

The Open Door Swings Both Ways: Australia, China and the British World System, c.1770-1907.

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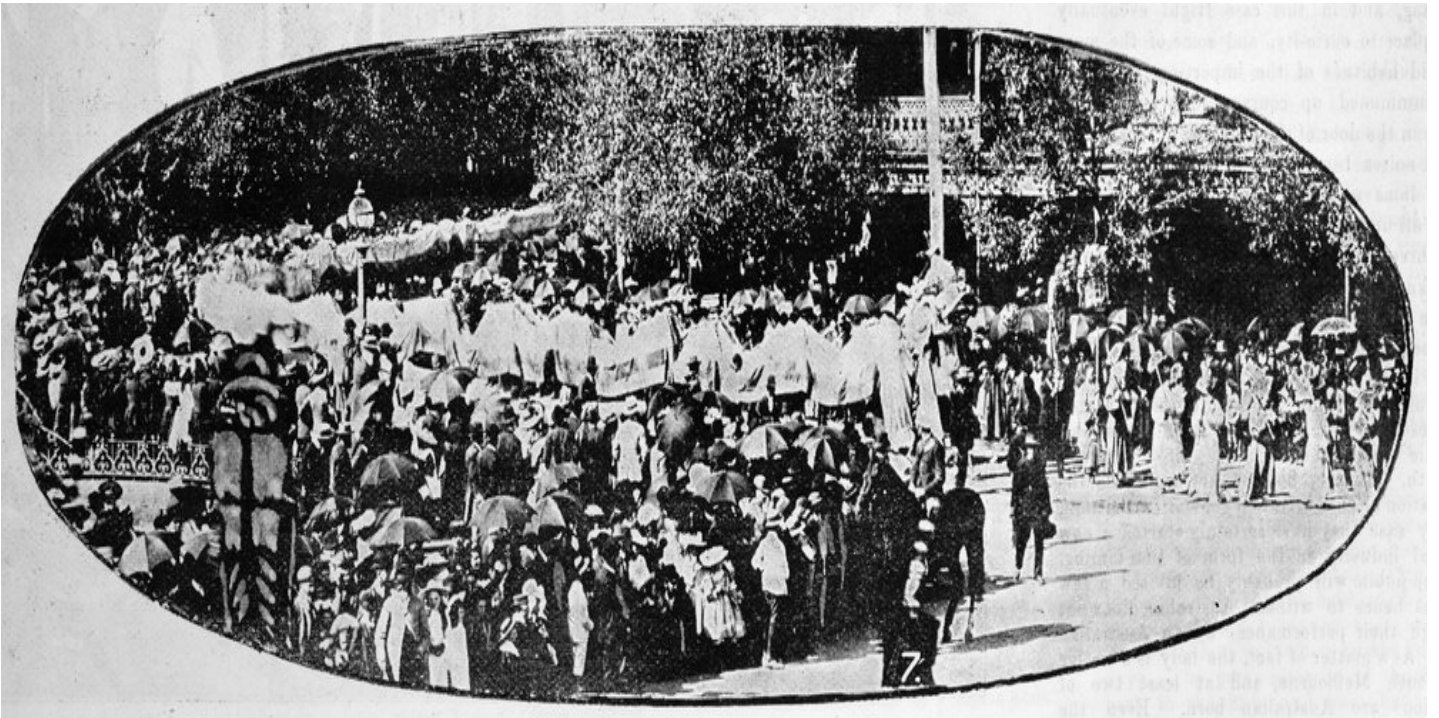


Figure 1: 'The Great Dragon', Bendigo Easter Fair, 1895. Picture Collection, SLV

Short Abstract

This doctoral thesis considers the significance of Australian engagement with China within British imperial history between the late-eighteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It sets out to explore the notion that colonial and early-federation Australia constituted an important point of contact between the British and Chinese Empires. Drawing on a long tradition of imperial historiography and recent advances in British World and Anglo-Chinese history, it utilises extensive new archival research to add a colonial dimension to the growing body of scholarship on the British Empire's relations with Qing China. In doing so, it also seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the internal dynamics and external relations of Britain's late-Victorian and Edwardian Empire.

The following chapters centre around two overarching historical themes. The first is the interconnection between Chinese migration to Australia and the protection of British mercantile and strategic interests in the Far East as imperial issues. The second is the relationship between Australian engagement with China and the development of the idea of a Greater Britain. Each of these themes throws up a range of fascinating historical questions about the evolving character of Britain's late-Victorian and Edwardian Empire, the inter-relation of its various parts and its ability to navigate the shifting winds of political and economic change. Taken together, they shed new light not only on Anglo-Australian, Anglo-Chinese and Sino-Australian history, but also serve to illuminate a series of triangular relationships, connecting the metropolitan, Far Eastern and Australian branches of the British Empire.

Long Abstract

In *Imperialism* (1902) J.A. Hobson emphasized the difference between the ‘new imperialism’ of the late-Victorian and Edwardian era, characterized by the scramble for ‘political and commercial gain’ in China and the spirit of colonialism, ‘the natural outflow of nationality’, that underpinned Britain’s settler empire. For Hobson, one of the most pressing questions facing the British Empire at the turn of the twentieth century, was ‘how this new imperialism reacts, and is likely to react, upon the relations between Britain and the self-governing colonies’. For much of the century that followed, however, imperial historians seemed less interested in this relationship. In studies of Anglo-Chinese relations and British Far Eastern policy, the relative position of the settler empire received little attention. For scholars engaged in Dominions history, Britain’s imperial activity in East Asia played a more visible role, but one largely confined to explanations for the development of colonial nationalism and (more recently) transnational discourse on whiteness and otherness. In Britain itself, imperial historians progressively shifted their focus away from the settler empire, towards Africa and Asia, whilst an ongoing debate over the importance of the imperial experience within British history, ebbed and flowed with the tide of world events. For the most part, the relationship between Britain, the white Dominions and her informal empire in China receded from view.

This thesis sets out to shed new light on the character and the historical significance of that relationship. As its focus, it explores the notion that colonial and early-federation Australia constituted an important point of contact between the British and Chinese Empires. Taking a broad sweep of a range of hitherto neglected archival material, it considers the influence of the Australian Colonies’ response to China

within British imperial affairs. Drawing on recent advances in British World and Anglo-Chinese history, ongoing research into the existence and function of imperial networks and the work of previous generations of imperial historians; it seeks to better understand the impact of colonial attitudes to China upon the evolving internal dynamics and external relations of the British Empire, in the late-Victorian and Edwardian era.

This impact is explored in relation to two overarching historical themes. The first is the interdependence of Chinese migration to Australia and the protection of British mercantile and strategic interests in the Far East as imperial issues. By the end of the nineteenth century it seemed to a number of observers that the Empire's 'Chinese questions' (as they were sometimes called) were becoming entwined. As British officials worked to preserve regional pre-eminence and secure mercantile expansion on the China Coast, colonial authorities in Australia were taking steps to insulate their fledgling populations from the prospect of large-scale Chinese migration. The divergence in colonial and metropolitan attitudes towards China revealed two contrasting visions of empire: one informal and driven by a desire for improved access to Asian markets and the preservation of the geo-political status quo; the other colonial, grounded in an emerging sense of British race patriotism and a commitment to the exclusion of Asian peoples. By reintegrating the histories of the Far Eastern and Australian branches of Britain's world-system, this thesis offers new insights to the intersections between British colonial and foreign policy in the Pacific and to the historical foundations of Sino-British and Sino-Australian engagement.

The second overarching theme of this thesis is the relationship between Chinese migration to Britain's white settler colonies and the emergence and subsequent development of the idea of Greater Britain. The issue of Chinese migration to the Australian Colonies, set off important debates on the movement of other Asian peoples and the rights of Asian-Britons, pushed certain imperial interests closer together and antagonised others. Following this second theme, this thesis explores the impact of colonial attitudes to China upon official and popular discourse on race, migration and intra-imperial relations. It concludes by weighing into the often-heated historical debate over the extent to which colonial ideas and policies were reflected in imperial Britain.

Each of these themes throws up a range of fascinating historical questions about the evolving character of the late-Victorian and Edwardian Empire, the inter-relation of its various parts and its ability to harness, or be buffeted by, the shifting winds of political and economic change. Taken together, they shed new light not only on Anglo-Australian, Anglo-Chinese and Sino-Australian history, but also serve to illuminate a series of triangular relationships, connecting the metropolitan, Far Eastern and Australian branches of the British Empire. More broadly, they provide us with a means to better understand some of the processes of nineteenth century globalisation, particularly as they were felt in those parts of the world that come under scrutiny. The coming together across vast distances of the questions addressed in this thesis and their ability to impact upon widely disparate communities was made possible by the increasing interconnectedness of the world in the second half of the nineteenth century. But more specifically, the wider resonance of these various local

issues reflected the respective positions of the Australian Colonies and parts of the China Coast within the British imperial orbit.

This research promises insights to the history of British engagement with China and the Dominions, the role of transnational forces in imperial politics and society and ongoing tensions between discourses of trade and settlement. At a time of global realignment, with the rest of the world adjusting to accommodate China's ascendancy, there is a need for ongoing research into the history of Sino-Western relations. Looking back, we can seek out a better understanding of the importance of the British Empire's relations with China in shaping our global society. By exploring our histories as shared, connected histories, albeit with a range of negative as well as positive dimensions, we can begin to better understand our mutual past and manage our shared future.

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Abbreviations and Style

Chinese Names

Throughout this thesis certain place and personal names are rendered as they appear in nineteenth and early-twentieth century British official papers, which relied on the Wade-Giles system of Romanisation. Hence ‘Peking’ and ‘Sieh Tajen’ are favoured over ‘Beijing’ and ‘Xue Fucheng’. Otherwise Mandarin Pinyin is used. Further details are provided where clarification is required.

Reference Abbreviations

<i>ACIMC</i>	Chen, X. and Han, R. (eds.) <i>Archives of China's Imperial Maritime Customs</i> (4 vols., Beijing, 1992).
<i>ADB</i>	<i>Australian Dictionary of Biography</i>
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BL	British Library
BL/AJB	Arthur James Balfour Papers, BL
BL/CWD	Charles Wentworth Dilke Papers, BL
BL/WEG	William Ewart Gladstone Papers, BL
BPP	British Parliamentary Papers
CAB	Cabinet Office Records, National Archives UK
CAC	Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College Cambridge
CAC/LA	Leopold Amery Papers, CAC
<i>CHBE</i>	J. Holland Rose, A.P. Newton and E.A. Benians (eds.) <i>The Cambridge History of the British Empire</i> (8 vols., Cambridge, 1929-1959).
CO	Colonial Office Records, National Archives UK
CUL	Cambridge University Library
CUL/MS/JM	Jardine Matheson Archive, CUL
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>

FO	Foreign Office Records, National Archives UK
HH/LS	Robert Gascoyne-Cecil (3rd Marquess of Salisbury) Papers Hatfield House
HO	Home Office Records, National Archives UK
HOC	Hansard, House of Commons Parliamentary Debates
HOL	Hansard, House of Lords Parliamentary Debates
<i>HRNSW</i>	A. Britton (ed.) <i>Historical Records of New South Wales, Volume 1, Part 2, 'Phillip. 1783-1792'</i> , (Sydney, 1892).
BL/IO	India Office Records, BL
LHASC	Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester
ML	Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales
ML/GEM	George Ernest Morrison Papers, ML
ML/HP	Henry Parkes Papers, ML
ML/JRW	John R. Wallace Papers, ML
ML/SCC	State Chamber of Commerce (NSW) Archive, ML
ML/QT	Mei Quong Tart Papers, ML
NAA	National Archives of Australia
<i>NCH</i>	<i>North China Herald</i>
NLA	National Library of Australia
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NLS/LR	Archibald Philip Primrose (5th Earl of Rosebery) Papers, NLS
NMM/WHI	Arnold White Papers, National Maritime Museum
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>OHBE</i>	W.R. Louis (ed.) <i>Oxford History of the British Empire</i> (5 vols., Oxford, 1998-1999).
<i>SMH</i>	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>

SLV	State Library of Victoria
SLV/MCC	Melbourne Chamber of Commerce Archive, SLV
SOAS/CA	China Association Archive, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
TNL	Times Newspapers Ltd Archive, News International
UB/JC	Joseph Chamberlain Papers, Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections, University of Birmingham

In the footnotes, 'London' is omitted as a place of publication.

Introduction

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the British Empire was confronted by two great Chinese questions. Neither of these questions was particularly new. They could both be traced back (at least in part) to the extension of British influence into the Pacific Ocean in the eighteenth century. Nor was interest in them in Britain, or in other parts of the Empire, at all constant down the years. From the middle of the nineteenth century they had periodically come into focus and then receded from view. Their resonance within British politics and wider public consciousness ebbed and flowed with the passage of world events and the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of those willing to trumpet their importance at the imperial centre. At the edges of the Empire, where these questions pressed hardest, the challenge was how to convince officials in Whitehall of their importance and to encourage them to embark on a suitable course of action. On occasion the message might get through, but more often, by the time these Chinese questions arrived in London it was as though their significance had been lost in transmission. Then, at the end of the 1880s, something changed. In a world made smaller by late-Victorian advances in transport and communications, isolated events at the periphery began to resonate elsewhere. Transferred along the circuits of Britain's world-system, Chinese questions began to move to the front rank of imperial problems.

The first of these questions (often known as the 'Far Eastern question' to contemporaries) related specifically to the maintenance of British interests on the China Coast and the broader implications for British foreign policy in East Asia. Since the 1840s, when Anglo-Chinese trade had moved away from the Canton system, centred on the principles of isolation and Company monopoly, British policy

in China had been guided by a commitment to free trade and the open door.¹ Hammered into place by the First (1839-42) and Second Opium Wars (1856-60) and the provisions of the subsequent Treaties of Nanjing (1842) and Tianjin (1858), the Treaty-Port system provided the architecture through which the dual aims of British policy - the expansion of commerce and influence - could be pursued. Guaranteed with certain qualifications the right to trade freely, to reside and to travel into the interior, Treaty-Port Britons were supported in their endeavours by the largest consular network in the world, vocal chambers of commerce and a legal and policing apparatus independent of the Chinese authorities.² The enforcement of treaty provisions by diplomacy and (if necessary) by force, were the hallmarks of an informal imperialism, pulling various pieces of the Middle Kingdom into the British orbit as ‘uncolonized extension[s] of empire’.³

From the middle of the 1880s, however, it became increasingly difficult to look upon China as a ‘purely commercial arena’.⁴ There were two main reasons. The first was that, in spite of the predictions of a number of vocal advocates, the China trade struggled to live up to the lofty expectations surrounding it. In the period right down to the First World War, China’s capacity as a market for British goods proved frustratingly limited.⁵ As a result, it became increasingly important for British companies to secure their established positions, protecting their hard won gains against the threat of outside competition. Secondly, with increased foreign activity in

¹ W.C. Costin, *Great Britain and China, 1830-1866* (Oxford, 1937), p.343; J. Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions* (Oxford, 1990), pp.24-25.

² P.D. Coates, *The China Consuls* (Oxford, 1988).

³ J. Osterhammel, ‘Britain and China, 1842-1914’, in *OHBE*, iv, pp.146-154.

⁴ M.H. Wilgus, *Sir Claude Macdonald* (New York, 1987), p.30.

⁵ P. Lowe, *Britain in the Far East* (1981), p.5.

the Far East, that competition appeared to be heating up.⁶ From their vantage points across the Empire an assortment of political leaders, Old China Hands, Treaty-Port merchants and others lobbied the British Government for a more assertive Far Eastern policy. What had once been a ‘commercial question’, Lord Beresford observed after travelling to China on behalf of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, had become entangled in a range of ‘international, racial and political complications’.⁷

For the rest of the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, British officials and China experts grappled with this Chinese question. At its core it was always, in the words of the long-serving Inspector General of China’s Imperial Maritime Customs Service, Robert Hart, about ‘how to treat China?’⁸ For those charged with finding an answer, the question itself seemed to fall apart whenever they picked it up, its composite pieces rolling off in so many directions that putting it back together was almost beyond comprehension. A series of crises over the provision of foreign loans, railway concessions and anti-foreign sentiment in China seemed to catch British officials off-guard, often a step behind their overseas rivals. In this context, long-standing disputes between the Foreign Office and the British mercantile community in China (together with their supporters in London) over the management of Anglo-Chinese relations spilled over into broader discussions on the future of the Empire itself.⁹ The globe was being ‘parcelled out like an allotment-ground’, wrote the Liberal MP Harry Norman in 1895, and ‘whoever succeeds in making his voice heeded in the Far East will be able to speak in dominating accents to Europe’. The

⁶ L.K. Young, *British Policy in China, 1805-1902* (Oxford, 1970), p.2; J. Darwin, *After Tamerlane* (2007), pp.318-330.

⁷ C. Beresford, *The Break Up of China* (1899), p.1.

⁸ R. Hart, *These from the Land of Sinim*, 2nd edn (1903), preface.

⁹ N. Pelcovits, *Old China Hands and the Foreign Office* (New York, 1948).

‘last house of the horoscope of the Far East’, was ‘England – what is to be her future there?’¹⁰

But if safeguarding British interests in the Far East presented British policymakers with a range of significant challenges, as they wrestled with this first Chinese question, another was knocking at the door.

Since the eighteenth century, when plans for the establishment of a British colony at New South Wales had begun to materialise, Australia’s potential relations with China had attracted considerable interest. For the first sixty years of settlement, the Middle Kingdom retained a prominent place in both metropolitan and colonial schemes for the development of British Australasia. But from the 1850s, when large numbers of Cantonese miners travelled to the Pacific gold rushes, these earlier visions began to appear hopelessly naive. Henceforth, the fear that a sudden wave of Chinese migration might engulf Australia hovered over colonial attitudes towards the Middle Kingdom. The ‘Chinese question in Australia’, as it was often called by metropolitan observers, was rather different than that which preoccupied Britons along the China Coast. This colonial ‘Chinese question’, wrote the Scottish-born merchant, Victorian politician and historian William Westgarth, was ‘one of our being someday blotted out or flooded out of national existence in certain of our colonies by a possible countless swarm of non-associable human beings’. Failure to act and ensure their ‘timely exclusion’ promised social and political chaos, as British communities

¹⁰ H. Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East* (1895), p.599.

overseas were overwhelmed and ‘denationalise[d]’ by endless waves of Chinese settlement.¹¹

Through the nineteenth century the Chinese question in Australia was gradually transformed into an imperial issue. The climax came in 1888 when Australian leaders introduced a range of measures designed to prevent the landing of Chinese passengers at colonial ports. In London, the Chinese Ambassador protested over what he saw as the violation of the right to free passage and protection promised to Chinese subjects by the Anglo-Chinese treaties. Soon a series of parallel complaints rained down on Whitehall over the potential hardship imposed on British traders and Chinese Britons. As temperatures rose, colonial leaders also lobbied the British Government, demanding imperial support for their vision of a ‘White Australia’, insulated from the vast populations to the north. The issue raised, in the words of Lord Knutsford, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, ‘a question of great importance as well as considerable difficulty’.¹² From the imperial perspective, the Australian response to China threatened to complicate Britain’s efforts to manage that larger Chinese question, the protection of her position in East Asia. Moreover, the situation raised uncomfortable questions as to the relations between Britain and the Colonies themselves. For those British officials looking out towards the eastern arc of the Empire, it must have often seemed as if they were trying to reconcile two incompatible responsibilities. On the one hand, they were charged with protecting the open door, the key plank in Britain’s push for the expansion of her trade and influence in East Asia, in an age of intensifying great power rivalry. On the other, they had to contend with the prevailing anxiety of their Australian colonists that this

¹¹ W. Westgarth, *Half a Century of Australian Progress* (1889), pp.vi-vii, 284-285.

¹² CO/881/8/10/No.24/CO to FO, 13 April 1888.

same door might swing both ways, unleashing vast waves of outward migration from China towards the Antipodes.

The Relations of History and Geography

This doctoral thesis explores the history of the Chinese question in Australia and traces its development into a significant issue within British imperial affairs. As the entrance of ‘the Great Dragon’ to the 1895 Easter Fair at Bendigo illustrates **[cover image]** by the late-nineteenth century, patterns of interaction between Qing China and Victorian Britain on the Australian continent were well-established. Reaching back to the foundation of the Second British Empire, this thesis considers how the unfolding narrative of Sino-Australian engagement, interacted with British Far Eastern interests, impacted on Anglo-Australian relations and influenced contemporary thinking about the future of the Empire itself. By adding a colonial dimension to recent developments in Anglo-Chinese history and relocating the story of Australia’s response to China more clearly within its imperial context, it investigates the ways in which colonial and early-federation Australia came to constitute an important point of contact between the British and Chinese Empires.

In order to navigate this wide and undulating historical landscape, the following chapters plot a course in relation to two overarching themes and associated traditions of scholarship. The first, introduced above, is the interconnection between the Empire’s ‘Far Eastern’ and ‘Australian’ Chinese questions, together with the resulting impact upon British foreign and colonial policy. The second, outlined below, is the importance of Australian perspectives on China in shaping official and popular discourse on ‘Greater Britain’. Each of these themes opens up a series of fascinating

historical questions about the evolving character of Britain's late-Victorian and Edwardian Empire, the inter-relation of its various parts and its ability to harness, or be buffeted by, the shifting winds of political and economic change. Likewise, they provide us with a means to better understand some of the processes of nineteenth century globalisation, especially as they were felt in those parts of the world that here come under scrutiny. The coming together across vast distances of the questions addressed in these pages and their ability to impact upon widely disparate communities was made possible by the increasing interconnectedness of the world in the nineteenth century. More specifically, it reflected the respective positions of the Australian Colonies and the China Coast within Britain's imperial orbit.

During the eighteenth century the British had begun to extend their influence into the distant Pacific Ocean.¹³ By the end of the 1830s their presence (commercial, military or both) was being consolidated in all the regions of the globe. Across the decades that followed, dramatic improvements in communications and transport; the expansion of overseas investment, trade and settlement; and the closer integration of the British and international economies, wound Britain and her scattered offshore interests into an ungainly but nonetheless united entity. By the 1880s, the various branches of this 'world-system' were becoming ever-more interdependent.¹⁴ Though the overall pattern of British expansion remained relatively consistent, the integration of the system's composite parts was continually speeding up.¹⁵ Across the globe a series of imperial networks sprung up, or else were superimposed onto existing

¹³ V. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763-1793* (2 vols., 1964), ii, 419. On the British, *ibid.*, 482-595; J. Samson (ed.) *British Imperial Strategies in the Pacific, 1750-1900* (Aldershot, 2004).

¹⁴ On the British Empire as a world-system, J. Darwin, *The Empire Project* (Cambridge, 2009), pp.1-12, 92-106.

¹⁵ J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *EHR*, 6:1 (1953), 3.

networks, linking Britain to its satellites overseas and these satellites to their hinterlands and to each other.¹⁶ A ‘complex agglomeration of overlapping webs’, often fragile, uneven and ‘constantly remade’, drew the inhabitants of distant parts of the world together into new relationships and allowed for the mass transfer of people, ideas and goods over vast distances.¹⁷

To a number of observers, it seemed as though the relationship between history and geography might be changing. In a paper on the subject, delivered at the Royal Geographic Society in 1886, the historian and Liberal M.P. James Bryce observed that the development of aboriginal, classical and medieval peoples could all be traced to the particular local interplay of the natural and the human. But in the nineteenth century, humans were liberating themselves from the restrictions of the natural world, reaching out across the topographical barriers that had hemmed in past societies. The result was that the world appeared to be shrinking. ‘This whole planet of ours’, observed Bryce ‘is for practical purposes very much smaller than it was in the time of Herodotus’. As Victorian technologies exploded longstanding conventions of space and time, the relations of hitherto remote regions were becoming more intimate. ‘Think’, Bryce urged his audience, of the transformative power of the great migrations of the Irish to America or the Chinese across the Pacific. In Hawaii, Chinese migrants were beginning ‘to form the bulk of the labouring population’, while they were ‘kept with difficulty from occupying Australia’.¹⁸ In a shrinking world, local issues, regional antagonisms and the implications of growing disparities

¹⁶ D. Lambert and A. Lester, ‘Introduction’, in D. Lambert and A. Lester (eds.) *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2006), pp.12-13; K. Grant, P. Levine, and F. Trentmann, ‘Introduction’, in K. Grant, P. Levine, and F. Trentmann (eds.) *Beyond Sovereignty* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp.2-3.

¹⁷ T. Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp.14-15.

¹⁸ J. Bryce, ‘The Relations of History and Geography’, *Contemporary Review*, 49, (1886), 426-443.

between ‘advanced’ and ‘backward’ nations, loomed larger on the horizon.¹⁹ History was working itself into ‘new forms’ as the temperate regions of the world, those suited to the ‘civilized European man’ were ‘fast being occupied’ and the interactions of disparate peoples grew ‘closer and more delicate’.²⁰

It was in this environment, where natural and national borders were being transcended, that seemingly peripheral issues might take on a whole new prominence. Such was the case with Australia’s engagement with China. As Britain’s position in the Far East assumed greater importance, so too did the connections between her settler and informal empires at either ends of the Pacific. By the early-twentieth century, Sino-Australian relations had made a visible impression on British foreign and colonial affairs, most notably around questions of migration, trade, imperial defence and the Empire’s Pacific orientation. Against a backdrop of late-Victorian expansion and Edwardian fears of decline, the Empire’s Chinese questions were drawn in together, producing a marked effect on both the internal dynamics and external relations of Britain’s world-system. This thesis explores how.

Australasian Questions and Questions of the Whole Empire

In taking this approach, this thesis endeavours to bridge some of the historiographical gaps separating studies of Britain’s informal empire in China and her white settler empire in Australia. Recent years have proved something of a watershed in Anglo-Chinese history. An explosion of scholarly interest has triggered a wave of research on: the character and administration of Britain’s informal empire; Far Eastern diplomacy; the lives and administration of settler communities; and the impact of the

¹⁹ E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* (New York, 1989), pp.14-22.

²⁰ Bryce, ‘History and Geography’, 443.

British presence in China ‘at home’.²¹ As a result, our understanding of the history of Britain in China and China in Britain has been profoundly enriched. Yet for all these considerable advances, colonial perspectives on the unfolding story of the British Empire’s relations with Imperial China have attracted relatively little attention.²²

While historians of empire in China have tended to overlook the place of Britain’s settler colonies, since the emergence of Australian history as an academic discipline in the 1890s, the issue of Australia’s relationship with East Asia has remained front and centre.²³ For much of the period down to the Second World War, China presented Australian historians with a cultural and economic counterpoint to meta-narratives of settler colonialism and a uniquely Australian Britannic nationalism.²⁴ From the 1970s, as Australia’s racially based migration policies were dismantled, historians shifted their focus, attempting to make sense of the meaning and the legacy of Australian’s long-standing hostility to Asian immigration.²⁵ In recent years, some scholars have concentrated on rediscovering the history of Chinese Australians on their own terms

²¹ Key works utilised here include R. Bickers, *Britain in China* (Manchester, 1999); J. Hevia, *English Lessons* (Durham, 2003); R. Bickers, ‘Ordering Shanghai: Policing a Treaty Port, 1854-1900’, in D. Killingray, M. Lincoln and N. Rigby (eds.) *Maritime Empires* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp.173-194; I. Phimister, ‘Foreign Devils, Finance and Informal Empire: Britain and China c.1900-1912’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 40 (2006), 737-759; T.G. Otte, *The China Question* (Oxford, 2007); R. Bickers, *The Scramble for China* (2011).

²² There have of course been exceptions. W.E. Soothill noted the unpredictable response of the Colonies towards treaty revision and the guarantee of mutual rights for British and Chinese subjects via the ‘law of reciprocity’. W.E. Soothill, *China and England* (1928), pp.93-94. The question of reciprocity and equality has more recently been taken up in the landmark, J. Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie* (Sydney, 2007).

²³ For an early example, T.A. Coghlan and T.T. Ewing, *The Progress of Australasia in the Nineteenth Century* (1903), pp.57-60.

²⁴ This interpretation underpins the Australian volume of the *CHBE*. See for instance, E.O.G. Shann, ‘Economic and Political Development, 1860-1885’, in *CHBE*, vi, part 1, 297-324.

²⁵ The classic works here are M. Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, 2nd edn (1967); H. McQueen, *A New Britannia* (Melbourne, 1970); C. Price, *The Great White Walls Are Built* (Canberra, 1974); A. Markus, *Fear & Hatred* (Sydney, 1979). The key collection of 1970s racial studies is A. Curthoys and A. Markus (eds.) *Who Are Our Enemies?* (Sydney, 1978).

and mapping the evolution of Sino-Australian relations and bilateral trade.²⁶ Others have continued to wrestle with the awkward legacy of Australia's race-based immigration policies by locating them within broader studies of white settler colonialism and an emerging transnational discourse on whiteness and otherness.²⁷ Where historians have considered the imperial implications of colonial reactions to Asia, they have tended to pursue their impact along one investigative pathway – explaining the rise of colonial nationalism.²⁸ For the most part, the impact of Australian contact with China upon British imperial affairs awaits investigation.²⁹

By bringing together these two divergent strands of imperial historiography this thesis aims to shed new light not only on the links between Anglo-Chinese and Sino-Australian history, but also to illuminate a series of triangular relationships, connecting the metropolitan, Far Eastern and Australian branches of the British Empire. In doing so, it takes a leaf from a number of contemporary observers, who looked to the development of settler colonialism in the Antipodes and informal imperialism in East Asia as interrelated imperial issues. As William Westgarth argued in his *Half a Century of Australian Progress*, 'the Chinese question [in Australia] must be faced and discussed by anyone who deals with Australian socio-economics'. In the intricately connected world of the late-nineteenth century, however,

²⁶ On the growth Chinese Australian history, A. McKeown, 'The Continuing Reformulation of Chinese Australians', *After the Rush. Otherland Literary Journal*, 9 (2004), 1-9. On trade, S. Tweedie, *Trading Partners* (Sydney, 1994).

²⁷ M. Lake and H. Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line* (Melbourne, 2008); J. Martens, 'A Transnational History of Immigration Restriction: Natal and New South Wales, 1896-97', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 34:3, 323-344.

²⁸ A. Offner, "'Pacific Rim' Societies", in J. Eddy and D. Schreuder (eds.) *The Rise of Colonial Nationalism* (Sydney, 1988), pp.227-248; L. Trainor, *British Imperialism and Australian Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1994), p.184. David Walker's work stands out for its consideration of hostility towards British Far Eastern Policy in Australia, D. Walker, *Anxious Nation* (St Lucia, 1999).

²⁹ The international ramifications of the White Australia Policy in the twentieth century have received more attention, S. Brawley, *The White Peril* (Sydney, 1995).

‘Australasian Questions’, were ‘questions of the Colonies in general, and questions of the whole Empire’.³⁰

An English World

The other thematic and historiographical foundation upon which this thesis rests is anchored to a different set of imperial relationships. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Chinese question in Australia had a marked influence on Anglo-Australian relations; inter-colonial engagement; and official, scholarly and popular discourse on empire in Britain and overseas. Most important were Australian views on race and migration. From the 1850s, emigration from China pushed certain imperial interests closer together and antagonised others. It united Britain’s white settler colonies, aligned in their desire to erect ‘great white walls’ against arrivals from the Middle Kingdom.³¹ Beyond the Empire, it encouraged a growing affinity between American (particularly Californian) and colonial leaders on the need for racially based policies of exclusion.³² Conversely, it frustrated those who saw colonial attitudes as incompatible with Britain’s position as an Asiatic power. Some saw commitment to a White Australia, a White New Zealand or a White Canada, as a betrayal of notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority. Others feared that the displacement of a ‘colour-blind’ model of imperial unity would alienate India, the central ‘pivot of the Empire’. At the same time, anti-Asian sentiment clearly had the potential to estrange both China and Japan, two important potential allies in the East.³³ Finally, there might also be implications closer to home. From the 1880s, but particularly in the wake of

³⁰ Westgarth, *Australian Progress*, pp.v, vi-vii, 284-287.

³¹ Price, *Great White Walls*; R. Huttenback, *Racism and Empire* (1976).

³² Lake and Reynolds, *Global Colour Line*, p.4, 9.

³³ Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*; P. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge, 1986), pp.12-15. On the tension between Greater Britain and India as ‘two opposite questions’, J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 2nd edn (1914), pp.205-206. The pivot here is Lord Curzon’s concept, Curzon to Northbrook, quoted in M. Belloff, *Imperial Sunset* (1969), p.48, fn.3.

the South African War, anti-alien campaigners and sections of the British working classes seemed increasingly receptive to ideas on race and exclusion long-held by their colonial and American cousins.³⁴ For their critics, it was as if all the worst excesses of democratic socialism were washing up on the banks of the Thames. As British officials attempted to weave a path between these conflicting sets of interests, an ever-expanding chorus of commentators weighed in with their own analyses and solutions to what seemed to be a mounting catalogue of imperial problems.

This thesis navigates these debates by considering the ways in which the Chinese question in Australia influenced Anglo-Australian relations and contributed to the initial development, and subsequent evolution, of the idea of a 'Greater Britain'. The expression (often interchanged with 'British World') was taken from the title of the English radical Charles Dilke's account of his youthful travels in America, Australasia and India in the late-1860s. Though Dilke's initial definition extended beyond the formal empire, drawing in the United States, Greater Britain became fixed over time as a collective term for Britain and her white Dominions (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa).³⁵ At its heart was a belief in what Dilke called the 'grandeur' of the British race, rooted in a proud Anglo-Saxon heritage and which he had found 'already girdling the earth ... destined, perhaps, eventually to overspread'.³⁶ The idea accorded privileged status to the colonies of settlement, setting them apart from the rest of the Empire and most significantly from India. The people of India, observed J.R. Seeley in his lectures on the *Expansion of England*

³⁴ N. Kirk, *Comrades and Cousins* (2003), pp.164-165; J. Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself White', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12:4 (1999), 398-421.

³⁵ When Dilke revised *Greater Britain* for an eighth edition, he noted the term had become 'hackneyed'. C.W. Dilke, *Greater Britain*, 8th edn (1885), preface. He later reverted to the phrase 'The British Empire'. C.W. Dilke, *The British Empire* (1899).

³⁶ Dilke, *Greater Britain*, preface.

(1883) were not ‘part of Greater Britain in the same sense as those ten millions of Englishmen who live outside the British Islands’. ‘When we inquire then into the Greater Britain of the future we ought to think much more of our Colonial than our Indian Empire’.³⁷

By the turn-of-the-twentieth century, the idea of an Anglo-Saxon Greater Britain provided ‘old’ and ‘neo-Britons’, with a powerful vision of a shared imperial future and a tonic to recurrent anxieties about the inevitability of decline.³⁸ In a world that seemed destined to be divided amongst the great European Powers and the United States, Britain’s colonial empire and her close demographic, economic and cultural relationship with the USA performed a number of reassuring functions. Together they created a large Anglophone polity, capable of dwarfing the demographic and industrial expansion of Britain’s continental rivals.³⁹ Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, North America and Australasia both received huge numbers of British emigrants, proved a relatively safe field for capital investments and provided a steady market for British exports.⁴⁰ They also served as great democratic laboratories for testing ‘political and social experiments of every kind’, the best of which could be transferred back to Britain after successful trials.⁴¹ Above all, Greater Britain brought with it the possession of a ‘boundless space’, across which the British race could expand and improve.⁴² In *Oceana*, J.A. Froude wrote;

It is simply impossible that the English men and women of the future generations can equal or approach the famous race that has overspread the globe, if they are to be bred in towns such as Birmingham and Glasgow now

³⁷ Seeley, *Expansion of England*, p.13.

³⁸ D. Bell, ‘From Ancient to Modern in Victorian Imperial Thought’, *The Historical Journal*, 49:3 (2006), 735-759; D. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain* (Oxford, 2007), pp.1-5.

³⁹ *ibid.*; C.W. Dilke, *The Problems of Greater Britain* (2 vols., 1890), i, 5-6.

⁴⁰ P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism* (1993), pp.229-275.

⁴¹ Dilke, *Problems*, pp.5-6.

⁴² Seeley, *Expansion of England*, p.184.

are, and to rear their families under the conditions which now prevail in those places. Morally and physically they must and will decline.⁴³

Britain's Australian Colonies, wrote Froude, would allow the British people, hemmed in by the effects of industrialisation, 'to increase and multiply'.⁴⁴ In doing so, Dilke chimed, Greater Britain provided a vital counterweight to the growing strength of the Continental Powers, by ensuring access to 'unbounded regions of fertile lands, outside Europe, but in climates in which white men can work upon the soil'.⁴⁵

In the Colonies themselves, the concept allowed overseas Britons to see themselves as part of a broader community (if not necessarily a formal federation) of Anglo-Saxon peoples, united by ties of kinship, culture and identity.⁴⁶ On the one hand, this connection provided a sense of security, reflected in the Colonies' continuing dependence on the protection of the Royal Navy, the ability to sell their exports in British markets and the inflow of investment capital from the City of London.⁴⁷ On the other, it was sufficiently malleable to allow for the development of Canadian, Australian, New Zealand (and eventually South African) colonial nationalisms. Built around 'an adherence to British institutions and ideas', each Dominion's journey towards nationhood was shaped by the particular local contexts in which they grew up.⁴⁸ A range of factors including the capacity of indigenous peoples to resist and collaborate; proximity to key shipping routes and major trading economies; natural resource endowments; and regional issues of trade and security, all influenced the

⁴³ J.A. Froude, *Oceana* (Leipzig, 1887), p.342.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.347.

⁴⁵ Dilke, *Problems*, p.2.

⁴⁶ C. Bridge and K. Fedorowich, 'Mapping the British World', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31:2 (2003), 2.

⁴⁷ Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, pp.229-275.

⁴⁸ J. Darwin, 'A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics' in *OHBE*, iv, p.86.

emergence of new ‘Britannic’ nations. For the residents of Greater Britain, experience at the colonial frontier added a sense of being Canadian, Australian, New Zealander or South African to being British.⁴⁹ In *Australia* (1930) W.K. Hancock captured that spirit when he aligned the narrative of British settlement with the creation of ‘a dwelling place spacious enough to house ... a nation ... new and old; Australian yet still British’.⁵⁰

The following chapters set out to explore the ways in which notions of a British World were continuously informed by colonial attitudes to race and nineteenth century globalisation. Here the Chinese question in Australia was fundamental.⁵¹ In January 1867, writing to his father from Sydney, Charles Dilke had first laid out his plans for a book on the ‘English World’. It would ‘look at the future of countries now peopled or likely to be peopled by the English race’, Dilke reflected. ‘I should look especially at the Pacific ... I should above all consider the effect on the English race of the presence of Chinese, Irish + German populations by its side – in America and in Australia (this idea is the key to my present tour).’⁵² Throughout his travels, Dilke’s attention was drawn to questions of race and particularly to the intermingling of disparate peoples from the Old World in the New. In San Francisco and Victoria, he observed ‘the violent prejudice’ of Americans and Australians towards the Chinese.⁵³ When he returned home to complete *Greater Britain* (1868) he expressed his sympathy for colonial perspectives and stressed their imperial significance:

⁴⁹ Linda Colley has argued that increased exposure to outsiders from the eighteenth century superimposed a sense of ‘Britishness’ onto English, Welsh and Scottish identities. It is proposed here that the colonial frontier served a similar purpose. L. Colley, *Britons* 3rd edn (New Haven, 2005), pp.6-7.

⁵⁰ W.K. Hancock, *Australia* (1930), p.68.

⁵¹ J. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth* (Oxford, 2009), pp.466-467.

⁵² BL/CWD/Add.MS.43901/Dilke to Father, 4 January 1867.

⁵³ C.W. Dilke, *Greater Britain* 5th edn (1870), pp.186-192, 339-346.

Many Victorians ... are in favour of ... [excluding] the yellow immigrants, in order to prevent the destruction of the rising Australian nationality. They fear that otherwise they will live to see the English element swamped in the Asiatic throughout Australia. It is not certain that we may not someday have to encounter a similar danger in old England.⁵⁴

In seeking a better understanding of the link between Chinese migration, the evolution of Anglo-Australian relations and the idea of Greater Britain, this thesis draws on both an older tradition of imperial historiography and more recent British World scholarship. For late-Victorian enthusiasts such as Dilke, Seeley and Froude, Greater Britain held the key to understanding both the dynamism of British overseas expansion and the Empire's capacity to negotiate future imperial rivalries. For much of the period down to the late 1950s, imperial history reflected this view and was often treated as the shared preserve of Britain and the white Dominions.⁵⁵ Then, for much of the second half of the twentieth century, imperial historians paid relatively little attention to Britain's white settler colonies. Across the waves, historians in the former Dominions reciprocated, eschewing imperial historical frameworks in favour of localised studies of national development and the troubled legacies of settler colonialism.⁵⁶ In part, this trend reflected the loosening of the bonds of empire as Britain turned away from the Dominions and towards Europe and they in turn, began to reconsider their own place in a postcolonial world. The history of Greater Britain, characterised by its focus on patterns of overseas settlement and constitutional evolution, largely receded from view. Imperial historians concentrated their energies towards developing a better understanding of the foundations of empire in Asia and

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.345.

⁵⁵ This view underpins both the *CHBE* and *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs* series. W.K. Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs* (2 vols., 1937-1942); N. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of External Policy, 1931-1939* (1952).

⁵⁶ P. Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, 'Introduction' in P. Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (eds.) *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary, 2005), pp.9-13.

Africa in the age of decolonisation. In a fitting epitaph, in 1956, the year of the Suez Crisis, Seeley's *Expansion of England* went out of print for the first time since its initial publication in 1883.⁵⁷

In recent years, however, a growing community of historians have set out to 'map', 'reinvent' and 'rediscover' the imperial history of Greater Britain. At the centre of the movement has been a desire to better understand the importance of 'Britishness' as a point of identification for imperial subjects at home and abroad.⁵⁸ As such, British World history might be taken as reflecting Hopkins' call to go 'back to the future'.⁵⁹ Looking back to an earlier historical tradition, grounded in the work of nineteenth century scholars, British World historians have also been at pains to recognise Greater Britain as a product of broader global and imperial forces. At its best, the British World framework presents not only a means for liberating British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and South African history from the boundaries of nationalist historiography, but shines a light on the importance of the multifarious networks that joined the various parts of that world together.⁶⁰ Naturally, though the model is not without limitations. Some historians have pointed to its inadequacy as a framework for considering Anglo-American relations.⁶¹ Others, focusing on the dynamics of imperial circuits and networks, have argued that 'in restoring British settlers to a central role in empire building', historians have neglected their 'virulently racist

⁵⁷ D. Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History* (Cambridge, 1980), p.155.

⁵⁸ Fundamental to this shift were J.G.A. Pocock, "British History: A Plea for a New Subject", *New Zealand Journal of History*, 8 (1974), 3-21; and Colley, *Britons*.

⁵⁹ A.G. Hopkins, 'Back to the Future: From National History to Imperial History', *Past and Present*, 164:1 (1999), 198-243.

⁶⁰ G.B. Magee and A.S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation* (Cambridge, 2010).

⁶¹ D. Armitage, 'Greater Britain: A Useful Historical Category?', *American Historical Review*, 104:2 (1999), 427-445.

contribution to the shaping of colonial discourses and practices'.⁶² The strongest corrective, from Tony Ballantyne, asserts that:

The use of "Britishness" as an analytical apparatus not only marks a return to C.W. Dilke's celebration of Britishness and empire, but also is an impoverished and reductive model for the history of multi-ethnic and polyglot colonial societies far removed from the United Kingdom.⁶³

As Ballantyne suggests, British World historians have sometimes struggled to strike a balance between searching for coherence and acknowledging diversity. Where they have gone to considerable lengths to investigate the notion of 'belonging' to a British World, less attention has been paid to the way in which the boundaries of that world were imperfectly defined and contested.

Clearly, if we are to retrieve the concept of Greater Britain from the offsite storage of imperial historiography, we need to deploy it in a rather different way than before it went in. Recognising the inadequacy of simply recreating nineteenth century approaches, this thesis sets its sights on evaluating the connection between the notion of a Greater Britain, the evolution of intra-imperial (particularly Anglo-Australian) relations and the Chinese question in Australia. To take this approach is of course neither to endorse particular notions of 'Britishness' put forward by Dilke and others, nor to ignore the wider imperial context in which they developed. It is instead reflective of a desire to better understand the reductive nature of the model itself and to assess its historical relevance. As such, for its failures as much as for its influence, the development of the idea of Greater Britain provides a particularly useful prism for considering the imperial significance of Australian contact with China. As we shall

⁶² A. Lester, 'Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire', *History Compass*, 4:1 (2006), 130.

⁶³ Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race*, p.3.

see, its influence was felt not only by those who were able fit snugly within the Anglo-Saxon ideal, but also by those who found themselves excluded and who envisaged a very different imperial future.

Methodology and Structure

Across the pages that follow, this thesis pursues these twin themes across both space and time.⁶⁴ While the majority of events described take place in London, Eastern Australia and along the China Coast, at times this focus loosens to allow for comparative analysis and for relevant events elsewhere to enter the frame. The structure of the thesis follows a loose chronology across the period c.1780-1907. Relevant historiographical debates are considered *in situ* with the various topics examined. Part One traces the evolution of Sino-Australian relations from the colonisation of NSW down to the 1880s. Part Two focuses on the dramatic crisis over Chinese migration that swept the Australian Colonies in 1888. Part Three considers the subsequent resonance of Australia's engagement with China in British political and popular discourse, particularly in relation to questions of migration, imperial defence and Britain's imperial future.

This is foremost a political history. It is concerned primarily with exploring the impact of Australian engagement with China upon colonial, British and imperial politics, though cultural and economic investigations play a supporting role.

Extensive use has been made of a range of official papers and public records and close attention is paid throughout to the role of prominent public individuals, both in Britain and across the Empire. As such, the questions raised here have been shaped

⁶⁴ On the historians' task in relation to horizontal (space) and vertical (time) integration, D. Northup, 'Globalization and the Great Convergence', *Journal of World History*, 16:3 (2005), 249.

primarily by the official and private correspondence of a number of Prime Ministers, Colonial Secretaries, Governors and lesser officials. These chapters, however, also seek to embrace a more panoramic conception of imperial politics, following Andrew Thompson's assertion that:

We must look beyond Westminster and Whitehall and adopt a broader conception of "politics" which embraces pressure group and press activity, extra-parliamentary political culture, intra-party allegiances, and the configuration of national political debate.⁶⁵

Here this thesis reaches out in three main directions. Firstly, as well as examining the 'functionaries' of the imperial system (to borrow J.R. Seeley's term), they consider the contributions of a number of non-government figures who made their voices heard on Australia and China. Secondly, they explore the role of several private organisations (ranging from Trade Unions to Commercial Associations) that expressed their own vested interests. Thirdly, they explore to the role of the newspaper press, particularly *The Times*, in shaping (as well as illustrating) many of the historical episodes described.⁶⁶

By taking this approach, this thesis seeks to contribute to the ongoing efforts of imperial historians to better understand the evolving internal dynamics and external relations of the British Empire in the long nineteenth century. In *The Problems of Greater Britain* (1890) Charles Dilke noted that:

Today the Chinese Question [in Australia] appears to present itself in a very different aspect from that in which it is viewed by us at home, and it is difficult to induce the men of the colonial lower-middle or working class, to take what we should call a broad international view.

⁶⁵ Thompson, *Imperial Britain*, pp.190-191.

⁶⁶ On moving beyond the 'illustrative', C. Kaul, 'Introductory Survey' in C. Kaul (ed.) *Media and the British Empire* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp.1-19.

The historical tension between an ‘international’, ‘imperial’ and an ‘Australian’ view of China dominates the following pages. Above all, it reveals a divergence in metropolitan and colonial perspectives on the triangular relationship linking Britain, the white settler colonies and the Far East - tied up in competing visions for the future prospects of the British race, Sino-Western engagement and the Empire’s global economic and geopolitical priorities. Overall, the story of Australian engagement with China between the late-eighteenth and early-twentieth centuries provides us with a window onto the complex interplay between different branches of a British world-system. On the one hand, we might look to the informal empire of influence, trade and commerce that characterised the British position in China, and on the other, the Australian settler colonies, with their aspirations for a Greater Britain.

Part One

Over the Hill Lies China

In his landmark study, Vincent Harlow pointed to the fundamental contradiction underpinning *The Founding of the Second British Empire* (1952-1964). The ‘altered course’ of Britain’s imperial expansion, Harlow observed, had produced a ‘dichotomy between a system of oceanic trade and an empire of settler colonies’.¹ By the end of the eighteenth century the contrast between the two was already evident at either end of the Pacific. To the north lay Canton - the central pivot of the East India Company’s circular trade. To the south was the freshly established penal colony of New South Wales (NSW) - a lonely and distant prison for the overcrowded criminal population of Georgian Britain. A century later the disparity was equally visible. While an informal empire of trade and influence had grown up around the Treaty Ports of the China Coast, the Australian Colonies had shaken off the convict stain and were developing into vibrant settler democracies.

The following two chapters investigate the interconnections between these two very different spheres of interest during the first one hundred years of Australian settlement. Building on the work of previous scholars, they examine some of the commercial and migratory networks that linked China and Australia during this period, together with the economic, logistical and legal barriers that conspired to keep them apart. More specifically, they set the realities of the relationship against the often surreal catalogue of fears and aspirations put forward by British and colonial observers as they contemplated closer Sino-Australian engagement and the implications for Britain’s imperial future. By focusing on this disconnect between the

¹ Harlow, *The Second British Empire*, ii, 4.

real and the imagined and tracing the history of Sino-Australian relations back to the British occupation of the Antipodes, they seek to locate Australia's response to China in the latter-nineteenth century within a longer historical narrative: one emerging out of the latent tension between the settler and informal branches of Britain's Pacific Empire.

In taking this approach, these chapters turn the spotlight onto the origins of the Chinese question in Australia. By focusing on the internal dynamics of Britain's imperial system, they concentrate on three themes that preoccupied contemporary observers. The first was the question of how Australian settlement might impact upon the Empire's trading interests in the region and particularly in China. The second was the appearance and rapid growth of colonial anxieties over Australia's isolation and the spectre of large-scale Chinese immigration. The third, straddling both these earlier themes, was the gradual drift between antipodean and metropolitan attitudes towards the Pacific. Across the first century of Australian settlement, the interplay between these three forces reverberated through the architecture of Britain's evolving imperial system. Here the interaction between British interests in Asia and in Australasia was vital. The famed cry 'over the hill lies China', which brought misguided hope to those early convicts who dreamt of escape, continued to resonate.² As the nineteenth century wore on, it set British officials and colonial leaders increasingly at odds, as they manufactured contrasting visions of Britain's Pacific destiny and Australia's place within it.

² On convicts' impressions of China's proximity, D. Walker and J. Ingleson, 'The Impact of Asia' in N. Meaney (ed.) *Under New Heavens* (Melbourne, 1989), p.295.

Chapter One

Sometimes as a Half-Way House to China: Australian Settlement and the British Empire in the Pacific

In 1786, the great Scottish geographer and hydrographer Alexander Dalrymple, noted that plans for an English settlement at NSW had ‘appeared in many Proteus-like forms’. In Britain, colonisation had been promoted variously as providing a ‘receptacle for transported convicts’; a check on Spanish influence in the region; an asylum for American loyalists; a new ‘Emporium’ for obtaining maritime resources; and the southern link in a trans-Pacific fur trade. Reflecting growing interest in the commercial potential of the Pacific Ocean, the settlement of Australia had ‘sometimes’ been cast as ‘a half-way house to China’.¹

The following chapter explores the importance of China in shaping impressions of Australian settlement from the 1770s down to the middle of the nineteenth century. It investigates the ways in which British and colonial interest in the Middle Kingdom came to influence aspirations about the development of British Australia. Looking back to the foundations of British settlement in the Antipodes, it traces the emergence of two distinct visions of Sino-Australian relations, set within the overall context of British imperial expansion in the Pacific. By picking up these interlocking historical threads, it provides us with our starting point for considering the imperial significance of Australian engagement with China.

¹ A. Dalrymple, *A Serious Admonition* [1786] ed. G. Mackaness (Sydney, 1943), p.21.

***Powerful Nations Should Calculate by Centuries
... And Lay Plans Only for Eternity.***

In the second-half of the eighteenth century, as commercial expansion and advances in maritime exploration were opening the Pacific Ocean to European influence, the distant islands of the South Pacific were coming into clearer focus.² For centuries, the ‘Antipodes’ had existed in the European imagination as semi-mythical lands beyond the edges of the known world. ‘The Antipodeans, around whom revolve[d] many fables’, according to one medieval source, inhabited a ‘fourth place’. Beyond Europe, Africa and Asia, they lay across an ocean and were obscured by the sun.³ Some five centuries later, the depiction had endured. In his popular comedy *The Antipodes*, the Caroline playwright Richard Brome presented a world ‘upside down’, where ‘women overrule[d] the men’ and ‘people rule[d] the Magistrates’.⁴ As European knowledge of the Americas and the Far East improved, the unknown southern regions of the world retained their secrets. The *Terra Australis Incognita* continued to provide a ‘rich source of imagery’ as the last ‘earthly unknown’.⁵

English schemes promoting trade in the southern hemisphere had been in existence since at least Elizabethan times.⁶ In the wake of Dampier’s expeditions in the 1680s and 90s, the buccaneering spirit embodied by Drake and Hawkins had been gradually replaced by a desire for scientific discovery. By the mid-eighteenth century, the European invasion of the Pacific was stimulating British interest in the region.

Buoyed by patriotic sentiment, navigators at sea and maritime theorists at home

² A.G. Price, *The Western Invasions of the Pacific and its Continents* (1963), pp.24-42.

³ Beatus Map, Turin Copy [c.1150] cited in S. Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye* (Cambridge, 1996), p.113.

⁴ R. Brome, *The Antipodes* [c.1636], ed. D.S. Kastan and R. Proudfoot (2000), p.24, 27.

⁵ D. Faucett, *Writing the New World* (Syracuse, 1993), p.2.

⁶ C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia* (6 vols., Melbourne, 1962), i, 59; G. Mackaness, *Some Proposals for Establishing Colonies in the South Seas* (Sydney, 1943), pp.6-7.

sought to piece together the remaining pieces of the Pacific puzzle.⁷ At Edinburgh, the publisher John Callander sought to pre-empt foreign competition. Between 1766 and 1768, he produced an English translation of the Dijon parliamentarian Charles de Brosses' *Terra Australis Cognita*, a compilation of the observations of generations of European explorers. The goal, Callander wrote, was to 'awaken the attention' of those with the 'power to promote the naval empire of Great Britain' and encourage the 'formation of settlements' in the southern hemisphere.⁸ Just as Spain, Portugal and Holland had distinguished themselves through colonial endeavour, now Britain would confirm her status as a 'powerful nation' capable of 'lay[ing] plans for eternity'. Any Pacific investments made by the East India Company (EIC) or the British Government would be repaid handsomely as British colonies forged new commercial links across Japan, China, South East Asia and the known and 'unknown lands which lie dispersed in the great South Sea'.⁹

The age of Pacific exploration culminated in the voyages of James Cook. Commercially disappointing in the short-term, Cook's expeditions profoundly enriched Europeans' understanding of Pacific geography [**Figure 2 below**] and made dramatic improvements to the quality of shipboard life. By the end of his second voyage, during which he circumnavigated the globe at a high southern latitude, Cook had shattered the myth of the Great Southern Continent. In its place he had opened up a sphere for scientific, humanitarian and commercial enterprise.¹⁰

⁷ W.P. Morrell, *Britain in the Pacific Islands* (Oxford, 1960), pp.13-15; G. Williams, 'The Pacific: Exploration and Exploitation', in *OHBE*, ii, 556.

⁸ J. Callander, *Terra Australis Cognita* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1766-1768), i, ii; iii, 739-740.

⁹ *ibid.*, iii, 739-740.

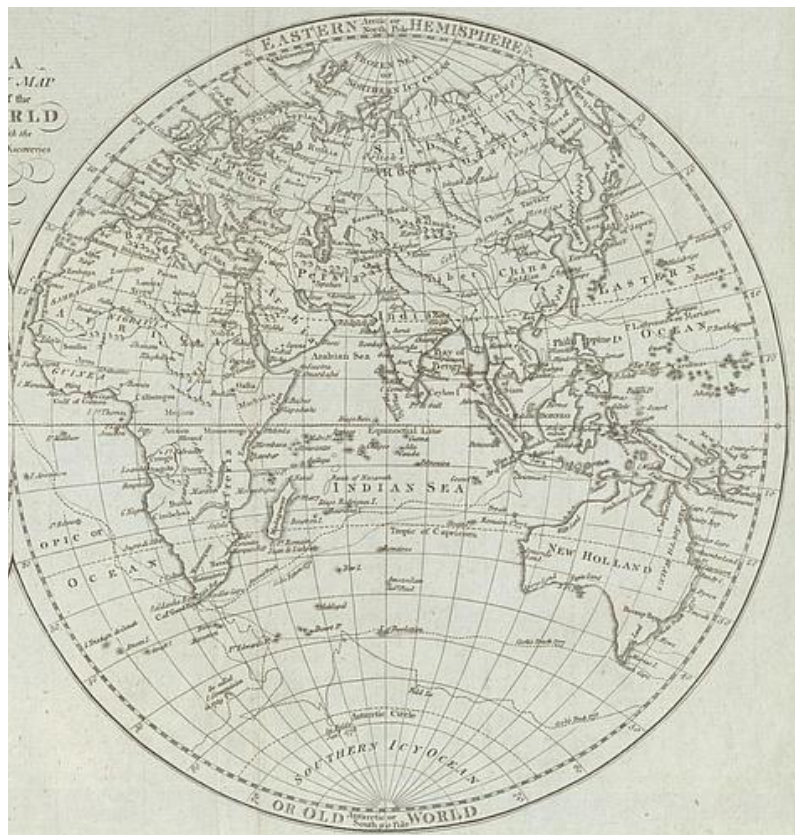
¹⁰ Morrell, *Britain in the Pacific Islands*, p.26; J.A. Williamson, 'The Exploration of the Pacific', in *CHBE*, vii, part i, 47-52.

Figure 2: Mapping the East.

Two maps showing the dramatic advances in European knowledge of Indian and Pacific Ocean geography during the 1700s, the second incorporating Cook's latest discoveries.



'A Map of the East Indies', from W. Dampier's *New Voyage Around the World* (1697).



'A New Map of the World with the Latest Discoveries', Engraved for J. Harrison, London (1788).
NLA/Nan Kivell-Collection/Map.NK.1541

As the ‘fabrications’ of centuries past gave way ‘to firmly placed dots and then lines’, the Pacific became ‘ready for economic exploitation’.¹¹ By the end of the 1770s Cook’s discoveries were making their first contribution to the formulation of policy. Before the Bunbury Committee of the House of Commons (1779) Joseph Banks (who had joined Cook on his first Pacific voyage aboard the *Endeavour*) put forward Botany Bay on the eastern coast of the Australian mainland as a potential site for a penal colony. ‘It was not to be doubted’, Banks suggested, ‘that a Tract of Land such as *New Holland*, which was larger than the whole of *Europe*, would furnish Matter of advantageous return’.¹²

From the beginning, there were always those who saw settlement as part of a larger push to secure and expand the British position in Asia. The desire for commercial and strategic advantage lay at the heart of two well-known schemes put forward in the 1780s, which promoted Australia as a great southern base for British enterprise.¹³ Of all the ‘many new discoveries ... which know no Sovereign’, the *Endeavour* veteran James Mario Matra observed in 1783, ‘None are more inviting than New South Wales’.¹⁴ With a climate apparently well suited to tropical production, Matra predicted colonial staples would find a welcome market throughout South-East Asia, India and beyond. In time this trade would inspire a ‘Revolution in the whole system of European Commerce’, concentrating regional power and influence into British

¹¹ D. Mackay, ‘Myth, Science and Experience in the British Construction of the Pacific’ in Samson (ed.) *British Imperial Strategies in the Pacific*, p.54.

¹² BPP/HOC Journal/vol.xxxvii, 1 April 1779, 311.

¹³ CO/201/1/James Mario Matra, 23 August 1783; CO/201/1/Sir George Young, 1785. Subsequent quotes from these sources.

¹⁴ The author of the anonymous *A Journal of a Voyage Round the World*, Matra later became British Consul at Tangier. A. Frost, ‘James Mario (Maria) Matra’, *ADB* [website], <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/matra-james-mario-maria-13084>>, accessed 11 July 2011.

hands. Two years later, Sir George Young took a similar line.¹⁵ ‘Its great Extent, and relative Situation with Respect to the Eastern and Southern parts of the Globe, is a material Consideration’, he noted in his own proposal. Settlement would facilitate the expansion of a British trading system already spanning the globe:

From the coast of *China*, it lies not more than about a thousand Leagues, and nearly the same Distance from the *East Indies*; from the *Spice Islands*, about seven hundred Leagues and, near a Month’s run from the *Cape of Good Hope*.

These projected commercial benefits were coupled with strategic gains. In wartime, wrote Matra, the Colony might take a ‘commanding influence in the policy of Europe’: her harbours providing a valuable refuge for British ships and a base for striking out against hostile rivals. ‘Here’, Young chimed, were ‘Ports of Shelter and Refreshment, for our Ships, should it be necessary to fend any into the *South Sea*’, as well as a potential source of timber and flax for the production of masts and cordage.

Of particular interest to Matra and Young, was the extent to which NSW might be connected to China. Both put forward visions of a symbiotic relationship. Drawing on the ready market for Pacific furs at Canton, Matra glimpsed a potential solution to Britain’s trade deficit with China.¹⁶ ‘Should this Settlement be made’, he wrote, ‘we should no longer be under the necessity of sending such immense quantities of Silver, for the different Articles we import from the Chinese Empire’. In return, China could provide the manpower needed to kick-start colonial development. Young advocated collecting settlers from ‘the *Friendly Islands* and *China*’, while Matra invoked the expertise of his patron Joseph Banks, who was of the ‘opinion that we may draw any

¹⁵ A ‘competent officer’, Young had served in the Royal Navy and the East India Company Marine. A. Frost, ‘Sir George Young’, *ODNB* [website], <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30261>>, accessed 11 July 2011.

¹⁶ M. Steven, *Trade, Tactics and Territory* (Melbourne, 1983), pp.64-105.

number of useful Inhabitants from China'.¹⁷ While at Batavia, Banks had found that Chinese spent 'their lives working and gaming, scarce allowing themselves time for ... food and sleep'. It was as 'extraordinary a sight to see a Chinaman idle, as ... to see a Dutchman or Indian at work'.¹⁸ Now Chinese labour could help build up Britain's new southern territories, as colonial produce improved her terms of trade at Canton.

The complementary nature of the relationship was also extended to the problem of convict transportation. For Young, engagement with the China trade was the only way to conquer the inevitable problems that would be thrown up by the vast distances separating a potential penal colony from Britain. Matra neglected to include convict settlement in his initial proposal but later informed Undersecretary of State for the Home Department, Evan Nepean, that the expected expansion of the tea trade would provide the perfect means for disposing of 'as many [convicts] as are on hand'.¹⁹ Both men worked this proposed system into the broader claim that, with further advances in navigation, NSW would be shown to provide a shorter and safer route for British ships bound for China. Young wrote:

The *China* Ships belonging to the *India Company*, after leaving the *Cape of Good Hope*, and keeping more to the Southward than usual, may land the Felons on the Coast, and then proceed to the Northward round *New Ireland*, &c. or through *St. Georges Channel*, and fo on to the Island FORMOSA for *Canton*.

Having delivered their colonial produce, there they would collect shipments of tea for the return voyage to Britain.

¹⁷ On Matra and Banks, N. Chambers (ed.) *The Indian and Pacific Correspondence of Sir Joseph Banks, 1768-1820* (4 vols., 2008), i, xx-xxi; 23-24.

¹⁸ ML/Banks Papers/'Endeavour Journal', December 1770, pp.501-505. *ML Online Collection* [website], < <http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/album/albumView.aspx?acmsID=887466&itemID=887496>>, accessed 11 July 2011.

¹⁹ Quoted in *HRNSW*, 8-9.

That China featured prominently in schemes promoting Australian settlement was perhaps a natural expression of the European fascination with the Middle Kingdom in the eighteenth century. Though Western impressions were becoming less favourable (influenced by accounts of Qing imperial decline) China's value as a potential market was compelling.²⁰ In 1784, Pitt's Commutation Act had substantially reduced the import duty on Chinese tea. Designed to remove the incentive for smugglers, Pitt's Bill sparked a dramatic increase in tea sales and shifted the EIC's commercial focus towards China.²¹ Connected to Britain (and her European markets) via British India, Canton would become the focal point of the Company's circular trade.²² In their proposals, Matra and Young sought to carve out a sympathetic place for NSW within this developing system. In doing so, they joined others for whom improved access to Eastern markets provided a stimulus to activity in the New World, a phenomenon which had been most clearly visible in the search for the illusive Northwest Passage.²³

Others, however, painted a more sobering picture of the likely impact of colonial settlement on British interests in Asia. In 1786, Dalrymple published his dramatically titled *A Serious Admonition to the Public on the Intended Thief Colony at Botany Bay*. As a leading Pacific propagandist, Dalrymple had been central in encouraging the search for the Great Southern Continent. At one stage he had gone so far as to suggest that the trading potential of the *Terra Australis* might be sufficient to maintain Britain's 'power, dominion, and sovereignty ... by employing all its

²⁰ C. Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Oxford, 1989), pp.43-65; J. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd edn (1999), pp.132-137.

²¹ Tweedie, *Trading Partners*, p.14. The drop in import duties (from 199% to 12.5%) led to an increase in sales from 5.9 million pounds in 1783 to 15 million pounds in 1785.

²² Harlow, *The Second British Empire*, ii, 526-527.

²³ B.M. Gough, 'The North West Company's "Adventure to China"' in Samson (ed.) *British Imperial Strategies in the Pacific*, p.310. The Australian example of 'Colonizing with Convicts' offered inspiration to R.C. Etches of the King George Sound Company, who sought to develop a fur trade between North America and Asia. Etches to Banks, 17 July 1788, quoted in Chambers (ed.) *The Correspondence of Joseph Banks*, i, 316-318.

manufactures and ships'.²⁴ But as Cook undermined and disproved his geographic theories, Dalrymple had become embittered and sceptical. When plans for a penal colony appeared, he warned that the despatch of convicts would prove damaging to Britain's wider interests. Botany Bay would become a nest for pirates:

The probable consequence of a Colony ... would be their addicting themselves to Piratical excursions amongst the Islands, and on the Coast of China ... The lives of the fair trader and the total loss of the Trade to China might be the forfeit for the[ir] transgressions.²⁵

Beyond the reach of the British Government if divided and too dangerous to crush if united, they would be a constant threat to the EIC's presence in China.

To Dalrymple's way of thinking, the expansion of Britain's commercial interests in Asia and the inevitable demands of a developing settler community in Australia seemed not only incongruous - they were bound to come into conflict. He demolished the claim that NSW might provide a faster and more secure passage to China as 'the offspring of ignorance' (which of course it was). He argued that it was an 'absurdity' to presume the existence of maritime supplies in quantities that would offset the exorbitant cost of settlement. Worst of all, the suggestion that NSW might establish some form of independent shipping capacity, was simply a scheme to 'carry on an illicit Trade, under pretext of a Colony'. As 'Guardians of the publick welfare' and the British 'stake in India', the EIC would resist all attempts to undermine its monopoly over Eastern trade.²⁶ Finally, Dalrymple turned on Banks' prediction that penal settlement might anticipate an eventual shift towards civil government. 'If we had *nothing to lose* in the EAST', he retorted, 'it might be a curious subject of

²⁴ A. Dalrymple, *An Historical Collection of the Several Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean* (2. Vols., 1770-1771), i, xxviii-xxix.

²⁵ Dalrymple, *A Serious Admonition*, p.22.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp.20-22.

Political Speculation, to see what kind of Government, a Set of lawless Ragamuffins would constitute? ²⁷

Australian Settlement and the Swing to the East

Historians remain divided over the importance of these early reflections on Australian colonisation. Assessments vary in keeping with broader disagreement over why Australia was settled. Against the traditional interpretation, that solving the problem of overcrowding in British prisons was paramount, revisionists have sought to highlight the importance of commercial and strategic considerations. The resulting debate might be crudely boiled down into a three-way argument over the primacy of the Pitt Cabinet's desire to relocate convicts; to build up a maritime base in the region, with access to new supplies of flax and timber; and to develop NSW as a commercial hub, along a safer pathway to China and India.²⁸

The settlement debate has flared periodically since the 1960s, though its key parameters were sketched out much earlier.²⁹ In 1888, in an article for the *EHR*, Edward Gonner set out to interrogate the prevailing notion 'that a criminal establishment was the one object of Australian colonisation'.³⁰ Gonner's analysis highlighted the link between the scholar's field of vision and the impression they might come to form. A tight focus on the immediate stimulus acting upon the Pitt Cabinet would foreground the transportation question. A wider investigative lens would detect the presence of a series of less refined, supplementary motivations.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.27.

²⁸ For an introduction, G. Martin (ed.) *The Founding of Australia* (Sydney, 1978).

²⁹ The spark that fired the debate in the 1960s was Blainey's cool assertion that Australian settlement was 'a startlingly costly [and slow] solution' to the convict issue. G. Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, 2nd edn (Sydney, 1982), p.19.

³⁰ E.C.K. Gonner, 'The Settlement of Australia', *EHR*, 3 (1888), 625.

Disagreement over the appropriate frame of reference underpins much of the more recent discussion. Proponents of the traditional view have called for a close reading of the aims of the key statesmen involved, paying little attention to ‘the ideals of lesser and later men’.³¹ In response, advocates of the ‘maritime strategy’ and ‘pathway to China’ theories have sought to locate the move towards convict settlement more firmly within the ‘overall context of British interests in Asia’.³² Here the observations of the likes of Matra and Young enjoy a more prominent position, while the traditional interpretation assumes ‘an extraordinary degree of short-sightedness in Pitt’s Cabinet’.³³

This uncertainty over propagandists’ influence helps locate the Australian debate within a more general discussion of British imperial strategy in the region. In the 1940s, John Ward argued that even after Cook’s voyages had focused attention onto the Pacific, ‘the official British attitude ... was one of indifference’. The one ‘limited and grudging departure’ was the settlement of NSW.³⁴ Others were less sceptical. Writing at the beginning of the 1960s, W.P. Morrell saw ‘accumulators and systematizers of knowledge’ (such as Callander and Dalrymple) as vital. It was they who had ‘helped stimulate governments’ and create the ‘new climate of opinion’ that produced ‘a sustained attempt to secure British ascendancy in the “South Sea”’.³⁵ Vincent Harlow went further, setting the search for the Great Southern Continent as ‘the main drive of national policy’ from the 1760s, part of a ‘revulsion against imperialism by settlement’ and an early sign of the British Empire’s ‘Swing to the

³¹ A. Atkinson, ‘Whigs and Tories and Botany Bay’ in Martin (ed.) *The Founding of Australia*, pp.207-208.

³² G. Martin, ‘Economic Motives Behind the Founding of Botany Bay’ in *ibid.*, pp.246-247.

³³ H.T. Fry, ‘Cathay and the Way Thither’ in *ibid.*, p.144. Frost has been the key proponent of the maritime argument, A. Frost, *Convicts and Empire* (Melbourne, 1980).

³⁴ J. Ward, *British Policy in the South Pacific, 1786-1893* (Sydney, 1948), p.1.

³⁵ Morrell, *Britain in the Pacific Islands*, p.14.

East'. It was a shift in attitudes, he argued, that eventually 'effected a diversion of interest and enterprise from the Western World to the potentialities of Asia and Africa'.³⁶ In recent years historians have taken a more cautious approach, offering a measured interpretation of the prominence of the Pacific and the coherence of any imperial strategy.³⁷ In his contribution to the *OHBE*, Glyndwr Williams emphasizes the inconsistent and eclectic nature of British attitudes towards the Pacific. Here the schemes of the enthusiasts were always of limited consequence, contested and changeable. Their impact on policy was never definitive and 'there was no official masterplan into which the voyages of Cook and his colleagues neatly fit'.³⁸

For the moment, an unresolved truce has come to rest over the Australian settlement debate. Historians have turned elsewhere, acknowledging that the discussion has effectively reached a stalemate. When tempted to explore the issue, one comes almost immediately to a historiographical fork in the road. Guided only by the contradicting maps and observations left behind by previous scholars and an inconclusive catalogue of primary sources, we are forced to choose one of three divergent pathways and forge ahead, quickly losing sight of the alternate routes. Undoubtedly the surest, most well trodden approach remains that which focuses on the transportation issue. While the 'Maritime Strategy' and 'Pathway to China' arguments have been taken up by a number of distinguished scholars, we might well remain sceptical as to whether they

³⁶ Harlow, *The Second British Empire*, i, 38, 62.

³⁷ Harlow's faith in enthusiasts' influence; the coherence of British policy; his depiction of an empire of oceanic trade replacing one of dominion; and the timing and economic reality of the 'Swing to the East', have all come under challenge. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, p.8; W.R. Louis, 'Introduction', in *OHBE*, v, 36; P.J. Marshall, 'Britain without America' in *OHBE*, ii, 577-578. Marshall disputes the notion that the 'East' ever displaced the 'West' in strict economic terms. For a more general assessment of Harlow's work, R. Hyam, 'British Imperial Expansion in the Eighteenth Century', *Historical Journal*, 10:1 (1967), 113-131.

³⁸ Williams, 'The Pacific', 558.

place too much faith in the influence of Pacific enthusiasts and the cohesiveness of official planning leading up to Australian settlement.

While we might struggle to quantify the influence of strategic and commercial concerns upon the Pitt Cabinet, however, we can at least safely acknowledge their presence within a wider public discourse. Indeed, even proponents of the traditional view have been willing to concede the attractiveness of ‘compensations’ that might offset some of the cost of establishing a convict settlement. Public curiosity, wrote the author of *An Historical Narrative of the Discovery of New Holland & New South Wales* (1786) had been strongly excited by the settlement question and the national benefit it might provide. ‘Every intelligent person’ would wish to ‘continue the friendly intercourse’ Britain enjoyed with the inhabitants of the Pacific and to foster ‘commercial connections with them’.³⁹ The following year the politician, reformer and diplomat William Auckland Eden, observed that ‘the future existence of such a Colony’, was regarded by some ‘as a visionary event, and deprecated by others as the probable source of unhappiness to the parent state’. Seeking to allay concerns over challenges to the EIC Charter, he argued that NSW might one day render to Britain an ‘important instrument for the improvement of her commerce’.⁴⁰ Even the ‘Heads of a Plan for Settlement’, a document overwhelmingly preoccupied with ‘the confinement for felons’, found space to consider issues of regional trade and migration.⁴¹ When sending the plan to the Chairman of the EIC in 1786, Lord Sydney wrote that it would

³⁹ Anonymous, *An Historical Narrative of the Discovery of New Holland and New South Wales* (1786), pp.1, 52-54.

