

# **Dispatches from a Forgotten War: Australian Journalists and China's Boxer Rebellion**

**Michael Dwyer**

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I declare that the research presented here is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

Signed: Michael Dwyer

Date: 26 November 2018

## Abstract

China weighs heavily on Australian public discourse, influenced by perceptions that have been moulded by the stories, voices and images produced by Australian journalists reporting from China. My thesis critically examines the experiences of a group of journalists who were reporting on China at the start of the 20th century and how they interpreted the populous Asian nation for a domestic audience. While most studies looking at the way the Australian media has helped frame our images of China use the 1930s or World War II as a starting point for their analysis, this thesis investigates the importance of those reporters who covered Australia's military involvement in the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900-01. It initially examines the role of the media in stoking anti-Chinese sentiment in the Australian colonies in the 1800s, looking at the part played by jingoistic periodicals like the *Bulletin* and the *Boomerang*. The thesis then uses original press dispatches from reporters and editors as part of a qualitative analysis of media coverage of a conflict which has often been referred to as Australia's "forgotten" war. It will also explore the role played in press coverage of the Boxer Rebellion by George "Chinese" Morrison, a Geelong-born reporter for *The Times* of London who has been described by many as Australia's most important foreign correspondent, but whose reputation should be open to more rigorous scrutiny than has been the case to date. Although some source material used in this study has been utilised by other researchers in the past to examine other issues, this thesis provides a new perspective that focuses on the role of the print media in shaping Australian views on China at the time of federation.

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## Introduction

China has occupied many column inches in Australian newspapers over recent months, not to mention extensive coverage on radio, television and online. Headlines have been screaming out anti-Chinese messages such as “Beijing bullying”<sup>1</sup> and “Back to Mao”.<sup>2</sup> Overheated media reports have claimed that Chinese university students are being used as spies by the Communist regime in Beijing, while newly published books come with ominous titles such as *Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia*.<sup>3</sup>

While this may appear to have the hallmarks of a fresh set of China phobias for a new generation of Australians, such anti-Chinese sentiments have actually been part of our public discourse since the early years of European settlement in the 1800s. Coral Bell, one of Australia’s most distinguished international relations theorists, has written that “a vague sense of China as a distantly alarming force is woven into the original fabric of Australian national attitudes.”<sup>4</sup> Australian literary history over the past century is “littered” with works of fiction depicting Chinese hordes invading Australia, with titles such as *The Yellow Wave* and *White or Yellow?*<sup>5</sup>

This long-running hostility towards China and its people, first expressed in the mid-1800s, intensified as a result of the influx of Chinese labourers into gold mining areas in Victoria and New South Wales from the 1850s. The increased number of Chinese migrants and their unconventional mining practices fuelled resentment on the goldfields and in the broader community about “the possible impacts of non-Europeans

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<sup>1</sup> *Australian Financial Review*, 29 May 2018, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Australian Financial Review*, 3 March 2018, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia*, Melbourne, Hardie Grant Books, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Coral Bell, “Australia and China: Power Balance and Policy,” in A M Halpern (ed.), *Policies toward China: Views from Six Continents*, New York: Published for the Council on Foreign Relations by McGraw-Hill, 1965, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Ouyang Yu, “Australian Invention of Chinese Invasion: A Century of Paranoia 1888-1988.” *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 1995, p. 74; Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 21.

on the development of Australian society.”<sup>6</sup> These bouts of anti-Chinese xenophobia ebbed and flowed over the second half of the 19th century as new gold discoveries attracted more Chinese migrants.

Australian perceptions of China and the Chinese in the 19th century were, in part, a construct of media representations of the latter’s history, culture and social development and interactions between European settlers and Chinese mine labourers. These representations were, to a large extent, the product of opinionated journalists and editors domiciled in the Australian colonies reporting on racial agitation. But over the decades, the Australian press corps in China also became an increasingly important confluent for local opinions and attitudes about the world’s most populous nation, both at a political level and among the general populace.

While most studies looking at the way the Australian media has helped frame our images of China and the Chinese use the 1930s or World War II as a starting point for their analysis, my thesis investigates the importance of reporters who covered Australia’s military involvement in the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900-01.

The Boxer Rebellion was an anti-Westerner and anti-missionary uprising in China that originated in the drought-stricken north-eastern Shandong province and culminated in a highly publicised siege of the foreign legations in the capital Peking that Hollywood later made into a film of “egregious absurdity”<sup>7</sup> entitled *55 Days at Peking*. Prior to the siege dozens of Christian missionaries had died at the hands of the Boxers, as well as hundreds of their converts, reinforcing strong anti-Chinese prejudices that had been present in the Australian colonies for decades.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939*, St Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 1999, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Cyril Pearl, *Morrison of Peking*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1967, p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> Neil Smith, *Carving up the Melon: Australians in the Boxer Rebellion, China 1900-1901*, Brighton, Mostly Unsung Military History, 2000, pp. 38-39.



Yet the grievances of the Chinese peasants who made up the ranks of the Boxers were, in some respects, well justified. Many Western missionaries treated the local population quite poorly. And the foreign powers operating in China at the time cared for little more than carving out territorial concessions for themselves. Robert Hart, who ran the Chinese Maritime Customs from 1863 until 1908 and who was one of the more astute scholars of Chinese affairs at the time, described the Boxer movement as “patriotic in origin, justifiable in its fundamental idea, and in point of fact the outcome of either foreign advice or the study of foreign methods.”<sup>9</sup>

The British government, whose armed forces were largely tied up in a debilitating war with the Boers in South Africa, asked its Australian colonies for military assistance to help crush the Boxer rebels in China. The colonies responded to the British request with varying degrees of enthusiasm, jockeying for position ahead of the Federation of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 January 1901.<sup>10</sup>

After debates over who would be paying for the military mission, the colonies of New South Wales and Victoria eventually agreed to send a combined contingent of about 500 men, whilst South Australia separately provided a gunboat that was the entirety of its navy. Two journalists travelled to China with the naval brigades, while another Australian reporter – George “Chinese” Morrison – was already on the ground in Beijing as a correspondent for London’s influential *The Times* newspaper.

Unfortunately for the eager Australian brigades, the rebellion had been more or less quashed by the time they arrived in northern China after a 17-day voyage from Sydney. With no real fighting to be done, the Australian troops were assigned to much

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Hart quoted in Justin Corfield, *The Australian Illustrated Encyclopaedia of the Boxer Uprising 1899-1901*, McCrae, Slouch Hat Publications, 2001, p. 83.

<sup>10</sup> Bob Nicholls, *Bluejackets and Boxers: Australia's Naval Expedition to the Boxer Uprising*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1986, pp. 22-36.

more menial jobs like police work, sanitation duties and fire-fighting before they were eventually sent home in early 1901.<sup>11</sup>

It is hardly surprising that the Boxer Rebellion has been described by some military historians as Australia's most "forgotten" war.<sup>12</sup> Yet the brief military campaign which took place in China around the time of Australian federation actually played a not inconsequential role in helping to frame emerging nationalist feelings as well as reinforcing domestic attitudes towards Asia.

A scholarly study of the press coverage of the campaign and its relationship with Australian national consciousness has required an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on disciplines including journalism and media history, military history, and Australian and Chinese modern history as well as media studies and cultural studies. Research on Australia's involvement in the Boxer Rebellion has been relatively scant to date, with much of the literature on the subject provided by enthusiastic amateur military historians.<sup>13</sup> Some histories of the media coverage of Australian military engagements since the 1800s fail to mention the Boxer Rebellion at all, or only deal with the conflict in a cursory manner.<sup>14</sup>

Whilst there have been interactions between the Australian media and China since the late-1800s, the space constraints of a Master of Research thesis make it unrealistic to cover this entire history. My thesis therefore has a narrower scope and critically examines the role of the Australian journalists who reported from China on the

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Firkins, *The Australians in Nine Wars: Waikato to Long Tan*, Adelaide, Rigby, 1971, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Bob Nicholls, op. cit., p. xi; Wilson Evans, *Deeds Not Words*, Melbourne, The Hawthorn Press, 1971, p. 88.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance Neil Smith, *Carving up the Melon: Australians in the Boxer Rebellion, China 1900-1901*, Brighton, Mostly Unsung Military History, 2000; Kit Denton, *For Queen and Commonwealth*, Sydney, Time-Life Books, 1987; James Atkinson, *Australian Contingents to the China Field Force 1900-1901*, Sydney, NSW Military Historical Society, 1976.

<sup>14</sup> The narrative in Pat Burgess, *Warco: Australian Reporters at War*, Richmond, William Heinemann Australia, 1985, runs from the Boer War to World War I, skipping over the Boxer Rebellion.

Boxer Rebellion at the start of the 20th century, investigating their relationship with the construction of Australian nationalism, particularly on the question of race.

Two of those reporters – George Watkin Wynne from the Sydney *Telegraph* and John Wallace from the *Sydney Morning Herald* – were effectively embedded with the 500-strong naval brigades sent to China from Victoria and NSW. The third – Morrison – had already been working in Peking for Britain's most influential newspaper for a number of years. My thesis considers how this small group of correspondents interpreted and represented China for an Australian domestic audience.

The role of the media in the construction of Australian perceptions of Asia, including China, has been a relative latecomer to scholarly scrutiny. This is hardly surprising given the striking paucity of academic expertise on Asian culture and languages in Australian universities until well into the 1960s. Antonia Finnane wrote that the serious study of Chinese history in Australia was largely a phenomenon of the second half of the 20th century, with the pivotal event being the appointment of C P (Charles Patrick) Fitzgerald to head up the Department of Far Eastern Studies at the ANU in 1950.<sup>15</sup>

There are a handful of early works that touch on the role of media in interpreting events in Asia for an Australian audience, including publications by William Macmahon Ball and Denis Warner.<sup>16</sup> David Walker and Alison Broinowski both chronicle Australia's response to the so-called "rise of Asia", reflecting in part on its impact on public

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<sup>15</sup> Antonia Finnane, "Australian Excursions into East Asian History," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, No. 41, 1995, p. 232.

<sup>16</sup> Denis Warner, "Foreign News," in Lindsay Revill and Colin Roderick (eds.), *The Journalist's Craft: a Guide to Modern Practice*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1965, p. 207.

consciousness and policy discourse.<sup>17</sup> Other scholarly studies have appeared from Lachlan Strahan, Robin Gerster, Timothy Kendall and Richard White.<sup>18</sup>

The role of the media in shaping public discourse in 19th century Australia is particularly significant given the importance of newspapers in colonial Australia. Colonial Australia was awash with newspapers, with one estimate suggesting that the proportion of the Australian population at the time with the financial capacity to buy newspapers was ten times that of Britain. As the journalist Richard Twopeny wrote in 1883: "This is essentially the land of newspapers. Excepting the Bible, Shakespeare, and Macauley, the only literature within the bushman's reach are newspapers."<sup>19</sup>

There is little in the way of published scholarly research on Australia's military foray into China at the time of the Boxer uprising. The two most substantive works of research to date have been a thesis by Robin McWhinney in 1974 and Bob Nicholls' 1986 book *Bluejackets and Boxers: Australia's Naval Expedition to the Boxer Uprising*.<sup>20</sup> The Boxer Rebellion itself is well covered in the historiography of pre-revolutionary China.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939*, St Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 1999; Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Lachlan Strahan, *Australia's China: Changing Perceptions from the 1930s to the 1990s*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1996; Robin Gerster, "Representations of Asia," in Peter Pierce (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009; Timothy Kendall, *Ways of Seeing China: From Yellow Peril to Shangri-la*, Fremantle, Western Australia, Curtin University Books, 2005; Richard White, "Australian Journalists, Travel Writing and China: James Hingston, the 'Vagabond' and G E Morrison," *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, June 2008, pp. 237-250.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia*, Penguin Colonial Facsimiles, Ringwood, Victoria, Penguin Books, 1973, p 221. Twopeny's book was originally published in London by Elliot Stock in 1883.

<sup>20</sup> Robyn McWhinney, *Imperialists and Policemen?: The Australians in China 1900-1901* (unpublished BA Hons thesis, Macquarie University, 1974); Nicholls, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> For general histories of the Boxer Rebellion see Paul Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience and Myth*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997; Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, New York, WW Norton & Company, 1990, pp 230-238; Diana Preston, *The Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China's War on Foreigners That Shook the World in the Summer of 1900*, New York, Walker & Company, 1999.

There is no shortage of publications when it comes to both scholarly and popular literature on the subject of George Morrison, although much of what has been written about him verges on hagiography. Morrison was an intrepid Geelong-born reporter for *The Times* of London who has been described by many as Australia's most important foreign correspondent, but whose reputation should be open to more rigorous scrutiny than has been the case to date.

Morrison certainly had a presence, captivating the writer Banjo Paterson when he met him just after the Boxer Rebellion had been quashed. "It was an education to listen to him, for he spoke with the self-confidence of genius," Paterson wrote in a somewhat sardonic later reminiscence.<sup>22</sup> Yet while Morrison has been the subject of two biographies and numerous other studies, question marks remain over his attitude towards China and its inhabitants and his influence in domestic policy debates.

Morrison, Wynne and Wallace are covered in some histories of Australian foreign and war correspondents, including the recent *Witnesses to War* by Fay Anderson and Richard Trembath.<sup>23</sup> Other notable studies of Australian war correspondents by scholars including Prue Torney-Parlicki, Trish Payne and Jeannine Baker have been focused on different time periods or look at the role of women reporters.<sup>24</sup>

In terms of thesis methodology and structure, my first chapter provides a broad oversight of the role of the media in stoking anti-Chinese sentiment in Britain's Australian colonies in the 1800s, looking at the part played by jingoistic periodicals including the *Bulletin* and the *Boomerang*. A theme running through Australian popular

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<sup>22</sup> Andrew Barton Paterson, *Happy Dispatches: Journalistic pieces from Banjo Paterson's days as a war correspondent*, Lansdowne Press, Sydney, 1980, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Fay Anderson and Richard Trembath, *Witnesses to War: the History of Australian Conflict Reporting*, Carlton, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> For a fuller discussion of the historiography of Australian foreign and war reporting, see Prue Torney-Parlicki, *Somewhere in Asia: War, Journalism and Australia's Neighbours 1941-75*, Sydney, UNSW Press, 2000; Trish Payne, *War and Words: the Australian Press and the Vietnam War*, Carlton, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2007; Jeannine Baker, *Australian Women War Reporters: Boer War to Vietnam*, Sydney, NewSouth Publishing, 2015.

literature at the time, according to David Walker, was a fear of the unknown or “other” when it came to China. Novels warning that Australia was about to be swamped by hordes of Chinese or other Asians “formed a sub-genre in the narratives of racial conflict and have a significant place in Australian literature”, he observed.<sup>25</sup> In 1888, at the peak of this anti-Chinese literary xenophobia, William Lane’s fictional account of an Asian invasion on Australia, entitled *White or Yellow? A Story of the Race-War of AD 1908*, was serialised in the trade union affiliated *Boomerang*. The story also had an anti-imperialist tinge, with Lane writing that “the defence of Australia would come from bush-bred republicans who put nation before Empire.”<sup>26</sup>

In the decades leading up to World War II, Australian perceptions of China and Asia more broadly remained coloured by a lack of any meaningful interaction with the region. When Australians thought about their Asian neighbours, according to war correspondent Edmond William (“Bill”) Tipping, “they thought of coolie hats and paddy fields, sampans and pagodas, snake-charmers and rope tricks, dusty maidens, Dr Fu Manchu, opium and the rest.”<sup>27</sup>

My second chapter uses contemporary newspaper reportage and manuscript material from reporters and editors about the Boxer Rebellion as part of a qualitative analysis of media coverage of the conflict and their attitudes towards China and the Chinese. It aims to ascertain to the extent to which they reflected Australian public and political sentiment about race, identity and colonial nationalism, as well as the extent to which they may have fermented such discourse.

The third chapter of my thesis explores the role played in Australian press coverage of the Boxer Rebellion by Morrison, using primary sources to focus on his

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<sup>25</sup> David Walker, “Survivalist Anxieties: Australian Responses to Asia, 1890s to the Present,” *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 120, 2002, p. 322.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Edmond William Tipping, “Australians in the Near North,” in Robert Gilmore and Denis Warner (eds.), *Near North: Australia and a Thousand Million Neighbours*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1948, p. 1.

views on China. Morrison worked at Beijing correspondent for the *Times* from 1897 until 1912, when he resigned to become an adviser to the newly-installed Chinese republican government. Morrison has been called Australia's greatest-ever China watcher<sup>28</sup> and the "Uncrowned King of China,"<sup>29</sup> and has been the subject of a number of biographies, including Cyril Pearl's *Morrison of Peking* (1967), the most authoritative study up to this point.<sup>30</sup> Lo Hui-min, who edited two hefty volumes of Morrison's correspondence and also wrote a lengthy precis of his life, noted that Morrison had arrived in China at the "high noon of imperialism" and remained a "watchdog" of British imperialist interests throughout his lengthy career.<sup>31</sup>

The eminent British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper argued that Morrison had little understanding of China itself, but was extremely well-versed in the aims of foreign imperialism in China.<sup>32</sup> Robin Gerster is more scathing in his criticism of Morrison, calling the reporter a "raging imperial jingo" whose dispatches "were full of half-truths and racially directed misreadings."<sup>33</sup> Whilst Morrison has been eulogised by some scholars, there are question marks over whether his role as a serious political player compromised his journalism in China. Morrison's first priority appears to have been the protection of British imperialist interests in China and the Far East, rather than covering political and social developments within China itself.

