 1906 and 1908. The difficulties of opening up a new labour market and the size of the investment at stake forced the groups into a unified labour buying group, which functioned smoothly throughout the short period of its existence. Thus, the agency was assured of adequate funds to ensure that emigration could be conducted on a scale sufficient to reduce the unit costs of importation, whilst at the same time giving the industry power to create debt bondage over its labour force and recruit at a uniform rate all over north and south China. The uniform contract and advances against wages were to be of great economic importance in the struggle to ensure the maximum possible output from the Chinese workforce.51

An organization of this sort was also suitable for securing the recognition and toleration of the British and Chinese governments and to some extent it offset official reluctance to openly encourage emigration. Thus, the general manager in China, J. R. Brazier, established very cordial relations with the British consul-general at Tientsin and with the British consul at Chefoo. Further Brazier, and his successor Kempster, were men of sufficient importance to be able to secure audiences with the British minister at Peking, the head of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, Sir Robert Hart, and the head of the Chinese Emigration Bureau, Dr Mark. This bona fides based on financial muscle had a direct bearing on the Transvaal government's willingness to recognize the CMLIA for certain activities in China under powers conferred on the colonial government by the 1904 Emigration Convention. Thus the agency was recognized as the employer under terms of Article 6 of the Convention, and as approved attorney's for the mining houses under the repatriation clauses of the Convention and the Labour Importation Ordinance of the Transvaal.52

The CMLIA's financial structure did more than rationalize and stabilize

51 Jeeves, op. cit. pp. 22–8. For the industry's successful reduction of recruiting and shipping costs see Perry to Committee of Agents, 19 Jan. 1904 quoted in Minutes of Representatives of Mining Groups, 21 Jan. 1904, ATCM. The degree of this indebtedness was striking. For example on the s.s. Ascot which arrived on 26 Apr. 1905 at Durban with 286 labourers for the French Rand Gold Mine (inter alia) contracted at Chefoo, there was 100 per cent indebtedness to the CMLIA: 278 labourers receiving advances of $37 each, and 8 labourers receiving advances of $47 each, making a total cash outlay by the CMLIA of $10,662, or £1,666 4s. for this quarter of the shipment alone. FLD 345 Contract No. 60 of 1905, French Rand Gold Mine, from Chefoo, via s.s. Ascot. This contract was officially approved by the Transvaal Government—See Handbook of Ordinances, op. cit.
52 Brazier to Bagot, 27 Mar. 1907, ATCM 'C' Letter from China; CMLIA Circular No. 1078, 28 May 1907; CMLIA Circular No. 1060, 20 Apr. 1907, in ATCM, Ch. 65. Milner to Lyttelton, 23 Feb. 1904, C.O. 291/68/6464; Minutes of Deputation from Chamber of Mines to the Acting Lt-Governor, 27 Jan. 1905, ATCM, Ch. 59.
investment in Chinese labour importation, and secure access to state power. It also enabled the widest possible exploitation of the Chinese labour market. This had important implications for maximizing the labour supply, but also did much to insure the mining houses against actual or potential disaster in one area. Thus the collapse of the operations in the south in September 1904 was followed by an intensified and very successful recruiting drive in the north. At the same time, moves were made to investigate and assess the potential of the Yangtze valley regions. Recruiting supplies were also guaranteed by the extent of the agency’s local contacts. Thus the employment of at least two agents in each port was an attempt to bring down the costs of the acceptance price of the labour and to extend the available areas of contact. It is clear, for example, that Silas-Schwabé & Co., in Shantung were operating in a substantially different part of the province to the rival South African agent, Cornabé Eckford & Company. The proximity of the two embarkation ports similarly meant that in particularly populous parts, such as western Shantung or southern Chihli, all four northern agents could work and still ensure a reasonable supply. Supply maximization was also secured by the CMLIA’s allotment system in Chihli province. Instituted as a form of advertisement for the South African system, this was recognized as probably the single most important labour mobilizing device; in 1907 Kempster recommended extending it to Shantung and making it compulsory for all contracted recruits in the event of recruiting being reopened for the Transvaal. The postal arrangements operated by the CMLIA in conjunction with the repatriate boats served a similar purpose.  