⁴⁰ W.A. Eden, *The History of New Holland* (1787), pp.7-9.

⁴¹ Quoted in *HRNSW*, 18-19.

provide a ‘means of preventing the emigration of our European Neighbours to that Quarter’ and the ‘infinite prejudice’ that might ‘bring to the Company’s affairs’.⁴²

Whatever their eventual policy impact, the articulation of these possible remunerations focused attention on the relationship between Australian settlement and the British Empire’s Pacific trajectory. And it is here that we might glimpse the true significance of the sorts of ideas put forward by Matra, Young and Dalrymple from the perspective of the present study. If we decouple our analysis from a desire to pin down the ultimate impetus to colonisation, we might look to them instead for the origins of two competing visions of British Australia’s place in Asia. On the one hand, settlement enthusiasts like Matra and Young dreamt of a close association. Here NSW would be intricately linked to the surrounding islands, to India and particularly to China. Commercial and colonial interests would come together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Their contours would align and allow for the construction of a more complete and resilient whole. On the other hand, Dalrymple feared that colonial settlement would introduce an unpredictable and uncontrollable element into Britain’s system of Eastern trade. Interaction between colonists in the south and the Empire’s oceanic trading networks in the north would produce an adverse reaction, destabilising the EIC’s posture and undermining the expansion of British trade. Authorities in London would be forced to manage the growing tension between these two incompatible branches of their imperial system. In the years ahead the contest between these two impressions of Australian settlement, connected to Asia and set apart from Asia, would come to have a significant impact on British imperial affairs. That scenario was still some way off. But as the First Fleet made its way to the

⁴² Quoted in A. Frost, ‘The East India Company and the Choice of Botany Bay’ in Martin (ed.) *The Founding of Australia*, pp.229-230.

southern hemisphere, many of those who took an interest in NSW were already turning their attention towards the question of China.

Establishing a Free Bridge

With the colonisation of NSW the China schemes put forward by the likes of Matra and Young broke hard against the cruel reality and bitter isolation of convict settlement. The renewal of the EIC Charter in 1793 dealt a crushing blow to the development of Australian exports. Determined to protect its position, the Company worked to ensure that restrictions on NSW's right to build large ships and engage in direct trade were enforced. That resolve was made clear during an episode in 1806, when its London representatives intervened to prevent the landing of a cargo of seal skins and whale oil shipped privately from Sydney. Such 'piratical enterprises', the Company advocate warned, must be stamped out or 'the inevitable consequence' would be a colonial 'intercourse with all the ports of the China and India-Seas'.⁴³

Shipping records indicate that a number of vessels leaving NSW called at Chinese ports. Between 1788 and 1845, some 262 vessels disembarked from Sydney for China (often en-route to subsequent destinations) while 124 made the reverse journey. The corresponding figures for India were 764 and 251; Batavia, 498 and 125; and Ceylon, 22 and 13.⁴⁴ Although China clearly occupied a prominent place along the maritime routes linking Australia to the wider world, her capacity as a market for NSW' production was limited. When the shadow of the EIC Charter was finally lifted in 1834 export expansion was marginal, as attempts to find a staple attractive at

⁴³ 'The Emancipation of Australian Trade', in *The Brabourne Papers* (Sydney, 1897), pp.11-12. British whalers also took steps to protect their business from local interference. Tweedie, *Australia and Asia*, p.14.

⁴⁴ Estimates taken from J. Broadbent, S. Rickard and M. Steven (eds.) *India, China, Australia* (Sydney, 2003), p.199. Here 'China' includes mainland China, Macau and Hong Kong.

Canton stumbled. The sandalwood trade (which initially held out great promise) was undermined by a market glut during the first decade of the nineteenth century and was thereafter plagued by low prices and inconsistent supply. The overwhelming importance of the British market and a chronic shortage of available tonnage stifled the development of wool exports to Asia until well into the twentieth century. On the other side of the ledger, the inflow of Chinese tea and other products ensured that the balance of Sino-Australian trade remained firmly tilted in China's favour.⁴⁵ In the meantime, India became a much more 'familiar part of the Colonists' world'.⁴⁶ From the 1790s, Calcutta had kept a 'watching brief' on NSW and dispatched essential supplies.⁴⁷ After 1813, a relaxation in Company regulations allowed for the emergence of a promising trade with Bengal. Within the first thirty years of settlement more than one hundred trading vessels made their way from India to Sydney. By 1820-21, NSW was exporting some 67,016 Rupees worth of produce to Bengal and importing some 212,187 worth of goods in return.⁴⁸

But despite the importance of India and the difficulty of forging closer links with China, during the first sixty years of settlement colonial interest in the Middle Kingdom remained conspicuous. In commercial and official circles proponents of closer engagement embraced their predecessors' belief in the potential for bringing Chinese labour to Australia and sending colonial exports to the Chinese market. Hampered by Company Monopoly, the first generation of NSW merchants engineered Pacific rendezvous with American ships in order to bring their produce to

⁴⁵ Tweedie, *Trading Partners*, p.16; F. Broeze, 'The Cost of Distance: Shipping and the Early Australian Economy, 1788-1850', *EHR*, 38:2 (1975), 582-597.

⁴⁶ Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp.13-25; J. Broadbent, 'Fashioning a Colonial Culture' in Broadbent, Rickard and Steven (eds.) *India, China, Australia*, pp.15-30.

⁴⁷ M. Steven, 'Eastern Trade' in *ibid.*, p.600.

⁴⁸ 1 Rupee = 2s3d Sterling. 'Appendix 2: Bengal-NSW Trade, 1804-1821' in *ibid.*, p.200. Walker and Ingleson, 'The Impact of Asia', p.295.

Canton.⁴⁹ Leaving home, enterprising Britons bound for Sydney expressed their desire to connect NSW to the China market. In 1801, the explorer George Bass urged his wife, ‘Pray write to me at Canton ...write also to me at Port Jackson ... for we shall return to that place from China’.⁵⁰ In search of commercial intelligence they made contact with Far Eastern trading firms and established themselves as local agents in the tea trade.⁵¹ Likewise, for resident British officials, China represented an ‘arena for action’: a state of mind exemplified by Governor Gipps’ apparent readiness to deploy ships to the First Opium War.⁵² Geostrategic considerations were coupled with a desire to ensure future access to Asian commerce. These twin motivations found their expression in the annexation of the vast expanse of Western Australia in the 1820s. The Swan River Colony, observed its first Governor James Stirling, commanded the ‘facilities for carrying on trade with India and the Malay Archipelago, as well as with China’. Its situation would allow ‘for the equipment of cruisers for the annoyance of trade in those seas’ and it was clearly within British interests to ensure that no foreign power be allowed to exploit that advantage.⁵³

A striking feature of early colonial impressions of China is their faith in the inevitability of closer Sino-Australian relations. Failure to penetrate the China market appears to have done little to dampen expectations of a healthy commerce down the line. Colonial traders retained their faith in the notion that closer association was bound to come. In the meantime, they should position themselves accordingly, whilst

⁴⁹ Tweedie, *Trading Partners*, p.14.

⁵⁰ G. and E. Bass, *The Letters of George and Elizabeth Bass*, ed. M. Estensen (Sydney, 2009), pp.56-57.

⁵¹ Australian mariners were also engaged in the opium trade, ‘Sin Tuaka’, *Jottings of a New South Welshman* (Sydney, 1867).

⁵² The plan was ultimately aborted. A.W. Stargardt, *Australia’s Asian Policies* (Hamburg, 1977), pp.17-21.

⁵³ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.5.

the authorities took steps to exclude any potential foreign competitors who might have similar designs on the region.

Evidence of these attitudes (together with the difficulties confronting colonial exporters) is preserved in the records of Jardine Matheson and Company (JM). The history of the firm, its influence in shaping British policy towards China and its rise to pre-eminence amongst the foreign trading companies in the Far East is well-known. In the 1820s, two Scotsmen, William Jardine and James Matheson, who were both engaged as merchants at Canton, began collaborating under the banner of Magniac and Co. The firm was restructured as Jardine Matheson and Co. in 1832 and made substantial advances in the tea trade following the collapse of the EIC monopoly two years later. In the 1830s, faced with mounting Chinese resistance to the opium trade, Matheson and Jardine travelled to London to lobby the British Government for intervention. Jardine convinced Lord Palmerston of the need for military action, providing detailed intelligence in the so-called 'Jardine Paper'. In the wake of the First Opium War, the Treaty of Nanjing ceded the island of Hong Kong to Britain, provided indemnity for British losses (following the destruction of some 20,000 opium chests by the specially appointed Qing Commissioner Lin Tse-hsu) and opened five Chinese ports to foreign trade. Soon the firm established a new headquarters at Hong Kong. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century it expanded its interests along the China Coast, eventually diversifying its presence into a range of sectors including railways, shipping, and cotton spinning and weaving.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ M. Keswick (ed.) *The Thistle and the Jade* (1982); R. Blake, *Jardine Matheson* (1999). On the need for additional research into the Company's Australian interests, W.E. Cheong, *Mandarins and Merchants* (1978), p.42.

In October 1828, one Gordon Browne, a British trader freshly arrived in NSW (and seemingly unaware of the constraints imposed by the Company Charter) wrote to Jardine at Canton to enquire:

Upon the mercantile relations of China and this Colony ... One of my wishes in settling here was to enter into this trade and I think that I might be able to do so under as great or greater advantages than anyone in this Colony.⁵⁵

Browne's strength was that he was in a position to provide dedicated shipping. He claimed to possess four vessels of 300 tons that could be put into service between Sydney and Canton. His weakness was the lack of any obvious colonial product that might offset demands for payment in silver. Professing himself committed to bringing Chinese tea to NSW, Browne sought Jardine's advice on 'the creation of any import' that might put the trade onto a 'new footing'. He queried the suitability of beche-de-mer, the sea slug that had been collected by Macassan trader-fishermen from northern Australia for the China market for several centuries prior to European settlement. Browne had 'no doubt of being able to provide some considerable quantity', but was 'quite ignorant of its real value and of its good and bad qualities'. In concluding, he thanked Jardine for any advice forthcoming and promised he might 'freely command my services in this port' in return. Similar concerns with finding suitable exports for the Asian market resurface throughout Jardine's Australian correspondence. By 1851, Thacker & Co., agents for the firm at Sydney, were shipping sandalwood to China for what they complained was a depressingly low price. They noted with relief that the recent discovery of gold reserves might finally provide a tradable commodity for 'a country so destitute of exportable productions'.⁵⁶ Thacker and other Australian merchants also pointed to the difficulties of shipping and selling their perishable

⁵⁵ CUL/MS/JM/B6/3/3, Browne to Jardine, 1 October 1828.

⁵⁶ CUL/MS/JM/B6/3/464, Thacker to JM, 4 July 1851.

product on consignment, given the fluctuations in demand and price that characterised the Australian tea market.

As colonial merchants continued to search for a path to Canton, others looked to human rather than commercial traffic as the key to the Colonies' relations with the Middle Kingdom. In the early-1800s, the possibility of importing Chinese labourers was taken up (and then abandoned) by Governor King, who believed that Chinese would be more productive than convict workers.⁵⁷ The idea later found its most articulate proponent in the colonial theorist Edward Gibbon Wakefield. In *A Letter from Sydney* (1829) Wakefield pointed to the chronic shortage of free labour in Australasia as the greatest impediment to development. Australasians, he wrote, must 'secretly yearn for a trade in human flesh' that could furnish a surplus of cheap labour. Wakefield's solution was the free migration of Chinese workers and their families. British settlements, he suggested, would accrue 'infinite advantage', by 'establishing a free bridge' to those 'numerous over-peopled countries, by which they are ... surrounded'. Tapping into contemporary fascinations with China's commercial potential, he concluded his treatise by posing a tantalising open question:

It would appear, at first sight, that the people of England have no motive for enabling the Chinese to multiply according to the laws of nature, by means of free migration. But would it be no advantage to British manufacturers to enjoy free trade with millions of fellow subjects of Chinese origin, and, *through them*, perhaps with hundreds of millions of customers in the Celestial Empire?⁵⁸

The suggestion echoed pre-settlement models of reciprocity. As expanding communities of Chinese Britons worked to develop the colonial frontier, they would

⁵⁷ S.H. Roberts, 'History of the Contacts between the Orient and Australia', in I.C. Ross (ed.) *Australia and the Far East* (Sydney, 1936), p.3.

⁵⁸ E.G. Wakefield, *A Letter From Sydney* (1829), pp.201, 221-222.

simultaneously provide the British Empire with a new point of access to the China market.

Wakefield's vision was not as startling as it appears in hindsight. By the beginning of the nineteenth century China's population had grown to approximately four hundred million – providing an alluring potential market for colonial trade. Moreover, for centuries, the story of China's foreign commerce had been entwined with that of emigration. From the twelfth century, periodic bursts of political energy and private endeavour had stimulated the expansion of Chinese commercial activity in Asia and encouraged small numbers of enterprising Chinese to venture abroad. From the sixteenth century, when China first legalised private trade, overseas commerce flourished. The result brought primary resources and silver into the Empire and carried Chinese into the port cities of South East Asia. There they became ensconced and prospered, seeing off rival communities of foreign traders and providing subsequent generations of Western observers with models of Chinese ingenuity and resourcefulness. By the nineteenth century, despite the Qing's ambivalence, small numbers of Chinese were venturing beyond Asia, a process that would be dramatically enhanced by increased interaction with the West.⁵⁹

Wakefield's plans to jointly tap China's population and markets, however, amounted to nothing. Instead moves to import Asian labour were pre-empted by the massive expansion of 'squatting' in eastern Australia in the 1830s and the resulting shortage of workers available to watch over colonial flocks. In 1837, a Committee of Council in NSW reported in favour of coolie immigration and efforts were made to secure the

⁵⁹ G. Wang, *The Chinese Overseas* (2000), pp.1-37; L. Pan, A. Reid, W.L. Lai, R. Skeldon, P. Bailey, M. Hood, F. Christiansen and X. Liang, 'Migration' in L. Pan (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Chinese Overseas* (1999), pp.46-71.

importation of indentured Indians.⁶⁰ The opening of the Treaty Ports widened the focus to include Chinese. Threatened by the end of transportation, pastoral interests sought to retain some system of unfree labour, drawing inspiration from the use of indenture in British possessions such as the West Indies and Mauritius. As news of the Treaty of Nanjing reached Sydney, the colonial statesman William Wentworth formed a coolie association to channel Asian labour.⁶¹ But despite the efforts of colonial pastoralists, opposition from the Colonial and Foreign Offices, the Governor and town workers in Sydney, precluded the adoption of any official indenture scheme. The importation of large numbers of indentured Asians, warned successive Colonial Secretaries, might stem the flow of free migrants, who would be put off by the presence of ‘degraded elements’.⁶² In 1843, responding to a petition from the workers of Sydney, Lord Stanley sought to assure his memorialists that there was ‘no measure in contemplation for permitting the emigration of coolies’.⁶³ Small numbers of indentured labourers (including more than 2000 Chinese) were imported as a result of private arrangements. These schemes, however, had limited success and fell away following the wool depression of the 1840s.⁶⁴

The challenges confronting those colonial interests who sought to draw labour from China are again preserved in the archives of Jardine Matheson. In 1851, Thacker & Co. wrote to the Company at Hong Kong, asking if they would ‘have any objection to

⁶⁰ ‘Coolie’ was a derogatory term applied to indentured or unskilled workers on long-term restricted contracts. The origins of the term have been traced to the Tamil word *kuli* (wages). R. Bright, ‘Chinese Indentured Labour in South Africa’ (King’s College London Ph.D. Thesis, 2009), p.13.

⁶¹ Roberts, ‘History of the Contacts’, p.5.

⁶² Glenelg to Gipps, 14 December 1837, quoted in K. Saunders, ‘The Workers’ Paradox’, in K. Saunders (ed.) *Indentured Labour in the British Empire 1834-1920* (1984), p.216.

⁶³ Stanley to Gipps, 4 August 1843, quoted in Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, p.29.

⁶⁴ Saunders, ‘The Workers’ Paradox’, p.218. Before a Select Committee on Immigration (1838) one pastoralist testified that 1,203 Chinese and Indian Shepherds had already been engaged by 111 masters, *ibid.*, p.216. On indentured labour and the Colonies, M. Harper and S. Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford, 2010), pp.170-179; Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, pp.26-58; H. Tinkler, *Separate and Unequal* (Vancouver, 1976), pp.21-42.

undertake to ship Chinese Coolies or labourers down to us'? The Sydney merchants gave no mention of their intended purpose for the labourers, but made special enquiries as 'to whether their wives could be enticed [*sic*] to accompany them', as well as some of their children. In doing so, they acknowledged the spread of anti-Chinese sentiment, particularly amongst urban workers, and the perceived 'great evil' that would develop if groups of single Chinese men were imported alone. Thackers were seemingly keen to avoid the charge of importing a foreign pauper workforce. The firm had been informed that Chinese from Amoy (from whence the first coolies had arrived in NSW aboard the *Nimrod* some 11 years earlier) were of 'the very lowest description' and enquired whether 'better' candidates might be drawn from Hong Kong or Shanghai. Thacker & Co. were also wary of possible resistance from authorities in London and Peking. They concluded by enquiring as to whether there might be any 'regulations the Chinese or English Government may have with regard to the exportation of coolies', that they need be aware of. If all was in place and Jardines could organise a supply of suitably refined workers, Thacker & Co. looked to 'make arrangements for the importation of considerable numbers'.⁶⁵

Thacker & Co.'s efforts to secure the importation of Chinese labourers (together with their struggle to establish a reciprocal trading partnership with Jardine Matheson) provide us with a glimpse of some of the impediments that stood in the way of closer Sino-Australian engagement in the early-nineteenth century. The pull of the Canton market continued to attract the attention of colonial merchants, while pastoralists worked to secure the importation of Chinese labour. But if the idea of closer association retained its attraction in certain sectors of colonial society, the hurdles to

⁶⁵ CUL/MS/JM/B6/3/464, Thacker to JM, 4 July 1851.

its achievement were also becoming more visible. Failure to identify suitable colonial exports, the emergence of anti-Chinese sentiments amongst town workers and the overarching presence of a sceptical imperial authority were just some of the obstacles for those who sought to forge new links with the Middle Kingdom. Like the speculations of the previous century, the commercial and migration proposals of the first half of the 1800s had promised much but delivered little.

Conclusion: Everywhere and Nowhere

Between the 1770s and the middle of the nineteenth century there existed a considerable gulf between aspiration and reality when it came to the potential of Australian relations with the Middle Kingdom. For pre-settlement enthusiasts and their detractors alike, Australian settlement had promised to drastically alter the course of British commercial interaction with the Chinese Empire. The result had of course been altogether more modest. Always apparently destined to become a field for colonial endeavour, China's markets and manpower remained tantalisingly out of reach, with the benefits of closer engagement indefinitely deferred. China it seemed was everywhere and nowhere. If the reality of Sino-Australian engagement during this early period in Australian history failed to live up to expectations, however, the notion that Australia and China were destined to be more closely connected endured. Whether that engagement might prove complimentary, binding Britain's Pacific interests more closely together, or whether it might in fact raise a series of new intra-imperial problems remained to be seen.

Perhaps the most notable feature of British and colonial reflections on Australian relations with China across the period surveyed in this chapter is the presumption of

British (or colonial) control. For Wakefield and Thacker, as for Matra and Young, the eventual coming together of NSW and China would be a British endeavour engineered for the benefit of imperial and colonial interests. Here it was British actors at home, in Australia and in China itself, who would dictate the terms of any closer engagement, tapping into the Middle Kingdom's human and commercial potential and turning it to their own ends. That impression, however, was about to be shattered. By October 1851, Thacker was writing to Jardine Matheson about the impact of recent gold discoveries in Victoria:

People are all mad in Melbourne, every class and description of people are leaving their ordinary occupations, and flocking to the Gold Field: great consternation prevails.⁶⁶

As gold fever swept the Australian Colonies, the presumption of British and colonial control looked increasingly naive. Soon it was the Chinese themselves who began reaching out across the ocean to British settlements in the south.

⁶⁶ CUL/MS/JM/B6/3/472, Thacker to JM, 10 October 1851.

Chapter Two

Two Overflowing Reservoirs: Chinese Migration and the Preservation of British Australia

In *Through the British Empire* (1886) the Austrian diplomat Baron Von Hübner reflected on the impact of European penetration into China upon the course of world history. A great ‘Chinese Wall’, Von Hübner observed, ‘which from time immemorial had separated four hundred millions of souls from the rest of mankind’, had been ruptured in the interest of foreign commerce. In the process, the globe had ‘been opened to the Chinese’, who had ‘poured out headlong through the open gates of their prison’. While Europeans at home knew the Chinese only through ‘heresay’, across the Pacific European and Chinese migrants were coming into ever-more intense competition. The results were frightening. The ‘continual advance’ of the Chinese, Von Hübner warned, threatened to drive European settlers from the field. Their ‘weapons of industry and the cultivation of the soil’ were a poor match for the ‘vast hordes’ which the ‘Middle Empire’ continued to ‘pour from its populous loins’:

What we cannot help seeing are two enormous overflowing reservoirs. Two rivers are issuing from them; the white river and the yellow river, the one fertilising the lands through which it runs with the seeds of Christian civilisation, and the other threatening to destroy them. Already at several points these rivers are meeting, dashing against each other, and contending for mastery.¹

One of those points of confluence to which Von Hübner referred was Britain’s Australian Colonies. As we saw in the previous chapter, before the 1850s China remained well beyond the horizon for the vast majority of British settlers in Australia. For most colonists, like their British counterparts at home, the Chinese Empire seemed ancient and passive. Chinese people tended to be characterised accordingly:

¹ J.A. Hübner, *Through the British Empire* (2 vols., 1886), ii, 508-509.

as a collective of dormant consumers and workers, awaiting activation by some foreign endeavour. As such, despite her enormous population, the Qing Empire presented little obvious threat to the development of a British Australasia. Australian newspapers followed the events of the First Opium War closely and looked optimistically to the commercial prospects of China's opening. 'It is calculated that the Chinese Empire contains at least half as much wealth and industry as the remainder of the globe', observed Sydney's *Australasian* in 1843. The Chinese themselves were 'wealthier and more advanced' than other Asian peoples and were 'capable of becoming better customers than the same number of people in the far larger half of Europe and America'.²

From the 1850s, the arrival of large numbers of migrants from China affected a profound shift in Australian perceptions of the Middle Kingdom. Suddenly, the Chinese were mobile, independent and potentially everywhere. As they established themselves along the frontier and in the heart of Australian cities, goldseekers from Canton and their followers inspired a rapid change in settler attitudes towards the appropriate course of colonial development and Australia's relations with the outside world. While commercial interests continued to call for a closer association, their voices were increasingly drowned out by demands for migration restriction. The mood of white settlers (and their by now elected leaders) moved firmly towards a desire for insulation from the masses of Asia.

Continuing the story of Australian contact with China during the first century of settlement, this chapter concentrates on the ways in which Chinese immigration to

² *Australasian*, 22 March 1843, p.3.

colonial Australia impacted on British imperial affairs from the 1850s down to 1887. Along the way it pursues two overlapping lines of inquiry. The first is the extent to which the Chinese migration question coloured views as to the potentialities of closer Sino-Australian and Anglo-Chinese engagement. Here the movement of Chinese to Australia injected a new dynamic into predictions of the future relationship between Britain's informal and settler empires in the Pacific. For officials in Britain and in the Colonies themselves, it provided a taste of some of the intra-imperial and external tensions (together with the inevitable policy challenges) that would arise as the 'white' and 'yellow' rivers came together in the New World. Over time, this experience would contribute to a growing divergence in colonial and metropolitan attitudes towards China and raise new questions as to Australia's place within the Empire. This first line of enquiry spills into to the second. As we saw in the previous chapter, perspectives of Australian engagement with China were often linked to competing visions of the British Empire's Pacific future. By the 1880s, Anglo-Australian relations were becoming increasingly strained as a result of heated debates over the preservation of colonial interests in New Guinea and the New Hebrides. It was a situation that was to have considerable ramifications for the subsequent development of the Chinese question in Australia as an imperial issue. By bringing these themes together, this chapter completes our analysis of the origins of the Chinese question in Australia and illuminates the foundations of the coming imperial crisis over Australian relations with China.

Going, Going, Going Towards this Land of Gold

The outward migration of large numbers of goldseekers to Britain's Australian Colonies was one of a number of consequences of foreign intervention in China

during the mid-nineteenth century. The opening of the Treaty Ports established the legal and logistical frameworks through which large-scale emigration could take place, while simultaneously exacerbating some of the acute internal tensions that were already encouraging Chinese in the southern coastal provinces to look abroad.³ By 1850, economic and political life in Guangdong and Fujian, had been destabilised by a range of factors including: the expansion of the opium trade; the importation of Western manufactures; lawlessness; overpopulation; and the impact of the Taiping (and lesser) anti-Manchu rebellions and their suppression.⁴ In 1860, a Report from the Foreign Representatives at Canton lamented the ‘character and the circumstances of the native population of the neighbouring districts, - the poverty and misery of many of the lower classes, - the pressure of the numbers on the supply of food’.⁵ As a result an unprecedented number of Chinese (mostly young men) set off for destinations overseas as indentured and free labourers in an effort to improve their domestic situations.⁶

These push factors coalesced at much the same time as gold discoveries were transforming the European settler societies of Northern California and South-Eastern Australia. The impact of gold was particularly dramatic in the newly separated colony of Victoria. With the discovery of sizeable deposits at Ballarat, Bendigo and Mount Alexander, Victoria’s population leapt from just under 33,000 to almost 350,000 in the ten years to 1855. At its peak, the Colony produced roughly one third of the

³ P.A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others* (Singapore, 2008), pp.107-112.

⁴ P.A. Kuhn, ‘The Taiping Rebellion’ in J.K. Fairbank (ed.) *The Cambridge History of China* (15 vols., Cambridge, 1978-2009), x, part 1, 264-317; Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp.167-191.

⁵ BPP/Command-Papers[2714]/‘China’, 1860, pp.122-124.

⁶ Appendix 1. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, p.107; Across the nineteenth century approximately fifty million Chinese migrated to destinations overseas, P. Manning, *Migration in World History* (New York, 2005), p.149.

world's gold output, furnishing twenty million ounces by 1860.⁷ Heading south via Hong Kong, miners from China soon joined the crowds of Europeans and Americans who were rushing to the Victorian diggings [**Figure 3 below**]. By 1854, 2,400 Chinese had made their way to the Colony, rising to 25,400 in 1857 and peaking at an estimated 42,000 in 1859, a figure that suggests roughly one in five men was Chinese.⁸

Initially there was considerable support for the new arrivals, though as numbers grew so too did a pervading sense of hostility, inspired by widespread resentment over Chinese working methods, social organisation, perceived moral depravity and the repatriation of gold.⁹ Contemporary witnesses often tended to identify Chinese as sojourners more readily than other nationalities who might visit the diggings for short periods of time. While historians have gone to considerable lengths to demonstrate the weaknesses of the sojourner tag, the characterisation provided a powerful tool for those who sought to denigrate the Chinese as parasitic, culturally alien and incompatible with colonial ideals.¹⁰ In 1854, the British goldseeker William Howitt, observed men from 'all the nations of the world, going, going, going towards this land of gold ... [but who] would never stay'.¹¹ Victoria, he wrote, was being over-run by 'human ants ... streaming up the country through the Eucalyptus Forest to the various fields of gold', but it was the 'crowds of Chinese', who were robbing the Colonies by taking their riches back home.¹²

⁷ I. McCalman, A. Cook and A. Reeves (eds.) *Gold* (Cambridge, 2001), p.19.

⁸ G.A. Oddie, 'The Chinese in Victoria 1870-1890' (University of Melbourne MA Thesis, 1959), p.184.

⁹ Markus, *Fear and Hatred*, pp.19-34.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp.240-241; K. Reeves and B. Mountford, 'Sojourning and Settling: Locating Chinese Australian History', *Australian Historical Studies* 42:1 (2011), 111-125.

¹¹ W. Howitt, *A Boy's Adventures in the Wilds of Australia* (1855), pp.237-239.

¹² W. Howitt, *Land, Labour, and Gold*, 2nd edn (2 vols., 1858), i, 199-200.

Figure 3: Chinese Marching from Melbourne to the Goldfields.
'Flemington Melbourne', 1856, SLV Picture Collection.



More ominously, the growth of Chinese communities on the goldfields heightened concerns over the sheer size of China's potential emigrant population. The prospect of a sudden inundation cast doubt on the capacity of settler communities to retain their British character and to determine the course of their own social and cultural development. Sinophobia emerged as a potent political force, developing in tandem with anti-Chinese sentiments in those other white settler societies (most notably California) whose experiences of gold rush migration were remarkably similar.¹³

¹³ On the interconnections between the Australian and Californian experience, D. Goodman, *Gold Seeking* (Sydney, 1994); Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, pp.323-324. On the links between Australian and American Sinophobia, Markus, *Fear and Hatred*. For the corresponding situation in New Zealand, H. Johnson and B. Moloughney (eds.) *Asia in the Making of New Zealand* (Auckland, 2006); C.

‘Considerable anxiety prevails as to the invading army of Chinese’, noted the Melbourne *Argus* in 1855, ‘and the colonists are beginning to rouse themselves to an anxious consideration of what is best to be done to turn aside the impending danger’.¹⁴ Soon political leaders took up the call for restriction. The Victorians, observed the colonial politician John Pascoe Falkner in a memorable speech to parliament, were determined to ‘control the flood of Chinese immigration ... and ... prevent the gold-fields of Australia Felix from becoming the property of the Emperor of China and of the Mongolian and Tartar hordes of Asia’.¹⁵

The prospect of a British colony taking steps to exclude the subjects of a friendly power raised potentially difficult imperial and diplomatic questions. Colonial authorities had no authority over external affairs, though Victorians had previously demonstrated their determination on migration issues, most notably in refusing to allow the landing of convicts at Melbourne. A potential solution was inadvertently provided by the Duke of Newcastle. In 1853, in letters to the Governors of Victoria and NSW, the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies expressed his concerns over the welfare of Chinese being shipped to Australia. Newcastle urged the Colonies to impose penalties on the masters of unseaworthy or overcrowded vessels and, in doing so, suggested a means of restriction ostensibly less offensive to Colonial and Foreign Office sensibilities. In 1855, Victoria imposed a limitation of one Chinese passenger for every ten tons of cargo and levied a poll tax of £10 to administer the Act. NSW followed with derivative legislation in 1861. To prevent inter-racial violence of the sort seen in California, Chinese in Victoria were instructed to move

Ferrall, P. Millar and K. Smith (eds.) *East By South* (Wellington, 2005). On Canada, P. Li, *Chinese in Canada*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1998) and F. Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration* (Kingston, 1988).

¹⁴ *Argus*, 14 April 1855, p.4.

¹⁵ *Argus*, 5 June 1857, p.4.

into government camps, each of which was placed under the administration of a Chinese Protector. At first Chinese evaded these measures by shipping to neighbouring South Australia and then entering Victoria by land. But over time, as legislation was strengthened and supplemented by supportive restrictions in neighbouring colonies, the Victorian Government was able to exert its authority over both the flow of Chinese migrants and the lives of those who had already arrived.¹⁶

Anti-Chinese hyperbole and demands for exclusion drew counter-arguments from a number of quarters. Liberals protested the arbitrary nature of government action, the undermining of longstanding traditions surrounding the free movement of peoples and the demonisation of the Chinese themselves. ‘Is not this Continent open’ asked the liberal *Empire* ‘to every being, Negro, Chinaman, and every other who would land thereon with a character free from culpable taint?’¹⁷ Chinese communities and their European supporters also resisted discriminatory measures, making passionate stands at public demonstrations and through written petitions to colonial authorities. They appealed variously to British traditions of justice (the ‘British Constitution’), Anglo-Chinese treaty obligations and the democratic principles of the Victorian Parliament. ‘The evident tendency of legislation in this colony for natives of China’, read one protest from the Chinese at Castlemaine, had been to ‘harass’ and oppress’:

Elsewhere the Chinese have been received upon the same footing as other foreigners, and have not been debarred from any of the privileges which have been conceded as a matter of right or courtesy to other nations of the earth.¹⁸

¹⁶ Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, pp.61-62.

¹⁷ Quoted in Markus, *Fear and Hatred*, p.20.

¹⁸ Quoted in A. Kyi, ‘The Most Determined, Sustained Diggers’ Campaign’, *Provenance*, 9 (2009), unpaginated.

The Victorian goldrushes of the 1850s are a seminal moment for Australian historians. ‘The discovery of gold’, observed T.A. Coghlan and T.T. Ewing in *The Progress of Australasia in the Nineteenth Century* (1903) ‘was by far the most important event which had yet occurred in the annals of the country’.¹⁹ A century later the ‘golden age’ seems no less remarkable.²⁰ The transformative power of the gold rushes touched all levels of colonial society. In subsequent years the Victorian experience was replayed across the continent like a great, gilded travelling show. Subsidiary productions were staged across NSW, New Zealand, Queensland, Tasmania, the Northern Territory of South Australia and eventually Western Australia.

Of the many changes that emerged out of the gold rush years two stand out as being particularly significant for the present study. The first was the dramatic shift in Australian attitudes to China that developed out of the experience of Chinese migration to Victoria and subsequently to other gold regions. Gold rush migration exposed the myth that the Australian colonists might be able to dictate the terms of any free and open relationship with China. The dynamics had proved to be the reverse of those predicted by earlier generations of enthusiasts. It was the Chinese who were pushing out through the Pacific, snapping up colonial resources for their own material benefit. Against this backdrop we might interpret the actions of the Victorian Government as an attempt to redefine the terms of engagement. Migration restriction was both an acknowledgement of the Colonies’ inability to engage the Chinese on an equal basis and a desperate attempt to reassert some form of colonial control.

¹⁹ Coghlan and Ewing, *The Progress of Australasia*, p.37.

²⁰ On the Victorian rushes, G. Serle, *The Golden Age* (Melbourne, 1963).

Victoria's success in shutting off the migratory networks that were bringing Chinese to the diggings was also a marker of the declining influence of the old closer association argument. Evidence of the diminishing power of commercial considerations (or at least of the willingness of business leaders to openly advocate them) can be found in the archives of the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce. In April 1855, the Chamber met to discuss the legality of the Government's actions; the possible impact upon Britons in China; and the 'effect such interference would have upon the commercial interests of Great Britain and the Australian Colonies in connection with China'. A short lived 'Committee on the Chinese Question' was charged with mapping out a path to peace and harmony. Even at the heart of the business community, however, the growing weight of the exclusionist lobby was making itself felt. When one member proposed a motion that the Government's legislation was 'highly objectionable in principle and contrary to the spirit of the treaty between China and Great Britain', he was encouraged to drop the subject on the grounds that ongoing political commentary was undermining the influence of the Chamber. When he moved the less ambitious motion that the 'Chinese were entitled to full security for their persons and property', he was unable to secure sufficient support for the motion to be passed. Liberal principle and the desire for the expansion of Sino-Australian trade were becoming victims of the exclusionist cause.²¹

The second important change was the gradual emergence of the Chinese question in Australia (as it was coming to be called) as an imperial issue. In their search for gilded fortunes the émigrés from Canton had turned colonial Australia into a widely-recognised point of contact between the British and Chinese Empires. Henceforth

²¹ SLV/MCC/MS.10917/Minute-Books, 23 April 1855, 4 June 1855.

Chinese migration to Australia would be seen as part of a grander narrative of Sino-Western and Anglo-Chinese engagement. In a feature on ‘John Chinaman in Australia’, published in 1858, Charles Dickens’ *Household Words* noted the significance of recent developments:

Not only are Europeans and Americans forcing their way into the fortress of Chinese society; but now Chinamen themselves- contrary to their long-established uses and habits, and in defiance of imperial edicts, are swarming (no other word is so expressive of the manner of their emigration) into other climes.²²

Like their counterparts at the periphery, metropolitan commentators tended to conflate the Australian and North American contexts.²³ To many it seemed as if the movement of Chinese goldseekers across the Pacific was providing a foretaste of a world in which Anglo-Saxon and Asian peoples were bound to come into increasingly close contact. The outflow of Cantonese to Australia, commented an editorial in *The Times* from 1857, was merely one of a series of ‘direct contests’ inspired by British engagement with China. These challenges had to be expected as ‘the natural result of the contact of a restless, adventurous race, with the self-esteem and bigotry of semi-civilisation’.²⁴

These immediate reactions left a lasting impression. In the years ahead, the gold rush experience would serve as the primary point of reference for colonial and British commentary on Chinese immigration and Australian development. In the Colonies themselves, the arrival of Chinese on the goldfields and their subsequent exclusion provided a valuable lesson. For those determined that Australia must remain a British island, the enduring image of long lines of Chinese diggers marching inland in close formation [**Figure 3**] demanded eternal vigilance. Likewise, the use of local

²² ‘John Chinaman in Australia’, *Household Words*, 17:421 (1858), 416-420.

²³ For example, *The Times*, 13 December 1877, p.9.

²⁴ *The Times*, 18 November 1857, p.8.

regulations to restrict entry provided a workable model for exclusion on racial lines. In Britain, continuing awareness of the Chinese question in Australia owed much to the general (if fleeting) upsurge of interest in colonial affairs that followed the gold discoveries. The phenomenon can be clearly traced through a sudden boom in Australia-related publishing and press coverage. *The Times* provides an illustration. In 1852, the London daily despatched its first dedicated correspondent to Sydney and Melbourne, but before his contract expired the journalist, J. Filmore, had been recalled to cover the Crimean War. ‘The novelty of the Antipodes has worn off’, explained Editor John Dalane, ‘Australian affairs have resumed their place among the ordinary intelligence’.²⁵ Antipodean news rarely regained its mid-century prominence. In 1871, for instance, when Anthony Trollope was seeking *The Times*’ support for his own colonial tour, he was apologetically informed that London’s ‘news-paper reading public’ had little ‘stomach’ for the humdrum of colonial affairs.²⁶ The effect of this sudden flash of interest in the 1850s was that the events of the gold rush years were fused onto subsequent metropolitan reflections on Australia. Captured as part of that watershed moment when Australian gold attracted world attention, the Chinese question appeared periodically in the London press in later years and remained a key focus for British writers on colonial tours.

By the end of the 1850s then, the experience of Chinese migration to Victoria and New South Wales was provoking a marked shift in both metropolitan and colonial reflections on the future of Sino-Australian engagement. In Australia, it had injected a new sense of urgency to the arguments of those who feared open intercourse and further undermined calls for a closer association. In London, it had provided a

²⁵ TNL/Manager’s Letterbooks/4/Morris to Filmore, 27 April 1854; 3/Morris to Filmore, 8 December 1852; Delane Correspondence/Book 25/Filmore to Delane, 11 May 1853.

²⁶ TNL/Manager’s Letterbooks/16/Morris to Trollope, 17 April 1871.

fascinating example of some of the questions that might emerge out of the coming together of the British and Chinese Empires across the Pacific and the first real sense of a growing divergence between British and Australian attitudes towards China.

In the Hands of the Colonists

From the 1860s, the Chinese population of the southern Colonies waned, as declining gold yields and discriminatory legislation encouraged a period of net outward migration.²⁷ Numbers receded to such an extent that concessions could be made to liberal sensibilities. In 1863 in Victoria and 1867 in NSW immigration restrictions were repealed. The Chinese question entered a period of dormancy, but it never fully subsided. Attention shifted towards Sydney and Melbourne, where Chinese congregated in the years after the rushes.²⁸ Investigative journalists descended into colonial Chinatowns, looking for clues as to the capacity of British and Chinese populations to live side-by-side. ‘One half of Little Bourke Street’, observed the author and journalist Marcus Clarke ‘is not Melbourne but China’. ‘It is as though some *genie* had taken up a handful of houses in the middle of one of the Celestial cities, and flung them down, inhabitants and all, in the Antipodes’.²⁹ ‘The Chinese question is the topic of the day’, noted the London *Graphic* several years later, ‘and it may interest you as well as the Victorians’.³⁰ The ubiquity of these exposés was noted by Trollope when he arrived to complete *Australia and New Zealand* (1873).

Informed that Melbourne had both ‘an Irish quarter and ... a Chinese quarter’, which would enable the visitor to see ‘the worse side of life’, Trollope criticised those who

²⁷ Between 1861-1871, the Chinese population of Victoria fell from 24,700 to 17,800 and of NSW from 13,000 to 7,200. Marcus, *Fear and Hatred* pp.67-68.

²⁸ In 1881 there were 1,057 Chinese in Melbourne and 1,321 in Sydney. A decade later there were 2,143 and 3,499. C.F. Yong, *The New Gold Mountain*. (Adelaide, 1977), p.4.

²⁹ *Argus*, 9 March 1868, p.5.

³⁰ *Graphic*, 13 November 1880, pp.484-489.

had searched ‘especially’ to ‘see such misery’. To demonstrate his own high-minded approach, Trollope then moved on to neighbouring Ballarat and promptly made enquiries as to ‘the wickedness of the town’. Led into the Chinese quarter by local police he revealed for his readers a scene of ‘degraded life’, ‘viscous and inhuman’. Like a number of his contemporaries, Trollope cast the Chinese presence as a stain on British colonial expansion. He departed Ballarat ‘surprised that a single “heathen Chinee” was left alive’.³¹

In the meantime, the epicentre of the Chinese question was shifting to Queensland, where events had followed a rather different course. Unimpeded by local restrictions, Queensland’s Chinese population had increased freely throughout the 1860s. Travelling across colonial borders and direct from overseas, Chinese became engaged in mining and the pastoral industry. For the majority of Queensland’s political leaders, the Colony’s tropical climate had long justified some form of foreign indentured labour. In 1874, the Colonial Government approached the British Consul at Amoy seeking assistance for the importation of Chinese. By the time the Consulate replied the following year, however, enthusiasm had cooled. ‘The Government’, Premier Arthur Macalister now claimed, ‘had never contemplated Chinese emigration to Queensland’.³² This sudden reversal came about as a result of the arrival of large numbers of Chinese diggers at the Palmer River goldfields, some 1,200 miles north of Brisbane. The rush to Palmer River brought the frailty of colonial authority over Northern Queensland into sharp relief. Queensland’s Chinese population, which had been only 540 in 1861 and 3,300 in 1871, soared to 10,400 in 1876.³³ By 1877, 17,000

³¹ A. Trollope, *Australia and New Zealand* (2 vols., 1873), i, 3, 386 and 415.

³² Quoted in P.G. Griffiths, ‘The Making of White Australia: Ruling Class Agendas, 1876-1888’ (Australian National University Ph.D. Thesis, 2007), p.113.

³³ Figures from Marcus, *Fear and Hatred*, p.67.

registered Chinese miners on the Palmer diggings dwarfed 1,400 Europeans. In response, the Government legislated to increase the cost of mining and business licenses for African and Asian aliens. They informed authorities at Hong Kong that Chinese migrants bound for the northern port of Cooktown would be subject to new regulations and that ships providing passage might be detained there.³⁴

The controversy that followed underlined the potential imperial implications of the migration question. Against the advice of the Colony's Attorney General, Governor Cairns reserved the Bill, concerned about the potential violation of the Anglo-Chinese treaties. Cairns received vocal support from the Secretary of State Lord Carnarvon, though as Huttenback has shown, Colonial Office (CO) staff were sceptical as to whether the Act would touch upon treaty obligations in practice.³⁵ John Bramston, the Assistant Undersecretary, did however express his concern over the use of summary judgment for miners without licenses and the inability of Chinese Britons to prove their status as subjects (and thereby claim exception). 'If a Chinese cook sends up a bad breakfast to two J.P.'s in a goldfield public house and is without a miner's right', Bramston minuted, 'he may at once be sent off for three months hard labour'.³⁶ Undeterred, Queensland drew support from the other Australian Colonies and instructed her Agent General in London to agitate for the colonial cause. 'The Chinese invasion', noted *The Times*, was becoming 'the most burning question everywhere'. Queensland was 'making every effort to induce the rest of the Colonies to support her in her conflict with the Home Government'.³⁷ In a letter to his NSW counterpart, Henry Parkes, Queensland Premier John Douglas acknowledged his

³⁴ E.O.G. Shann, 'Economic and Political Development', p.322; Griffiths, 'White Australia', pp.110-136.

³⁵ Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, pp.241-250.

³⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.243.

³⁷ *The Times*, 3 September 1877, p.9.

Government was 'in a fix'. His most recent advice from the new Governor, Arthur Kennedy, was that 'the Queen's Government ... [would] insist upon Chinaman ... [having] equality with our own people'. Reiterating Queenslanders' 'greatest anxiety' over the 'Chinese inroad', he held out hope that London would give way.³⁸

All the while the stakes appeared to be rising. In a bold affirmation of the strength of colonial opinion, Queensland's Attorney General, Samuel Griffith, urged Carnarvon to remember the lessons of 1776. 'Even if the Colonies ... had to resign ... from their connection to Great Britain', he declared, 'it would be better ... than to allow their country to become an appendage of the Chinese Empire'.³⁹ In the event the British blinked first. In 1877, a second attempt at legislative restriction made its way through the Queensland Parliament. Though it offered some concessions in terms of its approach and language, its purpose was undiluted. When Governor Kennedy cabled London as to whether assent should be granted, the Home Government showed little appetite for prolonging the controversy. 'We are in the hands of the colonists', mused Lord Derby, 'and they must act in this matter as they please'.⁴⁰ The legislation stood. By 1881, Queensland's Chinese population had fallen to 11,400 and the influx of new arrivals had slowed to a trickle.⁴¹ Further schemes for Chinese labour were clearly untenable. When he toured the Colonies, the Harbour Master of Hong Kong found 'the general cry was for Chinese labour, but no one seemed disposed to import it'.⁴²

³⁸ ML/HP/CY33/Vol.11/A881/Douglas to Parkes, 4 June 1877.

³⁹ Quoted in Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, p.246.

⁴⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.248.

⁴¹ Shann, 'Economic and Political Development', p.322. Queensland's restrictions were subsequently strengthened in 1884.

⁴² CO/384/108/4575/26-30, 15 February 1876.

In subsequent years Queensland's tropical industries would rely on workers from the Pacific Islands, whose tiny populations posed little threat of inundation.⁴³

At the local level, events in Queensland provided a vivid reminder of the capacity of the Chinese migration issue to flare up rapidly and dominate the Australian political landscape. From the imperial point of view, the episode set the tone for the more serious clashes between colonial governments and London over Chinese migration that would follow. To some observers, it seemed as if the Colonies, with their wide electoral franchise, were taking a dangerous socialist path. 'Those profits of evil among ourselves who are always predicating danger from the political power of the working classes', remarked *The Times* in its commentary, 'will always be able to find fresh arguments in Correspondence from Australia'.⁴⁴ Certainly the situation underlined a dilemma with which the CO would be confronted again and again: forced to balance imperial principles with a desire to placate public opinion in the Colonies. Despite concerns over the potential diplomatic and imperial implications of Queensland's behaviour, London could do little but seek minor concessions. Though they were naturally loathe to set a precedent when it came to migration policy, British officials were in little doubt as to the depth of settler conviction. In 1877, the China Consul J. Dundas Crawford had conducted an investigation for the FO on the extent of anti-Chinese hostility in Australia. 'The appearance of a single Chinaman in many districts', Crawford reported, 'is enough to cause a popular disturbance; so powerful has been the exaggerated influence of a doubt as to the permanency of white conquest'.⁴⁵

⁴³ K. Saunders, *Workers in Bondage* (Brisbane, 1982).

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 3 September 1877, p.9.

⁴⁵ BPP/Command-Papers[3742]/J.D. Crawford, September 1877, p.7.

It was that exaggerated sense of doubt which had come to dominate colonial attitudes towards China. As Queensland's anti-Chinese laws came into force, the point of focus was again returning to the south. From the mid-1870s, arrivals of Chinese to Sydney and Melbourne had begun to exceed departures.⁴⁶ In Australian cities, Chinese came into competition with unionised white workers, particularly in the furniture and laundry trades. Cultural chauvinism and fear of economic competition became embedded in a white working class culture that linked Australian working-men to their contemporaries overseas.⁴⁷ In 1878, maritime workers in NSW launched a dramatic strike over the use of Chinese sailors aboard Australian-bound ships.⁴⁸ The following year, a meeting of the first Inter-Colonial Trades Union Conference unanimously declared its opposition to Chinese migration. Important as they were in their own right, the anti-Chinese activities orchestrated by workers' unions were simply one manifestation of a fear and hatred that by now touched all-levels of white settler society on both sides of the Pacific. 'It is admitted by all classes', noted San Francisco's *Daily Evening Bulletin*, that the Chinese 'are an undesirable race'. Anti-Chinese agitation in California and Australia, the writer hoped, would soon produce united action by the British and American Governments to 'prevent some of the richest of their possessions becoming the prey to an alien race, who can never amalgamate with Western civilisation, and whose presence is a canker in our midst'.⁴⁹

The growing intensity of anti-Chinese feeling across Australia ensured the continued decline of the old closer association argument. Certainly, colonial merchants were

⁴⁶ Despite the increase in arrivals to departures, there was still an overall decline in the Chinese population of Victoria across the decade (17,800 to 12,000). Numbers in NSW increased from 7,200 to 10,200. Marcus, *Fear and Hatred* pp.67-68.

⁴⁷ Lake and Reynolds, *Global Colour Line*, p.4, 9.

⁴⁸ A. Curthoys, 'Conflict and Consensus', in *Who Are Our Enemies*, pp.48-65.

⁴⁹ *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 10 April 1878, issue.2.

still looking to tap into China. As late as 1881, one Arthur Tapsell was writing to Jardine Matheson in a manner reminiscent of earlier generations of British and colonial merchants. 'Desirous of opening up a trade', he promised any combination of Chatham Islands fungus and other 'Island produce' in return for tea.⁵⁰ Others expressed passing interest in testing samples of new products such as Japanese Rice and Chinese sugar. In 1881, Jardines even dispatched their own representative on a business tour of Australia and New Zealand. Meanwhile, colonial authorities showed a general reluctance to allow questions of Asian migration and trade from becoming entangled. In 1876, for instance, the South Australian government received a proposal for the importation of indentured Japanese labour. The Colony's Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration declined the offer, though he expressed his belief that the Japanese were of excellent character and his 'hope that ere long friendly mercantile relations may spring up and be extended between Japan and these Colonies'.⁵¹

Despite these sentiments, considerable evidence survives of the extent to which the migration issue and anti-Chinese hostility were impacting upon the desire for an expansion of Sino-Australian trade. In her history of Australian trade with Asia, Tweedie has suggested that Australian manufacturers and merchants who came to fear Chinese competition, could cultivate Sinophobic feeling, 'to serve their own ends'. In particular, she postulates that the impact of anti-Chinese sentiments, 'may well have had a psychological impact' on the Australian market for Chinese tea.⁵²

Jardine Matheson's archives provide support for this hypothesis. Taken together, letters received from Australia during the late-70s and early-80s betray a sense of

⁵⁰ CUL/MS/JM/B6/3/4588*, Tapsell to JM, 22 February 1881.

⁵¹ CO/384/108/4191/481/25, February 1876.

⁵² Tweedie, *Trading Partners*, pp.25-26.

foreboding over impending decline. Colonial firms reported that the market for Chinese tea was ‘extremely slack’, ‘in a very dull state’ and ‘hardening’.⁵³ Efforts by the Calcutta Tea Syndicate to undermine the market for Chinese teas were also getting underway. The successful penetration of Australia, the Syndicate hoped, would support the ‘further extension of the trade of Indian Tea to other countries, where the consumption of tea is very large, but the Indian product is almost unknown’.⁵⁴ The intervention by tea merchants from India and Ceylon brought the issue of trade with China, versus trade with the Empire, to the colonial breakfast table. In 1880, the *Argus* published letters on ‘Tea and Coffee in Victoria’, championing the Indian product and deriding the Chinese. Commentators attacked Chinese teas as the ‘rankest rubbish that can be imported’, and accused the thrifty ‘John Chinaman’ of driving down both the price (and therefore profitability) and the quality of teas shipped to Australia.⁵⁵ A planter from Ceylon wrote to the *Argus* seeking a free trial for his own colony’s coffee and tea. Espousing the superiority of the Ceylon product, he draped its consumption in imperial imagery:

Some time back coffee grown by our countrymen in India and Ceylon had to wage the same war with coffee grown in Brazil that tea grown by our countrymen in India and Ceylon has now to carry on against tea grown in China. Let us hope the result will be as satisfactory. This struggle is a very protracted one, and far more severe than any one unversed in such subjects can possibly imagine.⁵⁶

The subsequent decline in the trade of Chinese tea to Australia will be discussed further in Chapter Six, though the events of the 1880s were already providing a taste of the potential interconnection between the issues of migration and trade. From Dunedin, in early-1882, Jardine’s travelling representative wrote that ‘Agents for the

⁵³ CUL/MS/JM/B6/3, letters from 1879-1881.

⁵⁴ Minutes of a General Meeting of the Calcutta Tea Syndicate, c. 1879, in CUL/MS/JM/L14/11.

⁵⁵ *Argus*, 3 January 1880, p.5, 16 January 1880, p.7.

⁵⁶ *Argus*, 13 January 1880, p.6.

Calcutta Tea Syndicate' had been 'vigorously pushing Indian teas in the Colonies'. Though their success had so far been confined to Victoria, their efforts were bound to affect the consumption of China teas (of which there was already a large stock). Prospects looked 'very gloomy'.⁵⁷

At government level, the wider influence of the Chinese migration question was driving the Australian Colonies towards a common purpose.⁵⁸ In 1881, an Inter-Colonial Conference met at Sydney to devise a model for restrictive legislation. Fears that Chinese would bring disease and flood the tropical north of the continent predominated. 'Communication between China and Australasia', argued the Conference architect, NSW Premier Henry Parkes, was 'daily increasing'. Moves towards exclusion in the United States were 'likely to drive' Chinese from North America and elsewhere onto Australia's doorstep.⁵⁹ In the wake of the Conference, restrictive measures were passed in NSW, Victoria, South Australia and New Zealand, adding to those already in force in Queensland. Only Tasmania and Western Australia, still largely untouched by Chinese migration and chronically starved of labour in the latter case, declined to take action. South Australia's commitment did not extend to its tropical Northern territory, where Chinese labour was also seen as essential to overcoming a dearth of European workers. Despite these exceptions, the Colonies had taken a significant step towards co-ordinating their own independent response to China. Some thirty years after the arrival of the first Chinese goldseekers, vague aspirations for closer association had been all but overshadowed by efforts to insulate Australasia from the Middle Kingdom.

⁵⁷ CUL/MS/JM/B1/3/P31, Pollard to JM, 31 January 1882.

⁵⁸ Shann, 'Economic and Political Development', p.323.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Griffiths, 'White Australia', p.410.

Great Lines of Islands, from the Australian Mainland to that of Asia

The sustained anxiety over Chinese migration that became such a prominent feature of Australian society during the second half of the nineteenth century was reflective of a growing awareness of the Colonies' regional orientation. In the 1850s, gold had brought the world rushing in. By the 1880s, increasingly sophisticated networks of transport and communications were carrying news, passengers and cargo to Australia more quickly and in greater quantities than had been known to previous generations.⁶⁰ The effect on colonial attitudes towards the outside world was dramatic. While settlers had always taken a keen interest in events overseas, now foreign affairs seemed less distant, Australia more connected. How fast 'we grow accustomed to the miracles of science', wrote the journalist A.P. Martin in 1889, reflecting back on the arrival of the telegraph some seventeen years earlier. 'It was not so long ago' that Australians had relied on monthly mail steamers for their European news, but it seemed 'like another era – like the division between ancient and modern colonial history'. As information, travellers and trade were transferred along new high-speed circuits, the Colonies were being liberated from their longstanding 'condition of all but outer darkness'.⁶¹

This new sense of connectedness brought to the fore questions of history and geography. At the edges of the Empire, British settlers clung to their European heritage, taking pride in their own place in the story of British overseas expansion. At the same time they were becoming increasingly aware of their physical location: distant from Europe and closer to Asia. In *The Australian Abroad* (1879-1880) the Melbourne journalist James Hingston noted that Galle, the seaport at Ceylon where

⁶⁰ D. Cryle, 'Peripheral Politics?', in Kaul (ed.) *Media and the British Empire*, pp.174-189; S. Potter, *News and the British World* (Oxford, 2003).

⁶¹ A.P. Martin, *Australia and the Empire* (Edinburgh, 1889), p.64.

passengers travelling between Europe and Australasia were likely to call, was still all that most colonists saw of ‘the Eastern world and its endless wonders’.⁶² The successful publication of Hingston’s correspondence from across the globe in the *Argus*, however, was just one indication of a growing desire amongst ‘Anglo-Australians’ to better understand the changing world and to affirm their own place within it.⁶³ For British colonists, the London *Spectator* observed, ‘distance on water’ had ‘little or no meaning’. Compared with metropolitan Britons, Antipodeans understood space ‘as might ... the inhabitants of a larger planet’. They had come to view their interests as extending across a vast swath of the Pacific Ocean. In time the Colonists’ ‘thirst for dependent possessions’, would carry them across the ‘great lines of islands from the Australian mainland to that of Asia’. In the not too distant future a federated Australia would ‘possess them all’.⁶⁴

The fate of the islands off Australia and New Zealand came to prominence in the 1870s and 1880s.⁶⁵ Linked to the Colonies by networks of labour recruitment, missionary activity and commercial endeavour, Pacific islands were most important in terms of defence. While distance had long served to insulate Antipodeans from the conflicts dividing Europe, they had nonetheless remained wary of Britain’s Continental rivals. The spectre of a Russian cruiser swooping down on Australasian ports had sparked panic at several points throughout the nineteenth century. By the 1870s, colonial authorities had become concerned that the occupation of Pacific islands by foreign powers might facilitate attacks on colonial territory and maritime

⁶² J. Hingston, *The Australian Abroad* (2 vols., 1879-1880), ii, 13.

⁶³ Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp.17-19.

⁶⁴ *Spectator*, 28 January 1888, p.122.

⁶⁵ R.C. Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific* (Melbourne, 1980).

traffic.⁶⁶ In this context, French plans for sending convicts to the New Hebrides (expanding on the existing French presence at New Caledonia) and German interest in the non-Dutch portion of New Guinea and Samoa came to be seen as a direct threat to Australia's safety and future development. While the focus of this thesis is of course upon Sino-Australian engagement, Anglo-Australian debates over the appropriate response to French and German activity in the Pacific islands were fundamental to the way in which Australian and British leaders subsequently dealt with the question of colonial relations with China. As such, Australians' efforts to exclude foreign influence from what they were coming to see as their own regional sphere of influence, provides a vital link in our investigation of the imperial significance of Sino-Australian relations. Like the Chinese question, the idea of European intervention in the Pacific islands clashed with the Colonists' belief in their need for space and time, free of foreign influence, in which to complete their maturation into British nations. For some the correlation was even more direct. 'We cannot afford to let the islands of the Pacific pass into the hands of dangerous neighbours', warned Melbourne's *Leader*:

It is not only the European Powers who can be dangerous to us. Settlements of Chinamen or Malays will infallibly be formed ... If Chinamen enter in they will be an outpost of a possible Chinese invasion.⁶⁷

This fear of dangerous neighbours inspired a new brand of Australasian sub-imperialism, centred on a desire to exclude foreign powers from the Colonies' perceived sphere of influence. 'Sooner or later', observed the Victorian MP and former Oxford Don, Charles Henry Pearson, 'it must come to something like a

⁶⁶ F.W. Egglestone, 'Australia and the Empire', in *CHBE*, vi, part 1, 528-529; Meaney, *The Search for Security*, pp.13-39. On New Zealand, A. Ross, *New Zealand Aspirations in the Pacific in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1964).

⁶⁷ *Leader*, 16 June 1883, quoted in C. Pearl, *Morrison of Peking* (Harmondsworth, 1970), p.42.

Monroe doctrine for Australia'.⁶⁸ The Colonies, chimed the Victorian Premier James Service, possessed 'no lust for territory or expansion', but were determined to 'keep the English people in these distant lands as far removed as possible from the dangers of European intervention'.⁶⁹ To achieve this end, Australian leaders lobbied London for the annexation of those islands deemed to be of strategic value. Disraeli's willingness to intervene in Fiji in 1874 (where instability had provoked fears over German or American action) provided encouragement. But though he was lionised in the Antipodes, the Conservative leader's actions had only served to distort colonial leaders' impressions of their influence in London and to inflate the gap between metropolitan and colonial estimates of the Islands' importance. Subsequent petitions fell on deaf ears.⁷⁰ Whitehall 'might accept the need to annex territory in particular circumstances', wrote Fieldhouse in his pithy assessment, 'but it was assumed that in general Pacific islands were not worth the taking'.⁷¹ Though staff at the CO proved sympathetic, Australian concerns tended to carry little weight in the more powerful departments of state.⁷²

Events came to a head in 1883. The catalyst was a report from the German Newspaper *Allgemeine Zeitung*, passed to the *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)* by the Colonial Secretary of NSW. 'We Germans have learnt a little about conducting colonial policy', ran the translation 'and ... our wishes and plans turn with a certain vivacity towards New Guinea'. There Germany would create 'a German Java, a great

⁶⁸ *Age*, 29 May 1883. On Pearson's authorship, Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific*, p.240, n.41.

⁶⁹ J. Service, 'Memorandum for the Governor of Victoria', 6 February 1885, quoted in N. Meaney, *The Search for Security* (Sydney, 1976), p.17.

⁷⁰ M. Jacobs, 'The Colonial Office and New Guinea, 1874-1884', *Historical Studies*, 5 (1952), 109.

⁷¹ D.K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830-1914* (1973), p.437.

⁷² J.A. Cross, 'The Colonial Office and the Dominions Before 1914', *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 4:2 (1966), 138-148.

trade and plantation colony, which would form a stately foundation stone for a German colonial kingdom of the future'. Given the tropical jungle environment on New Guinea and the condition of the indigenous population, it was suggested that Chinese labourers could be imported to work under European direction.⁷³ The effect of the report was dramatic. Colonial officials and public opinion went into a tailspin, demanding a British response. 'If New Guinea is not annexed by Great Britain', the *SMH* warned, 'it will soon be annexed by someone else', to the serious detriment of Australian and imperial interests.⁷⁴ Further north, the *Queenslander* encouraged the Colonial Government to win London's support by promising to 'bear the [financial] responsibility for such an expansion of territory'.⁷⁵

At the imperial level, German interest in New Guinea revealed the yawning gulf between British and Australian assessments of the Pacific islands' importance and the likely impact of foreign colonisation. Having lodged an unsuccessful appeal for imperial intervention, Queensland Premier Thomas McIlwraith took matters into his own hands. Queensland annexed the territory and wired London, offering to cover the costs of colonial administration. While some feared the Queensland Government might have exceeded its constitutional authority (an echo of its earlier behaviour on Chinese migration) expressions of support soon arrived from NSW, Victoria and South Australia.⁷⁶ When Gladstone refused to back the acquisition, colonial leaders met in conference to demarcate the South Pacific as a British sphere. The impact of their efforts, however, was marginal. The following year Australian fears were

⁷³ *SMH*, 7 February 1883, p.4.

⁷⁴ *SMH*, 10 February 1883, pp.10-11.

⁷⁵ *Queenslander*, 17 February 1883, p.257.

⁷⁶ For a critique, *Brisbane Courier*, 28 March 1883, p.4.

validated when Bismarck declared a protectorate over the north-eastern section of non-Dutch New Guinea.⁷⁷

On the British side, colonial anxieties over New Guinea seemed thoroughly misplaced. ‘The opening up of a German settlement’, wrote one FO official to the CO in the wake of German occupation, might be of ‘more benefit to the Australian Colonies than to Germany itself’. The difficulty, as far as the FO was concerned, was whether colonial leaders ever would be satisfied ‘by an arrangement which gives a foreign power a footing in N. Guinea?’ In any case, they would have to realise it was ‘too late to meet their wishes in this subject’.⁷⁸ For Gladstone the situation pointed in two directions. Firstly, it was clear that colonial demands could have little sway where they might impact on the maintenance of friendly Anglo-German relations. The Imperial Government ‘must be most cautious ... to colonial alarmism’, he wrote to Derby in December 1884. ‘Any language at Berlin appearing to convey sympathy with it’, might create ‘extra-ordinary mischief to us at our really vulnerable point, Egypt’.⁷⁹ On the flipside, accommodating German colonial aspirations might provide a useful opportunity to bring the Australians to heel for presuming to dictate imperial policy.⁸⁰ Deriding their ‘preposterous proposals’, he informed Granville at the FO that:

German colonisation will strengthen and not weaken our hold upon our Colonies: and will make it very difficult for them to maintain the domineering tone to which their public organs are too much inclined.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Motivated by domestic and international considerations, Bismarck’s new colonial policy in Africa and the Pacific, ‘blew up half a century of imperial arrangements like a land mine’. D.K. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires* (1966), p.211.

⁷⁸ CO/225/17/16725/164/FO to CO, 29 September 1884.

⁷⁹ BL/WEG/Add.MS.44547/Gladstone to Derby, 24 December 1884.

⁸⁰ H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone 1875-1898* (Oxford, 1995), pp.151-152; N. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, 2nd edn (2 vols., 1982), i, 123-124.

⁸¹ BL/WEG/Add.MS.44547/Gladstone to Derby, 8 December 1883; Gladstone to Granville, quoted in Matthew, *Gladstone*, p.152.

Anticipating ‘Parliamentary controversies’ and criticism from colonial sympathisers the Prime Minister then made preparations to highlight Queensland’s failings on humanitarian issues.⁸² He requested copies of a damning pamphlet on ‘the Native Question in Queensland’. Should the New Guinea issue be raised in the Commons, he wrote to Derby, ‘I should like to have the means of throwing in an authentic form with what kind of opinions and tendencies among the colonists we may have to deal’.⁸³

For Australian leaders, the Imperial Government’s failure to react to the German threat was a betrayal of the Colonies themselves, but also of the Empire’s future interests in the region. When the Agents General met Derby to protest at the German presence, he responded: ‘Why, you have the whole South Pacific’. ‘Yes, that was what we did have’, came their embittered reply.⁸⁴ The New Guinea experience heightened Australian’s sense of exposure to foreign influence and of grievance at London’s willingness to disregard (now vindicated) colonial counsel. ‘We may lose all the Pacific by degrees’, complained Robert Murray Smith, the Agent General for Victoria, to Lord Rosebery in July 1884.⁸⁵ By December he was writing again, ‘is it possible that Bismarck’s designs are larger than we supposed?’ A ‘chain of [German] islands from Java to Samoa would envelope Northern Australia!’⁸⁶

Australian frustrations were little remedied by the eventual British annexation of the southern portion of non-Dutch New Guinea in 1884 and the Anglo-German

⁸² Both German and French commentators criticised the Australians’ record on diplomatic and humanitarian issues. See for instance CO/225/22/544-607, 6 September 1886; CO/225/17/115-118, 22 April 1884.

⁸³ BL/WEG/Add.MS.44558/Gladstone to Derby, 10 Sept 1883.

⁸⁴ NLS/LR/MS.10081/Murray Smith to Rosebery, 4 July 1884.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ NLS/LR/MS.10081/Murray Smith to Rosebery, 30 December 1884.

agreement reached in April 1886, which divided New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. On his arrival in Melbourne in January 1885, J.A. Froude found Governor Loch in 'warm water' over the issue and was struck by the prevailing hostility towards Gladstone and Derby. Colonial anger, Froude wrote, was 'directed as much against England as at Germany. As they could not act for themselves, they thought that England ought to have acted for them'.⁸⁷ That strength of colonial feeling was also making itself felt in Britain. Gladstone's critics lamented his willingness to neglect Australian interests, a slight that appeared all the more callous in light of NSW's contribution of a contingent for the Sudan. In Parliament, the Prime Minister was pressed as to whether the Home Government was showing their appreciation by conceding rights to Germany that they had denied their loyal colonists?⁸⁸ Slamming Liberal 'effeteness', the Conservative MP Ashmead-Bartlett argued that the Government had only needed to 'raise their little finger' in order to secure New Guinea for the Empire. Instead they had 'incurred the danger of falling between two stools - Prince Bismarck and the Colonies'.⁸⁹

By the time the Conservatives were returned in July 1886, there was room for a cautious optimism that Britain and the Australians might reach a common position on Pacific questions. Swayed by the spirited lobbying of the Agents General, the Liberals had already given ground.⁹⁰ In the dying days of the Third Gladstone Ministry, Lord Rosebery rejected a proposal for French occupation of the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) in return for the cessation of all convict transportation to the

⁸⁷ Froude, *Oceana*, pp.93-96.

⁸⁸ HOC/vol.295/cc.888-889, 15 March 1885.

⁸⁹ HOC/vol.295/cc.938-948, 15 March 1885.

⁹⁰ CO/225/22/509-510, 23 February 1886.

Pacific, citing colonial objections to the arrangements proposed.⁹¹ With the Tories back in office, draft plans for a joint Anglo-French naval commission, guaranteeing the independence of the islands, came under review. The Conservative leader, Lord Salisbury, had already acknowledged the need to protect colonial interests in Pacific negotiations.⁹² It was not long, however, before his government received a troubling reminder of the Australians' willingness to disregard diplomatic considerations in order to secure their own ends. From New Caledonia, the Acting British Consul Leo Layard wrote to complain about the behaviour of the Government of NSW and the Governor, Lord Carrington. In a secret cable to Sydney, the Consul had warned of the departure of French men of war for the New Hebrides. Colonial authorities had responded by leaking the report to the local press. When the news arrived back in New Caledonia, Layard had faced an awkward meeting with his French hosts. The 'extraordinary breach of diplomatic etiquette ... + its consequences to myself', Layard thundered in his despatch to London, had provided 'a lesson in Australian political honour, which will last me for the rest of my life'.⁹³

It was just this sort of lesson that the new British government hoped to avoid by bringing about a swift resolution to the New Hebrides question. Despite lobbying by the CO, however, over the winter of 1886 the issue drifted out of focus in light of protracted French delays and more pressing foreign policy concerns in Eastern Europe.⁹⁴ As such, it was still very much alive the following Spring, when colonial leaders arrived to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee and to participate in the

⁹¹ NLS/LR/MS.10081/Rosebery to Dilke, 12 Feb 1890 and Enclosure.

⁹² Salisbury had expressed as much in relation to German requests to alter agreements over Samoa.

⁹³ CO/201/605/14612/Enclosure/Layard to FO, 23 June 1886. Even the French Minister for the Interior on New Caledonia expressed sympathy for the way a British Consul had been let down by his colonial countrymen.

⁹⁴ J.A. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin* (2 vols., Melbourne, 1965), i, 97-98; Meaney, *The Search for Security*, p.20.

British Empire's First Colonial Conference. Attended by members of the Home Government and the self-governing colonies, the Conference emerged in response to a growing awareness of imperial questions (particularly defence) and the spirited lobbying of the Imperial Federation League. It marked the first tentative step towards closer collaboration between the Britain and her white settler empire, a shift from 'isolation and practical dependence, and therefore irresponsibility', to 'maturity and co-operation'.⁹⁵ Australian delegates reached notable agreements with the Home Government over their contributions to the maintenance of the Royal Navy's Australian Squadron and control over British New Guinea.⁹⁶ For all its limitations, the meeting that came together in 1887 was (as Colonial Secretary Henry Holland sought to acknowledge) the first official gathering of the constituent members of Greater Britain.⁹⁷

For the Conservatives, the Conference provided the opportunity to cement the party's lead on imperial issues. In March, Holland wrote to Salisbury to request his presence at the opening session. 'It would ... give great satisfaction', the Colonial Secretary suggested, 'if you could be present ... + say a few words ... on behalf of HM's Government'. The Prime Minister's presence, he continued, would 'be most useful + have a good + wholesome effect upon the Colonial Representatives', setting the tone for the discussion of topics where 'strict colonial views clash[ed] with the necessities of Imperial policy'.⁹⁸ Salisbury agreed, promising to try and keep his temper inspite

⁹⁵ J.E. Kettle, *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences, 1887-1911* (1967), pp.5-8; Eggleston, 'Australia and the Empire', p.530.

⁹⁶ Several Crown Colony representatives were in attendance, as were a number of prominent individuals with colonial interests. Notably India was not represented.

⁹⁷ BPP/Command-Papers[5091]/Proceedings of the 1887 Colonial Conference, 2 vols. 1887, i, 8.

⁹⁸ HH/LS/E/Holland to Salisbury, 10 March 1887.

of the 'outrecaidance of ... Greater Britain'.⁹⁹ Encouraged, the Colonial Secretary made a further request. As delegates were to receive briefings from the heads of all the other major departments, it was likely they would press for a meeting with the Foreign Secretary too. Inevitably, awkward questions would arise as to the Empire's policy in the South Pacific. Holland suggested Salisbury might attend, 'start the discussion by stating your views + point ... out that the Colonists must not try + set up the Monroe doctrine over all the Pacific Islands'. He could then depart on the 'ground of urgent business elsewhere', passing proceedings over to his subordinates. It was a strategy, Holland felt, that would help ensure the Conference was a 'success + a feather in our Conservative cap'.¹⁰⁰

When the delegates gathered in April, however, tension over the Pacific and imperial foreign policy was quick to rear its head. In his opening address, Holland sought to steer proceedings with a pointed reminder that there would always be 'times ... emergencies ... and reasons of imperial policy', which would require sacrifices on the part of individual Colonies.¹⁰¹ The mood began to shift when the head of the Victorian delegation, Alfred Deakin, took the floor. Deakin launched into a savage critique of imperial policymaking. While he was 'prepared to admit that Imperial interests must override individual interests', the Colonies would 'at the same time express frankly and fully the very strong feelings we cherish on these subjects'. Given the CO's 'disdain and indifference' when it came to Pacific questions, Deakin continued, it was little wonder that the Empire was failing 'in the South Seas while foreigners succeed'. In the future he argued, colonial policy must be imperial policy

⁹⁹ HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Holland, 18 April 1887.