Although some primary source material used in this study has been utilised by other researchers in the past to examine other issues, this thesis provides a new perspective that focuses on the role of the print media in shaping Australian views on

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<sup>28</sup> Kendall, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> Tipping, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Cyril Pearl, *Morrison of Peking*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1967. See also Peter Thompson and Robert Macklin, *The Man Who Died Twice: The Life and Adventures of Morrison of Peking*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Lo Hui-min, *The Correspondence of G E Morrison: Volume 1 1895-1912*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Hermit of Peking: The Hidden Life of Sir Edmund Backhouse*, Harmondsworth, UK, Penguin Books, 1978, pp. 44-48.

<sup>33</sup> Gerster, op. cit., p. 306.

China at the time of federation. This thesis forms part of a significantly broader research project looking at Australian journalists reporting from China across a much lengthier timeframe – basically encompassing most of the 20th century. This expanded project, in the form of a PhD thesis, will also examine the role of other media platforms that have become more important over the past 100 years or so, including radio, television and online news and social media outlets.

## Literature Review

Henry Mayer may have gained more than he bargained for when, in the early 1960s, he embarked on an ambitious scholarly exercise to study what he described as the “basic facts” of the Australian print media.<sup>34</sup> The German-born politics professor from the University of Sydney had set out to examine the “history, structure and content” of the Australian press; study the “technical and business conditions” under which they operated; and analyse and decipher “common attitudes” towards Australian newspapers.<sup>35</sup> But Mayer appears to have been somewhat dismayed when he found that most Australian historians had shown “little interest” in studying the media and journalism, despite the influential role that the press played in framing public discourse in colonial and post-colonial Australia. “I have been compelled to do my own spade-work in a field in which I have no special competence,” Mayer wrote in *The Press in Australia*.<sup>36</sup>

Despite such self-deprecation, the initial chapters in Mayer’s book dealing with journalism history still represent one of the most substantive examinations of the role of the press in colonial Australia. In his opening chapters on the origins of the popular press and 20th century journalism in Australia, Mayer provides forensic details of the business and economics of running newspapers, as well as analysing the impact of the

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<sup>34</sup> Henry Mayer, *The Press in Australia*, 2nd edition, Melbourne, Lansdowne Press, 1968, p. xiii. The first edition of Mayer’s book was published in 1964.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.



press on national consciousness and the interplay between the media and government. Mayer felt that the “murky obscurity and ignorance” surrounding the Australian media was “unique” and that the industry suffered from a “special kind of secretiveness”.<sup>37</sup>

Five decades after its initial publication, Mayer’s book continues to be lauded as a “landmark” in the study of the Australian media,<sup>38</sup> with the author described as the “single most important individual” in establishing the field in Australia.<sup>39</sup> Ken Inglis, himself an accomplished scholar and media practitioner, said in a review at the time of publication that Mayer’s work was “the best book on its subject ever published.”<sup>40</sup> This is not to say that there was no significant scholarly work undertaken before Mayer’s seminal text was published, or in subsequent years. But journalism history was still very much in its infancy as an academic discipline in Australia during the 1960s. Some earlier works had tackled aspects of Australian media history, including Willis Sprague Holden’s 1961 treatise *Australia Goes to the Press*,<sup>41</sup> although Inglis claimed it was a less than critical work in which the American author’s opinions “read like a bread-and-butter letter” to “hundreds of kind hosts”.<sup>42</sup>

Twenty years after the publication of Mayer’s influential book, John Henningham stepped into the debate, lamenting the lack of a general history of journalism in Australia despite the fact that newspapers had, by then, been printed and published in Australia for close to 200 years.<sup>43</sup> Henningham’s 1988 comments have since become a mainstay of literature reviews on subjects relating to media history in Australia. Whilst

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<sup>37</sup> Henry Mayer, “Review Article: Australian Media Studies,” *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1967, p. 271.

<sup>38</sup> Murray Goot, “The Press we Had to Have? Henry Mayer and *The Press in Australia*: Argument, Reception, Impact,” 2014 Henry Mayer Lecture, *Media International Australia*, No. 153, November 2014, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> John Sinclair, “The Media and Communications: Theoretical Traditions,” in Stuart Cunningham and Sue Turnbull (eds), *The Media & Communications in Australia*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2014, p. 27.

<sup>40</sup> Ken Inglis, “Review of *The Press in Australia*,” *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 10, No. 2, August 1964, p. 248.

<sup>41</sup> Willis Sprague Holden, *Australia Goes to Press*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1961.

<sup>42</sup> Inglis, op. cit., p. 248.

<sup>43</sup> John Henningham, “Two Hundred Years of Australian Journalism: a History Waiting to be Written,” *Australian Cultural History*, No. 7, 1988, p. 49.

Henningham observed that it was “surely surprising” that two centuries of Australian history had failed to deliver a “comprehensive” study of Australian journalism, he conceded that some progress had been made and that the field of media history in the late 1980s was “much better served” than it had been when Mayer was writing his treatise in the early 1960s: “It remains a fragmentary field, but the fragments are larger and more plentiful, as the jigsaw comes together.”<sup>44</sup>

Fast forward three decades and Henningham’s media-history jigsaw puzzle has become much easier to decipher and view in a holistic fashion, with the fragments larger still and even more plentiful. In 1999 academics Ann Curthoys and Julianne Schultz edited *Journalism: Print, Politics and Popular Culture*,<sup>45</sup> which even in the last few years has been described as “the most important contribution to Australian journalism history.”<sup>46</sup> Curthoys and Schultz provide a succinct reading of the development of media history in Australia, as well as explaining the ways in which it has “grown and diversified” in recent years as a result of the “cultural and linguistic turn” that has occurred more broadly in Australian historical studies.<sup>47</sup>

Substantial progress has also been made in the area of institutional histories, most notably Gavin Souter’s monumental *Company of Herald*s<sup>48</sup> and Bridget Griffen-Foley’s authoritative study of the Packer family’s media interests.<sup>49</sup> Less has come to light about Rupert Murdoch’s Australian activities, although the scholarly journal *Media International Australia* did devote a substantial proportion of its November 2015

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>45</sup> Ann Curthoys and Julianne Schultz, *Journalism: Print, Politics and Popular Culture*, St Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 1999.

<sup>46</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, “Media History,” in Bridget Griffen-Foley (ed.), *A Companion to the Australian Media*, North Melbourne, Victoria, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2014, p. 263.

<sup>47</sup> Curthoys and Schultz, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Gavin Souter, *Company of Herald*s: A Century and a Half of Australian Publishing by John Fairfax Limited and its Predecessors, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1981.

<sup>49</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, *The House of Packer: the Making of a Media Empire*, St Leonards, NSW, Allen & Unwin, 1999.

issue to the 50th anniversary of News Limited's *The Australian* newspaper and Denis Cryle earlier produced a work on the paper's 25th anniversary.<sup>50</sup>

Yet the recent progress that has been made in Australian media history has not been without criticism. Cryle, an academic at Central Queensland University, has been a particularly vocal critic of the direction of Australian media history studies. Cryle has produced significant scholarly studies of Queensland regional journalism in colonial Australia.<sup>51</sup> But Cryle has been scathing in his assessment of what he has described as the "bibliographical approach and tradition of potted biography which have dominated Australian press historiography."<sup>52</sup> Cryle claims that the research literature produced by Australian media historians, despite their valiant efforts, is "often lacking in readability, synthesis or interpretive frameworks."<sup>53</sup> He writes that it is not surprising that "media history has been slow to establish itself as a recognizable sub-genre of the historical discipline, let alone as a separate or distinct endeavour."<sup>54</sup> Cryle argues that Australian academics have for too long in the past subsumed journalism history under the generic discipline of literary history, rather than seeing it as "a field worthy of special investigation."<sup>55</sup>

Foreign reporting, particularly in relation to Australia's Asian neighbours, had until relatively recently been a somewhat neglected category of media history, although there has been a tradition of journalist memoirs. Foreign news reporting in Australia has evolved over the decades as our interactions with the outside world have changed as a result of experiences including war, tourism, business travel and trade. Colonial

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<sup>50</sup> *Media International Australia*, No. 157, November 2015 and Denis Cryle, *Murdoch's Flagship: Twenty-five Years of the Australian newspaper*, Carlton, Vic., Melbourne University Press, 2008.

<sup>51</sup> See for instance Denis Cryle, *Disreputable Profession: Journalists and Journalism in Colonial Australia*, Rockhampton, Qld, Central Queensland University Press, 1997.

<sup>52</sup> Denis Cryle, "Researching Media History; National and Global Perspectives," *Media History*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1999, p. 66.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Denis Cryle, "Journalism and Status: an Historical Case Study Approach," *Australian Journalism Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1, June 1997, pp. 171-172.

Australia certainly had perceptions about Asia, and especially China, but much of this was substantially influenced by British imperialist constructs of the exotic and mysterious Far East rather than a genuine understanding of our place in the Asian region. Linda Jaivin notes that 19th century Australian views about China and the Chinese were “not simply the product of competition on the goldfields” in the 1850s, but reflected a more philosophical shift away from the idealised views of Enlightenment philosophers like Voltaire.<sup>56</sup>

The changes that occurred in Australian perceptions of China since the mid-19th century are perhaps best chronicled in David Walker’s seminal 1999 work *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939*.<sup>57</sup> Walker argues that Australia approached nationhood at a time when the growing power of Asia was posing questions about Europe’s global hegemony, leading Australia to consider how it felt as a European outpost whose nearest neighbours were Asian.<sup>58</sup> In a subsequent piece in a volume co-edited with Agnieszka Sobocinska, Walker argues that China – “real or imagined” – has been an integral part of the Australian “story” since the first Chinese settler arrived in 1803, just 15 years after the First Fleet.<sup>59</sup>

Walker provides a substantive analysis of the evolution of this anti-Chinese sentiment in colonial Australia, although a number of other authors have also made substantial contributions to this literature in recent years. Robin Gerster and Timothy Kendall have both written about post-colonial representations of Asia in Australia. Gerster argues that anti-Chinese scaremongering peaked in the last two decades of the 19th century, when both colonial debate and cultural debate “were dominated by the

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<sup>56</sup> Linda Jaivin, “Morrison’s World: The 72nd George E. Morrison Lecture”, 13 July 2011, The Australian National University, *China Heritage Quarterly*, No. 27, September 2011.

<sup>57</sup> David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939*, St Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 1999.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska, “Introduction: Australia’s Asia,” in David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska (eds), *Australia’s Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, Crawley, Western Australia, UWA Publishing, 2012, p. 13.

spectre of the Yellow Peril, of hordes of Orientals overrunning capacious Australia.”<sup>60</sup> Kendall also explores this “Yellow Peril” theme in his work, although his study is more focused on post-1949 China.<sup>61</sup> Sylvia Lawson has written extensively on the role of the *Bulletin* magazine in encouraging Chinese sentiment in Australian colonial society, with the periodical playing a significant part in the introduction of restrictive immigration policies in the colonies in the 1880s and at a Commonwealth level after federation in 1901.<sup>62</sup> The *Bulletin* also played a very important literary role in turn-of-the-century Australia, an aspect that is thoroughly examined in Lawson’s quasi-biography of the magazine’s enigmatic one-time editor Jules Francois Archibald.

In the decades leading up to World War II, Australian perceptions of China and Asia more broadly remained coloured by a lack of any meaningful interaction with the region. World War II wrought considerable changes to Australian media coverage in Asia, with the military conflict placing a comparatively large number of reporters on the ground in the region for the first time. Denis Warner, one of Australia’s most pre-eminent war correspondents and an influential intellectual who made a “significant” contribution to foreign policy debates,<sup>63</sup> argued that World War II changed Australian attitudes to international news. “Events have forced us to become more concerned with our neighbours than we were in the past,” Warner wrote in a handbook for journalists in the mid-1960s.<sup>64</sup> Having correspondents based in Asia was no longer an indulgence but a post-war necessity for the Australian media, according to Warner.<sup>65</sup> T

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<sup>60</sup> Robin Gerster, “Representations of Asia,” in Peter Pierce (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 307.

<sup>61</sup> See Timothy Kendall, *Ways of Seeing China: From Yellow Peril to Shangri-la*, Fremantle, Western Australia, Curtin University Books, 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Sylvia Lawson, “Print Circus: The Bulletin from 1880 to Federation,” in Ann Curthoys and Julianne Schultz (eds.), *Journalism: Print, Politics and Popular Culture*, St Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 1999, p. 87. For a general history of the *Bulletin*, see Sylvia Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox: A Strange Case of Authorship*, Ringwood, Vic., Allen Lane, 1983.

<sup>63</sup> John Tebbutt, “Foreign Reporting,” in Griffen-Foley, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>64</sup> Denis Warner, “Foreign News,” in Lindsay Revill and Colin Roderick (eds.), *The Journalist’s Craft: a Guide to Modern Practice*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1965, p. 207.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

The war also significantly changed the composition and origin of foreign news in Australian media publications. By the mid-1960s there had been a shift in the focus of attention of media consumers away from Britain and Europe and towards Asia and North America.<sup>66</sup> “Horizons may not be expanding, but at least they are changing,” Colin Hughes and John Western observed in 1973 in the results of a quantitative study of the sources of foreign news in Australia’s major newspapers.<sup>67</sup>

At around the same time that the Australian media was finally starting to take an interest in the region, an institutional awakening to Asia was also occurring. Having consistently failed to understand Asia for most of its colonial and post-colonial history, Australian universities began taking a serious interest in the region in the 1940s and 1950s. Walker pinpoints the emergence of specialist “Asianists” to the development of Asian Studies programs at Canberra University College and the Universities of Tasmania and Western Australia in the 1940s.<sup>68</sup>

Despite a slow start, the history of war correspondents is now one of the more prolific areas of Australian media historiography and is well represented in the academic literature. Perhaps the most authoritative comprehensive study on the subject is Anderson and Trembath’s *Witnesses to War*, which covers the work of journalists from the Waikato campaign in New Zealand in the mid-1860s through to the latest developments in the Middle East.<sup>69</sup> As well as examining the role of war reporting in helping shape national identity, the authors also look at the issue of so-called “blue pencil” censorship and interrelations between government and journalists.<sup>70</sup> The Australian investigative journalist Phillip Knightley covered similar territory in his 1975

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<sup>66</sup> Colin Hughes and John Western, “The Geographical Sources of Foreign News in Australian Newspapers,” *Australian Outlook*, Vol 27, No. 1, 1973, p. 93.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Walker, op. cit., p. 320.

<sup>69</sup> Anderson and Trembath, op. cit.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-5.

book *The First Casualty. From the Crimea to the Falklands: the War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth Maker*.<sup>71</sup>

Other recent histories of Australian conflict journalism have been more focused in their approach. Prue Torney-Parlicki limits her work to reporters in Asia between 1941 and 1975.<sup>72</sup> Trish Payne looks at Australian coverage of the Vietnam War.<sup>73</sup> Jeannine Baker's research on Australian women war reporters challenges stereotypes about conflict reporting, rejecting the image of the war journalist as a "risk-taking macho correspondent, living and working alongside the troops."<sup>74</sup> In recent years, a sizeable number of foreign and war correspondents have also published accounts of their time overseas, adding further depth to the field of media history by leaving what Anderson and Trembath describe as "rich source material in terms of memoirs, autobiographies and studies of particular regions and/or conflicts in which they worked."<sup>75</sup>

The authority bestowed on foreign correspondents in public discourse is also a subject of considerable interest for scholars. Foreign reporters play an influential role in providing the optics through which Australian perceptions of Asia are filtered, and are often described as a "looking glass" or a "mirror" that we utilise to view and understand countries in the region including China.<sup>76</sup> The respected media scholar Rod Tiffen says the media, when reporting from overseas locations, "can potentially define for the

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<sup>71</sup> Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty. From the Crimea to the Falklands: the War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth Maker*, London, Pan Books, 1975.