It would be a mistake to assume, however, that the CMLIA was uniformly successful throughout the period of recruiting operations. Behind the provision of a sizeable labour force in South Africa lay increasingly difficult problems in the Chinese labour market. The evidence indicates a growing inability on the part of the CMLIA to guarantee the necessary labour supply between July 1904 and November 1906. In some measure this is attributable to incidental factors. Thus the outbreak of ‘relapsing fever’ in the Ch’inghuangtao depot prior to the departure of the thirtieth and thirty-first shipments—s.s. Indravelli and Cranley—had a serious if temporary effect on the recruiting programme. Yet there were more deep-seated causes of these difficulties. They can be explained partly in terms of the pattern of the industry’s initial approach to the Chinese labour market, which had necessitated, as we have seen, a widespread dependence on intermediaries, and a complex hierarchy of financial

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checks and controls to secure cost efficiency. Part of this problem was unavoidable under any system of recruiting arrangements: the Chinese provincial governors consistently refused to have any other than licensed Chinese recruiters operating in the interior. The mechanism which tied these recruiters to the CMLIA was expensive and relatively inefficient, but remained essentially unchanged except for the fact that Butterfield and Swire's operations in south China were terminated. Throughout the period of recruiting operations, there remained considerable dispute within the CMLIA as to the most suitable form of replacement. Thus Brazier and Kempster were in favour of employing a Chinese comprador as sole agent for the CMLIA, with complete responsibility for procuring the labour. The man envisaged was called Ning—a recruiting agent for the Russians in Manchuria, who had close connexions with the salt gabelle—whose offices it was proposed to use for purposes of enlistment and remittance. The Chinese adviser to the CMLIA, Baldwin, was in favour of establishing a fully fledged Chinese recruiting company based in Tientsin with prominent Chinese merchants and officials on the board of directors. This was seen as a means of neutralizing local hostility to emigration. Either proposal should be seen in conjunction with the CMLIA's attempts to establish complete control over the receiving depots. There can be little doubt that the agency was pushing for a much greater degree of direct private control over Chinese recruiting and transportation arrangements as a means of improving their bargaining position in the labour market. The issue was still being debated in early 1907—showing the industry's continuing optimism as to the prospects of reopening recruiting.54

Underlying these difficulties were more fundamental problems than those generated by the initial emigration arrangements. There is evidence to suggest that the CMLIA was facing an almost constantly deteriorating situation in the labour market from early 1904 onwards, and this gave real urgency to the necessity of tightening control over its own arrangements. Initially, these difficulties were centred on the southern part of the market—particularly in Kwangtung province, although there are indications that strong opposition would have been encountered in Fukhien as well.

Opposition from rival employers, in this case the agents working for the South East Asian traffic, was intense and vociferous. With local official and gentry support for this opposition, the competition became undeniable and the CMLIA was forced to capitulate to an effective

54 B. Owtram (Transvaal Emigration Agent, Ch'inghuangtao) to Jamieson, 11 Aug. 1906, FLD 124, file 16/30; Viceroy of Chihli to the Viceroy of Kwangtung and Kwangsi, quoted in Campbell to Satow, 28 Oct. 1904, F.O. 228/1548; Brazier to Bagot, 22 Mar. 1905, ATCM 'G' Letters from China; Memorandum re Compradores by G. W. Sheppard, Financial Sec. to the CMLIA in China, Tientsin, 4 May 1905, ATCM, Ch. 63 and Notes by G. Baldwin on Mr Sheppard's Memorandum, 1 July 1905, ATCM, Ch. 63; Report by H. W. Kempster on Chefoo depot, 8 Mar. 1907, pp. 13-15, encl. 1 in Brazier to Bagot, 18 Mar. 1907, ATCM, 'C' Letters from China.
monopoly. By contrast, the north-eastern parts of China had some surplus migrant labour as the Russo–Japanese war temporarily closed up traditional areas of employment. This was particularly true of Shantung province, although the pressures diverting usual labour patterns were also operating in Chihli province, and even bringing down labourers from southern Manchuria. However as the war developed, and the Japanese began to establish their hold on Korea, intense competition for labour developed in the north also with little information from returning South African migrants to offset it. As early as March 1905 Brazier was complaining about the effects of crimping by Japanese interests in Shantung. By July 1905 competition was such that Wolfe, Transvaal emigration agent at Chefoo, was moved to comment:

Emigration from this province (i.e. Shantung) could hardly have commenced under more favourable auspices. As the area affected by the Russo–Japanese war embraces the whole country to which emigration naturally tended, an excellent opportunity has arisen for turning it into a new channel. For close on a year coolies have been steadily drafted from this province to South Africa. Local superstition, official opposition and the scepticism of the people have in great measure been overcome. While the war continues it is not unreasonable to suppose that the supply of coolies will be adequate. The great question is how will matters stand when the war is over? Already difficulties are experienced whenever the Japanese require coolies and send a ship to Chefoo to collect them. All able-bodied men are taken, they are paid good wages, there is no medical examination, no questions are asked and coolies are not tied down by strict regulations. They are near their homes and can return when they please. Such are the prospects which at present attract many coolies, coolies brought from up country by the Transvaal recruiters to Manchuria. At the close of the war, they will no doubt be encouraged to emigrate there and take up what occupation they prefer.