¹⁰⁰ HH/LS/E/Holland to Salisbury, 18 April 1887.

¹⁰¹ BPP/Command-Papers[5091], i, 5-7.

and colonial interests must be imperial interests.¹⁰² All agreed it was a significant moment. The image of the Australian-born colonial dressing down representatives of the British Government would remain etched in Australian and British imperial folklore for years to come. ‘He told us how we had given [away] the islands’, Holland’s Under-Secretary Lord Onslow later recalled, ‘and he told it with such *bonhomie* that we could not help realising that we had before us a real live man’.¹⁰³ More immediately, Deakin’s remarks set the tone for the even pricklier discussions over the New Hebrides that would follow. In a secret session devoted to the issue, Salisbury reprimanded colonial delegates over their Pacific demands and their unwillingness to accept French occupation. In return, the Colonists voiced their disappointment at British inaction and pushed for the annexation of the islands to the Empire.

While these discussions affected little in terms of the eventual policy outcome, they were of fundamental significance for their impact on Anglo-Australian relations.¹⁰⁴ The debate on the New Hebrides poured poison onto the colonial attitudes towards the British Government and vice-versa.¹⁰⁵ ‘The Australian delegates appreciated the frankness of your speech’, Holland wrote to Salisbury immediately after the secret session, but they were ‘very sore indeed’.¹⁰⁶ Deakin’s notes document a sense of outrage at the tone of ‘sarcasm’ and ‘condescension’ adopted by Salisbury:

His line of argument was directed to show that the colonies in the excess of their enthusiasm + the exuberance of their youth + their interference in

¹⁰² *ibid.*, pp.24-25.

¹⁰³ Quoted in La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, p.94.

¹⁰⁴ In the months ahead the Anglo-French naval commission already under consideration would come into force.

¹⁰⁵ Deakin later described the effect of his own protests as ‘electrical’, leaving Salisbury ‘in considerable amazement’. A. Deakin, *The Federal Story*, ed. J.A. La Nauze, 2nd edn (Melbourne, 1963), p.23.

¹⁰⁶ HH/LS/E/Holland to Salisbury, 27 April 1877.

international rights + acts of diplomacy were without reason intruding into a sphere in which they were doing much mischief.¹⁰⁷

Subsequent press reports noted with some humour the way in which Victoria's radical Agent General Graham Berry, with his strong cockney accent, had mocked Salisbury's speech as one that only a French Prime Minister could be proud of.¹⁰⁸ On the British side, the Conservative leader was equally scathing. 'I told you that if I came I must speak the truth in love', he wrote to Holland, but the Australians seemed 'the most unreasonable people I ever heard or dreamt of'.¹⁰⁹ 'They want us to incur all the bloodshed and the danger, and the stupendous cost of a war with France', the Prime Minister raged, 'for a group of islands which ... are as valueless as the South Pole – and to which they are only attached by a debating-club sentiment'.¹¹⁰ The mood soured further when colonial representatives leaked accounts of the proceedings to the press. Holland rightly suspected the Victorians. Forced to disown the press reports in the Commons, he wrote apologetically to Salisbury: 'I can well understand how angry you must feel at this breach of confidence but I assure you cannot be more annoyed or vexed than I am'.¹¹¹

Imperial historians have been right to be cautious about overplaying the significance of the 1887 Colonial Conference. As La Nauze made clear in his celebrated biography of Deakin, it was always primarily a 'Colonial Office affair' and 'not in any serious sense a conference of governments'.¹¹² But its importance both as a crescendo in Anglo-Australian tensions over the Pacific islands and as a precursor to

¹⁰⁷ NLA/Deakin Papers/MS.1540/9/4/5/Item 9/444/'Notes, speech notes and other documents, 1887'.

¹⁰⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 January 1888, p.2.

¹⁰⁹ HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Holland, 27 April 1887.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Deakin had argued that proceedings should be openly covered by the British press, while Berry was notably absent from Holland's subsequent inquisition. On Deakin, NLA/Deakin Papers/MS.1540/9/4/5/Item 9/445. On suspicion of Berry, HH/LS/E/Holland to Salisbury, undated. On Berry's own reaction, La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, i, 101-102.

¹¹² *ibid.*, 92.

the brewing crisis over Chinese migration should not be underestimated. Even the blinding lustre of Victoria's jubilee celebrations had failed to mask the growing sense of distrust between British and Australian officials over foreign affairs. Colonial leaders left London with the impression that Britain had little regard for their external interests or their counsel. For the British it seemed as if the Colonies were becoming hysterical over vague and imagined threats, and worse, that they might seek to interfere with imperial diplomacy on their own initiative. As Colonial Secretary, Holland worked tirelessly to paper over these cracks. During the Conference and afterwards he urged Salisbury to 'let my Australians off easily' in public, lest tensions 'mar the good of the Conference'.¹¹³ Salisbury appears to have heeded the advice, taking time to inform Deakin that he saw the Australian leaders 'as belonging to a type of men to whom the destinies of Australia might be entrusted'.¹¹⁴ The fallout from the Conference though, had a marked effect on the British Prime Minister. As he gave his assent to the Anglo-French convention over the New Hebrides, Salisbury expressed his frustration in biological terms. 'It has a bad effect on my liver' he wrote to Holland, 'to think how those Australian Colonies put upon us'.¹¹⁵

Beyond its impact on the personal relationships between British and Colonial leaders, the Conference had also provided a powerful illustration of the potential for conflict between Britain's foreign and colonial policy objectives. It was a problem reaffirmed when officials debated whether Salisbury's speech on the New Hebrides should be included in the Conference Bluebook. Holland encouraged publication, albeit with extensive editing.¹¹⁶ Salisbury disagreed. The Prime Minister had learnt his lesson in

¹¹³ HH/LS/E/Holland to Salisbury, 2 May 1887.

¹¹⁴ Deakin, *The Federal Story*, p.23.

¹¹⁵ HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Holland, 16 October 1887.

¹¹⁶ HH/LS/E/Holland to Salisbury, 9 May 1887.

what Leo Layard had called ‘Australian political honour’. ‘It is a mess’, he wrote of the draft version of his speech put forward for publication, ‘owing to my having fancied that all the discussions were to be treated absolutely and permanently as confidential’. For Salisbury, the danger of encouraging Colonial aspirations in relation to external affairs had been made all-too clear. ‘It really was altogether wrong, as Foreign Minister, for me to have spoken there at all’, he wrote of the Conference, ‘and it was a stupid want of thought on my part not to have seen that’.¹¹⁷ As the focus shifted again to Chinese migration, the Conservative leader would find little respite in the struggle to accommodate Australian demands and to balance imperial foreign and colonial policy.

The Sleep and the Awakening

As colonial delegates pressed their case in London, Australians at home were already turning back towards the question of China. In April 1887, public attention was captivated by the arrival of a pair of Qing Imperial Commissioners [**Figure 4 below**]. General Wong Yung Ho and Consul Yu Chiung had come to Australia on an official mission to investigate the condition of Chinese communities across South East Asia and to consider the need for an expanded consular presence in the region.¹¹⁸ During their stay they travelled across a vast swathe of the Australian continent, visiting the Northern Territory, NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland. In cities and regional centres along the way they enquired into the treatment of Chinese settlers and consulted with local authorities and Chinese community leaders on the improvement of Sino-Australian and Anglo-Chinese relations.

¹¹⁷ HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Holland, 25 June 1887.

¹¹⁸ The Commissioners are also referred to as Wang Jung-Ho and U. Tsing in contemporary sources.

Figure 4: The Chinese Commissioners (with an unidentified Chinese male) at Sydney, 1887. Picture Collection. Mitchell Library. State Library of New South Wales. ON 219/404.



To colonial observers the visit by General Wong and Consul Yu was a potent signal of China's growing international prestige. Through the 1880s a number of factors had coalesced to challenge longstanding impressions of Middle Kingdom. The first was China's performance in the Sino-French War (1884-1885) fought over control of Tonkin (northern Vietnam). Though the French would eventually secure most of their desired aims, the competence of Chinese forces demonstrated the progress that was being made as a result of Qing military reforms.¹¹⁹ Australian newspapers followed these developments closely. Several public figures commented on the potential threat that a modernised Chinese state might present. Charles Pearson prophesied that China would be 'strengthened even by an unsuccessful war'. Experience in the field would only serve to inspire further reform and improve China's ability to utilise her

¹¹⁹ On the war, L.E. Eastman, *Throne and Mandarins* (Cambridge, MA, 1967).

vast human and material resources. More worryingly for Australia, ‘any great success of China in war with France’, Pearson predicted, ‘would lead to a great settlement of Chinese colonists along all the shores watered by the Indian Ocean’.¹²⁰

To many in the West it seemed as though China was also developing a new confidence in the realm of foreign diplomacy. In 1887, the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* published a widely read article by the Marquis Tseng Chi-tse (Zeng Jize) the former Chinese Ambassador to London, entitled ‘China: the Sleep and the Awakening’. Having revealed the extent of China’s weakness, Tseng wrote, now relations with the Treaty Powers were rousing the Empire from her long slumber. As the Chinese Government embraced economic and social development at home, its foreign policy would be directed towards two ends. The first was the improvement of the terms of engagement with the Treaty Powers. The second was the ‘amelioration of the condition’ of the Chinese Overseas. In his article, Tseng looked optimistically to work of the Imperial Commissioners. Their investigation, he hoped, would demonstrate Peking’s growing interest in the welfare of diaspora Chinese and ensure that foreign nations afforded greater hospitality to the ‘stranger living within their gates’.¹²¹

In Australia there were ‘few persons’ who had not ‘heard or read of the Marquis Tseng’.¹²² The Ambassador’s forecast and the rumours of China’s awakening fanned old, smouldering anxieties and sparked off fresh ones as well. By 1887, Chinese migrants in the Northern Territory (where attempts to bring legislative restriction had

¹²⁰ Quoted in J. Tregenza, *Professor of Democracy* (Melbourne, 1968), p.192.

¹²¹ Tseng Chi-tse, ‘China the Sleep and the Awakening’, *Asiatic Quarterly Review* 111, no. 5 (1887), 1-10.

¹²² *Brisbane Courier*, 22 June 1888, p.7.

failed) outnumbered Europeans by more than five to one.¹²³ As familiar fears of inundation began to re-emerge, Tseng's warning that China would no longer tolerate the 'outrageous treatment' of her subjects added a new dimension. Now the Colonists would have to deal with the possibility that Peking might intervene (or at least seek redress) over their anti-Chinese policies. The level of concern amongst certain sectors of colonial society at potential Chinese hostility was reflected in the actions of the Victorian Parliamentarian J. Campbell. Whilst visiting Peking in 1887, Campbell received word of 'an unscrupulous Chinaman who had returned from Australia' and was making it known 'that the Chinese were being treated with injustice'. Hoping to 'disabuse the minds of the Chinese Government of any erroneous opinions', Campbell sought an audience with Marquis Tseng. In their interview Tseng quizzed him on the Chinese question and asked whether Qing protectors should be sent to Australia to ensure the Chinese received justice. To Campbell, the suggestion must have seemed a stark declaration of China's growing self-assurance. Eager to avert such a move, he acknowledged the force of Australian Sinophobia, but sought to assure the Marquis that Chinese subjects in the Colonies would always be afforded full legal protection by local authorities.¹²⁴

Apprehension in Australia over the potential for increasing Sino-Australian enmity was coupled with uncertainty over how Britain might respond to the emergence of a more powerful Chinese Empire. With her vast population, geographical position and abundance of natural resources, a rejuvenated China was likely to become an important ally for Britain in the Far East. Moreover, as the *SMH* recognised, if China were somehow to form an alliance with Britain's Tsarist rival 'she would become a

¹²³ Markus, *Fear and Hatred*, pp.136-139.

¹²⁴ *Brisbane Courier*, 22 June 1888, p.7.

very awkward antagonist', posing a particular threat to India, Burma and the Straits Settlements. As Griffiths has shown in his recent study, during the 1880s a number of colonial commentators speculated that British interest in securing an alliance with China might make it impossible for the Colonies to continue their policies of exclusion.¹²⁵ If London and Peking were to forge a new defensive partnership, the Chinese would no doubt take full advantage of British goodwill and seek the removal of colonial restrictions on migration. The struggle over New Guinea and the New Hebrides had made clear the dominance of imperial foreign policy objectives over colonial interests. Australians had reason to be sceptical as to whether London might prioritise their migration concerns in the event of an Eastern crisis. 'The time may come', the protectionist politician E.W. O'Sullivan prophesized, when the same British warships that were subsidized by the Australian Colonies 'may be sent as conveys ... bringing Chinamen to these shores'.¹²⁶

Between April and August, General Wong and Consul Yu provided a point of focus for these multi-layered anxieties. The atmosphere surrounding their visit, however, was far from universally hostile. Colonial leaders were keen to make a good impression. In almost all the Colonies they visited (with the exception of Queensland) the pair were honoured with official and public expressions of welcome. Likewise, they proved adept at ingratiating themselves to their Australian hosts. Observers were suitably wowed, for instance, when General Wong offered a moving tribute to the widely-mourned General Gordon (for whom he had served as interpreter during the Taiping Rebellion) in perfect English.¹²⁷ When they were conveyed into Melbourne aboard the Victorian Government's state carriage, the party was greeted by a large

¹²⁵ Griffiths, 'White Australia', pp.420-424.

¹²⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.423.

¹²⁷ *Argus*, 27 May 1887, p.3.

crowd of Chinese and Europeans. Prominent in the local Chinese community was a former school-mate of the General, Lowe Kong Meng. A successful merchant, Lowe was the co-author of an important publication, *The Chinese Question in Australia* (1879) which had critiqued anti-Chinese discrimination and migration restriction on religious, diplomatic, economic and humanitarian grounds:

In the name of heaven, we ask, where is your justice? Where your religion? Where your morality? Where your sense of right and wrong? Where your enlightenment? Where your love of liberty? Where your respect for international law?

In seeking to exclude the Chinese, Lowe had argued, the Colonies were violating the spirit of ‘reciprocity’ underpinning the Anglo-Chinese treaties and dishonouring British traditions of liberty and justice.¹²⁸ While the Commissioners took up these arguments, complaining at the imposition of poll-taxes and restrictions on entry, they also reported being generally satisfied with the treatment of their countrymen in Australia. The situation of Chinese settlers in the Colonies was at least far better than in the Spanish Philippines or the Dutch East Indies.¹²⁹

Importantly, the Commissioners’ colonial tour also provided a final example of the ongoing tension between the two competing visions of Sino-Australian engagement with which this thesis has been so far concerned. For business leaders in Sydney and Melbourne, their arrival offered a platform for articulating recently muted (but never forgotten) dreams of closer commercial relations. In Victoria, the Chamber of Commerce planned a welcome dinner, though those celebrations were eventually folded into an event already planned by the Colony’s Centennial Commission.¹³⁰ At Sydney, the NSW Chamber organised a picnic. Its President marked the occasion

¹²⁸ Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong, Louis Ah Mouy, *The Chinese Question in Australia* (Melbourne, 1879), p.29.

¹²⁹ For their report, CO/881/1/10/No.145/Enclosure .

¹³⁰ SLV/MCC/MS.10917/Minute-Books, 9 May 1887.

with a speech on the benefits of an expansion in Sino-British and Sino-Australian trade.¹³¹ In response General Wong expressed China's commitment to 'doing her utmost to cultivate friendly relations with England'. In the Australian context, he continued, trade would be inevitably bound up with the question of migration. He informed the gathering that:

The Emperor had sent him here simply to see if the Chinese were fairly treated, and having ascertained that this was so, the Chinese Government would send more of their subjects, but not too great a number.

With this in mind the Chinese authorities would look to 'the [Colonial] Government, to the Chamber of Commerce, and other gentlemen interested in mercantile pursuits to give the Chinese as much protection as possible'. If that was forthcoming, there might be found a considerable market for Chinese goods in Australia and vice-versa:

He ... hoped that a reciprocal trade of considerable value would be established at no very distant day. As there were so many lines of steamers now plying between this country and China he saw no reason why the development of that commerce should not be rapid.¹³²

To the assembled audience (who cheered loudly) it must have felt like a remarkable moment. General Wong appeared to be arguing that closer Sino-Australian interaction in the commercial and human spheres might form part of a wider expansion of Anglo-Chinese relations. At a picnic in colonial Sydney, an official delegate of the Qing Empire was advocating a version of the old closer association argument that had fascinated colonial entrepreneurs for generations.

If sectors of the business community clearly revelled in the idea that China might take a greater interest in Australian affairs though, for others the Commissioners' presence was altogether more troubling. NSW's Anti-Chinese League pointed to Marquis

¹³¹ ML/SCC/MSS.5706/1(11)/Book-5, 21 April, 12 May 1887.

¹³² *Brisbane Courier*, 21 May 1887, p.5.

Tseng's article and the Imperial Commission as proof 'that the future policy of China is fraught with graver menace than ever to Australia'.¹³³ By the time the touring party moved on to Brisbane the warm welcomes had dried up. A series of anti-Chinese protests were held to coincide with the Commissioners' arrival in the city and they were presented with various petitions making clear the colonists' opposition to Chinese migration. 'Being loyal citizens of a self governed British colony of freemen', ran one memorial from the residents of Charter's Towers, 'we cannot but view the Chinese labor as slavery or labor that lives on next to nothing'.¹³⁴ It was a point reiterated by the Queensland Premier Samuel Griffiths, who stressed the 'great objections' that existed in relation to 'any attempt to introduce both European and Asiatic forms of civilisation into a democratic country like Queensland'. Colonial society, Griffiths told the Commissioners, rested on 'permitting everybody to share in the Government'. The Chinese, were they allowed to enter freely, were bound to take on the 'position of a governed race'.¹³⁵

More worryingly, throughout the course of Commissioners' visit, there remained the suspicion that their investigation into the treatment of Chinese settlers might in fact be masking a more sinister ulterior motive. General Wong's admission that China had an interest in sending additional numbers of migrants to Australia added weight to suggestions that the Qing were looking to open the Colonies to Chinese migration on a massive scale. In August, as the pair left Australian shores, the *SMH* published its own analysis of the implications of their mission:

They came ostensibly for the purpose of inquiring about the welfare of their compatriots in these parts, but ... they did not come with that object alone. They wanted to discover how wide a field the Australian Colonies presented

¹³³ *SMH*, 7 November 1887, p.4.

¹³⁴ On the tone of these protests, *The Northern Miner* [Charters Towers, QLD], 30 July 1887, p.3.

¹³⁵ *SMH*, 26 July 1887, p.7.

for the employment of Chinese labour, and what prospect there was for obtaining here a market for Chinese goods.

It was an assessment that reflected both long-term colonial anxieties, forged out of the experience of gold rush migration, as well as an attempt to make sense of the potential implications of China's growing imperial power. 'If there were only a few hundred Chinese in Australia and no prospect of more coming' continued the *Herald* editorial, the Commissioners 'might have travelled from one end of Australia to the other without hearing a single unfriendly word about their countrymen'. Instead, on the eve of the centenary of British settlement, it appeared that China had her own designs on the Australian Colonies. The 'idea had got about' that the Imperial Commission could 'lead to a fresh influx' of Chinese arrivals. A 'warning note' had 'been raised'. To complicate matters further it seemed likely that the issue of Chinese migration to Australia was bound to impact more heavily upon British imperial affairs in the years ahead:

Great Britain enjoys, under treaty, commercial and other privileges in China of very great value, and it may occur to the authorities at Peking to ask that in return Chinese subjects may be more liberally dealt with in Australia. In such a case the British Government would be in a difficulty. Satisfaction could not be given to China without interfering in some way with what we should regard as our domestic affairs; and if China were persistent, trouble might arise out of the business.¹³⁶

It would prove to be a prophetic analysis. As 1887 rolled into 1888, that trouble was already brewing on the horizon.

Conclusion: Who Knows What May Happen a Hundred Years Hence?

In his centennial study of Australian settlement, Edward Gonner looked back to the founding of a penal colony at Sydney as 'the first boring for a new shaft'. While the expedition to NSW could 'always be justified on the ground of present necessity',

¹³⁶ *SMH*, 4 August 1887, pp.6-7.

Gonner wrote, ‘those who sent it [had] aimed at something more important than the mere foundation of a new criminal establishment’. Colonisation needed to be understood as part of a powerful new desire to prise open the Pacific and to establish a new southern base for Britain’s Eastern ambitions. Of course, Gonner acknowledged, the dreams of the enthusiasts had turned out rather differently. ‘Who knows what may happen a hundred years hence?’¹³⁷

Certainly the situation looked rather different by the time Gonner was writing. The coming together of the British and Chinese Empires in Australia during the first century of colonisation had underlined the difficulty of marrying Britain’s settler and commercial interests in the Pacific. By 1888, the vast majority of British settlers in the Antipodes were openly hostile to any prospect of closer engagement with Asia, frightened off by the traumatic experience of Chinese migration. At the same time, the divergence between British and Australian attitudes towards imperial policy in the region had become marked. Disagreement with London over the use of local measures to restrict Chinese immigration to Queensland had been followed closely by further clashes over the fate of the islands to Australia’s north. The fallout was such that both Gladstone and Salisbury had expressed greater empathy with foreign powers than with Britain’s own colonial subjects. Echoes of Alexander Dalrymple’s prediction that antipodean self-government would come to impact upon the maintenance of the Empire’s interests in the Asia-Pacific were everywhere.

In the years that followed, the competing visions of Australian settlement explored in these first two chapters, connected to China and set apart from China, would continue

¹³⁷ Gonner, ‘The Settlement of Australia’, p.632.

to find their expression in the shifting tide of events. For now they were set to produce a crisis in British imperial affairs. Having tracked the development of the Chinese question in Australia across the first century of Australian settlement, it is to that imperial crisis, which we now turn.

Part Two

The Chinese Immigration Question Began to Assume Larger and More Significant Proportions

In 1888, Britain's Australian Colonies were swept by a dramatic crisis over the question of Chinese migration. Australian anxieties on the subject were hardly unique. Similar concerns over the scale and character of Chinese migration had surfaced periodically in all the Anglo-settler societies of the Pacific Rim during the second-half of the nineteenth century. But as Australians celebrated the centenary of British settlement, it seemed to many of them as if their own Chinese question was changing. In a world made smaller by late-Victorian advances in transport and communications, China appeared larger and more active on the horizon. The 'poor Chinaman' who had been a feature of colonial society since the gold rushes of the 1850s, observed Henry Parkes, was now 'a citizen of that Power which has risen up to be one of the most formidable powers in the world'.¹ The implications for Australia were considerable. For some, the rise of China still presented an opportunity: a chance to develop the empty north using Chinese labour and to expand upon a fledging trade with Asia. To most, it constituted a significant threat to Australian society and the Colonies' position within a British World. Centennial celebrations had made much of Australia's rapid growth and development, but they had done little to mask the fragility of colonial authority across much of a vast, sparsely populated, continent. Fear of exposure fuelled nightmares of a celestial invasion. The Chinese were 'a powerful race', warned Parkes, 'capable of taking a great hold upon the country'.²

¹ *SMH*, 9 April 1888, p.3.

² *ibid.*

If China seemed closer, Britain was still painfully distant. Australians continued to view the world through the prism of the *Pax Britannica* and to rely on the Royal Navy's Australian Station (for which they now contributed an annual subsidy) as the ultimate guarantor of their security. But the treatment of the Pacific questions at the Colonial Conference had demonstrated Lord Salisbury's reluctance to allow the Colonists' regional concerns to impinge on British diplomacy. As attention turned towards Chinese migration, a residual bitterness hovered over Anglo-Australian relations. In some quarters, it was Britain herself who deserved the blame for stirring up the Chinese dragon. 'It was England, with her disgusting cant and hideous passion for trade', wrote the radical Queensland republican William Lane, who had blown 'open the gates of China to let the Opium merchants in and the Chinese hordes out'.³ More generally, despite their reservations, Australians continued to look to London for protection. Confronted by the prospect of a resurgent Manchu Empire and unable to enter into international negotiations independently, they turned first to the imperial system of which they were a part.

The nature of that appeal, its reception in London and its impact on British foreign and colonial relations, provide the focus for the following three chapters. Replacing the panoramic lens deployed in Part One, Part Two zooms in to examine the intricate details of one of the most dramatic moments in Australian colonial history.⁴ 1888, records London's *Annual Register*, was the year in which 'in all the Australian Colonies, the Chinese immigration question began to assume larger and more

³ Quoted in Walker, *Anxious Nation*, p.43.

⁴ Here these chapters take inspiration from Thompson's statement that 'History is made up of episodes, and if we cannot get inside them we cannot get inside history at all.' E.P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', *The Socialist Register*, 2 (1965), 338.

significant proportions'.⁵ By slowing the passage of time and allowing these contours to come into sharper relief, the following chapters set out to demonstrate the extent to which the crisis of 1888 was an inherently imperial crisis: one that emerged from the latent tension underpinning British interests in the Pacific and which influenced contemporary debates on foreign and colonial affairs.

In approaching this subject, these chapters owe much to the work of generations of thoughtful scholars. For Australian historians, the escalating importance of the Chinese migration question has long provided a window to the essential relationship between history, geography and national development.⁶ Australia might be an 'offshoot of Europe, and its culture European', wrote Professor Ernest Scott in 1916, but her 'shores lay within a few days' steaming of the overcrowded areas of Asia'.⁷ Elsewhere, mounting Australian hostility to Asian migration has attracted attention in work on late-Qing diplomacy and the Chinese Overseas.⁸ It has appeared in British imperial historiography as a marker of the intra-imperial tensions inspired by colonial self-government and the growing predominance of Greater Britain. More recently it has featured in transnational studies, charting the emergence of discourses on whiteness, citizenship and border control.⁹ Since the nineteenth century, an ongoing chicken and egg debate has raged over the primacy of the economic and cultural roots

⁵ 'Australasia and Polynesia', *The Annual Register for 1888* (1889), p.428.

⁶ The best study is Walker, *Anxious Nation*. On the relationship between history and geography, N. Meaney, *Australia and the World* (Melbourne, 1985), pp.8-13. On 1888, Willard, *White Australia Policy*, pp.69-74; Price, *The Great White Walls*, pp.186-257; Markus, *Fear & Hatred*, pp.121-281; Griffiths, 'White Australia', pp.403-535.

⁷ E. Scott, *A Short History of Australia*, 4th edn (Melbourne, 1920), pp.262, 273. 332.

⁸ Yen Ching-Hwang, *Coolies and Mandarins* (Singapore, 1985), pp.159-160; A. McKeown, *Melancholy Order* (New York, 2008), pp.121-189; Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, pp.197-239.

⁹ L. Curtis, *The Problem of the Commonwealth* (1916), pp.60-63; Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*; Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration*, pp.22-24; Martens, 'A Transnational History of Immigration Restriction', 323-344; Lake and Reynolds, *Global Colour Line*, pp.15- 48; Bright, 'Chinese Indentured Labour', pp.12-27.

of settler racism and the extent to which blame for past policies of exclusion rest with a particular sector of society.¹⁰

While engaged with these rich traditions of scholarship, the following pages seek to bring to the fore the imperial dimensions of the Chinese migration crisis of 1888. In doing so, they redress two essential weaknesses of existing historiography. The first is the relative omission of British perspectives on the crisis and the acceptance of a one-dimensional and static portrayal of the metropolitan ‘Official Mind’.¹¹ Turning to the archive and examining the motivations, institutional dynamics and local considerations that influenced policy makers in London, they seek out a more nuanced understanding of the British response to Australia’s Chinese question.¹² This first research target provides the means for approaching the second. By bringing the British perspective back in, we can begin to locate the events of 1888 within our broader narrative on the imperial significance of Australia’s relations with China during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

To use an imperial lens is not to deny the importance of the broader global contexts that shaped the Chinese question in Australia, nor the international resonance of the Australian case itself. On the contrary, these chapters endeavour to better understand both these dimensions, by considering the influence of international developments not just at the periphery (where scholars have tended to focus) but also at the centre. The

¹⁰ For two early contrasting views, Coghlan and Ewing, *The Progress of Australasia*, pp.37, 39; H.G. Turner, *A History of the Colony of Victoria* (2 vols., 1904), i, 232-233.

¹¹ Two exceptions are Huttenback, *Race and Empire*; McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, pp.186-189.

¹² On the Official Mind, ‘the collective mind of government’, and how it might be approached, R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians* (New York, 1961), pp.21-25. The importance of interrogating the colonial archive and pursuing ‘dissonant voices’ is discussed in F. Cooper and L. Stoler, ‘Between Metropole and Colony’ in F. Cooper and L. Stoler (eds.) *Tensions of Empire* (Berkeley, 1997), pp.21-22.

growing influence of the United States, the repercussions of the opening of China and the gradual emergence of the Antipodean settler colonies from relative obscurity, influenced the British response to the Chinese question at least as much, though probably more, than they mattered elsewhere. To look towards the imperial dimension is rather to reassert the significance of the diplomatic and political framework through which the Chinese question in Australia ultimately had to be raised and resolved. If its roots, like its shadow, stretched beyond the formal bounds of the British Empire, it still had to be tended by those that managed Britain's imperial interests. As such, the crisis of 1888 was not only an Australian, Chinese and Pacific Rim phenomenon, but an imperial one as well. It was played out most dramatically within Britain's imperial system. For so long the focus of idle dreams and speculation, the question of Australia's relations with China was about to explode onto the imperial stage.

Chapter Three

Between Two Difficulties: British Foreign and Colonial Policy and the Question of Chinese Migration

During the early months of 1888, the issue of Chinese migration to Australia began to take on a new political significance, both within the Colonies and beyond. This chapter, the first of three dealing with the events of that tumultuous year, concentrates on the period between January and April. It explores the way in which escalating Australian anxieties over China began to clash with a growing determination amongst Qing diplomats to protect the interests of the Chinese Overseas. Making use of official records overlooked in previous studies, it charts the way in which this new form of Sino-Australian engagement was channelled through the architecture of Britain's Foreign and Colonial Offices (FO and CO). By following the extensive paper trail carved through Whitehall and elsewhere, it considers how a range of developments on the British, Chinese and Australian side conspired to transform the Chinese question in Australia into a pressing imperial problem.

On the 6 January 1888, Henry Loch, the Governor of Victoria, sent a despatch to the CO in London. In all the Australian Colonies, he reported, there was 'considerable public agitation ... with respect to the influx of Chinese'. Backed by popular sentiment, local leaders looked like embracing calls for further immigration restriction, in a spirit contrary to the friendly relations of Britain and China and in potential violation of the Anglo-Chinese treaties. The situation, Loch warned, threatened to place the Imperial Government 'between two difficulties'. If the Colonies legislated to exclude Chinese migrants, the Qing Empire was bound to remonstrate, or even retaliate, in a manner consistent with its 'growing political and

material importance'. London would be forced either to act 'at variance with the friendly policy it would desire to maintain with China', or to refuse royal assent for colonial legislation, thereby defying the 'unanimous' will of the Queen's Australian subjects. Urging the Imperial Government to come out ahead on the issue, Loch suggested a conference should be called to devise a means for controlling Chinese migration acceptable to both the colonial authorities and Peking. Such an agreement could provide for the protection of Australia's white population, while allowing for the employment of Chinese labour in the undeveloped, tropical north. If an imperial solution could not be found, there would be no alternative but to rely on local legislation to control the influx of Chinese into Australia.¹

As Loch prepared his message, word of the Chinese question in Australia had already made its way to Whitehall from another source. On the 12 December 1887, the Chinese Minister in London, Lew Tajen, had written to Lord Salisbury to protest against the treatment of his countrymen in Britain's Australian Colonies.² Drawing on the observations of the Imperial Commissioners, Lew expressed particular concern at the poll-taxes and passenger restrictions colonial authorities had inflicted on Chinese migrants. He called upon Salisbury to institute an enquiry into how far Australian legislation was 'compatible with the increasing growth of ... friendly relations' between Britain and China. In light of the importance of the Anglo-Chinese relationship, such an investigation should naturally be carried out 'with a view to the elimination' of any colonial measures, 'found to be at variance with treaty obligations and international usage'.³ Like Loch, Lew encouraged the British Government to deal with the migration issue to prevent the Australian situation from upsetting the course

¹ CO/881/8/10/No.15/Loch to Holland, 6 January 1888.

² Lew Tajen is sometimes rendered as 'Liu Ruifen' and 'Liu Juifen'.

³ CO/881/8/10/No.8/Enclosure/Lew to Salisbury, 12 December 1887.

of Anglo-Chinese relations, but he approached the question from a fundamentally contrary position. If Loch sought an imperially sanctioned agreement on exclusion as the best means for harmonising Australian and Chinese interests, Lew looked instead to the exercise of the rights of free passage and protection promised to Chinese subjects by those treaties already in existence.

Lew's efforts need to be understood as part of the wider campaign by late-Qing authorities to improve conditions for Chinese Overseas. By the 1880s, motivated by the growing wealth and political clout of diaspora communities, Peking had begun to push for recognition of the reciprocal privileges accorded to Chinese subjects by the various treaties that China had signed with the Foreign Powers.⁴ Here the work of Chinese diplomats was central. Always cautious about the cost of expanding its consular network the Qing Foreign Office, the Zongli Yamen, looked first to China's foreign ambassadors to improve the 'position and treatment' of Chinese emigrants.⁵ It was an end to which the Legation in London devoted considerable energy. Lew's predecessors and successors regularly raised diaspora issues in their diplomatic communications.⁶ These included calls for the establishment of consulates in British colonies, the right to migrate to British dominions and to enjoy 'full security and protection' of 'persons and property' while resident.⁷ Though British officials were not always receptive to these approaches (citing the continuing restrictions placed on Britons in China) the issue was evidently one on which Chinese diplomats felt able to

⁴ S. Fitzgerald, *China and Chinese Overseas* (Cambridge, 1972), pp.5-6; Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, pp.135-248; I. Hsü, *China's Entrance Into the Family of Nations* (Cambridge, MA, 1968), pp.180-210.

⁵ S.M. Meng, *The Tsungli Yamen* (Cambridge, MA, 1962); Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, pp.152-153; Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, glossary, A68-69.

⁶ Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, pp.140-144; Tseng, 'China: The Sleep and the Awakening'.

⁷ In the Australian Case, Lew pressed Salisbury on Article I of the Treaty of Nanjing (1842). 'Treaty of Nanjing', *USC-UCLA East Asian Studies Documents* [website], <<http://www.international.ucla.edu/eas/documents/nanjing.htm>>, accessed 1 April 2011.

look to London for help and assistance.⁸ Lew Tajen seems to have been well equipped with the skills and personality needed to win British support for his countrymen's aspirations. A native of Anhui province, Lew had been involved in the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion in the 1860s, taking charge of the importation of Western ammunition into Shanghai. He had gone on to serve in several judicial and administrative positions and was appointed Acting Governor of Jiangxi province, before being named as Chinese Ambassador to England and Russia in 1885.⁹ An 'uncommonly good-looking man ... with a fine presence' and a solid understanding of world affairs, noted Robert Hart, Lew would be more respected 'than any [envoy] hitherto sent'. London had 'not seen such a Chinaman before'.¹⁰

On arriving in London in 1886, one of Lew's first acts had been to petition Lord Rosebery over the treatment of Chinese in Western Canada. At the heart of his complaint was, 'An Act to regulate the Chinese Population of British Columbia', which had been declared ultra vires by the Province's Supreme Court and was now before the Canadian Privy Council at Ottawa.¹¹ Though confident the Council would rescind the law, Lew felt particularly aggrieved by the exceptional restrictions it placed upon freedom of movement and access to employment, which rendered the Chinese migrant 'a suspect and worse than a ticket of leave man'.¹² To add insult to

⁸ J.D. Frodsham, *The First Chinese Embassy to the West* (Oxford, 1974), pp.li-liv. In one exchange in the late-1870s, staff at the Chinese Legation in Washington had approached the British Minister there for assistance over a suspected violation of the Burlingame Treaty (1868). HH/LS/A/vol.19/Thornton to Salisbury, 7 January 1879.

⁹ He later added France, Belgium and Italy. Tu Lien-che, 'LIU, Jui-fen' in A.W. Hummel (ed.) *Eminent Chinese of the Ching Period, 1644-1912* (2 vols., Washington, 1943), i, 522-523.

¹⁰ Hart to Campbell, 31 July 1885; 20 November 1885; 21 December 1885, *ACIMC*, ii, 215, 264 and 278.

¹¹ CO/881/8/10/No.5/CO to FO, 13 August 1886 and Enclosures.

¹² CO/881/8/10/No.1/Enclosure/Lew to Rosebery, 13 July 1886. Here Lew protested on the basis of Article I of the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) and on Article V of the Peking Convention (1860). 'Convention of Beijing', *China Foreign Relations* [website],

injury, the legislation's preamble showcased all the worst excesses of settler Sinophobia. The Chinese were apparently unlawful, culturally alien, morally depraved and untaxable: their presence 'subversive of the comfort and well-being of the community'. It looked, conceded Justice Crease of British Columbia's Supreme Court, 'like a bill of indictment as against a race not suited to live amongst a civilised nation'. For Lew, the preamble violated the commitment to mutual respect established in the famous Article LI of the Treaty of Tientsin (1858) which had abolished the use of the term *yí* (Barbarian) in diplomatic communications. The 'invidious distinction', made against Chinese in Canada, was hostile towards the Government of China, 'injurious to commerce' and poorly considered in the light of efforts to create 'a more cordial feeling between the people of England and China'. The Chinese Government did not expect its subjects abroad to enjoy the 'advantageous position' accorded to Britons in China, but it did demand that they should 'not be made the subject of an exceptional treatment'.¹³

Much of the heat came out the issue when Vancouver subsequently dropped its appeal to the Canadian Privy Council. The British Government apologised for the offensive language used in the preamble, while Lord Lansdowne, the Governor-General at Ottawa, promised to discourage its use in the future.¹⁴ In many ways, however, the incident served as a precursor to the Chinese Minister's intervention in Australia. For Lew, the key to the Chinese question in both contexts seemed to be the relationship between imperial authority and colonial self-government. Across the British Empire Chinese had demonstrated their 'orderly conduct' and their economic

<http://www.chinaforeignrelations.net/treaty_beijing>, accessed 1 April 2011. On the Chinese in Canada, Li, *Chinese in Canada*, pp.1-43.

¹³ CO/881/8/10/No.1/Enclosure/Lew to Rosebery, 13 July 1886.

¹⁴ CO/881/8/10/No.9/Enclosure/Iddesleigh to Lew, 14 September 1886; No.10/Lansdowne to Holland, 20 December 1887.

contribution. In Britain's Crown Colonies they were not being singled out for prejudicial treatment. As such, it was 'difficult to understand why it should be otherwise in those Colonies to whom a certain amount of self-government has been conferred'.¹⁵ Positioning himself skilfully, Lew acknowledged that the passage of offensive legislation 'inimical to Chinese' and 'incompatible' with treaty obligations, could not be assumed to have London's support. Once alerted to the impact of these colonial laws, however, he saw no 'sufficient reason' why the Salisbury Government should not act to prevent Chinese 'being treated differently from the subjects of other Powers'.¹⁶

On the British side, the Canadian example and its suggestion of a possible link between local anti-Chinese legislation and imperial foreign relations inspired little enthusiasm. In a note to the CO, one FO official commented, 'the less said the better about this business'.¹⁷ In his despatch to London, however, Lansdowne had warned that the 'intensity of the feeling' against the Chinese could not be 'disregarded or suppressed'. In support, he enclosed a report from the Privy Council of British Columbia. While expressing regret at the tone of the recent Act, the Council conceded that its aims had reflected 'the wishes of the majority'.¹⁸ As the focus shifted across the Pacific to Australia, this latent tension, between white settler democracy and the demands of imperial diplomacy was about to come to the fore.

¹⁵ The Crown Colony of Western Australia received no specific attention in Lew's protest. A. Inglis Clark (the Attorney General of Tasmania) criticised Lew's argument on the grounds that Western Australia (lacking self-government) had also brought restrictive legislation. CO/881/8/10/No.117/Enclosure, 24 April 1888. The most notable was the 'Act to Regulate and Restrict Chinese Immigration' (1886) which levied a £10 poll-tax on Chinese attempting to enter without pre-existing labour contracts. CO/881/8/10/No.119/Enclosure, 7 April 1888.

¹⁶ CO/881/8/10/No.8/Enclosure/Lew to Salisbury, 12 December 1887.

¹⁷ FO/17/1701/26/FO to CO, 7 January 1887.

¹⁸ CO/881/8/10/No.10/Lansdowne to Holland, 20 December 1887 and Enclosure.

As Christmas 1887 approached, the FO began to cobble together a response to Lew's Australian protest, calling upon the CO to provide information on the offending local legislation. With few details to hand, Henry Holland sent a circular to the Governors of all the Australasian Colonies. Enclosing Lew's letter, he requested details of the character, aims and success of any anti-Chinese legislation.¹⁹ As these letters steamed for Australia, Loch's was on its way to London, where it arrived on the 20 February 1888. After consideration, the Colonial and Foreign Offices concurred that any plans for a conference would have to await the Colonies' response to Lew's protest.²⁰ Though they could not have known it at the time, they had lit the fuse that would ignite the Chinese question in Australia as an imperial issue.

She Will Have to Make Our Cause of Contention, Her Cause of Contention

By March of 1888, the situation in the Antipodes was becoming acute. In a letter to London, the New Zealand merchant and financier J.C. Firth, noted that it was 'forcing itself into a position' that could no longer 'safely be ignored'. While the colonial working classes were determined to exclude Chinese competition, the 'instinct of racial preservation' was everywhere.²¹ Across the Tasman Sea, anxieties had been amplified by the appearance in the press of a telegram from John Langdon Parsons, the South Australian Government Resident at Port Darwin. Noting the significant number of recent arrivals from China, Parsons claimed to have learned of the existence of a 'powerful syndicate' of Treaty Port Merchants ready to 'pour Chinese'

¹⁹ CO/881/8/10/No.14/Holland to the Australian Governors, 23 January 1888. The message was also sent to Ottawa.

²⁰ CO/881/8/10/No.18/Knutsford to Loch, 15 March 1888. Holland had become Lord Knutsford in February.

²¹ CO/881/8/10/No.35/Enclosure/Firth to Holland, 14 February 1888.

into Darwin. 'Once landed in the centre of Australia', they were bound 'to spread all over the Colonies'.²²

Parsons' telegram galvanised efforts to pressure the South Australian Government to close the north to Chinese immigration.²³ In a speech on the 22 February, Henry Parkes received 'loud cheers' when he informed a public audience of his efforts on the subject.²⁴ In a private letter sent that day to his South Australian counterpart, Thomas Playford, Parkes had expressed his 'serious apprehensions' over the 'growing designs of China in relation to Australia'. Secretly, he confessed his fear that the Qing Government was taking an active role in encouraging emigration and harboured plans to 'plant a Chinese settlement in some remote part of this continent with the view of ultimately forming a Chinese Colony'. Parkes urged the South Australian Premier to erect new legislative barriers, for Australia was 'more available than any other region of the earth and ... more suited to the wants of China'.²⁵ When he replied, Playford reassured Parkes that he was in agreement, though he hoped the notion of the 'Chinese Government as instigators' might prove to be mistaken. The South Australians too preached 'Australia for the Australians'.²⁶ Implementing a poll-tax and promising to bring further restrictions following elections in April, the Government began manipulating quarantine regulations, to reduce the incentive to shipping companies for providing passage to Chinese.²⁷

²² The telegram was published in the *South Australian Register*, 20 February 1888; *SMH*, 20 February 1888; *Launceston Examiner*, 23 February 1888; *Argus*, 24 February 1888.

²³ Griffiths, 'White Australia', pp.470-473.

²⁴ *South Australian Register*, 23 February 1888, p.5.

²⁵ ML/HP/CY84/Vol.2/A932/Parkes to Playford, 22 February 1888.

²⁶ ML/HP/CY78/Vol.56/A926/Playford to Parkes, 3 March 1888.

²⁷ Markus, *Fear and Hatred*, pp.136-139; Griffiths, 'White Australia', p.473.

Figure 5: Chinese at Castlemaine, c.1888. Picture Collection, SLV.
By 1888, the long-familiar sight of Chinese in the Australian Colonies was raising fresh fears over mass immigration.



It was into this volatile political environment, where the Chinese question and its possible solution were being widely discussed, that the British Government's request for information and Lew's protest finally arrived. By coincidence, as Holland's circular did the rounds of the Colonies, Australian newspapers were receiving information on a new Sino-American Treaty, designed to exclude Chinese labour from the United States for a period of twenty years. Although the idea of using treaty revision to resolve the Chinese question in Australia had already been suggested by Loch and others, now it seemed the Americans were showing the way forward. On the 22 March, Duncan Gillies, Premier of Victoria, wrote to his counterparts suggesting that they lobby the Imperial Government to negotiate an American-style treaty of exclusion on Australia's behalf. Such a response would enable the withdrawal of local legislation offensive to China, whilst also recognising Australian

fears over immigration. Though support for the plan amongst colonial leaders was not universal, there seemed little harm in securing ‘the sympathy and aid of the mother country’.²⁸ An array of responses explaining the character and extent of anti-Chinese sentiment and calling for negotiations with Peking were slammed down on paper for return to London.²⁹

These political machinations were all the while being pushed ahead by popular sentiment. At a raucous meeting at Sydney Town Hall, NSW parliamentarian Edmund Barton moved a unanimous motion;

That the almost unrestricted influx of Chinese into Australia will, if continued, threaten our political and social welfare ... the time has arrived for the imposition of substantial and effective restrictions on their further introduction.³⁰

Mindful of securing British support, the leaders of the Sydney meeting coupled their demand for exclusion with an acknowledgement of the broader imperial interests in play. Presenting their resolutions to the Governor, Lord Carrington, delegates insisted they had no desire to ‘provoke a rupture of the relations between Great Britain and China’. The question, however, had ‘assumed such proportions’ as to become ‘a serious menace to the wellbeing of the people of British descent’. In response Carrington ‘expressed his pleasure’ at the tone of the representations and the absence of language that might prove offensive to China. He promised to pay full attention to the issue and to forward colonial resolutions to London.³¹

²⁸ CO/881/8/10/No.65/Enclosure/Gillies to Parkes, 22 March 1888. On scepticism, *Argus*, 30 April 1888, p.9; Griffiths, ‘White Australia’, p.475.

²⁹ Gillies favoured joint representation, while Parkes argued that separate petitions would carry more weight in London, *Argus*, 3 April 1888, p.5.

³⁰ CO/881/8/10/No.46/Enclosure, 27 March 1888.

³¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 30 March 1888, p.5.

On the 31 March, in one of the most dramatic acts by an Australian political leader to date, Parkes seized the mantle and sent via Carrington a long message of ‘greatest importance’. This time the news travelled by telegraph:

Australian feeling ... much exercised in reference to Chinese immigration and the enquiry made by the Marquis of Salisbury ... owing to recent occurrences severer measures are now demanded throughout all the Colonies. This state of things has given rise to new reflections in dealing with a difficulty which threatens to become a calamity.³²

Sent at enormous cost, Parkes’ telegram called upon the Imperial Government to begin negotiations for a treaty with China.³³ Falling back on the economic and cultural foundations of Australians’ hostility towards increased Chinese migration, he laid out for ‘Her Majesty’s Imperial advisers, the more prominent phases of the Chinese question as it specially and almost exclusively affects the Australian section of the British people’. Picking up on a theme he would return to in the months ahead, Parkes set the Chinese question in Australia as an imperial question, one bound up not only with Sino-British diplomacy, but the future of Anglo Australian relations as well. ‘If we have no voice in the making of treaties’, he famously noted, ‘it seems only just that our interests should be considered and protected by those who exercise that power’. If, however, the Empire proved unable to provide Australia with the protection that Americans could take for granted, there was little chance of holding back local legislation, ‘irritation and conflict[s] of interest’. The Colonies would be driven by ‘public opinion’ to defend themselves from inundation.³⁴ A few days later Carrington telegraphed again, warning Holland (now Lord Knutsford) to expect similar communications from the other Australian Colonies.³⁵

³² CO/881/8/10/No.19[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 31 March 1888.

³³ Griffiths estimates the telegram cost £300 pounds. Griffiths, ‘White Australia’, pp.475-476.

³⁴ CO/881/8/10/No.19[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 31 March 1888.

³⁵ CO/881/8/10/No.20[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 3 April 1888.

If Australian leaders expected a quick response to this explosive telegram, none was forthcoming. In his *Australia and the Empire* (1889) the journalist A. Patchett Martin, commented on his countrymen's complacency on questions of imperial politics. 'The relation between England and her Colonies', he wrote, 'is one purely of haphazard; we do not steer, - we drift'.³⁶ But as they awaited word from London, analyses and commentary on the appropriate imperial response proliferated, shifting attention towards Australia's place within the Empire. In a speech on the 7 April, Parkes sought to raise his audience 'a little above the ordinary platform of political discussion' and convince them of their own position as 'citizens of a rapidly- rising Empire'. Recalling Napoleon's reputed observation, that skill in European arms and mastery of modern shipbuilding would allow China to 'conquer the world', he stressed the need for Australians to draw strength from the imperial system of which they were a part. To applause and cries of 'here, here' from the floor, he urged his audience to see themselves 'not simply as colonists of Victoria, or New South Wales, but as subjects of Her Majesty the Queen, entitled to full participation in all the rights of the Empire'. The Chinese question 'must be settled between the Empire and ... the Government of China'. Britain would 'have to make our cause of contention her cause of contention'.³⁷

Parkes' belief in the importance of imperial protection was no doubt genuine. It reflected the widespread assumption amongst Australia's middle class political leaders that continuing membership of the Empire was essential to the development of a white, federated Australia.³⁸ Against radical calls to 'cut the painter' and take an independent path, he asserted the need for the Colonies to remain within the British

³⁶ Martin, *Australia and the Empire*, p.207.

³⁷ *SMH*, 9 April 1888, p.3.

³⁸ Clark, *A History of Australia*, v, 16-18.

orbit. When faced with the growing threat from China, observed Manning Clarke in a memorable quip, Parkes and Gillies had found that ‘Groveland was preferable to extinction’.³⁹ It also reflected Parkes’ own image of himself as a ‘loyal Australian’. On learning he was to be appointed K.C.M.G in January 1888, Parkes had told Holland that despite all his ‘efforts to advance New South Wales’, he had never lost sight of the ‘progress and moral grandeur of the Empire’.⁴⁰ Now though, Parkes had also used the Empire to establish his own political cover. His appeal to London enabled him to unite diverse constituencies on what seemed a pressing national question. By positioning himself as the devoted colonial statesman, keenly aware of the delicate balance of Britain’s international engagements, he could appear sensitive to the loyalist sentiments of Australia’s political elites. Treaty revision, he argued, was simply the most sensible and appropriate policy response to a potential imperial crisis. But by backing his appeal with a loosely veiled threat, Parkes could simultaneously speak to a more radical constituency.⁴¹ Colonial leaders, he reminded all who would listen, were bound to honour the democratic will of the majority. Given the overwhelming support for excluding Chinese migrants from Australia, they were ready to take action should the Empire fail to respond. The argument left Parkes with considerable room to manoeuvre and placed responsibility for whatever happened next squarely with Downing Street. Independent colonial action, should it prove necessary, would simply be a reflection of London’s inability to engineer an imperial solution.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁰ ML/HP/CY83/Vol.1/A931/Parkes to Holland, 20 January 1888.

⁴¹ Roberts’ suggestion that anti-Chinese campaigners were ‘ignorant ... or blatantly defiant’ of Britain’s international obligations has usually been accepted by historians. Roberts, ‘History of the Contacts Between the Orient and Australia’, p.8.

On the 13 April, a reply finally arrived from the CO, though its tenor was completely out of sync with passions on the ground: ‘Chinese immigration’ wrote Holland (now Lord Knutsford) ‘subject under consideration’.⁴² The anxious wait continued. There were, however, signs of encouragement for those who sought imperial intervention. In a speech at the University of Sydney, Lord Carrington publically endorsed the conduct of colonial leaders and noted the significance of the moment. Australians, he argued, had come ‘to a unanimous decision’ on ‘the Chinese question’. For the first time in their history they were ‘compelled ... to have a foreign policy’. To cheers from the floor, he described his personal commitment to ensuring ‘cordial relations’ between the Colonies and the Mother Country. If he was a mouthpiece for English views, he was also an advocate for the ‘national ideas, the national aims and ambitions, and undoubted national rights of this glorious country’.⁴³

Despite these lofty sentiments, it was clear to Carrington that patience with the Empire was in short supply. A few days later, he telegraphed London again, warning that ‘feeling on the subject [was] increasing’ and that ‘all classes’ were in agreement with Parkes.⁴⁴ In a newspaper interview given around the same time, Parliamentary veteran John Robertson noted the existence of a great deal of anti-imperial ‘braggadocio’. In response, he sought to remind Australians that they relied on ‘England to keep the Chinese back’. Alone the Colonies ‘could do nothing in the way of fighting China’.⁴⁵ All of Australia, the *Sydney Evening News* observed, was now ‘held in suspense’, pending the reply ‘to Sir Henry Parkes’ ... famous despatch’.⁴⁶

⁴² CO/881/8/10/No.23[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Carrington, 13 April 1888.

⁴³ *SMH*, 16 April 1888, p.4.

⁴⁴ CO/881/8/10/No.25[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 16 April 1888.

⁴⁵ CO/201/608/10562/Enclosure, *Sydney Evening News*, undated.

⁴⁶ CO/201/608/10562/Enclosure, *Sydney Evening News*, undated.

On the 23 April the silence was finally broken. A telegram, purportedly from Knutsford, appeared in the *SMH* suggesting that ‘the proposal to exclude Chinese from Australia for a period of 20 years, presents a serious international difficulty’.⁴⁷ Though its authenticity was later denied by imperial officials, the effect of the telegram was immediate. In a piece entitled ‘the Snub Direct’, the *Daily Telegraph* noted, ‘the resort to Downing-Street has failed’. ‘Soft –cooing’ and ‘gentle humility’, and even the ‘bolder accents’ of Parkes, had achieved little. Now the Colonies must act on ‘national and patriotic grounds’.⁴⁸ While it struck a more subdued tone, lampooning those who were beginning to attack Knutsford for ‘hand[ing] Australia over to John Chinaman’, the *SMH* looked back to the New Guinea question and lamented the ‘disinclination’ of Britain’s leaders to respond to Australian concerns:

We have looked to the Home Government for help, and it is unsatisfactory to find so palpable an indisposition to give us assistance. We are not met by a direct refusal – it would be almost better if we were, for then we should know exactly how we stood-but we get one of those diplomatic answers which mean delay, procrastination, and do-nothingness. It is the story which is nearly always told when Australian interests are concerned.

If the CO thought that the Colonies had been somehow ‘seized with a sudden attack of Chinese fever’, they were mistaken. The ‘easy solution’ of following the American example had not been taken up. Now the Australian Parliaments had no choice but to legislate to convince the British Government of their intentions and to induce London ‘to attempt the solution of a “serious international difficulty”’.⁴⁹

While it seemed to some as if Australia’s appeal to the imperial system had failed, others remained determined to press the colonial case. At a dinner in Melbourne, Alfred Deakin called for Australian federation to ensure ‘the protection of this

⁴⁷ *SMH*, 23 April 1888, p.7.

⁴⁸ CO/201/608/11646/Enclosure, *Daily Telegraph*, 25 April 1888.

⁴⁹ *SMH*, 24 April 1888, pp.6-7.

country from Chinese invasion'. From the floor came a voice 'What about Knutsford?' Deakin expressed his 'profound disappointment' at the recent cable, but remained hopeful of imperial support. The Colonies 'were quite able to protect themselves', he argued, but a series of parallel and inconsistent colonial measures might prove inadequate to 'protect the continent'. Australia still 'looked to the Empire for an additional safeguard', a treaty of exclusion. This they could still get, and 'indeed ... [they] must get it'.⁵⁰

The turn of events deeply troubled Carrington, who telegraphed Knutsford about the impact of the press reports: 'Though Cabinet Ministers deny authenticity, much feeling already manifest and, formented by all press correspondents'. If the news was confirmed, colonial governments would be forced to 'introduce restrictive measures of a grave character'.⁵¹ A few days later he clipped the articles and posted them London, again expressing his anxieties: 'In vain I tell everybody that the subject is under consideration; and that no communication has been received; They will jump to conclusions'.⁵²

A Question of Great Importance and Considerable Difficulty

At the beginning of 1888, one might well have expected the British Government to have had little enthusiasm for the Australians and their Chinese question. Though the New Hebrides issue had seemingly been resolved, distrust over Pacific questions endured. In January, British press reports were still replaying Salisbury's embarrassing dressing down at the Colonial Conference, where he had 'seemed almost for the first time to realize that Australians had to be reckoned with in the

⁵⁰ *SMH*, 24 April 1888, p.8.

⁵¹ CO/881/8/10/No.33[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 26 April 1888.

⁵² CO/201/608/11646/Enclosure/Carrington to Herbert, 23 April 1888.

settlement of the foreign policy of the Empire'.⁵³ To Salisbury, Australian leaders had proved themselves unable to grasp the nuances of international diplomacy and to consider the interests of the Empire at large. They suffered from the same 'small map' anxieties that he associated with the jingoes at home – equating potential threats thousands of miles away, with the cartographic gap between the thumb and the finger.⁵⁴ Worst of all, they expected the Imperial Government to factor their dubious fears into foreign policy calculations. Just a few weeks before receiving Lew's protest, Salisbury had warned his Colonial Secretary against being 'too humble' on Pacific issues. The Australian Colonists, the Prime Minister fumed, 'want taking down a peg'.⁵⁵

As the Colonial Conference had demonstrated, Salisbury's ability to deal with the Colonies depended to a great extent on the personal qualities and expertise of his Colonial Secretary. While the Prime Minister dealt in cold political realities, Henry Holland would extend a more gentle hand, convincing colonial leaders that their interests were his own.⁵⁶ The importance of this collaborative double act [**Figure 6 below**] was acknowledged by Salisbury. During the Conference he had asked:

Do you mind our driving a hole into your room? It would expedite consultation- and the present distance between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, reckoned by time, is about as long as the distance between London and Berlin.⁵⁷

By 1888 it was apparent that Holland was suffering from 'extreme fatigue'. Anxious to ensure he could 'keep the Colonies', Salisbury orchestrated a shift away from the

⁵³ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 January 1888, p.2.

⁵⁴ A. Mee, *Lord Salisbury* (1901), pp.40-41.

⁵⁵ HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Holland, 20 November 1887.

⁵⁶ Deakin told Holland's son, 'I would rather take a "No" from your father, than a "yes" from most men'. S. Holland, *In Black and White* (1926), p.92.

⁵⁷ HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Holland, 25 May 1887. When Joseph Chamberlain was appointed Colonial Secretary, Salisbury apologised to Holland for not being able 'to ask you to resume the duties, for which you are so eminently fitted'. Quoted in Holland, *In Black and White*, pp.208-209.

‘inconvenience’ of the Commons to the Lords, and Holland’s creation as Lord Knutsford.⁵⁸ Confirming the move, the Queen wrote to Knutsford hoping it would ‘enable him to continue to serve her and the Country as he does so ably’.⁵⁹

Figure 6: Lord Salisbury and Lord Knutsford (then Henry Holland) at the 1887 Colonial Conference in London. Lord Granville is in the background. *Illustrated London News*, 11 June 1887, p.671, Author’s Collection.



It was into this environment of resentment and exhaustion that Parkes’ telegram had arrived. Where historians have considered the British response, they have tended to focus on whether London’s delayed reply reflected a lack of support for the Australian position.⁶⁰ An analysis of British records, however, suggests the influence

⁵⁸ HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Holland, 13 February 1888.

⁵⁹ Holland, *In Black and White*, p.96.

⁶⁰ Willard, *White Australia Policy*, p.97; Price, *Great White Walls*, pp.272-273.

of a number of competing pressures and interests. Undoubtedly, as the former Governor of Hong Kong, John Pope Hennessy, pointed out, there was considerable resistance to anything that would upset China or impact on ‘Indo-Chinese Questions’.⁶¹ But on Saturday, 31 March, when word from NSW reached Whitehall, CO officials appear to have immediately grasped its significance. Staff minuted: ‘they want an actual prohibition by imperial treaty of immigration’, on the model of ‘the US + China’. In response, it was proposed to make a public reply to Loch’s earlier request for a conference on the subject– granting him credit and assuring the Colonies of Britain’s interest.⁶² The issue was picked up again on Tuesday of the following week, when it was agreed to ask Salisbury for information on the American treaty. Anticipating FO resistance, the CO would have to ‘do our best’. ‘China may want to have reciprocity on these matters’, but this would ‘hardly suit the Australians’. The ‘strength of feeling’ in the Colonies given their ‘proximity to China’ was understood. There was ‘no probability’ of their being ‘content with less stringent provisions than have been adopted in the United States’. With this in mind, it would ‘do well to give the FO a hint that Ld. Knutsford is disposed to look at the matter from the Australian point of view’. The British Government could not ‘resist this movement’ and would do ‘well not to take up an attitude in opposition to it’.⁶³

When he reviewed the notes made by his staff, however, Knutsford counselled caution. If the Colonies were to ‘press the matter’, he wrote, ‘we can hardly help ourselves’, but the Imperial Government need not ‘encourage the policy’. Knutsford instructed his staff to ‘proceed as suggested’ in contacting the FO but thought it

⁶¹ J.P. Hennessy, ‘The Chinese in Australia’, *Nineteenth Century*, 23:134 (April 1888), p.618.

⁶² CO/201/608/6284, 31 March 1888; CO/201/608/6390, 4 April 1888.

⁶³ CO/201/608/6390, 4 April 1888.

‘better not to telegraph’ a reply to Australia.⁶⁴ From here, the Chinese question seems to have fallen off the radar for nine days. On the 7 April, Salisbury’s staff sent over a newspaper report summarising the aims of the Sino-American Treaty, but no other record of correspondence on the subject seems to exist until the 13 April.⁶⁵ Given the support suggested in the CO minutes, the urgency of Parkes’ telegram and the receipt of the earlier message from Loch, Knutsford’s suggestion that the Colonies were not already ‘pressing’ seems surprising. Perhaps he held out hope the tension would dissipate. This may simply have reflected his personal reticence about wading into another issue where foreign and colonial policy looked like becoming entangled. His own exhaustion and typical reluctance to burden Salisbury with colonial questions may have encouraged him to slip the Chinese question into the pending tray and hope for the best. He might also have been influenced by his knowledge of Parkes’ flamboyance. Just two months earlier he had been informed of Parkes’ provocative attempt to rename NSW - ‘Australia’, a move that exceeded the authority of the Sydney legislature and evoked protests from all the other Australian Colonies.⁶⁶ Awaiting the responses from the rest of the Australian leaders to his initial circular, which would hopefully allow cooler heads to prevail, must have been appealing.

Another possible reason for the delay lay closer to home. Overlooked in previous studies, it is important to note that as British authorities sought to manage the Australians’ Chinese question, they were also beginning to consider their own ‘destitute alien’ one. In 1888, as high unemployment, a lack of housing and the growth of sweated industries, heightened tensions in London’s East End, anti-

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ CO/881/8/10/No.22/FO to CO, 7 April 1888.

⁶⁶ CO/201/608/2877, 3 January 1888. One Victorian suggested ‘Convictoria’ as an alternative title. S. Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2004), p.120.

immigration activists turned towards the Jewish scapegoat.⁶⁷ One of the most prominent was the journalist Arnold White. In the 1880s, having completed a tour of the settler-empire and the United States, White had set to work campaigning on the issue of poverty in East London. There he became involved with the colonial emigration movement and developed strong views on the subject of national efficiency. By 1888, White had already sought to conflate metropolitan and colonial anxieties over migration. In his *Problems of a City* (1886) he had advocated the introduction of a poll-tax on German Jewish migration, similar to that employed against the ‘the indigent foreigner of the Mongolian variety’ elsewhere.⁶⁸ Subsequently, he would continue to call for ‘England for the English’, joining with others who sought to highlight the ‘points of analogy between Chinese immigration in the New World and Jewish Immigration in the Old World’.⁶⁹ It was a vision that bound the future of the British race at home with its expansion overseas, highlighting the need for migration restriction to preserve Anglo-Saxon dominance and vitality. In his introduction to *The Destitute Alien in Great Britain* (1892) an edited collection including considerable material on the Chinese in Australia, White observed:

A strange movement ... towards the crystallization of national life from native elements only, and the rejection of those alien constituents which, since the fall of Rome, have generally been considered desirable for the creation of perfect national existence.⁷⁰

The interconnection between British and Australian discourses on foreign labour is a subject to which this thesis will periodically return. Undoubtedly, the greatest

⁶⁷ W.J. Fishman, *East End 1888* (1988), p.61.

⁶⁸ A. White, *Problems of a Great City* (1886), pp.141-145. White was later critical of Australian efforts to limit British migration, which he saw as exacerbating the threat of an influx of Asians. L.R. Teel, ‘The Life and Times of Arnold Henry White’, (Georgia State University PhD Thesis, 1987), p.136.

⁶⁹ A. Bauman, ‘Possible Remedies for the Sweating System’, *National Review*, 12:69 (1888), 304. See White’s letters to *The Times*, 26 March 1887, p.6; 30 November 1887, p.5.

⁷⁰ A. White, ‘Introduction’, in A. White (ed.) *The Destitute Alien in Great Britain* (1892), p.1.

challenge for historians is to gauge the wider resonance of the polemical views put forward by the likes of White.⁷¹ From surviving sources we can at least deduce that the destitute alien question touched key figures on both sides of British politics during the 1880s. Salisbury invoked it as one of the perils of Home Rule and expressed a personal objection to ‘the immigration of pauperised foreigners into the country’.⁷² In a speech at Bow and Bromley on the 15 March 1888, Lord Rosebery noted that ‘the immigration of pauper aliens’ was ‘probably not a big question at the moment’, but one with ‘very large bearings in the future’. Britain, he warned, must be wary lest the ‘rubbish of the world may come to be shot on our favoured island’.⁷³ Traces of White’s contact with Salisbury and Rosebery also survive. In 1885, Rosebery had written to encourage White’s championing of East End emigration, hoping it would ‘give serious impetus to public opinion on the subject, and call the attention to those who are free to help’.⁷⁴ While he later accused White of taking statements about race and national efficiency ‘to an extreme which will repel many’, Rosebery confessed his ‘substantial agreement’, with the bulk of his arguments.⁷⁵ White also received partial-endorsements from various public figures, including Lord Rothschild.⁷⁶ In February 1888, White led a delegation to the Prime Minister calling for the restriction of pauper migration. Salisbury commended him on speaking ‘with great eloquence’ on the subject, though he felt the present problem had been overstated and restriction would be ‘exceedingly difficult’ to enforce.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Despite a doctoral thesis and a dedicated chapter in one recent study, White’s personal influence requires further investigation. L.R. Teel, ‘The Life and Times of Arnold Henry White’; D. Gorman, ‘The Imperial Garden’, in D. Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship* (Manchester, 2010), pp.115-144.

⁷² D. Steele, *Lord Salisbury* (2001), p.203; A. Roberts, *Salisbury* (1999), p.726.

⁷³ *The Times*, 15 March 1888, p.6.

⁷⁴ NMM/WHI/51/Rosebery to White, 10 April 1885.

⁷⁵ NLS/LR/MS.10131/Rosebery to White, 6 January 1901.

⁷⁶ Rothschild shared White’s opinion that ‘an influx of persons of foreign birth ... is not desirable and should be discouraged’. NMM/WHI/112/Rothschild to White, 28 April 1891.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Gainer, *The Alien Invasion* (1972), p.167.

Whatever their broader influence, related ideas on race and migration had clearly penetrated the CO. Departmental and parliamentary records suggest that in April 1888, CO staff were divided as to the potential impact of Australia's Chinese question upon domestic policy considerations. The potential for cross-pollination was embodied by the new Undersecretary of State for the Colonies, Baron Henry de Worms.⁷⁸ De Worms had recently been appointed to a House of Commons Select Committee on Emigration and Immigration (Foreigners). The Committee (together with a parallel investigation into 'sweated industries' by the Lords) was assembled in response to the campaign by White and others against foreign pauper migration into Britain. It was charged with investigating the issue and asked to report on what solutions (should they be required) were available.⁷⁹ For his own part, De Worms appears to have looked to the Australian situation with some sympathy. Later in the year he would stand up in the Commons, stressing the lessons that might be learned from the Colonies as Britain considered, 'the best means of meeting the enormous influx of foreign labour which [had] found its way to these shores'.⁸⁰ Others, however, expressed concern that imperial support for Chinese exclusion from Australia might impact upon Parliament's efforts to better understand and resolve the migration issue at home. The American example, which the Australians sought to emulate, linked the two. 'We in England + especially in London', wrote one CO official, 'suffer greatly ... from the enormous influx of destitute and Foreigners'. While the Chinese question was clearly an 'extremely delicate and difficult' one, the American response to the Chinese was 'nearly the same' as their policy towards

⁷⁸ Described by Salisbury as 'exceedingly clever - with all the tenacity of his [Jewish] race - and a knowledge of the value of advertisement which Mrs Gladstone herself has never surpassed', De Worms had taken over as Undersecretary to represent Knutsford in the Commons. HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Holland, 13 February 1888.

⁷⁹ On the Committees, J.A. Garrard, *The English and Immigration* (1971), pp.23-30; Gainer, *The Alien Invasion*, pp.166-170.

⁸⁰ HOC/vol.326/cc.986-987, 1 June 1888.

pauper immigration.⁸¹ As such, support for an American-style treaty of exclusion for Australia, might be inappropriate at a time when Parliament was yet to reach its own conclusions on foreign immigration. The measures advocated by the Australians were ‘very stringent’ and Britain ‘should be very careful not to encourage such a policy’.⁸² Turning back to the delayed response to Parkes’ telegram, this division in CO opinion over the potential intersection of colonial and domestic policy may have helped confirm Knutsford’s initial reluctance to engage on the issue.

By the 13 April, however, as another telegram arrived from Carrington, it was clear the Chinese question was not going away. Finally the CO contacted the FO, forwarding the messages from NSW and warning that ‘the question thus raised by the Colonial Government is one of great importance as well as considerable difficulty’.⁸³ Despite the blame he would later incur in the Colonies, Salisbury and his staff showed considerably more endeavour on the issue than their CO colleagues. By the 16 April, messages had been dispatched to British representatives at Washington and Peking, to determine how the American negotiations might inform British efforts and to see whether Peking would be willing to negotiate a deal to limit emigration to Australia.⁸⁴ Salisbury was familiar with the ‘strange fear’ that motivated the American ‘native and elector’ on the Chinese issue, having been kept well informed in the 1870s by the British Minister in Washington.⁸⁵ Now, as he read reports on the proposed US treaty obtained by his staff, the parallels with the unfolding Australian situation must have been apparent. Press coverage included US Secretary of State

⁸¹ In 1882, the USA passed an Immigration Act imposing a poll-tax on several categories of immigrants ‘likely to become a public charge’. Extended in 1891, this legislation would later become a ‘blue-print for anti-alien agitators in Britain’. Garrard, *The English and Immigration*, p.24

⁸² CO/201/608/6390, 4 April 1888.

⁸³ CO/881/8/10/No.24/CO to FO, 13 April 1888.

⁸⁴ CO/881/8/10/No.26/FO to CO, 16 April 1888.

⁸⁵ HH/LS/A/vol.19(1878-1890).

Thomas Bayard's briefing to President Cleveland. Driven by the 'manifest popular discontent' of the Pacific States against the influx of Chinese migrants, Bayard wrote, Washington was intervening to prevent the emergence of local legislation, which might 'impair' Sino-American relations.⁸⁶

Support for the Sino-American treaty as a model for an Anglo-Chinese agreement on Australia, soon appeared in the British press. In an article in *Nineteenth Century*, John Pope Hennessy, confirmed the 'direct injury' continued migration would inflict on the Colonies. He called on the Government to work towards a treaty in the interest of Anglo-Australian relations. Reflecting on his tenure as Governor of Hong Kong, when he had tried to restrict the shipment of Chinese coolies, Hennessy suggested stopping migrants from leaving Hong Kong, thereby shutting the 'conduit pipe of emigration to Australia'. From conversations he claimed to have enjoyed with senior members of the Zongli Yamen, he could guarantee that such a policy would be viewed 'at least with indifference and probably with satisfaction' in Peking.⁸⁷

Hennessy's article was widely read across the Empire and is a feature of most subsequent histories - but we should be sceptical of its influence on the British Government.⁸⁸ Put simply, Hennessy's career had been calamitous. Shortly before writing the article, he had been recalled as Governor of Mauritius, where he had been accused of quarrelling with British officials, financial maladministration and a 'pro-criminal bias'.⁸⁹ True to form, his contribution on the migration question seems to

⁸⁶ CO/881/8/10/No.26/Enclosure, *New York Tribune*, 28 March 1888.

⁸⁷ Hennessy, 'The Chinese in Australia', 617-619.

⁸⁸ Commentary appeared in *SMH*, 5 May 1888, p.9 and *NCH*, 12 May 1888, p.521.

⁸⁹ 'Hennessy, Sir John Pope', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [website], <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22537?docPos=2>>, accessed 10 April 2011.

have been part of a thinly veiled campaign to obtain a new vice-regal position in China or in Australia.⁹⁰

Though not without his own critics, John Walsham, the British Minister to China, offered a somewhat more reliable impression of Peking's likely response to requests for an agreement on migration.⁹¹ In a message to Salisbury, Walsham poured cold water on suggestions that the American treaty might form a basis for British negotiations. The Chinese Government, he argued, would see little in common between the Australian and the American situations. China was prepared to negotiate with the United States, 'not because she considers ... prohibition to be anything but unjust', but because the American Government had proved unable to ensure the protection of Chinese residents.⁹² In British Colonies, the situation was 'exactly the reverse'. Notwithstanding the existence of the poll-taxes, the Imperial Commissioners had delivered a favourable report of 'the position occupied by their countrymen' in Australia.⁹³ China would be unwilling to 'conclude a prohibitive treaty', and would regard 'as unfriendly any Colonial legislation of a restrictive nature'. In concluding, Walsham noted that he had 'not mentioned the subject to the Chinese Government' and did 'not think it would advisable to do so'.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Hennessy had already written to Knutsford and Salisbury seeking the role of British Minister at Peking. Salisbury later called him one of Knutsford's 'treasures'. HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Knutsford, 12 April 1888; 5 May 1889; HH/LS/E/Knutsford to Salisbury, 8 April 1888. In September, Colonial papers carried reports that Hennessy was 'anxious to obtain a vice-regal position in a province possessing responsible government'. *South Australian Register*, 24 September 1888, p.5.