<sup>72</sup> Prue Torney-Parlicki, *Somewhere in Asia: War, Journalism and Australia's Neighbours 1941-75*, Sydney, UNSW Press, 2000.

<sup>73</sup> Trish Payne, *War and Words: the Australian Press and the Vietnam War*, Carlton, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2007.

<sup>74</sup> Jeannine Baker, *Australian Women War Reporters: Boer War to Vietnam*, Sydney, NewSouth Publishing, 2015, p. 211.

<sup>75</sup> Fay Anderson and Richard Trembath, "The Greatness and Smallness of Their Story: Australian War Correspondents in the Twentieth Century," in Sybil Nolan (ed.), *When Journalism Meets History 2003*, Papers Presented at the Australian Media Traditions Conference, Melbourne, RMIT Publishing, 2004, p. 111.

<sup>76</sup> See for instance Paul French, *Through the Looking Glass: China's Foreign Journalists from Opium Wars to Mao*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2009 and Dennis Bloodworth, *Chinese Looking Glass*, 2nd. Edition, London, Secker & Warburg, 1969.

audience the truth, significance and meaning of the world it brings them.”<sup>77</sup> Although he was writing about foreign correspondents working in Southeast Asia rather than in China, Tiffen notes that the processes of newsmaking “are not politically neutral or ideologically inert.”<sup>78</sup>

The views and observations of journalists reporting from abroad are often considered to be more legitimate or valid than other sources of information because they carry with them what Richard White describes as the “weight of empirical observation”.<sup>79</sup> Barbie Zelizer identifies a similar construct in her study of the role of “eyewitnessing” in strengthening a foreign correspondent’s legitimacy to their domestic audience.<sup>80</sup> She writes that for news reporters eyewitnessing “has been invoked to embody the on-site presence by which journalists constitute their authority for reporting events of the real world.”<sup>81</sup>

Most of the secondary literature concerning Australia’s military involvement in the Boxer Rebellion has been produced by ardent amateur military historians and their small-scale publishing operations, which one scholar has warned “contain many inaccuracies and should therefore be read with caution.”<sup>82</sup> The conflict itself has often been referred to as Australia’s “forgotten” war.<sup>83</sup>

Wynne and Wallace, neither of whom are featured in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, both appear to have brought the ideological bent of their respective

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<sup>77</sup> Rodney Tiffen, “Australian Press Coverage of the Third World,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1976, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Rodney Tiffen, *The News from Southeast Asia: the Sociology of Newsmaking*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1978, p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> Richard White, “Australian Journalists, Travel Writing and China: James Hingston, the ‘Vagabond’ and G E Morrison,” *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, June 2008, p. 237.

<sup>80</sup> See Barbie Zelizer, “On ‘Having Been There’: ‘Eyewitnessing’ as a Journalistic Key Word,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Vol. 24, No. 5, December 2007, pp. 408-428.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410.

<sup>82</sup> Malcolm Saunders, “The Boxer Rebellion: 1900-1901,” *Sabretache*, Vol. 24, No. 4, October-December 1983, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> Bob Nicholls, *Bluejackets and Boxers: Australia's Naval Expedition to the Boxer Uprising*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1986, p. xi; Wilson Evans, *Deeds Not Words*, Melbourne, The Hawthorn Press, 1971, p. 88.



publications to their dispatches from China. Both were well connected in the Australian media industry. Wynne was the son of the *Telegraph*'s general manager and Wallace was a trusted employee of the Fairfax family.<sup>84</sup> We know that Wynne and Wallace together produced a newspaper on the 17-day journey from Australia to northern China, and that both Wynne and Wallace were reportedly accused by French troops of "extortion towards a Chinese washerwoman."<sup>85</sup> The Australian naval diarist who reported the incident noted that "no more is known of this tantalising case," although the implication is that it may have involved sexually inappropriate behaviour.<sup>86</sup>

The unearthing of such "tantalising" cases can be immensely rewarding for students of media history who spend their time buried in newspaper archives. But the absence of further substantive details about the role played by Wynne and Wallace in Australia's involvement in the Boxer conflagration, and an unresolved debate about Morrison's journalism, leaves gaps in the historiography and provides an opportunity for additional archival research and secondary analysis. This thesis will provide fresh perspectives on media coverage of the Boxer Rebellion and the role that reporters' dispatches from China played in informing public discourse back in Australia.

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<sup>84</sup> Gavin Souter, *Company of Heralds: a century and a half of Australian publishing by John Fairfax Limited and its predecessors*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1981, pp. 101-104.

<sup>85</sup> Nicholls, op. cit., pp 51, 72.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 1

### “Yellow Peril”

Not much is known about “Ahuto”, whose arrival in Sydney on the convict ship *Rolla* in 1803 reportedly made him the first Chinese person to land on Australian shores after the First Fleet initiated European settlement just 15 years earlier.<sup>87</sup> Clearly an adventurous soul, ‘Ahuto’ was said to be a carpenter by trade, probably drawn to Australia by the prospect of a decent wage in the colony’s burgeoning furniture-making industry. But little more about ‘Ahuto’ can be ascertained after his line-item entry in the General Muster List of New South Wales in 1825.<sup>88</sup>

Given the mystery surrounding “Ahuto”, academic researchers and amateur historians of Australia’s early links with China often like to focus attention instead on Mak Sai Ying, who arrived in Sydney from the southern Chinese province of Guangdong on the ship *Laurel* on 27 February 1818 and who is perhaps better known by a number of Anglicized names including John Shying and Mak O’Pong. Mak’s arrival in Australia has been widely acclaimed as part of celebrations of the 200th anniversary of China-Australia relations.<sup>89</sup> Even the *New York Times* reported on the bicentenary of Mak’s disembarkment, noting the anniversary came at a time when Australia ‘is once again conflicted about its relationship with the region’s biggest, most powerful country.’<sup>90</sup>

Unlike “Ahuto”, Mak left a relatively detailed account of his activities in the Australian colonies. Also a carpenter by trade, Mak worked with the high-profile settler

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<sup>87</sup> David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska, “Introduction: Australia’s Asia,” in David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska (eds), *Australia’s Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, Crawley, Western Australia, UWA Publishing, 2012, p. 13.

<sup>88</sup> Kate Bagnall, “Man Sue Bach, 1790–1862: the ‘oldest Chinese colonist’ in New South Wales,” at <http://chineseaustralia.org/man-sue-bach/>

<sup>89</sup> For an example of media coverage of the 200th anniversary of Australia-China relations see <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-10/first-chinese-settlers-descendants-reconnect-with-their-roots/9845804>

<sup>90</sup> Isabella Kwai, “200 Years On, Chinese-Australians Are Still Proving They Belong,” *The New York Times*, 7 May 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/07/world/australia/china-australia-history.html>

John Blaxland before becoming a publican in Parramatta. He married twice to Caucasian women and fathered four children. Mak's memory has also lingered on in more unusual ways, with a Perth restaurant named in his honour in 2018.<sup>91</sup>

Whether the historiographical focus is on "Ahuto" or Mak, there is clear evidence that Chinese migrants played a not inconsequential role in the early history of the Australian colonies. This is despite the fact that Chinese Australians, as John Fitzgerald notes, have largely been left out of Australia's "national story."<sup>92</sup> Notwithstanding popular narratives about modern Australian history, there is a long history of Chinese settlement in colonial Australia.

This chapter provides a brief chronicle of Chinese migration to the various Australian colonies in the 1800s and its impact on the local white populace, as reflected through what was a vibrant newspaper culture. It examines the role of the media in helping to mould public sentiment, as well as its role in reflecting popularly held beliefs and prejudices. This provides the background to Australian attitudes towards both China and the Chinese at the time when Australian servicemen were preparing for military intervention in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900-01, accompanied by a number of newspaper correspondents.

The total number of Chinese migrants who made the voyage to the Australian colonies through the first half of the 19th century remains unclear, with official historical records showing about 18 individuals arrived in Australia during this period.<sup>93</sup> But unofficial records and anecdotal evidence suggests a higher number. In the early years of the colonies there were reportedly a number of Chinese cabinet-makers in Sydney, Melbourne and Van Diemen's Land, while pastoralists in South and Western Australia

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<sup>91</sup> Sue Yeap, "Beer and dumplings on Yagan menu," *The West Australian*, 26 July 2018. <https://thewest.com.au/lifestyle/food/beer-and-dumplings-on-yagan-menu-ng-b88908430z>

<sup>92</sup> John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia*, Sydney, UNSW Press, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>93</sup> <http://arc.parracity.nsw.gov.au/blog/2017/01/27/mak-sai-ying-aka-john-shying/>

imported small numbers of Chinese-born men from Singapore to work as farm labourers on their properties.<sup>94</sup>

From a slow start, the scale and practice of Chinese migration changed dramatically on 2 October 1848 when the barque *Nimrod* sailed into Sydney Harbour. After a circumlocutious journey from the Chinese coastal port of Amoy [now called Xiamen] that took 86 days, the vessel docked at Port Jackson with a somewhat controversial cargo. Onboard was the first ship-load of indentured labourers from China to arrive on Australian shores.<sup>95</sup>

The arrival of the *Nimrod* in 1848 came amid a vigorous debate in Australia (as well as in Westminster) over how to balance the looming end of convict transportation with the labour needs of the colonies' burgeoning pastoral sector. The use of so-called "coolie" labour from India, the Pacific Islands, as well as from China, was seen by many in the Australian colonies as a practical and cheap solution to this labour supply issue.

Robert Swan, who made much of his fortune from transporting indentured labourers to Australia in what a parliamentary inquiry found to be inhumane conditions, was a vocal advocate of the China "coolie" trade. Swan organised as many as eight ship-loads of Chinese labourers between 1849 and 1852, with many of the poorly treated "coolies" bound for further mistreatment on his properties in northern New South Wales and Queensland.<sup>96</sup>

The arrival of the *Nimrod* with its human cargo of Chinese labourers drew mixed reactions from the colonies' fledgling press. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, which by the mid-1840s had overtaken other publications including the *Sydney Gazette and New*

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<sup>94</sup> Margaret Slocumb, *Among Australia's Pioneers: Chinese Indentured Pastoral Workers on the Northern Frontier 1848 to c. 1880*, Bloomington, Indiana, Balboa Press, 2014, pp. 118-120.

<sup>95</sup> Charles Price, *The Great White Walls are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australasia 1836-1888*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1974, p. 46.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

*South Wales Advertiser* to become the colony's dominant newspaper, was measured in its response to the disembarkment of the ship's 120 Chinese workers.<sup>97</sup> "The Chinese labourers she has on board are all young men, and appear in sound health," the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted in a report on the ship's human cargo. "No deaths have occurred on the voyage."<sup>98</sup>

The Sydney correspondent of the *South Australian Register* was effusive in his praise of the arrival of additional cheap labour for the colonies' pastoral sector. "The inhabitants of this part of China are said to be a hardy, active, and industrious race – excellent artisans, gardeners, field labourers and home servants," the newspaper said of *Nimrod*'s Chinese passengers. "Their habitual sobriety is also a very strong point in their favour, and they are said to be characteristically honest."<sup>99</sup>

*The Melbourne Daily News and Port Phillip Patriot* was equally supportive of the use of Chinese labour, despite a headline in the newspaper that read "Incipient Slave Trade."<sup>100</sup> "The Chinese have now been five months with me, seem contented and even happy, and do the same work as Europeans, with whom they are equally intelligent and hardy," wrote the contractor who supplied the labour for the *Nimrod*. "They will make excellent shepherds, being equal in attention and superior in willingness and steadiness to the European." "They are careful, I think honest, and exceedingly cleanly, and would doubtless answer well for cooks or in-door servants," he wrote in a column for the Melbourne paper. "I must not omit stating that by their civility and tact they have avoided all quarrelling, and are individually liked by their white fellow servants."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> For a detailed history of the *Sydney Morning Herald* see Gavin Souter, *Company of Herald: A Century and a Half of Australian Publishing by John Fairfax Limited and its Predecessors 1831-1981*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1981.

<sup>98</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1848, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> *South Australian Register*, 1 November 1848, p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> *Melbourne Daily News and Port Phillip Patriot*, 4 November 1848, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

Yet other press coverage was not so positive, reflecting a complex public debate about issues including the abolition of slavery, the role of convict transportation, and the urgent demand for labour to aid the growth of the colonies' rural sector. In the background all of this debate was a fear of the unknown or "other" when it came to how a still relatively small European-focused outpost was to manage relations with its substantially larger Asian neighbours.

"We much dislike this copper-coloured, anti-Christian emigration. There is a sufficient mixture of creeds and countries in this colony imported at the expense of residents, without introducing any farther variety," the *Goulburn Herald and County of Argyle Advertiser* declared in a stridently-worded editorial:

The active operations that are going on at home for an extensive emigration are likely to be materially affected should such mean as the present be resorted to for the supply of labour; and we would recommend all those who desire to see this country peopled with the virtuous and enlightened redundant population of the three kingdoms, Christians and born subjects of the British Crown, to discountenance this trafficking in foreign labour.<sup>102</sup>

Over the next five or so years more than 2,000 Chinese indentured labourers landed in the Australian colonies, aided by a relaxation of Chinese emigration rules that was one of the tough conditions imposed on Beijing by the British as part of the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing at the end of the Second Opium War (1839-1842). Less than five months after the *Nimrod*, the *London* arrived with a ship-load of 149 Chinese workers. Other vessels involved in the trafficking trade included the *Duke of Roxburgh* and the *Amazon*, which arrived in Sydney on 17 March 1852 with a cargo of 290 Chinese passengers.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Goulburn Herald and County of Argyle Advertiser*, 7 October 1848, p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> Wang Sing-wu, *The Organization of Chinese Emigration 1848-1888, with Special Reference to Chinese Emigration to Australia*, Unpublished MA thesis, Canberra, Australian National University, December 1969, Vol. II, pp. 326-327.

Ultimately, the use of Chinese indentured labour failed to be the solution to the mid-century labour shortage that many in the young Australian colonies hoped it would be.<sup>104</sup> Resistance to the use of “coolie” labour by some sections of the colonial population was one of the driving forces behind the formation of the 1854 Committee on Asiatic Labour, which failed to either outrightly condemn the trade or support it.<sup>105</sup> Many of the pastoralists who had been most vocal in their support of Chinese labour also came to the conclusion that they “were not worth the trouble,” especially when they absconded in search of higher wages.<sup>106</sup> And then there was gold.

The discovery of gold in Victoria and New South Wales in the early 1850s changed the dynamics of Chinese migration to Australia yet again. The resulting gold rush was also to become the catalyst for an anti-China populism that was to remain a hallmark of public discourse in Australia until well into the 20th century. News of the gold discoveries in Australia reached southern China in 1852, several years after similar discoveries in California had already resulted in an exodus of fortune hunters from the country’s southern coastal provinces. Over the next few years, tens of thousands of Chinese migrants made their way to the Australian goldfields. Census data indicates that the number of Chinese in Victoria peaked at about 40,000 in 1858, while NSW reported a high of about 15,000 in 1861.<sup>107</sup> While the number of Chinese on Victorian fields stood at 24.5 per cent in 1861, on some of the secondary fields in NSW they made up as much as 60 per cent of the mining population in the same period.<sup>108</sup> The

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<sup>104</sup> Eric Montgomery Andrews, *Australia and China: the Ambiguous Relationship*, Carlton, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 1985, p. 5. See also Maxine Darnell, “Life and Labour for Indentured Chinese Shepherds in New South Wales, 1847-55,” *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, Vol. 6, 2004, pp.137-158.

<sup>105</sup> Price, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>106</sup> Andrews, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> Andrew Markus, *Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia and California 1850-1901*, Sydney, Hale & Ironmonger, 1979, p. 14.

concentration of Chinese settlers in mining areas also “made them appear to be more numerous than in fact they were.”<sup>109</sup>

The Melbourne-based *Age*, reporting from Bendigo in February 1855, found that Chinese migrants were “still very numerous” in the bustling township that was one of the epicentres of the Australian gold rush. “Some of them are doing well, and getting quite rich, and learning to speak the English language fluently,” the newspaper’s Bendigo correspondent wrote: “But I am sorry to say they have still as many of their old customs and vices amongst them as formerly. They keep up some of their heathen ceremonies, and seem to have religious preachers amongst them, or, I should rather say, heathen teachers. The correspondent concluded that the colony’s legislature “ought to put a stop to Chinese immigration altogether, for they will never become good colonists, and are a pest and an annoyance to the people near to where they reside.”<sup>110</sup>

As more Chinese migrants streamed into Victoria in the hunt for gold, the *Melbourne Punch* in June 1856 published a satirical piece on how the colony would look in the year 2000 as it celebrated 100 years of a “Mongolian dynasty”. The *Government Gazette*, according to the satirical report, put the population in April 2000 at 76,726,685, with Chinese accounting for 75,364,852 and “slaves of British origin” recorded to be 17,402. No Aboriginals were counted in the census survey. The unnamed author notes there was only one incident that occurred on the day “that was calculated to remind us that we belonged to a conquered race:”

We allude to the circumstance of three Englishmen having been beaten to death, for casually upsetting a dish containing a trussed puppy-dog, garnished with grubs, on its way to the bakehouse.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Arthur Huck, *The Chinese in Australia*, Longman, Croydon, Victoria, 1967, p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> *Age*, 9 February 1855, p. 5.