A determined press campaign against South African interests was also pursued in the Japanese-owned Chinese language newspaper, the Shantung ji-pao. The ever widening gaps between shipments from mid-1905 onwards testifies to the truth of Wolfe’s speculations. The thirty-second and thirty-third shipments which arrived in South Africa in August and September 1906 respectively were particularly difficult to fill. By the beginning of 1906, an additional problem had presented itself: the doubt

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55 See placard by Ch’en Kang entitled An Exhortation to refrain from Emigration to the Savage Lands of New Foochow [sic], Kuyao [sic], Mexico, Manila and the Transvaal (transl. by Consular Service), encl. in Amoy Intelligence Report for May–July quarter, 1904, F.O. 228/1545; P. Richardson, ‘The Recruiting Activities of the Chamber of Mines in South China, 1903–5’, op. cit; Statement by the Governor of Shantung, quoted in Johnstone, Secretary to the Commissioner of Weihaiwei, to Commissioner Lockhart, 29 Aug. 1904, encl. in Lockhart to Lyttelton, 13 Sept. 1904, C.O. 879/85/755; Brazier to O’Brien Butler, 21 Mar. 1905, encl. in Brazier to Bagot, 5 Apr. 1905, ATCM, ‘G’ Letters from China.

56 Report on a Journey through Shantung Province with Special Reference to South African Emigration by E. D. C. Wolfe (Transvaal Emigration Agent—Chefoo) in FLD 83, file 11/-.
over continued emigration to South Africa was becoming widely known in the interior of Shantung and Chihli and having a material effect on recruiting levels. When the Liberal government dealt the coup de grâce to the scheme in November 1906, by withdrawing consular-delegate status from the Transvaal emigration agents, the prospects for even a hypothetical extension of the scheme were not good. After November 1906 the CMLIA became little more than a remittance and a repatriation agency. With declining staff levels and wasting assets it survived another fifteen months, by which time the demise of Chinese labour in South Africa was certain and the funds laid aside for its continuance were required for mobilizing other sources of labour in Africa.

The logic behind this transfer may be traced in the changing recruiting patterns of WNLA in these years. In 1904 Africans from outside British South Africa accounted for 53.95 per cent of recruits received by WNLA. In 1907, 75.55 per cent of all WNLA recruits came from outside the British South African High Commission territories, and by 1909, 88.36 per cent. This was a striking change. At the time of the introduction of Chinese labour, WNLA operated throughout the South African regional labour market, and drew recruits, as sole buying agent for the mining industry, in almost equal proportions from inside and outside of British South Africa. By 1909, the penultimate year of the Chinese labour experiment, the position had totally altered. The great bulk of recruiting inside British South Africa was done by mines independently of WNLA, and WNLA itself, in providing directly a significantly reduced proportion of the labour force, was drawing upon an enlarged catchment area outside. In 1909 WNLA only provided 52.65 per cent of all recruits to the mines and in so doing had been forced to increase five-fold the supply of Africans from Portuguese East African territories north of 22° south, and three-fold from British Nyasaland over the 1903 figure to maintain the proportionate balance of long-term contract labour in the mines as a whole. The response of the mining houses to the recruiting anarchy inside British South Africa, and the health hazards of long-term contract labour from tropical Africa in subsequent years were the logical consequence and the bitterest legacy of Chinese repatriation. The amalgamation of WNLA and CMLIA in February 1908 in many ways symbolized this process.

58 CMLIA Circular No. 1110, 23 July 1908; ATCM, Ch. 66. Memorandum of Agreement between WNLA and CMLIA, 3 Feb. 1908; ATCM, Ch. 66. Figures for recruiting drawn from WNLA, Annual Reports, 1903-12. The mobilization of mining interests to protect themselves against the effects of Chinese repatriation was very complex and requires further investigation. For isolated examples see Van Onselen, Chibaro, 26; B. Neil-Toomlinson, 'The Nyassa Chartered Company of Mozambique, 1891-1929', J. Afr. Hist., xviii (1977), pp. 109-128, below.
SUMMARY

One of the responses of the Transvaal gold mining industry to the economic crisis after the South African War of 1899–1902 was to import Chinese indentured mine labour. To facilitate this process and to integrate it with the overall demands and requirements of the industry, the mining companies established a recruiting and shipping company in 1904, known as the Chamber of Mines Labour Importation Agency. This short-lived company, which was characterized by a high degree of vertical integration, operated as recruiting and shipping agency in China, receiving agent in Natal and co-ordinating and advising agent in the Transvaal. Despite complex arrangements designed to exploit the Chinese labour market, the company was, generally speaking, successful in securing the requisite labour force of suitable size and quality for the Transvaal mines. However, it showed a longer-term susceptibility to competitive pressures in the northern Chinese labour market. The company was amalgamated with WNLA in 1908.