⁹¹ Shanghai's *NCH* depicted Walsham as 'all at sea', lacking the knowledge and backbone to defend British interests in China. *NCH*, 1 June 1888, pp.601-602.

⁹² CO/881/8/10/No.37/Enclosure/Walsham to FO, 18 April 1888.

⁹³ FO/17/1701/97-100, 21 April 1888.

⁹⁴ CO/881/8/10/No.37/Enclosure/Walsham to FO, 18 April 1888.

Conclusion: A Difficulty Which Threatens to Become a Calamity

Walsham's response left the Imperial Government, as Henry Loch had foreseen, caught between two difficulties. On the one hand, the FO was obliged to respond to the protest from Lew Tajen calling for the removal of anti-Chinese legislation in Australia. On the other, the CO had to deal with the Australians' requests for an imperial solution to their Chinese question. The Australians had warned that failure would result in a raft of local legislation, likely to be even more offensive to China. Now, it seemed the chance of successfully negotiating such an agreement with the Qing authorities was small. The American example, attractive to some in London and most in the Colonies, looked rather different from the point of view of the British Minister in China. As such, there seemed to be few clear options. If the Chinese Government or the Australian Colonies escalated their demands, Salisbury and Knutsford had little room to manoeuvre.

The situation had clearly been compounded by the tyranny of distance and the lack of detailed information reaching London from the periphery. Parkes had turned the electric telegraph skilfully to his purpose, but the responses to Knutsford's initial circular, which he had sent in January, travelled by steamship and had still not arrived back in London by the end of April. While colonial leaders acknowledged treaty negotiations would take time, Knutsford's failure to even acknowledge Parkes' telegram for almost two weeks put the Imperial Government on the back foot.⁹⁵ The Chinese question loomed like a black hole over Anglo-Australian relations. Close to the epicentre, the Colonies responded at a pace that felt normal to those on the ground but appeared frenzied from distant London. In turn, from the Australian perspective,

⁹⁵ CO/881/8/10/No.30[Telegraphic]/Loch to Knutsford, 23 April 1888.

the machinations of a faraway imperial bureaucracy seemed to be played out in slow motion.

That disconnect, however, was about to be shattered. On the 26 April, word arrived that colonial papers had published the reputed telegram from Knutsford, declining British intervention. Suddenly the CO went into a flutter. The message must have been either ‘inaccurate or ‘imaginary’, though at first staff seemed unsure as to what they had already sent to NSW.⁹⁶ A hurried reply was drafted and sent ‘at once’ to the FO for approval. It denied the authenticity of the published telegram and provided assurances that the subject was ‘receiving careful consideration’ and that British Government were ‘fully sensible of the strength of the feeling in the Colonies’. Nothing, including treaty negotiations, had been taken off the table.⁹⁷ When the draft arrived, officials at the FO wondered whether ‘the Colonies [should] be left under the impression that we intend to negotiate with China?’⁹⁸ The Colonial Governments, Salisbury believed:

Should [instead] be informed that, while the matter is still under the consideration of Her Majesty’s Government, the information they have received from China leaves very little hope that the Chinese Government would concur in stipulations of the kind suggested.⁹⁹

But before Knutsford could respond, events on the ground had had taken on a new momentum. The following day word reached London that the Australian Colonies had taken their own steps to fend off the Chinese Empire.

⁹⁶ CO/201/608/8061, 26 April 1888.

⁹⁷ CO/881/8/10/No.34/CO to FO, 27 April 1888.

⁹⁸ FO/1701/81, 30 April 1888.

⁹⁹ CO/881/8/10/No.36/FO to CO, 30 April 1888.

Chapter Four

Serve Yourself If You'd Be Well Served: The Afghan Affair and the British World System

On the 27 April 1888, the SS *Afghan* arrived at Port Phillip Heads, the maritime gateway to the colony of Victoria. After a month-long journey south from Hong Kong, the steamer was given a clean bill of health and so proceeded up the bay towards Melbourne. On board were 268 Chinese passengers bound for destinations across Australia and New Zealand. When she reached anchorage, the *Afghan* was boarded by the local Collector of Customs, who declared the ship in violation of the Colony's regulations on Chinese migration. These were the *Chinese Immigration Statute* (1865) and the *Chinese Act* (1881) which imposed a £10 poll-tax on Chinese immigrants and set a limit of one Chinese passenger per one hundred tonnes of cargo for all incoming vessels.¹ The restrictions made special allowance for British subjects so long as they possessed an official certificate of exemption. In Victoria, as in a number of the Australian Colonies, admissions procedures for Chinese Britons had been complicated by an illicit trade in the certificates. When the majority of the *Afghan*'s passengers for Melbourne presented the documents – many appeared to be of dubious authenticity. The authorities responded by declaring the ship under quarantine. While permission was granted for the landing of cargo, officers were placed in charge with explicit instructions that no Chinese were to disembark. At the end of her long journey south, within sight of land, the *Afghan* had sailed into the tempest that was brewing over the Chinese question in Australia.

By the evening Melbourne was abuzz. In itself, the presence of a ship carrying a large consignment of Chinese passengers was unremarkable. Vessels from Hong Kong had

¹ CO/881/8/10/No.141/Loch to Knutsford, 10 May 1888.

transported comparable numbers to Australian ports in the past and the *Afghan* had done so on at least one previous occasion.² But the timing of her entrance, coming at the very moment when colonial faith in Britain was fading, imbued the situation with a special significance. As the ship was diverted into quarantine, anti-Chinese sentiment and dissatisfaction at the sluggish pace of British diplomacy came bubbling to the surface. At Trades Hall, workers gathered to discuss what seemed to be a developing emergency. They resolved that a deputation should be sent to Government House to demand that the Chinese be turned away. The Chinese question ‘had reached an acute stage’, thundered one speaker, and the Imperial Government had been ‘very supine’. In the past, added another, Victorians had resisted the landing of unwanted British convicts. Now a new generation, led by the colonial ‘working classes, were being driven to a similar course with regard to the Chinese, by the inaction’ of the imperial authorities.³ The following day, in an audience with the Premier, delegates claimed to represent the views of 30,000 to 40,000 workmen. An ‘attempt was being made to flood Australia with Chinese’, they warned Premier Gillies, one which took advantage of ‘the diplomatic relations of China with Great Britain’. If the Government failed to respond, the workers stood ready to take matters in their own hands.⁴

The mood of the moment was vividly captured in a cartoon subsequently printed in the Melbourne *Punch* [**Figure 7 below**]. Here a pioneer from ‘Old Australia’ delivers a message to the young colonial labourer: ‘In the old days I stopped the convicts in the bay. And now you must bar out the yellow plague with your own arm’. As grotesque caricatures pour forth from their ‘plague ship’ the sturdy workman bars the

² *Argus*, 28 April 1888, p.13; Markus, *Fear and Hatred*, p.143.

³ *Argus*, 28 April 1888, p.13.

⁴ *Argus*, 30 April 1888, p.13.

door, his outstretched arm replacing the original Colonial Office crossbar, which has been cast aside and lies crumpled in the dust. The message was clear. With the arrival of the *Afghan*, Victorians were being called upon to hold the line for what was shaping as a once-in-a-lifetime challenge. If London could not be counted upon for assistance, it was up to the Colonists to defend the gains made by previous generations and to secure Australia's future as a free, white nation. 'Serve yourself', the hardened pioneer implored Young Australia, 'if you'd be well served'.

**Figure 7: 'Serve Yourself If You'd Be Well Served'.
Melbourne Punch, 3 May 1888, p.261. Newspapers Collection, SLV.**



“SERVE YOURSELF IF YOU'D BE WELL SERVED.”

OLD AUSTRALIA—“RIGHT, MY BOY; YOU'RE WORTHY OF YOUR SIRE. IN THE OLD DAYS I STOPPED THE CONVICTS IN THE BAY, AND NOW YOU MUST BAR OUT THE YELLOW PLAGUE WITH YOUR OWN ARM.”

For most historians the ‘Afghan Affair’ has remained an essentially antipodean story. Certainly, its importance to the trajectory of Australian national development is well-established. Stirred by the ‘sudden and almost inexplicable panic’ that accompanied the *Afghan*’s arrival at Melbourne and then Sydney, colonial leaders began to invoke a series of measures designed to prevent the landing of Chinese passengers. Within weeks they had met in conference to devise a continental solution, laying the foundations for the first White Australia Policy and strengthening the case (at least so far as the Eastern Colonies were concerned) for greater inter-colonial co-operation. ‘An Australian spirit, feeble at first, but to grow steadily stronger’, wrote Willard in her seminal study, had ‘begun to animate’ colonial policymakers.⁵ Taken together, their efforts served as a precursor to the emergence of a ‘broad doctrine of national identity and sovereignty’ grounded upon the prohibition of Asian migration.⁶ Recent studies have done much to enrich this enduring picture, though the essential interpretation remains unchanged. One doctoral thesis to have emerged over the last few years has cautioned scholars against simply characterising the Afghan Affair as a product of working-class Sinophobia.⁷ At the same time, perhaps the most internationally recognised work to consider the issue, has suggested that the Colonies’ resort to independent action might be read as a response to feelings of emasculation, exacerbated after London had failed to leap to Australia’s assistance.⁸

Acknowledging the national significance of the Afghan Affair, the following chapter seeks to bring to the fore its imperial dimensions. Building on its predecessor, it sets the appearance of the *Afghan* at Melbourne as the opening of a new phase in the

⁵ Willard, *White Australia Policy*, p.69, 84-85.

⁶ G. Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia* (Melbourne, 2005), pp.9-10.

⁷ Griffiths, ‘White Australia’, pp.509-510.

⁸ Lake and Reynolds, *Global Colour Line*, p.38.

imperial history of the Chinese question in Australia. Maintaining a tight focus on contemporary sources, it focuses on the ways in which unfolding events in the Australian Colonies reverberated across other branches of Britain's world-system. Here, the independent action taken by the colonial authorities inflamed the existing conflict between British colonial and foreign interests and ignited new intra-imperial ones as well. Amidst the panic and chaos that spread throughout April and May of 1888, colonial leaders took an important step on the road to a unified White Australia. That shift, however, was also part of a wider imperial narrative: one in which the ongoing tension between two visions of Australian settlement – connected to and set apart from British interests in East Asia – had a marked impact on British imperial affairs.

A White Elephant

The arrival of the *Afghan* presented the Victorian Government with an immediate dilemma. Victoria's conservative Premier Duncan Gillies had been one of the strongest advocates for resolving the Chinese question through treaty revision. The Colonies could not expect to 'enjoy the shelter of the Empire', Gillies had remarked, only to 'ignore its honour' by employing local measures offensive to China. But Gillies also believed that it was the Australians (rather than the British) who were 'the best judges of the perils of a Chinese Invasion'.⁹ Mindful of an impending general election, he assured the public that the Government would act 'in the interests of the continent'.¹⁰ Destined for locations across Australia, the Chinese onboard the *Afghan* would find their entrance barred at Melbourne.

⁹ Quoted in Griffiths, 'White Australia', p.241.

¹⁰ *Argus*, 30 April 1888, p.9.

The difficulty was that Victoria lacked the constitutional authority to simply prevent the landing of Chinese passengers. Along with those exempt from migration restrictions by virtue of their status as British subjects, based on the *Afghan's* tonnage, another fourteen Chinese were eligible to land on payment of the poll-tax. The Government responded by declaring all Asian ports infected, enabling the Colony to detain 'vessels bringing Chinese passengers to any port'. Though he later described the process as 'wholly irregular', Governor Loch assented.¹¹ As a yellow flag of quarantine was hoisted above the deck, Victoria's Collector of Customs and the Government's Chinese interpreter began a more thorough examination of the certificates of exemption. All were found to be fraudulent. When members of the local Chinese community called attention to the plight of several individuals whom they claimed were returning to families and property in Victoria, the authorities were unmoved. The *Afghan's* Melbourne agents were informed that their passengers would have to go elsewhere, her captain encouraged to 'clear away ... if he did not desire to be prosecuted for carrying more Chinese than the law permitted'.¹² It was unclear, however, where the ship should go. Most of her cargo was for Sydney, though Henry Parkes had already suggested that any attempt to land the passengers there would meet similar resistance. With no exit strategy, the crew and passengers languished in port. In the evenings the residents of Melbourne made their way down to the bay. Awaiting fresh developments, they stared out across the invisible barricade that had been so hastily erected against these latest émigrés from China.¹³

To many Victorians, the *Afghan* embodied all that was at stake in the struggle over Chinese migration. On the 1 May, an 'enormous' public rally marched through

¹¹ CO/881/8/10/No.141-142/Loch to Knutsford, 10 May 1888.

¹² *Argus*, 1 May 1888, p.8.

¹³ *ibid.*

Melbourne to celebrate the Government's hard-line stance.¹⁴ Congregating at the Town Hall, the crowd cheered as speaker-after-speaker railed against the cheap labour and cheap imports that China might dump upon Australia. The oration drew on both economic and biological conceptions of racial struggle. Just as the Colonies were taking steps to tackle the rabbit invasion, urged one speaker, they could not tolerate 'men who huddled together ... in a warren, and lived upon food that would not suffice for any Englishman'. Attacks on the Chinese were peppered with critiques of the Home Government. James Liddell Purves Q.C., President of the nationalist organisation the Australian Natives' Association and the recognised head of the Victorian Bar, mocked the notion that Australia's treatment of Chinese migrants might impinge on London's relations with Peking. To Lord Knutsford (whose name evoked groans from the audience) he offered some stark advice:

If you don't stop this thing, the people of England must choose other Ministers who will, and if the people of England won't stop the Chinese coming to Australia, then we will. Aye, we will, with our last man and our last shilling.¹⁵

Tension on the ground was ratcheted up even further when a small coastal collier, the *Burumbeet*, appeared in port with another fourteen Chinese on board. When some of the passengers attempted to pay the poll tax they were refused and the ship followed the *Afghan* into quarantine.¹⁶

As the temperature rose in Melbourne word reached Whitehall. From the 30 April, the *Afghan's* owners, the shipping firm Gellatly, Hankey, Sewell, & Company, began to lobby the CO for assistance. It seemed 'hardly possible' they protested, that a British steamer 'should be prevented' from landing passengers 'at one of our

¹⁴ Markus, *Fear and Hatred*, pp.142-143.

¹⁵ *Argus*, 2 May 1888, p.8.

¹⁶ CO/881/8/10/No.141/Loch to Knutsford, 10 May 1888; Huttenback, *Race and Empire*, pp.105-108; G. Serle, *The Rush to be Rich* (Melbourne, 1971), p.297.

Colonies'. Any delay to the *Afghan's* onward voyage would inflict heavy losses. In their communications with British officials, the shipowners complained that Victoria appeared to be shifting its policy without warning. If the Australian Colonies were to be governed by 'popular feeling', British firms would look to the Imperial Government to defend their interests.¹⁷ Knutsford telegraphed Loch at Melbourne:

Gellatly's urge 'Afghan's' Chinese may be permitted to land; prohibition not anticipated ... Please give me any information you can as questions may be asked in Parliament.¹⁸

Knutsford's telegram gave voice to a different set of concerns than had dominated his earlier communications. Where previously the Secretary of State had sought to highlight the diplomatic fallout that might accompany independent colonial action, now he was urging the Victorians to be mindful of the financial interests of a British enterprise with its own stake in the migration question. Knutsford's intervention probably made a significant impression, but not in the way he intended. Just two days earlier, a revealing statement from Gillies had appeared in the Melbourne press. Victoria's *Afghan* strategy, Gillies explained, rested on twin planks. Most immediately, the Government was determined to reject the Chinese passengers. Looking further afield, the Premier hoped that the fate of the *Afghan* would send a powerful signal out beyond Australian shores. Here the primary targets were the migration agents at Hong Kong who promoted Chinese emigration and the ship owners who profited by providing conveyance. If the *Afghan* was forced to return to Hong Kong with her passengers, Gillies suggested, the whole episode would serve to undermine confidence in the commercial viability of the Chinese passenger trade. It

¹⁷ CO/881/8/10/No.39 and 47/Gellatlys to CO, 1 May 1888 and 5 May 1888.

¹⁸ CO/881/8/10/No.40[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Loch, 1 May 1888.

would be a ‘severe matter to bring a shipload of Chinamen here and then have to take them back,’ offered the Premier, ‘that sort of thing will not be tried a second time’. Soon inter-colonial steamers and eventually all Australia-bound vessels would be reluctant to transport Chinese, lest they ended up bearing, in Gillies words, ‘a White Elephant’: a shipment of passengers ‘they might never be able to get rid of’.¹⁹ On receiving Knutsford’s telegram, Gillies assured London that the Government was ‘act[ing] strictly within the limits’ of its existing anti-Chinese legislation.²⁰ In fact (as Loch had already conceded) the legality of the Victorian position was far from certain. But by drawing attention to the concerns already being expressed by the *Afghan*’s owners, the Colonial Secretary had inadvertently provided proof of the effectiveness of the Colony’s new hard-line approach when it came to undermining confidence in the Chinese passenger trade.

On the 3 May the *Afghan* finally left for Sydney. Though some Chinese for New Zealand had been transferred to another ship, all of those for Australia remained on board. ‘Not a man [had] escaped’, observed the *Argus*, ‘to relate his experiences to his fellow countrymen in Little Bourke-street’, the heart of Melbourne’s Chinatown.²¹ Replenished with supplies, the ship carried an important message. Victoria was closed to Chinese immigration and those who suffered by this determination could expect little sympathy from the colonial authorities.

As the White Elephant steamed north, that message was already creating ripples elsewhere. At Sydney, Adelaide, Wellington and Dunedin, demonstrators came out into the streets to express support for the Victorian position, while at Brisbane crowds

¹⁹ *Argus*, 30 April 1888, p.9.

²⁰ CO/881/8/10/No.41[Telegraphic]/Loch to Knutsford, 2 May 1888.

²¹ *Argus*, 1 May 1888, p.8.

of larrikins attacked Chinese residents.²² Further afield, telegrams began to appear in the newspaper press. ‘CHINESE LABOURERS SHUT OUT FROM AUSTRALIA’ and ‘CHINESE LABOURERS RETURNING FROM MELBOURNE’, read cables published in Bombay and Shanghai.²³ Before long an array of articles, correspondence and editorials appeared in English publications across Asia, offering competing analyses as to the wisdom and likely effects of the Victorian response. At Hong Kong, the *Daily Press* complained about the damage to Sino-Australian trade. China would play an essential role in Australia’s development, but only if it was ‘allowed to’. Commercial relations would continue to be hampered, ‘while impediments are placed in the way of the free intercourse of the peoples’.²⁴ Shanghai’s *North China Herald* (which served almost as ‘the official organ of the British Legation and Consulates’, according to its onetime editor) struck a similar note.²⁵ The Victorian Government, the *Herald* claimed, was ‘putting into action the most extreme views of the anti-Chinese party’. Armed with the vote, colonial workers would ‘probably obtain what they want’ and in doing so hopelessly slow the pace of Australian development.²⁶ From Singapore, the *Straits Times* picked up on the foreign and colonial policy complications involved. Here reconciling British ambition and Australian hostility when it came to China seemed an impossible task. ‘So long as the treaty of Tient-Tsin exists, and so long as the Australian Colonies are subject to England’, the paper predicted, ‘the Chinese question is likely to remain unsettled’. At Yokohama, the *Japan Weekly Mail* wondered over the broader questions of reciprocity and Sino-Western engagement. When British Columbians and Australians ‘have shut their doors in the face of the Celestial’, the *Weekly Mail* asked, ‘how will it

²² *SMH*, 8 May 1888, p.6; Griffiths, ‘White Australia’, pp.398-399.

²³ *Times of India*, 2 May 1888, p.5; *NCH*, 4 May 1888, p.490.

²⁴ Quoted in *SMH*, 17 May 1888, p.7.

²⁵ CUL/Gundry Papers/Add.9269/159/Bundle-8, undated.

²⁶ *NCH*, 12 May 1888, p.521.

fare with foreigners in China, and with the theories that Western nations have hitherto forced down Oriental throats at the point of the bayonet?’²⁷ Against this catalogue of complaints, across the Pacific, San Francisco’s *Daily Evening Bulletin* adopted an altogether more sympathetic tone. Celebrating the ‘metaphorical propriety’ of sending ‘moral, social and industrial pests’ into quarantine, the *Bulletin* applauded Victoria’s efforts to shatter the commercial foundations of the Chinese passenger trade. Shipowners would not be able to ‘afford to have their vessels laid up indefinitely’ and so the Colonial authorities had hit upon ‘a very effective scheme to make the Mongols unpopular with the lines of transportation’.²⁸

At Hong Kong, where the direct implications would be most keenly felt, concerns were quickly carried over into official discourse. On the 3 May, the *Afghan*’s managers, the shipping firm Gibb, Livingstone and Company, sought the assistance of Governor William des Vœux. Echoing protests already lodged in London, the firm complained about ‘the serious consequences’ of Victoria’s policy. Unveiled without warning it would inflict considerable hardship on passengers and shipowners.²⁹ Commercial associations at Hong Kong also took up the cause. At a special meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, a unanimous resolution demanded ‘the very grave consideration of Her Majesty’s Government’. Victoria’s actions were offensive to English traditions of justice, the Chamber contended, and would do great damage to British merchants at Hong Kong.³⁰ The issue also evoked a response from the local Chinese business community. In a letter to the Chamber (also passed to Des Vœux) a group of leading Chinese merchants challenged the ‘unjustifiable action of the

²⁷ These sources were all quoted in the *SMH*, 17 May 1888, p.7.

²⁸ *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 3 May 1888, p.2.

²⁹ CO/881/9/1/No.2/Des Vœux to Knutsford and Enclosures, 16 May 1888.

³⁰ *ibid.*

Australian Government'. It was a policy, they argued, that made even less sense in light of the 'long commercial intercourse' between the Australian Colonies, Hong Kong and China.³¹ Alongside the economic fallout, both British and Chinese traders expressed concern as to the possible effect on Anglo-Chinese relations. 'We cannot but view the present action', observed the Chinese merchants, 'as a direct infringement of all international law and usages, and a violation of treaty rights'. Should the Qing take a harder line on the Anglo-Chinese treaties, agreed the Hong Kong Chamber, Victoria's policy would be 'fraught with most serious consequences to British interests in China'. The Colony had set a 'dangerous precedent', one likely to 'very seriously affect the promotion of England's friendly intercourse with China in the near future'.³²

Whatever his thoughts on these broader questions, Des Vœux's first priority was to protect the investments made by Hong Kong shipping operators and to ensure the welfare of the passengers. In a series of telegraphic exchanges with Melbourne, he sought to clarify the legal basis of the Victorian policy and to press home the commercial interests of Hong Kong.³³ When these efforts evoked a stern reply from the Victorian Government, insisting they would rigorously enforce migration restrictions, the Governor requested a temporary amnesty. 'Without slightest reference question exclusion Chinese for future', Des Vœux cabled Loch:

I earnestly request your Government permit landing immigrants from vessels despatched before notice new policy, to obviate enormous losses to British merchants and passengers.³⁴

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*

Given Gillies' ultimate objective, it is not surprising that the Victorians proved unsympathetic. Offering a vague commitment to minimise the losses inflicted on British companies, the Colonial Government denied the adoption of any new policy. Victoria, Des Vœux was informed, was simply pursuing 'a more strict enforcement of the existing law'. The provisions of that legislation should already be known by any Hong Kong firms with an interest in Australia.³⁵ It was a response that showed the extent to which Victorian attitudes to the Chinese question had been hardened: firstly, by the failed appeal to London and secondly, by the emotional and symbolic significance attached to the *Afghan's* arrival. By refusing to allow the landing of the Chinese passengers and to treat seriously the complaints emerging from Hong Kong, the Victorian Government had plainly set local considerations ahead of any diplomatic, imperial or commercial concerns. It was a shift in strategy that clearly enjoyed widespread public support. Even the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce declined to publicly back the sorts of arguments emerging from Hong Kong.³⁶

Taking the longer view, the opening of the Afghan Affair marked an important turning point in the struggle to align British commercial and settler interests in the Pacific. The Victorian Government's pursuit of a policy of questionable legality, regardless of the potential impact on British relations with China or the damage inflicted on British firms at Hong Kong, showed the extent to which the old closer association argument had been cast aside. In its repulse of the passengers, Victoria had succeeded in erecting a formidable barrier between the Chinese and British Empires in Australia. Though the implications of this development were still far from certain, Gillies' attempt to turn the *Afghan* into a symbolic white elephant presented a

³⁵ CO/881/8/10/No.142/Loch to Knutsford and Enclosures, 10 May 1888.

³⁶ SLV/MCC/MS.10917/Minute-Books, 7 May 1888. The Chamber convened its own special meeting, where 'the whole question' was discussed, but no public statement was issued.

serious challenge to imperial policymakers. If the other Colonies followed suit, the situation threatened to spiral out of control. According to enquiries made by the Hong Kong Chamber, another five ships carrying an additional 570 Chinese passengers, had already left Hong Kong and were en-route to Australasia.³⁷

Two Points of View

As the news filtered in from Victoria, Knutsford had continued the search for an imperial solution. It was a task that appeared to be becoming more complicated by the day. In effect, the Colonial Secretary was now charged with negotiating a course that would recognise the demands of the Australian Colonies; protect the commercial interests of the British shipowners; and ensure the welfare of Chinese passengers. Moreover, any response would have to be carried out in such a way as to minimise disruption at Hong Kong and avoid causing further offence to China. The difficulty of Knutsford's position was encapsulated in a series of documents that made their way across his desk on the 5 May, the day before the *Afghan* was due to arrive at Sydney. Again the ship's owners petitioned the CO. Emphasising the 'extreme care exercised at Hong Kong' in relation to the acceptance of Chinese passengers, the firm cast doubt on the Victorian Government's claims of a fraudulent trade in certificates of exemption. Citing press reports that the *Afghan* would be refused entry into NSW, they called on the British Government to recognise the 'gravity of the case' and to instruct the Governor at Sydney to protect their interests.³⁸ In a hurried message to Carrington, the Colonial Secretary betrayed his growing apprehension: 'Owners

³⁷ CO/881/9/1/No.2/Des Vœux to Knutsford and Enclosures, 16 May 1888. This figure included Chinese Britons and Chinese willing to pay poll-taxes.

³⁸ CO/881/8/10/No.47/Gellatlys to CO, 5 May 1888.

“Afghan” afraid that Chinese passengers may rise or escape. They hope you will afford assistance if necessary’.³⁹

Knutsford’s anxiety must have been compounded by a series of despatches from Australia, which arrived that same day. From Queensland and NSW came reminders that in the absence of an imperial response, the Colonies would turn to local measures, irrespective of their impact on Anglo-Chinese relations. ‘I conceive ... that there is no rule, either of international law or comity’, wrote Premier Griffiths of Queensland, ‘which requires one nation to admit within its borders, against its will, the subjects of another’. With or without London’s support, Australians would be guided by ‘principles of self-preservation’.⁴⁰ From Sydney, Carrington sent on resolutions passed by one of the larger anti-Chinese rallies. Expressing ‘strong objections[s]’ to an attempt by the Qing to send Chinese to Australia, delegates had demanded that London recognise the right of the colonial parliaments to invoke legislation that would ‘ensure ... the preponderance and supremacy of the British race’.⁴¹ A third Australian cable, from Governor Robinson at Adelaide, called attention once more to the benefits of an American-style treaty.⁴² Though they were at least a month old by the time they arrived in London, these three Australian messages appear to have hammered home to Knutsford the advantages of seeking a negotiated solution with the Qing. Securing an agreement was unlikely to be easy, but it seemed to offer the best chance of accommodating (at least partially) the conflicting demands of the various groups involved.

³⁹ CO/881/8/10/No.48[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Carrington, 5 May 1888.

⁴⁰ CO 881/8/10/No.45/Musgrave to Knutsford and Enclosure, 27 March 1888.

⁴¹ CO/881/8/10/No.46/Carrington to Knutsford and Enclosure, 29 March 1888.

⁴² CO/881/8/10/No.44/Robinson to Knutsford, 5 April 1888.

Any move towards an Anglo-Chinese agreement over Australia still faced considerable hurdles. The first was the FO. As Salisbury had made clear, the Colonial Secretary's faith in the treaty option was far from universal. By coincidence, it was also on the 5 May that Knutsford received the Prime Minister's draft cable to the Colonies (prepared several days earlier) suggesting there was 'very little hope' for negotiations.⁴³ In a hasty reply, Knutsford emphasized the potential consequences of sending the message to Australia. Not only would it be 'taken as intimation that Her Majesty's Government decline to make any overtures to China', but that they were content to 'leave the Colonies to their own remedy'.⁴⁴ London, added another member of the CO staff, 'would not be able to veto' any subsequent legislation, as 'a feeling of dissatisfaction would have been aroused in the Australian Colonies'.⁴⁵ 'Might it not be desirable on political grounds', he implored his FO counterparts, to 'open negotiations with the Chinese Government?'⁴⁶

Even if Knutsford managed to garner support for his approach, its success would ultimately depend on Britain's ability to craft an agreement sensitive to Australian and Chinese grievances. A daunting task at the best of times, the *Afghan* situation created additional uncertainty. On the Australian side, progress would depend on getting the Colonies to come to a joint position and to refrain from taking further action offensive to China. Though cables from the Eastern Colonies did paint a picture of growing cohesion, it seemed to be based primarily on anti-Chinese rhetoric and a shared commitment to exclusion. On the 8 May, both NSW and South Australia

⁴³ CO/881/8/10/No.36/FO to CO, 30 April 1888.

⁴⁴ CO/881/8/10/No.49/CO to FO, 5 May 1888.

⁴⁵ FO/17/1701/121-123/CO to FO, 5 May 1888.

⁴⁶ CO/881/8/10/No.49/CO to FO, 5 May 1888.

telegraphed their intention to join Victoria and to reject Chinese arrivals.⁴⁷ While it looked as though the Colonies might be encouraged to speak with one voice, it was far from certain that what they might say would provide an acceptable basis for approaching Peking. On the 10 May, however, Knutsford received some encouragement from Adelaide. South Australian Ministers, Governor Robinson wrote, had invited colonial leaders to come together for a conference on the Chinese question. Mindful that the Australians would have to articulate a co-ordinated vision upon which London could act, Robinson had encouraged the move as ‘calculated to allay excitement’, to foster unity and to drown out ‘inter-colonial jealousy’. He advised Knutsford to announce that the British Government would ‘consider joint representation from Australasian Colonies’, such a move would be likely to ‘produce [a] good effect in every way’.⁴⁸

If Robinson’s telegram offered hope that the Australians might fall into line, the Chinese still had to be coaxed to the table. Given Lew Tajen’s earlier protests over colonial legislation and the advice received from John Walsham, convincing Peking looked a hard sell. For one, British diplomats seemed to have very little to offer. The only real inducement would be the promise that an agreement could provide a means for doing away with the various colonial measures currently being deployed. The question was whether the Qing would accept an arrangement that replaced local legislation (with its overt and offensive anti-Chinese language) with a treaty that respected diplomatic convention, but imposed tighter restrictions on Chinese migration. Here the wash from the *Afghan* muddied the water even further. Having heard the latest from Melbourne, Lew now re-entered the discussion. In a letter to

⁴⁷ CO/881/8/10/No.51[Telegraphic]/Robinson to Knutsford, 8 May 1888; CO/881/8/10/No.52[Telegraphic]/Stephen to Knutsford, 8 May 1888.

⁴⁸ CO/881/8/10/No.56[Telegraphic]/Robinson to Knutsford, 10 May 1888.

Salisbury, the Chinese Minister called on the British Government to ensure the landing of the passengers and to 'prevent the recurrence of an act so illiberal, so invidious' elsewhere. For Lew, the *Afghan's* treatment was just the latest in a long line of colonial slights. Adopting a now familiar tone, he branded the Victorian policy as contrary to 'the spirit of the treaties from which the colonists, not less than the inhabitants of the mother country, derive so many advantages'.⁴⁹

Lew's intercession made it clear that any attempt to open a dialogue with China on a treaty was unlikely to find much support while the fate of the *Afghan* and its passengers was unresolved. As officials in London considered the way forward, discussion drifted into the metropolitan press. *The Times* took up the debate and published 'two points of view'. The first was an excerpt of the report made by General Wong and Consul Yu in 1887, arguing that 'the path of emigration from China to the outer world should be made smooth and easy'. The other was from a Victorian correspondent, who expressed Australia's determination to turn away the 'chronic overflow ... becoming very rapidly acquainted' with the Colonies.⁵⁰ A long editorial, weighing both arguments, accused the Colonists of being like the 'old magician who called up the devil [having previously allowed Chinese immigration] and was unable afterwards to get rid of him'. Australia's efforts at restriction must not be allowed to interrupt Britain's 'present good relations with the Chinese Government' and her 'still considerable' Far Eastern trade. The solution, *The Times* argued, lay in fostering the development of China's domestic economy, the prospects for which were 'as great as those of Australia or any country in the world'. If additional foreign capital and expertise was allowed in, then the 'Chinese might

⁴⁹ CO/881/8/10/No.62/Enclosure/Lew to Salisbury, 7 May 1888.

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 7 May 1888, p.11, 15.

profitably remain at home'.⁵¹ It was an analysis that worked the Australian situation into an argument for the expansion of British commerce and investment the Far East, looking forward to a period when the migration question would be subsumed within a grander narrative of China's economic awakening.

The Times' interpretation must have appealed to many British officials, but it offered few suggestions as to how the 'two points of view' might be reconciled in the short-term. The uncertainty was mirrored within Government. Despite Knutsford's lobbying, the FO continued to play both sides of the argument. In a message to the CO on the 9 May, FO officials confirmed that dialogue with China would begin 'at once'.⁵² In consequence, the Colonial Secretary cabled Sydney to assure the Australians that Britain would negotiate.⁵³ When the Secretary of the Chinese Legation, Sir Halliday Macartney, visited the FO soon after, however, staff played a rather different tune. Reflecting on Australian affairs, Macartney suggested that the Qing might be willing to countenance some form of migration restriction but would always 'resent ... differential treatment'. With this information (and despite Knutsford's telegram) the FO decided against making any formal approach for-the-moment. Instead, they insisted that the Australians were simply 'much excited' and attempted to whitewash the policy of 'differential treatment' that had just been enforced at Melbourne. The *Afghan's* passengers, Macartney was assured, had been barred not because they were Chinese, but because 'they were largely in excess of the

⁵¹ *The Times*, 7 May 1888, p.11. A similar suggestion was made in 'Chinese in Australia', *Quarterly Review*, 167:333 (1888), 162-185.

⁵² CO/881/8/10/No.55/FO to CO, 9 May 1888.

⁵³ CO/881/8/10/No.61[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Carrington, 11 May 1888.

numbers allowed under customs regulations which applied equally to *all* foreigners'.⁵⁴

Whether this dubious response was taken at all seriously is not recorded. What must have been clear to all involved, however, was that the British Government would not be able to sit on the fence indefinitely. If the desire to tread carefully and to see which way the wind was blowing was understandable, the ability to do so relied on the situation not escalating any further. In a letter to Robert Hart, J.D. Campbell, the London Representative of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, summed up the British predicament:

Seeing that the Australian Colonies can make their own laws, and legalize there what we cannot here (e.g. marriage with a deceased wife's sister etc.) it will be a very difficult matter to arrange to the satisfaction of the Chinese Govt. if Lew Ta-Jen has correctly represented its views.⁵⁵

That difficulty was about to become more acute. As uncertainty reigned in Whitehall, the *Afghan* had reached Sydney.

***Rule Britannia, Britannia Rules the Waves
No More Chinamen Will Enter New South Wales!***

By the time the *Afghan* arrived at Sydney, the nature of her reception had been largely predetermined. On the evening of her departure from Victoria, a large crowd had assembled in the city centre. There, the Mayor led reflections on the rapid shift in perspectives on the Chinese question. 'It was only a few weeks ago that a meeting was held for a similar purpose as the present one', he began, but 'since then ... the English Government had either failed, or declined to do what we asked them'. Now it was the people who would 'say what shall be done to prevent the Chinese from

⁵⁴ FO/17/1701/157-159, 11 May 1888. (My emphasis).

⁵⁵ Campbell to Hart, 11 May 1888, *ACIMC*, ii, 532.

coming'. As in Melbourne, a chorus of speakers raged against the Chinese and the British Government. When the oration had concluded, the meeting unanimously resolved that immigrants and imports from China should be prohibited from entering Australia, 'regardless of England's treaty relations with China, and, if need be, without the sanction of the English Government'. To press the point an estimated 5,000 demonstrators marched on Parliament and took over the precinct. Crying 'out with the Chinamen' and 'the *Afghan* will be here at daylight', the crowd threatened to invade the Assembly.⁵⁶ At the end of a nervous standoff, Parkes offered an assurance that the passengers would be refused permission to disembark. The following day the SS *Tsinan* steamed into port carrying some 204 Chinese and was promptly ordered into quarantine.⁵⁷ The *Afghan* arrived to join her on the 6 May. Police were stationed on both ships, to protect the Chinese from violence and to prevent any attempt at landing. Now the Mother Colony had joined Victoria in taking urgent and independent action, pulling up a drawbridge against the expected Chinese invasion. In the days and weeks that followed anti-Chinese agitators took up the chant: 'Rule Britannia. Britannia, Rules the Waves. No More Chinamen Will Enter New South Wales!'⁵⁸

Like the Victorian Government, the authorities at Sydney were determined to enforce a policy of exclusion. In doing so, however, the Parkes Ministry was willing to soften the financial impact on those shipping firms whose vessels were already en-route to Australia. Parkes informed company representatives that the Chinese would have to be returned to Hong Kong, though an agreement was struck whereby the Government would pay the passage of any passengers found to be carrying valid certificates of

⁵⁶ *SMH*, 4 May 1888, p.9, 13; H. Parkes, *Fifty Years in the Making of Australian History* (1892), p.206.

⁵⁷ *SMH*, 5 May 1888, p.11. 144 of the Chinese were passengers, the remainder crew.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Roberts, 'History of the Contacts', p.11.

exemption. The shipowners would bear the cost for the rest. In the event fifty-six of the ninety-six who presented exemption certificates were deemed to be genuine British subjects. Their voyage north would be covered by the colonial Treasury. Eight naturalised Chinese from NSW were allowed to disembark, while others for New Zealand and Queensland were moved onto ships for those destinations. The remainder were slated for return to Hong Kong at the shipping companies' expense.⁵⁹

For both parties it seemed like a workable solution. After the 'arbitrary and unjust' action by the Victorian Government, shipping agents acknowledged that NSW had 'under the circumstances, met them very fairly'.⁶⁰ From the Government's point of view, the return of the Chinese (regardless of who paid their passage) would still send a powerful signal to the shipowners and potential émigrés at Hong Kong. Parkes was relaying Gillies' message, but subsidising its transmission. This approach had the additional benefit of shielding NSW from some of the complaints being directed at Victoria. In its commentary the *SMH* detected cause for optimism. Though the use of quarantine measures might have 'strained the law', it had also 'disgusted the steamship companies with the traffic'. The 'Chinese difficulty' was 'temporarily overcome' and the shipowners would 'bring no more Chinese' until the question was 'definitely settled'.⁶¹ Parkes appeared to have bought everyone some time, during which a longer-term solution could be found.

One notable feature of the *SMH's* coverage was the suggestion that the loss of the Chinese passenger trade would have little impact on Sino-Australian commerce.⁶²

⁵⁹ Griffiths, 'White Australia', p.486.

⁶⁰ *SMH*, 8 May 1888, p.3.

⁶¹ *SMH*, 8 May 1888, p.3, 7.

⁶² *SMH*, 8 May 1888, p.5.

Parkes and Gillies appeared to have acted with surgical precision. By isolating the human strands linking China to Australia and starving them of oxygen, they were leaving the surviving mercantile treads untouched. But if the Government's attempt to distinguish between human and commercial traffic appealed in theory, the difficulty of implementing such a policy, was made clear when the *Afghan* and *Tsinan* were given permission to discharge their cargoes.⁶³ Having gone some way to placating the shipping firms, the authorities had failed to secure the acquiescence of another key group - the passengers themselves. For several days attempts to unload the ships were hampered by the passengers' protests against their detention. Despite personal encouragement from Mei Quong Tart, Australia's most well-respected and well-known Chinese personality, they refused to be transferred to a rough hulk while the cargo was offloaded. Promises of resettlement on Fiji for those who did not want to return to China were rejected. A number who had been destined for Melbourne made it clear they would 'appeal to the Imperial Chinese authorities for redress', while others made reference to Australia's treaty obligations, insisting they were 'strictly within their rights under the law' to enter at Sydney. Many also complained as to the financial and personal hardships endured. Some were being forced to leave behind family and property. Others had invested considerable sums to come south and now would be returned to Hong Kong penniless, forced to beg their way back to their native villages.⁶⁴

The passengers' plight soon attracted sympathy from the local Chinese community, led by Quong Tart. A native of Guangdong, Quong had arrived in Australia at the age of nine, rising to become a prominent tea merchant at Sydney. In addition to his

⁶³ *SMH*, 10 May 1888, p.5.

⁶⁴ *SMH*, 10 May 1888, p.5; 11 May 1888, p.4.

commercial pursuits, he was active in lobbying for the improvement of the condition of Chinese in Australia. By the time of the *Afghan* crisis, Quong had been made Mandarin of the Fifth Degree, in recognition of his efforts to foster friendly relations between Chinese and Europeans.⁶⁵ Quong's role as a 'mediator' was just as valued by Australian statesmen.⁶⁶ He was (as the diplomatic community at Sydney made clear in a joint statement in 1903) the 'recognised spokesman' of the Chinese community and their unofficial Consul.⁶⁷ In taking up the passengers' cause, Quong walked a delicate line. Above all, he was wary that public advocacy might be taken as indicating support for increased Chinese immigration. On the 8 May, Quong led a delegation to meet Parkes. 'The Chinese merchants in the city were not in favour of a large number of Chinese being brought to Sydney', the delegates assured the Premier, but they did object to violations of law and a policy, which might render their countrymen homeless. All Chinese Britons with valid certification and those eligible to pay the poll-tax should be allowed to enter. Focusing particularly on the status of those who 'had been in Australia before, had been in business there, and owned property there', Quong pointed to protections for persons and property embedded in the Anglo-Chinese treaties. Suppose that a British subject 'owning a property in China', returned from a sojourn in England 'and found that he was prohibited from entering Chinese territory', Quong suggested. It was just this sort of 'very great hardship' that was being 'complained of here'.⁶⁸

There were echoes in these arguments not only of the statements made by Lew Tajen, but of the influential *The Chinese Question in Australia* (1879) published a decade

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 9 May 1888, p.9; M.S. Tart, *The Life of Quong Tart* (Sydney, 1911). R. Travers, *Australian Mandarin* (Sydney, 2004).

⁶⁶ ML/QT/MSS.5094/1/2, 2 February 1903.

⁶⁷ ML/QT/MSS.5094/1/2, 3 February 1903.

⁶⁸ *SMH*, 9 May 1888, p.6.

earlier by community leaders in Melbourne. There, the authors had also asserted that Australians were ‘bound to reciprocity’, while equating the position of Chinese in the Colonies with British merchants and travellers in China.⁶⁹ In the midst of the *Afghan* crisis, however, these appeals to ‘do unto others’ gained little purchase. Parkes acknowledged Quong’s concerns, but dismissed any suggestion of a shift in policy. It was the passengers after all, the Premier retorted, who had attempted to circumvent colonial legalisation by utilising fraudulent documentation. When Quong apologised on their behalf, Parkes joked: ‘I have long been under the impression that the only perfect man amongst your countrymen is yourself’.⁷⁰ Statements of support from other quarters evoked an equally lukewarm response. One of the more notable came from Sydney’s Cardinal Moran. Against the wholesale importation of Chinese labour, Moran nonetheless challenged the economic arguments levelled against the Chinese. It was ‘unchristian’, Moran insisted, to say ‘we reject you, not that you are unnecessary or useless, but because some idle and worthless men object to you on account of your usefulness’. Instead, he urged that the vitriol aimed at incoming Chinese should be redirected towards the opium problem in Australian Chinatowns.⁷¹ It was an argument whose popularity was perhaps best demonstrated by the Cardinal’s unofficial public title: the ‘Chows’ Patron’.⁷²

Although the passengers and their advocates appeared to have lost the rhetorical battle, by delaying the unloading of the ships, they had denied the Government the speedy resolution on which its policy depended. On the 9 May, the *Afghan* and *Tsinan* finally began to discharge their cargoes. With the passengers still refusing to

⁶⁹ Lowe, Cheong and Ah Mouy, *The Chinese Question in Australia*, p.13, 29.

⁷⁰ *SMH*, 9 May 1888, p.6.

⁷¹ CO/881/8/10/No.144/Robinson to Knutsford and Enclosure, 14 May 1888.

⁷² ‘Moran, Patrick Francis’, *ADB* [website], <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/moran-patrick-francis-7648>, accessed 10 January 2011.

cooperate, the Government deployed a police guard to prevent any Chinese sneaking ashore and blurring the distinction between human and commercial traffic.⁷³ It was a sizable operation, (requiring some 102 policemen) but progress was painfully slow.⁷⁴ As the hours and the days rolled by, a series of maritime and legal complications began to attach themselves like barnacles to the quarantined vessels. From London, Knutsford wired to clarify the legal basis of the colonial measures and to follow up Lew's most recent protest.⁷⁵ Fearing mutiny and suspicious that the Government was acting illegally, Captain Alison of the *Tsinan* and Captain Roy of the *Afghan* made contact with the Royal Navy's Australian Station. 'The safety of our ships and the lives of the few Europeans on board are in peril', they wrote to the commanding officer, Rear-Admiral Fairfax, and 'we as British subjects, claim your protection in these untoward circumstances'. Quong Tart had already confirmed that many onboard blamed the Captains for their predicament, stoking fears of a 'possible outburst of frenzy on the part of the Chinamen'.⁷⁶ It seemed they were already growing more desperate. On the 14 May an attempted escape had to be thwarted by the local police [Figure 8].⁷⁷ Of greatest concern so far as Parkes was concerned, efforts had begun to bring the Government's actions under the scrutiny of the Supreme Court. Here, advocates advanced a case of *habeas corpus* on behalf of those passengers whose exemption tickets had been accepted as valid.⁷⁸ If the Court proved sympathetic, the NSW Government faced the very real possibility that it might be found to be acting illegally.

⁷³ *SMH*, 10 May 1888, p.5.

⁷⁴ *SMH*, 16 May 1888, p.7.

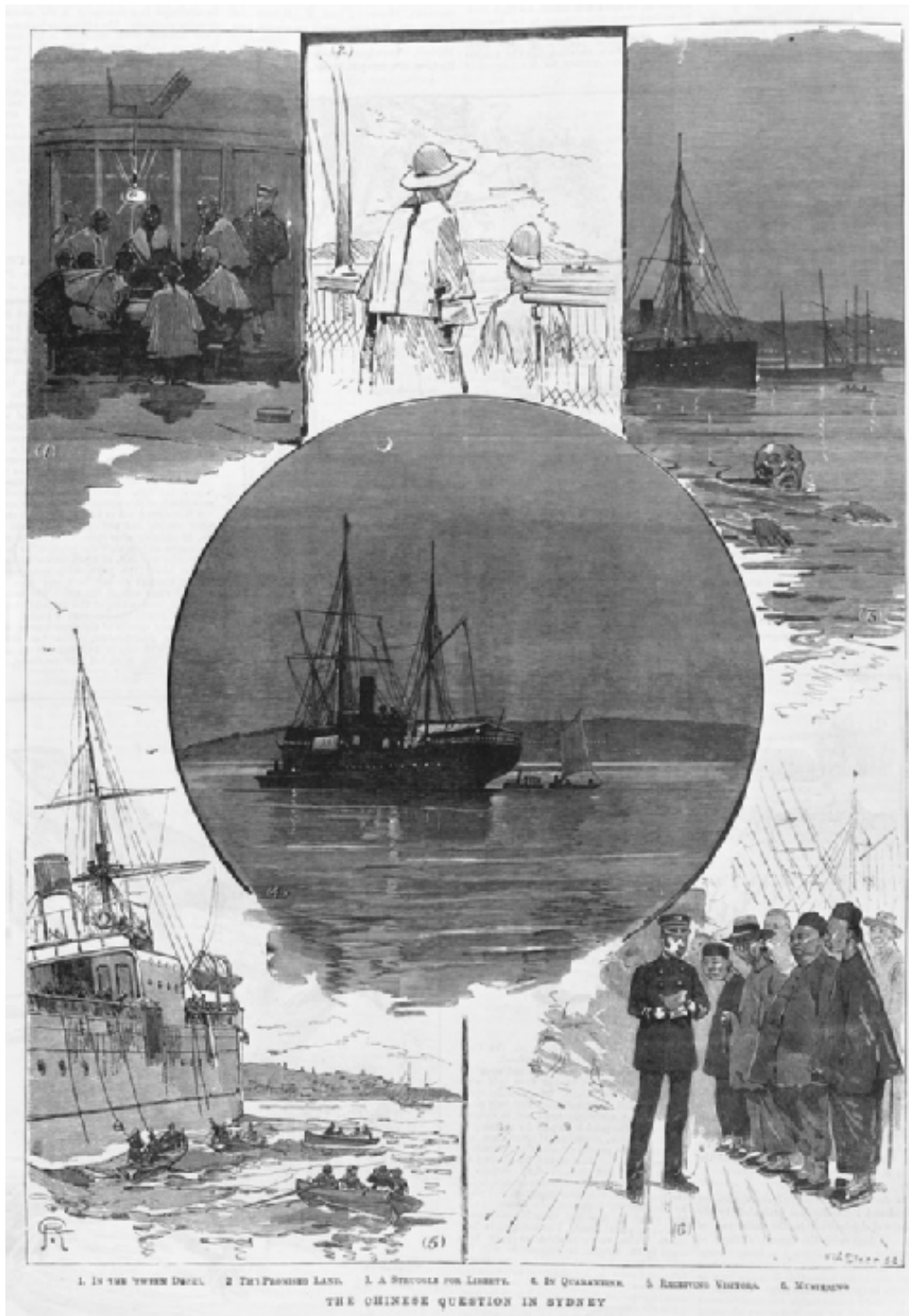
⁷⁵ CO/881/8/10/No.64[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Loch and Carrington, 12 May 1888.

⁷⁶ *SMH*, 14 May 1888, p.4.

⁷⁷ *SMH*, 15 May 1888, p.4.

⁷⁸ Proceedings began on the 14 May on behalf of Lo Pak, a Sydney Chinese aboard the *Afghan*. At the initial hearing the Court was informed that applications would follow on behalf of another 47 Chinese on board. *SMH*, 15 May 1888, p.14.

Figure 8: 'The Chinese Question in Sydney', 1888. Picture Collection, SLV.



1. In the 'tween decks (top left).
2. The promised land (top centre).
3. A struggle for liberty (top right).
4. In quarantine (centre).
5. Receiving visitors (bottom left).
6. Mustering (bottom right).

By the 15 May, when the *Afghan* was due to depart, the situation threatened to descend into chaos. In the morning, the Supreme Court informed Captains Alison and Roy that they were not to leave port until the case of *habeas corpus* was resolved. Both then instructed those passengers onboard their ships with exemption tickets to go ashore. When the Chinese attempted to disembark, they were prevented from doing so by the police. As emotions reached boiling point, two other ships, the *Guthrie* and *Menmuir* entered port, bringing with them another 218 Chinese from Hong Kong.⁷⁹ With Lord Carrington away, it fell to the Lieutenant-Governor to update Knutsford in London. Clearly anxious about the legality of Government's action he confessed:

There exists no Colonial law authorising prevention of landing Chinese who are within limitations of existing law with respect to poll-tax, or have been naturalized. Estimated number refused between two and three hundred.

In a second message, he made clear the reality of the situation:

This Government has decided to prevent all hazards Chinese landing at this Colony, with exception of such as hold certificates of naturalization proved after strict examination not to be fraudulent, as many are. Three ships at Port Jackson just now and others expected. Government has almost unanimous support of Parliament and people in this matter of urgency.⁸⁰

As the tide swirled up around the Chinese question, Parkes seized the moment. In a statement before the Legislative Assembly, the Premier announced that the time had come to invoke the fall-back provisions of his initial appeal to London. Lacking adequate imperial protection NSW would legislate to head off an impending catastrophe. The Bill proposed left little doubt as to Government's desire to exorcise the spectre of Chinese migration once and for all. The poll-tax would be raised to

⁷⁹ *SMH*, 16 May 1888, p.7.

⁸⁰ CO/881/8/10/No.69-70[Telegraphic] Lieutenant-Governor to Knutsford, 15 May 1888.

£100; Chinese would have to pay an additional £20 annual residence fee; given recent frauds, NSW would no longer recognise even its own naturalisation documentation; and all Chinese would be required to carry passports. While Parkes' initial proposal was for tonnage restrictions to remain at one Chinese passenger for every 100 tons of cargo, this was subsequently amended to 300 tons. In a deliberate reflection of the limited freedoms accorded to Britons in China, Chinese would have their right to reside restricted to Sydney, Newcastle and five other areas to be gazetted. As a rejoinder to the earlier symbolic messages despatched to Hong Hong, a massive £500 fine would be imposed on anyone attempting to transport excessive numbers of Chinese to the Colony. Finally, the law would be backdated to 1 May, indemnifying the Government for all potential illegal actions taken since the *Afghan's* arrival.⁸¹ Few were unaware of the potential implications of the proposal. Whatever the eventual outcome, it was bound to impact on NSW's engagement with the other Colonies, with China and with London. 'The attitude of the Government' observed the *SMH* in a call for moderation, 'brings the Chinese question to a crisis ... [and] it is hoped that the crisis will be met with calmness and dignity'.⁸²

***Conclusion: What is Good for the British Goose
is Good for the Chinese Gander***

When he took to the floor of Parliament to introduce his Bill the following day, Parkes delivered one of the most dramatic and widely reported speeches ever made by a colonial statesman.⁸³ He began by defending the Government's actions to date.

⁸¹ Griffiths, 'White Australia', pp.489-490.

⁸² *SMH*, 16 May 1888, p.8.

⁸³ For a sample of the coverage, *Glasgow Herald*, 16 May 1888, p.7; *Times of India*, 18 May 1888, p.5. The speech was published as H. Parkes, 'The Chinese in Australia' in *Speeches of Sir Henry Parkes, Prime Minister of New South Wales* (Sydney, 1888), pp.1-17.

Whatever the legal opinion, the colonial authorities had been guided by a higher principle:

There is one law which overrides all others, and that is the law of preserving the peace and welfare of civil society. Would you talk about a technical observance of the law if a plague was stalking in our midst - if a pestilence was sweeping off our population – if a famine was reducing the members of our household to skeletons?

After reiterating the case against the Chinese, the Premier turned his fire on the British Government. The Colonies had appealed to London ‘fully, fairly and truthfully’ to negotiate with China on Australia’s behalf and so preserve ‘the integrity of the union of the Empire’. In response, they had received a bitter slight, typical of a long tradition of neglect and condescension:

We are treated as if the wisest course was to let us alone and the excitement would die out, and there would be no need for anything to be done at all. I venture to say that a few other masterful displays of indifference like this ... [will] sap the loyalty of these great countries.⁸⁴

It was a statement that might just as easily have been applied to the incursion of France and Germany into the South Pacific as to Chinese migration. Certainly the complaints were familiar: British arrogance, which dismissed colonial concerns as the products of overheated passions and impatience; diplomatic preoccupation, which prioritised foreign over colonial relations; and official detachment, which downplayed the scale of Australia’s external anxieties. Each of these rhetorical struts now helped position Parkes’ Bill, not as a rushed response to a popular crisis, but as a sensible corrective to the Home Government’s failings. NSW, was taking action to guard Australia against both Chinese immigration and British inaction. Having fired members into an ‘emotional frenzy’ with the passion of his oratory, Parkes’ pushed the Bill through, the Assembly breaking at 7am the following morning.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, pp.7-9.

⁸⁵ Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, pp.112-113.

For contemporaries and historians, the introduction of the NSW legislation and Parkes' speech to Parliament, have provided a enduring illustration of the importance of Chinese migration to the development of independent Australian perspectives on race, migration and foreign relations. Certainly Parkes sought to use the issue in order to articulate his own interpretation of the rights of colonial self-government. 'Neither for Her Majesty's ships of war, nor for Her Majesty's representative on the spot, nor for the Secretary of State for the Colonies', he thundered ahead of the final vote, would NSW be deterred from stopping 'the landing of Chinese on these shores forever'.⁸⁶ A few days later, while preparing the preface to the published version of his speech, Parkes clarified his views into something like a vision statement for Australian colonial nationalism. As an Australian statesman his 'first duty' would always be to NSW. In taking independent steps to resolve the Chinese question, he had simply adhered to the 'sacred doctrine' of self-government, with which 'no Imperial Minister' had the 'constitutional right to interfere'.⁸⁷ But if Parkes' performance represented a powerful assertion of colonial rights, it was also the crescendo to a movement which had been building since the *Afghan's* arrival at Melbourne. Here three factors were central. Firstly, the transformation of well-established colonial anxieties over Chinese migration into what seemed like an imminent threat. Secondly, the growing recognition that the mechanics of Chinese migration to Australia were interlinked with the maritime and legal architecture of Britain's imperial system. Thirdly (and most importantly from an imperial point of view) that the Colonies themselves might try and reconfigure the dynamics and character of that system, without recourse to London.

⁸⁶ Parkes, 'The Chinese in Australia', p.10.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pp.2-4.

In writing the history of the Afghan Affair, historians have been right to emphasize this first factor, the climate of ‘sudden and almost inexplicable panic’ that underlay the events which transpired in Victoria and NSW. Like a fireship, the *Afghan’s* appearance sparked off a wave of fear and uncertainty amongst her receivers. To many on the ground, the Colonies stood on the verge of a grave calamity. Australia it seemed faced either a Chinese invasion, of which the *Afghan* and the other ships in port were simply the first wave, or alternatively, a descent into anarchy, as popular fears of mass Chinese migration outpaced official reaction. These anxieties framed colonial policy and provided justification for the adoption of extraordinary measures. The passage of the NSW legislation, Carrington, wrote to London on the 17 May, was essential lest ‘most serious public riots ... and great maltreatment’ of Chinese erupt at Sydney.⁸⁸ By the same token, the relative composure shown by the Victorian authorities during the first phase of the migration crisis had quickly evaporated with the *Afghan’s* arrival. In both colonies, the focus had shifted rapidly towards containing the Chinese threat by whatever means necessary. Like a fireship of old, the *Afghan* simply had to be diverted away before it set the Colonies ablaze and inflicted lasting damage.

The second and third themes emerging out of the Afghan Affair have attracted far less attention, though they remain just as remarkable. While any analysis clearly has to take into account the growing force of public feeling in Australia over Chinese migration, the historical moment which culminated in the passage of Parkes’ legislation, also needs to be understood as both emerging from and impacting upon a series of intertwined imperial relationships. From the beginning, the actions taken by

⁸⁸ CO/881/8/10/No.75[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 17 May 1888.

the Victorian and NSW Governments were conducted with a view to altering the dynamics of the Colonies' interactions with other branches of Britain's imperial system. The rejection of Chinese passengers at colonial ports was enforced not simply as means of placating local opinion, but of sending a pointed message to Hong Kong and British shipowners everywhere, that the economic and legal provisions that had facilitated Chinese migration to Australia, were now being torn apart. Likewise, the Colonial Governments sought to make it clear to officials in Whitehall that they would not shrink from taking independent action on pressing national concerns, even when they might interfere with London's foreign relations.

Looking back out across our overarching story, the Afghan situation had already added a new dimension to Australia's role as a point of contact between the British and Chinese Empires. For all the criticism of Britain's failure to act on Chinese migration, it is important to note that neither Parkes nor Gillies had equated their resort to independent initiative with disloyalty. On the contrary, as Parkes made clear, colonial leaders saw themselves as acting in the Empire's true interests, which British officials had chosen to neglect. 'The only way in which we can be true to ourselves as her Majesty's free subjects', Parkes suggested, 'is to show that we have a lively appreciation of the great liberties – the great privileges – which we possess, and which we will never forfeit or suffer to be impaired'.⁸⁹ In their treatment of the *Afghan*, Parkes and Gillies saw themselves as upholding their duty at free Britons, while implementing their own ideas as to the Colonies' position within Britain's imperial system.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.9.

In doing so, they had effectively articulated an Australian model for governing the triangular relationship linking the Colonies with Britain and China, one which distinguished between commercial and human interaction. It was a development perhaps best crystallised in Parkes' speech to Parliament. In urging the passage of the Government's Bill, Parkes dismissed calls for a complete legal prohibition on Chinese immigration or special restrictions on Chinese goods. Instead he championed the Government's 'practical prohibition' on Chinese passengers, on the grounds that it respected 'international relations' and the spirit of reciprocity embodied in the Anglo-Chinese treaties. China, with her immense population of some four hundred million, had restricted the British to the Treaty Ports. NSW, with her comparatively tiny population, was simply proposing to do the same. 'I cannot see', Parkes concluded:

How any treaty obligation can be violated, so long as we extend to our respected brethren from the Chinese Empire precisely the same class of rights which they extend to us. What is good for the British goose is good for the Chinese gander.⁹⁰

Here, he was adopting the same principles that had underpinned the protests made by Lew Tajen and the Chinese leaders in Australia, turning them to his purpose. On the one hand, appropriating the language of reciprocity had a practical advantage. By stressing the lengths NSW had gone to recognise the reciprocal principle, Parkes was making it clear that there would be very little sympathy in Sydney for any attempt to withhold Royal Assent for the Chinese Bill on diplomatic grounds. But more generally, Parkes was attempting to put forward his own vision for the way in which his Colony would engage with China, based on his own interpretation of the British Empire's international agreements.

⁹⁰ Parkes, 'The Chinese in Australia', p.12.

It was clear almost immediately that Parkes had overplayed his hand. The following day the Supreme Court ruled against the Government in the case of *habeus corpus*.⁹¹ With the NSW Upper House refusing to be rushed into passing the Chinese Bill, Parkes was left with little choice.⁹² Those passengers with valid 'exemption certificates should be at once allowed to land', he was informed by the Attorney General, George Bowen Simpson. Resistance would only provoke additional applications to the Court and these would be endorsed as 'a matter of course' and at Government expense.⁹³ If Parkes had been content to play around the edges of the law, he had little appetite for engaging in pointless and open defiance. Under cover of darkness, those Chinese for Sydney with valid exemption tickets were snuck ashore. 'About 3'Oclock this morning', Carrington cabled Knutsford, 'all Chinese holding exemption tickets allowed to land – eight from "Tsinan", forty-two from "Afghan." Very few spectators present. Landing accomplished without any disturbance'.⁹⁴ With the Court decision, a tide of uncertainty and mistrust again engulfed the Chinese question in Australia. For the moment, the ruling had clearly hampered the NSW Government's ability to intervene. Meanwhile, the Victorian Chinese community, led by Lowe Kong Meng, had launched its own challenge upon the Gillies Ministry. Following the example set in Sydney, they applied for a writ of *habeus corpus* on behalf of the Chinese still aboard the *Burumbeet*.⁹⁵

Leaving this tumult in its wake, the *Afghan* itself finally steamed out of view. After a diversion to Newcastle, the ship returned to Sydney for provisions for the journey

⁹¹ *SMH*, 18 May 1888, p.6, 8.

⁹² *SMH*, 19 May 1888, p.11, 13. Another potential complication - the Captains' request for naval protection – had also petered out when Admiral Fairfax declined to interfere.

⁹³ ML/HP/CY59/Vol.37/A907/Simpson to Parkes, 18 May 1888 (Simpson's emphasis).

⁹⁴ CO/881/8/10, No.87[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 19 May 1888.

⁹⁵ *SMH*, 22 May 1888, p.5.

north. On board were still some seventy-one Chinese who had been denied entrance to Australia. A number had accepted compensation, while others still demanded to be allowed ashore.⁹⁶ If the Chinese question was far from resolved, as the *White Elephant* left Sydney, its message inscribed by Parkes and Gillies, was already reverberating across the Empire. On the 18 May the *NCH* reported that the Australian situation had ‘set Hong Kong in a blaze’. Reiterating the potential commercial implications, the paper carried a report of one ship that was preparing to leave port with some three hundred and fifty Chinese passengers when news of the *Afghan’s* plight came in:

The steamer was stopped, and the men bundled out unceremoniously on to the shore with their baggage. The resulting loss to the owners and charterers of the steamers which, many of them, have been constructed specially for the trade can be imagined.⁹⁷

In the weeks that followed, passengers from the *Changsha*, who had been refused entry at Sydney, marched en-masse to Butterfield & Swire’s office at Hong Kong to demand the return of their passage money. When staff refused the scene degenerated. The unfortunate passengers found themselves again detained, charged for disorderly conduct, fined and imprisoned for three days.⁹⁸

The wash from the *Afghan* had also made its way to London. As we shall see in the chapter that follows, the reaction by Victoria and NSW to the Afghan Affair dramatically increased the pressure on British policymakers to respond to the Chinese question. While the Home Government was hardly likely to encourage the Australians’ efforts to put their own stamp on the Empire’s foreign and intra-colonial relations, clearly, British officials would have to find some means of responding to

⁹⁶ *SMH*, 26 May 1888, p.12; 30 May 1888, p.10; 31 May 1888, p.6.

⁹⁷ *NCH*, 18 May 1888, p.549.

⁹⁸ *NCH*, 13 July 1888, p.31.

the ‘fig for Great Britain’ and her ‘treaty obligations’, which the Colonies had now presented.⁹⁹ It was not going to be easy. ‘The New South Wales People’, exclaimed Lord Salisbury, when news of Parkes’ Bill reached Whitehall, ‘have gone stark staring mad!’¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *SMH*, 5 May 1888, p.13.

¹⁰⁰ HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Knutsford, 27 May 1888.

Chapter Five

The Invasion of Australia is Rapidly Coming to the Front Rank of Imperial Problems: The Official Mind and the Search for a Solution

By the middle of May, ‘the Chinese Emigration Question’ was ‘causing some excitement’ in London.¹ For British officials and observers, the treatment of the Chinese passengers at Melbourne and Sydney and the introduction of the NSW legislation, finally brought home the full implications of the situation. Within days Parkes’ tinkering with the legal and maritime mechanisms connecting NSW into Britain’s imperial system, had begun to upset normal operations elsewhere. ‘The Chinese question’, the *SMH* reflected, was becoming ‘chameleon-like in its changes’.² In response FO and CO staff searched for a policy of containment. Still divided as to the merits of pursuing an Anglo-Chinese treaty over Australia, they moved awkwardly towards a common position, pushed on by a climate of escalating political and public tension. Alongside fresh demands from the Colonies and the Chinese Legation, advocates on both sides of an expanding public discourse, centred on Fleet Street, but extending out across the Empire, poured their observations, their critiques and their prescriptions onto the British Government. Adopting a tone already becoming familiar in English language publications across the globe, London’s *Pall Mall Gazette* warned that ‘the invasion of Australia’ was ‘rapidly coming to the front rank of imperial problems’.³

As we saw in the previous chapter, any attempt to open negotiations with the Qing already involved enormous challenges. Several messages received just prior to the

¹ Campbell to Hart, 18 May 1888, *ACIMC*, ii, 534.

² *SMH*, 18 May 1888, p.6.

³ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 May 1888, p.1.

passage of Parkes' Bill highlighted the Government's dilemma. On the 16 May, word arrived that South Australia had passed exclusionary measures based on the Victorian model. Despite having requested a stay on anti-Chinese legislation pending negotiations with Peking, Lord Knutsford was forced to concede London had little choice but to assent.⁴ That same day a highly suspect account of recent events arrived from Melbourne. Laying the blame for the *Afghan* crisis with the ships' captain (whom it was suggested had never insisted on landing the passengers) the Victorian Government now denied it had ever excluded Chinese subjects eligible to enter via the poll-tax.⁵ Finally, having initiated a study of colonial statutes, Lew Tajen contacted the FO to insist that Victoria and NSW had violated their own immigration legislation and should be liable to claims for compensation.⁶ FO officials forwarded the letter to Knutsford, minuting: 'the C.O. will find it rather hard to answer this'.⁷

As several missives from the Antipodes brought news of Parkes' legislation to Whitehall, they cast a gloomy pall over the prospect that London, Peking and the Colonies might ever find a shared position. From Sydney, Lord Carrington telegraphed for permission to assent, while suggesting that the British Government effectively had no choice in the matter. The colonial authorities, he wrote, 'consider[ed the] position of affairs critical ... refusing to sanction would inevitably lead to most serious complications'.⁸ Simultaneously, from Adelaide, Governor Robinson telegraphed to protest against the legislation. Negotiations for an inter-colonial conference had been 'progressing satisfactorily', but now Parkes' behaviour

⁴ CO/881/8/10/No.72/CO to FO, 16 May 1888.

⁵ CO/881/8/10/No.71[Telegraphic]/Loch to Knutsford, 16 May 1888.

⁶ CO/881/8/10/No.84/Enclosure/Lew to Salisbury, 16 May 1888.

⁷ FO/17/1701/182, 17 May 1888.

⁸ CO/881/8/10/No.76[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 17 May 1888.

threatened to ‘upset joint action’.⁹ From Melbourne, Governor Loch raised the even more worrying scenario that the other colonies might also bring in tighter migration restrictions.¹⁰ ‘The precipitate action of the New South Wales Government’, grumbled Lord Salisbury, ‘throws almost insuperable difficulties in the way of a negotiation with China’.¹¹

Yet negotiate they did. Despite the obvious hurdles to securing an agreement with Peking, in the wake of the Afghan Affair, the British Government finally took up the call to find an imperial solution to the Chinese question in Australia. Of all the hitherto neglected aspects of the crisis of 1888, the British effort to strike a grand bargain between colonial and foreign interests remains the most opaque. Again the omission is somewhat understandable. The events that transpired from the end of May, most notably the Australian Conference and the subsequent passage of colonial legislation based upon its deliberations, had important implications for both Australian history and the global history of border control and immigration restriction.¹² By comparison with these two showcase themes, the failed attempt by British officials to drum up a diplomatic resolution has appeared a shaky understudy, rarely deserving of the centre stage. ‘Nothing appears to have eventuated from Britain’s negotiations with China’, wrote Willard from the vantage point of the late-1920s. ‘All things considered, it is not surprising’.¹³ ‘Caught between the pugnaciously anti-Chinese Australasian Colonies and an incensed Chinese Government’, Huttenback confirmed some two generations later, the British were always ready to withdraw from negotiations and concede the initiative to their

⁹ CO/881/8/10/No.73[Telegraphic]/Robinson to Knutsford, 16 May 1888.

¹⁰ CO/881/8/10/No.78[Telegraphic]/Loch to Knutsford, 17 May 1888.

¹¹ CO/881/8/10/No.96/FO to CO, 24 May 1888.

¹² McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, pp.121-214

¹³ Willard, *White Australia Policy*, pp.91-92.

colonial subjects. Failure to secure a treaty and the eventual acceptance of local policies of restriction simply reflected the fact that the Australian Colonies ‘drew a good deal more water in Whitehall’, than ‘the dying Ch’ing Empire’.¹⁴

Given the tremendous difficulty of finding a diplomatic resolution, the question remains as to why London pursued the treaty option in the first place and then persevered with attempts to secure a deal? More broadly, little has been said by previous scholars about the impact of the failed negotiations upon Anglo-Chinese, or Anglo-Australian relations.

This chapter explores these questions by approaching the final phase of the Chinese migration crisis of 1888 from the largely overlooked British perspective. In doing so, it targets two gaps in existing historiography. The first is the series of internal discussions and policy motivations that underpinned the Imperial Government’s attempt to negotiate with China. The second is the growing impact of the migration crisis upon contemporary debates about the future of Anglo-Chinese and Anglo-Australian relations. In addition to the wealth of colonial commentary produced, throughout the rest of 1888, events in Australia attracted the attention of an ensemble cast of observers scattered across the Empire. As they offered up varied interpretations of the Australian situation, they weighed into an often heated political debate on the likely repercussions in terms of Anglo-Chinese engagement and the relationship between Britons at home, in the Antipodes and in the Far East.

¹⁴ Huttenback, *Race and Empire*, p.115; Price, *Great White Walls*, pp.272-273.

Lord Knutsford Does This and Lord Knutsford Does That

In London the Afghan Affair caused widespread consternation. As British officials digested the cables now pouring in from the Colonies, debate was already spilling into the metropolitan press. The growing turmoil over the Chinese question was picked up in a variety of liberal and conservative newspapers and periodicals, which surveyed the overarching themes and offered a range of policy solutions. ‘Is Australia to be Chinese?’ - asked one typical feature in the *Spectator*. There was ‘no question in politics’ upon which it was ‘more difficult to think straight’. At the core of the issue seemed to be the notion of reciprocity and of the Colonies’ obligations under the Anglo-Chinese treaties. If the unhindered entry of Chinese into Australia would see the ‘white man ... completely eaten out’, race-based restrictions appeared to threaten the position of Britons in China. ‘The argument from colour’, the author suggested, ‘ought to be as good against the white man as the yellow, and if we may tax Chinese washermen, so may Peking tax English telegraph clerks’. In response, the *Spectator* sought an agreement that would distinguish between networks of trade and settlement, restricting the right to free migration to British merchants travelling to China and Chinese merchants going to Australia. Such a policy would allow for China’s economic expansion, enriching British merchants and investors, whilst preserving the Colonies for the Empire and European settlement.¹⁵

Approaching the subject from a very different perspective, a leading article in William Thomas Stead’s *Pall Mall Gazette* drew on the British experience of ‘sweated labour’ to frame its own analysis. ‘What the sweater’ was to England, ‘the Mongol’ was to Australia. ‘Not even the sweaters of London could compete’ with

¹⁵ *Spectator*, 12 May 1888, p.647.