<sup>111</sup> “The Mongolians in Victoria. (From the *Argus* of June 18th, AD 2000),” *Melbourne Punch*, 19 June 1856, p. 2.



According to Ann Curthoys, this type of hatred of the Chinese developed “very quickly” on the goldfields of Victoria and NSW. She notes that the dramatic rise in Chinese migration to Australia in the mid-1850s brought with it a corresponding increase in racist rhetoric, but argues that much of this xenophobia was stoked by politicians and newspapers rather than by the miners themselves.<sup>112</sup> Curthoys observes:

The hatred of Chinese does not seem to have been the product of long or bitter experience. It emerged very quickly on the goldfields, and in any case the Chinese miners appear to have done little to offend. A reading of the newspaper reports of miners’ complaints against Chinese leads me to the conclusion that the animus against them was based less on any particular matter than on the feeling that they had no right to be present at all.<sup>113</sup>

This increase in anti-Chinese xenophobia and persecution had a number of overlapping elements. Firstly, there was the economic argument that Chinese workers were threatening the livelihood of the local diggers. White miners disliked how their Chinese counterparts were prepared to rewash areas that had already been worked for alluvial gold or how they tended to work collectively. They claimed that the Chinese used too much water, ate different food and wore different clothes.<sup>114</sup>

The *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* gave strident expression to these concerns about the Australian colonies being overwhelmed by a flood of Chinese in a strongly worded editorial in June 1857. The editorial noted the overcrowded state of the “Celestial Empire” and referred to “the intelligence which reaches us from time to time of the movement amongst the masses of that country towards this colony.” The newspaper observed that with a population of 400 million people, “immense numbers are annually

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<sup>112</sup> Ann Curthoys, “‘Men of all Nations, except Chinamen’: Europeans and Chinese on the Goldfields of New South Wales,” in Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves (eds), *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 108.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Andrews, op cit., p. 8.

compelled to migrate to other countries in order to obtain the very necessities of life.” But the paper said there was no place in Australia for this surplus population. “We unhesitatingly express our belief that no worse branch of the human family could be introduced into a British colony,” the vitriolic newspaper editorial argued, claiming that the Chinese were “thoroughly imbued with the most debasing vices, filthy, treacherous and dishonest.”<sup>115</sup>

Curthoys argues that another element of this anti-Chinese vilification was a sense of racial superiority and entitlement amongst white miners, many of whom had come from Great Britain and other parts of Europe. “Ultimately, their objection was a racial one: they regarded Chinese as outsiders and interlopers who had no right to share in the wealth of the colonies,” Curthoys writes. “This racial identity had not yet developed the nation-building function it was to fulfil later, but it was crucial to the expression of belonging and exclusion within each of the Australian colonies.”<sup>116</sup>

The racial violence that accompanied this xenophobia culminated in the Lambing Flat riots of 1860 and 1861, which “exemplify and represent” anti-Chinese racism in 19th century Australia.<sup>117</sup> The press once again was a pivotal player in these ugly riots, with the *Lambing Flat Miner* having a “large role” in these events.<sup>118</sup> The short-lived *Lambing Flat Miner* was only published between February and November 1861, but its influence spread as its incendiary articles were re-published in much larger mainstream newspapers. This was aided by the fact that miners on the Australian goldfields were actually “great readers.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 24 June 1857, p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> Curthoys, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>117</sup> Ann Curthoys, “‘Men of all Nations, except Chinamen’: Europeans and Chinese on the Goldfields of New South Wales,” in Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves (eds.), *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 104.

<sup>118</sup> Robin Berwick Walker, *The Newspaper Press in New South Wales 1803-1920*, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1976, p. 162.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

The lives of many mining newspapers in the 1850s and 1860s, like the *Lambing Flat Miner*, were often brief as they catered for a transient readership. The poet and erstwhile journalist Henry Lawson wrote about the role of these small rural newspapers in shaping Australian public perceptions, as well as the ease with which Chinese workers were targeted on the goldfields, in his 16-stanza poem “The Cambaroora Star”. This poem, in which Lawson described the aforesaid fictional newspaper as the “diggers’ Bible”, highlights the main grievances that Caucasian miners repeatedly voiced about their Chinese rivals:<sup>120</sup>

There was strife about the Chinamen, who came in days of old  
Like a swarm of thieves and loafers when diggers found the gold -  
Like the sneaking fortune-hunters who are always found behind,  
And who only shepherd diggers till they track them to the ‘find’.<sup>121</sup>

Other contemporary accounts also highlight the important role that newspapers played in Australian colonial society in the second half of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century. Richard Twopeny, the son of an Anglican clergyman who migrated to South Australia in the mid-1860s, received a “cool reception” when his book *Town Life in Australia* was first published in 1883, but his work has subsequently been described as a “minor classic” that “never received the critical reception it deserves.”<sup>122</sup> Twopeny, who worked as an editor on a number of newspapers in both Australia and New Zealand including the *Otago Daily Times* and the *Australasian Pastoralists’ Review*, was writing at a “pivotal” time in the transformation of Australian society.<sup>123</sup> As

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<sup>120</sup> Henry Lawson, *In the Days When the World was Wide and Other Verses*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1912, pp. 205-215.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, pp. 210-211.

<sup>122</sup> Graeme Davison, “R E N Twopeny and Town Life in Australia,” *Historical Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 63, 1974, p. 292.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. See also the entry for Richard Twopeny in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/twopeny-richard-ernest-nowell-984>.

the scion of a “lesser gentry” family, his book is part of Twopeny’s “attempt to interpret Australian society to a potential gentleman-immigrant.”<sup>124</sup>

Twopeny is positively glowing in his assessment of Australian print media in the 1880s and their importance as a source of news and commentary for members of colonial society. He describes Australia at the time as “essentially the land of newspapers.”<sup>125</sup> He notes that Australian readers had relatively few other avenues when it came to intellectual nourishment:

The colonist is by nature an inquisitive animal, who likes to know what is going on around him. The young colonial has inherited this proclivity. Excepting the Bible, Shakespeare and Macaulay’s ‘Essays’, the only literature within the bushman’s reach are newspapers. The townsman deems them equally essential to his well-being. Nearly everybody can read, and nearly everybody has leisure to do so.<sup>126</sup>

Twopeny claims that media penetration in Australia was significantly greater than in Great Britain because more readers were able to purchase newspapers. The proportion of the population in colonial Australia in the latter half of the 19th century with the financial capacity to buy a newspaper was ten-times greater than in England, according to Twopeny’s analysis.<sup>127</sup>

Modern-day researchers concur with the general thrust of Twopeny’s study of the important role of newspapers and journalists in the Australian colonies throughout much of the 19th century. Victorians were particularly “voracious” newspaper consumers.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Davison, op. cit., p. 302.

<sup>125</sup> Richard Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia*, Penguin Colonial Facsimiles, Ringwood, Victoria, Penguin Books, 1973, p 221. Twopeny’s book was originally published in London by Elliot Stock in 1883.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Frank Bongiorno, “Constituting Labour: The Radical Press in Victoria, 1885-1914,” in Curthoys and Schultz, op. cit., p. 70.

One estimate claims that in the early 1880s there was one newspaper title for every 6,000 Victorians, compared with a ratio of 1:18,000 in Great Britain.<sup>129</sup> The gold rushes were a major catalyst for the spread of newspapers in regional areas, although papers folded with the same rapidity with which they were established.<sup>130</sup> One estimate suggests that nearly 1,000 newspapers were brought into existence as a result of the gold rushes.<sup>131</sup> “It may be going too far to describe the Australian colonies as a journalist’s paradise, but widespread literacy and a thirst for news permitted many colonists to earn a living as publishers, editors and writers, and many more as members of the printing trade,” writes Frank Bongiorno.<sup>132</sup>

The Australian colonies actually had a “thriving, if small scale” newspaper industry as early as the late 1820s.<sup>133</sup> The press also played a “key role” in a “bitter struggle for power within the politics of colonial dependency.”<sup>134</sup> These small-scale (although often short-lived) newspapers flourished over the next two decades, and by 1848 there were 11 daily newspapers being published in the colonies.<sup>135</sup>

It is hard to overestimate the role that these early newspapers, particularly those published on the goldfields, played in the formation of national identity in the mid to late 19th century Australia. The *Ballarat Times*, for instance, “trumpeted” the dissatisfaction of white miners and was “seen as contributing” to the Eureka Stockade uprising of December 1854.<sup>136</sup> Accordingly, journalists also played a disproportionately large role in shaping public perceptions about controversial major social issues, such as the role and treatment of Chinese migrants in an endemic racist environment. “The newspaper was

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Rod Kirkpatrick, “House of Unelected Representatives: The Provincial Press 1825-1900,” in Curthoys and Schultz, op. cit. p. 23.

<sup>131</sup> Rod Kirkpatrick, “Goldfields Newspapers,” in Bridget Griffen-Foley (ed), *A Companion to the Australian Media*, North Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2014, pp 193-194.

<sup>132</sup> Bongiorno, op. cit., p 70.

<sup>133</sup> Pat O’Malley, “Class Formation and the ‘Freedom’ of the Colonial Press. New South Wales 1800-1850,” *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol. 7, 1985, p. 429.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p. 440.

<sup>136</sup> Kirkpatrick, op. cit., p. 194.

the only mass medium aside from circus and vaudeville; it flourished within and because of intense relationships with its audience,” Sylvia Lawson wrote in a prescient article in 1999.<sup>137</sup> Other cultural historians have also emphasised this influential role for newspapers in colonial society, particularly on issues of race and identity: “Most people’s impressions of the Chinese were formed, not through personal experience, but through the coloured reports of slumming journalists, street missionaries, popular novelists and illustrators.”<sup>138</sup>

As the gold rush began to peter out in the mid-1860s, so did a lot of the anti-Chinese rhetoric that had accompanied it in public debates over the previous decade. But a renewed influx of Chinese migrants in the late 1870s and the 1880s rekindled much of the vitriol than had been simmering beneath the surface of Australian public discourse since the first round of migration in the 1850s and 1860s. Anti-Chinese violence and persecution quickly made their way to the surface, with Davison arguing that the wave of anti-Chinese demonstrations which swept around the Australian coast in the autumn of 1888 was “possibly the most concerted attack of xenophobia” in the colonies’ history.<sup>139</sup>

Edward Dyson chronicled the grievances behind this new anti-Chinese agitation in his short story “A Golden Shanty”, which was published as the title-piece in the *Bulletin*’s 1889 Christmas anthology.<sup>140</sup> The protagonist in Dyson’s story is forced to return to the gold mines to supplement his income, where he confronts groups of Chinese miners:

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<sup>137</sup> Sylvia Lawson, “Print Circus: The Bulletin from 1880 to Federation,” in Ann Curthoys and Julianne Schultz (eds), *Journalism: Print, Politics and Popular Culture*, St Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 1999, p. 84.

<sup>138</sup> Davison, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>140</sup> For a biography of Edward Dyson see <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dyson-edward-george-ted-6073>

To augment his troubles, came that pestiferous heathen, the teetotal Chinee. One hot summer's day he arrived in numbers, like a plague, armed with picks, shovels, dishes, cradles, and tubs, and with a clatter of tools and a babble of grotesque gibberish, camped by the creek and refused to go away again. The awesome solitude of the abandoned diggings was ruthlessly broken. The deserted field, with its white mounds and decaying windlass-stands fallen aslant, which had lain like a long-forgotten cemetery buried in primeval forest, was now desecrated by the hand of the Mongol, and the sound of his weird, Oriental oaths. The Chows swarmed over the spot, tearing open old sores, shovelling old tips, sluicing old tailings, digging, cradling, puddling, ferreting, into every nook and cranny.<sup>141</sup>

But this time around the perpetrators of the anti-Chinese violence were not just miners, but a loose movement of the urban working class – seamen, rural workers and trade unionists – and even some small businesspeople.<sup>142</sup> This class found a compelling voice in the *Bulletin* magazine.

First published in 1880, the *Bulletin* was to become one of the most influential periodicals in Australia in the decade leading up to Federation in 1901 and in the years immediately after. "From 1880 to the years after Federation and the Boer War this journal penetrated its society and gripped attention in ways for which it is hard to find any parallel, even in the highest times of national radio and television," Sylvia Lawson wrote in her quasi-biography of the weekly's enigmatic one-time editor Jules Francois Archibald.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Edward Dyson, "A Golden Shanty," 1889, <http://www.telelib.com/authors/D/DysonEdward/prose/belowontop/belowontop11.html>

<sup>142</sup> Andrews, op. cit., pp 13-14.

<sup>143</sup> Sylvia Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox: A Strange Case of Authorship*, Melbourne, Allen Lane, 1983, p. ix.

Commencing publication on 31 January 1880, the periodical promised that the “vigour, freshness and geniality” of its literary contributions would be “unsurpassed.” “The *Bulletin* will assuredly [sic] become the very best and most interesting newspaper published in Australia,” its front-page letter to new readers said.<sup>144</sup> The first edition kicked off with a front-page illustration of the American violinist Camilla Urso, gossip columns including one entitled “Long Odds and Sharp Ends”, creative and innovative artwork, and theatre and concert reviews. There was some somewhat original poetry and a lengthy piece on the last days of so-called Captain Moonlite and his Wantabadgery bushranger gang.<sup>145</sup> The periodical’s coverage of the political issues of the day started out as relatively tame.

The *Bulletin* appears to have captured the attention of its target readership right from the start. Within a month of its first edition the weekly’s publishers announced they were changing their publication date from Saturday to Friday to better compete against other more established titles in the Australian market. Readers were especially attracted by the *Bulletin*’s encouragement of previously unpublished amateur bush poets. “The public are in splendid spirit towards us, and every poet brings us further assurance of this,” the newspaper noted in an editorial on 28 February 1880. “Already the sale in Sydney exceeds that of any weekly newspaper published here.”<sup>146</sup>

The *Bulletin*’s anti-Chinese campaign reached its zenith in the edition of 21 August 1886. The centrepiece of its special issue was a 12,000-word diatribe covering more than two pages, which kicked off with a heavy dose of racist venom:

Disease, defilement, depravity, misery and crime – these are the indispensable adjuncts which make Chinese camps and quarters loathsome to the senses and faculties of civilised nations. Whatever neighbourhood the Chinese choose for

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<sup>144</sup> *The Bulletin*, 31 January 1880, p. 1.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

<sup>146</sup> *The Bulletin*, 25 February 1880, p. 4.



the curse of their presence forthwith begins to reek with the abominations which are ever associated with their vile habitations. Wherever the pig-tailed pagan herds on Australian soil, they introduce and practise vices the most detestable and damnable – vices that attack everything sacred in the system of European civilisation – vices which cannot be named in print.<sup>147</sup>

The article continued in a similar vein, filled with the “windy verbosity and pious ranting” that the *Bulletin* would normally ridicule when it appeared in other publications.

<sup>148</sup> Sylvia Lawson described the lengthy diatribe as “one of the most dishonourable and destructive moments” in the publication’s history.<sup>149</sup> But such language by the late 1800s had increasingly become the lexicon of public discourse about the Chinese, and was mirrored in many other Australian newspapers and periodicals.

The illustrations and cartoons published by the *Bulletin* were equally confronting in their anti-Chinese posturing. Cartoonists produced for the periodical what Alison Broinowski labelled “images of Asians as a pestiferous insect plague, an Oriental dragon, or a Mongolian octopus whose tentacles wormed into every hallowed Australian institution, a venal usurper of Australians’ jobs, and a creeping threat to their wives and daughters.”<sup>150</sup>

Whilst the *Bulletin*’s campaign reached its peak in 1886, Archibald maintained the tempo of the magazine’s rhetoric over the following years. Ouyang Yu notes that in 1888 the periodical published more articles, stories and poems about or against Chinese than any time before or after. According to Yu’s findings, there were 14 articles,

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<sup>147</sup> *Bulletin*, 21 August 1886.

<sup>148</sup> Lawson, op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>150</sup> Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 19.