John Chinaman. Although the Government had been placed in a difficult position, caught between its foreign and colonial interests, Britons should always favour their own kin.¹⁶ The domestic parallel filtered down as far as local press coverage. For the *Essex Standard*, with its orientation towards the East End, there was ‘something about the [Australian’s] strong prejudice against the Chinese’, that was reminiscent of ‘the ancient and modern prejudice against the Jews’. If there remained ‘some ground[s]’ for anti-Semitism in Europe, the case ‘against the lower-class Chinaman’ was even stronger. His rejection from the Colonies was simply ‘a repetition of history’ and the expulsion of the Jews from medieval England and Tsarist Russia.¹⁷

The most influential analysis appeared in *The Times*. During May and June, a series of editorials offered a running commentary on the Australian situation. Copies of official cables were reproduced, while correspondence pages served as a forum for exchanges on the direction of government policy; the relevance of the Anglo-Chinese treaties; the merits of Chinese labour; and the dangers of miscegenation.¹⁸ Colonial experts, such as the imperial federationist, Peter Francis Labillere, and the historian (and by now leading member of the London Chamber of Commerce) William Westgarth, used *The Times* to explain the ‘long ripening’ of the Afghan Affair to British readers and to promote Australian perspectives.¹⁹ Two of the most prominent were the Conservative MPs John Henniker Heaton (nicknamed the ‘Member for Australia’ by one periodical) and Robert Baden-Powell.²⁰ Both mixed public activism with private lobbying. ‘If the Home Government take a stand with the Colonists on

¹⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 May 1888, pp.1-2.

¹⁷ *Essex Standard*, 26 May 1888, p.5.

¹⁸ For example *The Times*, 7 May 1888, p.15; 17 May 1888, p.13; 29 May 1888, p.11; 11 June 1888, p.5.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 22 May 1888, p.13; 26 May 1888, p.10.

²⁰ On Heaton’s moniker, ‘Chinese in Australia’, *Quarterly Review*, 167:333 (1888), 162, fn.2.

Chinese labour, as distinct from trade', Heaton wrote to the CO while the *Afghan* was at Sydney, 'every fair minded politician will be satisfied'.²¹ The following day he carried his point into the Commons.²² In regular telegraphic contact with Parkes, Heaton became something of a mouthpiece for the Colonial Premier, using *The Times* to ensure his version of events was available in London.²³ Baden-Powell meanwhile took to the newspaper to advocate his own plan for a climate-based solution. 'Our fellow countrymen in Australia', he wrote to *The Times*, 'are ... experiencing the recurrent crisis of troubles in connexion with Chinese immigration'. By limiting coloured migration to those tropical regions where white labour would struggle to compete, the British Government could prevent any 'antagonism between China and Australia or between China and the British Empire'.²⁴ Just two days later, the newspaper correspondent turned private lobbyist, informing the FO that he found his 'Australian friends ... very excited about the old Chinese immigration question', and calling for a return in Parliament.²⁵

Those with less sympathy for Australian anxieties also turned to *The Times*. Here, the focus tended to be on the potential damage to British interests in the Far East and the prospects for colonial development. One prominent letter came from the China missionary and Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade, Frederick Storrs-Turner. 'The anti-Chinese fury of our colonial cousins', Storrs-Turner wrote, was 'being watched with dismay and disgust by Englishmen who have lived in China, whose friends and relations are now there, and who have commercial

²¹ CO/201/608/9074/Enclosure/Heaton to CO, 8 May 1888. (Heaton's emphasis).

²² HOC/vol.325/cc.1820-1821, 10 May 1888; HOC/vol.326/c.333, 15 May 1888; HOC/vol.326/cc.751-752, 31 May 1888.

²³ *The Times*, 22 May 1888, p.11. On Heaton and Parkes, *SMH*, 23 May 1888, p.8

²⁴ *The Times*, 26 May 1888, p.10.

²⁵ FO/17/1701/278/Baden-Powell to FO, 28 May 1888.

and other interests in that Empire'. Denouncing 'nightmare visions of innumerable Mongol hordes', and the 'miserable business' being conducted at Australian ports, he made the case for Chinese migration. The refusal to allow the thrifty Chinese to work in tropical regions was indefensible on moral grounds and reflected instead the selfishness of Australia's working classes. Worse still, the situation sent a worrying message so far as British interests further north were concerned:

Not long ago the Chinese were as determined to exclude us from their territory as are the Australians now to shut out the Chinese. Our footing in China was hardly won, is precarious still, and is secured by the very treaties which our colonists are tearing to shreds.²⁶

Other correspondents offered similar critiques. Edward Wakefield, the editor of Wellington's *Evening Press*, also played the socialist card. 'I do not know how many Chinese there are in London but I am inclined to think that down in Wapping or Limehouse way they "swarm" more than they do here'. The arguments being put forward by the Colonial Governments, Wakefield insisted, were 'as hollow a sham as the Socialist agitation in England'.²⁷ Echoes of these views could also be found in the Treaty Port press. At Shanghai, an editorial in the *NCH* slammed 'the arbitrary way in which the stoppage' of Chinese passengers had 'been finally enforced'. 'Unusual', 'incredible' and 'unexpected', the Afghan Affair raised serious questions as to the future of Australia's engagement with Asia. The 'working-classes ... who dominate Australian politics', were deaf to commercial arguments and might 'seriously affect the promotion of England's friendly intercourse with China in the near future'. The question was whether London would intervene to diffuse the situation. Clearly, by 'the repulse of the *Afghan* and her passengers', the Colonies had 'show[n] the Colonial Office they are in earnest'.²⁸

²⁶ *The Times*, 26 May 1888, p.10.

²⁷ *The Times*, 22 August 1888, pp.13-14.

²⁸ *NCH*, 18 May 1888, p.549.

In reality, Australian frustrations were concentrated as much upon the Foreign as the Colonial Office. In a letter to the South Australian Premier, Parkes expressed the belief that the imperial authorities had ‘utterly failed to comprehend the gravity’ of the Chinese question. It was this realisation that had forced his Government to legislate ahead of the forthcoming conference.²⁹ While he was quick to condemn London’s willingness to ignore Australian interests, however, Parkes also sought to defend the minister technically responsible. Against popular cries of ‘Lord Knutsford does this and Lord Knutsford does that’, he remained convinced that blame for the deteriorating state of Anglo-Australian relations did ‘not belong to the Secretary of State for the Colonies’. Instead, it was a problem of the whole ‘English Government, and [in particular] the chief actor ... the Prime Minister of England’.³⁰ It was a similar line to that taken by Alfred Deakin at the London conference of the previous year. While Knutsford’s personal support for Australian interests was acknowledged, there was little doubt that the Colonial Secretary was being kept on a tight leash by Salisbury and the Foreign Department.

Unbeknownst to colonial leaders and the press, however, growing unease over the migration question was already the subject of a series of discussions between the Foreign and Colonial Offices. Moreover, it was beginning to inspire a gradual shift away from the usual dynamics governing British foreign and colonial policymaking.

When it first hit Whitehall, the immediate effect of Parkes’ legislative missile had been to exacerbate the divisions at the centre. For staff at the CO it was a reminder of Britain’s impotence when it came to restraining Australian legislators and further

²⁹ *SMH*, 17 May 1888, p.7.

³⁰ Parkes, ‘The Chinese in Australia’, p.7.

evidence of the need for a treaty. Knutsford advised that assent be granted (subject to disallowance) as refusal would only inflame the ‘strong feeling in the Colony’. At the same time, the Government should keep its eye on the long game, encouraging the Colonies to proceed with their planned conference as a precursor to an imperial ‘settlement on moderate terms’.³¹ At the FO, meanwhile, Parkes’ latest stunt reinforced the lack of enthusiasm for the treaty option. The first communication from Knutsford on the Australian Conference went unanswered.³² Instead, Salisbury and his team found themselves engaged on the opposite flank. On the 15 May, Halliday Macartney, had informed J.D. Campbell that the Chinese Legation intended to maintain its protests over the treatment of Chinese passengers and to seek damages on behalf of those who had suffered at Australian hands.³³ The following day, Lew called on the Government to admit ‘the illegality of the action of the Colonial Authorities’. Surely, the Chinese Minister insisted, Colonists would ‘scarcely venture to deny their obligation to respect the statutes which they themselves have enacted?’ The situation was particularly galling given the *Afghan* and the other ships had embarked at Hong Kong. It was unbelievable that one British colony could authorise the shipment of the passengers only for others to refuse their landing. The problem, it seemed to the Chinese Minister, was one of imperial governance. As such, he was turning to the stewards of Britain’s global system to explain its apparent inequities and to provide compensation for the Australians’ ‘arbitrary and irregular’ behaviour.³⁴

³¹ CO/201/608/9782, 17 May 1888; CO/881/8/10/No.7680A/CO to FO, 17 May 1888.

³² They eventually responded, following a reminder. CO/881/8/10/No.90A/FO to CO, 21 May 1888.

³³ Campbell to Hart, 18 May 1888, *ACIMC*, ii, 534.

³⁴ CO/881/8/10/No.84/Enclosure/Lew to Salisbury, 16 May 1888.

In light of the Chinese position, Salisbury remained unconvinced as to the prospects for a formal agreement. By May, the Prime Minister had already received word that the much vaunted Sino-American treaty was unlikely to be ratified.³⁵ Any surviving faith in a Sino-Australian deal now appeared to have been scuttled at Sydney. Parkes' Bill, the Prime Minister wrote:

Would remove from the minds of the Chinese Government any idea that it was possible, by spontaneous action on their part, to obtain more tolerable terms. No advantage would be gained by approaching them with proposals founded on that legislation.

If a treaty seemed unlikely, Salisbury reasoned, then negotiations would only serve to inflame an already volatile situation. Instead, he advocated an alternative course: tolerating new Australian legislation, whilst reassuring Peking that colonial laws were in no way reflective of British attitudes towards China. Far from perfect, it was an approach that would at least limit the extent to which Sino-Australian hostilities were refracted through London. 'As a choice between two courses, both of which are open to objection', the Prime Minister minuted:

I much prefer to give the Colonies a free hand in their legislation rather than undertake to try & obtain from the Chinese Government any legislation or Treaty analogous to that with the United States. The latter course, which would fail, would simply bring on us the united resentment of China & the Colonies. In the former case they would respectively visit the responsibility to a great extent on each other, + not on us.³⁶

There seemed little wisdom, he consoled his Colonial Secretary, in 'interposing [with] negotiations', which could have no 'practical result' and which would 'in the end, expose the policy of this county to misconstruction both in China and Australia'.³⁷

³⁵ CO/881/8/10/No.85/Enclosure/Sackville-West to Salisbury, 24 April 1888.

³⁶ FO/17/1701/259, 22 May 1888.

³⁷ CO/881/8/10/No.96/FO to CO, 24 May 1888.

This contrast in departmental attitudes was of course partly due to the competing constituencies to which officials were responding, but it was also reflective of the alternate views, held by Knutsford and Salisbury, as to how London should manage the relationship between colonial and foreign interests. Their disagreement was not so much over the ends as the means. The Colonial Secretary's desire for a conference and a treaty and the Prime Minister's preference for tolerating local legislation, were both envisaged as being the most sensible and anodyne means of putting a lid on the crisis. Likewise, both acknowledged that colonial perspectives should inform imperial policymaking, though Knutsford favoured a more formal arrangement than Salisbury. As the secret Colonial Conference discussions over the Pacific had made clear, the Colonial Secretary believed in the Australians being brought into the inner sanctum of policy discussions, if only as consultants. Once there, he hoped, colonial statesmen would develop the maturity that so often lacking in their attitudes to imperial policy. The chance to frame terms for negotiations with China would provide an opportunity for Australian leaders to display their readiness. Salisbury, meanwhile, scoffed at that notion that colonists might ever put the Empire's interests ahead of their own. So far as the Prime Minister was concerned, London should resist anything that might smack of colonial intervention in foreign policy, lest the Home Government appear to be acting on parochial interest. Rather than lending weight to the Australian case by carrying it into the Empire's foreign relations, Her Majesty's Government should maintain an acceptable distance and 'accept without reserve, so far as treaty obligations permit, the action which Colonial legislatures may think it right to take'.³⁸

³⁸ CO/881/8/10/No.96/FO to CO, 24 May 1888.

In any normal situation one might have expected the Prime Minister to carry the day. In the lead up to the Australian Conference, however, Salisbury swallowed his reservations and gave the green light to Knutsford's approach. That decision no doubt partly reflected the Prime Minister's preoccupation with European diplomacy (especially in relation to the Near East); his tremendous respect for his Colonial Secretary; and his distaste for Australian affairs. But it was nonetheless significant. Salisbury's willingness to concede the initiative to the CO potentially opened the door to the Colonies having unprecedented influence over British negotiations with a foreign power. While Lord Rosebery had previously welcomed Australian input in regard to discussions with France, there the Colonists had effectively been restricted to raising objections to proposed diplomatic agreements.³⁹ Now they were being called upon to help shape something new. While the Government could always row back to Salisbury's devolved approach if the Knutsford plan stalled, allowing the CO to take the lead in framing the British response was not without its perils. If the situation turned sour, it risked further alienating the Australians and exposing British interests in the Far East to continued contagion from their Chinese question.

The Gentlemen of the Colonial Office Are Not Safe Guides

Whatever their ongoing differences, in the lead up to the Australian Conference collaboration between the Colonial and Foreign departments was close. At the top, Salisbury and Knutsford remained in regular correspondence, corrected each other's drafts and devised messages updating the Chinese Legation and the Colonies on the

³⁹ Lords Rosebery and Knutsford evidently shared a number of similar views on imperial affairs. In 1896, Rosebery wrote to Knutsford, 'The difficulty of Government in England daily increases with the swollen territories of the Empire. It is surely not much to ask that we should limit our party broils to domestic affairs and keep our hands off the ark of imperial destiny and relations.' NLS/LR/MS.10131/Rosebery to Knutsford, 17 October 1896.

British position. Together, they sought to channel all the disparate lines of argument surrounding Chinese migration in Australia towards the Conference, while deferring Lew's queries until the Australians had come to a united position. It would be up to Australian leaders to provide British diplomats with the ingredients they required, to concoct an agreement suited to Chinese tastes.

At the core of Knutsford's thinking was a belief that Australian leaders should be given the space to debate all the aspects of the Chinese question freely. Ahead of the meeting, the Colonial Secretary resisted the temptation to wade into discussions on the inter-colonial tensions that were becoming evident. When cables arrived from either end of British Australasia making the case for the continuation of some form of Chinese labour migration, he replied that the question was now for the Australian Governments. Likewise, Knutsford took a conciliatory approach to potential Anglo-Australasian disagreements. On the 8 June, he waved through new anti-Chinese legislation for New Zealand, after his plea for a delay was dismissed by Governor Jervois.⁴⁰ Most importantly, he resolved that London would refrain from sending an imperial representative to Sydney. 'Anything approaching what is called Downing Street spirit or Imperial influence', he explained to the Lords, would only evoke distrust and jealousy.⁴¹ Instead (with Salisbury's approval) he sent on three points for consideration: that offensive legislation against Chinese was a threat to treaty

⁴⁰ Jervois suggested creating a new Crown Colony in the north open to coloured labour. CO/881/8/10/No.91[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Jervois, 22 May 1888; No.110[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Jervois, 1 June 1888; No.112[Telegraphic]/Jervois to Knutsford, 5 June 1888; No.120[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Jervois, 8 June 1888. Just six months earlier Knutsford and Salisbury had rejected a similar plan on the grounds of cost and the 'great disfavour + jealousy' it would inspire amongst the Australian Governments. HH/LS/E/Holland(Knutsford) to Salisbury, 10 December 1887. The case for limited Chinese immigration was also put by Western Australia. Regardless of the clamour in the Eastern Colonies, wrote Governor Broome, 'it was doubtful' whether the Legislative Council at Perth would agree to 'totally exclude Chinese'. CO/881/8/10/No.119/Broome to Knutsford, 5 May 1888.

⁴¹ HOL/vol.326/cc.1509-1522, 8 June 1888.

negotiations; that methods of immigration restriction should be ‘in accordance with the views and feelings of the Chinese Government’; and that the present controversy threatened the growth of both Anglo-Chinese and Sino-Australian trade.⁴² The Colonial Secretary was effectively calling on the Colonies to show themselves as responsible imperial partners. While London understood the Australian’s desire for a treaty, everything would ‘depend upon the nature of the proposals’ put forward.⁴³ ‘I confidently believe’, ran a final plea from the Colonial Secretary to the Australians, ‘that the Conference will endeavour to conciliate susceptibilities of [the] Chinese Government as far as practicable’.⁴⁴

The decision to engage by telegraph had two advantages. Firstly, it avoided the potential embarrassment of a British representative being present during discussions likely to be (at the very least) unflattering to China. Secondly, it ensured that the Colonists would be forced to take ownership of proceedings. Underpinning this approach, we might detect the influence of Salisbury’s desire that the Home Government should be insulated from any further Sino-Australian animosity. With Her Majesty’s Government absent, the Colonies could only blame themselves if proceedings proved hopelessly hostile to China and scotched any chance of a treaty. In the meantime, by making it clear to Lew that the views expressed would be exclusive to the Australian Governments, the FO sought to ensure that any resulting opprobrium was directed towards the Colonies rather than London.⁴⁵

⁴² CO/881/8/10/No.107/CO to FO, 31 May 1888.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ CO/881/8/10/No.109/FO to CO, 1 June 1888; No.114[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Robinson, 6 June 1888.

⁴⁵ CO/881/8/10/No.116/Enclosure/FO to Lew/Draft, June 1888.

In the background, Salisbury's department was also working to strengthen Britain's hand ahead of negotiations with China. On the 11 June, FO officials forwarded Knutsford two documents from Walsham at Peking. The first was a request from the Zongli Yamen, received some two years earlier, seeking British assistance to block outward migration from Hong Kong to the United States. The second was a memorial (based on the findings of the Chinese Commissioners) which called for the establishment of a Chinese consulate in Australia.⁴⁶ While the second suggestion appears to have gone nowhere, Salisbury was clearly taken by the potential benefits of the first:

I think we ought, if there is no local difficulty, to comply at once with the request of the Chinese Gov. and take steps to prohibit the emigration of Chinese from Hong Kong to the U.S. It will make it difficult for them to object if restrictions are imposed hereafter on emigration to our own parts.⁴⁷

Knutsford advised against taking up this particular carrot, citing the age of the correspondence; the well-known disparity between the treatment of Chinese in Australia and California; and the likely objections by shipping interests at Hong Kong, but the Prime Minister's willingness to countenance such a move was a marker of his support for the Colonial Secretary's efforts.⁴⁸ Knutsford was also afforded considerable scope in shaping the Government's communications with the Chinese Legation. In the wake of the Supreme Court ruling at Sydney, for instance, the Colonial Secretary was allowed several alterations to Salisbury's message to Lew, striking out its depiction of Parkes' Government as 'hasty' and 'ill-considered'.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ CO/881/8/10/No.122/FO to CO, 8 June 1888 and Enclosures.

⁴⁷ FO/17/1701/100, 7 June 1888

⁴⁸ CO/881/8/10/No.122/FO to CO, 8 June 1888 and Enclosures; CO/881/8/10/No.134A/CO to FO, 15 June 1888.

⁴⁹ FO/17/1701/275/FO to CO, 25 May 1888 and notes; CO/881/8/10/No.116/Enclosure/FO to CO, 7 June 1888.

If Salisbury was willing to get behind the CO, a number of observers expressed concern as to whether Knutsford and his men were equipped to steer the Government's policy. In the Commons, the Liberal MP William Hunter pondered whether the 'intense feeling' in Australia had the potential 'to cause considerable friction between the colonists and the Colonial Office'. In response the Undersecretary for the Colonies, Baron de Worms, sought to defer discussion until after the Conference. He assured members that an arrangement 'entirely satisfactory to Australia' and mindful of the 'susceptibilities of the Chinese', would soon be within reach. Having apparently dealt with the question, however, the hapless De Worms held the floor. Soon he found himself wandering into an interpretation of Britain's diplomatic obligations and the still uncertain relevance of the Anglo-Chinese treaties. Denying that the Colonies were in any way bound by notions of reciprocity, he ventured to suggest that:

Although the Emperor of China had engaged by Treaty not to prevent his subjects from leaving ... and emigrating to British Colonies there was no engagement on the part of Her Majesty's Government that Chinese emigrants should be permitted to enter any British Colonies at their pleasure.

Quizzed as to the exact details of the treaty arrangements, De Worms seemed ill-informed and struggled to pedal back. 'It would be impossible ... to give information as to the exact bearing of the Treaty', he bumbled awkwardly, 'of course' matters would be 'considered by competent authorities ... before any decision was arrived at'.⁵⁰

De Worms' shaky performance and Knutsford's decision not to send an imperial delegate were taken up in the Lords the following day, where no less than three former Colonial Secretaries offered their analysis. Opening the debate, the Earl of

⁵⁰ HOC/vol.326/cc.984-989, 1 June 1888.

Carnarvon expressed his sympathy with Australian and Chinese perspectives and endorsed the Government's search for a treaty. It was beyond belief, however, the former Conservative Minister protested, that the CO should 'allow this Conference to be held without sending over someone ... in the confidence of, and who knows the mind of, her Majesty's Government'. The Chinese question 'was essentially an Imperial one', involving 'responsibilities from which no English Government' could 'possibly escape'. Carnarvon's concerns were echoed by the former Liberal Secretary of State for the Colonies (and for India) Lord Kimberley. 'When the Australian Colonies are united upon a point of this kind', Kimberley began, 'it is impossible that they should not have their own way'. But London's role was to ensure that the interests of the Empire as a whole were protected. 'It is impossible not to feel that this question of Chinese immigration places us in difficulty in the conduct of our foreign relations'. Moreover, the security of British India had to be kept in mind when dealing with its Chinese neighbour. Imperial representation was vital then to ensure the Australians gave 'serious consideration' to the Empire's 'relations with the other countries of the world and with China'.⁵¹ Subjected to these criticisms, Knutsford deployed all his personal charm. Going to great lengths to praise his predecessors' extensive knowledge, he reiterated his belief that the Australians would provide London with the means to secure a 'beneficial and honourable' agreement for 'all interested'. The futility of sending an imperial delegate was seconded by Lord Derby. Pointing to the Australians' ongoing refusal to take direction, Derby reiterated his earlier comment that Britain was 'in the hands of the Colonists', when it came to Chinese migration. Derby's contribution was not so much an affirmation of Government policy, as recognition that Australians would hardly 'sacrifice their own

⁵¹ HOL/vol.326/cc.1509-1522, 8 June 1888.

wishes to considerations of Imperial policy'. The real danger, he conceded, was that in doing so they might 'cut the ground' from under British attempts to claim 'unlimited admission into China'.⁵²

Beyond Westminster opinion was just as divided. In the wake of the Lords' debate, Carrington cabled from Sydney to report that Knutsford's speech had been 'most favourably received'.⁵³ In London, however, the CO was soon drawing fire from those on the other side of the argument. On the eve of the Australian Conference, an anonymous correspondent launched a savage critique in *The Times*. Pouring scorn on the 'puzzled Undersecretary' (De Worms) the correspondent warned that 'the gentlemen of the Colonial Office', were not 'safe guides'. Having repeatedly told the Chinese that they 'must not ... preserve their isolation', it was Britons who were now 'raising the barriers, while their own 'fine phrases about the intercourse of nations' were 'in the Chinese mouth'. Drawing on the experience of Russian Jewish migration to the East End, the anonymous writer suggested anti-pauper legislation could be deployed to solve both dilemmas without affecting diplomatic relations. Britain should remember she was about to 'ask a favour'. If she went to Peking 'hat in hand', leaving behind the 'absurd and baseless pretensions ... of Baron de Worms', she would 'get the convention' she wanted 'readily and without friction'.⁵⁴

It was a poorly kept secret that the anonymous 'Times Correspondent' was probably Halliday Macartney. Within days of the letter's publication, Frances Parry, a former member of the Legislative Council at Hong Kong, had written to the FO to make sure officials recognised that the author was someone with 'the confidence of the

⁵² HOL/vol.326/cc.1509-1522, 8 June 1888.

⁵³ CO/881/8/10/No.123[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 12 June 1888.

⁵⁴ *The Times*, 11 June 1888, p.5.

representatives of China at this Court'.⁵⁵ A descendent of the first British envoy to China, Macartney had served as an army surgeon in the Far East in the early-1860s, before entering into a long period of service for the Qing. With the establishment of the Chinese Legation in London from 1877, he played a key role as Secretary and Counsellor to Chinese Ministers in Britain into the twentieth century.⁵⁶ According to Macartney's biographer, for the ten years after the departure of Marquis Tseng, much of the 'work and responsibility [of the Legation] fell' to the First Secretary. Increasingly relied upon by Ministers with limited English, he held many of the Legation's 'strings in his own hands'. In particular, he excelled at putting the Chinese Embassy's views through the British press, developing 'unequalled experience' at lobbying 'behind the scenes' through Fleet Street.⁵⁷

For British China observers in London, the suspected intervention by Macartney through the press added weight to a theory that the Legation was acting independently and without recourse to Peking. As early as the 11 May, J.D. Campbell had written to Robert Hart to raise the question of whether Lew was taking action on Australian legislation '*proprio motu* or by the Yamen's orders?' Campbell doubted whether Qing officials cared sufficiently to make a concerted stand against the treatment of Chinese in British colonies. 'What reception would the Chinese Govt. give', he asked sarcastically, 'to a host of English, Scotch, Irish or German Emigrants landing on her soil?!?'⁵⁸ At the end of May, he wrote again on the 'Australian business', forwarding

⁵⁵ FO/17/1701/405/Parry to Pauncefote, 16 June 1888 and Enclosure. Parry enclosed an article he had published in the *Globe* repeating the suggestion and contesting Macartney's interpretation of the Anglo-Chinese treaties.

⁵⁶ C.P. Lucas (rev. K.D. Reynolds), 'Macartney, Sir (Samuel) Halliday', *ODNB* [website], <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34666>> accessed 10 April 2011.

⁵⁷ D.C. Boulger, *The Life of Sir Halliday Macartney* (1908), pp.287-293, 471. Rosebery was one notable target of Macartney's press campaigning. 'So far from being a specialist', he felt, Macartney was 'something of an idiot'. NLS/LR/MS.10131/Rosebery to Spender, 1 October 1895.

⁵⁸ Campbell to Hart, 11 May 1888, *ACIMC*, ii, 532.

cuttings from the London papers. ‘The Times Correspondent’ was ‘at it again’, he informed Hart, with the goal of aggravating the situation and ‘making it still more difficult for Sir John Walsham!’⁵⁹ From Hart’s vantage point at Peking, it seemed likely that Lew was being goaded into stirring up a diplomatic crisis by someone who would then sweep in and take the credit for its resolution. ‘I don’t believe Liu [Lew] is acting under orders from Peking’, he wrote back to Campbell, ‘it is to the interest of somebody else to make it a burning question and then win credit for extinguishing the flames’. The most likely culprits were the ‘two M’s at Liu’s elbow’: Halliday Macartney and the Standing Advisor to the Legation J.M. Macarthy, though Hart could not rule out the influence of the Peking medical missionary John Dudgeon acting through the Marquis Tseng.⁶⁰ The suspicion of intrigue at the Chinese Embassy added another layer of uncertainty to the wisdom of Knutsford’s plan. If it turned out the Legation had been acting independently all along, then approaching Peking might mean escalating the diplomatic ramifications of the Australian situation unnecessarily.

Whatever happened next, however, it was clear that the Chinese question in Australia was ensconced at the centre of British imperial affairs. Across Whitehall, Westminster and Fleet Street, Australian perspectives on Empire and the Pacific had taken on a rare public prominence. Swept along the communications and maritime networks connecting the Colonies into Britain’s world-system, the Chinese question had been transformed into a significant imperial issue. Having grasped that reality in the wake of the Afghan Affair, the Empire’s head office had deferred the initiative to its regional affiliates, seeking further consultation before settling on a final course of

⁵⁹ Campbell to Hart, 25 May 1888, *ACIMC*, ii, 536.

⁶⁰ Hart to Campbell, 1 July 1888, 8 July 1888 and 5 August 1888, *ACIMC*, ii, 546, 548, 555-556; On the two M’s, *ACIMC*, iv, 246, 251.

action. Now, all eyes were on Sydney to see if Knutsford's gamble would pay off. On the morning of the Australian Conference, an editorial in *The Times* offered its own take on the CO's much debated policy and the notion of reciprocity. Englishmen were generally content to 'leave the people of Australia at liberty to manage its affairs', but 'a discretion to violate treaties' could not be 'conferred upon a colony'. In order for an imperial solution to emerge, Australian statesmen would have to rise above 'the agitation of an epidemic of popular panic' and recognise that Anglo-Chinese treaties were as 'much compacts between Australia and China as between England and China'.⁶¹

The Spirit in Which the Chinese Question Has Been Discussed

On the 13 June 1888, far away from the imposing edifices of Whitehall, delegates to the Inter-Colonial Conference on the Chinese question were enjoying an afternoon excursion around Sydney Harbour. In the midst of three days of discussions and debate, colonial leaders allowed themselves a moment of sunny self-congratulation. It 'was not the first time that the Colonies ... had met', began a jovial master of ceremonies, Henry Parkes. Now they had shown their ability to come together and deal with 'a difficult and unpleasant question'. Praising each of those present, Parkes expressed his confidence in a shared antipodean future. The assembled leaders should indeed 'congratulate themselves', added the Victorian Premier, Duncan Gillies. Having gathered to resolve 'a difficult question', they had showcased all 'the best feelings of unanimity'. The Conference marked an important step towards making 'the voice of United Australia heard by the Imperial Government'.⁶²

⁶¹ *The Times*, 12 June 1888, p.9.

⁶² *SMH*, 14 June 1888, p.5.

The following evening, the Conference being concluded, Carrington cabled its resolutions to London. The Australians had reached four key conclusions. Firstly, Chinese exclusion was ‘essential to the welfare of the people of Australasia’. Secondly, restriction could ‘best be secured through the diplomatic action of the Imperial Government and by uniform Australasian legislation’. Thirdly, the Conference would make ‘a joint representation to the Imperial Government for the purpose of obtaining the desired diplomatic action’. Finally, the Colonies would pass local legislation establishing a passenger restriction of 500 tonnes and making passage between colonies (without permission) a misdemeanour. Poll-taxes would be revoked as a concession to Peking. A series of supplementary findings were also provided: general restrictions (such as an anti-pauper law) had been deemed ineffective; no special provision could be made for Chinese Britons (given the sheer number in close proximity); and any potential commercial impact was expected to be negligible (owing to the existing balance of trade being heavily in China’s favour, with India an obvious alternative supplier). Having laid out their stall, delegates called on the Imperial Government to enter diplomatic negotiations with the Chinese Empire and to shut off Chinese migration from British ports in Asia.⁶³

It was a staggeringly dense and complicated telegram. Knutsford must have groaned under the weight of its contents. Central to the Colonial Secretary’s faith in the conference-treaty option so far, had been an understanding that the promise of an agreement with Peking would satisfy Australian demands and remove the need for local measures offensive to China. Likewise, while Salisbury had suggested taking action at Hong Kong, Knutsford had been reluctant to further upset that Colony’s

⁶³ CO/881/8/10/No.133[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 14 June 1888. Carrington’s telegram was tabled in both Houses without debate, HOC/vol.327/cc. 253-256, 15 June 1888; HOL/vol.327/cc. 230-232, 15 June 1888. The Conference Report was filed in the FO papers in FO/17/1702/205-216.

shipowners and commercial interests.⁶⁴ Now, however, the Australians had requested all three approaches be pursued at once. London should start negotiations with China; assent to new colonial legislation; and shut-off migration through Hong Kong and the Straits Settlements. ‘In so serious a crisis’, ran the statement from Sydney, the Colonies had remained ‘studious of Imperial interests, of international obligations, and of their reputation as law-abiding communities’. Now, they would ‘confidently rely upon the support and assistance of Her Majesty’s Government in their endeavour to prevent their country being overrun by an alien race’.⁶⁵

Given his repeated appeals to respect Chinese sensibilities, Knutsford had a right to feel let down. Though the removal of the poll-taxes was a step in the right direction, it was hardly likely that the new shipping regulations proposed (which were stricter than those in NSW) or the criminalising of inter-colonial transit, would help London extend a hand to China.⁶⁶ The draft bill, observed Governor Jervois from Wellington, was ‘an attempt to paralyze the Imperial initiative ... and to reduce Imperial intervention to a simple registry of the decrees of the conference’.⁶⁷ Moreover, while the resolutions had been put forward as ‘faithfully represent[ing] the opinion of the Parliaments and peoples of Australia’, there were several chinks in the united antipodean front that the Colonial Secretary had sought. Only the second and third resolutions, which called for imperial intervention, had been carried unanimously. The first and fourth, which laid out model colonial legislation, were not endorsed by either Tasmania (who dissented) or Western Australia (who did not vote). The New

⁶⁴ Knutsford had agreed to gauge opinion with Des Vœux if such a move became necessary down the line. CO/881/8/10/No.134A/CO to FO, 15 June 1888.

⁶⁵ CO/881/8/10/No.133[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 14 June 1888.

⁶⁶ FO/17/1702/284-285[Telegraphic]/Walsham to Salisbury, 12 August 1888. Both the Zongli Yamen and the German Minister at Peking later raised concerns over Australian shipping measures with Walsham.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, pp.124-125.

Zealand delegate had been waylaid and had missed the meeting altogether.⁶⁸ In consequence, not only had the Conference failed to capture the voice of united Australia (let alone Australasia) but what it had said appeared to leave little scope for appealing to China.

Popular reaction was mixed. ‘As a great Asiatic Power’, reflected an uncharacteristically upbeat editorial in *The Times*, ‘it is satisfactory to note that there is a prospect of a settlement of the Chinese question in Australia’. Here, the Colonists’ request for a treaty and their willingness to abandon poll-taxes, seemed to hold out the promise that Britain’s Pacific interests could be brought back into alignment:

China faces the Russian Empire on one side, while on the other she touches ... our Indian Empire ... It would be in every way most regrettable if a State thus capable of affecting Imperial interests were to be estranged by reason of measures called for by our colonies. Fortunately there is no reason to doubt that means will now be found of reconciling Imperial and colonial interests.⁶⁹

Other commentary was rather more scathing. Zeroing on the proposed local restrictions, the *NCH* criticised colonial trade unions for stirring up ‘claptrap fears of Australia becoming a province of “Mongolia”’ and inspiring a policy so ‘severe as to expose the Colonists to ridicule’.⁷⁰ The simultaneous pursuit of local and imperial modes of restriction was also derided by Lew. The attitude of the Conference, he warned Salisbury, ‘threaten[ed] to still further complicate the question at issue between the Governments of London and Peking’. Despite ‘professing a preference for a ... Treaty’, the Australians had resorted to an even ‘more stringent and drastic form’ of local legislation. Peking was likely to greet the news with ‘extreme regret’.⁷¹

⁶⁸ CO/881/8/10/No.133[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 14 June 1888.

⁶⁹ *The Times*, 14 June 1888, p.9.

⁷⁰ *NCH*, 13 July 1888, p.33.

⁷¹ FO/17/1702/28-32/Lew to Salisbury, 5 July 1888.

Confronted with this outcome, one might have forgiven British officials for simply abandoning treaty negotiations and falling back on Salisbury's initial approach of assenting to colonial legislation. Remarkably though, instead of retiring to lick their wounds, Knutsford and Salisbury put their weight behind the resolutions. Having contacted Sydney to confirm that Parkes would bring his own Bill into line with the model legislation, Knutsford cabled the Australians:

Her Majesty's Government recognize spirit in which Chinese immigration question has been discussed by Conference, and will be prepared to consider Resolutions in all their bearings without delay.⁷²

After confirming that Britain was unlikely to be exposed to legal challenges, telegrams were sent to Hong Kong and Singapore ordering the authorities to stop ships from departing with Chinese for Australia.⁷³ A private message forwarded to Adelaide, provided assurance that London would not prevent the Colonies preparing local legislation (even if it affected Chinese Britons) so long as implementation awaited the outcome of negotiations.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Salisbury instructed Walsham to approach the Zongli Yamen and encourage them to 'enter into a Convention with Her Majesty's Government to the effect indicated ... [by] the Conference held at Sydney'.⁷⁵

In seeking to account for the Government's continuing willingness to pursue diplomacy on Australia's behalf, historians have tended to follow Willard's analysis that Knutsford and Salisbury were acting solely in response to the 'wishes of the

⁷² CO/881/8/10/No.139[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Carrington, 16 June 1888.

⁷³ Knutsford reported to Cabinet legal advice that foreign nations had 'no right to object'. HH/LS/E/Knutsford to Salisbury, 25 June 1888; FO/17/1702/47[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Des Vœux, 5 July 1888; CO/881/9/1/No.25[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Smith, 13 July 1888.

⁷⁴ CO/881/1/9/1/No.16[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Robinson, 5 July 1888.

⁷⁵ CO/881/8/10/No.147/FO to CO, 21 June 1888 and Enclosure.

Colonies'.⁷⁶ Certainly, the Australians had reiterated their desire that Britain should approach Peking. 'While believing that the local legislation now proposed will accomplish its object', the Conference had resolved, 'the Colonies would prefer the exclusion of the Chinese should be brought about by international agreement of a friendly nature, as in the case of the United States'.⁷⁷ Archival records suggest, however, that as well as responding to the Colonies, Knutsford and Salisbury had turned increasingly to thinking about the longer-term impact of the Australian situation on Anglo-Chinese relations. The starting point for this interpretation is that in the wake of the Conference (as delegates noted) Australian aims looked likely to 'accomplish[ed]'. The question was whether Chinese exclusion would be secured by local restrictions, maritime measures, a treaty, or some combination of all three. What colonial legislation and shipping regulations could not guarantee, however, was that the migration question would be subsequently neutralised as an issue affecting British foreign policy. For the Home Government, the clearest path to resolving this dilemma now appeared to lay via discussions with Peking.

This analysis is borne out in Knutsford and Salisbury's private correspondence. On the 16 June, the Colonial Secretary wrote privately to the Prime Minister, enclosing Carrington's 'enormous + unprecedented' telegram from the Conference.

Acknowledging the Colonies' request that London should persevere with treaty negotiations, Knutsford flagged Britain's own diplomatic interests:

We may not agree in their [Australian] views, but the matter has received full discussion there, and they profess to desire as far as possible to have the matter settled by Treaty, as the mode probably most satisfactory to the Chinese Government.

⁷⁶ Willard, *White Australia Policy*, p.91.

⁷⁷ CO/881/8/10/No.133[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 14 June 1888.

I should imagine that the Chinese would prefer that we should at all events endeavour to settle the matter by Treaty, than that we should decline to negotiate + leave the Australians to their own wicked devices.⁷⁸

The Prime Minister concurred. Showing little patience for the Australians, but mindful of the need to preserve good relations with China, he replied:

I quite accept ... It is quite true that I “recognize the spirit in which the Chinese immigration question has been discussed”. I recognize it perfectly: but whether my description would exactly tally with yours, I do not know.⁷⁹

That Knutsford and Salisbury had come to view treaty negotiations primarily as a means of insulating Anglo-Chinese relations from Australian affairs, is reinforced by the nature of the draft treaty put forward by the CO. All along it had been obvious that framing an agreement satisfactory to both parties presented an enormous challenge. On the 13 July, the *NCH* made light of that difficulty with a ‘novel suggestion’: that the Colonies should simply outlaw repatriation. Denied the prospect of burial at home, ‘Chinamen ... would cease to come’, while the Qing could save face and enshrine reciprocity by ‘forbid[ding] the export of dead Australians from China’.⁸⁰ The following day, when CO staff sent their proposals to Salisbury, it was clear that they had taken their own novel approach. Despite the Australians’ rejection of general, non-racial restrictions, the proposed agreement made no mention of the ‘Chinese’. Instead it was aimed at ‘labourers’: a group defined as ‘waged servants, miners, manufacturers and manual’ workers. If Britain and China agreed terms, labourers would be restricted to entering:

Only in such possessions, provinces, territories, or places [belonging to the other power] as may from time to time be notified as being open to them, and under such laws or rules as may or the time being be established for regulating their numbers, and the conditions of their residence and employment.

⁷⁸ HH/LS/E/Knutsford to Salisbury, 16 June 1888.

⁷⁹ HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Knutsford, 20 June 1888.

⁸⁰ *NCH*, 13 July 1888, p.32.

To preserve more refined modes of human interaction teachers, students, merchants and travellers bearing special documentation would:

Be freely admitted to visit, pass through, or reside in all possessions, provinces, territories, or places under the sovereignty or protections of the other, without let or hindrance' and would enjoy protection.

On signing the treaty the two Powers would stipulate the places where restrictions might apply, though these could be changed without notice and without compensation.⁸¹

Despite all the effort devoted to soliciting colonial input on a proposed treaty then, by August, British officials were working with a model that the Australians had already rejected. If that position seems illogical in hindsight, it was less so if we keep in mind the notion that the Government's treaty exertions were now more about dealing with the Anglo-Chinese ramifications of the Chinese question than the Anglo-Australian ones. Lew and Macartney (and a number of independent observers) had already suggested that China might approve of 'general legislation'. CO officials had therefore based their draft treaty on provisions, 'the Chinese Government would not find difficulty in accepting'.⁸² 'Lord Salisbury will observe', ran their introduction to the proposal:

That in order not to wound the susceptibilities of China, the stipulations contained in these articles avoid all mention of the exclusion of Chinese from Australia and put both countries on an equal footing in respect of the privileges and disabilities of their subjects.⁸³

⁸¹ FO/17/1701/455/'Australia'.

⁸² Macartney had made the suggestion to the FO and through the press. Lew did so in FO/17/1702/28-32/Lew to Salisbury, 5 July 1888. On the CO's approach, FO/17/1701/456/CO to FO, 23 June 1888.

⁸³ FO/17/1701/453/CO to FO, 22 June 1888.

Soon a message was despatched to Walsham, seeking confirmation that the proposals could be taken to the Yamen.⁸⁴ Notably, the Government showed considerably less urgency in sending the draft to the Australians, despatching it to the Antipodes just over a month later.⁸⁵

The suggestion that Britain's commitment to diplomacy was as much about London's own foreign interests as the Colonies' multi-pronged approach to Chinese exclusion, is of course not without its problems. If Britain was so concerned about Chinese sensibilities - why the rapid acceptance of local and shipping measures? As we saw above, it was still unclear whether Chinese agitation on the Australian situation was coming from Yamen or the Legation. If the buck stopped with Lew and Macartney, how much could be gained by dragging the Australian situation before the Qing?

Archival records again provide some guidance on these questions. After all that had gone before, Knutsford appears to have held out hope that a successful agreement would leave the door open to the Colonies backing away from their planned local restrictions. If this view seemed overly optimistic, there was a clear precedent, with colonial measures having been repealed in the past once the perceived threat of imminent inundation had subsided. The Colonies' own suggestion, that shipping restrictions were being deployed because the 'length of time to be occupied in negotiations ... was uncertain' and they feared 'a large influx from China' while waiting, seemed to raise the possibility that effective inter-imperial restriction might prove sufficient.⁸⁶ Even if that scenario failed to eventuate, however, direct engagement with Peking would enable British diplomats to put some distance

⁸⁴ FO/17/1701/462/Salisbury to Walsham, 26 June 1888.

⁸⁵ CO/881/9/1/No.37A/Knutsford to Australasian Governors, 27 July 1888.

⁸⁶ CO/881/8/10/No.133[Telegraphic]/Carrington to Knutsford, 14 June 1888.

between London and Sydney and to distinguish the wider course of Anglo-Chinese relations from the treatment of Chinese in Australia. This was an end that Salisbury previously suggested would be best achieved by London remaining aloof. Perhaps the key to understanding the shift in the FO's attitude towards the benefits of negotiation was the severity of the proposals put forward by the Australian Conference. Rather than rein in Parkes, as the British had hoped, collective action had seen the Australians coalesce around a new set of draconian migration restrictions. As such, securing a treaty (rather than tolerating local legislation) now seemed the most obvious method by which Britain could make its own position clear to China and to minimise any potential Anglo-Chinese complications that might emerge over Australia. Knutsford and Salisbury briefed Walsham accordingly. Chinese officials, Knutsford insisted, should be made to recognise that Britain would not be able to 'refuse sanction to the restrictive legislation proposed by the Colonies in case of failure to negotiate a treaty'.⁸⁷ If diplomacy floundered, the Australians would be off the leash. As such, it was everyone's interests that the two Imperial Governments should come to an amicable solution.

With this goal in mind, there was much to be said for side-stepping any potential manoeuvring taking place at the Legation. The FO therefore resolved that further communications with Lew should be deferred until after negotiations with Peking.⁸⁸ By coincidence, as the Government resolved to take its case to the Yamen, the basis of Chinese interest in the Australian situation was becoming clearer. 'Until a few days ago', Walsham informed Salisbury at the end of July, 'the Chinese Government had

⁸⁷ CO/881/8/10/No.148/CO to FO, 21 June 1888.

⁸⁸ FO/17/1702/226-266, 6 August 1888, 'Sir J. Walsham'.

not addressed any communication' on colonial legislation or the Afghan Affair.⁸⁹ It looked as though China's previous protests then, had their roots in the London Embassy. Now, however, Peking's own interest had been sparked by a plea for help from the Chinese community at Melbourne.⁹⁰ Approaching the British Minister, the Yamen had complained that the 'harsh and exceptional treatment' inflicted on the Chinese in the Colonies was difficult to understand; 'disastrous to mercantile interests'; and an 'infringement of the Treaties between Great Britain and China'.⁹¹ If London's priority for pursuing a treaty had already shifted towards the protection of Anglo-Chinese relations, then the Yamen's direct intervention now added a new impetus to the search for an agreement. If 'Chinese action' had begun in London, Robert Hart concluded, 'the arrangement of the Emigration affair' would 'not be easy' now the imperial authorities were awake to the situation.⁹²

To Remove All Risk of Future Embarrassment

As these political machinations took place behind closed doors, there remained considerable public scepticism about the Government's policy. In London, the acceptance of local restriction and the move to block Chinese passengers travelling from British ports in Asia, raised doubts as to whether negotiations were entrain.⁹³ But on the 10 August 1888, the British Minister to China finally visited the Yamen **[Figure 9]** to discuss the Australian situation. Largely ignored by historians, it was a moment that signified the extent to which British foreign and colonial policy had become entwined over Chinese migration to the Antipodes.

⁸⁹ FO/17/1702/172-191/Walsham to Salisbury, 27 July 1888 and Enclosures.

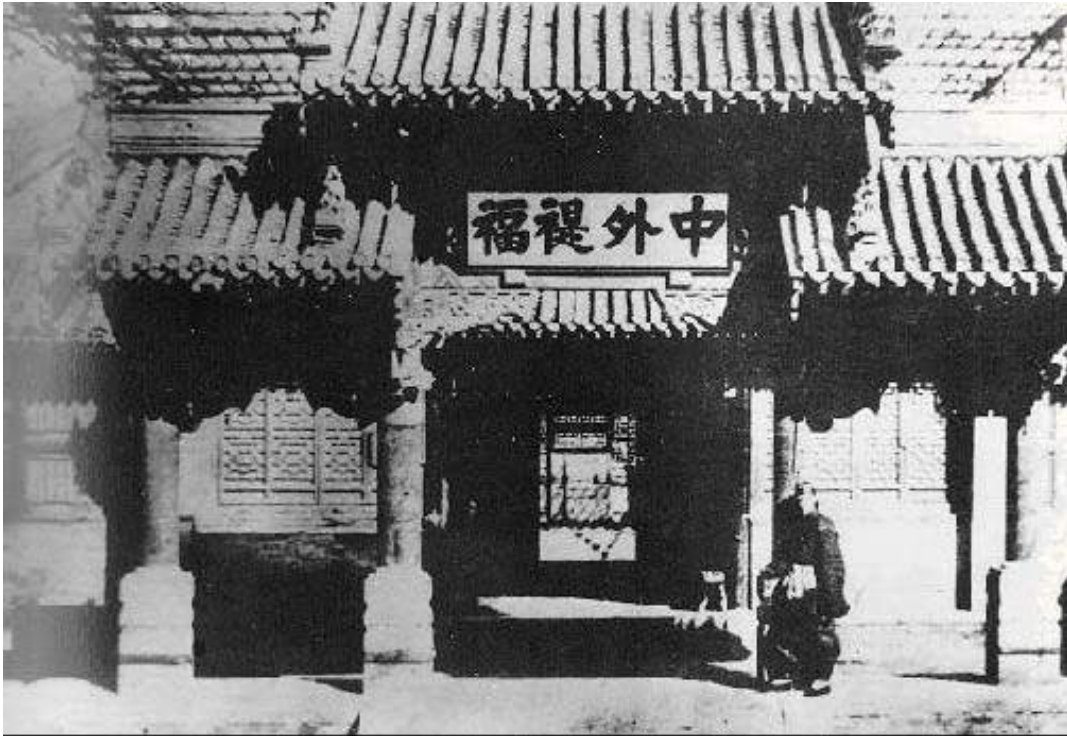
⁹⁰ On Chinese Australian protests and the Qing, Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie*, p.114.

⁹¹ FO/17/1702/172-191/Walsham to Salisbury, 27 July 1888 and Enclosures.

⁹² Hart to Campbell, 5 August 1888, *ACIMC*, ii, 555-556.

⁹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 18 July 1888, p.5; HOC/vol.328/c.1768, 19 July 1888. On the Government's rebuttal, FO/17/1702/79, 18 July 1888.

Figure 9: The Front Gate of the Zongli Yamen. Public Domain.



In the lead up to the meeting, Walsham had written to Chinese ministers suggesting they should come together to resolve the migration issue. To secure ‘an amicable solution’, Britain was seeking ‘friendly discussion’ for an ‘arrangement calculated to remove all risk of future embarrassment’. At the heart of negotiations was likely to be the recurring question of how the Colonies were affected by the Anglo-Chinese treaties. Australian leaders had already denied that Britain’s international agreements prevented them from closing their own borders to undesirable aliens. Chinese and British diplomats were less certain. The Colonies were under the ‘jurisdiction of England’, the Yamen had argued in relation to the protests from Melbourne. As such, they were bound by Article V of the Convention of Peking not to hinder Chinese immigration and to provide protection to Chinese residents.⁹⁴ For his own part,

⁹⁴ FO/17/1704/44-45/Walsham to Yamen, 5 August 1888.

Walsham believed that this clause was ‘clearly inapplicable to the case of the Chinese in Australia’. More problematic was the first clause of the Nanjing Treaty with its promise that Chinese and British subjects would ‘enjoy full security and protection for their persons and property within the dominions of the other’. On these grounds Walsham advised, China could claim for her emigrants ‘the same protections as would be accorded by those countries to the nationals of any other Treaty Power’.⁹⁵ In London, FO staff had also been working to clarify the legal position ahead of the meeting. If it was accepted that ‘Act I of the Nanking Treaty of 1842’ was of ‘a reciprocal character’, minuted one official, then ‘the only argument’ open to the Colonies was Parkes’ suggestion that they were mirroring limitations imposed by the Qing:

Not all parts of China are in practice unrestrictedly open to British subjects so Chinese subjects cannot in the absence of express Treaty stipulation claim as a right to enter all parts of the British Empire.

From the British perspective though, embedding this principal in a new agreement had obvious limitations as it might encourage China to ignore British requests for greater access to the interior and along the Yangtze.⁹⁶

Fearing the Australians had violated the Nanjing treaty, Walsham took his case for a new arrangement to the head of the Yamen, Prince Ch’ing.⁹⁷ He began by assuring the Chinese that the British Government was looking to ‘remove the existing difficulties’ in a way that was ‘equitable to all ... concerned’. The Colonies, he explained, had ‘acted somewhat hastily and unadvisedly’, but were now listening ‘to

⁹⁵ FO/17/1702/172-191/Walsham to Salisbury, 27 July 1888 and Enclosures; FO/17/1702/217[Telegraphic]/Walsham to Salisbury, 3 August 1888.

⁹⁶ FO/17/1702/226-266, 6 August 1888.

⁹⁷ FO/17/1702/217[Telegraphic]/Walsham to Salisbury, 3 August 1888. On Ch’ing, Meng, *The Tsungli Yamen*, pp.27, 55-56.

the advice of the Home Government'. Prince Ch'ing was hardly won over. 'Considering the cordial relations existing between Great Britain and China', he replied, the exclusion of Chinese 'appear[ed] to be an unfriendly act'. 'Not so long ago England and other foreign countries had been anxious to obtain Chinese labour', while the mere fact that Chinese were emigrating seemed to suggest 'a willingness to hold friendly intercourse with the natives'. Sensing the Yamen's sensitivity, Walsham put forward the CO plan as 'a natural understanding' rather than a 'definite agreement'. He then took a harder tack, reminding Prince Ch'ing that the Chinese were in the process of stopping migration to the United States. Surely 'what was granted to one friendly Power would not be withheld from another?' The British Minister then concluded by making a strong assertion that the notion reciprocity was practically flawed when:

Only foreign merchants came to China, and the conditions imposed upon them as to residence and freedom of action were much stricter than those to which Chinese of a similar class would be subjected in Australia.

The idea of 'informal understanding' appealed to Prince Ch'ing. While China was 'willing to forbid emigration', she would never 'consent to make a [diplomatic] arrangement to that effect'. One of the Ministers, Hsu Yung- i, then suggested that authorities might forbid the emigration of labourers to Australia from Chinese ports. Hong Kong could do the same. If the Chinese made that suggestion, Walsham replied, 'the British Government would doubtless feel at liberty to act'.⁹⁸ When discussion adjourned to allow for reflection, Walsham telegraphed that discussions were proceeding positively 'on [a] general and friendly basis rather than

⁹⁸ FO/17/1704/46-59, 10 August 1888.

with special reference to Treaties'.⁹⁹ The parties then reconvened on the 24 August. The Yamen began by expressing their happiness at the proposed abolition of poll-taxes and suggested that the CO proposals 'appeared to afford a satisfactory basis of arrangement'. The one exception was the shipping limit, which (at one passenger to five hundred tonnes) would impose a practical prohibition.¹⁰⁰ As the livelihood of Chinese merchants in Australia appeared to depend on their ability to cater for their countrymen, the Yamen sought to lower the restriction to three hundred tonnes, which would allow the Chinese population of Australia to remain roughly stable. Walsham expressed serious doubts that such a 'modification ... had any chance of acceptance'. Sensing the moment was slipping away, he sought to remind Ministers that the proposed restrictions only applied to labourers and 'to one portion of the extensive dominions of Great Britain'. Moreover, he urged them to remember the violence that had been perpetrated against Chinese in America. That 'condition of things ... had not yet, he was glad to say, been reached in Australia', but Britain had entered the present negotiations 'with the object of obviating any such contingency'. The Yamen were unmoved. Rejecting a passenger limit of more than three hundred tonnes (to be relaxed if the Chinese population of Australia declined) they insisted on a further exemption for Chinese servants. The agreement, if ratified, could be in place for five years and would be exclusive to Australia.¹⁰¹

From the British point of view the negotiations had clearly served their immediate purpose. Direct engagement with the Yamen had thrown up a potential agreement that could smooth the friction between Britain's foreign and colonial interests.

⁹⁹ FO/17/1702/284-285[Telegraphic]/Walsham to Salisbury, 12 August 1888.

¹⁰⁰ Based on an average capacity of 1,500 tonnes for ships servicing Australia, only two or three Chinese would be able to board each vessel.

¹⁰¹ FO/17/1704/69-74/Yamen to Walsham, 27 August 1888.

Whether the treaty itself came into force or not, the discussion had at least provided a forum for communicating Britain's own frustration at the Colonists' tendency to act 'hastily and unadvisedly', while making it clear that London was keen to prevent the issue affecting Britain's friendship with China. From the Chinese perspective, the agreement would ensure the protection of Chinese subjects already in Australia and secure the removal of the exceptional poll-taxes. Even if it was never implemented, the Yamen had communicated their unwillingness to see the exceptional treatment of Chinese subjects enshrined in China's diplomatic relations. The confinement of the terms to migration between China and Australia presumably appealed to both parties. The imperative on both sides was to contain the present situation. No one in Peking or in London wanted the Australian case to become a precedent for either British-Colonial or Sino-Western modes of engagement elsewhere.

The question now was whether the Colonies could be encouraged to embrace the deal. Though the proposed arrangements were based on a model they had previously rejected, British officials appear to have held out hope that London's willingness to carry the Australians' concerns to the imperial authorities at Peking would encourage favourable consideration. On the 31 August the FO sent details of the negotiations to Knutsford.¹⁰² The Colonial Secretary was disappointed that China had sought to adjust the shipping regulations. Again he suggested reminding the Yamen that Britain would be unable to 'oppose severely restrictive legislation' in the event of failure. But despite these reservations, Knutsford sought colonial support for the agreement as it stood.¹⁰³ On the 14 September, he forwarded a circular to the Colonies detailing the arrangements and asking whether Walsham could 'be authorised to continue

¹⁰² CO/881/9/1/No.60/FO to CO, 31 August 1888 and Enclosure.

¹⁰³ CO/881/9/1/No.61/CO to FO, 31 August 1888.

negotiations on the basis ... sketched out'. Anticipating some resistance to the softer tonnage restrictions, he urged that this concession might be safely granted 'under proper precautions'. Having offered up various carrots, Knutsford now concluded with the stick. Whatever reservations the Colonies might have about the proposed arrangements, their own treasured example, the American treaty, was unlikely to ever be ratified.¹⁰⁴ After all the turmoil and struggle inspired by the Chinese question in Australia, the British Government had now put an imperial solution on the table. The Colonists' concerns had been taken to the centre of British relations with a foreign power, now it was up to them to decide if the result should be carried to fruition.

***Conclusion:
Two Alien Races, Two Totally Distinct Civilisations,
Meeting Each Other in a Continent to Which, Until the Other Day,
Both Were Equally Strangers***

As the proposal made its way to the Colonies, debate in London was already turning to the wider implications of the migration crisis that had dominated Anglo-Australian relations around the centenary of British settlement. From the end of August, the publication of a dedicated bluebook prompted renewed criticism in the British press of the Australians' apparent disregard for imperial interests.¹⁰⁵ In a letter to *The Times*, an anonymous correspondent again slammed the way the Chinese question 'had been bungled almost beyond belief in Sydney and London'. While Lord Salisbury could perhaps be forgiven, having simply made himself the 'conduit-pipe' for Australian views, Henry Parkes clearly deserved the blame for 'upset[ting] the apple-cart', ahead of American and British negotiations with China.¹⁰⁶ By appealing

¹⁰⁴ CO/881/9/1/No.69/Knutsford to the Australian Governors, 14 September 1888. The collapse of the treaty had been reported in *The Times*, 1 September 1888, p.12. Official confirmation arrived in London on the 5 September, FO/17/1702/317-350/Sackville-West to Salisbury, 5 September 1888.

¹⁰⁵ There had been some previous criticism in Parliament, HOC/vol.330/cc.73-74, 9 August 1888.

¹⁰⁶ *The Times*, 3 September 1888, p.8.

to the parochial chauvinisms of working-class voters, warned another feature in *The Times*, colonial leaders were ‘playing with rather dangerous weapons’. Australia was in danger of becoming a ‘paradise lost’.¹⁰⁷ The *Spectator*, meanwhile, drew on the Jewish parallel, which had surfaced periodically in attempts to explain the Australian crisis to British observers. Across ‘the Old World and the New World’ easier ‘intercommunication between peoples’ was inspiring fears of ‘an influx of foreigners’ and a belief in the immigrant ‘as a thief’.¹⁰⁸ By far the most eloquent coverage appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*. The Australian story, the *Guardian* argued, should be understood as emerging ‘from the contact of two alien races, two totally distinct civilisations, meeting each other in a continent to which, until the other day, both were equally strangers’. It was a narrative that had already touched Australia and the United States and which was inextricably linked to Western penetration into China. As ‘thousands of Chinese workers’ made their way to ‘the young colonies’, they had evoked a ‘feeling no less profound than that with which the Chinese at home so long opposed the entry of Europeans into their country’.¹⁰⁹

As Part Two of this thesis has sought to demonstrate, the crisis that grew up around the Chinese question in Australia in 1888 needs to be understood not only as a landmark in Australian national history, but as a significant moment in British imperial history as well. For much of the previous century, observers at the centre and at the antipodean fringes of the Empire had struggled to articulate visions of the relationship that might grow up between Britain, Australia and China. In some sense, 1888 needs to be read as the climax of those debates. Bound up with the issue of Chinese migration, were competing conceptions of the way in which that triangular

¹⁰⁷ *The Times*, 18 September 1888, p.9.

¹⁰⁸ *Spectator*, 6 October 1888, p.1351.

¹⁰⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1888, p.4.

relationship should grow and be managed. These in turn reflected back on very different ideas about the British Empire itself. Embedded in the crisis of 1888 were a series of rival assumptions about Anglo-Australian, Anglo-Chinese and Sino-Australian interaction; the ramifications of imperial treaties; the importance of maritime and commercial connections between British ports in Asia; Whitehall's management of foreign and colonial interests; the practical independence of colonial legislators; and colonial contributions to the framing of imperial policy. By the year's end, the traumatic events at the edges of Empire had inspired a rich political and popular discourse - extending across disparate branches of Britain's world-system - but focused on the centre, where they brought to the fore questions of race, migration and imperial and foreign relations.

These last three chapters have all sought to demonstrate the extent to which the Chinese migration crisis was shaped by the internal dynamics and external pressures acting upon Britain's imperial system. Moreover, they have endeavoured to shed new light on the extent to which British officials worked to solve what they conceived not only as an Australian issue, but as an inherently imperial problem. The Chinese question in Australia, as the *Guardian* observed, presented 'particular practical difficulties to English statesmen'. To the Official Mind the pressures and tensions stimulated by the Australians' response to China, were a reminder of the difficulty of balancing the conflicting demands of a multi-polar, diverse imperial system, increasingly buffeted by integrationist forces of nineteenth century globalisation. They provided a useful illustration, the *Guardian* reflected, of the 'great difficulty of managing from a common centre, as a single polity, the affairs of countries and

peoples so widely separated as those of Great Britain and her hugely scattered colonies and possessions'.¹¹⁰

As we have also seen, the events which transpired in Australia in 1888 were intricately connected with developments elsewhere. As previous scholars have emphasized, the influence of Californian perspectives on Chinese migration provided an essential reference point. The constant presence of the proposed Sino-American treaty in the minds of those British, colonial and Chinese representatives featured here, was just one indication of the extent to which the North American experience shaped the Australian. But traffic across the Pacific moved in both directions. The American press paid regular attention to the state of affairs in Australia, relating them to the United States' own internal struggles over the Chinese question. One notable article from San Francisco's *Daily Evening Bulletin* entitled 'What a British Colony Can Do', for instance, applauded London's willingness to assent to Parkes' NSW Bill, contrasting it with California's own frustrations with Washington. 'We do not appear to a very great advantage when placed in contrast with the Australians, in the matter of Chinese exclusion', ran the *Bulletin's* analysis, when 'a British Colony can have much more in its way in the management of its affairs than a sovereign American State'.¹¹¹ As we saw in Chapter Two, the correlation between British Colombian and Australian contexts also had a significant impact in terms of translating Chinese migration into an issue for British imperial policymakers. The connection between the treatment of Chinese in British settler colonies on the west coast of Canada and the east coast of Australia had raised particular concerns for Lew Tajen. The inter-dominion dimension to the Chinese question would remain an

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 21 July 1888, p.2.

important issue within British imperial affairs. By September of 1888, Canadian Privy Councillors were already writing to Parkes, thanking him for copies of the NSW legislation sent for their reference.¹¹²

There were also other intra-imperial elements to the Chinese migration crisis, which have been largely overlooked in previous studies. At Hong Kong, the behaviour by the Australian Governments had proved a bitter pill to swallow. In October, Governor Des Vœux again turned to Knutsford, forwarding messages from shipping operators seeking redress for the loss of the Chinese passenger trade. As ‘a very large amount of capital was invested’, he wrote, companies might have expected ‘due notice’ of any change in policy. The Governor also confessed a sense of a moral obligation to the Chinese passengers themselves. These ‘unfortunate people’ had incurred substantial losses thanks to the Australian’s arbitrary action. ‘I do not doubt’, he pointedly suggested, ‘that the Australian Governments, if applied to will deal with their case [for compensation] in a spirit of justice and liberality’.¹¹³ Similar despatches were forwarded to Ministers at Sydney and Melbourne.¹¹⁴ Having apparently received no response, the following February Des Vœux passed London another petition, this time from local merchants, urging the British Government to help secure the repeal of immigration restriction in the United States, Hawaii and Australia. Hong Kong was ‘vitaly connected with California and Australia’, ran the appeal, and their closure to Chinese migration would ‘bring unspeakable distress upon the [Colony’s] merchants’. Clearly frustrated at the Australian’s continuing disregard for Hong Kong’s interests, Des Vœux forwarded the memorial with the following bitter rejoinder:

¹¹² ML/HP/CY77/Vol.55/A935/Canadian Privy Council to Parkes, 8 September 1888.

¹¹³ CO/881/9/1/No.89/Des Vœux to Knutsford, 16 October 1888 and Enclosures.

¹¹⁴ CO/881/9/1/No.94/Knutsford to Carrington and Loch, 29 November 1888.

While I fully sympathise with the petitioners, and agree generally to the views which they express, I feel so strongly that no representation from me can have any effect in altering the policy objected to, that I see no advantage in entering upon a discussion of the subject.¹¹⁵

For the most part, his scepticism was well-founded. The Governor of Hong Kong, responded the Victorian authorities, was ‘altogether misinformed in this matter’. Claims for compensation would not ‘be entertained’.¹¹⁶ Again NSW proved more receptive to the commercial interests of a fellow British colony, expressing its willingness to consider requests found to be ‘valid and justifiable’.¹¹⁷ But overall, the Australians’ message to British shipowners and commercial interests at Hong Kong - that the Colonies’ determination on racial questions trumped their commercial and imperial sympathies - had been unequivocal. With the repulse of the *Afghan*, Victoria and NSW had taken the first decisive steps towards strangling Hong Kong’s Chinese passenger trade. From 8,705 in 1887-88, the combined number of arrivals for the two colonies had fallen to 688 by 1889-91.¹¹⁸

Another important voice of dissent coming from within the Empire had been the Chinese in Australia. Essential in bringing developments to the attention of the Qing authorities, a number of Australian Chinese also raised pertinent questions as to the Colonies’ treatment of their fellow Britons and of the subjects of friendly foreign power. Many of these protests appealed to British liberties and traditions. Perhaps the most elegant was that put forward by Melbourne’s Cheong Cheok Hong. In his ‘Chinese Remonstrance to the Parliament and People of Victoria’, Cheong put

¹¹⁵ CO/881/9/1/No.117 and Enclosure/Des Vœux to Knutsford, 15 February 1889.

¹¹⁶ CO/881/9/1/No.119/Loch to Knutsford and Enclosures, 15 February 1889.

¹¹⁷ CO/881/9/1/No.121/Carrington to Knutsford, 14 March 1889.

¹¹⁸ Appendix 2.

forward a series of arguments critiquing the model bill devised at the Australian Conference and imploring the Victorian Parliament not to act on its provisions. Framing the question in moral terms, Cheong turned to the statue of General Gordon, which was about to be unveiled in Melbourne:

We can conceive of his noble scorn of the language and proceedings of the past few months, and if it were possible for those silent lips of bronze to speak when the statue is erected, we believe they would utter a mighty protest against being placed in the midst of a people capable of enacting what some of its public men have proposed.

Barbarous and uncivilised, if the ‘passions and prejudice’ exhibited at the Sydney Conference were carried into law, they would mark an indelible stain on the Australian name’.¹¹⁹ Colonial authorities were not unmoved by these sorts of expressions, at least as they related to individuals deemed to have been suitably ‘civilised’ by periods of long residence in the Colonies.¹²⁰ But by the end of 1888, the potential difficulties inflicted on Chinese Australians had generally come to be viewed as a necessary corollary to enforcing a policy of exclusion.

The most neglected aspect of the 188 crisis has been the extent to which it touched Sino-British relations. As these Chapters have sought to demonstrate, from the point at which Lew became involved at the end of 1887, up until the negotiations of late-August the following year, Australian difficulties had been a recurrent theme in communications between British and Chinese officials. On both sides, the management of the issue highlighted divisions in imperial bureaucracy and inspired disagreement as to the ramifications of Australian behaviour upon the wider course of Anglo-Chinese relations. If Chinese interest had initially emerged from the Legation

¹¹⁹ NLA/Cheong Papers/MS.8625/‘Chinese Remonstrance to the Parliament and People of Victoria, 1888’.

¹²⁰ See for instance, ML/HP/CY36/Vol.4/A874/Petition, August 1888.

in London, by August it had become the focus of top level discussions. Above all, the agreement put forward by Walsham and Prince Ch'ing at the end of that dialogue seems most clearly designed as an attempt by both parties to neutralise the potential effects of the Australian situation upon their 'friendly relations' moving forward.

Here though, the prospects seemed increasingly doubtful. By the end of September there was still no word from Australia. When MPs contacted the CO to seek an update, staff simply replied: 'no settlement yet – negotiations in progress'.¹²¹ In the meantime, observers in London were increasingly critical of the way in which Australian sentiments had been elevated onto a level worthy of Anglo-Chinese diplomacy. In a private letter to Marquis Tseng, Halliday Macartney damned the Yamen's willingness to negotiate over the Colonists' anxieties. Holding out hope that the Australians would refuse the proposed arrangement and 'relieve the Yamen' from their 'mistake', he set the Australian episode (along with the American move to exclusion) against a backdrop of China's engagement with the Western Powers:

If foreign countries will not accord to Chinese subjects the same rights as they accord to Japanese, Malays, and the lowest specimens of the human race, let us protest against it; but never, never let it be said that we have consented to their being treated differently from the subjects of other countries. China will never receive the respect and consideration to which she is entitled until she makes it evident that she respects herself, and no nation will consider that she knows what becomes a great nation as long as her ministers set their signatures to such ignominious agreements as those that have recently been concluded at Washington and Peking.

The Yamen's efforts, Macartney added, were in sharp contrast to the 'success' which he and Lew had previously enjoyed.¹²² On the British side, there were also lingering doubts as to the wisdom of carrying Australian fears into an official dialogue with a

¹²¹ CO/201/608/21095, 6 November 1888; CO/201/608/23553, 28 November 1888.

¹²² Macartney to Tseng, 28 September 1888 quoted in Boulger, *Sir Halliday Macartney*, pp.437-439. Tseng later responded, blaming Australian and American hostility on the electoral cycle. Tseng to Macartney, 20 March 1889, quoted in *ibid.*, pp.439-445.

friendly power. Soon the FO was sending around copies of a report on the Chinese question prepared by E.H. Parker, a member of the British Consular Service in China. ‘The disturbing vision of unlimited Chinese immigration which appears to affect the imaginations of the Australians and Americans’, Parker had found after an extensive survey, ‘may be reduced on careful examination to comparatively and shadowy unsubstantial dimensions’. The report found that the threat of inundation had been overstated, while highlighting the contribution made by Chinese migrants throughout Asia. If a country like Siam could sustain a large Chinese population, Parker argued, ‘surely, great European states like Australia need not shrink’ from the prospect.¹²³

As we shall see in the following chapter, Australian hostility to Chinese migrants would remain a feature of Sino-British relations into the 1890s. Whatever impact the success of the Walsham-Ch’ing proposals might have had on that subsequent history, however, by November 1888 it was becoming clear that a deal was unlikely. As Australian responses began filtering back, it was obvious that Knutsford’s hope - that imperial measures might trump local restrictions - was being turned on its head. While Tasmania remained committed to a treaty, most of the other Colonies were now content to rely on their own migration policies.¹²⁴ Victoria and South Australia cabled that they were ‘under obligation’ to pass Chinese Bills based on the resolutions of the Conference.¹²⁵ Western Australia and New Zealand suggested their ‘existing laws ... respecting Chinese Immigration ... [were] sufficient at present’.¹²⁶

¹²³ CO/881/9/1/No.95/FO to CO, 3 December 1888 and Enclosure. The CO forwarded the report to Australia, CO/881/9/1/No.106/CO to FO, 17 January 1889.

¹²⁴ CO 881/9/1/No.88[Telegraphic]/Hamilton to Knutsford, 19 November 1888.

¹²⁵ CO/881/9/1/No.85[Telegraphic]/Loch to Knutsford, 14 November 1888. Gillies apparently retained ‘great hopes’ that a treaty might be secured as well. On the lengthy debate at Adelaide, Griffiths, ‘White Australia’, pp.516-534.

¹²⁶ CO/881/9/1/No.87[Telegraphic]/Broome to Knutsford, 19 November 1888. Knutsford had given New Zealand the option to opt in to an Australian agreement if they so desired. Wellington resolved to rely on its own legislation, passed ahead of the Conference.

Queensland meanwhile took even more drastic measures, adding new punitive features to its own Bill, which (after being reserved by the Governor) would be eventually passed the following year.¹²⁷ NSW was simply silent. Having succeeded in dictating terms for much of the crisis, Parkes now ignored calls to bring his legislation into line with the Conference and refused to provide any response to the treaty.¹²⁸ Some seventeen months after his initial despatch, Knutsford would still be chasing a reply from Sydney.¹²⁹

As the treaty fell away, the Colonists set about strengthening their own white walls against Chinese migration. One hundred years after European settlement, the collision between the British and Chinese Empires in Australia had taken a distinctive turn. From here on, British officials would be far more wary when it came to dealing with the imperial implications of the Chinese question in Australia. From an Anglo-Australian perspective, arguably the most significant feature of the migration crisis had been the British attempt to allow the Colonies a greater say in the framing of imperial policy, where it affected their own perceived foreign interest. It was perhaps a sign of the Colonies' new determination on that front that Quong Tart proceeded to Hong Kong and Canton to explain the Australian position to local authorities. Carrying numerous letters of recommendation (including one from Parkes) his public suggestions that the Chinese population in Australia had reached its optimal level raised suspicions that he had been despatched by colonial authorities. While the characterisation of Quong as an agent seems a step too far (he was also critical of anti-Chinese legislation) his presence was at least encouraged by Australian leaders to

¹²⁷ On Knutsford's anxieties over the severity of the Queensland Bill, CO/881/9/14.

¹²⁸ Willard, *White Australia Policy*, p.93.

¹²⁹ CO/881/9/14/No.7[Telegraphic]/Knutsford to Carrington and Onslow, 29 March 1890. New Zealand had not responded either, owing in that case to a change in Governor.

ensure the ‘Australian’ as well as ‘the Chinese side of the Question’ was well-known beyond the Antipodes.¹³⁰ As we shall see in Part Three, as questions over Britain’s future in China began to loom larger on the horizon, the antipodean perspectives entrenched during the crisis of 1888 retained their imperial significance.

¹³⁰ ML/QT/5094/1/2/Letter of introduction, 7 November 1888; *The Times*, 23 February 1889, p.16; *Manchester Guardian*, 12 February 1889, p.5.

Part Three

How This New Imperialism Reacts Upon the Relations Between Great Britain and her Self-Governing Colonies

In 1902, the British radical J.A. Hobson published his influential critique of the economic foundations and future trajectory of Western imperialism. The late-Victorian age, Hobson famously argued, had witnessed the birth of a new imperial era. Across Africa and Asia, ‘earth hunger and a scramble for markets’ were driving the European Powers and the United States into ever-more intense competition. At the wheel were the West’s moneyed and political elites, who dictated public policy for their own material advantage. As domestic economic development and the pursuit of free trade were overshadowed by the quest for controlled markets and investment opportunities overseas, geographical and racial boundaries were being transcended. Nowhere was this seismic shift more evident than in the scramble for China. It was here that ‘the spirit and methods’ of Western imperialism faced their most ‘crucial test’. As the industrialised nations of the West and Japan jockeyed for position along the China Coast, commercial rivalries, diplomatic tensions and racial antagonism were all coming to the fore.¹

On its publication *Imperialism* evoked a rather lukewarm response. Even in liberal circles Hobson’s attack on empire seemed to fall like a seed ‘on rather stony ground’.² While Lenin later lauded its ‘very good and comprehensive description’ of the economic and political features of the ‘highest stage of capitalism’, subsequent scholars have challenged Hobson’s analysis, most notably in relation to his

¹ J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism* (1902), pp.11-12.

² P. Cain, *Hobson and Imperialism* (Oxford, 2002), p.161.

suggestion of a qualitative change between mid and late-Victorian expansion.³ What remains most intriguing about Hobson's work from the point of view of the present study, is his attempt to understand the possible connections between imperial expansion in the Far East and the future of Greater Britain. Hobson's thoughts on the self-governing colonies have attracted 'the least' attention amongst scholars.⁴ Throughout his book, however, he was keen to emphasize the difference between the new imperialism he saw in China and the spirit of colonialism, that 'natural outflow of nationality', which underpinned Britain's white settler empire in Canada and Australasia. While the British position in the Far East centred around 'a certain little clique of private profit mongers', the Dominion and the Antipodean Colonies were British communities – bound to the Mother Country by ties of race, language, culture and institution.⁵ Whether these connections would endure, or even become more closely cemented through some formal imperial federation would depend upon the growth of national sentiments in the settler colonies and the strength of interests 'alien from and conflicting with those of the mother nation'.⁶ Here, the most pressing question was the impact of the new imperialism in Asia and Africa on the relations between Great and Greater Britain. While tariff reform and the promise of support for their own territorial aspirations might tempt the colonies towards a closer union, they

³ Debate centres on Hobson's failure to consider the importance of informal empire, Robinson and Gallagher, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade'; Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians'. Cain and Hopkins draw rather more inspiration from Hobson's work. Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, pp.16-17. For Lenin's debt to Hobson, V.I. Lenin, 'Preface to the French and German Editions', *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (St Petersburg, 1917). Available online at *Marxist's Internet Archive* [website], <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>>, accessed 10 June 2011.

⁴ Cain, *Hobson and Imperialism*, p.141; J.C. Wood, 'J.A. Hobson and British Imperialism', *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 42:4 (1983), 483-500.

⁵ Hobson, *Imperialism*, p.333.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.4.

were bound to be wary of the costs and perils of continued British expansion and to resist any further direction from London.⁷

The third section of this thesis sets out to bring together the histories of the Australian and the Far Eastern branches of the British Empire at the end of the Victorian era.

Taking a leaf from Hobson, and other contemporary observers, it attempts to reintegrate two of the most prominent issues within British imperial affairs around the turn-of-the-twentieth century. The first was the search for an appropriate response to the Qing Empire's apparently terminal decline and China's possible dismemberment by rival foreign powers. The second was the question of imperial unity and whether Britain might achieve some closer political and military co-ordination with the colonies of white settlement. From the early 1890s, both questions had significant ramifications across the Pacific, but also, crucially at the imperial centre.

Continuing the story of the imperial significance of Australian engagement with China, the following two chapters explore the interconnection between Britain's Far Eastern and Australian interests in relation to migration, foreign policy, trade and defence. Chapter Six focuses on Australia's place within diplomatic and academic discourse over the future of British interests in China and, inverting the lens, on the importance of China in shaping contemporaneous discussions on imperial unity and the future of Greater Britain. Chapter Seven traces these themes through to the early Edwardian-era, focusing particularly on the Australian contribution to the Boxer War; White Australia's place in the Pacific; and finally, the re-importation of colonial ideas on race and migration into Britain itself. Across both chapters, these popular and

⁷ *ibid.*

official debates are set against the dramatic backdrop of events that pulled and pushed at the British Empire's core and periphery and that drove British imperialists and their critics to confront new questions and search for new answers, in order to make sense of a rapidly changing world scene.

Chapter Six

The Interest of Our Colonies Seems to Have Been Largely Overlooked: Australia and the Problems of the Far East

On the 9 March 1898, an audience gathered at the United Services Institute in London for a lecture by the former *Times* correspondent and China expert, Archibald Colquhoun, billed ‘The Chinese Question: How it May Affect Our Imperial Interests’.¹ Colquhoun’s title spoke to an established tradition of writing about China. Negotiating the ebbs and flows of Chinese engagement with the international community in the decades after the Opium Wars, foreign observers had often tended to conceptualise issues in Sino-Western relations as part of an overarching ‘China’, ‘Chinese’ or ‘Far Eastern’ question. By the 1890s the technique had become ubiquitous. As foreign competition and Manchu decline focussed attention on the future of the Qing Empire, the Chinese question provided a shared prism for considering the multiplicity of policy challenges and commercial and investment opportunities that China presented.² It covered ‘so wide a field’ and was ‘so many sided’, Colquhoun began, that the most one could do was to illuminate its predominant features, stimulate debate and ‘arouse public attention to the critical position of British interests in the Far East’.

As Otte has shown in his recent study, ‘China’s future development, indeed survival was the most complex problem facing the Great Powers outside Europe’ during the

¹ CUL/Royal Commonwealth Society Archive/RCS.Case.b.17/Pamphlet: A. Colquhoun, ‘The Chinese Question: How it May Affect Our Imperial Interests’, London, 1898. Subsequent quotes from this source.

² We might locate this development within a longer intellectual tradition, where perceptions of China were reshaped to accommodate geo-political change and the West’s ‘needs, preoccupations and sense of itself’. D. Kerr and J. Kuehn, ‘Introduction’ in D. Kerr and J. Kuehn (eds.) *A Century of Travels in China* (Hong Kong, 2007), p.3; Hevia, *English Lessons*, pp.1-27; C. Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, pp.43-65.

penultimate decade of the long-nineteenth century.³ To a number of late-Victorians, it appeared as if the world was tilting on its axis, tipping towards the east. ‘The shifting of the political centre of gravity’, observed Colquhoun, ‘the opening of a new and larger Eastern question’. The rumblings were felt both along the China Coast and in the European capitals. After decades of struggling uphill from their treaty-port toeholds for painfully modest gains, now the foreign devils seemed to occupy the higher ground, looking down over a vast and open field, accessible and ripe for exploitation. With the opening of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894, ‘everything accelerated’ as private interests and foreign governments began to pour on more pressure in the race to extract commercial and territorial advantages.⁴ The great external stress test of Manchu authority was under way. The shockwaves from China had a particular resonance in Britain. Hopelessly entangled with the diplomatic relations of the Continental Powers, Far Eastern tensions threatened the dual foundations of British imperial power in Europe and in India.⁵ China’s future, wrote Lord Rosebery in 1895, ‘seemed pregnant with possibilities of a disastrous kind: and it might result in an Armageddon between the European Powers struggling for the ruins of the Chinese Empire’.⁶

China’s prominence within international affairs (and the pervading uncertainty as to her future) sparked a corresponding explosion in the number of publications on Sino-Western relations after 1890. As Hevia has shown, British imperialism in the Far East ‘was always [about] more than guns and goods’. Imperialism and colonialism were

³ Otte, *The China Question*, p.1.

⁴ Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, pp.323-336.

⁵ Otte, *The China Question*, pp.4-5.

⁶ Rosebery to Cromer, 22 April 1895, quoted in *ibid.*, p.1.

‘pedagogical processes ... made up of teaching and learning by gun and pen’.⁷ A growing number of British commentators devoted their attention to better understanding their Empire’s changing relationship with China. In *The Real Chinese Question* (1901) the retired American diplomat Chester Holcombe observed:

The shelves are full of books - notably English - telling with great detail and much ingenuity what China wants, what China desires, and what is best for China, with the sole object of promoting the interests of British commerce, and thwarting the possible designs of Russia, and every other power.⁸

But Holcombe’s appraisal implied a false sense of cohesion. At home and abroad, British China experts engaged each other in a scramble for Eastern knowledge and official influence.⁹ ‘There are an infinite number of books ... on Chinese subjects but ... few which can be recommended’, wrote the former Consul Chaloner Alabaster to Richard Simpson Gundry, General Secretary of the British China Association, in the mid-1890s. Even the best could be ‘attacked furiously’ by ‘idiots who know nothing ... push[ing] themselves forward as authorities’.¹⁰ In various posts springing up across China, British journalists sought to extract privileges from officials and foreign legations and to secure most favoured agent status. At home, their editors in Fleet Street worked to prise open the minds of Her Majesty’s Government and to awaken the sleeping population. ‘Apathy proceeds doubtless from ignorance’, wrote *The Times*’ Donald Mackenzie Wallace with regards to British policy in China, ‘we are doing what we can to enlighten the British public on the subject’.¹¹

Colquhoun’s lecture opens a window to a number of the themes and perspectives that predominated in this noisy intellectual world. Across a wide-ranging paper, he

⁷ Hevia, *English Lessons*, pp.3-4.

⁸ C. Holcombe, *The Real Chinese Question* (1901), p.v.

⁹ Colquhoun’s analysis attracted its own criticism, *The Times*, 12 April 1898, p.6. The competitive nature of writing on China is well-documented in NLS/Colquhoun Papers/MS.9996.

¹⁰ CUL/Gundry Papers/Add.MS 9269/Bundle-3/9/Alabaster to Gundry, 1895.

¹¹ TNL/Foreign Editor’s Letterbooks/Book-3/Wallace to Colquhoun, 11 August 1897.

anchored his arguments around a catalogue of concerns long-familiar to British merchants in the East and to Old China Hands at home.¹² Britain was an Asiatic Power, though the fact was scarcely recognised; she had won exclusive concessions from China, only to see that advantage frittered away by a weak and confused foreign policy; she had become over-reliant on regional co-operation, in a world of Asiatic despotism and diplomatic manipulation; and she had neglected the Pacific in favour of the foolhardy pursuit of empire in Central Africa. China's fate, Colquhoun hammered, was intricately linked to Britain's domestic welfare and her international prestige. The Middle Kingdom represented 'a virgin field' for British products and investment, while the 'Great Game' with Russia looked likely to reach its climax in the Eastern Seas. These facts 'ought to be written up in every newspaper office in the country, in every politician's study'. In response, Colquhoun called for national regeneration and a new awareness of the British stake in China. He concluded by reminding his audience that the Chinese question was, after all, an imperial question:

The interest of our Colonies seems to have been largely overlooked ... It may be safely predicted that the Australians and Canadians will bitterly resent the neglect of their obvious interests. Through Canada lies the All-British Route to the Far East. The natural destiny of Australasia is to dominate the Pacific, and our Colonial kinsmen rightly look to us to see that the vast trading regions of China and Japan are kept open.

When the speaker sat down others rose to respond. The comments from the floor touched on some of the key contemporary debates over the future of Britain in China and pointed to the circles in which they were taking place. The first to their feet was William Des Vœux. Well aware of the pressures confronting British diplomats in the Far East, the now-retired Governor of Hong Kong congratulated Colquhoun on his effort to 'draw public attention to the enormous value' of Anglo-Chinese trade and

¹² Pelcovits, *Old China Hands*, pp.vi-vii.

seconded the call for a more coherent and forward-looking foreign policy. He was followed by the travel writer, Isabella Bishop (nee Bird) whose popular accounts of exotic overseas locations had captured the imagination of British readers. She too commended Colquhoun's paper and expressed her regret at the 'policy of drift' that had led to the 'partial effacement of England' in Asia.¹³ A more cautious response came from the Conservative MP, J.M. MacLean, who pointed to the division between official and mercantile opinion.¹⁴ The 'great difficulty' facing the Salisbury Government, MacLean warned, was 'restrain[ing] the impatience' of those who had tired 'of the persistent and organised persecution' of British interests overseas. Finally discussion shifted to the Colonies. Pointing to the map, Captain J.R. Colomb, an expert on imperial defence, rounded on Colquhoun's suggestion that Australia's interests were being somehow neglected. If it was Australia's 'natural destiny to dominate the Pacific', he asked, 'was she preparing for it?' Having failed to make adequate contribution to the Empire's Pacific forces, the Australians were 'overlooking their own interests and their own duties' in Asia.¹⁵ Called upon to offer an Australian perspective, the shipowner James Huddert (who had spent several years in the Colonies) expressed his belief in their loyalty, the potential of their trade with Asia and their willingness to join with their Anglo-Saxon brethren in resolving 'the perplexing question of China'. 'It is a matter of very great importance, and always must be to Australia', Huddert concluded, 'to see that the hands of British statesmen are assisted in taking a bold policy on a question such as China'.

¹³ Bird had first travelled to China in 1878 and published chapters on Hong Kong and Canton in I. Bird, *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (New York, 1883).

¹⁴ Pelcovits has shown that 'throughout the half-century following the Treaty of Tientsin, merchants and officials were consistently and with few exceptions on opposite sides of the fence on most issues raised in Anglo-Chinese relations'. Pelcovits, *Old China Hands*, p.ix. This realisation displaced an earlier consensus that 'commercial interests cum economic pressure at home determined foreign policy in the China seas'. For example, T.W. Overlach, *Foreign Financial Control in China* (1921), pp.45-46.

¹⁵ As early as 1880, Colomb had argued that there was 'no such thing as a distinction between Imperial and Colonial responsibility' in defence. J.C.R. Colomb, *The Defence of Great and Greater Britain* (1880), pp.116-118.

As we saw in the introduction to this study, over the last fifteen years our understanding of the history of Anglo-Chinese relations and the political and cultural significance of Britain's connections to the Far East have been profoundly enriched. The place of Britain's settler colonies within this story has attracted less attention. National and regional histories of white racism and the experiences of diaspora communities, together with comparative and transnational studies of migration networks and racial discourse, have all helped to illuminate the dynamics of engagement between white-settler communities in the Pacific and the Chinese Overseas. The impact of that engagement on British efforts to understand and respond to the course of events in China remains less clear. Likewise, the impact of the scramble for Empire in the East upon Anglo-colonial relations remains a topic in need of further historical investigation. This chapter sets out to consider the resonance of Australian perspectives on China within British diplomatic, scholarly and commercial discourse during the first half of the 1890s. In doing so it begins an investigation (carried on in Chapter Seven) of Colquhoun's suggestion that the Colonies had a significant, if often overlooked, role to play in the wider imperial drama that was coming together in East Asia during the last decade of the nineteenth century. From the outset, it is important to note that colonial perspectives were of course only ever one of a number of factors that might break through and colour British thinking on China and imperial policy. But, at particular times and in particular contexts, break through they did, adding an antipodean voice to the escalating debates over the Chinese question and its implications for Britain's imperial future.

Good Manners are not Among the Products of the Antipodes

At the end of 1888, as the crisis over Chinese migration to Australia had begun to abate, the *NCH* reflected on its possible future ramifications:

We imagine that there is nothing that both England and China would like better than to leave Australia alone in the matter. China has her *amour propre* to consider, but beyond that her government cares nothing about the question, as England's *role* now is to accept the dictation of the Colonies with bated breath, she would rather be left out of the question.¹⁶

It was a sentiment shared by a number of British statesmen and commentators, not least Lord Salisbury. Salisbury had long professed a limited interest in the settler empire, noting at one stage that it took 'the courage of a literary martyr, or the despair of a seaside lodger, to even open a book of colonial facts'.¹⁷ For the Prime Minister, the events of 1888 had only served to underline Australians' obsession with their own parochial anxieties, their inability to grasp the nuances of foreign diplomacy and their disregard for the Empire's wider interests. 'Good manners are not among the products of the Antipodes', he thundered as the frustration mounted, 'and any nation that has intercourse with the Australians is pretty sure to fall foul of us in consequence'.¹⁸ Salisbury must have felt considerable relief when a relative calm settled around the migration issue. In March 1891, in response to the plight of a passenger aboard the *Afghan*, the Privy Council in London ruled that foreign aliens could not claim the legal right to enter British territories. The decision confirmed (at least in practical terms) the Colonies right to employ local methods of Chinese exclusion.¹⁹ Though

¹⁶ *NCH*, 21 December 1888, p.674.

¹⁷ Quoted in A. Roberts, *Salisbury* (1999), pp.42-43.

¹⁸ HH/LS/A/vol.59/Salisbury to Lytton, 25 October 1888. NSW had become involved in another diplomatic dispute when Adrien Loir, nephew of the French Scientist Louis Pasteur, was allegedly mistreated by colonial authorities. Loir had travelled to Australia on Pasteur's behalf, as part of an international competition to find a solution to Australia's rabbit plague.

¹⁹ 'Musgrove vs. Chun Teeong Toy', *Law Reports: Privy Council Appeal Cases, 1891*, 13, 14, 19 November 1890 and 18 March 1891, pp.272-283. For press analysis, *The Times*, 19 March 1891, p.9; *Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1891, p.5. The Privy Council Appeal had been launched by the Victorian Government, after its own Supreme Court had ruled that Chun Teeong Toy should not have been refused permission to land.

encouraging responses had been received from Australia in relation to the Yamen's proposals for limiting emigration, the Chinese Legation in London had made little attempt to push negotiations forward. Understandably reluctant to stir up matters any further, the British Government had left plans for an agreement over Australia to wither on the vine.

In July 1891, however, the issue was put back on the table by the new Chinese Minister in London Sieh Tajen.²⁰ In a letter that recalled earlier protests from the Legation, Sieh pointed to the exceptional treatment of Chinese migrants in British Columbia and Australia. While acknowledging the Colonies' right to restrict alien immigration, Sieh lambasted colonial measures as 'incompatible with the dignity of China' and 'a standing-bar to the growth of that "entente-cordiale" between the people of the two empires'. Particularly grating was British Columbia's reluctance to treat Japanese migrants with the same contempt, in light of the 'international complications' that might eventuate. The letter closed with a loosely veiled threat. The considerable trading advantages the Colonies enjoyed, Sieh warned, might be called into question if they failed to meet 'the obligations which treaty and international comity impose on them as well as the mother country'.²¹

A prominent scholar who had taken a keen interest in administrative reform, Sieh's appointment as Ambassador to England, France, Belgium and Italy, reflected the Qing's growing awareness of the need for competent international representation. 'The new minister ... is an intelligent and progressive man', wrote Robert Hart, but 'the reverse of polished ... and I daresay he'll grow conceited inhaling the atmosphere

²⁰ The Chinese Minister's name is also rendered Hsieh Fucheng. In pinyin, Xue Fucheng.

²¹ FO/17/1704/22-24/Sieh to Salisbury, 31 July 1891.

of court life'.²² Whether conceited or not, Sieh proved determined in his outlook and his methods. On one occasion, when he fell into dispute with the FO, officials were warned he might call 'three or four times each day, and perhaps even six or seven times' until the problem was resolved.²³ During four years service in Europe, Sieh worked vigorously to restore China's international prestige and to push for the recognition of her legal rights. He found the diplomatic environment conducive to his efforts. British and French officials (he noted in his diary) 'no longer regard[ed] China with utter contempt' and 'improving relations' had become 'a favourite subject of conversation'.²⁴

To the proud and ambitious Sieh Tajen, the condition of many of his countrymen abroad was a stark reminder of China's past failures and of her continuing inability to command the respect of the Great Powers. With limited support from Peking, Sieh devoted considerable time to securing improved protection for Chinese within the British Empire, most notably by encouraging London to support the expansion of China's consular network in British jurisdictions. Underpinning these efforts was a belief that outward expansion presented a panacea for China's recent humiliation and decline. In his European diary, Sieh blamed a misunderstanding of classical texts for discouraging maritime exploration and nurturing insular preoccupations. It was this attitude, he wrote, that had contributed to decrepit governance, foreign invasion and domestic overpopulation and which had left those Chinese who had ventured abroad hopelessly exposed to local chauvinisms. In response, Sieh dreamt of a world in which increasing numbers of labourers would look beyond China's borders. Here

²² Hart to Campbell, 6 April 1890, *ACIMC*, ii, 699.

²³ Hsieh Fucheng [Sieh Tajen], *The European Diary of Hsieh Fucheng* (trans. H. Hsieh Chien) (New York, 1993), 16 August 1890, p.53. Hereafter, 'Diary'.

²⁴ Diary, 5 June 1890, pp.34-35.

mass emigration and the building of ‘a new China outside of Chinese territory’, would relieve population pressure at home, generate vast new wealth and put an end to the long and tragic chain of disasters that had plagued the Chinese people for generations. After conducting ‘a painstaking study of world geography’, Sieh came to the conclusion that this grand venture should be focussed ‘in some underdeveloped region’ of the globe (preferably in Latin America). There the Chinese would settle and flourish, free of the indignities they had recently suffered ‘in both Old Gold Mountain in the United States and New Gold Mountain in Australia’.²⁵

By the 1890s, it was well known that few in the New Gold Mountain (or in any of the Anglophone settler societies of the Pacific Rim) shared Sieh’s views on Chinese migration. Had the Chinese Minister’s thoughts been widely known, they might well have been enough to trigger a renewed bout of what Alfred Deakin had called the ‘Yellow Agony’.²⁶ Recent history offered little to suggest that any quest to improve the situation of Chinese Overseas might find much support in the Antipodes. Nonetheless, Sieh’s diary records a number of experiences that appear to have conspired to bring the Australians and their Chinese question to the Minister’s attention. Sieh had travelled to Europe via Hong Kong and Singapore. There he became convinced of the need for improved consular representation and the assertion of China’s ‘legal rights as a nation’. At the entrance to the Red Sea, he was briefed on American Sinophobia by one of his aides (who had served as Chinese Consul at San Francisco) and pondered whether ‘the recent rapid increase of the Chinese population in Australia’, might prompt the British to ‘take the same measures to curb the Chinese

²⁵ Diary, 12 August 1890, pp.50-51; 16 January 1891, pp.64-65; 1 August 1891, p.77; 29 June 1892, pp.130-131.

²⁶ BL/CWD/Add.MS.43877/Deakin to Dilke, 11 December 1891.

population explosion there'.²⁷ The Australian and Californian contexts were again conflated by the Belgian diplomat Lambermont. After a dinner with Leopold II, Sieh was warned that 'the natives of both Old Gold Mountain and New Gold Mountain' were 'growing restless'. In time, the United States and Britain might lose control of both territories, leaving China to confront two 'new nations ... which may prove troublesome'. After meeting Lew Tajen at Paris, Sieh familiarised himself with the Legation archives in London. He came across the report of the Chinese Commissioners, details of Australian poll-taxes and notes on the need for a consulate at Sydney. In June 1891, his interest appears to have crystallised when he was informed by Peking that nothing had been heard regarding the proposals made by John Walsham and the Yamen almost three years earlier.²⁸

While Lew Tajen's intervention on the treatment of Chinese in Australia and Canada has attracted significant attention, Sieh's efforts are less well known. This is hardly surprising as he appears to have had little success in lobbying the British Government on the issue. If Sieh's protests were less notable in terms of their impact, however, they shed considerable light on the changing context within which the Chinese migration question had to be managed in the early-1890s. In 1891, anti-foreign sentiment in China had found expression in a series of violent outbreaks against European missionaries in towns along the Yangtze.²⁹ Though primarily directed against French and German nationals, Britain joined the other powers to press the Yamen and Chinese Ministers abroad for the protection of foreigners and the punishment of those responsible. While the riots were eventually suppressed, the

²⁷ Diary, 14 January 1890, p.4; 22 January 1890, p.7; 8 February 1890, p.9. Sieh was of course mistaken about the 'population explosion' - Appendix 2.

²⁸ Diary, 19 February 1890, p.10; 28 April 1890, pp.25-26; 25 June 1890, p.41; 10 June 1891, p.75.

²⁹ On the riots, E.S. Wehrle, *Britain, China and the Antimissionary Riots, 1891-1900* (Minneapolis, 1966). On anti-missionary sentiment, P.A. Cohen, *China and Christianity* (Cambridge MA, 1963).

deployment of European gunboats and the issuing of a British military directive authorising marines to engage Chinese mobs, underlined the seriousness of the situation.³⁰ It was against this backdrop, when diplomatic and public attention in Britain was focussed on the plight of the missionaries, that the Chinese Legation chose to lob their concerns over Australian and Canadian legislation back onto Salisbury's desk.

The timing was not lost on the FO. 'The Chinese have returned to the charge on this question', noted one official. The issue was whether Britain 'should reopen the [Australian treaty] negotiations in view of the present state of affairs in China'. A debate on the treatment of Chinese in the Colonies, just as Britain was putting pressure on Peking to protect Europeans in China, risked putting the Government in a rather awkward position. Determined to hold Peking to account over the authorities' handling of the Yangtze violence, the last thing British officials needed was for the issue to become in any way associated with their own failure to protect Chinese interests in relation to Australia and Canada. The FO responded by playing for time and informed the Chinese Minister that the Government would have to consult further with its colonies.³¹

Whatever little enthusiasm there might have been in Whitehall for revisiting the migration question in the shadow of the Yangtze Riots was in any case negated by the attitude of NSW. As we saw above, the Parkes Ministry had declined to even respond to a CO circular outlining the 1888 proposals. Apparently content with the force of local measures, there was little to suggest that Sydney might now be willing to act at

³⁰ Wehrle, *The Antimissionary Riots*, pp.19-44.

³¹ FO/17/1704/26-27, 31 July 1891.

the behest of officials in London.³² In a private letter to Rosebery, Lord Carrington had professed his hope that ‘the good deal of indignation [in Britain] over the Chinese business’ might be overcome.³³ But on his return to England, the former Governor continued to speak publically on the growth of Australia’s national self-consciousness, which was being strengthened by ‘pressure from without, as in the Chinese question’ and ‘relations with the mother country, as in the case of New Guinea’.³⁴ It was a sentiment immortalised by Henry Parkes in his soon to be published *Fifty Years of Australian History* (1892).³⁵ ‘It is very self-satisfactory for persons who know nothing of the effects of Chinese immigration to speak of the illiberality of stringent legislation’, reflected the aging colonial statesman, but those who saw the ‘symptoms around them’ could not be indifferent. Britain must be wary of interfering with the ‘inalienable rights and liberties’ of her self-governing colonies, particularly ‘the right of self-preservation from a great threatening evil’.³⁶

When the CO sent a fresh reminder to Sydney asking for comments on the proposed treaty conditions, again it elicited no response. Without NSW, the British Government had little prospect of finding a method of exclusion mutually acceptable to the Australians and the Chinese. ‘I am a little puzzled as to know what to do about this’, mused Salisbury. The Prime Minister speculated, as he had in 1888, whether some more detailed agreement might be reached for stopping passengers at Hong Kong and Singapore, thereby alleviating the need for colonial laws singling out the ‘Chinese by name’. But in contrast to his earlier efforts to negotiate a grand bargain

³² Coghlan and Ewing, *The Progress of Australasia*, p.98.

³³ NLS/LR/MS.10008/Carrington to Rosebery, 25 November 1888.

³⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 27 January 1891, p.5.

³⁵ Parkes described the book as a ‘story of Australian progress so far as I have been an actor and promoter of it’. BL/CWD/Add.MS.43877/Parkes to Dilke, 17 July 1892.

³⁶ Parkes, *Fifty Years*, ii, 57-58, 230.

between diplomatic and colonial interests, now Salisbury appeared most anxious that the issue simply remain inconspicuous. He warned against the ‘natural course’ of publishing Sieh’s note in the official bluebook, which would necessitate the inclusion ‘of [a number of] Australian Acts, which would hurt the feelings of the Chinese still more’.³⁷ Though he met Sieh twice in early-1892, the Prime Minister appears to have managed to avoid the subject altogether.³⁸ When the Chinese Minister reiterated his protests in light of proposed amendments to Canada’s *Chinese Immigration Act* (1886) Salisbury restricted himself to suggesting that the Dominion ‘be cautioned’ that any further legislation might arouse ‘strong protests on the part of the Chinese Government’.³⁹

With little room to manoeuvre on the colonial front, the Government’s response to the Chinese question in Australia and Canada now rested on acknowledging the Legation’s protests, while lowering expectations that London might be willing to do anything more. The ultimate aim was to ensure that the migration issue was prevented from spilling over into other aspects of Sino-British relations. Following the return of the Liberals, Sieh continued to push his views (with particular reference to Canada) through correspondence and in person, but he received little by way of encouragement.⁴⁰ In December 1892, responding to the now familiar arguments emerging from the Legation, the FO simply forwarded a series of documents from Canada outlining equally familiar reasons for colonial hostility towards the Chinese. It was hoped, wrote the FO, that ‘these explanations and assurances’, would satisfy the Chinese Government as to why British colonists brought restrictive measures and

³⁷ FO/17/1704/91-92, undated.

³⁸ Diary, 19 January 1892, p.103; 24 January 1892, pp.104-105.

³⁹ FO/17/1704/75-76/FO to CO, 26 April 1892.

⁴⁰ FO/17/1704/123-126/Sieh to Rosebery, 31 October 1892

show that they were implemented without ‘any unfriendly intention to China’. The message, however, was mixed to say the least. Included in the papers was a declaration from the Dominion Trades and Labour Congress stressing that ‘Chinese immigration is still the burning question of the day; and the more we see of them the more we are convinced of the great curse they are to this country’.⁴¹

Underpinning the Government’s dismissive approach to the protest, was an assumption that Sieh’s main reason for dragging up colonial legislation, was to blunt British demands over the treatment of Europeans in China. This suggestion was reinforced when a cable arrived from Peking. Since discussions over Australia had broken off in late-1888, John Walsham wrote, there had ‘not been the slightest allusion on the part of the [Chinese] Ministers of the Emigration controversy ... or the invidious position assigned to the Chinese in Australia through the Legislative Acts of the several Colonial Governments’.⁴² The message raised the possibility that the Chinese Legation might once again be acting under its own auspices.

As we saw above, Sieh’s belief in the need to improve the position of Chinese Overseas was no doubt genuine. Anti-foreign violence in China, though, was also a ‘perpetual thorn’ in the Chinese Minister’s side, undermining his efforts to assert China’s position on a range of other issues.⁴³ However deeply Sieh empathised with the plight of the Chinese Overseas, his diary contains a number of entries that suggest he was also attempting to use the migration question as a smokescreen to buy time and deflect diplomatic pressure over the Yangtze violence. Moreover, the diary gives

⁴¹ FO/17/1704/130, 10 November 1892; FO 17/1704/152-162/FO to Sieh and Enclosures, 19 June 1893.

⁴² FO/17/1704/41-43/Walsham to Salisbury, 31 July 1891.

⁴³ D. Howland, ‘Introduction’ in Diary, p.xix. At one stage there was a suggestion that Sieh’s own son might be involved in the rioting – the suggestion proved false. *The Times*, 15 September 1891, p.3.

the clear impression that he was doing so at the behest of the Chinese Government.⁴⁴ On the 29 May 1891, Sieh had received a cable from Peking informing him that the Europeans had ‘banded together and lodged a strong protest’ over the failure of China’s efforts to stamp out the anti-foreign riots.⁴⁵ It was just over a week later (after a silence of almost three years) that the Yamen wrote detailing the hardships endured by Chinese in Australia and calling attention to the British Government’s failure to follow up treaty negotiations.⁴⁶ The likelihood that these two events were connected is supported by Sieh’s contemporaneous engagement with the French Foreign Office. On the 11 June 1891, the French Consul in Shanghai had warned Peking that the harassment of foreigners ‘endanger[ed] the reputation of China on an international level’ and would result in the despatch of more Western gunboats.⁴⁷ The following day, Sieh was instructed by the Yamen to resume negotiations with Paris begun by Lew years earlier, ‘regarding the head tax levied on the Chinese in Saigon’.⁴⁸

By the early-1890s then, the Chinese question in Australia had threatened to become entangled with what was then the most pressing issue in Sino-British relations, the fallout from the Yangtze riots. For the Chinese Government, the use of diplomatic protests over colonial migration restrictions appears to have been one element of a wider strategy designed to discourage the Foreign Powers from using anti-foreign violence as pretence for making further inroads into China. As well as calling attention to the exceptional treatment of its subjects in European jurisdictions, Peking also resorted to other methods to avoid becoming the sole target of blame for recent

⁴⁴ The Yamen did allow Sieh latitude on a number of other issues. See for instance, Diary, 26 September 1891, p.84.

⁴⁵ Diary, 29 May 1891, pp.73-74.

⁴⁶ Diary, 10 June 1891, p.75.

⁴⁷ Diary, 11 June 1891, pp.75-76.

⁴⁸ Diary, 13 June 1891, p.76.

events. In September 1891, for instance, when renewed violence led to diplomatic negotiations being broken off, the Yamen informed Sieh of a ‘conspiracy’ between the secret society bandits who had hitherto been blamed for attacking foreigners and ‘the British citizens in China’, who were allegedly supplying them with arms.⁴⁹ The Chinese Minister was urged to make the discovery known in Europe in order to demonstrate China’s capacity for policing criminal elements and to highlight the need for the missionary crisis to be settled according to ‘international law’.⁵⁰

But if creating a new debate over the exclusion of Chinese from Australia and Canada had the potential to muddy British arguments over the protection of Westerners in China, the FO had refused to take the bait. By acknowledging the Chinese position over colonial migration but offering little hope of redress, British officials worked to keep the treatment of Britons in the Chinese Empire and of Chinese in the British Empire as distinct issues. Through the early-1890s official determination and public concern over the safety of foreigners in China would be little distracted by protests over the condition of the Chinese Overseas. By 1893, Rosebery explained to the Chinese Minister that there was only one issue ‘which threatened the perfect harmony of Anglo-Chinese relations’ and that was the ‘mistreatment of Western missionaries in China’.⁵¹

***Is this the ‘Freedom of Intercourse’ we are
Forever Preaching to the Chinese?***

For those Treaty Port merchants and Old China Hands who had long dreamed of a freer commercial intercourse with the Middle Kingdom, the Yangtze Riots

⁴⁹ On the secret society, Cai Shaoqing, ‘On the Origins of the Gelaohui’, *Modern China*, 10:4 (1984), 481-508.

⁵⁰ Diary, 3 September 1892, pp.82-83.

⁵¹ Quoted in Wehrle, *The Antimissionary Riots*, p.18.

represented a watershed moment. The outrages were clearly alarming, reflected Robert Jardine, the nephew of William Jardine and the one-time head of Jardine, Matheson & Company, at the annual dinner of the British China Association in 1892. But, Jardine continued, they were also bound to have ‘a powerful influence on European relations with China’, produce changes that would extend British ‘intercourse with that country’ and open up ‘new channels of commerce’.⁵² With the Qing increasingly desperate to ensure the goodwill of the Foreign Powers, it was as though Britain had been gifted a new diplomatic lever for prising open Chinese restrictions on trade and access to the interior.

The attacks on Western missionaries had come to a head at a time when British China interests were becoming better organised and more vocal. Old China Hands had played a prominent role in the establishment of the London Chamber of Commerce in the early-1880s, but a decade later they were congregating around a new association specifically formed for ‘people in London interested in the China trade’. As well as a social hub and meeting place, the London China Association endeavoured (in the words of its first Chairman Alfred Dent) ‘to maintain British interests and British trade’.⁵³ The organisation counted amongst its membership representatives of the Far Eastern trading firms, together with an assortment of parliamentarians, returned diplomats, military and naval experts and China scholars. It served as a hub for British China watching, a forum for debates on Anglo-Chinese affairs and a clearing-house for mercantile attitudes towards British Far Eastern policy.⁵⁴ This latter role ensured a close (if at times frustrating) relationship with the British Government. The

⁵² SOAS/CA/Minute-Books/1, 23 February 1892.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 11 April 1889.

⁵⁴ Some were clearly sceptical to begin with. After the first meeting Campbell noted a Hong Kong bias and doubted whether ‘many of the Treaty Ports people will join the Hong Kong people in a so-called “China Association”’. Campbell to Hart, 8 March 1889, *ACIMC*, ii, 603.

Association's energetic Secretary, R.S. Gundry, described his own role and that of the organisation as a 'public service' involving 'increasingly intimate' contact with British policymakers during the 1890s. The China Association, Lord Curzon remarked at its annual dinner in 1896, had 'gained the confidence of the Foreign Office', which respected and 'not infrequently invited' its views on China questions.⁵⁵

As Pelcovits pointed out in his seminal study, the furore over anti-missionary violence provided the China Association with its first real opportunity to articulate a vision for 'political and commercial policy'.⁵⁶ In December 1891, a Central Committee meeting discussed assigning a special group 'to guide the Foreign Office ... to take advantage of the opportunity' that had sprung up along the Yangtze. While it was eventually decided that the Shanghai mercantile community should take the lead in lobbying British authorities, the Committee resolved to offer its advice to the FO and devised a list of demands that might be put to China. Peking, the resolution ran, must be made to agree to the punishment of responsible officials as well as 'poorer classes' of rioters; guarantee the personal safety of Europeans and their property; allow freedom of enterprise in the Treaty Ports; and remove barriers to inland communication. The argument rested upon notions of reciprocity. The Association was simply insisting that 'the same privileges be demanded for foreigners in China that are accorded to Chinese in this country'. The benefits of such a relationship were not only material. 'The best guarantee' of preventing further violence in the future 'consisted in China getting a better knowledge of foreigners ... [by] being brought into more intimate contact with them'. The China Association,

⁵⁵ CUL/Gundry Papers/Add.9269/159/Bundle 8, undated.

⁵⁶ Pelcovits, *Old China Hands*, p.164.

Jardine promised the following year, stood ready ‘to advocate what was calculated to bring about friendly relations’ with the Chinese and to inspire their confidence in Britain.⁵⁷

For Pelcovits, the historian who has devoted the most attention to the China Association platform, the one unexpected element was the suggestion that Britons in China should be accorded the same privileges as ‘Chinese in this country’.⁵⁸ The surviving China Association minutes offer little insight to exactly what the Committee meant by this point. By the 1890s, the number of Chinese in Britain was still tiny.⁵⁹ Nor was there any sign that a significant increase was on the horizon. The small communities of Chinese in London, Liverpool and Manchester who were, more often than not, engaged in seafaring and supportive industries [**Figure 10 below**] were dwarfed by the British presence in China. If the parallel was dubious, linking the treatment of Britons in China with that of Chinese in Britain perhaps made some sense in the context of the China Association’s overarching goals. In the late-1800s the most remarkable feature of the story of Chinese migration to Britain was that it was, on the whole, unremarkable. Despite the sometimes sensational depiction of the Oriental in Victorian popular culture, the East End opium dens that ensnared Edwin Drood, Dorian Grey and Sherlock Holmes loomed larger in fiction than reality.⁶⁰ What the actual situation of Chinese in Britain provided was a relatively benign example of peaceful interaction between Chinese and Europeans. However trivial the presence of Chinese communities in Britain might seem in global terms, it offered a

⁵⁷ SOAS/CA/Minute-Book/1, 2 December 1891, 23 February 1892.

⁵⁸ Pelcovits expressed surprise that this point was ‘apparently advanced in all seriousness’. Pelcovits, *Old China Hands*, p.163.

⁵⁹ By 1891 the Chinese population of London was 302, nationally it was 767. J. Seed, ‘Limehouse Blues’, *History Workshop Journal* 62 (2006), 63.

⁶⁰ V. Berridge and G. Edwards, *Opium and the People* (1981), pp.196-197.

less problematic vision of Anglo-Chinese engagement than could be found (and found far more easily) either along the Yangtze or, importantly for this study, in those regions of the British Empire where arguments about free intercourse and friendly relations with the Middle Kingdom had received a much cooler reception.

**Figure 10: Chinese Unloading Tea at a London Dock, 1870s.
Picture Collection, Tower Hamlets Local History Archive**



It was around the freedom of intercourse argument that the Chinese question in Australia became entangled with British commentary on the causes of the Yangtze riots and the expansion of the Empire's Far Eastern trade. While Sieh Tajen's attempt to link the issue of anti-foreign violence in China with the treatment of Chinese abroad had made little impression on British officials, beyond Whitehall the suggestion that the two issues might be somehow connected had begun to take on a life of its own. As early as 1889, the *Manchester Guardian* had published correspondence warning that it was a 'serious mistake' to presume that Chinese were indifferent to the treatment of their countrymen overseas. Acknowledging that it was impossible to estimate 'the effects of this public opinion upon the foreign relations of China', it could be safely assumed, the *Guardian* noted, that 'the hostility of the Chinese mob to Europeans is in no degree diminished by recent events connected with Chinese emigration'.⁶¹

It was a theme picked up by the China expert and occasional *Times* correspondent Alexander Michie.⁶² In his *Missionaries in China* (1891) Michie blamed the Yangtze riots on Western arrogance and a 'race hatred ... [that was] common to all mankind'. To illustrate the universality of this racial antipathy, he pointed to the prejudice of the English working class against 'nasty dirty furriners' and quoted a passage from Charles Dilke's recently published *The Problems of Greater Britain* (1890) on the Chinese question in Australia:

The dislike of the Australians for the Chinese is so strong and so general that it is like the dislike of terriers for rats. . . . Nothing will so rapidly bring together an Australian crowd as the rumour that Chinamen or rabbits are likely to be landed from a ship, and one class of intruder is about as popular as the other.

⁶¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 13 July 1889, p.5.

⁶² Michie was also involved with the China Association.

By substituting ‘foreign missionaries’ for ‘Chinamen’ and ‘Australian’ for ‘Chinese’, Michie suggested, one might arrive at a fair understanding of the situation along the Yangtze. The only difference was that the Chinese had tended to ‘keep their feelings under better control than Australians, Californians, or any other branch of the white Christian family’.⁶³

Michie’s arguments were reiterated by other commentators in the years ahead. In his *Things Chinese* (1900) James Dyer Ball of the Hong Kong Civil Service, put forward an analogous explanation for the development of anti-foreign sentiment during the 1890s. It was the ignorance of the Chinese and the arrogance of the foreigners, compounded by ‘knowledge of the shutting of foreign countries, such as America and Australia, against Chinese immigration’, Dyer Ball wrote, that had ‘transform[ed] the law-abiding Chinaman into a demon of destruction’.⁶⁴ In search of answers in the wake of the Boxer Crisis, the well-known merchant and Sinologist Archibald Little struck a similar chord. For much of the nineteenth century, Little reflected, Europeans had travelled to China in relative safety while her expanding commercial relations with the West had given promise of a lasting friendship. Then, during the last decade of the century, something had shifted. The behaviour of Christian missionaries and the Qing Empire’s mistreatment at the hands of the Foreign Powers had eroded trust and fostered a deep resentment. The migration question had come to represent all the unfairness and double standards which tainted China’s foreign relations. ‘We force China to admit our people of every class to trade and travel throughout the country’, Little wrote, ‘while in America and in British colonies, not to speak of France and

⁶³ A. Michie, *Missionaries in China* (1891), pp.11-13. He was quoting Dilke, *Problems*, i, 357.

⁶⁴ J. Dyer Ball, *Things Chinese* 3rd edn (1900), pp.515-517. In *Things Chinese* and his later work, Dyer Ball criticised Australian hostility to Chinese labour, the repressiveness of colonial poll-taxes and called for the importation of Chinese to northern Australia, J. Dyer Ball, *The Chinese At Home* (New York, 1912), p.63.

Russia, the Chinese are excluded or only grudgingly admitted under a heavy poll-tax'. 'Is this the "freedom of intercourse"', he asked searchingly, 'we are forever preaching to the Chinese?'⁶⁵

Australia's Opportunity

If Australia's treatment of Chinese migrants might be picked up by British commentators seeking to understand the causes of anti-foreign hostility in China, it was naturally only one of many contributing factors put forward. This situation reflected the peripheral status of colonial perspectives more generally. For British commercial interests, colonial questions tended to come into view only when they were felt to have some relevance to discussions on trade or British policy. In his *China Present and Past* (1895) for instance, Gundry invoked the migration question to add force to his arguments about the danger of bimetallism, an issue which concerned British exporters throughout the 1890s. As the value of gold (the basis of the British economy) increased and the value of silver (the basis of the Chinese economy) remained stable, new cotton textile production was being stimulated in China. 'A nation whose cheap labour excites so much alarm in Occidental countries towards which it inclines to migrate', Gundry warned, 'may cause greater consternation still when it takes the form of silver-paid competition, on its own ground, with the gold-paid workmen of the West'.⁶⁶

By the 1890s, the question of Australia's commercial engagement with Asia was attracting greater interest in Britain and in the Colonies themselves. The prospects for Australia's wool trade with China and Japan had struck Dilke when he had arrived in

⁶⁵ A. Little (revised by Mrs A. Little) *Gleanings from Fifty Years in China* (1910), pp.292-293.

⁶⁶ R.S. Gundry, *China Past and Present* (1895), p.117

the mid-1860s. Thirty years later, suggestions that these trading relationships were finally about to take off were still being put forward by the likes of *The Times*' Valentine Chirol.⁶⁷ Proposals for the expansion of Australia's Eastern trade also appear to have been put to British officials, with the FO Library adding to its collection a map of the Pacific Ocean [Figure 11] 'showing [a] probable trade route between Australia, North China and Japan'.

During the course of the 1890s Australia's trade with Asia (and particularly with Japan) did begin to expand.⁶⁸ These gains reflected a growing recognition of the potential of Eastern markets and of the need to diversify the Colonies' export focus in light of the major recession and trading downturn that hit in 1891. But the growth of Australia's trade with Asia remained modest and was certainly never as dramatic as the enthusiasts had hoped. This was particularly so in the case of trade with China. Australian merchants tended to echo their British counterparts' mistaken conviction that traders 'need[ed] merely to introduce Australian products more exclusively into the Chinese market and the numbers will do the rest'. It was a sentiment that lasted well into the twentieth century, built around the belief that rising incomes would produce greater demand for Australian goods in Asia.⁶⁹ But there were also other considerations which impacted on the growth of trade and which tapped contemporaneous debates over Sino-British and Anglo-Australian interaction in the Pacific.

⁶⁷ BL/CWD/Add.MS.43901/Dilke to father, 16 March 1867; V. Chirol, *The Far Eastern Question* (1896), pp.132-133.

⁶⁸ Appendix 3.

⁶⁹ H.D. Black, 'China as a Possible Market for Australian Production' in I. Clunes Ross (ed.) *Australia and the Far East* (Sydney, 1935), p.246.

Figure 11: 'Probable Trade Route between Australia, North China and Japan', 1885.
FO Library Map Collection. FO/925/4382



In *The Wealth and Progress of New South Wales* (1893) government statistician, T.A. Coghlan, provides an excellent snapshot of the situation in the 1890s with regard to the most commercially significant of the Australian Colonies. Of all Britain's overseas dominions, NSW was behind only India and Canada in terms of its commerce, with a total trade of over forty-two million pounds in 1892.⁷⁰ Whilst the bulk was concentrated within the Empire, the Colony's chief foreign trading partners were the United States, Belgium, Germany, France and New Caledonia and China. Coghlan encountered some difficulty in quantifying Sino-Colonial trade (owing to an increasing proportion being diverted through Hong Kong) but it was nonetheless clear that 'the actual loss of trade' for the decade 1882-1892 was 'by no means inconsiderable'. Direct imports from China to NSW fell from £358,783 in 1882 to £217,996 ten years later. Exports, which had always been smaller and more erratic, fell from £28,958 to £8,810. While tea, opium, silks, flax, hemp and matting all made their way south from China and Hong Kong, the longstanding problem of finding an Australian export endured. NSW sent mostly coin in return, though coal, bêche-de-mer, fungus, and old metal were also dispatched to East Asia.⁷¹ In Victoria the trade imbalance was even starker. In 1894 Victoria's imports from China came in at around £118,000, while exports amounted to a paltry £99.⁷²

Despite considerable optimism, a number of factors seem to have undermined the growth of Australian trade with China. As we saw in Chapter Two, the impact of Australian Sinophobia had begun to seep into the commercial sphere during the

⁷⁰ Total trade was worth £42,748,773. This included £20,776,526 in imports and £21,972,247 in exports. India, with a population 246 times larger, had roughly three times that amount. Canada, with a population four times the size, had only a slightly larger commercial presence. T.A. Coghlan, *The Wealth and Progress of New South Wales* (Sydney, 1893), p.108.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, pp.156-157, 164.

⁷² NLA/Petherick-Collection/Australian-Politics/Box-6/Pamphlet: E.J. Dyer, 'Australia and the Asian Pacific', Melbourne, 1895, p.14.

1880s. In the 1890s, the decline in the China tea trade and the substitution of Chinese teas for Ceylonese and Indian substitutes had continued. The trend seems to have had more to do with the hardening of Australian attitudes towards the Chinese and the promotion of the *Britishness* and *purity* of teas from the Subcontinent rather than any decline in the quality of the China product.⁷³ According to Coghlan, the falloff in China tea could be traced to ‘no perceptible decrease ... in the consumption of the article’ but instead to the ‘decrease in the quantity required for re-export ... and to the larger consumption of Indian teas’.⁷⁴ Racial hostility towards the Chinese (and later the Japanese) as Tweedie and Walker have observed, came to ‘outweigh ... all other considerations, including those of a commercial nature’ in late-nineteenth century Australia.⁷⁵ For many the proud colonial, the drinking of Chinese tea had become a portent of the celestial infiltration of the Antipodes. The people of NSW joined other Australians in rejecting the vision put forward by one newspaper where ‘the teapot’ would ‘substitute the decanter’ and Australians would drink ‘green tea’ with ‘neither milk or sugar but ... a smile on our faces’.⁷⁶

For Colquhoun, the expansion of Australia’s trade with Asia seemed a natural part of the Empire’s destiny in the Pacific. For other British observers Australian developments might also serve as an indicator of more general trends. The decline of Chinese tea in the Colonies was noted by Gundry, who saw it as reflecting a wider malaise in a trade that the China Association was working to revive.⁷⁷ To other British traders Australia might come to represent an unhelpful competitor in the race for Asian customers. From the late-1880s, Britain’s trading dominance in East Asia

⁷³ Tweedie, *Trading Partners* pp.25-26.

⁷⁴ Coghlan, *Wealth and Progress*, p.164.

⁷⁵ Tweedie, *Trading Partners*, p.27; Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp.68-84.

⁷⁶ *Telegraph* quoted in Tweedie, p.25.

⁷⁷ Gundry, *China Past and Present*, p.117; SOAS/CA/Minute-Book/1, 2 December 1891.

was being increasingly challenged by Japan, the United States and Germany. In this context it seems unsurprising that not all British commercial operators were keen to encourage colonial endeavours in their own backyards. In February 1886, the Australian Wool Association had contacted the London Chamber of Commerce to ask for advice and assistance ‘in the development of the Australian Wool trade with China, Japan and the Far East’. The Chamber refrained from offering the assistance on the grounds that ‘it was considered that such suggestion was of a nature to interfere with British interests’.⁷⁸ British scepticism in relation to Australian trade with East Asia was even clearer with regard to Japan. During the 1890s, the potential development of a Japanese textile industry fuelled by Australian raw wool imports prompted Ernest Satow, the British Minister at Tokyo, to pour cold water on ‘the extravagant hopes’ of the Australians as to ‘finding or creating a profitable or extensive market for her products here’.⁷⁹ While it is difficult to quantify the impact of these attitudes, it is clear that Australian merchants might expect little by way of assistance from their British counterparts as they sought to break into Eastern markets. Distrust of British commercial motives was also highly visible in Australia itself. When Coghlan met *The Times*’ Colonial Editor Flora Shaw in 1892, he informed her that Australians were in ‘no doubt that England has exploited other countries ... here there is a very strong feeling that she must not be allowed to exploit us’.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ London Metropolitan Archives/London Chamber of Commerce Archive/MS.16511/Australasian-Trade Section/Minutes, 17 February 1886.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Tweedie, *Trading Partners*, p.19.

⁸⁰ Rhodes House Library/Flora Shaw Papers/Box-4/File-7/Australian Diary, 16 December 1892, 22 December 1892. Shaw was ‘absolutely astonished’ at ‘the weakness’ of Coghlan’s arguments and his ‘class bitterness’.

The question of Australia's trading relationship with Asia was ultimately brought to the fore by the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty in 1894. By the terms of the Treaty, British colonies were allowed a period of two years grace to determine whether they would be party to the agreement. For Australians, the Treaty involved a choice between their racial and commercial ambitions. While acceptance would provide new commercial opportunities in Asia, it would also confirm the right of Japanese to emigrate freely. In London, *The Times* reported that the financial crisis of the early-1890s 'made it a matter of life and death' for the Australians to 'develop the natural production of their soil'. It applauded the actions of Victoria, which had already deployed commercial agents to Asia and pointed to the 'mine of wealth' that Asia presented for the Australian pastoralist. The question for Britain's Pacific colonies was whether commercial advantage could outshine racial hostility:

Race prejudice is one of those questions about which the argument may easily become impossible. But when this drawback has been discounted the remainder of the Treaty offers little but pure gain.⁸¹

It was an argument taken up by E.J. Dyer. Dyer was one of the Victorian commercial agents applauded by *The Times*, having recently visited Japan and China on an exploratory trade mission on behalf of the Colonial Government.⁸² In an address at the Melbourne Town Hall entitled 'Australia and the Asian Pacific', Dyer pointed to the uncertainty of European markets and to Asia's capacity to drive Australia's economic development. While Asian merchants had been active in building their exports, 'enabling them to send a pound's worth to us for every penny's worth we send them', Australians had neglected the opportunities before them:

⁸¹ *The Times*, 22 October 1894, p.10.

⁸² Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp.68-70. Dyer published on Australia and Canada and served as Honorary Secretary of the London Chamber of Mines.

It is undeniable that we are most conveniently, and indeed incomparably, situated for supplying those countries, as geographically, climatically, and productively, they are our natural markets. It is also equally clear that, while statistics prove a moderate immediate demand for our products positively exists, the countless millions of those changing nations present illimitable possibilities for Australian enterprise, not only in the region of present demand but also in the creative.

Australia was already the ‘food factory’ of the British Empire, Dyer argued, supplying one hundred times the demand of its present population. Now she would feed the rising peoples of Asia. While he focussed on Japan, given the looming treaty deadline, Dyer also found space to reflect on the importance of China. Citing works by Marquis Tseng, Henry Norman and Lord Curzon on the Chinese question, he had come to the conclusion that the Middle Kingdom possessed only the ‘vener of civilisation’. While her backwardness was a tragedy in human terms:

From a callous, commercial point of view, looked at from the standpoint of Australia’s interests, the long-delayed deliverance of these people until this day of Australia’s power and productive plenty constitutes, I think, Australia’s opportunity.⁸³

In the end, Australia’s reluctance to engage with Asians proved stronger than the attraction of Asian markets during the 1890s. The eventual decision to remain outside the Anglo-Japanese agreement reflected the strength of race sentiment and the widespread belief, as the *SMH* put it, that ‘no commercial benefit ... would be commensurate with the evils that might come upon Australia from an unrestricted influx of Asiatics’.⁸⁴ Discussions over Australia’s economic position in East Asia during the last decade of the nineteenth century are perhaps most interesting because they provide a window into a series of relationships that were at least beginning to shift. The realisation of Australian commercial ambitions, as Colquhoun had argued

⁸³ NLA/Petherick-Collection/Australian Politics/Box-6/Pamphlet: E.J. Dyer, ‘Australia and the Asian Pacific’, Melbourne, 1895, pp.5-6, 13-14.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Walker, *Anxious Nation*, p.74.

in his paper to the United Services League, might on the one hand be seen as a natural part of the growth of the British Empire as a commercial power in the Pacific. This view touched on that age-old vision of a colonial cog being added to the British Far Eastern machine, strengthening the Empire's position in the Asia-Pacific. In another calculation, the Australian components that were being developed might prove a poor fit. The hostility of colonials to Asian peoples might preclude their willingness to engage economically, or alternatively, Australians might emerge as competitors (rather than partners) for their fellow Britons.

The Voice of Your Colonial Community

If Australian perspectives on China and the Pacific filtered into British political and mercantile discourse, they also continued to play a central role in discussions on imperial unity. For British officials, the Chinese migration crisis of 1888 had provided a vivid reminder of the ongoing uncertainty over how London should respond when self-governing colonies became involved in matters of imperial significance. It was a problem that concerned (or at least confused) both Liberals and Unionists. Even Gladstone, who had wrestled with the subject for longer than most, appeared unsure during his final Premiership as to whether there was 'any Statute, or other law, which prevents the self-governing Colonies from interfering on their own account in diplomacy and foreign relations?'⁸⁵ While the tone of debate was altogether more gentle than in previous years, during the 1890s, Australian sentiments over Chinese migration and Pacific affairs continued to resonate. The most prominent concern was whether colonial attitudes might be accommodated without undermining

⁸⁵ BL/WEG/Add.MS.44549/Gladstone to Ripon, 5 April 1893. On Gladstone's struggle to define 'imperial issues' as Colonial Secretary, P. Knaplund, *Gladstone and Britain's Imperial Policy* (Woking, 1927), pp.72-73.

the Empire's position in Asia and whether they might prove an insurmountable hurdle to closer imperial union.

For some, most notably Lord Rosebery, the likelihood that Britain's colonial and foreign relations might become more closely interlinked was a source of optimism. In 1888, in a speech before the Leeds Chamber of Commerce, Rosebery had expressed his support for the peaceful 'extension of [British] commerce' in Asia. But, he reminded his audience, there was now a colonial dimension to consider:

In questions relating to the Pacific, the voice of your colonial community in Australia must be loudly heard, and ... given effect to, and it must be paramount in the counsels of the Foreign Office with regard to those questions. When you come to approach almost every foreign question at this moment you find the colonial interest inseparable, and in future your colonial policy must be a prepondering factor in your foreign policy as well.⁸⁶

For Rosebery (who served as Chairman and then President of the Imperial Federation League) and other enthusiasts of a Greater Britain, the settler empire provided the tonic to persistent fears of British decline in an increasingly interconnected and competitive world.⁸⁷ In February 1885, he had confided to an Australian correspondent that the 'one bright outlook in the political situation' was 'the spirit of our colonies', which assured 'the future of the Empire'.⁸⁸ It was a spirit that Rosebery had proved willing to locate at the heart of British policy. During his short tenure at the FO under Gladstone, he had been called to respond to a request from Paris over the deportation of French convicts to the New Hebrides. In no uncertain terms, he had rejected the French proposals on the grounds that the British Government 'could not but be mainly guided' by the Australian Colonies in the Pacific.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ 'Commerce and Empire', *Lord Rosebery's Speeches 1874-1896* (1896), pp.52-53.

⁸⁷ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, pp.1-19; H.C.G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists* (1973), pp.161-162.

⁸⁸ SLV/Clarke Papers/MS.Box.455/2(b)/Rosebery to Mackinon, 22 February 1885.

⁸⁹ NLS/LR/MS.10088/Rosebery to Waddington, 7 July 1886.

This blending of foreign and colonial affairs was one step on the road to what Rosebery would later describe as a ‘true imperialism’. Here, he envisaged a united, white empire (perhaps even an Anglo-Saxon reunion) sharing the growing burden for the maintenance of imperial interests across the globe and providing a model for liberal government everywhere. It would be ‘an ideal empire, inhabited by the ideal race’.⁹⁰ But during the 1890s, the Pacific was becoming a more prominent and difficult environment for policymakers. Soon members of Rosebery’s own government began to grow weary of Australian claims on British diplomacy in the region. In 1894, for instance, *The Times* published reports that Australian leaders planned to raise the German presence on Samoa at the 1894 Colonial Conference at Ottawa. The Colonial Secretary, Lord Ripon, wrote to Rosebery wondering whether an imperial representative might be found who could help assuage this intention and how he might be expected to respond if the subject did come up. Both Ripon and Rosebery appear to have been eager to ‘allay the suspicions of the Germans’, who would probably blame London for having ‘stirred up the Australians to make fools of themselves’. Ripon attempted to resolve the situation by turning ‘a tap of cold water on the proposal for discussing Samoa’ but confessed to being unsure whether the Australians would listen. The situation was indicative of the difficulty of managing Australian attitudes towards the Pacific and of a wider problem for those who contemplated a more formal imperial union. ‘If the Colonies interpret Imperial Federation to mean that they are to manage our foreign relations’, Ripon mused, ‘we shall have some interesting results’.⁹¹

⁹⁰ NLS/LR/MS.10131/Rosebery to Spencer, 17 January 1900.

⁹¹ NLS/LR/MS.10059/Ripon to Rosebery, 20 May 1894.

As Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Lord Salisbury was well-aware of the arguments circulating in the late-1880s and early-1890s about the need for a more formal imperial federation.⁹² At the 1887 Colonial Conference, he had sought to assure delegates that he had no intention of taking up the matter himself, declaring these ‘sentimental aspirations ... a matter for the future rather than the present’.⁹³ In July 1889, he had been asked by Rosebery to receive a deputation from the Imperial Federation League to discuss plans for a conference for ‘establishing closer and more substantial union’ between Britain and the self-governing colonies. Such a gathering, Rosebery stressed, would be ‘to the advantage of the whole Empire’. Salisbury replied that it was not London’s role to encourage such a process. Any shift towards closer union would have to come from the Colonies themselves. British intervention ‘would only lead to misapprehension’ and imply that the Home Government was looking to establish some new arrangement or was ‘at least ... fully convinced of the possibility of doing so’.⁹⁴

Having come face-to-face with Australian demands over the Pacific and China, Salisbury had even more reason by 1889 to be cautious about any plan that might allow the Colonies a greater say in imperial affairs. In November of that year, his thoughts on the subject were made clear when he received just such an enquiry from the man at the heart of Australia’s Chinese crisis, Henry Parkes. Addressing Salisbury not as Prime Minister, but as ‘an English Statesman’ who had ‘long had his eyes fixed upon the complex web of interests which have to be considered and served in the progress of the Empire’, Parkes wrote that the push for Australian Federation had

⁹² On Salisbury’s attitude, M.B. Burgess, ‘The Imperial Federation Movement in Great Britain, 1869-1893’ (Leicester University Ph.D. Thesis, 1976), pp.229-239.

⁹³ BPP/Command-Papers[5091], i, 5.

⁹⁴ NLS/LR/MS.10088/Salisbury to Rosebery, 23 July 1889.

led him to consider the prospects for a closer imperial union. He called for the creation of ‘a great National Council [with executive powers] in which all parts of the Empire should be represented on terms of equality’. Parkes’ vision though was a white one. His proposal referred exclusively to Britain, Australia, Canada, South Africa and Anglo-India where, he argued, progress should be ‘consanguineous, intercommunicative and emulous of English speaking union + kinship’.⁹⁵

Salisbury (who had recently referred to Parkes as ‘stark staring mad’ over the Chinese issue) was polite but dismissive. While the sentiment was noble, he wrote, the path to a closer union was barred by two main practical considerations. The first was that the formation of any imperial council would require England to sacrifice control of ‘either our domestic or our foreign policy’. While discussion might produce some ‘general concurrence’ on imperial questions, division would re-emerge with ‘each individual controversy’. The second difficulty arose out of the multi-racial character of the Empire. It was no longer possible, Salisbury continued, ‘to ignore all the constituents of it that are not of Anglo-Saxon origin’. As representation would have to be based on population, the guidance of the Empire’s destiny would fall ‘entirely into Asiatic hands’. This was ‘hardly a change’, he noted dryly, ‘which Australia, or New Zealand, or Canada would desire’.⁹⁶

Champions of imperial federation had put forward various solutions for addressing the predominance of Asian Britons in any imperial council based on demography. In their search for a workable model, they devised increasingly complicated systems of representation that would ensure the voice of the white colonies was suitably

⁹⁵ HH/LS/E/Parkes to Salisbury, 2 November 1889.

⁹⁶ ML/HP/CY80/Vol.58/A928/Salisbury to Parkes, 23 December 1889.

amplified.⁹⁷ For Parkes, who replied to Salisbury the following year, the answer was simply to restrict membership to those colonies who had already obtained self-government. ‘I do not see myself’, he wrote from Sydney, ‘why the limits of the constituent bodies should be extended to admit the Asiatic populations not now included, or why the constitutional basis of existing institutions need be materially affected’. Of more immediate significance was the issue of colonial influence over British policymaking. Parkes sought to reassure the Prime Minister that a closer ‘connection between the Head and ... the far outstretching limits of the Empire’ could be arranged so as to ‘leave the National Centre still supreme’.⁹⁸ Salisbury appears to have made no effort to reply to this second letter. No doubt the British Prime Minister had some sympathy with Parkes’ desire to better organise imperial resources. At the Colonial Conference he had begun work on a more co-ordinated approach to imperial defence by appealing to both sentiment and self-interest.⁹⁹ But as we have seen above and in previous chapters, Australian leaders (and Parkes in particular) had little endeared themselves to Salisbury for their actions over China and the Pacific. Given the ‘outcrudicence of ... Greater Britain’, about which he had so often complained, the Prime Minister seems to have remained altogether unconvinced as to the wisdom of any union that would allow greater colonial influence over imperial policy.

The relationship between imperial unity and the development of the Empire with the lessons of Australia’s Chinese question, became a topic of interest for imperial observers during the early-1890s. To some the migration issue undermined the Federationists’ belief that the rise of Greater Britain was the answer to fears of

⁹⁷ For one typically convoluted example, B.H. Thwaite, *The Electoral Government of Greater Britain* (1894).

⁹⁸ HH/LS/E/Parkes to Salisbury, 3 February 1890.

⁹⁹ BPP/Command-Papers[5091], i, 6.

domestic and imperial decline. For several visitors to the Colonies in the early 1890s, Australia's demand for exclusion represented the squandering of her natural resources, the triumph of trade union sentiment and a worrying portent of the socialist tendencies that lurked behind popular democracy. 'You don't know what work is in this part of the world', remarked Kipling, when he visited the Antipodes in 1891. 'You don't suppose that this eight-hours' work, eight-hours' rest, and eight-hours' recreation is going to last forever, do you?' Though he was widely celebrated wherever he went, Kipling was not afraid to warn his hosts over the possible implications of their treatment of Chinese labourers:

There is a big score to be wiped out, and if you Australians could see them as I have in their native towns, where you meet eyes in every crevice till you might think the very stones in the street are made of flesh and blood, then you might get an idea of the force you will have to reckon with, and besides their great population, their coast and rivers give them a supply of born sailors who would carry them just where they wanted to go. If white men won't work other men will.¹⁰⁰

Similar comments were raised by General Booth, visiting Australia to raise funds for the Salvation Army's 'Darkest England' scheme and desirous of obtaining a land grant for disadvantaged British emigrants:

In All Australia I have not seen above three or four pieces of land that I count properly cultivated, and they belonged to Chinamen. Then comes the cry "Australia for the Australians" ... Where do these Australians get the land from that they should sit down like dogs in the manger and neither use the land themselves nor let anyone else do so?¹⁰¹

One particularly scathing critic was *The Times* journalist Valentine Chirol. From his post in Berlin, Chirol had contributed to the great metropolitan daily's criticism of the Australian Colonies' in 1888, fearful of the impact of their behaviour on British relations with China. In 1891 Chirol ventured to Australia to inspect some financial

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in J. Oldham and A. Stirling, *Victorian* (Melbourne, 1969), pp.132-133. Kipling had toured China and Japan following at the end of his stint in India.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, pp.124-125.

interests. It was an endeavour that ended grimly when the bank holding his savings collapsed during the great financial crisis that was then taking hold.¹⁰² In a long letter to the British diplomat Frank Lascelles, Chirol noted his ‘disappointment and disgust’ over the course of Australian development. ‘Nowhere else in the world has democracy had such a fair field as in Australia’, he wrote, yet nowhere else had ‘it shown itself more selfish + more ignorant’:

The great idea of the Australian Demo seems to be that he has got hold of a real good thing in that splendid virgin continent, + that he has only got to build a kind of great wall of China all round it so as to prevent anybody else coming in + then proceed to a quiet redistribution of the wealth it contains by transferring it from other people’s pockets into his own.

For Chirol it was as though all the most deplorable elements of working class politics from the Old World had been given their own space in which to expand and flourish. Political competition and the extension of suffrage had empowered the masses, who were composed largely of the ‘scourings’ of the British Isles ‘bloated with strong meats + strong drinks + enormous wages lightly earned + lightly spent’. Free from the accumulated restraints of their British cousins, they found themselves ‘masters of a situation which they are bent upon exploiting for the meanest ends of immediate enjoyment’.¹⁰³ As we shall see in the following chapter, Chirol’s attitude towards Australia would become an important factor as *The Times* took a more active role in China and in the Colonies themselves. In his letter to Lascelles, he had already taken the step of pointing to the Chinese question in Australia and ‘the attack of red hot fever’ which had ‘taken over the Colonies in the last few years’, as a marked hurdle on the road to imperial federation.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² L. Fritzingler, *Diplomat Without Portfolio* (2006), pp.46-47.

¹⁰³ CAC/Spring-Rice Papers/CASR/1/14/Chirol to Lascelles, 28 November 1891.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

The interconnection between the Chinese migration issue and the foreign policy of a federated British Empire was another theme picked up by imperial commentators in the 1890s. In his study of the *Canadian Question* (1890) the one-time Regius Professor of History at Oxford, Goldwin Smith, noted that ‘Federation would be nothing if not diplomatic’:

But whose diplomacy is to prevail? That of Great Britain, a European Power and at the same time Mistress of India? That of Australia, with her Eastern relations and her Chinese question? Or that of Canada, bound up with the American continent, indifferent to everything in Europe or Asia, and concerned only with her relation to the United States? If we may believe Sir Charles Dilke, Australia avows her intention of breaking away from England should British policy ever take a line adverse to her special interests in the East.¹⁰⁵

As Smith intimated, the most influential commentator to come forth on the issue was Charles Dilke. By the 1890s, Dilke’s knowledge of imperial affairs was second to none. As Undersecretary at the FO during Gladstone’s Second Administration, he had found himself ‘rather given to interfering in the affairs of other offices’ and became a beacon (particularly for radicals) when it came to ‘all Indian, colonial, naval and military questions’.¹⁰⁶ In London, Dilke established himself as the pre-eminent expert on Britain’s white settler colonies, a point of contact for colonial leaders and a metropolitan advocate for their concerns.¹⁰⁷ While Salisbury wrestled with the bad affects of British colonists on his liver, Dilke made no secret of the ‘predominance of colonial questions on my mind’.¹⁰⁸ When his personal life became engulfed in scandal, scuppering any suggestion that he might be anointed as Gladstone’s successor, Dilke had turned increasingly to his journalism and writing. It was this

¹⁰⁵ G. Smith, *The Canadian Question* (1891), p.263.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in R. Jenkins, *Sir Charles Dilke* (1958), p.138.

¹⁰⁷ The position is made abundantly clear in Dilke’s papers, which contain numerous pieces of correspondence and records of various engagements with colonial leaders over the decades.

¹⁰⁸ HH/LS/D/vol.32/Salisbury to Knutsford, 16 October 1887. Dilke, quoted in D. Nicholls, *The Lost Prime Minister* (1995), p.15.

work that culminated in his magnum opus, the two volume *Problems of Greater Britain* (1890). The book was lauded across the Empire. It was, according to Rosebery, set apart from the ‘evanescent statements of journalism ... a book ... of authority and permanence’.¹⁰⁹ ‘All Colonials and indeed everyone interested in the Colonies ought to be in your debt’, gushed Cecil Rhodes, writing on the same day.¹¹⁰ ‘It was the one book’, wrote Alfred Deakin from Victoria, enabling Britons in Europe and ‘the various groups of colonies to understand each other + their individual relation to the whole of which they form a part’; a text book ‘for all English Speaking peoples + their public men’.¹¹¹

Like Salisbury, Dilke considered the various models for imperial federation unworkable. His vision of a Greater Britain rested instead on his faith in the character of the Anglo-Saxon race and in finding a more coherent approach to imperial defence.¹¹² As he noted in his earlier work, *Greater Britain*, the Australian and American experiences of Chinese migration (as well as the American ‘Negro Problem’) had left a profound impression on the young Dilke. In Victoria and California he had become convinced of the growing importance of competition between ‘cheap’ and ‘dear’ races in shaping the course of world history. ‘Everywhere’, he wrote, ‘we have found the difficulties which impede the progress to universal domination of the English people lie in the conflict with the cheaper races’.¹¹³ In *The Problems of Greater Britain*, Dilke attempted to reconcile his

¹⁰⁹ NLS/LR/MS.10088/Rosebery to Dilke, 12 February 1890.

¹¹⁰ BL/CWD/Add.MS.43877/Rhodes to Dilke, 12 February 1890.

¹¹¹ BL/CWD/Add.MS.43877/Deakin to Dilke, 31 March 1890. Australian infatuation with Dilke was well-known. Deakin hoped to see Dilke at the CO or FO. Another colonial correspondent wondered if he might ‘accept a place’ as Prime Minister of a United Australia. BL/CWD/Add.MS.43877/Deakin to Dilke, 14 March 1892; Melby to Dilke, 18 February 1890.

¹¹² Dilke, *Problems*, ii, 481, 497.