3 short stories and 4 poems published in that year's *Bulletin* that dealt directly with the Chinese question.<sup>151</sup>

Competing for the attention of the increasingly literate working class was the Queensland-based biweekly *Boomerang*, which has been described as “the most virulently racist paper in Australia.”<sup>152</sup> First published in Brisbane in 1889, it was edited by the quixotic Bristol-born journalist William Lane, whose greater claim to fame was as the leader of the ill-fated New Australia movement, which attempted to establish a utopian community in rural Paraguay in 1893.<sup>153</sup> Through the pages of the *Boomerang*, the firebrand Lane championed a brand of xenophobic socialism that gave expression to the ideals of a nascent working class in search of some form of national identity. A key element of Lane’s radical ideology was a belief in the racial purity and superiority of white Anglo-Saxons and a vehement hatred of the Chinese, with his editorials warning that Australia’s future “could be blighted by descending Asian hordes.”<sup>154</sup>

Lane was also a novelist whose book *White or Yellow? A Story of the Race War of AD 1908*, serialised in the *Boomerang* from February to May 1888, showcased a new genre of “invasion” literature that proved highly popular in colonial Australia. Lane’s novel was set 20 years into the future in Queensland, which by that time had a population of 42 million people, made up of 30 million whites and 12 million Asians. The state is governed by a corrupt white elite who are in cohorts with rich Chinese who dominate its economy. Railing against the corruption is the novel’s hero, a down-to-earth farmer called John Saxby who is secretary of the Anti-Chinese League

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<sup>151</sup> Yu Ouyang. “Australian Invention of Chinese Invasion: A Century of Paranoia 1888-1988.” *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 1995, p. 74.

<sup>152</sup> Graeme Davison, “Unemployment, race and public opinion: reflections on the Asian immigration controversy of 1888,” in Andrew Markus and M C Ricklefs (eds), *Surrender Australia? Essays in the Study and Uses of History: Geoffrey Blainey and Asian Immigration*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1985, p. 104.

<sup>153</sup> For a brief biography of Lane and his brand of utopian socialism see John Kellett, “William Lane and ‘New Australia’: a Reassessment,” *Labour History*, No. 72, May 1997, pp 1-18.

<sup>154</sup> Anne Whitehead, “William Lane,” in Griffen-Foley, *Companion to Australian Media*, p. 238.

and a member of a secret army of patriotic Queenslanders.<sup>155</sup> Saxby and his allies are spurred into action by the sexual assault and murder of his beloved daughter Cissie and are eventually victorious. David Walker argues that such invasion stories like those told by Lane “formed a sub-genre in the narratives of racial conflict and has a significant place in Australian literature.”<sup>156</sup> Invasion literature is said to have expressed “a xenophobia or Sinophobia, deeply embedded in Australian social structure and national discourse.”<sup>157</sup>

The other “foundational” text in the Asian invasion novel genre was Edward Maitland’s *The Battle of Mordialloc: Or, How We Lost Australia*, which was also published in 1888. Set in the year 1897, Maitland’s short book tells the story of a joint Russian-Chinese invasion of Victoria following the Australian colonies’ declaration of independence from Great Britain. It emphasises the “foolishness” of such a move away from Britain and the supposedly vulnerable state that Australia was left in as a result.<sup>158</sup> In its fulsome review of the book, the *Queenslander* newspaper declares it as a warning to those Australian patriots who would drive nationalism to the extent of separation from the mother country.”<sup>159</sup> The *Melbourne Punch* saw the invasion scenario plotted in the book as unlikely to ever occur, claiming with an air of racial superiority that a Victorian was worth “five Chinamen at the very least.”<sup>160</sup>

These invasion novels depicted Chinese men as sexual predators, a theme that had also been at the heart of much of the anti-Chinese agitation that occurred in the Australian colonies in the preceding decades. In his less well-known novel *The Workingman’s Paradise*, published in 1892, one of Lane’s main female characters Nellie

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<sup>155</sup> Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp. 102-104.

<sup>156</sup> David Walker, “Survivalist Anxieties: Australian Responses to Asia, 1890s to the Present,” *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 120, pp 319-330, p. 322.

<sup>157</sup> Yu, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>158</sup> Catriona Ross, *Unsettled Imaginings: Australian Novels of Asian Invasion*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 2008, p. 8.

<sup>159</sup> *Queenslander*, 13 October 1888, p. 659.

<sup>160</sup> *Melbourne Punch*, 6 September 1888, p. 1.

has nightmares about her “always watching” Chinese shopkeeper neighbour “creeping upon from behind”:

It would come to her sometimes like a cold chill, that this yellow man and such men as he were watching them all slowly going down lower and lower, were waiting to leap upon them in their last helplessness and enslave them all as white girls were sometimes enslaved, even already, in those filthy opium joints whose stench nauseated the hurrying passers-by. Perhaps under all their meekness these Chinese were braver, more stubborn, more vigorous, and it was doomed that they should conquer at last and rule in the land where they had been treated as outcasts and intruders.<sup>161</sup>

William Lane’s ill-fated utopian socialist experiment in Paraguay had collapsed by the turn of the century, with Lane abandoning the South American colony to become a conservative newspaper editor in New Zealand. *Boomerang* had earlier lost much of its impetus when Lane left the editorship in 1890, with the publication eventually folding in 1892.<sup>162</sup> But Lane’s brand of radical post-colonial radicalism continued to have resonance among Australia’s rural and urban working class through the 1890s, forming a xenophobic backdrop for the decision to send servicemen to fight in China at the turn of the century.

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<sup>161</sup> William Lane, *The Workingman’s Paradise*, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 2009, p 18. First published in 1892 by Edwards, Dunlop & Co. and Worker Board of Trustees, Brisbane.

<sup>162</sup> Charles Grimshaw, “Australian Nationalism and the Imperial Connection 1900-1914,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, May 1958, p. 162.

## Chapter 2

### “Handy Men”

Newspaper readers across Australia awoke on the morning of 8 August 1900 to a barrage of rousing stories about colonial troops marching off to war against the Chinese. The previous day, hundreds of onlookers had lined the streets of Sydney to cheer on the 252 members of the NSW Naval Contingent that were heading off to support British troops involved in the suppression of a violent anti-European insurgency known as the Boxer Rebellion.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* painted a colourful picture of the send-off, revelling in the pomp and pageantry of the occasion as Australian servicemen prepared to embark on a quest to test their mettle in battle. Much was made of the contingent's recently acquired mascot – an eight-month old “plump and muscular” ginger and white bull pup named Nipper – which was “regarded as a comrade by every man in the departing force.”<sup>163</sup>

“The announcement that there was to be no public demonstration on the departure of the NSW Naval Contingent for China seems in the upshot to have been futile, for yesterday there was almost as large and quite as sympathetic a crowd in the streets to wave and cheer bon voyage to the intrepid volunteers as had appeared when our soldiers went to the Transvaal,” the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported in reference to the farewell given to Australian troops on their way to the Boer War several years earlier. “The NSW naval forces have at length, after persistent endeavours, obtained their opportunity to demonstrate on behalf of their colony what manner of fighting men they are when the British nation takes up arms,” gushed the morning newspaper.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 August 1900.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

The *Daily Telegraph*, the main rival to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the Sydney newspaper market, described the send-off given to the sailors in the contingent as “distinctly very enthusiastic, although there were no formal speeches.”<sup>165</sup> It went on to claim that the servicemen bound for China were embarking upon “the greatest mission of all – the stemming of the Yellow tide.”<sup>166</sup> The *Evening News* later that day wrote of the “stirring chronicles” of the naval brigade’s “triumphal procession” through the streets of Sydney, “chronicles which will be read with emotion by future generations.”<sup>167</sup> Other periodicals followed suit with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Cinematographers were also on hand to capture the event, which was one of the first commercial motion pictures to be produced in Australia and which employed the “powerful medium” of silent film.<sup>168</sup>

Farewell parties for the servicemen heading to northern China had been held throughout the city of Sydney and surrounding areas of New South Wales, as well as in population centres in Victoria, highlighting what appeared to be popular support for the military campaign from the general public. A “large number” of the residents of the Sydney suburb of Leichhardt bid farewell to one of their neighbours, presenting the departing seaman with a “handsome” silver-mounted pipe and a smoking jacket. The Balmain Social and Amusement Society put on a concert for one of their members, James Mooney, before his embarkation. A local branch of the YMCA farewelled two of their members, with both presented with a small dressing-case and a pocket Bible. Harry Sayers was given a send-off at the Town Hall Hotel in Paddington by his local football club, with attendees including a number of soldiers who had been invalided home from the ongoing Boer War in southern Africa.<sup>169</sup> In Victoria a farewell party was held at Webber’s Rose of Melbourne Hotel in Fitzroy to say goodbye to Harold Fletcher

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<sup>165</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 8 August 1900, p. 7.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Evening News*, 8 August 1900.

<sup>168</sup> Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 17. At the time of submission of this thesis I have been unable to view this footage.

<sup>169</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 August 1900; *Daily Telegraph*, 8 August 1900.

and a colleague from the Victorian Naval Contingent, with the hall “decorated for the occasion with Chinese lanterns and streamers of red, white and blue”.<sup>170</sup>

The following day the 250-odd members of the NSW Naval Contingent, along with an equal number of Victorian servicemen, left Sydney on the improvised troopship *Salamis*, answering a call from London just a few months earlier for more colonial troops to bolster Britain’s campaign against the Chinese Boxer rebels. The British government, whose armed forces were largely tied up in a debilitating war with the Boers in South Africa, had asked its Australian colonies for military assistance to help crush the Boxer rebels in China, keen for a show of the strength and reach of the Commonwealth and a display of its ability to call upon its dominions in future conflicts.

An added imperative behind the request for Australian troops was a racial one, with the British government wanting to ensure there were at least some white servicemen in its China mission and that it was not completely reliant on Indian forces from the subcontinent. “For all this lofty sentiment the British response to the Boxer War also revealed underlying imperial tensions,” according to historian Benjamin Mountford. “While the diversity of the British force demonstrated London’s ability to call on imperial reserves it nonetheless failed to mask anxieties over the relative scarcity of white troops.”<sup>171</sup>

The colonies responded quickly to the British request, jockeying for position ahead of the Federation of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 January 1901.<sup>172</sup> After debates over who would be paying for the military mission, the colonies of New South Wales and Victoria agreed to send a combined contingent of about 500 men, whilst South Australia separately provided a gunboat that was the entirety of its navy. Two journalists, George Watkin Wynne and John Wallace, travelled to northern China with

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<sup>170</sup> *Age*, 17 July 1900, p. 6.

<sup>171</sup> Benjamin Mountford, *Britain, China and Colonial Australia*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 224-225.

<sup>172</sup> Nicholls, op. cit., pp. 22-36.

the naval brigades, while another Australian reporter – George Morrison – was already on the ground in Beijing as a correspondent for London’s influential *The Times* newspaper.

Unfortunately for the eager Australian brigades, the rebellion had been more or less quashed by the time they arrived in northern China after a 17-day voyage from Sydney. The closest thing the Australian servicemen came to military action was their regular recruitment as members of firing squads tasked with the execution of Chinese prisoners.<sup>173</sup>

Australia’s role in the military campaign was so minor that it has been more or less overlooked by the wargaming manufacturers that produce miniatures for wargamers who like to recreate famous battles and conflicts. You can buy an Austrian sailor or a Japanese artillery crew, or even a dead Chinese Boxer rebel, but there are as yet no figurines of Australian combatants available.<sup>174</sup>

Newspaper coverage of Australia’s involvement in the military conflagration in China was by no means homogenous, with many mainstream conservative papers supporting the endeavour whilst some more radical titles were strenuously opposed. The *Sydney Morning Herald* had “no hesitation” in its support of Australia’s role in the Boxer Rebellion, as it had been equally supportive of the colonies’ role in the Sudan in 1885 and during the Boer War.<sup>175</sup>

The *Bulletin*, which had been an extremely vocal critic of Australian involvement in the Boer War, took a more jaundiced view when it came to China and the Boxer

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<sup>173</sup> Kit Denton, *For Queen and Commonwealth: Australians at War*, Sydney, Time-Life Books, 1987, p. 75.

<sup>174</sup> Bill Gray, Forgotten Wars: a Guide to Obscure Table-Top Conflicts (Part 2), *Wargamer*, 16 August 2017, <https://www.wargamer.com/articles/forgotten-wars-a-guide-to-obscure-table-top-conflicts-part-2/>. Accessed 3 June 2018.

<sup>175</sup> Gavin Souter, *Company of Heralds: A Century and a Half of Australian Publishing by John Fairfax Limited and its Predecessors*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1981, p. 101.



uprising. The periodical did not devote a lot of column inches to the issue in 1900, as it was far more focused on issues relating to Australia's federation at the start of 1901. But in its 7 July 1900 edition the periodical depicted China as a sleeping giant, with a cartoon caption questioning "Is he dead or just slumbering!"<sup>176</sup> This reinforced the suggestion that an "awakened" China could well pose a threat to Australia.

The editorial writers at the *Australian Star* were at their vitriolic best while the siege of the legations in Beijing was still underway, cursing China as a country inhabited by "human monsters, putrescent in morality and religion, practising unspeakable vices."<sup>177</sup> China needed to be taught a lesson, according to the Sydney-based newspaper. "Chinese ruffianism cannot be repressed by squirting rose-water upon the offenders, and it is to be devoutly hoped, In the Interests of future peace, that, when the allies are prepared, the Chinese may be taught something which it will take centuries for them to forget," the paper postured.

Adelaide's *Advertiser* epitomized the response of many mainstream newspapers to Britain's request for military assistance. After condemning those in the colony who had derided the South Australian Navy's gunboat Protector as little more than a "toy", the newspaper set out in its editorial the case for supporting Britain in northern China.<sup>178</sup> "Our own safety is not threatened, but, if it were, the naval might of England would not lie idle while a single foot of Imperial soil was menaced. It is not in such times as these that we are tempted to belie assurances of Imperial solidarity by the assertion of a petty and timorous policy of local selfishness," the Adelaide-based paper said. It went on to strongly endorse the argument in favour of military intervention:

China, too, has special interest for us, and on the threshold of Australian federation we cannot forget that in the future the Commonwealth will have a large

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<sup>176</sup> *Bulletin*, 7 July 1900.

<sup>177</sup> *Australian Star*, 20 July 1900.

<sup>178</sup> *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 7 July 1900, p. 6.

and important stake in the Pacific. So even selfishness – an enlightened selfishness that looks beyond trumpery provincial considerations and realises the broader concerns of Australia – impels us to seek a share in the settlement of the grave Eastern crisis, suddenly arising, of which no one as yet can even dimly foresee the issue.<sup>179</sup>

While radical papers including the *Sydney Truth*, the *Worker* and *Toscan* railed against the Boxer campaign, a more nuanced debate was taking place in colonial society about what a military engagement in China signalled about the role of Australian troops in future British imperialist conflicts. This debate, which played out principally in the colonial legislatures of New South Wales and Victoria, also questioned whether Britain could be relied upon to come to the aid of Australia in its hour of need.

By the late 1890s the Australian colonies had their own interests which did not always align with those of Britain.<sup>180</sup> The late 1880s and early 1890s had seen the emergence of a radical ideology of Australian nationalism that remained influential throughout the process of federation.<sup>181</sup> The debate included notions of “national virility and racial degeneracy”, with pointed references to China.<sup>182</sup> Robyn McWhinney argues that the year 1900 “was the first time that the question of whether Australia would contribute to imperial defence whenever Britain was at war was openly and insistently raised.”<sup>183</sup>

Wallace and Wynne, the two journalists who accompanied the Australian naval contingent on its mission in China, are not widely recalled. Wallace was the

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Charles Grimshaw, “Australian Nationalism and the Imperial Connection 1900-1914,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, May 1958, p. 161.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Barbara Penny, “Australia's Reactions to the Boer War: A Study in Colonial Imperialism,” *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, November 1967, p. 101.

<sup>183</sup> Robyn McWhinney, ‘Imperialists’ and ‘Policemen’? The Australians in China 1900-1901, Unpublished BA Honours thesis, Macquarie University, 1974, p. 14.

correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, although the newspaper did take some additional copy from Arthur Henry Adams, who represented a number of New Zealand publications.<sup>184</sup> (Adams was better known as a poet and novelist, writing a sonnet about China in 1899 in which he described the “langour-lidded insolence” of her glance.<sup>185</sup>) Wallace was not given a byline during his time in China, instead being labelled by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as “Our Special Correspondent.”<sup>186</sup>

Wynne and Wallace at the last minute were appointed as assistant paymasters to the combined naval contingent in order to facilitate their reporting, with the NSW Premier Sir William Lynne pointing out to the colonial parliament the “valuable” role played by journalists working on the frontline with troops.<sup>187</sup> “It was a proper thing to have these men with the troops, so as to get reliable Information as to what was going on,” Sir William told parliament in comments that acknowledged the role of the press in garnering support for military action. “Although they would be able to report for the papers when they got to China they were armed and would have to fight if they were called upon,” the premier added.<sup>188</sup>

Wallace and Wynne were not the first Australian journalists to report from China. James Hington and the so-called “Vagabond” John Stanley James both travelled through parts of China in the late 1870s and early 1880s, writing lengthy dispatches about their experiences for the Melbourne *Argus* newspaper.<sup>189</sup> Although both Hington and James challenged some stereotypes about China, they both ultimately came to the same conclusion: “the Chinese were a threat to white Australia.”<sup>190</sup> Nor were Wallace

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<sup>184</sup> For more details on Adams see his entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/adams-arthur-henry-4969>

<sup>185</sup> <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/china-1899/>

<sup>186</sup> Souter, *Company of Herald*s, p. 103.