¹¹³ C. Dilke, *Greater Britain*, 8th edn (1885), pp.564-565.

commitment to the preservation of a White Australia, a place where the British could settle without being undermined by cheap foreign labour and his belief in China's latent strength and her potential as a future British ally. He began with a response to those who had criticised the Colonies on Chinese migration:

Today the Chinese question appears to present itself in a very different aspect from that in which it is viewed by us at home, and it is difficult to induce the men of the colonial lower-middle or working class, to take what we should call a broad international view of Chinese immigration.

What, Dilke asked, did the detractors expect? Australia's well-fed and well-clad population was bound to oppose the free immigration of a cheap labour force that would 'reduce their material condition to the level of that of the unemployed in the worst parts of London'.¹¹⁴ But while he sympathised with Australian anxieties on the migration issue, Dilke was also quick to stress the need to maintain good relations with China:

We in the old country, who see, perhaps more clearly than they can be expected to perceive, that the future mastery of the world lies between the British, the Russian, and the Chinese races, may be pardoned for attaching more importance than do colonists to good relations between Great Britain and the Chinese Empire.¹¹⁵

The solution, he argued, lay in some form of anti-pauper legislation. This would prevent the vast majority of Chinese migrants from landing in Australian ports without directly offending Chinese sensibilities. Such an approach was needed as it would be difficult for Britain to seek out an 'alliance on the Asiatic continent' and resist Russian aggression 'while our colonists violate our treaties with the Chinese Government'.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Dilke, *Problems*, ii, 303.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, ii, 310.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, ii, 309-311.

The Problems of Greater Britain was in part Dilke's attempt to solve one of the great questions that had emerged out of the movement of Europeans and Chinese across the Pacific region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the book Dilke was attempting to reconcile the racial attitudes forged by Anglophone settlers in the New World with the growing strategic importance of China. It was Australian (and American) perspectives that had proved fundamental in shaping Dilke's views on the Middle Kingdom. Unlike many British observers, who approached the Chinese question from the basis that the Chinese were depraved and backwards, Dilke's vision borrowed heavily from settler fears of Asiatic resilience and efficiency. He echoed the views of one of his sources, the colonial historian William Westgarth, who had noted that Chinese migrants were set apart by 'their readily adaptive qualities ... mobility and the countless multitude of their race'.¹¹⁷ 'The Chinaman has great vitality', Dilke chimed. Metropolitan observers must be more cautious, he suggested, about using the labels 'superior' and 'inferior' races.¹¹⁸

If Dilke's vision drew heavily on Australian perspectives on China, it was also shaped by a comprehensive rejection of that put forward by the British mercantile community in the Far East and the Old China Hands at home. For the expanded eighth edition of *Greater Britain* (1885) Dilke had included further reflections on the British Empire in Asia, having visited China, Japan and the Straits Settlements. At Hong Kong, he was warmly welcomed by British traders, though he expressed little sympathy with their views. The 'fire-eating merchants at the ports', Dilke wrote, 'think that China should be forced to do what they desire, and that force should be used at the caprice of any gunboat captain'. The self-interest of the merchants

¹¹⁷ Westgarth, *Australian Progress*, pp.284-285. On Dilke's debt to Westgarth, Dilke, *Problems*, ii, 309.

¹¹⁸ Dilke, *Greater Britain*, 8th edn, pp.335-337.

threatened to mask the more important question at hand. Eastern trade was ‘dull’.

What really linked China to the fate of British people across the globe, as the

Australian and American experience had shown, was competition:

When our merchants talk of “opening” China, we should remember that while the great English houses in China would gain in a thousand ways by such a change, English trade, as a whole, would suffer. The making of railroads throughout China will, in all probability, be accompanied by the starting of local manufactures on an enormous scale. If ever our Eastern trade is ruined there is a future for many of the men, and for much of the capital employed in it, in the direction and support of manufacturing establishments in the Treaty Ports and in the coal-bearing provinces of China; but it must never be forgotten for one moment that the gain of these men would be the loss of Lancashire.¹¹⁹

‘The day will come’, Dilke predicted, when the Chinese, armed with cheap labour would produce virtually all the goods ‘that Britain could produce with dear’.¹²⁰

As we have seen across the course of this chapter, throughout the early-1890s Australian perspectives on China had the potential to drift into discussions on Sino-British affairs, commercial discourse on Eastern markets and conversations as to the internal relations and future organisation of the Empire itself. They popped up in diplomatic cables about the welfare of foreigners along the Yangtze; in the consumer habits of tea drinkers; in newspaper coverage on the destinies of Great and Greater Britain; and in the private correspondence of British, Chinese and colonial statesmen. But in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Australia’s relations with China began to take on a new significance for those who sought to understand the unfolding history of a rapidly shrinking world. Faced with the great question of China’s future and the likely implications for the British Empire, a number of commentators began

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp.601-602, 605-606.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p.564.

to look to the experience of Chinese migration to the New World, in order to understand the inevitable coming together of Europe and Asia.

Conclusion: We are Guarding the Last Place

Years earlier, when he visited the Australian goldfields, Dilke had noted that many colonials were ‘in favour of ... [excluding] the yellow immigrants, in order to prevent the destruction of the rising Australian nationality’. The overriding fear amongst Britons in the Antipodes was that they might ‘live to see the English element swamped in the Asiatic’. It was possible, Dilke had predicted at the time, that there might one day ‘be a similar danger in old England’.¹²¹ By the 1890s that scenario had failed to materialise, but the Australian experience of Chinese migration remained relevant nonetheless. While China was clearly set to take a more prominent place in global affairs, the role she might play remained altogether less obvious. On the one hand, Western intervention might undermine the foundations of the Qing regime, prompting its collapse and the opening of the Chinese economy under foreign direction. Alternatively, foreign influence might stir China’s inner dynamism, awaken her productive impulse and send the Middle Kingdom powering into the world economy. In either scenario, for the industrialised nations of the West, the opening of China was bound to have profound consequences. The Yellow Peril which had terrified Anglo-settler communities in the Pacific for much of the nineteenth century, now seemed as if it might be a prelude for a global struggle between the races and China’s commercial invasion of Western markets and industry.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.345.

In his speech on the Chinese question, Archibald Colquhoun had framed the struggle for pre-eminence in China in national and racial terms. English speaking peoples throughout the world, Colquhoun argued, were waiting to see whether British statesmen would ‘rise to the occasion’ and marshal the Empire’s financial and naval resources for the coming struggle. The alternative was for Britain to fall inwards, focusing on ‘semi-socialist “reforms” and ‘drop[ping] out of the rank of Great Powers’. Anglophone peoples were of course far from united in their attitudes towards China. From Shanghai and Sydney to London and Lancashire, observers debated, analysed and proposed answers to their own interpretation of *the* Chinese question. Press coverage of the lecture itself provided a reminder of the importance of geographical perspectives in producing different views of China. While Colquhoun’s paper appeared in *The Times* as ‘The British Aspect of the Chinese Question’, it was reported variously in the Antipodes as ‘Australia and the Chinese Question’; ‘The Chinese Question: How It Affects Australia’; and ‘Australian Interests – Require Open Markets’.¹²²

By focusing on ‘imperial affairs’ Colquhoun had sought to show how the diverse interests of the various branches of the British Empire might find mutual benefits in China. In this he was responding to some of the altogether less harmonious impressions of the potential course of Sino-British engagement that emerged during the 1890s. While Dilke had remained confident that ‘Saxondom would rise triumphant’ out of the growing competition between ‘dearer’ and ‘cheaper’ races, others were less certain. For some, like Friedrich Engels, the greed of British capitalists would provoke the collapse of China’s social and economic structure and

¹²² *The Times*, 10 March 1898, p.12; *West Australian*, 11 March 1898, p.5; *Mercury*, 11 March 1898, p.3; *Advertiser*, 11 March 1898, p.5.

stimulate a great outpouring of Chinese émigrés. ‘Look at England’, wrote Engels to the Russian Marxist Nikolai Danielson in 1892. There the opening of China was thought to provide a ‘temporary revival of prosperity’. But as English investors poured funds into Chinese railways, opening up the country, they were destroying agriculture and domestic industry. The consequence, Engels prophesied, would be;

A wholesale emigration such as the world has not yet seen, a flooding of America, Asia and Europe by the hated Chinaman, a competition for work with the American, Australian and European workman on the basis of the Chinese standard of life, the lowest of all--and if the system of production has not been changed in Europe before that time, it will have to be changed then.¹²³

To the young J.A. Hobson, the opening of China (and the transfer of industrial technology to the East more generally) raised equally important questions about the future of English industry. In March 1891, in a piece entitled ‘Can England Keep Her Trade?’, Hobson sought to explore the impact of the movement of European capital to Asia.¹²⁴ It was a phenomenon, he wrote, directly bound up with the tightening of immigration restrictions across the Pacific. ‘Pressed upon ... by the large class of enfranchised workers’ who feared cheap competition, ‘the United States and Australia’ had closed the gate to Asian migration. Hobson empathised with these efforts, noting the ‘dramatic force’ of popular sentiment and acknowledging that a ‘few ship-loads of Chinamen emptied into the port of London, would compel the English Government’ to similar restrictions. But as the movement of cheap labour became more restricted, Hobson argued, capital was on the move. As investment moved eastwards, India looked like becoming the new Lancashire, China the new ‘workshop of the world’. England herself would be forced to adopt a raft of socialist

¹²³ Engels to Danielson, 22 September 1892, *Marx-Engels Correspondence* (Internationally Published, 1968). Available online at *Marxists’ Internet Archive* [website], <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1892/letters/92_09_22.htm>, accessed 10 June 2011.

¹²⁴ J.A. Hobson, ‘Can England Keep Her Trade?’, *National Review* 17:97 (1891), 1-11. The article anticipated many of the arguments Hobson would later refine in *Imperialism*.

measures including anti-alien legislation, protectionist trade policies and restrictions on the flight of capital, lest she revert back to a semi-feudal past.¹²⁵ Variations on the argument emerged across the Atlantic, where American commentators, such as Brooks Adams, cast doubt on the capacity of the industrial pioneers to adapt in an increasingly competitive world. Excluded from East Asia, ‘the prize for which all the energetic nations are grasping’, Britain and the United States would be forced to turn inwards, focusing on the development of systems of state socialism.¹²⁶

These dystopian visions of the opening of China found their most eloquent and important proponent in the former Oxford historian and Victorian Minister for Education, Charles Henry Pearson. Pearson’s classic work *National Life and Character* (1893) caused a sensation on its release.¹²⁷ It began by repeating the oft made observation that with the closing of the American frontier, the temperate regions of the world were becoming full. But in contrast with Dilke and others, Pearson took an altogether more pessimistic view of the inevitable triumph of the Western nations. In its place, he sketched out a future where Asian and African peoples were destined to expand outwards, while the industrialised countries hit the upper limits of their wealth and territory. ‘The day will come, and perhaps is not far distant’, Pearson famously warned:

When the European observer will look round to see the globe girdled with a continuous zone of the black and yellow races, no longer too weak for aggression or under tutelage, but independent, or practically so, in government, monopolising the trade of their own regions, and circumscribing the industry of the European.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ B. Adams, ‘The Commercial Future’, *Fortnightly Review* 65:386 (1899), 280-283.

¹²⁷ Tregenza, *Professor of Democracy*; Lake and Reynolds, *Global Colour Line*, pp.75-94.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p.89.

In consequence, the British were likely to find themselves increasingly cut-off and forced to follow a model of state socialism like that being devised in the Australian Colonies. ‘Crushed or cowed by the forces that surround him’, Pearson wrote, ‘the Englishmen will invoke the aid of the State’ and seek out an ‘extended socialism of the Australian type’.¹²⁹

The ‘outstanding intellectual’ of the Australian Colonies, Pearson sought to offer a uniquely antipodean vision of the coming engagement between those he called the ‘higher races’ and the rest.¹³⁰ His was an account grounded in his ‘twenty years under the Southern Cross’ and above all his experience of the Chinese question in Australia:

The fear of Chinese immigration which the Australian democracy cherishes, and which Englishmen at home find it hard to understand, is, in fact, the instinct of self-preservation, quickened by experience ... We are guarding the last part of the world, in which the higher races can live and increase freely, for the higher civilisation.¹³¹

In his forecast, Pearson expressed the familiar mix of admiration and fear that characterised Australian accounts of Chinese efficiency. Were the Chinese to come into direct competition with British settlers, the latter would be ‘starve[d] ... out of the field’:

No one in California or Australia, where the effects of Chinese competition have been studied, has, I believe, the smallest doubt that Chinese labourers, if allowed to come in freely, could starve all the white men in either country out of it, or force them to submit to harder work and a much lower standard of wages.¹³²

To Pearson it was inevitable that China’s military and diplomatic authority would be enhanced profoundly in the years ahead. China was destined to ‘people up to the

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p.110

¹³⁰ J. Tregenza, ‘Pearson, Charles Henry (1830-1894)’, *ADB* [website], <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pearson-charles-henry-4382>>, accessed 12 January 2011.

¹³¹ C.H. Pearson, *National Life and Character* (1893), p.17.

¹³² *ibid.*, pp.132-133.

furthest boundary of her recognised territory ... [and] gradually acquire new dominions'. But it was in the industrial sphere that Britain and the established Powers would most likely be covered by the rising power of Asia. As the Australians and Americans knew only too well, the English 'theory of unlimited competition', would not hold up long in an 'industrial war' with the cheaper races.¹³³

Pearson's book immediately caused a storm. *The Times* called it:

An emphatic and, on the whole ... effective counterblast to the triumphant and incoherent pæans of progress with which the ears of our generation have been so incessantly and often so importunately dinned'.¹³⁴

It made a significant impression on a number of leading figures across the English speaking world.¹³⁵ Gladstone noted reading *National Life and Character* in his diary and soon became 'full of Pearson's Book'.¹³⁶ He took to informing dinner guests at Downing Street that it must be read by anyone 'concerned or interested in public affairs'. When one diner suggested that Pearson's views might be overly pessimistic, the GOM had replied that 'the book would only disappoint the very sanguine believers in progress, but I have never been one of them'.¹³⁷ Across the Atlantic, Theodore Roosevelt was similarly gushing. He wrote to Pearson to congratulate him on his work and inform him of its reception in Washington, where (apart perhaps from Mahan's *Influence of Sea Power*) no book had 'excited anything like as much

¹³³ *ibid.*, p.112. Pearson's argument was remarkably similar to that put forward by Hobson two years previous. Cain has explored the correlation between Hobson and Pearson and concludes that Pearson was probably unaware of Hobson's work. Cain, *Hobson and Imperialism*, pp.133-142.

¹³⁴ *The Times*, 19 January 1893, p.7.

¹³⁵ On its reception, Tregenza, *Professor of Democracy*, pp.226-235; Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp.87-104. Beyond the English Speaking World, Jürgen Tampke has spoken of Pearson's influence in Germany. J. Tampke, Paper Presented at the 'Antipodean Orient' Symposium, University of Copenhagen, 17 February 2010.

¹³⁶ Matthew, *The Gladstone Diaries*, xiii, 3 March 1893. Quoted in Tregenza, *Professor of Democracy*, pp.144-146.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

interest'.¹³⁸ Several years later Roosevelt would review *National Life for the Sewanee Review*, calling it 'one of the most notable books of the end of the century'.¹³⁹ While he was altogether more optimistic about the West's capacity to survive industrial competition with Asia, Roosevelt recognised Pearson as being set apart from the bulk of British authors who feared Western decline. The book, Roosevelt argued, reflected both Pearson's 'careful training in one of the world's oldest universities' and his 'long experience as executive officer in one of the world's youngest commonwealths'. He went on to applaud Pearson and the efforts of Australian and American agitators for securing the exclusion of the Chinese. 'The whole civilization of the future', Roosevelt wrote:

Owes a debt of gratitude greater than can be expressed in words to that democratic policy which has kept the temperate zones of the new and the newest worlds a heritage for the white people.¹⁴⁰

National Life and Character evoked less enthusiasm in other circles. In his *Social Evolution* (1894) for instance, Benjamin Kidd sought to distance his own study of racial competition from Pearson's. Grounded in Social Darwinist theory, Kidd's book called for the improved 'efficiency' of the English people and the strengthening of the Anglo-Saxon race.¹⁴¹ He found little time for the attitudes towards the Chinese and other non-Europeans adopted by Pearson. The Australian scholar, Kidd wrote, had

¹³⁸ Bodleian Library/Pearson Papers/d.190/Roosevelt to Pearson, 11 May 1894.

¹³⁹ T. Roosevelt, 'National Life and Character', *Sewanee Review*, 2:3 (1894), 353-376. On Pearson's influence on Roosevelt, Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp.95-113.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.366.

¹⁴¹ On the influence of Social Darwinism on visions of Empire, W. Baumgart, *Imperialism* (Oxford, 1982), pp.82-90.

‘made the serious mistake of estimating the future by watching the course of events outside the temperate regions’.¹⁴²

Pearson’s most important detractor was George Curzon. After the publication of *National Life and Character*, Curzon wrote personally to Pearson to offer corrections, though he saved his real criticism for his own *Problems of the Far East* (1894).¹⁴³

The book was both a study of the major shifts taking place in Far Eastern affairs during the mid-1890s and an affirmation of Britain’s great stake in the region. The ‘prestige and the wealth arising from her Asiatic position’, Curzon wrote, these were the ‘foundation stones of the British Empire’.¹⁴⁴ It was in this spirit that towards the end of the book, Curzon devoted considerable space to evaluating Pearson’s arguments. He discounted any possibility that Chinese migrants might continually spread overseas, citing the enormous internal regions of China still to be developed and the Qing’s efforts to discourage emigration.¹⁴⁵ Pearson’s predictions of China’s future strength seemed an even more ‘peculiar feature of ... [his] daring forecast’. There was little evidence, Curzon wrote, that China was about to awaken. On the contrary, she had long shown a ‘steady and still unarrested decline’.¹⁴⁶ Fundamental to Curzon’s critique was challenging the colonial perspective upon which Pearson’s arguments had been built:

The writer had, as I believe, never been in China, but only studied the Chinese question from the academic distance of an Australian study and if, further, I can show his premises to be of questionable validity and authority, there will be some reason for regarding his conclusions with suspicion; the more so that

¹⁴² B. Kidd, *Social Evolution* 2nd edn (1895), p.339. A number of reviewers noted the difference between the two studies. *Manchester Guardian* 13 June 1894, quoted in Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, p.88.

¹⁴³ Bodleian Library/Pearson Papers/d.187/Curzon to Pearson, 28 August 1893.

¹⁴⁴ G.N. Curzon, *Problems of the Far East* (1894), p.414.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.399.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.408.

they are, to the best of my knowledge, shared by no contemporary authority who either knows or has resided in China itself.¹⁴⁷

In the following chapter, Curzon offered something of a corrective to Pearson's view on the course of world history:

Whatever the future may bring forth, to this country it cannot fail to be a matter of capital importance, seeing that the Empire of Great Britain, though a European, a Canadian, and an Australian, is before all else an Asiatic dominion.¹⁴⁸

In his own notes, Pearson reflected on these (or at least similar) criticisms. Exploring China's recent decline and contrasting it with the rising power of Japan, he acknowledged that 'the oldest civilisation on Earth' had achieved little in recent years. But he remained undeterred. The Western nations, Pearson maintained, would have to contend with the 'the pre-eminence' they 'at present enjoy[ed]' passing 'to Asiatics'. China would become a 'model civilization' and 'we shall pass for ever into the second rank'.¹⁴⁹

In his own book, *China in Transformation* (1898) from which his lecture to the United Services Institute was largely taken, Archibald Colquhoun referenced both *National Life and Character* and *Problems of the Far East*. This chapter has sought to demonstrate, as Colquhoun suggested, that Australian perspectives on China played a notable (if often neglected) role in shaping British efforts to understand China during the 1890s. Clearly there was considerable difference between antipodean and metropolitan views of the Middle Kingdom during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Across debates on trade, migration, imperial federation and the future trajectory of Sino-British engagement, Australian perspectives on China were often out of sync with those that predominated in Britain. As one reviewer of *National Life*

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.400.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.414.

¹⁴⁹ SLV/Pearson Papers/MS.7186/438/1/Box-1/'Some Explanations', pp.1-7.

and Character commented, Pearson's 'point of view' was 'not London or Paris, but Melbourne':

He regards the march of affairs from the Australian point of view, and next to Australia what he sees most clearly is the growth of Chinese power and of the native populations of Africa. In this forecast, in fact, Europe loses altogether the precedence it has always enjoyed. It appears here as not only the smallest, but as the least important continent.¹⁵⁰

As Curzon made clear, Australian views might be little valued by British observers looking towards the East. Certainly the Antipodes did not even appear on the radar for a number of British China watchers. But nonetheless colonial voices continued to make themselves heard at the imperial centre. As we shall see in the chapter that follows, in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War, when the Pacific loomed larger in the minds of British officials and commentators – Australia's response to China would remain a factor in British imperial thinking. The growing competition of the Powers in Asia and across the globe, as Captain J.R. Colomb had noted in his response to Colquhoun's paper, would require the British 'Empire and Australasia especially', to pool its resources as never before. The opportunity was not long coming.

¹⁵⁰ *Athenaeum*, 4 March 1893, quoted in Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp.91-92.

Chapter Seven

The Time for Small Kingdoms Has Passed Away: Australia, China and the Imperial Future.

On the 1 September 1900, Lord Rosebery wrote to the Empress Frederick at Berlin:

Your Majesty cannot but be preoccupied by the situation of the world, which seems extremely anxious. The number of interests and armies planted in China at this moment will require honest and adroit brains to adjust and conciliate. Our war in South Africa seems to be approaching a close, but it will leave a situation that may be difficult. There appears to exist in the world an almost insane desire for the acquisition of territory at any cost, and without examining its value or its liabilities.

It was remarkable, the former Prime Minister continued, that the various imperial rivalries smouldering across the world had not ignited into some greater conflict. The ‘conductor’, which appeared to have so far diverted ‘the lightning’, was a ‘common hatred of England’, but this was ‘hardly an agreeable conviction for a British subject’.¹ As Rosebery intimated, by the turn-of-the-twentieth century, the global supremacy that Britain had enjoyed since Waterloo appeared to be coming under threat.² In South Africa, the most powerful empire in the world had floundered, in a war many had expected would be wrapped up by ‘teatime’. Instead, as Alfred Milner had predicted, British authority had been subjected to ‘the greatest strain ... since the Mutiny’.³ The Army’s failings exacerbated concerns over social conditions at home and Britain’s capacity to maintain her status overseas. Holding up a mirror to British society, commentators such as Sidney Webb discovered signs of ‘race deterioration if not race suicide’. As the hardy and resourceful emigrated to brighter prospects elsewhere, it was falling to the ‘thrifless and irresponsible’, the Irish and the Jews, to

¹ NLS/LR/MS.10131/Rosebery to Empress Frederick, 1 September 1900.

² J. Darwin, ‘The Fear of Falling’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 36 (1986), 27-43.

³ Quoted in D. Lowry, ‘Introduction’ in D. Lowry (ed.) *The South African War Reappraised* (Manchester, 2000), pp.1-2.

spawn the coming generation. If the downwards trend in the nations' racial stock continued unabated, Webb sighed, 'the ultimate future of these islands may be to the Chinese!'⁴ To those looking out beyond the horizon, the struggle in South Africa compounded existing concerns over the wisdom of London's diplomatic isolation and her reliance on naval supremacy. Britain seemed dangerously overstretched. 'Another disaster upon the international situation', wrote Valentine Chirol in January 1900, might prove catastrophic and lead Britain's "'friends" on the Continent to an almost irresistible temptation'.⁵

On everyone's mind was China. In the wake of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) Britain's long-standing pre-eminence in East Asia seemed suddenly to be made of paper. The war, wrote Chirol, had 'inaugurated a new drama in the world's history', one that would 'affect the most vital interests of the British Empire'.⁶ As the Foreign Powers all made moves to assert their influence on the battered Qing Government, British officials battled to hold the line. The central challenge was to preserve regional pre-eminence and mercantile expansion, without being drawn into an eastern war, or the costly formal annexation of territory. 'Pulled hither and dragged thither' by a series of crises over public debt, internal reform, popular revolt and foreign intrigue, the Manchu Dynasty teetered on the brink of collapse.⁷ It seemed increasingly as though the Eastern trajectory of the European Powers and the nature of their engagement with the United States and Japan might be decided in the impending scramble for China.

⁴ S. Webb, *The Decline of the Birth Rate* (1907), pp.16-17.

⁵ CAC/LA/AMEL/1/1/3/Chirol to Amery, 19 January 1900.

⁶ V. Chirol, *The Far Eastern Question* (1896), preface.

⁷ UB/JC/33/1/18/Bredon to FO, 9 October 1899.

The noise from China reached a crescendo in 1900. By the end of June, foreign officials and residents were besieged at Peking and Tientsin by a combined force of Chinese soldiers and the popular anti-foreign and anti-Christian movement known as the 'Boxers'. Emerging out of troubled Shandong Province, the Boxer phenomenon gradually swept north, sparking fears for the safety of European communities. As the violence escalated, an international force sent to bolster the Peking Legations was repelled by a combination of Boxers and Chinese troops. An edict issued by the Empress Dowager Cixi, aligned the Qing with the Boxer movement and declared a state of war between China and the Foreign Powers. While onlookers across the globe sustained themselves on a diet of rumour and innuendo about the fate of the Legations, an eight-power expeditionary force, drove its way into China to extract a brutal retribution.⁸ Coming on top of the war in South Africa, the situation seemed an acid test of Britain's defence capacity. 'The primary interest of this country is to maintain the integrity of China and with it the open door', wrote the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain. Britain was 'not likely ever to want to take possession of any portion of the interior', but the Government must endeavour to 'keep off' others attempting to intrude on her sphere of interest. The rivalry of the Great Powers was leaving in its wake an 'open door in name only'.⁹

It was in this context, beset by mounting external pressures, that late-Victorians and Edwardians began to look more seriously at the unity and efficiency of their own Empire. In 1890, Charles Dilke had argued that Britain's fate in any future struggle with the European Powers would depend on imperial co-ordination. 'Greater Britain'

⁸ On the global dimensions of the crisis, R. Bickers and R.G. Tiedemann (eds.) *The Boxers, China and the World* (Lanham, MD, 2007). On the causes, J.W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley, 1987). On the Boxer's themselves and their place in historiography, P. Cohen, *History in Three Keys* (New York, 1997).

⁹ CAB/37/53/65/'The Chinese Problem', 10 September 1900.

was as vital as ‘London itself’, Dilke wrote, but the ‘stupendous potential strength’ of the British World was obscured by the ‘stupendous carelessness in organising its force’.¹⁰ A decade later, in his influential studies of *Britain and the British Seas* (1902) and ‘The Geographical Pivot of History’ (1904) the Geographer Halford Mackinder reinforced the point. The Victorian revolution in transport, Mackinder argued, was shifting the global balance of power towards the great land empires.¹¹ Against these competitors, ‘Britain could not again become mistress of the seas’. Through ‘virility and imagination’, she must maintain the ‘lead won under earlier conditions’ until her ‘daughter nations’ had ‘grown to maturity’.¹² If British imperialists had long conceived of their Empire as an organic entity, the situation required what one publication (produced on the anniversary of Trafalgar) called, ‘a critical period of imperial evolution’.¹³ Britain’s future prosperity at home and the long-term viability of her vast global interests, so the argument ran, depended on her ability to marshal her imperial resources. ‘The time for small kingdoms has passed away,’ wrote Chamberlain to the Australian Opposition leader George Reid in 1902, ‘the future is with the great Empires’.¹⁴

Drawing to a close our study of the imperial significance of Australian engagement with China, this chapter concentrates on the importance of that relationship around the turn-of-the twentieth century. Its overarching aim is to illuminate the ways in which the Sino-Australian dynamic came to permeate a series of broader historical developments, each connected to Britain’s search for imperial unity, in an age of

¹⁰ Dilke, *Problems*, ii, 508-509; 574-574.

¹¹ H.J. Mackinder, ‘The Geographical Pivot of History’, *The Geographical Journal*, 23:4 (1904), 421-437.

¹² H.J. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (1902), p.358.

¹³ C.S. Goldman (ed.) *The Empire and the Century* (1905), p.xxii.

¹⁴ UB/JC/14/1/1/52/Chamberlain to Reid, 13 June 1902.

intense international rivalry. This influence is explored in relation to five key themes. The first is the growing preoccupation with improving Britain's system of imperial defence, as viewed through the Australian contribution to the Boxer War. The second is the impact of that conflict on the evolution of Australian attitudes to China. The third is the continuing imperial resonance of Australian efforts to enforce policies of migration restriction, particularly as they affected British foreign and colonial relations. The fourth is the resulting impression etched upon contemporary estimations as to the future of the Empire in the Pacific and of the unity of Greater Britain. The fifth, in many respects a coda to these earlier themes, is the re-importation of colonial ideas on race and exclusion into Britain itself. Navigating a series of interconnected historical developments, this chapter sets out to demonstrate how the triangular relationship linking Britain, China and Australia, came to play a significant role within contemporaneous debates on the shared future of Great and Greater Britain and their engagement with the wider world.

***The Eldest Born and the Baby Standing Side-By Side
With the Mother Country in China***

It was New Year's Eve at the Tientsin Club. 'The champagne was flowing' and spirits were high. The British General, Lorne Campbell, was hosting representatives of the Foreign Powers stationed in the city, for an official banquet to welcome the 'New Century' and the 'New Baby'. The festivities went long into the night. At the American and German officers' clubs, slurred speeches in various languages gave way to boozy renditions of 'God Save the Queen', 'God Save the Tsar' and 'The

Watch on the Rhine'. 1901, the twentieth century and the inauguration of the new Australian Commonwealth were being rung-in with some style in Northern China.¹⁵

When he crawled out of bed the following morning, John Wallace, Assistant Paymaster with the NSW Naval Contingent and Special Correspondent for the *SMH*, joined the commander of the Victorian Contingent based at Tienstin, for a review of Indian Army troops. That evening Wallace and several of his fellow New South Welshmen (the bulk of whom were on garrison duty at Peking) accompanied Victorian and British officers to another banquet hosted by General Lorne. After toasting the Queen, the dry Scotsman rose again:

We meet tonight to celebrate an anniversary and a birthday – the anniversary of the proclamation of her Majesty as Empress of India and the birthday of a Federated Australia. It is appropriate that the dual celebration should come at a time when at the bidding of our queen troops from Australia and India are brigaded together, ready to fight shoulder to shoulder for the interest of her Majesty's subjects in China – as they are actually fighting and have been in the past year for the maintenance of the Empire in South Africa.

Amidst loud cheers, Lorne derided the Manchester School and the Little Englanders.

'Britons', he continued:

Whether raised in England – I mean Scotland (Laughter) – England, or Australia, are Britons for all that, and proud of belonging, not to Great Britain but a Greater Britain. (Applause).

It was several minutes before the mood died down sufficiently for Commander

Tickell of the Victorian Navy to respond:

It must be gratifying to Australia that on her natal day of federation, granted to her by the mother country that she should have some of her sons standing side by side with those of the old land, both in South Africa and China – (Cheers).

¹⁵ ML/JRW/Mss.346/1/Wallace to Wife, 3 January 1901.

Doubtless, he concluded, federation would bring ‘increased corresponding duties and responsibilities to imperialism’, but across South Africa and Northern China,

Australians were showing their willingness:

Australia is the baby of Imperialism ... our first call is the Empire. While we have to-day got troops from England and India doing honour to us in our own country, we have the eldest-born and the ‘baby’ standing side by side with the mother country in China.¹⁶

Australian forces had arrived in Northern China in September 1900, as a result of a request for support from the British Admiralty. Given the ‘great urgency’ of the Boxer situation, London cabled the Colonies to ask whether ships from the Royal Navy’s Australian Squadron might be deployed. With ‘applications for gunboats for the protection of life and property ... pouring in’, Australian vessels might reach China in half the time as ships from Europe.¹⁷ Despite initial enthusiasm, the plea for gunboats hit several logistical hurdles. Instead, naval brigades were assembled from Victoria and NSW, while the South Australian Government contributed one ship, the *Protector*. The activities and experience of these forces has been well documented.¹⁸ With less need for shallow-draught vessels than initially expected (given the relative peace on the Yangtze) the *Protector* was engaged in survey work and in carrying despatches, men and cargo, before returning to Australia in November. The force of two hundred Victorians, participated in the Pao-ting fu (now Baoding) expedition, before becoming the mainstay of the British garrison at Tientsin. The two-hundred and fifty New South Welshmen, meanwhile, proceeded to the Chinese capital and joined the British garrison there. Deployed mainly for policing and guard duties, both

¹⁶ ML/JRW/Mss.346/1/notebook.

¹⁷ B. Nicholls, *Bluejackets & Boxers* (Sydney, 1986), p.22

¹⁸ *ibid*; R.H. Wilde, ‘The Boxer Affair and the Australian Involvement in Imperial Defence’, *Pacific Historical Review*, 26:1 (1957), 51-65.

Contingents (minus several men who took up offers of employment on the railways) left China in March 1901. Their attitude and their role is aptly described as that of ‘Imperialists and Policemen’ by one unpublished study, a view reflected in the numerous first-hand accounts held by the Australian War Memorial (AWM).¹⁹

In *The Boxers, China and the World* (2007) contributors have emphasized the ways in which ‘the local, the national and the international were entwined’, in the infamous events of 1900-01.²⁰ For the British, the Boxer War constituted an important moment - both in terms of its ramifications for the inter-imperial power play taking place in the Far East, but also because it exposed the Empire to a serious security crisis in the Pacific, at a time when significant resources were already tied down in South Africa. Though Britain’s Boxer response relied heavily on Indian Army troops, the combined presence of Indian, British and Australian forces (together with Chinese troops from the British concession at Weihaiwei) was a powerful statement of London’s capacity to draw together auxiliary forces from across the disparate portions of the Empire.

Though small in terms of the overall foreign presence in China (and dwarfed by the antipodean contribution to South Africa) the Australian Contingents provided useful material support. But more importantly they offered symbolic reassurance. For Chamberlain, their deployment promised a shot-in-the-arm for British prestige. In forwarding the Admiralty’s initial request for ships, the Colonial Secretary had emphasized the ‘secret moral effect’ that would be produced by an impression of the ‘omnipresence of available British resources’.²¹ Chamberlain’s enthusiasm for the proposed use of colonial forces in Asia, needs to be understood in light of his earlier

¹⁹ AWM/Mss.860/R. McWhinney, ‘Imperialists and Policemen’.

²⁰ R. Bickers, ‘Introduction’ in Bickers and Tiedemann (eds.) *The Boxers, China and the World*, p.xii.

²¹ Wilde, ‘The Boxer Affair’, 51-52.

efforts to bring Australasian and Canadian troops to South Africa. Militarily useful, the presence of overseas Britons on the Veld had proved an even greater coup in terms of imperial propaganda.²² Here, the key was addressing concerns over ‘how slight and uncertain’, in the words of Leo Amery, *The Times*’ chief correspondent in South Africa, Britain’s reserve of military power appeared to have become.²³ In July 1899, Chamberlain had written to Lord Minto, Governor General at Ottawa, to offer him the ‘opportunity of showing the solidarity of the Empire’, by making ‘a really spontaneous’ offer of Canadian forces. ‘Such a proof of the unity of the Empire ... would have a great effect’, but it should not appear to ‘be the result of external pressure or suggestion’. In the weeks that followed Chamberlain made similar approaches to the Australians. In case there were any doubts as to the primacy of propaganda over military priorities, he reassured Minto: ‘we do not want the men’ and dangled funds for the Pacific Cable as a carrot.²⁴

It was natural that any Australian expedition to China should be viewed in light of the existing colonial presence in South Africa and as part of a more general debate over the Colonies’ obligation to assist the Empire internationally. In Australia, critics of both campaigns, never more than a vocal minority, questioned the extent to which conflicts in Africa and East Asia touched colonial interests directly. Tapping into debates about imperial federation and Australia’s obligation to help meet the cost of imperial defence, they warned that Britain might come to make more frequent and

²² A. Thompson, ‘Imperial Propaganda during the South African War’, in G. Cuthbertson, A. Grundlingh and M. Suttie (eds.) *Writing a Wider War* (Athens, OH, 2002), p.303; D. Lowry, ‘The Wider Impact of the South African War’ in Lowry (ed.) *The South African War Reappraised*, pp.225-227.

²³ A. Porter, ‘The South African War and Imperial Britain’, in Cuthbertson, Grundlingh and Suttie (eds.) *Writing a Wider War*, p.295. For a contemporary reflection, F. Wilkinson, *Australia at the Front* (1901), p.1.

²⁴ NLS/Minto Papers/MS.12568/Chamberlain to Minto, 3 July 1899, 7 July 1899, 7 October 1899.

elaborate requests in the future. In the case of China, the notion that the Boxer War was not a ‘real war’ - but an imperialist folly, was coupled with the suggestion that Australia might need her men at home to deal with the unpredictable consequences of a Qing collapse.²⁵ The prevailing argument, however, was that the Colonies were directly affected by the fate of the British Empire overseas and so must offer support where necessary. In a speech to the NSW Parliament in 1899, one which he subsequently posted to a thankful Chamberlain, the soon-to-be Australian Prime Minister Edmund Barton justified Australian military contributions to the Empire in the following terms:

Let any doubt of the strength, the impregnability, the complete union, of the British Empire once gain ground, and you will suffer in Australia in another way, because, whether it is in China and Japan or whether it is in India, the downfall of British interests in either of those directions would mean disaster to the continent of Australia.²⁶

In his study of the deployment of the NSW Lancers to South Africa, Wilcox has argued that the episode should be seen as ‘a rare example of imperial federation in action’: a reminder of ‘how viable the programme seemed to be at the close of the nineteenth century’, as well as the ‘forgotten and sometime mundane reasons it could not succeed’.²⁷ The arrival of British imperial forces in China also fits Wilcox’s characterisation. From the beginning, there was widespread recognition of the benefits of creating and showcasing a united imperial presence. As the photographer who captured the image below **[Figure 12]** clearly recognised, collaboration between Australian, Indian and British servicemen in China, also provided a very real

²⁵ On these debates, Wilde, ‘The Boxer Affair’, 57-61; C.N. Connolly, ‘Class, Birthplace, Loyalty: Australian Attitudes to the Boer War’, *Australian Historical Studies*, 18:71, 210-232.

²⁶ UB/JC/29/4/3/4/NSW Hansard, 19 October 1899.

²⁷ C. Wilcox, ‘The New South Wales Lancers in England and South Africa, 1899’, *London Papers in Australian Studies*, 1 (2000).

illustration of 'imperial federation in action'. Certainly the men at the frontline appear to have conceived of it this way. At the Commonwealth inauguration dinner in Tientsin, General Lorne, declared that the Australian presence in China (like the federation of the Colonies) would 'bear a strong part in working out the imperial conception' and, in-time, help lead to 'the ultimate union of the various units of the clan Briton'. It was this same notion that Victoria's Captain Tickell had sought to emphasize. The image of the 'eldest-born [India] and the "baby" [Federated Australia] standing side by side with the mother country in China', at the same moment as Indian and British troops attended federation celebrations at Sydney, provided a tantalising glimpse of the combined power of a federated British Empire.²⁸

Figure 12: Australian and Indian Servicemen in China, 1900-1901.
AWM Picture Collection (Negative Number: A04807).



²⁸ ML/JRW/Mss.346/1/notebook.

To many observers, the impressive physical condition of the Australians seemed to complement the martial virtues so prized amongst British Indian troops and to promise much in terms of the Empire's fighting capability. 'The Australian Naval Brigade', commented Field Marshall Count von Waldersee, the German Commander of the international forces, 'constitute the finest body of men I have seen'.²⁹ The potential implications for the future of British interests in Asia were warmly acknowledged at the annual dinner of the London China Association in 1901. In attendance, alongside Admiral Seymour, the leader of the first failed relief expedition to Peking, was a Colonel H. Pipon, who had recently returned from China. Called to offer a toast to the 'Imperial Forces', Pipon praised 'the loyalty of our brethren beyond the sea':

You have had out there an army composed of many nationalities which include gunners from the British Isles, Australian volunteers, a splendid body of men, and His Majesty's Imperial Service Native Troops from India. A finer and more magnificent body of men it is impossible to find (Cheers). I feel quite certain that our foreign allies in China must have been struck by the appearance of these men.³⁰

Another practical consideration was that the Australian commitment might provide a precedent for future conflicts and, in particular, an example to the Canadians. Despite initial hopes that Ottawa would contribute to the Boxer War, a move which would have also demonstrated the value of the Canadian Pacific Railway for deploying resources to the Pacific, London's appeals had amounted to nothing.³¹ In the Commons, the Secretary to the Admiralty, Hugh Arnold-Forster applauded what he called the first colonial naval contribution since 1812. The 'remarkable precedent, which has been set almost on the day of the birth of the great Commonwealth of

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ SOAS/CA/Minute-Books/3, pp.35-36.

³¹ Wilde, 'The Boxer Affair', 52, 56.

Australia’, he suggested pointedly, ‘may at some no distant day be imitated with advantage to the Empire by the equally great Dominion of Canada’.³²

For all this lofty sentiment, the British response to the Boxer War also revealed underlying imperial tensions. While the diversity of the British force demonstrated London’s ability to call on regional reserves, it nonetheless failed to mask anxieties over the relative absence of white troops. The overwhelming reliance on the Indian Army, according to members of the expatriate community who briefed John Wallace, had led ‘the ignorant Chinese to believe that Great Britain can only show black troops, and that therefore she is not the powerful nation she is supposed to be’.³³ A related concern was communicated to Commander E.R. Connor, second-in-command of the NSW Brigade, by the British Commander Lieutenant-General Gaselee. Given the shortage of white personnel in China, Gaselee commented, ‘the gentle foreigner’ had developed ‘a way of jeering at the English which might have a prejudicial effect on the peace of the Empire had it occurred to us’.³⁴ It was a situation that underlined the symbolic importance of the numerically small Australian presence. For a time, after the departure of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers for Hong Kong, the Australians were the only white British infantry in North China.³⁵

The deployment had also raised awkward questions over organisation and funding. Following Britain’s initial request for assistance the Colonies had rushed to respond. Victoria led the charge, offering to raise and dispatch its two hundred men at colonial expense. It was a significant pledge, as the cost of most of the Australian contribution

³² HOC/vol.91/cc.317-318, 18 March 1901.

³³ ML/JRW/MSS.346/1/notebook.

³⁴ ML/Connor Papers/ML.MSS/3282/1(Item2)/Diary, 18 September 1900.

³⁵ Nichols, *Bluejackets and Boxers*, p.73.

in South Africa was being met by London. In NSW, events got off to a bad start when the Imperial Commander of the Colony's armed forces suggested he might lead a force of 5,000 Australians to China. Floated without the Government's approval, his toadiness brought a sharp rebuke. Differences soon emerged between Sydney and London over the desired terms of service. For the NSW Government the situation promised useful experience for colonial crews, while prospective volunteers showed a particular interest in serving on British warships. When the Admiralty subsequently insisted on deployment on land, the pool of interested New South Welshman shrunk considerably. There were also disagreements over funding. While Victorian forces were to be paid a colonial day-rate (7s 6d), NSW volunteers (being paid for by London) would receive the lower imperial rate (5s). The situation was eventually resolved by the NSW Government agreeing to pay the difference, as had generally been the case with colonial forces in South Africa. In South Australia, however, the Government refused to cover the disparity in relation to the crew of the *Protector*. After bitter wrangling between Adelaide and Whitehall, it fell to Chamberlain to intervene with a direct plea to the Admiralty, who in the end convinced the Treasury to make up the difference.³⁶ Altogether, the varied (and at times divisive) financial arrangements which facilitated the Australian expedition were a marker of the difficulty of co-ordinating a multilateral system of imperial defence.

This theme was carried over into subsequent debates as to whether colonial contributions in South Africa and China might serve as a precedent. As Prime Minister Seddon of New Zealand suggested, Australasian leaders generally accepted they should contribute forces in the 'event of Great Britain standing in any danger of

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp.22-42; Wilde, 'The Boxer Affair', 53-56.

losing prestige through a lack of men'.³⁷ There was less agreement, however, as to the mechanics which should govern colonial involvement. In an influential speech to Parliament, Seddon advanced the merits of developing a colonial auxiliary force that could be deployed to regional emergencies. 'The lessons taught by the war in South Africa', he declared, had revealed 'altered conditions' in world affairs that would affect colony and Empire alike. Antipodeans should be particularly prepared to confront the 'eventualities that may arise in connection with the adjustment of affairs in China'.³⁸ Seddon's plan for an imperial reserve was soon adapted by an enthusiastic War Office and tabled for discussion by Chamberlain at the 1902 Colonial Conference. The Colonial Defence Committee's eventual proposal, 'Colonial Troops for Imperial Service in War', emphasized the 'necessity for organizing the defence of the Empire against far graver contingencies', than had been encountered in 1900. It rested on the belief that the Empire would come to rely increasingly on Greater Britain. 'The main burden of a great struggle between the British Empire and one or more States of European race, or descent', ran the text put to the Conference, 'must be borne by the white subjects of the King'.³⁹ There was a strong undertone of preparing for a conflict in the Far East. Speaking in favour of the scheme, the Secretary of State for War, St John Broderick, urged those present to consider 'the case of China'. Having recently signed the Anglo-Japanese treaty, Britain needed to know what assistance she might offer her ally. A war in Asia would undoubtedly bring challenges in 'other parts of the globe'. With the British Army perhaps tied up in Europe, London would hope to be able to:

³⁷ Quoted in Wilde, 'The Boxer Affair', 52.

³⁸ BPP/Command-Papers[1299]/Papers Relating to the Colonial Conference, 1902, pp.58-59.

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp.44-52.

Support our ally in China with a small body, but, at the same time, a well organised body of Colonial forces from those Colonies which are nearest and which are most conveniently situated for supporting us in China.⁴⁰

In the end, the proposal won support from Natal and the Cape Colony. The Australians and Canadians refused to sign up to any formal arrangement, suggesting that to do so would be ‘objectionable ... as derogating from the powers of self-government’ and might hamper the development of their existing defence programs. The Australians preferred to increase their naval contribution and to rely on a more informal imperial co-ordination. ‘Relationship and affection’, Barton assured Chamberlain, would ensure Australians came to London’s aid in a future emergency.⁴¹

It was an apt reflection of the priorities that had governed the Australian deployment to China, where sentiment and symbolism proved more important than the initial strategic considerations. In his history of ‘Defence and Imperial Disunity’, for the *OHBE*, Burroughs highlights the influence of the ‘desire for consolidation and the heightened awareness of common dangers and shared interests’, in driving the ‘movement for imperial federation’.⁴² As a case study of ‘imperial federation in action’, the dispatch of the Naval Contingents to China, coinciding with presence of antipodean and Canadian forces in South Africa and the achievement of Australian federation, offered considerable encouragement to those who hoped to see the divergent parts of the Empire knitted more closely together. But the often confused nature of the colonial contribution also provided a pointed reminder of the difficulty of channelling shared Britannic sentiment into a cohesive naval or military system.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.30.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.32. Barton quoted in Wilde, ‘The Boxer Affair’, 64.

⁴² P. Burroughs, ‘Defence and Imperial Disunity’, *OHBE*, iii, 336.

The scale of that challenge was perhaps best epitomized by the uncertainty over the organisation of the venture and the eventual involvement of only three Australasian Colonies, who sent mainly men, rather than the ships London had first sought. If Barton's 'relationship and affection', trumped these practical considerations in the heat of the moment, it proved insufficient during the early-1900s to make a lasting impression upon the architecture of imperial defence organisation.

An Eastern Education

For the men of the Australian Contingents, the Boxer War provided a unique window onto late-Qing China and to the imperial tensions that were manifesting themselves in East Asia. Their impressions were distilled into a series of diaries, the principal collection of which is held by the AWM.⁴³ Alongside descriptions of the mundane details of service, these war journals paint a vivid picture of the ways in which Australian volunteers came to view China and their own contribution to the British Empire. Many clearly saw the struggles in the Far East and South Africa, as disparate flashpoints in a global contest against Britain's external rivals. In time, a number would complain that their efforts had been poorly recognised compared to those who 'fought Old Kruger' and 'put on airs'.⁴⁴ In China, some reflected on their own racial pre-conceptions, commenting on the distinction between 'white and yellow'; the miserable existence of the thrifty Chinese; and the particular viciousness exhibited by the Russians. Not all were predisposed to Sinophobia. One member of the Victorian force commended the Chinese work ethic, engaged a former member of the Qing Navy as his interpreter and marvelled at the effectiveness of the Weihaiwei Regiment.

⁴³ As individual copyright permissions have not been secured, quotations from these sources are anonymised and cited simply as 'AWM Diaries', except where sections have been published elsewhere.

⁴⁴ AWM Diaries. On subsequent complaints over rewards, NAA/A6661/1/1048-1049/'China War Medals'.

‘If the Boxers had British Officers’, he wrote, having witnessed the capacity of these Chinese soldiers, ‘I am afraid the Allies would have suffered’.⁴⁵ For Commander Connor, the expedition appears to have been conceived as a quest to support the Empire’s position in the Far East. In China, Connor engaged with various British officials, including the new Minister Ernest Satow, on the future of British interests. During the deployment, he framed his lived experience by reading works including Curzon’s *Problems* (‘a most interesting + faithfully written book’) and *Chinese Characteristics* (1894) by the Western missionary Arthur Smith.⁴⁶

Taken together, the Australian Boxer diaries convey a sense of excitement and imperial adventure, wonder at the exoticism of China and a gradual desensitisation to the shocking violence that pervaded everyday life. In one village, a Victorian recorded his surprise at finding needles from Manchester in the local store. Outside he made a more gruesome discovery - buckets of severed heads, displayed to demonstrate the villagers’ resistance to the Boxers. Colonial forces were generally well-disciplined, but were not beyond acting in ‘cold blood’.⁴⁷ To many the brutalising impact of post-Boxer China was inescapable. It was best summed-up by Paymaster Wynne from NSW, who recorded that foreign soldiers were ‘growing callous’ as a result of ‘the Eastern education’. ‘Until you can bring yourself to regard the Chinaman as something less than human, considerably less’, Wynne philosophised, ‘you are at a disadvantage’.⁴⁸ In almost all the diaries, moments of triumph are punctuated by horrific (but progressively less shocking) reminders of the cheapness of human life. When a large crowd came to see off the Victorians from

⁴⁵ AWM Diaries.

⁴⁶ ML/Connor Papers/ML.MSS.3282/1(Item 2), 2 February 1901, 13 March, 21 April 1901.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 17 September 1900.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Hevia, *English Lessons*, p.221.

Tientsin, for instance, the happy scene was barely interrupted by the spectacle of hungry dogs eating dead bodies, which had washed up in the river.⁴⁹

Like their European counterparts, the Australians were entitled to their share of loot. To this day, various trophies remain in private archives and on display at the National Maritime Museum in Sydney. On the Contingents' return, a cartoon in the *SMH* depicted correspondent 'Johnny [Wallace] ... Marching Home', carrying a sack of 'curios' [Figure 13]. More significant though, were the first-hand impressions of the Far East that the Australians channelled back to their countrymen at home. Historians have been understandably cautious when gauging Australian interest in the Boxer Uprising. Undoubtedly, events in East Asia were often overshadowed by the situation in South Africa and the achievement of federation. But the extent of public awareness was evident when, despite the absence of an official ceremony, a crowd 'almost as large and quite as sympathetic', as had seen off soldiers for the Transvaal, turned out in Sydney 'to wave and cheer bon voyage to the intrepid volunteers' [Figure 13]. The Australian press gave extensive coverage to the conflict, the Boxers and the international situation in China. At particular moments China took precedence over South Africa. Prior to the despatch of the Australian forces, colonial newspapers had drawn their China intelligence primarily from Reuters and the British press. In July, following the metropolitan papers, they mistakenly reported on the fall of the Legations and the resulting 'Carnival of Horror'.⁵⁰ Like much of the foreign press,

⁴⁹ AWM Diaries.

⁵⁰ For instance *Argus*, 10 July 1900, p.5.

they fuelled a fascination for the lurid rumours and innuendo surrounding that ‘Dark Enigma’, the ‘vixenish Dowager’ Empress Cixi.⁵¹

Figure 13: The Correspondent’s Scrapbook. ML/JRW/Mss.346/1/notebook.
Three images from J.R. Wallace’s papers: ‘Johnny Marching Home’, the route to the Boxer War and the Australians’ departure from Sydney.



⁵¹ Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp.137-140. On the British Press in China, J. Elliot, *Some Did It For Civilisation* (Hong Kong, 2002). On relations between the British and Australian Press more generally, Potter, *News and the British World*.

With the departure of the Brigades, the press turned increasingly towards evaluating Australia's own stake in the conflict. One survey of editorial opinion highlights the centrality of 'considerations of self-interest'. 'All [publications] pointed out Australia's proximity to China' and argued that Australians would consequently 'be closely affected' by the present conflict - therefore she 'must assist Great Britain'.⁵²

The most influential member of the China force in terms of transmitting the Boxer experience home was John Wallace. If the crisis offered Western observers a window onto the uncertain future of the Qing Empire and the foreign intrigues raining down upon it, Wallace's correspondence from Northern China provided an Australian perspective on the themes and issues in play. In his comprehensive, 'With the Naval Contingent' letters to the *SMH*, Wallace detailed everything from the weather to the imperial palaces. He devoted considerable attention to the great 'Chinese riddle', which confronted Britain in the Far East and to characterising the representatives of the various nations with whom Australia would be sharing the future of the Pacific. Of the troops in China, he was particularly taken by the 20th Punjab Infantry, who were encamped nearby. Their swordplay was 'a revelation', while their war dance 'resembled in many respects the Aboriginal corroboree of Australia'. At Peking, he met Welsh Fusiliers (the Australian's 'countrymen') and Americans (who were more like 'cousins'). The Japanese, the 'heroes' of the Boxer War, were best described as 'fearless ... little bricks'.⁵³

Throughout his letters, Wallace emphasized the contribution that the Contingents were making to the Empire. As the force prepared to return in March 1901, he noted that their only regret was not having 'taking part in any decent-sized engagement

⁵² AWM/Mss.860/R. McWhinney, 'Imperialists and Policemen', pp.54-55.

⁵³ ML/JRW/Mss.346/1/notebook.

against the Boxers'. That aside, the venture had 'been a grand advertisement for the Colonies'. It had shown the 'Allies that Australia, besides sending thousands of mounted soldiers to South Africa to assist the Empire, can also supply a fine force of bluejackets in the hour of need'.⁵⁴ It was this sort of thinking that encouraged Wallace (and through him - his readers) into contact with key members of the British establishment in China. He met Satow and military and consular officials to discuss the situation in the Far East. Amidst his other duties, he became engaged as occasional private secretary to his fellow Australian, *The Times*' Peking Correspondent George Morrison.⁵⁵ A native of Victoria, Morrison had first come to fame as a journalist and explorer. In 1893, he carried his adventures into China, travelling from Shanghai to Rangoon, the experience of which formed the basis of his successful *An Australian in China* (1895). After arriving in Edinburgh, where he presented a thesis for the MD, he was made *Times* correspondent at Peking.⁵⁶

Via Morrison, Wallace gained a rich insight to the situation in China and Britain's position in the Far East. He described 'the doctor' as 'a well-known figure in Peking ... immediately you come into contact ... you feel that you are in the presence of one who has great force of character and who carries big responsibilities on his shoulders'.⁵⁷ In his study of Edmund Backhouse, Morrison's unofficial translator and editor, Trevor-Roper astutely detected that Morrison's greatest contribution to *The Times* was not so much 'his understanding of China' but rather 'his understanding of the aims of foreign imperialism in China'.⁵⁸ Morrison's appointment reflected the conviction in Printing House Square that, although the public were presently

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ ML/JRW/Mss.346/1/notebook.

⁵⁶ The best biography remains Pearl, *Morrison of Peking*.

⁵⁷ ML/JRW/Mss.346/1/notebook.

⁵⁸ H. Trevor-Roper, *Hermit of Peking* 3rd edn (1978), pp.47, 50-51.

disengaged, Far Eastern affairs were bound to become more important in the future.⁵⁹ In the previous decade, the paper had rejected a suggestion by Archibald Colquhoun that he should act as their ‘Special Representative at Peking’.⁶⁰ Morrison’s role, Valentine Chirol reflected in 1897, was ‘a new departure’ for the paper, in ‘a new line of country’. With his ‘headquarters’ at Peking, Morrison was informed he should be ready to proceed across China or the Far East and provide the ‘general information + enlightenment’ required ‘for the furtherance of British interests + of an Imperial policy’.⁶¹

Morrison’s papers provide a window to the tremendous difficulties he experienced. Competition with Reuters, distrust of the Chinese and his fellow correspondents, and constant complaints over a shortage of resources, plague his communications with Chirol and *The Times*’ manager Charles Moberly Bell.⁶² For all his troubles, Morrison reinforced *The Times*’ unique level of political influence when it came to China affairs.⁶³ Everyone in the Far East, the Australian reflected, appreciated the way the London daily ‘championed British interests’.⁶⁴ The importance of Morrison’s own role was confirmed after he beat diplomats to report on the Sino-Russian agreement on the lease of Port Arthur.⁶⁵ He later reflected on the moment in his diary, noting: ‘I should have been extremely annoyed if I had been at the Foreign Office, not to have been better informed’. Morrison felt himself better connected than British

⁵⁹ On *The Times* in China, S. Morrison (ed.) *The History of the Times* (5.vols., 1935-1984), iii, 180-209; Elliot, *Some Did It For Civilisation*, pp.2-25.

⁶⁰ TNL/Manager’s Letterbooks/20/MacDonald to Colquhoun, undated.

⁶¹ TNL/Foreign Editor’s Letterbooks/3/Chirol to Morrison, 14 May 1897, 22 April 1897; TNL/Chirol Papers/Morrison Correspondence (1897-1910)/Chirol to Morrison, 2 February 1897.

⁶² ML/GEM; TNL/Chirol Papers/Morrison Correspondence (1897-1901); TNL/Moberly Bell Papers/Morrison Correspondence (1895-1900).

⁶³ Bickers, *Britain in China*, pp.150-151; Elliot, *Some Did It For Civilisation*, p.3.

⁶⁴ TNL/Moberly Bell Papers/Morrison Correspondence (1895-1900)/Morrison to Moberly Bell, 2 February 1897.

⁶⁵ Pearl, *Morrison of Peking*, pp.97-98.

officials, because of his relationships with the Chinese, with whom British diplomats had ‘no intercourse whatever’.⁶⁶ Appreciation of *The Times* by British interests in China was reflected at the 1898 Annual Dinner of the China Association. There, Thomas Sutherland, founder of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, poured praise on Moberly Bell and Chirol (who were present) and the ‘*The Times* correspondent in China’. The press, Sutherland remarked, had done much to ‘maintain the integrity of the British Empire in every part of the world - and in promoting commerce’:

What the China Association desired in connection with China was a fair field and no favour, and he ventured to think that, with the assistance of the Press, they would succeed in obtaining it.⁶⁷

Morrison’s influence was just as important in his homeland. If he saw himself as an agent of British imperialism in China, *The Times*’ Peking correspondent never lost sight of Australia’s unique place within that dynamic. At Peking he became a strong advocate for the expansion of Sino-Australian trade. In an interview with Wallace, for instance, he argued that while China had ‘ceased to be a political power’ in the wake of the Boxer Rising, her ‘commercial possibilities ... [were] enormous’. If British Ministers could only remove ‘all those countless hindrances to trade which China now imposes’, then the ‘trade with Australia’ was ‘capable of infinite development’.⁶⁸ Though he repeatedly called for closer commercial relations, Morrison remained a lifelong advocate of restricting Asian migration to Australia. It was a tendency that often brought his views into conflict with those of his superiors in Printing House Square. In *An Australian in China* he wrote:

⁶⁶ ML/GEM/ML.MSS.312/10/Diary, 7 November 1899.

⁶⁷ SOAS/CA/Minute-Books/2, p.109. Morrison was less impressed with them. The following year, when visiting London, he recorded in his diary: ‘Dinner at the Thatched House Club – damned stupid ... I find extraordinary ignorance among these men.’ ML/GEM/ML.MSS.312/10/Diary, 7 November 1899.

⁶⁸ ML/JRW/Mss.346/1/notebook.

I went to China possessed with the strong racial antipathy to the Chinese common to my countrymen, but that feeling has long since given way to one of lively sympathy and gratitude, and I shall always look back with pleasure to this journey, during which I experienced, while traversing provinces as wide as European kingdoms, uniform kindness and hospitality, and the most charming courtesy. In my case, at least, the Chinese did not forget their precept, 'deal gently with strangers from afar'.⁶⁹

If Morrison's sympathies came to lie with the Chinese (particularly in light of growing fears of Japan) he rejected any notion that Chinese migrants should be allowed unrestricted entry to Australia. The White Australia Policy, he later wrote, was the Commonwealth's, 'most vital and most national policy ... which finds support from every section of the Australian people'.⁷⁰

This distinction, between wanting to reach out to the Middle Kingdom economically, whilst being shut off in terms of migration, was of course one of the oldest formulations of Sino-Australian engagement put forward by Australian observers of China. In the uncertain period that surrounded the Boxer War, however, Morrison played a vital role in ensuring that Australians connected the unfolding situation in Far East with their own future prospects in the region. Already well-known and respected in the Antipodes, Morrison's presence at the Siege of the Legations had turned him into something of an international celebrity. The gushing obituary published by *The Times* when it was believed the Legations had been lost, and Morrison's subsequent resurrection to deliver one of the first comprehensive accounts of the Siege, only added to his authority and (already burgeoning) sense of self-importance. 'Chinese' Morrison became Australia's own Far Eastern oracle.

⁶⁹ G.E. Morrison, *An Australian in China* 2nd edn (Sydney, 1972), p.2.

⁷⁰ Pearl, *Morrison of Peking*, p.398.

On visits to Australia his diaries record numerous meetings with political leaders. In January 1900, he met the soon-to-be Attorney-General of the new Commonwealth, Alfred Deakin, whom he noted ‘led me out of my depth asking me of the development of religion in China’.⁷¹ Likewise, he gave regular interviews to colonial newspapers, commenting on British and Australian interests in the Far East. In one well-documented encounter, Morrison was visited by the journalist A.B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson. Having won plaudits for his work in South Africa, Paterson had ventured to the East to find a job covering the Russo-Japanese War that he expected was just around the corner. Paterson described the situation in China with typical wit. The Foreign Powers, he wrote, had arrived to ‘take up the white man's burden and, incidentally, any of the yellow man’s concessions that might be lying about’. On his pilgrimage to ‘learn ... about the East’, Paterson sought out Morrison. He arrived at Chefoo (Yantai) carrying a letter of reference from an old acquaintance, who had described *The Times*’ correspondent in Scottish brogue as ‘a nosty conceited jockass’, but ‘the only white man that unnerstands they Chinese’ and the ‘uncrowned king o’ China’. In their conversation, Morrison slammed the British for failing to declare a protectorate over the Yangtze. ‘The English’, he complained, had ‘missed the chance of a lifetime ... instead of running the show themselves and being top dog, they just had to snap and bite along with the rest of the pack’. As a result, the British Empire had lost a tremendous opportunity to expand its future trade. Only the Japanese had come out with their dignity intact:

If you want to make an Oriental think well of you don't want to soft-sawder him; you want to kick him in the stern. The Japanese did more fighting and killed more men than anybody else because they did not worry their heads as to what the Chinese would think of them.

⁷¹ ML/GEM/ML.MSS/312/9/1/Diary, 17 January 1900.

Paterson was impressed by the internationalism he discovered along the China Coast and felt 'national prestige' at seeing the extent of British trade. 'Perhaps Morrison was right', he concluded for his Australian audience, 'we should have walked in and taken the boss Mandarin's seat at the top of the table'.⁷²

As well as offering his take on events through visiting colonial journalists, Morrison provided John Wallace with an unprecedented level of access to Qing officials for an Australian representative. Towards the end of 1900, *The Times*' correspondent pulled a number of strings to facilitate Wallace's efforts to meet the 'two most important Celestials in China': the seasoned Qing diplomat Viceroy Li Hung-Chang (Li Hongzhang) and Prince Ch'ing of the Zongli Yamen. Both long-serving officials, Li and Ch'ing had been given the task of negotiating with the Foreign Powers after the Manchu Court had fled Peking. Wallace's interviews, reported in the *SMH*, and referenced in various other colonial papers, established the first direct line between Australian audiences and the Chinese leadership.⁷³ His success in being granted access was partly a reflection of his ability to present as both Australian and British. Alongside his recommendation from Morrison, Wallace had obtained an 'imposing letter of introduction' from Minister Satow. For the interview with Prince Ch'ing he borrowed Backhouse ('an English gentleman ... and brilliant linguist') as his translator. They arrived in some fashion. With their orderlies 'gaily attired' and mounted on Morrison's prized mules, Wallace and Backhouse rode (uncomfortably but impressively) in a 'Peking cart each, drawn by white mules, with official brass trappings'.

⁷² A.B. Paterson, *Happy Dispatches* (Sydney, 1935), pp.78-79, 118-135.

⁷³ Wallace's interview notes are found in ML/JRW/Mss.346/1/'Li Hung-Chang Interview' and 'Prince Ching Interview'. Subsequent quotes from these sources. They were published in the *SMH*, 3 January, 1901, p.5; 18 January 1901, p.5. On the retransmission of the interviews, *West Australian*, 19 January, 1901, p.14.

The interviews themselves provided a rich insight to the personalities in charge of steering China out of the Boxer crisis and of the Mandarins' own interest in Australia. The contrast in Wallace's impression of the two men was marked. Morrison had described Li as 'the greatest man in China and one of the greatest statesmen in the world', a view with which Wallace agreed, making a point of flattering the Viceroy with comparisons to Bismarck. He was notably less impressed with Prince Ch'ing, who possessed 'none of the [same] force of character or evidence of power'. Greeted by a short and elderly figure, 'grinning and shaking hands profusely', he had asked Backhouse: 'Who is this old chap?' 'Why that is the Prince himself', came the whispered response. Conscious that a 'Chinaman must not be judged by his exterior', Wallace was nonetheless honoured when both statesmen joined him in spirited discussion on the future of China, touching frequently on Sino-Australian relations. Though Morrison predicted the conversations would be like 'draw[ing] blood from a stone', they successfully touched on three key themes, which linked Wallace's interviews in China to debates already taking place back in Australia.

The first was the migration question. In the wake of Sieh Tajen's protests in the early 1890s, Chinese Ministers had maintained their protest against the discriminative legislation that branded Chinese 'as Pariahs of the human race ... in the Dominion and the Australian Colonies'. In 1897, Ambassador Kung, had lobbied Lord Salisbury after receiving a petition from Chinese residents in Canada, who feared an imminent increase in poll-taxes in response to growing European hostility. 'The law of nations', Kung stressed, 'recognises no racial distinctions', while the Colonies 'claim and receive from China all the benefits accruing from the Treaties between China and the mother country'. Surely, Kung insisted, the Colonies' desire to restrict immigration

could be done ‘without insidiously offending the just-sensibilities of the Chinese nation’.⁷⁴ By the eve of the Boxer Uprising, the Yamen had evidently returned to the question, after being contacted by a Chinese benevolent association from British Columbia. Through the new Chinese Minister Loh, the Yamen called for the British Government to veto further offensive measures. ‘Within the last 20 years’, they insisted, ‘the Imperial Government have repeatedly had to complain of the odious character of the legislation respecting Chinese which has found favour in some British Colonies’.⁷⁵ By now, however, these complaints met a familiar response. London, the Legation was informed, had limited control over the measures deemed necessary by its self-governing colonies. In all cases restrictions on Chinese migration should not be taken as a sign of British hostility towards the Chinese Empire. ‘Nothing would be pleasanter to me than to give satisfaction to the Govt of China, when it was in my power to do so’, Salisbury wrote characteristically in relation to Loh’s protest, but ‘I am unable to express an opinion on the matter’.⁷⁶

Given London’s disengagement, Li Hung-Chang jumped at the opportunity of raising China’s concerns over colonial policies through the Australian press. Prince Ch’ing, who had led the negotiations with John Walsham in 1888 over the Australian treaty, was apparently less convinced of the benefits of dragging up the question. Li, however, who had previously spoken out against the severity of anti-Chinese legislation in America, pressed Wallace hard. After taking his seat, the young New South Welshmen realised that the interviewer would become the interviewee. The former Viceroy ‘plied’ the Australian ‘with a series of ingenious and searching questions’ on NSW’s still active poll-tax. Caught off guard, Wallace offered ‘many

⁷⁴ FO/17/1704/167-168/Kung to Salisbury, 7 April 1897.

⁷⁵ FO/171704/184-185/Loh to Salisbury, 29 April 1899.

⁷⁶ FO/17/1704/195/Salisbury to FO, 19 July 1899.

unblushing falsehoods' in an attempt to 'pacify and gratify the old man's feelings'. In particular, he assured Li that the migration question was bound to be resolved by the new Commonwealth. As we shall see below, that situation was still far from certain, though Li's intervention made it clear that China's humiliation in the wake of the Boxer crisis had not eroded her demands for an end to anti-Chinese legislation. Asked for a message for the Chinese in Australia, Li called on his countrymen to remain as 'peaceful law abiding citizens'. The poll-tax, he added was 'an iniquitous burden' out of kilter with 'humane and just rule' and he was 'glad to hear it may be abolished'.

The second theme was the condition of those Chinese already in Australia. Both Li and Ch'ing expressed their happiness at the wealth amassed by Chinese merchants and discussed the influence of advocates for imperial reform upon the Chinese at Sydney. Ch'ing 'pestered' Wallace over the impact of Kang Yu-Wei (Kang Youwei). An intellectual and reformer, who had played a central role in the failed Hundred Days' Reform Campaign, Kang had been forced to flee China in 1898 after the conservative coup led by Cixi. In 1900, Kang had despatched his student Liang Qichao to Australia. There Liang worked with Australian members of Kang's 'Society to Protect the Emperor' and became a driving force behind the *Tung Wah News*, the leading Chinese reform newspaper in Sydney. During an extensive six-month tour of Australia, Liang gave a series of speeches on China's weakness, the need for reform and the principles of human equality. He witnessed federation and met a number of leading Australian political figures, including Edmund Barton, who endorsed the reform movement.⁷⁷ When Li asked if Kang had visited Sydney, Wallace replied he had not. He was probably unaware of the presence of Kang's

⁷⁷ Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie*, pp.101-103; 118-122.

protégé. Prince Ch'ing, meanwhile, declared Kang 'a very clever but a very foolish man' motivated by money and a 'sensationalist'. It was a pity, he continued, that 'so many Chinese in Australia and outside China have attached themselves to his tenets'.

Though Wallace was ill-equipped to offer much advice on the state of the reform movement in Australia, one key argument put forward by Kang and his followers - that Western notions of equality would never be applied to the Chinese until China itself was modernised - had taken on a special resonance in the Colonies. In *Big White Lie* (2007) Fitzgerald has shown that many Chinese believed that defeat in the Sino-Japanese War had further undermined their status in Australia. It was this sense of growing vulnerability that encouraged Australian Chinese to devote themselves to reform in China. National strength, Liang informed his associates at Melbourne, would ensure that 'those who live in the country and overseas will never again be humiliated by foreigners'.⁷⁸ Liang's visit, coming as the Colonies were transcending their internal divisions in order to federate and Australians were serving in China, also helped to ensure the future development of both countries was aligned in public discourse.⁷⁹ Moreover, his presence in Australia was picked up and reintegrated into coverage of the reform movement in China itself. In February 1901, for instance, the *NCH* received a report from Ballarat, where Chinese had been settled since the 1850s. There, Liang's arrival had prompted a violent dispute over whether a local charitable fund should be made available to the reformers. It was a sign, the *Herald* reflected, of the 'far-reaching effects ... [of] the Boxer insurrection'.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Quoted in Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie*, p.123.

⁷⁹ Sometimes literally. On the 12 November 1900, for instance, the *SMH* reported a speech by the 'Chinese Reformer', followed immediately by a report on 'The Naval Contingents', *SMH*, 12 November 1900, p.5.

⁸⁰ *NCH*, 6 February 1901, p.253.

The final theme to emerge in the interviews was that of economic development and trade. By the turn of the century, Australia's exports to Asia and South-East Asia were on the increase, with the focus increasingly upon Japan.⁸¹ For many Australian producers, however, the expanded foreign presence in China raised the tantalising prospect of improved access to Chinese markets. In September 1900, the *Australasian Pastoralists' Review*, looked forward to the 'present Chinese trouble ... further opening the country' to primary exports.⁸² For others, the deteriorating situation, and then the War itself, had provided useful opportunities to showcase Australian goods. In 1899, Australian producers had made moves to supply British forces at Hong Kong with meat, taking advantage of fears over the condition of Chinese supplies.⁸³ In October the following year, the *NCH*, noted the departure of a ship from Melbourne carrying 'oats, hay and ... horses' to Taku on behalf of the War Office, while another was about to leave Brisbane to service German forces in China. Already exporting horses to India and Japan, the *Herald* suggested that the China trade promised 'well in the future':

The past six months have brought customers to these shores who are prepared to take any number of Australian bred animals, as they seem to thrive much better than others under circumstances where short rations of fodder are the rule rather the exception.⁸⁴

In his interview with Wallace, Li reiterated the case made by numerous Qing officials in the past, linking the growth of Sino-Australian trade with the freedom of intercourse. 'If you would only encourage Chinese emigration', the Viceroy contended, 'the trade would follow it'. He tied his suggestion to other long-familiar

⁸¹ Appendix 3.

⁸² *Australasian Pastoralist's Review*, 15 September 1900, p.405.

⁸³ CO/201/626/10019, 22 April 1899.

⁸⁴ *NCH*, 31 October 1900, p.927.

arguments, stressing the developmental benefits that would accrue to the Colonies with an increased supply of Chinese labourers. Australia had a ‘wonderful future’, he informed Wallace:

But the success of a country depends primarily on there being a large number of producers from the soil settled therein and as the Chinese are expert agriculturalists he thinks they should be encouraged to land in Australia.

There were echoes here of British demands for improved access for merchants and goods into the interior, but also of the age-old notion that closer association and a system of reciprocity might bring particular benefits for both China and Australia. The expansion of agriculture and the decline in cost of production that increased Chinese migration would inspire, Li argued, would cater to a ready market for Australian exports in the Middle Kingdom:

China ... can do with a good deal of Australian produce such as cereals and meats. If you can produce wheat and manufacture flour cheap enough, there should be a big demand for it.