<sup>187</sup> Sir William Lynne quoted in the *Daily Telegraph*, 8 August 1900.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Richard White, “Australian Journalists, Travel Writing and China: James Hington, the ‘Vagabond’ and G E Morrison,” *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, June 2008, p. 239, pp. 237-250. For more details about the Vagabond see Willa McDonald, “A Vagabond: the Literary Journalism of John Stanley James,” *Literary Journalism Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Spring 2014, pp. 65-81.

<sup>190</sup> White, op. cit., p. 246.

and Wynne Australia's first war correspondents, with reporters having covered the Maori wars of the mid-19th century in New Zealand and the Boer wars that ignited in South Africa in the 1880s.<sup>191</sup> Journalists who covered the Boer conflict included Agnes Macready, Australia's first woman war reporter.<sup>192</sup>

But Wallace and Wynn led the way in being the first journalists to cover a military conflict in Asia involving Australian servicemen. And their reportage came at a critical time for Australian society, which was in the throes of a vigorous debate about the role of China and anti-Chinese immigration restrictions in the new nation. Australia's involvement in the Boxer Rebellion, and its associated press coverage, therefore "had much more *political* than it did *military* significance."<sup>193</sup>

Wynne and Wallace travelled together on the 17 days that it took the *Salamis* to make its way from Sydney to Hong Kong. Shut off from any meaningful contact with the outside world, the two journalists reportedly enjoyed themselves by jointly producing a homemade newspaper. Wynne came from a newspaper family, being one of five sons of the *Daily Telegraph*'s legendary general manager for close to four decades, Watkin Wynne, who helped to revolutionise the Australian newspaper industry at the turn of the last century and was described by the *Bulletin* as "keen, tough, indomitable."<sup>194</sup> The Fairfax family also had connections to the combined NSW and Victorian naval brigade, with its commander Captain Francis Hixson the father-in-law of both James Oswald and

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<sup>191</sup> For more information about Australia's earliest war correspondents, see Pat Burgess, *Australian Reporters at War*, Richmond, Victoria, William Heinemann Australia, 1986; Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty. From the Crimea to the Falklands: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth Maker*, London, Pan Books, 1989; Fay Anderson and Richard Trembath, *Witnesses to War: The History of Australian Conflict Reporting*, Carlton, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2011.

<sup>192</sup> Jeannine Baker, *Australian Women War Reporters; Boer War to Vietnam*, Sydney, NewSouth Publishing, 2015, pp. 9-19.

<sup>193</sup> Malcolm Saunders, "The Boxer Rebellion: 1900-1901," *Sabretache*, Vol. 24, No. 4, October-December 1983, p. 8, pp. 4-9.

<sup>194</sup> *Bulletin* quoted in the Melbourne Press Club's Australia Media Hall of Fame at <http://halloffame.melbournepressclub.com/article/watkin-wynne>. See also the entry for Watkin Wynne in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wynne-watkin-9209>

Geoffrey Evan Fairfax, the two brothers who represented the third generation of the Fairfax clan to manage the family newspaper business.<sup>195</sup>

Although they had arrived in Hong Kong in late August 1900, it took more than two weeks for their dispatches to reach Australian shores and be published, with telegraphic technology still in its infancy. These delays meant that Wynne and Wallace had to employ a different style of reportage in the dispatches they were sending back to Australia. Both correspondents covered all the bases in terms of the-day-to-day news out of China, but they had to present their stories to their readers in such a way that the content did not seem stale. Wynne and Wallace adopted quite different journalistic styles in how they responded to this perennial reporting challenge, perhaps in response to the expectations of their respective readerships. Wallace often comes across as a very traditional matter-of-fact reporter, whilst Wynne is more lyric in his approach. Whilst Wallace seeks out key Chinese officials and presents a sober picture of policy issues, Wynne ruminates on the quality and availability of the local beer.<sup>196</sup>

Wynne, who has a somewhat poetic turn of phrase, ponders on his journalistic career to date and what it will mean to be a war correspondent in China – a new professional calling in a country still misunderstood in Australia:

Here, on the sloping decks of her Majesty's transport *Salamis*, with an uneventful career behind and God alone knows what ahead, shut off temporarily from the world, cabined and confined day after day with men whose thoughts are all of war, its methods and its history, its victories and defeats, one reaps rapidly of the knowledge gathered by them in long years of service, purloins the ripest fruits of their active brains, and wonders to find how strangely unanimous they are.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Souter, op. cit., pp. 101, 111-112.

<sup>196</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 17 October 1900, p. 7.

<sup>197</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 20 September 1900, p. 5.

In a lengthy dispatch to the *Daily Telegraph* dated 23 November 1900 and published on 10 January 1901, Wynne taps into the popular sentiment in colonial Australia that Chinese people are cunning and inherently untrustworthy. “There can be no such thing as over-caution in China. We are getting a bit tired of the man who has lived among the Chinese and who tells you he understands them. He can’t do it,” he writes:

But to understand them in the sense in which we use the word is beyond the ken of mortal man. Understand that they are cunning and cruel, treacherous and deceitful, as ignorant of their military weakness as they are of their undeveloped strength, their latent powers. Understand that they hate the foreigner and all his works; that they are a people easily led by the flowery eloquence of their rulers, and true to a religion that means death to the foreign devils, and you now on a safer basis.<sup>198</sup>

Wynne has nothing but abhorrence and disgust for the Chinese that he encounters on the streets of Beijing, with his views on sanitation and hygiene echoing concerns in Australia that the Chinese in Australia were spreading disease. “The future of the Chinese offers a fearful problem,” he says:

Look on the frightful sights one sees on the streets of Pekin [Beijing], the pock-marked, the deformed, the blind, the hideous yellow faces with their rows of blackened broken teeth, the sickening blood-red eye sockets, telling of horrible disease. See the filthy tattered rags they wrap around themselves. Smell them as they pass. Hear of their shameless immorality. Witness their shameless indecency, and picture them among your own people – ugh! It makes you

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<sup>198</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 19 January 1901, p. 5.

shudder.<sup>199</sup>

Wynne also repeatedly weighs into one of the biggest public policy debates occurring back home at the time, concerning the role of anti-Chinese restrictions in a newly federated Australia. “Shut the Chinaman up in his own country and let him work out his own destruction,” the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent writes:

Let his unbridled lust, filth, famine and disease aid him in his work. Leave his country, with its paltry trade that calls to human sacrifice, to inhuman human greed. See to it that he never leaves it. That is the only Chinese policy that Australia can afford to entertain. That is the only way to sweep back the yellow wave.<sup>200</sup>

While Wynne is largely contemptuous of what he observes in China, Wallace seems genuinely enamoured by what he gets to see of rural China in his brief time in the country. In his dispatches back to Australia, he repeatedly makes comparisons with the Australian bush and the British countryside. Travelling from Tientsin to Peking, he remarks that “the whole plain is rich and fertile and under cultivation.”<sup>201</sup> “Good-sized patches of maize were to be observed,” he writes. “At other times stretches of a poor kind of cotton; watermelon and pumpkin plants grew wild everywhere and there were also met the familiar dandelion and castor-oil tree.”<sup>202</sup> Wallace admires, and is impressed by, China’s fertile landscape:

In the vicinity of the towns and villages were many pretty landscapes that would gladden the eye of a painter and the bright scenery reminded one of English woods and dales. Many of the trees and shrubs were showing by their sere and yellow leaves the rapid approach of winter. In other places the graceful weeping

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 1900.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

willows acted as a pleasant shade from the midday sun. The main road to Peking resembles to a great extent the bad road of the Australian backblocks.<sup>203</sup>

Although the Australian contingent were aggrieved about their lack of any real military action during their time in China, Wallace positions their endeavours within the ongoing debate in the colonies over the strength and durability of the ties that continued to bind them to the mother country, Britain. The presence of the Australian Naval Contingent in China for the past seven months “has undoubtedly been a grand advertisement for the Commonwealth, in as much as it has shown to 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,” Wallace writes in a dispatch to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in mid-April 1901.<sup>204</sup>

While the Australian servicemen received accolades from their British military leaders for the “police” role they undertook in China after most of the real fighting was over and the Boxer rebels had been largely defeated, this was little compensation for troops who had been eager to fight the Chinese rebels. The Australians were limited to mundane garrison and guard duties rather than any combat role. “We came out here to kill Boxers and see some active service,” one sailor told Wallace. “But instead of that we are doing municipal council work and we are going to miss the federal celebrations, the event of a lifetime.”<sup>205</sup> Not only did the men of the naval brigade miss out on the festivities being held for Federation on 1 January 1901, but they were also still away for the opening of the first Australian parliament in Melbourne on 1 April, an event that they had at one stage been mooted as attending as special guests.<sup>206</sup> “While the great majority of us cast a longing and wistful eye towards that week of rejoicing and festivities in Sydney which marked the entrance of Australia into the great company of the nations, still we feel we have been recompensed considerably by the grateful

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 April 1901.

<sup>205</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January 1901, p. 7.

<sup>206</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 January 1901, p. 7.



recognition by the British Generals of our work in North China,” Wallace notes.<sup>207</sup>

Wallace also writes about the racial imperative of the British Commonwealth being able to demonstrate to other European powers that its imperialist strength and global reach were not reliant on using “coloured” colonial troops. “The absence of our white troops has been commented upon and adversely criticised by Britishers resident here, as they argue that it lends 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,” Wallace said in a dispatch received in late November 1900.<sup>208</sup>

Wallace clearly understood the commercial opportunities represented by China and their intersection with regional geo-political issues and Great Power diplomacy. “As China, Japan, and other countries in that quarter of the world come more under the influence of Western civilisation, the prospects of enormous markets for Australian produce loom up vividly,” Wallace writes. “If history teaches anything it is that Australian traders will not be satisfied until they have obtained a strong footing in those Eastern centres. To safeguard her merchant ships she must not shun her responsibilities any longer.”<sup>209</sup> The Boxer Rebellion, according to McWhinney, therefore contributed to a “growing awareness” amongst Australians of the “shifting power” in the Pacific and the fact that the “storm centre” of global affairs was moving to East Asia, making it much closer to Australia.<sup>210</sup> The Chinese uprising accordingly provides an historical context to a debate about the rise of East Asia that continues to resonate in contemporary Australia.

Wallace, like Wynne, reinforced unfounded stereotypical assessments of the Chinese populace as unhygienic and disease-ridden. Yet contrary to these misperceptions, on the Victorian and NSW goldfields of the mid-1800s Chinese often

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<sup>207</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 February 1901, p. 5.

<sup>208</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 November 1900, p. 7.

<sup>209</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 September 1900, p. 6.

<sup>210</sup> McWhinney, op. cit., p. 129.

operated laundries and their market gardens were one of the only sources of fresh vegetables. While Wallace is more empathetic than his *Daily Telegraph* counterpart, some of his descriptions of Chinese living conditions at the turn of the last century are equally disturbing. He describes what he witnessed of the remains of the iconic fortified township of Taku, which had been rebuilt after being destroyed by British and French troops in 1860 during the Second Opium War, and which guarded the route between Tianjin and Peking:

The ruined village of Taku lay beyond, the huts all made of mud, and built higgledy-piggledy – now showing only their bare walls. Deep gutters filled with filth ran through the narrow streets, and lean lank dogs were prowling around in search of food, whilst naked Chinese children played on the banks.<sup>211</sup>

Wallace describes thousands of human bodies floating down Chinese rivers on the way to the sea. Arriving in Peking, he finds the city to be “indescribably dirty”, with small canals “choked up with filth, whilst the atmosphere is reeking with vile smells.”<sup>212</sup> The main street of the capital’s Tartar City is inhabited by “teeming thousands overcrowded in dirty, unsanitary hovels and living in a vitiated atmosphere.”<sup>213</sup>

Wallace is appalled by reports of cannibalism emanating from the famine-stricken province of Shensi [Shaanxi]. “It is said that human flesh is being offered for sale, and that the officials state they are unable to prevent this horrible trade,” the *Sydney Morning Herald* correspondent writes. “Instances of cannibalism have occurred in previous years when famine was playing havoc with the poorer classes.”<sup>214</sup> Wallace has first-hand experience of other disturbing practices driven by starvation: “In Peking if a

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<sup>211</sup> *SMH*, 20 November 1900, p. 5.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 November 1900.

<sup>214</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 February 1901, p. 4.

diseased or mangy dog dies in the street or is shot not many minutes expire before its body is triumphantly hauled away by Chinese coolies for chow.”<sup>215</sup>

For his readers, Wallace’s numerous descriptions of Chinese executions must have also bolstered the popular view in the Australian colonies that Chinese people were barbaric, cruel and uncivilised. After witnessing a decapitation, Wallace reports that the execution “was performed without a hitch.”<sup>216</sup> “We never thought that a human head could be chopped off so extraordinarily easy: it was like lopping off a thistle with a stick,” he writes. “Many winced when the broad-bladed sword was poised in the air, then we involuntarily shuddered as we gazed at the rush of blood and the shapeless body.”<sup>217</sup> Wallace says that several weeks earlier some of his compatriots had seen five such executions in a row: “Few of us want to see again one man lose his head.”<sup>218</sup>

Wallace was feted by community groups on his return home from China, drawing reasonably sized audiences eager to hear about his experiences. At a dinner at the Queens Hall private dining rooms in Sydney in mid-May 1901, *Sydney Morning Herald* general manager Samuel Cook talked about the changes that had occurred between the military and the press in recent years: “There was no dearth of applicants who were willing to risk their lives as war correspondents.”<sup>219</sup> Cook remarked the *Sydney Morning Herald* had been fortunate enough to have men of “ability and honour” representing the newspaper in both South Africa and China “whose literary work bore favourable comparison with that performed by leading journalists at the front”.<sup>220</sup> In what may have been an attempt to draw a comparison with the *Daily Telegraph*’s coverage of the Boxer Rebellion, Cook said that what Wallace had achieved during his time in China “he had

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 February 1901, p. 5.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 February 1901, p. 7.

<sup>219</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 May 1901, p. 3.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

accomplished thoroughly and well, avoiding undue inflation and presenting his narrative in a way that bore the impress of truth and reliability.”<sup>221</sup>

The *Daily Telegraph* was not to be outdone, with Wynne receiving equally effusive praise for his China coverage from the senior managers and editors of the newspaper, including his father Watkin Wynne. *Daily Telegraph* stalwart Henry Gorman paid Wynne “a high compliment on account of the work he had done on behalf of the paper, and said he had on this and other occasions showed a ready resource, ability, and a comprehensive grasp of the subject in hand, combined with a faculty of presenting his facts or fancies in a peculiarly readable form, that stamped him as a journalist of the highest grade,” reported the newspaper.<sup>222</sup> Gorman “was glad on behalf of the directors to welcome Mr Wynne back safe and sound from his adventures, and expressed the wish that he would continue to supply the readers of the paper with such entertaining reading matter as he had contributed from China.”<sup>223</sup>

Although he arrived too late to witness any overt military action, the Australian poet and journalist Andrew “Banjo” Paterson also made a cameo appearance in China in 1901, having established a name for himself as a foreign correspondent in the Boer War several years earlier. Paterson was a strong advocate of Australia’s involvement in South Africa, with his views on Australian prowess in war reinforcing “pro-war sentiments” and the wide circulation of his reports in the *Sydney Morning Herald* guaranteeing “the currency of his views at home.”<sup>224</sup> Paterson’s reputation as a war correspondent – with dispatches “by any standards of war reporting as exciting as they are memorable” – was such that he was later retained by the international news agency Reuters.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 7 May 1901, p. 6.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Shirley Walker, “The Boer War: Paterson, Abbott, Brennan, Miles Franklin and Morant,” *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2, October 1985, p. 209.

<sup>225</sup> Clement Semmler, “War Correspondents in Australian Literature: an Outline,” *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2, October 1985, pp. 195-196.