Wallace sought to move the discussion on quickly. As generations of Australians had already made clear, while they were perfectly willing to send their produce to China, they had less interest in bringing much back. In contrast with the growth in exports, between 1895 and 1900, imports from East and South East Asia, had remained largely unchanged.⁸⁵ If Australians had proved willing to deploy men to bolster the Empire in the Far East and were awakening to the benefits of targeting Asian markets, the fledgling nation was for the most part still only interested in one-way commercial and human traffic. Nonetheless, the Australian presence at the Boxer War and the domestic discourse that China’s prominence helped to stimulate, demonstrated a new level of engagement with the British Empire’s position in the Far

⁸⁵ Appendix 3.

East. The 'Eastern Education', at least so far as Australians' own interests were concerned, was significant. The question was how a federated Australia and the imperial authorities in London would manage Australian attitudes to race and migration in an age where the nations of the Asia-Pacific were likely to play a more prominent role in global affairs. It was a reality awkwardly revealed, when at the conclusion of their interview, Wallace suggested Li Hung-Chang might visit Sydney, where he would be 'very well received on account of his fame having spread all over the Colonies'. The Viceroy's interpreter then responded bluntly: 'His Excellency wants to know if he would be required to pay that poll-tax?' As the Australian force left Northern China in 1901, the impact of the new Commonwealth's determination to enshrine the principle of a White Australia was already spreading beyond China and raising new questions as to the unity of the British Empire and its future in the Pacific.

A Cordon Drawn Right Round Australia

By the early-twentieth century, the always difficult question of Chinese migration to Australia had broken free of its traditional channels within British imperial affairs and was spilling over into a range of new areas. Still a fly in the ointment, so far as Anglo-Australian and Sino-British relations were concerned, by the Edwardian-era the Chinese question was complicating a series of other intra and extra-imperial relationships as well. It became particularly tied up with debates on the future of the Empire in the Pacific and the prospects for achieving greater imperial cohesion. The lie of the land was sketched out in the wake of the Boxer crisis by Archibald Colquhoun. In *The Mastery of the Pacific* (1902) Colquhoun described that ocean as the meeting ground between Orient and Occident, one which British observers were

finally coming to appreciate in terms of the defence of their Empire and the expansion of their trade. The ‘future of China’ was a ‘momentous question’, so too the rise of Japan and the position of British India. For those British dominions that touched the Pacific directly, there was the demand ‘for a white population of the right sort’ and the need for ‘closer federation ... with the mother country’. For London, the expansion of ‘international politics’ towards the East, with its ‘new conditions’ and ‘increased area’, made it even ‘more imperative that the British Empire should be bound together by the closest ties’. It was against this backdrop, Colquhoun argued, that the migration question, essentially: ‘how to keep the Chinaman out, and what to do without him’, had taken on a ‘magnitude and importance’, that could not ‘be exaggerated’ and which was ‘far from being confined to this quarter of the Pacific’.⁸⁶

As we saw at the end of Chapter Five, the various pieces of legislation invoked by the Australian Colonies in 1888 (or soon after) had shut the door to the vast majority of Chinese migrants. In 1896, another inter-colonial conference at Sydney resolved (with the exception of Queensland) to extend the provisions outlined in the draft Chinese Restriction Bill of 1888 to ‘all coloured races’. NSW, South Australia and Tasmania consequently introduced pieces of legislation along these lines, each of which were reserved for London’s approval. At the same time, delegates voted unanimously against becoming parties to Britain’s commercial treaty with Japan, adherence to which would have facilitated free migration from that country. If the 1888 Conference had been a bold statement that the Colonies would not be Chinese,

⁸⁶ A.R. Colquhoun, *The Mastery of the Pacific* (1902), pp.190-193, 423-429.

1896 made it clear that their commitment to a White Australia would now override all other imperial and foreign considerations.⁸⁷

Governor Hampden's correspondence with Chamberlain on the NSW legislation provides a flavour of the British response. The *Coloured Races Restriction and Regulation Act* (1896) was explicitly framed as 'bring[ing] to logical completion the defence against coloured migration'. It targeted:

All persons belonging to any coloured race inhabiting the Continent of Asia or the Continent of Africa, or any island adjacent thereto, or any island in the Pacific Ocean or Indian Ocean, not being persons duly accredited on any special mission to Her Majesty by the Government or rule of any country, state, or territory, or to this Colony under the authority of the Imperial Government.⁸⁸

This 'extraordinary piece of legislation', Hampden wrote to Chamberlain, had only been introduced to 'meet the views of labour'. The Governor was particularly worried about the impact on relations with India and foreign governments in Asia. The Bill was 'so outrageous and ridiculous' - the Australians so unreasonable - nothing, it seemed, could 'mend their ways ... except ridicule. Perhaps the world might laugh?'⁸⁹ For Hampden the political motivation behind the legislation and the corresponding irresponsibility of the Sydney legislature, was most clearly underlined by the 'special missions' provision. This, he suspected, was only included to facilitate the entry of the famous Indian Cricketer Prince Ranjitsinhji, whom the Australians wished to see play. Hampden doubted the Colonies (especially Queensland which continued to utilise limited Japanese and Pacific labour) would all fall into line with the Conference proceedings. If they did come to a common position, it would be prudent for Her Majesty's Government to:

⁸⁷ Willard, *White Australia Policy*, pp.109-110.

⁸⁸ UB/JC/29/2/5/58/1896 NSW Bill. On NSW and Natal, Martens, 'A Transnational History', 323-344.

⁸⁹ UB/JC/29/2/5/57/Hampden to Chamberlain, 19 October 1896.

Throw the entire onus of this legislation on to the Colonies. If the measure is treated as one of purely domestic legislation it will not be open to foreign governments to point to it as an act of Imperial policy.⁹⁰

With the Australian Bills reserved, it fell to Chamberlain to try and resolve the migration question once and for all at the 1897 Colonial Conference. For the Colonial Secretary, it was essential that settler concerns over migration be managed in a way that was acceptable to the Government of India and compatible with the friendship Britain was cultivating with Japan. Chamberlain played his hand masterfully. He began by expressing the Government's sympathy with the desire of those Colonies 'in close proximity to millions and hundreds of Asiatics', to restrict coloured migration. The CO, he insisted, would not 'offer any opposition to the proposals intended with that object'. By the same token, he hoped colonial leaders would 'bear in mind the traditions of the Empire', which made 'no distinction in favour of, or against race or colour'. Anything offensive to Her Majesty's Indian subjects, he pointed out, would be 'most painful' for the Queen to sanction.

Australian leaders had little desire to upset Victoria, whose Diamond Jubilee they had travelled to London to celebrate. But they had also heard similar arguments from London before (citing diplomatic rather than imperial considerations) in relation to their treatment of Chinese. Now, however, British officials possessed a more effective alternative to racial laws than the 'anti-pauper' measures they had unsuccessfully promoted in the past. Chamberlain led the Australians away from their 'Coloured Races' Bills, towards the Act recently invoked in Natal, which had been

⁹⁰ UB/JC/29/2/5/61/Hampden to Chamberlain, 30 October 1896.

designed to limit Indian immigration via the deployment of an education test.⁹¹ Despite some initial uncertainty, reassurances from Natal eventually convinced the Australians to get on board. In 1897, Western Australia passed a measure based on the Natal model. NSW, Tasmania and New Zealand followed in 1898 and 1899. In 1901, the education test made its way into the Immigration Restriction Act (IRA) the first major legislative issue considered by Australia's new Federal Parliament.⁹² The Bill, together with provisions for stopping Pacific labour migration and the employment of coloured seamen on ships carrying Australian mails, constituted the legal bedrock of the White Australia Policy.

The IRA followed Chamberlain's basic prescription. Without reference to particular nationalities, it prohibited the immigration of a range of undesirables, including any who:

When asked to do so by an officer, fails to write out a dictation and sign in the presence of the officer a passage of fifty words in length in an European language directed by the officer.⁹³

As Irving's study of the Australian constitution makes clear, the Act needs to be recognised as the product of the ongoing struggle over the 'sovereignty of the Colonies and the future sovereignty of the ... Commonwealth'. Certainly the Bill's champions saw it as a practical resolution to the long-running disagreement as to whether immigration policy was primarily a local or an imperial concern.⁹⁴ Though the use of the education test came under criticism from some Labour members (who favoured a more explicit approach) advocates such as John Forrest, the new Federal

⁹¹ BPP/Command-Papers[8596]/Papers Relating to Colonial Conference, 1897, pp.13-14.

⁹² Martens, 'A Transnational History', 338-340.

⁹³ The full title of the Bill, Act 17 of 1901, was 'An Act to Place Certain Restrictions on Immigration and to Provide for the Removal from the Commonwealth of Prohibited Immigrants'. On its passage, Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, pp.272-282.

⁹⁴ H. Irving, *To Constitute a Nation* (Cambridge 1997), pp.114-115.

Minister for Defence, echoed Chamberlain's views. Britain, Forrest informed the House, was steadfastly in Australia's corner. London had simply requested that the Commonwealth should:

Find some means of placing the restrictions so that it will not tread too harshly on the susceptibilities of the great nations, which they are in friendship with, and from which they derive a considerable amount of power and wealth.

The Natal model, Forrest continued, was 'ready to our hand' and could be passed quickly without the need for protracted correspondence with London. For those who sought even 'greater power ... to restrict the introduction of ... coloured races', the former West Australian Premier offered reassurance in the form of the old 'white elephant' argument, made so effectively in the 1880s by Parkes and Gillies:

So soon as this Act becomes law and the liabilities and penalties are in force, shipowners will refuse to give passage to those undesirable immigrants. Unless there is unmistakable evidence that a man has a permit to return, or that he has an undeniable right of admission, the shipowners will have nothing to do with him ... Not only will there be a cordon drawn right around Australia ... but the ship-owners will have nothing to do with the shipment of these undesirable persons.⁹⁵

To hammer home the point, Article 9 of the Bill imposed a massive £100 fine on masters or shipowners for every prohibited immigrant carried to Australia.⁹⁶

The structure of the Bill pleased Chamberlain. When Forrest posted cuttings from the Australian Hansard, the Colonial Secretary replied that he was glad the Commonwealth was taking steps to ensure the predominance of the white population, while recognising the international context in which the migration question had to be managed. 'We, as Imperialists', he informed Forrest:

⁹⁵ UB/JC/14/1/1/16/Forrest to Chamberlain, 5 October 1901 and Enclosure.

⁹⁶ Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, p.281.

Must take care not to make invidious distinctions between the difference races who live under the British Flag, and ... avoid unnecessary offence to peaceful nations like Japan whose friendship in the future may be of greatest importance to the nations of the Pacific.

Australia had decided to pursue 'legislation which is of universal application'. The future would justify that 'wise moderation'.⁹⁷ Even before the passage of the IRA, however, the Colonial Secretary's strategy was coming under fire from two directions. From the India Office came complaints as to the impact on Indians entering Natal.⁹⁸ In 1898, Sikhs from Western Australia protested over their treatment under new legislation in that Colony, claiming the 'protection of the British Flag' and pointing to their military service in Afghanistan. In both cases Chamberlain simply insisted that he 'found himself unable to disallow', ostensibly inoffensive legislation. Though the West Australian measures clearly grated, Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, was forced to concede that 'H.M.'s Govt does not seem prepared to prevent such legislation'.⁹⁹

By the end of the nineteenth century, Australian interest in India had been on the wane for some time. Although its strategic importance was unquestioned (and heroic accounts of imperial endeavour remained popular) the Raj seemed increasingly alien from most Australians' conceptions of the white, egalitarian society they envisioned themselves inhabiting.¹⁰⁰ That vision was of course rather different for the relatively small numbers of Indians who had made their way to the Colonies, primarily as agricultural labourers, hawkers and traders. Like the Sikhs in Western Australia, Australian Indians continued to resist restrictive legislation after federation. Although

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Martens, 'A Transnational History', 339.

⁹⁹ BL/IO/L/PJ/6/470/File.122/1898/Western Australia.

¹⁰⁰ Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp.26-36.

their protests achieved little in practical terms, the force of their arguments was recognised by a number of observers. With the passage of the IRA, for instance, Indians in Victoria petitioned authorities in Australia and Britain. ‘Greatly pained’ by ‘talk of a White Australia’, their protest hinged on two principles. The first was the loyalty and service of Indian subjects to the Empire, and their pride at ‘form[ing] part of the great British Nation’. As the Boxer War had demonstrated, ‘the Indian people’ were ‘ANXIOUS to give their blood wherever the British Government has asked for water’. The second was the sense of affront at being bundled in with the Chinese and Japanese on the basis of skin colour:

What is the difference between an Indian and any other member of the British nation? ... We cannot understand how it is that our own Government now wish to separate us from herself and put us as strangers along with the outside nations of the world; especially it is very painful for us to be put along with the Chinese, who are a defeated and dying race.

The petition brought a response from Barton’s Private Secretary, who in a simple reply demonstrated the logic behind Chamberlain’s new system. The Bill, he wrote, was in no way intended to ‘deprecate or depreciate the services ... rendered to the Empire by its Indian soldiers’ and contained ‘nothing which couples the Indian with the Chinese races’. With no overt discrimination built into its wording, the Government could not detect any ‘reason for pain’.¹⁰¹ In London, the protest prompted one official at the India Office to minute: ‘their point of view is mainly sentimental ... [but] their protest against the “White Australia” cry as *prima facie* anti-Imperial goes to the root of the whole matter’. With the Government of India refusing to intervene directly, the India Office took the lead in approaching Chamberlain. With the same cool detachment as the Australians had deployed, the CO simply replied that

¹⁰¹ NAA/A8/1901/27/24/51848, ‘Effect of Immigration Restriction Bill on the Indian Community’.

the legislation did ‘not appear to cast a reflection on any class of HM’s subjects’.¹⁰² The exchange was a marker of the effectiveness of Chamberlain’s method and set the tone for the years ahead. In 1905, amendments to the IRA raised fresh objections as to the practical effect of Australian legislation. When a suggestion was made that some form of reciprocal migration agreement might be needed to assuage Indian feeling, the new Viceroy, Lord Minto, urged the India Office to ‘let sleeping dogs lie’.¹⁰³

Aside from British Indians, the other key party that Chamberlain had sought to placate by encouraging the adoption of the Natal model was the Japanese. In the wake of the Sino-Japanese War and the signing of the commercial treaty of 1894, Britain had been eager to build on her relationship with the rising power in the East. The possibility of Australian complications had been well-demonstrated prior to federation in the case of Queensland. In the wake of the 1896 Conference, Brisbane had decided to reverse her initial position and to adhere to the Anglo-Japanese treaty. Via a special protocol agreed with Tokyo, the passage of labourers was controlled. The situation was complicated in 1899, when an increase in Japanese migration encouraged Queensland to bring new racially discriminative legislation.¹⁰⁴ Having received protests from the Japanese Minister in London, Chamberlain intervened, insisting on the use of an education test instead.¹⁰⁵ The question of offending Japan then re-emerged in relation to the passage of the IRA, which made its way through parliament at the same time as the British Government was secretly negotiating the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Though the use of the Natal formula had been seen as a

¹⁰² Quoted in Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, pp.305-306.

¹⁰³ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.311.

¹⁰⁴ Willard, *White Australia Policy*, pp.115-118.

¹⁰⁵ UB/JC/29/1/1/1/2/North American and Australian Department Diary, ii.

means of addressing Japanese resistance to overtly discriminative migration legislation, its administration brought several complaints from the Japanese Consul in Sydney and the Legation in London.¹⁰⁶ The key problem lay in the provisions for the education test. To avoid causing offence to the European Powers, the CO had insisted on the test being administered not only in English, but any European language. Japan's protest then, centred on resistance at being lumped with other non-Europeans. The people of Japan, Consul Eitaki raged at Sydney, 'belong to an Empire whose standard of civilisation', was superior to other coloured peoples. 'To refer to them in the same terms cannot but be regarded in the light of reproach.'¹⁰⁷ Similar protests by the Japanese Legation in London, brought a request from Lord Lansdowne at the FO that:

No pains should be spared in order to prove to the Japanese Govt that H.M.G. are not in sympathy with the extreme measures which have been resorted to in some of the British Colonies to check Japanese immigration.¹⁰⁸

Chamberlain was also keen to avoid alienating Japan. In 1899, he had urged Canadian authorities to put their 'foot down and disallow' any move by the Provincial Government at Victoria to restrict Japanese migration by means, 'disrespectful from the point of view of Imperial interest'.¹⁰⁹ Though he confessed to being 'uneasy' as to the tone of the debate surrounding the Australian Act, Chamberlain concluded that London could not 'depart from a settled policy [the Natal formula] which has been repeatedly made known to + pressed on the Colonies + is fully understood +

¹⁰⁶ I.H. Nish, 'Australia and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1901-1911', *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 9:2 (1963), 201-212.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, p.283.

¹⁰⁸ UB/JC/29/1/1/1/2/North American and Australian Department Diary, ii.

¹⁰⁹ UB/JC/29/2/2/119/Chamberlain to Minto, 8 May 1899.

recognised by them'.¹¹⁰ If the situation shared much with earlier attempts to balance Chinese and Australian sentiments, the difference was the scale of Japan's regional power and influence. It was hardly surprising that CO staff panicked when Viscount Hayashi, the Japanese Minister in London, began objecting not only at the mode of exclusion, but exclusion itself. Where before Australian restrictions had been tolerated, 'so long as it was done in a quiet way', this was a 'total change in position'.¹¹¹ The situation reached a climax in 1905, when Japanese protests spilled over into discussions on the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese treaty. In Cabinet, the British Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, reflected on the 'obvious difficulties-not to say absurdities-in allowing Australia and other Colonies to treat our Japanese allies as belonging to an inferior race'. There were also questions of reciprocity. If Britain permitted the Australians to 'differentiate against the Japanese immigrant', she could raise 'no objection to the Japanese differentiating against the British trader'. The Australian case was also kept in mind on the Japanese side. In May 1905, Hayashi telegraphed his Government on the potential benefits of renewing the agreement with London. One of these was that the 'sympathy' it would inspire between the:

Japanese and the Anglo-Saxons ... may gradually discourage the British dominions and the United States from excluding Japanese labourers because they are of different race. If this race question is allowed to persist as at present, it will give rise to serious complications in the future.¹¹²

There were echoes in all these arguments of the earlier experience of Chinese migration to Australia and its repercussions upon both British foreign and colonial policy. The extension of Australian anxieties to 'coloured immigrants', at a time

¹¹⁰ UB/JC/14/1/1/31/Chamberlain to Hopetoun, 15 January 1902; UB/JC/29/1/1/1/2/North American and Australian Department Diary, ii.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, pp.301-302.

¹¹² Quoted in Nish, 'Australia and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', 205.

when the British were seeking closer imperial cohesion and accommodation with Japan, had forced London to take a more active role in placating the various parties involved. It could only ever have been a partial success. The Australians had been willing to assist Chamberlain, but only so long as their own demands for a White Australia were not compromised. They were pleasantly surprised when the effectiveness of the language test proved more comprehensive than any distinctly anti-Chinese legislation they had known. In some ways, the less ostensibly offensive the Act, the greater flexibility it accorded to enforce a policy of racial exclusion. In 1905, the Commonwealth amended the IRA, changing the provisions of the test from 'any European language' to 'any prescribed language'. A visible concession to Japanese and Indian sensibilities (and coinciding with the decision a year earlier to allow foreign merchants, students and tourists to enter temporarily) in practice the amendment added an even stronger bar to Asian settlement. Officials had already taken to subjecting Asian migrants to tests in European languages they did not know. Now a series of non-European tests could be given as well, making it even easier to ensure the rejection of unwanted arrivals. 'The object of applying the language test', confirmed Alfred Deakin, by then Australian Prime Minister, 'is not to allow persons to enter the Commonwealth, but to keep them out'.¹¹³

Alongside these new manifestations of Australia's efforts at migration restriction, the original question - the exclusion of the Chinese - together with its ramifications for Sino-British and Anglo-Australian relations, had never disappeared. When he introduced the IRA for its second reading, Barton had quoted extensive passages from Pearson's *National Life and Character*, detailing China's ability to engulf

¹¹³ Quoted in Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, pp.309-310.

Australia.¹¹⁴ In 1904, the Commonwealth tightened restrictions on re-entry and concessions for Chinese wives, out of fears the provisions were being manipulated.¹¹⁵ At the same time, state governments, who retained control over a range of affairs, moved their own measures targeting Chinese already in Australia. The most invasive (mercifully rejected) would have restricted Chinese factory work in Victoria to environments where the labourer was visible through ground floor windows – a measure designed to prevent the thrifty celestial carrying on work after hours.¹¹⁶

As Li Hung-Chang had intimated in his interview with Wallace, the Chinese also remained committed to their position on the migration question. Fresh demands for the protection of Chinese Overseas were always likely to be somewhat muted in light of the Manchus' own failure to protect foreigners from the Boxers. Quietly, however, efforts to reach out to the Chinese diaspora continued. In January 1902, the Chinese Minister in London informed Lansdowne that the Acting Consul-General from the Straits Settlements was proceeding to Australia to conduct a tour of inspection. By May, two Chinese gentlemen then in Britain were instructed to proceed to Canada for the same purpose.¹¹⁷ In London, the Legation continued to lobby the FO over the offensive tone of Australian and Canadian legislation. In 1903, the new Ambassador, Minister Chang, wrote to Lansdowne:

I have the honour to approach Your Lordship on a subject as which it has fallen to the lot of every Chinese Minister to this Court since the Legation was established in 1876 to make representations. I allude to the Taxation and invidious legislation applied to Chinese immigrants entering His Majesty's Self-governing Colonies.

¹¹⁴ Markus, *Fear and Hatred*, pp.xi-xvi.

¹¹⁵ For an example of suspected manipulation, NAA/A1(A1/15)/1904/1799/'Influx of Chinese into W. Australia from Sydney'.

¹¹⁶ Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, p.292.

¹¹⁷ FO/17/1704/344-347/Loh to Lansdowne, 14 January 1902, 21 March 1902.

Particularly galling was the growing divergence between Canada's legislative restrictions on Chinese and Japanese migration. 'Formerly', Chang informed Lansdowne, 'the Japanese in common with my countrymen shared the odium of being made the objects of an offensively discriminative legislation'. Now the move towards an education test, which would have 'remove[d], in appearance at least, the stigma cast on Asiatics', had been vetoed at Ottawa as a result of Japanese protests. At the same time, the hated poll-tax on Chinese arrivals had been raised to a whopping \$500. Degraded, even by comparison with their fellow East Asians, 'the position of Chinese immigrants was worse than ever'.¹¹⁸ When officials returned the usual polite but dismissive response Chang was outraged.¹¹⁹ It was a great affront that Britain had addressed Japanese grievances, whilst the 'reiterated complaints' of China had been 'utterly disregarded':¹²⁰

China not less than Japan is a Power friendly to England. Both of them protested against their subjects being made "nominatia" the objects of offensively discriminative legislation and on the same grounds.

But Japan was now 'listened to' on the migration question, while China's objections were 'declared to be irrevocable'. If the situation carried on, Chang concluded, the Qing might be forced to reconsider the whole question of Chinese emigration to British possessions, including those that coveted Chinese labour.¹²¹

It is not clear if Chang was referring specifically to South Africa. By 1904, however, the question of Chinese migration to that quarter of the British Empire was provoking a new rift between London and the Australians. The spark was the beginning of the

¹¹⁸ FO/17/1704/387-388/Chang to Lansdowne, 21 May 1903.

¹¹⁹ FO/17/1704/385-386, CO to FO, 24 May 1903 and Minutes; FO/17/1704/392-395/FO to Chang, 8 June 1903; FO/17/1704/408-409/CO to FO, 21 October 1903

¹²⁰ FO/17/1704/402-403/Chang to Lansdowne, 8 October 1903.

¹²¹ FO/17/1704/396-398/Chang to Lansdowne, 24 July 1903.

British Government's scheme to import indentured Chinese to the labour starved gold mines of the Witwatersrand, in order to restart the local economy and to generate funds to meet the Colony's war debts. Between 1904 and 1907, some 64,000 Chinese were imported, all of whom had returned by 1910.¹²² In Australia, the scheme provoked massive resistance. On the 26 March 1904, the House and the Senate passed resolutions expressing 'grave objection[s]' to the policy, which it was argued should not have been implemented 'until a referendum of the white population' could be taken, or responsible government granted.¹²³ Australian anger, like that amongst British workers and Liberals at home, centred around the belief that the War in South Africa had been fought on the promise of creating a new white man's country, where British emigrants would find work and opportunity. To many of the approximately five thousand Australians on the Rand in 1904 and their countrymen at home, the appearance of the Chinese, made it seem as if the War had instead been 'fought for sweaters'.¹²⁴

The labour dimension was heightened by a change in Government at Melbourne. By coincidence, the arrival of the Chinese in South Africa was quickly followed by the formation of the first Australian Labour Ministry, under Chris Watson. Watson led a spirited charge against the policy, the details of which were reported back to Balfour by his 'old + valued personal friend', Governor-General, Henry Northcote. During 1904, Northcote provided Balfour with detailed information on how Australia was 'getting along under a Labour regime' and 'Watson's horror' at the 'Chinese Policy

¹²² On the scheme, Bright, 'Chinese Indentured Labour'.

¹²³ NAA/A6661(1)/743/'Objection to the Introduction of Chinese Labour into the Transvaal.'

¹²⁴ P. Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire* (2007), p.225; Bright, 'Chinese Indentured Labour', p.35.

in South Africa'.¹²⁵ Balfour responded in kind, offering British political intelligence and explaining the Home Government's 'chief difficulty':

The misrepresentation over Chinese Labour in the Transvaal, which is opposed on the preposterous ground that it is slavery but it is really unpopular because it is erroneously supposed to substitute yellow for white labour.¹²⁶

For Australian leaders, the Chinese labour question in South Africa heightened their distrust of the new Colonial Secretary, Alfred Lyttelton. A gifted cricketer, Lyttelton had played four test matches for England against Australia in the 1880s. As the successor to Chamberlain, however, he seemed little more than a disinterested nightwatchman. 'The idea exists here', Northcote informed Balfour, 'that Lyttelton knows and cares nothing about Australia'. 'As he has not written to me since April last', the Governor-General added in a veiled endorsement of the Australians' criticism, 'I have no tangible evidence to prove this'.¹²⁷ The Colonial Secretary's association with Chinese labour only heightened the sense that the CO was losing touch with Australian interests. 'Lyttelton has been a pronounced failure', Deakin wrote to Dilke in a typical evaluation, 'doing less + apparently caring less than any Colonial Secretary I can remember'.¹²⁸

It was perhaps inevitable given Chamberlain's involvement with the scheme, that the fallout would collide with discussions on Tariff Reform. Like Milner, Chamberlain dismissed the notion of 'Chinese Slavery' and reiterated that the Chinese were nothing more than a temporary workforce.¹²⁹ In Australia, however, the campaign for

¹²⁵ BL/AJB/Add.MS.49697/Northcote to Balfour, 9 May 1904.

¹²⁶ BL/AJB/Add.MS.49697/Balfour to Northcote, 15 June 1904.

¹²⁷ BL/AJB/Add.MS.49697/Northcote to Balfour, 22 November 1904.

¹²⁸ BL/CWD/Add.MS.43877/Deakin to Dilke, 22 January 1906.

¹²⁹ UB/JC/32/2/2/'The Editor's South African Notebook', 27 April 1904.

preferential trade had often tended to be conceived in racial terms, seen as a means of protecting Australian workers and producers from the ‘cheap’ labour industries of the Far East. In October 1904, for instance, Octavius Beale, the founding President of the Federated Chambers of Manufactures of Australia, had written to Chamberlain challenging the views put forward by John Burns and other British Labour representatives, as to the impact of a preference system on British food prices. For Beale the security of the British worker’s cheap loaf, was far less significant than the survival of British and Australian artisans. ‘Ruinous competition’ with the cheap labour nations of Asia, Beale wrote, ‘will ... wipe out the workers of our own race’. ‘We wish ... to assist you’, he informed Chamberlain, ‘in consolidating the British Empire for the good of our race and of mankind’.¹³⁰ Though Watson was a notable defender of Imperial Preference (famously engaging with the British Labour Representation Committee on the subject) ‘Chinese Slavery’ poisoned much of the Australian labour movement against the ideas of ‘Uncle Joe’. By the end of 1904, Northcote informed Balfour, ‘the cry of Chinese Labour in the Transvaal ... [was] being worked against Chamberlain for all it ... [was] worth’.¹³¹

No Rubbish Here! – This is the Heart of the Empire

As the White Australia Policy came into effect, debates on immigration and race had begun taking on a new momentum in Britain itself. In the wake of the South African War they crystallised around two key developments. The first was the maturation of the older narrative on the immigration of ‘foreign paupers’, which culminated in the 1905 Aliens Act. The second was the domestic imbroglio over the scheme for importing Chinese into South Africa.

¹³⁰ NLA/Beale Papers/MS.2822/Beale to Chamberlain, 4 October 1904.

¹³¹ BL/AJB/Add.MS.49697/Northcote to Balfour, 22 November 1904.

Australian ideas on race and exclusion, forged through engagement with late-Qing China, played a role in shaping British political discourse on both these issues during the early-Edwardian era. The final research goal of this thesis is to contribute to recent efforts to elucidate the impact of Empire on domestic culture and politics and to help quantify the place of Australian perspectives within that story. The extent to which racial thinking from the edges of the Empire re-shaped attitudes at the centre, remains one of the most contentious pathways into the debate on Empire's resonance 'at home'.¹³² While cultural historians have often set the re-importation of racial discourse as a natural result of the 'omnipresence' of empire in everyday life, others have remained altogether more sceptical as to the extent to which colonial attitudes displaced or complicated existing British views.¹³³ Most historians have found themselves somewhere in the middle of this debate. The 'limited scope and half-hearted application of the 1905 Aliens Act', writes one recent scholar, was a testament of the extent to which externally influenced approaches to immigration restriction clashed with British liberal tradition prior to the First World War.¹³⁴ On the Anglo-Dominion front, the cross-pollination of racial ideas has attracted significant attention from labour historians, who have tapped into the vibrant networks linking British and colonial (and American) workers' movements. Here, however, the extent of imperial reflection remains in dispute.¹³⁵ The contest between labour historians reflects academic dissonance on the place of colonial racism in

¹³² On the historiography, C. Hall and S.O. Rose, 'Introduction', in C. Hall and S.O. Rose (eds.) *At Home With The Empire* (Cambridge, 2006), pp.1-31. On high politics and the place of the Dominions, A. Burton, 'New Narratives of Imperial Politics in the Nineteenth Century', in *ibid.*, pp.212-229.

¹³³ On the cultural side, J.M. Mackenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', in *OHBE*, iii, 270-293. Key skeptical studies are Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* and Beloff, *Imperial Sunset*.

¹³⁴ A. Fahmeir, *Citizens and Aliens* (New York, 2000), p.224

¹³⁵ For the debate, Kirk, *Comrades and Cousins*, pp.164-165; Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class', 398-421.

shaping British culture and politics more generally. It is a situation particularly well-illustrated in the increasingly popular specialist studies of the history of the Chinese community in the United Kingdom. ‘Reports of Chinese in Australia and America and even of the Chinese in the Transvaal had no apparent effect on attitudes towards Britain’s Chinese minority’, offers one scholar, whilst seeking to explain the development of Sinophobia in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain.¹³⁶ An ‘abundance of anti-Chinese sentiment’ had been imported from the New World and ‘had entered into common currency’, retorts another. In ‘specific contexts this could be used to direct or justify hostility towards the Chinese’.¹³⁷ One more recent study has made the case that ‘images of race generated in and by the Empire were integrated into race relations in the capital’.¹³⁸ Another makes the more substantial suggestion that ‘racist measures taken in Empire countries provided a template for British [migration] legislation’.¹³⁹ In regard to both these claims, the influence of colonial attitudes and policies in shaping British ideas on race and exclusion (let alone legislation) requires extensive analysis.

As we have seen periodically throughout this thesis, popular agitation on the question of pauper migration to the East End of London and to other large British cities, had regularly conflated domestic and overseas experiences of alien migration. Likewise, for many exclusionists, American and Australian responses to unwanted immigration pointed the way to a metropolitan solution. In 1888, for instance, as the Chinese

¹³⁶ J.P. May, ‘The Chinese in Britain, 1860-1914’, in C. Holmes (ed.) *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society* (1978), pp.121-122. For a famous contemporary example, G.A. Wade ‘The Cockney John Chinaman’ *The English Illustrated Magazine* 23:202 (1900), 301-307.

¹³⁷ C. Holmes, ‘The Chinese Connection’, in G. Alderman and C. Holmes (eds.) *Outsiders and Outcasts* (1993), p.86.

¹³⁸ S. Auerbach, *Race, Law, and "The Chinese Puzzle" in Imperial Britain* (New York, 2009), p.3.

¹³⁹ G. Benton and E. T. Gomez, *The Chinese in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2008), p.299. Auerbach and Benton and Gomez draw on Gainer, *The Alien Invasion*, pp.108-112.

migration crisis was brewing in Australia, Captain Colomb had queried Britain's seemingly isolated position on the subject. 'What Great states of the World, other than Great Britain', he asked rhetorically, 'permit the Immigration of destitute aliens without restriction?'¹⁴⁰ Throughout the 1890s, campaigners such as Arnold White maintained this argument. White's *The Modern Jew* (1889); *Tries at Truth* (1891); *The Destitute Alien in Great Britain* (a collection he edited in 1892); and *Efficiency and Empire* (1901) all drew lines between settler Sinophobia and British anti-Semitism, Chinese exclusion and anti-alien legislation. In *Destitute Alien*, the MP W.A. MacArthur, praised Parkes' role in the events of 1888 and called for Britain to take the 'Imperial View'. Why, he wrote, did England 'refuse to listen to the teachings of the experience of almost every English-speaking community in the world except herself?'¹⁴¹ Another contributor, noting the diplomatic implications of Parkes' actions, suggested that the 'sting in our refusal to permit Chinese immigration into Australia would be taken away', if the colonial approach formed the basis of 'a general Imperial policy' on alien migration.¹⁴² In *Efficiency and Empire*, written in response to the lessons of the South African War, White expanded his earlier theories, locating them within a broader narrative on the need for new exclusionist measures to help revitalise the racial and organisational dynamism of the British system - lest 'Empire will fly out the window'.¹⁴³

The history of the passage of the Aliens Act has been explored by a number of historians and can be dealt with briefly here. As we saw in Chapter Three, in the late-1880s Lord Salisbury was unconvinced that the scale of pauper migration was large

¹⁴⁰ HOC/vol.311/cc.1724-1725, 10 March 1887.

¹⁴¹ W.A. McArthur, 'The Imperial Aspect' in White (ed.) *The Destitute Alien*, pp.135-136.

¹⁴² S.H. Heyes, 'Foreign Pauper Immigration', in *ibid.*, pp.186-187.

¹⁴³ A. White, *Efficiency and Empire* (1901), pp.212-236.

enough to require Government intervention. The Prime Minister had also been put off by the practical difficulties involved in tightening Britain's borders. The subdued tone of the reports subsequently presented by the dual parliamentary Committees into migration and sweating, enabled the Government to fall back on a policy of free migration, with Factory Acts and Public Health Regulations relied upon to deal with the worst excesses of sweating. Through the 1890s, however, a visible increase in immigration from Eastern Europe and recurrent fears as to Jewish criminality raised the profile of the destitute alien question amongst sectors of the labour movement and the Conservative Party. For Salisbury, immigration provided a useful stick for prodding the Liberals, accommodating Chamberlainites and attracting working-class support in East London. 'I am very anxious to pass an Alien Immigration Bill', he informed White on returning to Government, 'and I believe that it would be valuable and much demanded by the working classes in many districts'.¹⁴⁴

After several aborted attempts to take action, the question was put firmly on the agenda in the wake of the 'Khaki' Election of 1900. The Unionist victory brought into Westminster a number of candidates, who had campaigned on anti-alien (as well as a pro-imperial) platforms. The most prominent was the member for Stepney, William Evans-Gordon. Supported by the British Brothers League, Evans-Gordon and his cohort made it clear that the Government would have to address the aliens question to secure their support. Soon a favourable Royal Commission (its proceedings having been captured by several more extreme members); strong support from the King and the new Prime Minister Arthur Balfour; an economic downturn; an

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, p.178. In 1890, White travelled to Moscow to discuss plans for the emigration of Jewish refugees to Argentina. He carried a letter of introduction from the Prime Minister, to whom he had pressed the 'advantage that would accrue to England by the diversion from these shores of the growing stream of destitute aliens proceeding from Russia'. HH/LS/E/White to Salisbury, May 1890.

East End Housing Crisis; and a wave of public sensation on alien criminality, all pushed the Government towards a policy of restriction. Facing strong resistance over the need for the legislation and the violation of Britain's liberal traditions, the first Bill died in committee in 1904. The following year, a second attempt made it through the Parliament. The provisions of the Act confined immigrants to entry at designated ports and refused admission to aliens without adequate support (including the infirm), to lunatics and those convicted of a crime in a foreign jurisdiction. It conferred powers of expulsion on the Home Secretary and included special provisions to protect asylum seekers and those previously domiciled.

That Australian perspectives on migration should filter into the political debate surrounding the Aliens Act was always likely given the involvement of campaigners such as White and Evans-Gordon. In *The Alien Immigrant* (1903) Evans-Gordon had set the East End alongside 'the Chinese quarter of San Francisco'. In both locales 'Christian usage' was becoming 'a subordinate consideration', just one marker of the 'very serious state of things', in regard to migration. In response, he had looked to the 'principle of exclusion', embraced by Europeans and Americans (to shut out the criminal and the pauper) and Britain's 'self-governing colonies' (to shut out 'Asiatics' and other undesirables).¹⁴⁵ Evans-Gordon and his collaborators carried these views into Parliament during the heated debates on the issue in 1904 and 1905, where they presented Britain as a weak link in the Anglo-Saxon chain. 'The [restrictive] laws of America and our Colonies are perfectly well-known', Evans-Gordon argued. It was natural that unwanted aliens would 'come to this country instead'. Why should British authorities, chimed the Conservative member for

¹⁴⁵ W. Evans-Gordon, *The Alien Immigrant* (1903), pp.14, 289-290.

Fulham, not have ‘similar powers to those possessed by the United States and almost every one of our Colonies?’¹⁴⁶ It was a view that had been articulated the previous year by the President of the Local Government Board, Walter Long, who had asked members to realize that the time had arrived ‘when this question of alien immigration ... must be dealt with by regulations which have to be rather Imperial than local in their character’.¹⁴⁷

On the Liberal side, members sought to draw a clearer distinction between the situation at home and across the Empire. During the 1904 sessions, James Bryce insisted that ‘the existing evils’ were hardly ‘such as to justify the exceptional remedies’, being put forward by the Tories:

He did not think that any case had been made out for interfering with the free movement of population from one part of the world to the other, such as the peoples of California and Australia had for excluding Chinese. The general practice of mankind had been to allow the free movement of population from one country to another, and the mixture of the races had generally been found to be a good thing for the country where the races had mixed and had proved themselves capable of forming a civilised community.

If the people targeted were not ‘aliens’ in the sense of Chinese in Australia and America, it seemed that the Government was instead beholden to the extremist agitators from the East End. ‘Stepney was not England, and they could not legislate for all England merely for the sake of one borough’.¹⁴⁸ Charles Dilke, the MP probably most familiar with colonial legislation, refused to endorse alien measures for Britain in the way he had defended them for Australia. Unconvinced of the need for domestic restriction, and concerned over Britain’s tradition of offering sanctuary to political exiles, Dilke called on the Government to follow a different colonial

¹⁴⁶ HOC/vol.145/cc/687-768, 2 May 1905.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Feldman, ‘Jews and the British Empire’, *History Workshop Journal*, 63 (2007), 78.

¹⁴⁸ HOC/vol.133/cc.1131-1163, 25 April 1904.

example (one about which he had been in correspondence with Deakin) and invoke stronger legislation on working conditions. It was through these provisions, Dilke contended, that ‘the Colonies ... dealt with sweating’, which had been ‘completely wiped ... out in many of the great cities of New Zealand and Australia’.¹⁴⁹ Henry Norman, the Liberal MP who had called on Britain to assert its presence in China during the 1890s, took a different stance. For Norman, support for anti-Aliens legislation was simply the flipside to opposing Chinese labour in South Africa and supporting the white worker. As Britain continued to ‘export our best’ to the Empire, she could not continue to ‘receive the worst of other countries’, lest the population become ‘seriously impaired or deteriorated’.¹⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Norman had offered an even stronger assertion of his views. ‘At the mouth of our great river’, he hoped to see ‘a notice erected in unmistakable terms, “No Rubbish Here”, this is England, the heart of the Empire’.¹⁵¹

British Labour views could be equally ambiguous. In his study of the relationship between British, Colonial and American Labour, Kirk has drawn attention to the often awkward engagement between British and Colonial workers’ movements around the prioritization of questions of race and class. If the ‘attitudes and actions’ of British socialists demonstrated a ‘supremacy of class over race’, this relationship was reversed in Australia and South Africa, where colonial labours’ position in ‘the British imperial network’ together with distinct national characteristics, fuelled a ‘dominant socialist racism’.¹⁵² There is much in the archives of the British Labour movement to support Kirk’s analysis in relation to the alien immigration legislation.

¹⁴⁹ For instance, HOC/Vol.133/cc.1062-1131, 25 April 1904

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Feldman, ‘Jews and the British Empire’, 78.

¹⁵² Kirk, *Comrades and Cousins*, p.205.

At the 1895 Trades Union Conference held in Cardiff, for instance, delegates passed by a slim majority a resolution calling on the Government to intervene to stop the landing of ‘all pauper aliens who have no visible means of subsistence’. The motion was seconded with an assertion ‘that the alien was a “blighting blister” upon them; and the East End of London had been made the dumping ground for the common refuse of the world.’ At the same conference, delegates appointed by the American Convention of Labour (which had been held in Denver the previous December) added their perspective. Stressing the common aims and aspirations of labour movements on both sides of the Atlantic, they described the American struggle with the ‘hundreds of thousands of Chinese who could not be assimilated’. On the other hand, a large minority of dissenters, concentrated blame on the ‘capitalist system’, which set workers from different parts of the world against each other. Some humour was added to the situation when an informal survey of those present by a representative of the Tailors Union, found ‘nine-tenths’ of those present were wearing garments produced by sweated (and probably foreign) labour.¹⁵³ A number of notable British Labour leaders proved equally unconvinced of the merits of the anti-alien crusade. John Burns ridiculed the notion that Britain should be embarrassed as the ‘only civilised country that did not possess this kind of legislation’. Instead it made him ‘proud of being a Briton’.¹⁵⁴ The Aliens Act was, as Keir Hardie saw it, little more than a ‘fraudulent attempt’ to ‘impose upon an unthinking electorate’, a bogus explanation for urban unemployment.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ LHASC/Trades Union Congress Reports (1895), pp.45-49.

¹⁵⁴ HOC/vol.133/cc.1062-1131, 25 April 1904.

¹⁵⁵ LHASC/Labour Representative Committee Conference Reports (1905), ‘Special Unemployment Conference’, pp.61-63. Hardie had elsewhere suggested that: ‘Mankind, whether black, white or yellow must be left free to work out their own destiny’. NLS/Hardie Papers/Box.25/9, ‘Rough Draft’.

Colonial (and American) experiences of Chinese migration then, were adopted into parliamentary discourse surrounding the Aliens Act to serve contrasting purposes. On the one hand, the strict enforcement of migration regulation across the British World might be a marker of the Mother Country's relative vulnerability and the potential for national degradation. On the other, the sheer difference in scale between the problem in metropolitan and Pacific contexts, cast doubt on whether the Australian example was at all applicable. 'Australia and New Zealand', offered the Liberal MP, Herbert Samuel, had faced a 'considerable immigration of Chinese ...[who] could not be assimilated ...[and would] make the population of the country more Mongolian than Anglo-Saxon'. As such, Britain could not 'blame the Australasians for their measures of restriction'. Old England, however, faced a much more modest problem.¹⁵⁶ It was an interpretation that cast the policy as a blatant attempt to draw working class votes towards the Unionist Government, which Balfour himself had acknowledged was 'in deep waters' ahead of the forthcoming General Election.¹⁵⁷

The practical failings of the Aliens Act were numerous. Its passage, wrote Gainer in his landmark study, was little more than a 'Pyrrhic victory', as the Liberal Government that came to power in 1906 often refused to enforce its provisions. Certainly figures such as Evans-Gordon could complain that the legislation was 'emasculated'.¹⁵⁸ In her analysis of the administration of Act, Pellew concludes that the one redeeming feature was that it provided the Home Office (HO) with some experience of the workings of migration control system ahead of the First World

¹⁵⁶ HOC/vol.145/cc.687-768, 02 May 1905.

¹⁵⁷ UB/JC/21/2/1/Balfour to Chamberlain, 15 January 1906.

¹⁵⁸ Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, pp.166-198.

War.¹⁵⁹ If Australia had played a visible role in the political discourse surrounding the Aliens Act, it also appears to have had some small (hitherto undocumented) relevance for those framing and implementing it. HO records show that the Committee appointed to oversee the Bill in 1904 were passed copies of Acts and Reports on the prevention of criminal immigration into NSW.¹⁶⁰ The Committee found: ‘nothing noteworthy in these Regulations except perhaps the method of proving persons domicile in Australia’. The domicile certificate used by Australian authorities was filed as an example. The Commonwealth seems to have proved a clearer reference point in terms of what not to do. In 1906, the CO forwarded copies of the IRA and a related Queensland Bill. HO officials described them as ‘very complicated enactments - the effect of which ... [it seemed] almost impossible to set out on paper’, before forwarding them to the relevant inspector.¹⁶¹ The following year the Commonwealth’s High Representative in London, in response to a request from the Home Secretary, Herbert Gladstone, promised he would ‘send from time to time copies of any amending or supplemental laws or regulations on the same subject’.¹⁶²

Colonial perspectives naturally had a more direct connection to metropolitan discourse when it came to the importation of Chinese Labour into South Africa. As Bright and Hyslop have best demonstrated, the Chinese migration issue helped link working class sentiment at home and across the Empire: uniting resentment against the spoils of the South African War being given away in the interest of mine owners on the Rand.¹⁶³ It was an argument skilfully deployed by the Liberals in the lead up to

¹⁵⁹ J. Pellew, ‘The Home Office and the Aliens Act, 1905’, *The Historical Journal*, 32:2 (1989), 369-385.

¹⁶⁰ HO/15513/119823/1/CO to HO, 6 April 1904.

¹⁶¹ HO/15513/119823/2/CO to HO, 14 March 1906.

¹⁶² HO/15513/119823/3/CO to HO, 5 June 1907.

¹⁶³ Bright, ‘Chinese Indentured Labour’; Hyslop, ‘The Imperial Working Class’.

the 1906 General Election. At a meeting of the Eighty and Russell Clubs in 1904, the MP Sydney Buxton described the plan as ‘a negation of that liberty which ought to exist in a British white colony’. Warming to his theme, Buxton evaluated the issue from the ‘point of view of the Empire’:

I believe this question has come as a great shock to the nation at large. (Cheers) They had felt, and believed, that the great sacrifice of blood and treasure, many of them losing their nearest and dearest, had been at all events for the benefit of the Empire, had been, as Mr. Chamberlain put it once, for a higher civilisation instead of a lower. Now it has come home to them, that the only result of those sacrifices will be, that South Africa, or the Transvaal, is to become a yellow man’s land instead of a British white man’s colony. This I think has gone home greatly to the heart of the country.¹⁶⁴

On the Unionist side the issue proved difficult to handle. In 1902, Balfour had written to Curzon to predict that ‘the next election’, would ‘probably be fought on nothing in particular’, at least nothing ‘of obvious imperial interest’.¹⁶⁵ By the time Britain went to the polls in 1906, however, Chinese Slavery had become the most important election issue outside of tariff reform and protection. As Russell demonstrated in his pioneering work on the Liberal Landslide, it took on a particular resonance in London and the big cities.¹⁶⁶ Tories and Liberals flooded the electorate with leaflets, carrying competing arguments over whether the Government was guilty of hypocrisy on migration (in light of the Aliens Act) and had betrayed the Empire.¹⁶⁷ As one Unionist pamphlet put it:

ELECTORS

If you wish to assist in the development of the Colonies
and find work for British Emigrants in South Africa,
SUPPORT THE

¹⁶⁴ ‘The Eighty Club’, in *33 Pamphlets on English History Under Edward VII, 1901-1905*, Bodleian Library.

¹⁶⁵ BL/AJB/Add.MS.49732/Balfour to Curzon, March 1902.

¹⁶⁶ A.K. Russell, ‘The General Election of 1906’, (University of Oxford DPhil Thesis, 1962); A.K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide* (Newton Abbot, 1973).

¹⁶⁷ Russell, ‘The General Election of 1906’, p.172.

UNIONIST GOVERNMENT.

If you want to keep the scum of Europe out of the British
Islands, to stop sweating, overriding, vice and misery,
and prevent unfair competition with the labour of

British Working Men

SUPPORT THE

UNIONIST GOVERNMENT¹⁶⁸

Australian perspectives made their way into this debate in a number of ways. An Australian Unionist candidate ran in East Hull, while Australian attitudes to Chinese migration and the experience of Western Australian mines (which employed only white workers) drifted into metropolitan discourse on the need for Chinese labour in South Africa.¹⁶⁹

Resistance to Australian influence was most clearly demonstrated in *The Times*.

As we saw above, *The Times*' Peking correspondent George Morrison remained a devotee to the White Australia policy, suggesting to Edmund Barton at one stage that it be enshrined through three-way negotiations between Australia, China and Japan.¹⁷⁰

On a visit to London, Morrison gained first-hand experience of the South African issue as it was being played out in the British context, meeting Milner and hearing a speech denouncing the scheme by Lloyd George. Returning to China he complained about the impact of the policy in the East:

Anti foreign public'ns in China are now becoming equal to anti-Chinese defamatory public'ns in England. Effect is deplorable. John Chinaman on the Rand with pictures of torturing Chinese and shooting down refuges and driving Chinese with lashes to work in claims. Chinese have consul and know officially that untrue but public are inflamed.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Unionist Election Leaflet, *33 Pamphlets on English History*.

¹⁶⁹ For instance, *Manchester Guardian*, 11 August 1905, p.8 and 3 January 1906, p.4. See also Russell, 'The General Election of 1906', pp.182, 279-281; Bright, 'Chinese Indentured Labour', pp.61-89.

¹⁷⁰ Pearl, *Morrison of Peking*, pp.354-355.

¹⁷¹ ML/GEM/CY.Reel.235/Diary, 17 January 1906, 25 March 1906.

For senior management at Printing House Square, however, Australians' resistance to the South African scheme was indicative of a democratic socialism they had long despised. This phenomenon was even more alarming now it seemed to be finding its way back to Britain though resistance to the use of Chinese labour on the Rand. The tension was played out within the walls of the newspaper itself after the appointment of *The Times*' dedicated Australian correspondent, Arthur Jose. A strong Anglo-Saxonist, in *The Growth of the Empire* (1897) Jose had described Britons as 'the race and nation of the Empire-builders', whose business it was to 'understand their building in order rightly to maintain it'.¹⁷² For Jose, like Morrison, White Australia was an essential policy and 'Chinese Slavery' a violation of the racial and democratic principles upon which the future of the Empire rested. These views soon brought him into direct conflict with Chirol and Moberly Bell over the question of Asiatic migration. In his personnel file, they described Jose as a 'fine writer', but 'quite ruthless in his views', with an excessive 'passion for personalities' and 'a tendency to subordinate information and exposition to propaganda'.¹⁷³ Having appointed the British-educated Australian before realising his White Australia views, Moberly Bell stressed to his correspondent:

Everyone would wish that the Australians should remain an Anglo-Saxon people but, if we are unable to secure this except by absolute exclusion of other races, the sooner we give up talking of Anglo-Saxon capacity for rule and of the Anglo-Saxon being the ruling race the better!¹⁷⁴

Chirol took a similar line, warning Jose on numerous occasions that his views were 'too strong meat' for *The Times*', 'fastidious palates'. With a tendency to get 'carried

¹⁷² A. Jose, *The Growth of the Empire* 2nd edn (Sydney, 1900), preface.

¹⁷³ TNL/Managerial Files/Arthur Wilberforce Jose.

¹⁷⁴ TNL/Manager's Letterbooks/34/Moberly Bell to Jose, 15 September 1903. Moberly Bell had himself been the victim of anti-Semitic taunts. For instance, NMM/WHI/13/Aliens/Pamphlet: J. Bannister, 'Why the London Press Favours Alien Migration and English Emigration'.

away by ... enthusiasm for Mr. Deakin' and the Australian Labour Party, Jose was apt to 'push the White Australia idea to extremes, which may be dangerous to the Empire'.¹⁷⁵ For Chirol, the White Australia Policy represented a great socialist threat to Britain's domestic prosperity and her expansion in the East. He attacked the impact of Australian ideas on India, on Japan and on the Labour movement in Britain itself. By the time of the 1906 election, Chirol had clearly come to see foreign, colonial and domestic considerations as entwined. In a letter Leo Amery, he worried that the new Liberal Prime Minister, Campbell-Bannerman, was as much 'on the knee' to his labourites' as Deakin was to his in Australia. It was a worrying prospect:

I hold Socialism to be just as disintegrating a force in the Colonies as at home + all this outcry against Asiatic labour to be largely if not wholly Socialistic. Coquetting with Socialism in the Colonies will be as fatal to the Empire, as, I fear, coquetting with Socialism at home will be to Tariff Reform ... The *Daily News* today denounces every Asiatic as a "blackleg", who is incapable of "loyalty to his class". That is no doubt sound socialism but where does imperialism come in?¹⁷⁶

Conclusion: John Bull at Home and All the Little Bulls

In January 1907, the Canadian Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier, wrote to Lord Minto:

John Bull at home is the most gracious of all hosts + the most philanthropic of all men, but all the little Bulls, the world over, are set in a fury not by a red rag, but by a yellow skin. This prejudice on the skin colour is the same in all English speaking countries – Britain is alone excepted.¹⁷⁷

By the time Laurier was writing, however, the British Government had already taken its first tentative steps towards a policy of migration restriction. Though the initial Aliens Act proved largely toothless, the political debate that surrounded it and which

¹⁷⁵ TNL/Managerial Files/Arthur Wilberforce Jose/Chirol to Jose, 26 February 1908, 24 January 1908, 31 October 1907.

¹⁷⁶ CAC/LA/AMEL/2/5/6/Chirol to Amery, 11 September 1907.

¹⁷⁷ NLS/Minto Papers/MS.12402/Laurier to Minto, 1 January 1907.

became fused with the rancour over the issue of Chinese Slavery in South Africa, was highly conscious of the earlier experiences of Chinese migration (and attempts at migration restriction) in Britain's settler colonies.

The metropolitan discourse on the Aliens Act and the issue of Chinese migration to South Africa was just one manifestation of the way in which the longer story of Australian engagement with China had taken on an imperial resonance by the early-twentieth century. With the passage of the White Australia Policy, the old anti-Chinese sentiments so central to the formation of Australian colonial nationalism and which had long-affected relations between Britain and Australia and China, were spilling over into a series of other imperial relationships as well. The Chinese immigration question had rapidly become a 'coloured immigration' question - touching India, Japan and Australia's fellow white Dominions. Moreover, the Commonwealth could now point to Australians' military and naval service in defence of the Empire, to add to their claims that they should have a say in its future organisation and guiding principles. Before long questions of migration, defence, the Empire in the Pacific and domestic reform were becoming more entangled than ever. That reality was hinted at in two letters handled by Northcote in 1904-1905. 'I shall watch with great interest to see what effect the growth of a great Japanese Power has upon Australia', wrote Balfour to the Australian Governor-General in October 1904, 'and whether it will strengthen a desire for imperial unity'.¹⁷⁸ A year later, Northcote sent a message to Secretary Lyttelton on Britain's 'Aliens Restriction + Immigration

¹⁷⁸ BL/AJB/Add.MS.49697/Balfour to Northcote, 20 October 1904.

Bill', asking whether 'H.M. Govt would make an exception in favour of the Japanese, + so make an opportunity to raise the question here'.¹⁷⁹

Increasingly, it seemed to many in Britain, as well as in the Antipodes, that the old Chinese question (as Charles Pearson had predicted) was becoming subsumed within a wider struggle for survival of the Anglo-Saxon race. It was a situation that looked likely to drive white settler societies closer together, seeking mutual assurance against the rising strength of Asia. Fears of Japan's newfound dynamism were central, though the fate of China was inextricably linked. 'A coalition of the two great yellow races under Japanese leadership', Theodore Roosevelt informed Chirol, when *The Times*' Foreign Editor called on him at Washington, 'might be an equal danger for all Western nations that have interests in the Far East'.¹⁸⁰ Though he was far more enthusiastic about the rise of Japan, Chirol agreed that 'the Orient could no longer be dealt with by the Occident in watertight compartments'.¹⁸¹ The reawakening of the East was likely to have a particular impact on the British Empire and especially the states of Greater Britain. As Chamberlain had predicted, the time for small kingdoms had passed away. Forged through the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras, this impression would endure well into the twentieth century, for those British imperialists who looked out to the Pacific arc of the Empire. Years later, in his own copy of Mackinder's *Geographical Pivot of History*, Leo Amery highlighted a passage, which conveyed the sorts of sentiments Australian settlers had been expressing for generations. Were the 'Chinese ... organized by the Japanese, to

¹⁷⁹ CAC/Lyttelton Papers/CHAN/1/2/28/Northcote to Lyttelton, 16 September 1905.

¹⁸⁰ V. Chirol, *Fifty Years in a Changing World* (1927).

¹⁸¹ Valentine Chirol, 'The Reawakening of the Orient' in *The Reawakening of the Orient and Other Addresses* (New Haven, 1925), p.29.

overthrow the Russian Empire and conquer its territory', Mackinder, had suggested, 'they might constitute the yellow peril to the world's freedom'.¹⁸²

¹⁸² CAC/LA/AMEL/1/2/4/'The Geographical Pivot of History'.

Conclusion

In 1907, the British Empire League published a pamphlet by New Zealand's High Commissioner in London, William Pember Reeves.¹ Produced to coincide with the 1907 Imperial Conference, Pember Reeves' essay called for 'A Council of the Empire', to replace the 'imperfect and disconnected' methods of co-ordination upon which the British had long relied:

As the Empire grows, and as communication is quickened and intercourse increases between the different portions of it, so the number of problems born of the relations of these different parts is steadily added to.

Of primary importance were questions of defence; communications; trade and protection; and the alignment of legal, professional and educational standards across the British World. While imperial preference had been the 'most thorny' issue to date, the 'complex and delicate matter' of migration restriction, loomed at the top of Empire's list of future challenges:

At one time exclusion laws were airily supposed to be an unamiable eccentricity peculiar to Australia and New Zealand, and even there to be aimed solely at the virtuous and inoffensive representatives of one ancient Asiatic civilisation. It is barely a quarter of a century since the question gained any notice at all in this country. But since 1880 the example of the drastic exclusion laws of the United States has been copied in many parts of the Empire. Such laws have grown to be much more than machinery for levying a landing tax on Chinamen. We have lived to see the Transvaal importing Chinese while Cape Colony shuts them out; to see severely restrictive conditions imposed upon British Indians residing in parts of Africa; to see the Government of India actively concerning itself in the welfare of its coolies in other parts of the Empire; to see the immigration policy of the Transvaal debated in the Legislatures of other Colonies and even become a factor in a British general election; to see British Columbia agitated over incoming Asiatics ... [and] last, but not least, to see a law aiming at the exclusion of undesirable aliens passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom. If these

¹ The Empire League was a patriotic association committed to fostering imperial unity.

facts do not betoken that immigration laws have become an Imperial question of the first moment, then most observers are strangely deluded.²

This doctoral thesis has sought to demonstrate the ways in which the historical experience of Australian engagement with China came to influence both the internal dynamics and external relations of the British Empire. Drawing on extensive archival research, it has endeavoured to bring together several rich traditions of scholarship on imperial history; Australian history; Anglo-Chinese relations; and the idea of a Greater Britain. By pulling at a series of interweaving (and often entangled) historical threads, it has endeavoured to shed new light on the triangular relationships linking Britain, Australia and China, and to gauge their impact on the evolution of Britain's world-system between c.1770 and 1907. By the end of this period, as the veteran colonial statesman William Pember Reeves reflected, the Chinese question in the Antipodes had morphed into a series of broader imperial questions, touching foreign, colonial and even home affairs.

As Pember Reeves pointed out, before the 1880s the question of migration restriction had seemed to many imperial observers, a uniquely Australasian issue. Part One explored the emergence and maturation of the Chinese question in Australia, from British settlement, down to the mid-1880s. Taking a panoramic approach, its constituent chapters surveyed the contest between two contrasting visions of Australian settlement: connected to and insulated from China. In the lead up to colonisation, and for much of the eighty years that followed, dreams of tapping into the Middle Kingdom's human and commercial resources to stimulate colonial

² NLA/Watson Papers/Series.7/2/Pamphlet: W. Pember Reeves, 'A Council of the Empire'. Its reach was even wider. In 1904, British officials had become concerned over the potential treaty implications of a proposed Chinese Exclusion Act for the Gold Coast. In the end they decided that given London's inability to stop Australian measures, they could not reserve the Gold Coast plan. FO/17/1704/414-454/CO to FO and Enclosures, 6 April 1904.

development and to shore up the British position in the Pacific, seduced Australian settlers and enthusiasts at home. From the 1850s, however, with the arrival of large numbers of Cantonese goldseekers, the potential impact of open relations fuelled colonial nightmares of a celestial invasion. Were the Chinese to come in freely, Australians feared, the British population was bound to be displaced. The story of indigenous dispossession would be repainted in stark new colours. Through the 1860s and 1870s, periodic migration scares refocused colonial attention on the need for insulation from the Middle Kingdom. By the 1880s, Australian anxieties were becoming heightened over reports of China's awakening. With the arrival of the Imperial Commissioners, it appeared to many (most notably Henry Parkes) as though the Manchu Empire was staking a claim to Australia's vast, unoccupied territory.

It was in the 1880s, as Pember Reeves recognised, that the Chinese question in the Colonies began to resonate more broadly. Australia's response to the anticipated surge in Chinese migration sent ripples out across an increasingly interconnected world. Employing a sharper lens, Part Two explored this phenomenon, by zooming in on the imperial ramifications of the Chinese migration crisis that rocked the Australian Colonies at the centenary of settlement. Moving beyond existing studies, which have concentrated on national and trans-Pacific themes, Chapters Three, Four and Five, sought to illuminate the ways in which the events of 1888 were played out through the architecture of Britain's evolving imperial system. In particular, they used the crisis as a prism for investigating the interaction between British foreign and colonial policy and the long-neglected impact of the Settler Empire upon the late-Victorian 'Official Mind'.

Pulling back to a more panoramic vantage point, Part Three set out to consider the imperial implications of Sino-Australian engagement around the turn of the twentieth century. Its first research target was the way in which Sino-Australian contact informed official and popular discourse on Anglo-Chinese relations. The second was to explore the impact upon the quest for greater imperial unity. Here, Chapters Six and Seven explored Australia's place in the Far Eastern calculations of political and commercial commentators and in the visions of a Greater Britain articulated by British and colonial statesmen, military and naval authorities and journalists in Fleet Street and beyond. Taken together, these two investigative pathways led us towards a clearer understanding of the place of Australia's relations with China in late-Victorian and Edwardian conceptions of Britain's imperial future.

From the beginning, this study has sought to demonstrate the extent to which the history of Australia's engagement with China was both the product of, and an influence on, the evolution of a British world-system. Across all three sections, it has mapped the awkward and often conflicting relationship that existed between Britain's white settler empire in the South Pacific and her informal empire of trade and influence in East Asia. Since the days of Matra, Young and Dalrymple, the extent to which British interests in the Antipodes and East Asia might be brought into alignment, had remained an open question. A century later, it had taken on a new significance, as the coming together of Europeans and Asians in the Pacific, seemed increasingly relevant to the Empire's future prosperity at home and abroad. As new technologies and expanding imperial rivalries demolished old notions of space and time, colonial perspectives on race and migration, forged out of contact with China, resonated across the British World. To contemporaries, it seemed almost as if the

complex web of diasporic, economic, technological and ideological connections that bound Britain to the disparate regions of the world were contracting, pulling everywhere together. In this new modern age, reflected the onetime head of the CO Dominions Department C.P. Lucas, the ‘Colour Question’ would become the ‘greatest difficulty’ confronting the Empire.³

By showing the extent to which Australian contact with China penetrated British political and popular discourse, these chapters have paid particular attention to the ways in which British imperialists sought to manage the ever-growing series of internal and external pressures inflicted upon their imperial system. A final example, and our closing scene, came at the 1907 Imperial Conference in London. There, the extent to which the old Chinese migration question had been transformed into, ‘an Imperial question of the first moment’, was in evidence when delegates discussed the synchronization of British and colonial naturalisation policies. Advocated by the Home Government, and supported in principle by most of the Colonies, the aim was to ensure that naturalised subjects would have their status recognised across jurisdictions. It was part of a more general move, explained Herbert Gladstone, to foster imperial unity and lay the basis for an Imperial Naturalisation Law.

The resulting discussion revealed the extent to which colonial views on race and migration had gained wider acceptance. Gladstone was mindful of the Colonies’ reservations over granting entry to non-Europeans - ‘the special difficulties which affect them in various ways, and with which the Home Country is not directly concerned’. To assuage these reservations, he suggested that London might

³ C.P. Lucas, *Greater Rome and Greater Britain* (Oxford, 1912), p.97.

‘assimilate’ into any Imperial Naturalisation scheme colonial provisions to ensure the exclusion of non-white subjects. The resulting debate, however, also revealed the endurance of the intra-imperial tensions that had long beset Anglo-Australian relations over coloured migration. Alfred Deakin sought to remind Gladstone of the need to distinguish between self-governing colonies and the rest of the Empire. A memorandum from the Cape Government, meanwhile, gave voice to the fear that Chinese might secure naturalisation at Hong Kong or the Straits Settlements, in order to gain entrance to the Dominions. The submission also expressed concern that the lax enforcement of Britain’s own Alien Act, might provide non-Europeans and undesirables, with a means to penetrate the outlying parts of Greater Britain, having secured naturalisation in the Mother Country. On these rocks the search for a co-ordinated policy floundered.⁴ It was a potent reminder of the power of settler attitudes to influence relations between Great and Greater Britain. Four years later, at the next Imperial Conference, delegates reflected that it had been ‘absolutely impossible to get any unanimity ... on the question of naturalisation’. The problem, explained Wilfred Laurier, was that colonial leaders would always be wary that Britain was ‘more easy on the colour question’.⁵

By the first decade of the twentieth century then, the ideas formed from the coming together of the British and Chinese Empires in the Antipodes, had become established in imperial affairs as part of a more general ‘colour question’. In the decades that followed, Australian attitudes on race and the White Australia Policy, remained a significant factor within imperial (and then Commonwealth) politics. In his contribution to the *CHBE*, E.A. Benians noted that;

⁴ BPP/Command-Papers[3404]/Proceedings of the Colonial Conference, 1907, pp.533-541.

⁵ BPP/Command-Papers[7714]/Proceedings of the Colonial Conference, 1911, pp.249-271.

The problem of Asiatic immigration was an imperial problem which continued to bristle with difficulties. Because it concerned the prestige and status of India, it affected the whole fabric of imperial unity, and it became involved in the long run with the question of British trusteeship in Africa.⁶

By the 1960s, the lasting remnants of the Anglo-Saxonist ideal had become an ‘affront’ to efforts to forge a viable, multi-racial Commonwealth.⁷ The continuing use of race-based immigration policies in the former Dominions, wrote Derek Ingram in his *Commonwealth for a Colour-Blind World* (1965), might ‘become one of the Commonwealth’s most dangerous problems’.⁸ Australian views also drew numerous protests from foreign governments, most famously from Japan at Versailles. In the midst of the First World War, George Morrison had informed an audience at Melbourne to be mindful of the effects of anti-Asian migration legislation upon Japan and China, especially in terms of driving the two powers together:

One must very carefully guard against a policy which effects or tends to effect such a combination ... Chinese superabundance of raw materials in men and material – wrought with efficiency by the high administrative genius of Japan, must evolve a combination of really formidable danger.⁹

If the subsequent impact of the themes explored in these pages was evident in Commonwealth and Australian politics through much of the twentieth century, there are also a number of resonances in the present day. Although the triangular links between Britain, China and Australia have largely disappeared, traces of those historical foundations endure. Like their nineteenth century counterparts, British manufacturers and Australian primary producers, continue to view the China market as key to their own domestic economic expansion. In some areas, such as education,

⁶ E.A. Benians, ‘Finance, Trade and Communications, 1870-1895’, in *CHBE*, iii, p.481.

⁷ G. Arnold, *Towards Peace and a Multiracial Commonwealth* (1964), p.103.

⁸ Ingram, *Commonwealth For a Colour-Blind World*, pp.57-59.

⁹ Quoted in Pearl, *Morrison of Peking*, p.351.

Australian and British providers have moved into direct competition. Taking the long view, many of the dreams of the early settlement enthusiasts – seeking to align Chinese and Australian development through the expansion of trade and migration - appear to have been coming to fruition. In 2009, China became Australia’s most important export market. In 2011, it overtook the United Kingdom to become its largest source of migrants.¹⁰ At the same time, periodic debates over the scale of migration and Chinese influence (particularly around state investment in agricultural and mining ventures) has tapped into an older discourse over the costs and benefits of ‘closer association’. These, in turn, have reflected the ongoing tension between the influences of history and geography. In recent years, the most dramatic expression of regional anxieties in terms of migration has been the recurrent controversy over asylum seekers arriving from Asia by boat. Here, calls to break the economic models which underpin ‘people smuggling’, might be read as modern variations on Parkes’ and Gillies’ attempts to affect the migration networks linking Australia to Asia in the nineteenth century.

As Australia’s connections to China through trade and migration have expanded, political leaders have been quick to embrace the notion of Australia as a pivot between China and the West. In 2012, delivering the 70th Annual Morrison Lecture (named in honour of the former *Times* correspondent) then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced the launch of the Australian National University’s ‘Centre on China in the World’. The goal, Rudd explained, was to create a national and international research hub, growing over-time to become, ‘the global go-to place for the analysis of

¹⁰ ‘Trade and Investment’, *Australian Embassy, China* [website], <<http://www.china.embassy.gov.au/bjng/relations2.html>>, accessed 1 July 2012. In 2012, China has been pushed into second place (Britain third) as a source of migrants by India. ‘India Now Australia’s Largest Source of Permanent Migrants’, *Chris Bowen MP (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship)* [website], <<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/cb/2012/cb188313.htm>>, accessed 2 August 2012.

the continued rise of China'.¹¹ There were echoes here not just of the role which George Morrison had envisaged for himself, but of the generations of imperial thinkers who looked to Australia both as a 'pathway to China' and as a prism for considering her engagement with the West. Although, no longer part of a Greater Britain, or conceived as a point of contact between long-departed Empires, that sentiment which had emerged from the very beginnings of Australian settlement continues to endure: 'Over the Hill Lies China'.

¹¹ 'Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivers the 70th George E. Morrison Lecture: Australia and China in the World, 23 April 2010', *ANU News* [website], <<http://news.anu.edu.au/?p=2102>>, accessed 2 August 2012.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Estimated Outward Migration from China, 1801-1875 (Thousands).

<i>Australasia</i>	<i>Canada</i>	<i>Cuba</i>	<i>Peru</i>	<i>S-East Asia</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>West Indies</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>
70	30	152	120	845	178	45	160	1,600

Adapted from Zhu Guohong, *Overseas Emigration from China* (Shanghai, 1994), cited in Pan (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Chinese Overseas*, p.62.

Appendix 2

Chinese in Australia by Colony 1861-1901.

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
NSW	12,988	7,220	10,205	13,157	10,222
Victoria	24,732	17,826	11,959	8,489	6,347
Queensland	538	3,305	11,229	8,524	7,672
South Aust.	n/a	n/a	347	182	287
West. Aust.	n/a	n/a	145	917	1,521
Tasmania	n/a	n/a	844	939	506
Northern Territory	n/a	n/a	3,804	3,613	3,072
Total	38,258	28,351	38,533	35,821	29,627

Adapted from C.Y. Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia* (Sydney 1975).

Appendix 3

a. Australian Trade by Colony with East and South-East Asia, 1890-1900 (£Stirling).

NB: Tasmania not included

Year	NSW		VIC		QLD		SA		WA	
	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports
1890	689,324	169,597	1,181,470	44,966	151,497	27,654	27,519	31,645	47,912	125,936
1891	615,048	212,679	1,207,382	41,727	142,159	40,948	111,290	59,151	74,163	116,612
1892	52,043	140,680	1,133,105	35,675	136,543	49,794	189,160	106,609	60,988	154,600
1893	413,665	122,441	664,005	22,427	134,881	45,397	245,899	15,194	61,351	67,455
1894	401,963	135,727	515,070	51,102	122,134	65,880	184,251	22,848	50,370	68,407
1895	375,612	141,272	396,782	69,704	140,542	34,276	164,895	20,578	66,287	47,417
1896	352,421	158,312	419,423	52,394	134,164	54,165	122,649	21,066	164,963	89,726
1897	385,028	188,077	476,855	40,103	153,503	68,453	361,111	11,615	164,397	94,712
1898	370,855	227,533	390,983	64,650	144,036	152,356	29,643	10,470	154,537	39,755
1899	457,868	377,703	381,680	48,838	159,406	132,278	71,262	45,469	141,812	43,805
1900	539,306	443,884	728,798	199,010	156,629	225,443	331,426	86,319	248,012	62,486

b. Total Colonial Trade With East and South-East Asia, 1890-1900 (£Stirling).

Year	Imports	Exports
1890	2,097,722	399,798
1891	2,150,042	471,117
1892	2,040,249	487,358
1893	1,519,801	272,914
1894	1,273,788	343,964
1895	1,144,118	313,247
1896	1,193,620	375,663
1897	1,540,894	402,960
1898	1,460,909	494,764
1899	1,212,028	648,093
1900	2,004,170	1,017,142

Taken from S. Tweedie, *Trading Partners: Australia and Asia, 1790-1993* (Sydney, 1994), p.224.

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