After his return from South Africa, Paterson spent a number of months in China in the second half of 1901 en route to Britain. The *Sydney Morning Herald* appears to have been very keen to promote the fact that the famous balladeer was a member of its editorial stable, taking the then unusual step of giving Paterson a byline for his reports from South Africa.<sup>226</sup> Paterson seems to have adjusted quickly to his new role as a war correspondent, with his dispatches from the Boer War “lively and well-informed,” according to Souter.<sup>227</sup> Paterson, the *Sydney Morning Herald* trumpeted, had “done the most brilliant work of any correspondent who has gone through the campaign.”<sup>228</sup>

Although Paterson arrived in China too late to report on the short-lived Boxer Rebellion itself, his numerous reports resonated with many of the concerns about China that were a prominent feature of other colonial Australian periodicals. He appears to have had a particular affinity with the authors of the “invasion” genre of literature that flourished in the Australian colonies in the 1890s. In a despatch for the *Sydney Morning Herald* headlined “Our Eastern Neighbours: the Nearest we Have” that was filed while he was en route to China and Japan in August 1901, Paterson wrote:

People do not seem to think that any sane Australian could by any possibility want to go to Manchuria or Siberia, or could expect to find anything of interest there. But as a matter of fact the farthest East is really the part of the world that concerns us most. It can do us most harm and least good; and we surely should be interested in knowing what our next door neighbours are doing. A glance at a map of the world giving the trade routes shows how very isolated Australia is .... for only eight days' steam from our Northern Territory there lies the great seething cauldron of the East, boiling over with parti-coloured humanity – brown and

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<sup>226</sup> Souter, op. cit, pp. 102-103.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>228</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald* quoted in Souter, op. cit., p. 102.

yellow men by the million, and they are quite near enough to us to do us a lot of harm if their ideas ran that way.<sup>229</sup>

Having recently returned from an assignment in the Northern Territory, Paterson saw the top end of Australia as particularly vulnerable. "If our dashing Australian soldiers are ever to be called on to fight at all it will be to fight these Eastern peoples, they will have to fight in our Northern Territory," he writes. "The Chinese have four hundred millions, all ready to go anywhere and do anything that they are told." Paterson went on to tell his *Sydney Morning Herald* readers:

Our Northern Territory, practically uninhabited by whites, is just the place to suit these people. On those great sweltering, steaming, fever-laden plains, where the muddy rivers struggle slowly to the sea, the Orientals are in their glory. If they once get a good footing there they will out-breed and out-multiply any European race .... If the Orientals want to come this way they can spare a few millions of people easily enough, and if they sent over enough of an army to hold the north against us for a while they could pour in further people, till before long there would be more yellow people in the north than white in the south.<sup>230</sup>

But Paterson also felt that China offered great opportunities for Australia, and he was impressed by the industriousness and work ethic of the Chinese men and women that he encountered in his travels. "There is nothing the Chinese can't learn," he wrote in a report from Hong Kong: "All the businesses employ Chinese clerks and bookkeepers, and it is nothing uncommon to find a Chinaman who can speak English, French, and Russian, in addition to two or three dialects of his own tongue."<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 August 1901, p. 7.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

Paterson saw great business opportunities to be exploited in China, particularly for entrepreneurial Australians. "There is a boom on in China. Work is plentiful and highly paid, new enterprises are projected every day, capital is abundant, and in fact it reminds one of Australia in the 'good times'."<sup>232</sup> China's massive population would help drive this economic boom, according to Paterson. "The Chinaman is beginning to use foreign goods, and once he gets fairly started there is a market for the world here," he writes. "They live by trade and manufacture, and here is a vast rich country only waiting the pioneers to force a way in, to start a rush to these parts which will be as thrilling as the gold rush in Australia in the old days."<sup>233</sup>

But ultimately Paterson – like Wallace and Wynne – argued that there was no role for the Chinese in Australian society, not least because of the intense ongoing antipathy between white Australians and people of colour. Paterson later reminisced about the time he spent in China in 1901, describing open hatred on the part of the Chinese for the foreigners who had invaded their country. "Neither man nor beast in China has anything but hatred for the foreigner," Paterson wrote:

As we pass through the little villages and tumbledown humpies of the cultivators the men scowl at us; the dogs snarl and slink off with every symptom of terror and disgust; the cattle snort and shiver if we pass near them; and the mules will watch us uneasily till we go away. The people hate us with a cold intensity that surpasses any other hate that I ever heard of.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Andrew Barton Paterson, *Happy Dispatches: Journalistic Pieces from Banjo Paterson's days as a War Correspondent*, Sydney, Lansdowne Press, 1980, pp. 14-15.

## Chapter 3

### “Chinese” Morrison

Whilst Watkin Wynne and John Wallace were stuck on the troopship *Samalis* as it steamed slowly towards China, amusing themselves by publishing their own onboard newspaper, one Australian journalist was already on the ground in Peking reporting on the latest developments in the Boxer Rebellion. George “Chinese” Morrison, born in Geelong in February 1862, was making a name for himself on the international media stage as a star reporter on the London *Times* newspaper, which at the time was one of the most important and influential media publications in the English-speaking world.

Morrison had joined the *Times* in 1897 and would remain the newspaper’s high-profile Peking correspondent until he resigned 1912 to become an advisor to the first president of the Chinese republic Yuan Shikai, whose decision to declare himself emperor in 1915 compounded the political chaos that had engulfed the country for decades.<sup>235</sup> Along the way Morrison would also become the first Australian combat correspondent to become “world famous” and for close to two decades would be the West’s most-noted analyst on Chinese affairs.<sup>236</sup>

Morrison was already a well-known public figure in Australia before he began working for the *Times* in Peking, first gaining attention after undertaking a 752-mile (1,210-kilometre) walk from Geelong to Adelaide in late 1879 to mid-February 1880, a feat that took the 17-year old 46 days to complete and which fortunately got him to the South Australian capital just in time to watch the legendary Australian wicket-keeper Harwood “Affie” Jarvis play in a local cricket match.<sup>237</sup> Morrison, whose boarding room at his secondary school Geelong College was decorated with dozens of covers from the

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<sup>235</sup> Spence, op. cit., pp. 285-286.

<sup>236</sup> Anderson and Trembath, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

<sup>237</sup> Pearl, op. cit., p. 9.



*Illustrated London News*, made his journalistic debut by selling the diary of his walk to Adelaide to the *Leader*, a weekly paper published by Melbourne's *Age* newspaper.<sup>238</sup>

Morrison's first piece of published journalism consisted of long descriptive passages about the Australian bush, interspersed with complaints about having "to undergo much jeering from a herd of gaping rustics," being forced to suffer the indignity of having to eat in kitchens with servants, and complaints about accommodation like the hotel in Portland where "hunger, vermin, heat and bad ventilation prevented me sleeping; and to add to all my misery I wasn't called this morning till breakfast was finished, so all I got was some cold fish, rancid butter and re-cooked old bread."<sup>239</sup>

Following the success of his trek to Adelaide and the publicity it received, Morrison's next expedition less than a year later was a canoeing trip along the length of the "little explored" Murray River, Australia's largest river.<sup>240</sup> Morrison was not shy of self-promotion and clearly saw himself as part of the tradition of British explorer-adventurers like Henry Stanley and David Livingstone. Morrison's canoe was christened *The Stanley* and the 18-year old wrote in his diary that "my desire is that it may as successfully go down the Murray as his party descended the Congo".<sup>241</sup> At townships along the Murray River the "adventurous young colonial" was feted by small rural communities, with a four-oared boating crew from Echuca bidding the parched and sunburnt rower farewell with "three hearty cheers."<sup>242</sup> The *Riverine Herald* wished Morrison "every success in his arduous and plucky adventure".<sup>243</sup>

Morrison's next expedition in 1882 was to be his boldest so far, involving a 123-day journey from the Gulf of Carpentaria in far north Queensland to Melbourne, a

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., pp. 7, 10.

<sup>239</sup> *Leader*, 8 May 1880, p. 1.

<sup>240</sup> Lo Hui-min, "Introduction" in Lo Hui-min (editor), *The Correspondence of G E Morrison: Volume 1 1895-1912*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 2.

<sup>241</sup> Morrison's diary entry cited in Ibid., p 11.

<sup>242</sup> *McIlvor Times and Rodney Advertiser*, 17 December 1880, p. 2.

<sup>243</sup> *Riverine Herald*, 14 December 1880, p 2.

2,043 mile (3,300 kilometre) journey that followed the same route that had led to the deaths of the explorers Burke and Wills just 21 years earlier.<sup>244</sup> This escapade brought Morrison international attention, with the London *Times* newspaper describing the endeavour as “one of the most remarkable pedestrian achievements” after one local Australian paper had suggested the ambitious plan was nothing more than a hoax.<sup>245</sup> Morrison felt, however, that his determination to become a newspaper correspondent that he could expect to distinguish himself from the “common herd.”<sup>246</sup>

So there were still more adventures to come for Morrison, who was also studying medicine at the University of Melbourne at the insistence of his father, the headmaster at Geelong College. Morrison was not content to confine his attention-seeking travels to Australia, journeying next to the Pacific Islands in June 1882 to report on the “blackbirding” trade, which involved the kidnapping of islanders to work as slaves on the Queensland canefields.<sup>247</sup> On his return to Melbourne, Morrison wrote about the illegal kidnapping trade for both the *Leader* and the *Age*, with the *Age* in a strongly worded editorial agreeing with his abhorrence of the practice and his calls for reform.<sup>248</sup>

A less successful trip involved an expedition to New Guinea in 1883 on behalf of the *Age* newspaper, at a time when imperial powers including Great Britain and Germany were both attempting to consolidate their respective positions in the Pacific region. One account of the journey describes Morrison’s venture into New Guinea as a “glorious failure” which saw the intrepid traveller speared by Koperi natives 74 days after his party had left Port Moresby.<sup>249</sup> Whilst Morrison went on to pen nine “sensational” articles for the *Age*, it would be months before he could get the native spearhead removed by an eminent surgeon at Edinburgh University, where he also

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<sup>244</sup> Lo, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Morrison cited in Pearl, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>247</sup> Tipping, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>248</sup> Pearl, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>249</sup> Tipping, op. cit., p. 4.

proceeded to finally obtain his medical degree.<sup>250</sup> The three-inch (7.6 centimetre) long Koperi spearhead is apparently still preserved in the museum of Edinburgh University's medical school.<sup>251</sup>

Despite the failure of his New Guinea escapade, which was lampooned in the pages of the *Bulletin* magazine, Morrison's gentlemanly heroics had made him virtually a household name for Australian newspaper readers by the mid-1880s.<sup>252</sup> His next adventure occurred almost by accident, travelling to China in 1893 after missing a boat that was supposed to take him to Japan.<sup>253</sup> China was to become the "country of his future" for Morrison, remaining the focus of his life for the next quarter-century. Although he spoke next to know Chinese (and would never learn the language), Morrison decided to embark on a major trek through the country in a similar fashion to his exploration of the Australian hinterland a decade earlier. In 1894 he embarked on a 3,000-mile (4,800-kilometre) trip across western China to Burma, dressed in Chinese attire and wearing a fake pigtail attached to his hat. Morrison's journey would become the basis of his book *An Australian in China: The Narrative of a Quiet Journey Across China to British Burma*, published in both Sydney and London in 1895.<sup>254</sup>

Morrison claimed his long journey through China in the mid-1890s led him to distance himself from the anti-Chinese agitation that were being stoked back in Australia at that time by stridently racist publications like the *Bulletin* and *Boomerang*. "I went to China possessed with the strong racial antipathy to the Chinese common to my countrymen," Morrison writes in the opening pages of what would turn out to be his only published book. "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

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Pearl, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>252</sup> *Bulletin*, 1 December 1883, p. 4.

<sup>253</sup> Lo, op. cit., p. 3

<sup>254</sup> George Morrison, *An Australian in China: Being the Narrative of a Quiet Journey Across China to British Burma*, London, Horace Cox, 1895.

experienced, while traversing provinces as wide as European kingdoms, uniform kindness and hospitality, and the most charming courtesy.”<sup>255</sup>

Notwithstanding the kindness of strangers that he encountered on his travels, Morrison continued to harbour a degree of anti-Chinese sentiment throughout his book. Morrison spent two days in the city of Chaotong [Zhaotong] in Yunnan province, writing graphic descriptions of appalling torture and unnecessary human suffering. A young woman accused of adultery was “done to death in a cage, amid a crowd of spectators, who witnessed her agony for three days.”<sup>256</sup> One one of the city’s four gates a man had been nailed with red-hot nails hammered through his wrists, surviving four days after beating his head against the gate in a bid to quicken his death.<sup>257</sup> Morrison’s abhorrence at Chinese methods of punishment was coupled with a rather odd belief for a medical practitioner that Chinese people were more impervious to pain than other races:

No people are more cruel in their punishments than the Chinese, and obviously the reason is that the sensory nervous system of a Chinese is either blunted or arrested development. Can anyone doubt this who witnesses the stoicism with which a Chinaman can endure physical pain ..... And the indifference with which he contemplates the suffering of lower animals, and the infliction of torture on higher?<sup>258</sup>

Morrison’s modus operandi for travelling through rural China, according to Robin Gerster, was a “catalogue of colonialist assumptions that reveals much about how an Australian of his era and gender saw himself vis-a-vis Asia.”<sup>259</sup> Morrison adopted a condescending attitude towards the Chinese based on a belief in the racial and moral

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-104.

<sup>259</sup> Robin Gerster, “Representations of Asia,” in Peter Pierce (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 307.

superiority of Western culture and values, suggesting that they were less civilized than Morrison's Anglo-Saxon heritage:

On my journey I made it a rule, acting advisedly, to refuse to occupy any other than the best room in the inn, and, if there was only one room, I required that the best bed in the room, as regards elevation, should be given to me. So, too, at every inn I insisted that the best table should be given me, and, if there were already Chinese seated at it, I gravely bowed to them, and by a wave of my hand signified that it was my pleasure that they should make way for the distinguished stranger. When there was only the one table, I occupied, as by right, its highest seat, refusing to sit in any other. I required, indeed, by politeness and firmness, that the Chinese take me at my own valuation. And they invariably did so. They always gave way to me. They recognised that I must be a traveller of importance, despite the smallness of my retinue and the homeliness of my attire; and they acknowledged my superiority.<sup>260</sup>

Morrison also accepted no Western moral responsibility for China's chronic problems with opium addiction. Whilst he acknowledged the vast quantities of opium that the British were importing into China in the late 1800s, and witnessed first-hand the devastating effect that it was having on the Chinese populace, he said that "it is extremely difficult for the traveller in China to believe that the Chinese are sincere in their condemnation of opium and the opium traffic."<sup>261</sup>

Morrison only made a number of references to Chinese migration to Australia in his book, but what he did write was clearly seen by newspapers such as Sydney's *Evening News* was that "as an Australian, the author strongly expresses the opinion that they should be kept out of the country."<sup>262</sup> Morrison believed that Chinese migrants were

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<sup>260</sup> Morrison, op. cit., pp. 229-230.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>262</sup> *Evening News*, 19 October 1895, p. 1.

driving white settlers out of the Northern Territory and that their “unrestricted entry into the other colonies we must prevent at all hazards”. His “xenophobic fear” of Chinese migration was as vitriolic as some of the scare-mongering language employed by *Bulletin* editor Jules François Archibold or the *Boomerang*’s William Lane:<sup>263</sup>

We cannot compete with Chinese; we cannot intermix or marry with them; they are aliens in language, thought, and customs; they are working animals of low grade but great vitality. The Chinese is temperate, frugal, hard-working, and law-evading, if not law-abiding – we all acknowledge that. He can outwork an Englishman, and starve him out of the country – no one can deny that. To compete successfully with a Chinaman, the artisan or labourer of our own flesh and blood would require to be degraded into a mere mechanical beast of labour, unable to support wife or family, toiling seven days in the week, with no amusements, enjoyments, or comforts of any kind, no interest in the country, contributing no share towards the expense of government, living on food that he would now reject with loathing, crowded with his fellows ten or fifteen in a room that he would not now live in alone, except with repugnance. Admitted freely into Australia, the Chinese would starve out the Englishman, in accordance with the law of currency – that of two currencies in a country the baser will always supplant the better.<sup>264</sup>

Morrison’s book was well received when it was first published in Australia in 1895, garnishing renewed interest after Morrison was appointed as the Peking correspondent for the *Times* newspaper two years later. The *Ballarat Star* said that Morrison’s book highlighted another of the author’s “remarkable achievements in venturesome and economical travel.”<sup>265</sup> The *Morning Bulletin* in Rockhampton said in an article entitled “Winning Laurels for the *Times*” that people in diplomatic and media

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<sup>263</sup> Alan Knight, Reporting the “Orient”: Australian Foreign Correspondents in South East Asia, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wollongong, 1997, p. 37.

<sup>264</sup> Morrison, op. cit., pp. 223-224.

<sup>265</sup> *Ballarat Star*, 29 November 1895, p. 1.

circles in Britain and Australia were talking about the new Peking correspondent for the *Times*, “whose early exclusive and accurate information has done something towards reinstating the *Times* in its old position in London journalism.”<sup>266</sup> In an interview with Morrison in early February 1900, the *Queenslander* claimed that his book was “familiar to all students of Eastern affairs” and that his work for the *Times* “stamps him as being one of the most diplomatic litterateurs in the foreign service of that journal.”<sup>267</sup>

Morrison’s stature and reputation as a journalist working in China at the turn of the last century would be reinvigorated several decades later with eulogies from popular Australian writers including Banjo Paterson and the best-selling journalist Frank Clune, who sought to install Morrison as the “quintessential” Australian folk hero.<sup>268</sup> Journalist Peter Russo was to write in his introduction to Clune’s book on Morrison:

Every Australian schoolboy, every Australian in fact, should be as familiar with the saga of Morrison as Europeans are with the story of Marco Polo ... Morrison is our Marco Polo – a traveller, a scholar, a scientist, who has done more to demonstrate Australian initiative and enterprise in the Far East than any dozen Embassies or Departments of Information could ever hope to do.<sup>269</sup>

Clune also claimed that Morrison was far more tolerant of other racial groups than most ordinary Australians, despite strong anti-Chinese comments that the journalist made in his book and his eugenics-like views on the sensory nervous systems of Chinese people. Clune wrote that Morrison’s “sentiment of sympathy for non-Europeans was at variance with the hates, fears, phobias, complexes and dislikes

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<sup>266</sup> *Morning Bulletin*, 1 June 1898, p. 6.

<sup>267</sup> *Queenslander*, 1 February 1900, p. 247.

<sup>268</sup> For more details on the role and influence of Clune as “the most popular Australian historian of the first half of the twentieth century” see Bridget Griffen-Foley, “Digging up the Past: Frank Clune, Australian Historian and Media Personality,” *History Australia*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2011, pp. 127-152.

<sup>269</sup> Peter Russo, “Introduction,” to Frank Clune, *Chinese Morrison*, Melbourne, The Bread and Cheese Club, 1941, p. i.

of his fellow Australians, which culminated in the White Australia policy. He went on to argue that Morrison was “without prejudice of race or colour.”<sup>270</sup>

Earnest by name and earnest by nature, he (Morrison) had discovered the great truth that colour is only skin deep; that pigmentation of the hide of a kanaka, a Moor, a Jamaican negro, or an Aryan is only a surface disguise for the character of the man beneath.<sup>271</sup>

Knight argued, in contrast, that Morrison was “most definitely not invulnerable to 19th century Australian attitudes to people from Asia.”<sup>272</sup>

Much of the effort to rekindle public interest and establish Morrison as a re-imagined Australian cultural hero revolved around his role during the siege of the foreign legations from 20 June to 14 August 1900, when Boxer rebels cut Western diplomats and civilians off from the rest of the world. A number of contemporary accounts note Morrison’s gallantry during the siege, aiding foreigners with his medical expertise and helping to defend the diplomatic compound in Peking against attacks by the Chinese rebels. Whilst the diplomatic corp trapped in the legations included “prophets of doom, neurasthenics, hysterics and the plain mad,” there were also “level-headed, sanguine men like Morrison who did much to sustain morale by his good sense and cool demeanour.”<sup>273</sup> Mary Hooker, a young American woman holidaying in China with friends, became caught up in the fighting as rebels marched on the Chinese capital. Holed up in a temple near Feng-tai with a number of other Western women and children, their governesses and their Chinese servants, Hooker wrote in her diary on 28 May 1900 of the relief felt when Morrison arrived to assist them:

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<sup>270</sup> Frank Clune, *Chinese Morrison*, Melbourne, The Bread and Cheese Club, 1941, p. 23.

<sup>271</sup> Clune, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>272</sup> Knight, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>273</sup> H J Lethbridge, “Introduction” to Mary Hooker, *Behind the Scenes in Peking*, Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1987, p xi. Hooker’s book was originally published as *Behind the Scenes in Peking: Being Experiences During the Siege of the Legations* in London in 1910.



Our reward came when we saw down in the valley a dusty figure ambling along on a dusty Chinese pony, coming from the direction of Feng-tai and making direct for our temple. It was Dr Morrison, correspondent of the London *Times*.<sup>274</sup>

Trapped in the Peking legation quarter, Hooker wrote in her diary on 23 June 1900: "Dr Morrison is the most attractive at our impromptu mess; he works wherever a strong man is needed, and he is as dirty, happy, and healthy a hero as one could find anywhere."<sup>275</sup>

Morrison was to become a global media phenomenon in his own right at the height of the Peking siege when the *Daily Mail* newspaper in London on 16 July 1900 published an article datelined Shanghai claiming that Morrison had been killed in fighting to defend the British embassy, having been "put to the sword in the most atrocious manner."<sup>276</sup> The story turned out to be totally untrue, but that was not discovered until after the *Times* had published a glowing one-page obituary of their Peking correspondent:

No newspaper anxious to serve the best interests of the country has ever had a more devoted, a more fearless, and a more able servant than Morrison. An Australian by birth, he brought to the service of the *Times* and to the furtherance of British interests in the Far East, the deep and sustained enthusiasm for the greatness of the Empire which has so conspicuously distinguished our great self-governing colonies.<sup>277</sup>

In Australia, the incorrect story of Morrison's demise and the subsequent news of his supposedly miraculous escape from death at the hands of the Boxers fed into a

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<sup>274</sup> Mary Hooker, *Behind the Scenes in Peking*, Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 9.

<sup>275</sup> Hooker, op. Cit., p. 69.

<sup>276</sup> *Daily Mail*, 16 July 1900 cited in Knight, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>277</sup> *Times* obituary of Morrison cited in Julia Boyd, *A Dance With the Dragon: The Vanished World of Peking's Foreign Colony*, London, I B Tauris, 2012, p. 56.

populist anti-Chinese narrative that recurringly gained traction in public debate. Newspapers across the country headlined Morrison's murder by the barbaric Chinese. In an article headlined the "Peking Horror", the *Advertiser* newspaper in Adelaide published a list of those foreigners allegedly killed by Boxer rebels, noted that "Dr Morrison, too, whose fame as a courageous traveller and a talented journalist, has filled Australians with pride, is also included in the general dead."<sup>278</sup> The Melbourne *Argus* reported that 20,000 Christians had been slaughtered, one million Chinese had taken up arms against foreigners and that many of the West's treaty ports were now under serious threat.<sup>279</sup>

By the first week of August 1900 Morrison was to prove that reports of his death had been premature, with the *Times* publishing a despatch from their Peking correspondent dated 17 July 1900 setting out the scene in the diplomatic compound. The *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser* in Queensland captured the public mood with a headline referring to Morrison's "reincarnation."<sup>280</sup> In South Australia, the *Millicent Times* said that Morrison's escape from the Peking siege with his life was a clear demonstration that he was "one of the very greatest special correspondents of the present day."<sup>281</sup>

In other ages he would perhaps have been an explorer – a Christopher Columbus or Tycho Brahe – or some other of the men who have traversed strange continents, opened wide new domains to human civilization, and risked every peril of land, wild beast and wild man.<sup>282</sup>

Frank Clune took up a similar theme in the two of his books that featured Morrison prominently. "Free he was, and freely flew his dispatches to London, thrilling

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<sup>278</sup> *Advertiser*, 18 July 1900, p. 5.

<sup>279</sup> *Argus*, 20 July 1900, p. 5.

<sup>280</sup> *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser*, 3 August 1900, p. 2.

<sup>281</sup> *Millicent Times*, 6 October 1900, p. 4.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

the world with the greatest newspaper scoop of history, an eye-witnesses account of the Boxer Rebellion,”<sup>283</sup> Clune wrote regarding Morrison’s survival of the siege and the Boxer attacks on the foreign legations. “The siege of the legations and his bogus death placed him on the pinnacle of fame, as the greatest news-getter and cable-vibrator of the epoch.”<sup>284</sup> Clune’s historical treatment of Morrison is not exceptional, with Fay Anderson pointing out that much of the existing treatment of Australian reporters “is often celebratory, simplistic and hagiographic” or what Susan Carruthers describes as “journalist mythography”.<sup>285</sup>

The historical record also suggests that Morrison was perhaps not the “greatest news-getter and cable-vibrator” that Clune claimed him to be, and that he was more interested in being a player in the West’s imperialist project that was being played out in China than as an objective journalist reporting on events. Whilst his dispatch from the Peking siege proving that he was not actually dead and that a wholesale massacre of foreigners had not occurred was a world-wide scoop, Hugh Trevor-Roper points out that Morrison was actually “taken by surprise by both the great Chinese insurrections which occurred in his time – the Boxer rising of 1900 and the revolution of 1911.”<sup>286</sup>

Despite living in Peking for 22 years, Morrison made no effort to learn the language and he showed little interest in understanding the inner workings of Chinese politics. “Morrison’s concern with the internal politics of China was entirely subordinate to his imperialism. He made no attempt to understand the Chinese point of view,” according to Trevor-Roper.<sup>287</sup> Timothy Kendall notes that “it is worth remembering that

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<sup>283</sup> Frank Clune, *Sky High to Shanghai: An Account of my Oriental Travels in the Spring of 1938, with Side Glances at the History, Geography and Politics of the Asiatic Littoral, Written with Charity to all and Malice to None*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1947, p. 309.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Anderson, op cit, p 11. Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000, p. 15, as cited in Fay Anderson, “Good Campers: The History of Australian War Reporting,” *History Compass*, Vol. 8, No. 10, 2000, p. 1167.

<sup>286</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Hermit of Peking: The Hidden Life of Sir Edmund Backhouse*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1978, p. 45.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

Morrison considered himself first and foremost a member of the British Empire: he wrote for British newspapers, as a British subject, and his reports were used to help facilitate the British imperial project in China.”<sup>288</sup> According to one of his biographers, Morrison continued to consider China as “a mere field of strife among the Great Powers” and “never linked the outbreak of what is known as the Boxer Uprising with the events taking place in China immediately prior to it.”<sup>289</sup>

One of the more substantive challenges to the “myth” of Morrison as Australia’s greatest foreign correspondent comes from a comparative study of the *Times*’ coverage of the Boxer Rebellion vis-a-vis a number of other newspapers that had reporters on the ground in China. Whilst Morrison may have been an heroic character tending to the wounded and manning the garrisons during the Peking siege, his news gathering and reporting during the Boxer uprising left his readers with a somewhat distorted picture of what was going on in China. “It is important to note that the portrayal of facts and events in the *Times* was more persistently inaccurate than any other comparable newspaper,” according to Jane Elliott. “It also showed less understanding of any of the internal social and political pressures in China than did other newspapers.”<sup>290</sup>

Elliott analysed the *Times* coverage of the Boxer Rebellion principally against that of the *New York World* newspaper, concluding that the *Times* provided its readers with “highly coloured, emotive and inaccurate reporting,” in contrast to the *World* which, “showed exemplary standards of reporting of a contentious event in an almost inaccessible country.”<sup>291</sup> She found that the *Times* used language designed to denigrate the Chinese and selected news from rumour concerning military operations on the basis

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<sup>288</sup> Timothy Kendall, *Ways of Seeing China: From Yellow Peril to Shangrila*, Fremantle, Curtin University Books/Fremantle Press, 2005, p. 96.

<sup>289</sup> Lo, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>290</sup> Jane Elliott, “Who Seeks the Truth Should be of No Country: British and American Journalists Reporting the Boxer Rebellion, June 1900,” *American Journalism*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1996, pp. 255-285, p. 165.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

of what gave the impression of British success.<sup>292</sup> This contrasted with American newspapers that were prepared to acknowledge Chinese military successes. Gerster is equally scathing of Morrison, arguing that his dispatches from China during the Boxer uprising were “full of half-truths and racially directed misreadings.”<sup>293</sup>

Letter after letter sent to Morrison by the *Times*’ formidable foreign editor Valentine Chirol regarding the content and style of his dispatches from Peking were also “of such an elementary nature as to cast some doubt on Morrison’s professional ability as a journalist.”<sup>294</sup> In a letter dated 31 March 1898, Chirol told Morrison that an article on the Trans-Manchurian Railway “crammed almost too much information into the space ... as someone remarked to me it was a plum cake with nothing but plums.”<sup>295</sup> On 11 August 1898 Chirol suggested that Morrison should try to repress his “righteous indignation” at the “blundering and lying” of the British government as it weakens the effect of the “accurate statement of facts” contained in his dispatches.<sup>296</sup> In December of the same year, the *Times* foreign editor urged his Peking correspondent to “avoid such a sarcastic and contemptuous tone” in responding to articles filed by other reporters on the newspaper.<sup>297</sup>

Whilst the definitive study of Morrison’s role as a foreign correspondent in China at the turn of the last century has yet to be written, the work of academics such as Kendall and Elliott suggest that there are a number of serious question marks over the partisanship of his reporting, particularly when it concerned British imperial interests. His stature as a high-profile journalist on an influential newspaper like the *Times* of London also gave him a voice in Australian public debate about China and the Chinese people, who he stridently argued should be restricted in entering Australia.

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid, p. 285.

<sup>293</sup> Gerster, op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>294</sup> Elliott, op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>295</sup> Letter from Valentine Chirolin to George Morrison cited in Lo, op. cit., pp. 75-76.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., pp. 106-107.

## Conclusion

Less than 10 months after first embarking on their Chinese adventure the servicemen of the New South Wales and Victorian naval brigades were on their way home. In the short time they had been away they had missed the historic celebrations for Australian federation and the opening of the first Australian parliament in Melbourne in May 1901. Compounding the anticlimactic nature of their return to Australia was the fact that the *SS Chingtu* ship on which the contingents were travelling was placed into quarantine when it first reached Sydney in late April 1901 due to concerns that one of the men was suffering from smallpox. The ignominy of being placed in quarantine “typified the whole enterprise, which had started with noble aims but which, through no fault of its own, had deteriorated into a rather unadventurous affair.”<sup>298</sup>

Brigade members had been offered onshore accommodation at the Sydney quarantine station at North Head, but declined the offer as they didn’t want to be separated from their cargo of Chinese artefacts and other relics. “No prudent sailor was going to abandon his ‘rabbits’, as sailors call presents brought back from overseas, if at all possible,” Bob Nicholls writes.<sup>299</sup>

Having next to no military role to play in the campaign against the Boxers, the Australian servicemen had allegedly spent a fair deal of their time looting and burning villages as they marched through northern China.<sup>300</sup> In a speaking tour in August 1901, after he had returned home, Wynne told a laughing audience that the members of the naval contingent “for the most part did pretty well for themselves” despite seeing very little real military action.<sup>301</sup> “That they did not actually come into conflict with the Boxers

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<sup>298</sup> Bob Nicholls, *Handy Men up Top*, Balmain NSW, Ditty Press, 1990, p. 23.

<sup>299</sup> Nicholls, *Bluejackets*, p. 133.

<sup>300</sup> Henry Reynolds, *Unnecessary Wars*, Sydney, NewSouth Publishing, 2016, p. 25.

<sup>301</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 9 August 1901.

was not their fault; they were always looking for trouble, and occasionally they stumbled across a small patch of it in an unofficial way,” Wynne told the Waverley Bowling Club in Sydney, according to a report of the meeting in the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>302</sup>

The Victorian contingent, who were left to find their own way home from Sydney after eventually disembarking from the quarantined SS *Chingtu*, apparently did particularly well on the looting front. “The most creditable service they rendered, if sack and pillage can ever be considered creditable, was the amount of Chinese culture they amassed and brought back to Victoria,” according to one somewhat frank military history of the Boxer campaign.<sup>303</sup> The NSW contingent also did well for themselves, collecting a bounty including a large cast bronze Buddhist temple bell that is now part of the collection of Sydney’s Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences.<sup>304</sup>

The South Australian crew of the *Protector* fared slightly better in their welcome home in Adelaide. The ship had been in Sydney for federation celebrations and a detachment of her crew also formed part of the guard of honour for the Governor-General, the Earl of Hopetoun, at the ceremony.<sup>305</sup> The *Adelaide Advertiser* noted that the crew “had a splendid course of training during their long voyage, and they will be all the more valuable adjuncts of the defence force because of it.”<sup>306</sup> But the newspaper conceded that the ship had not been involved in any fighting against the Chinese. “The greatest danger through which they have passed was the typhoon which howled around them during the homeward voyage from Wei-hai-wei to Hong Kong, and in that hour of peril they showed all the pluck and coolness for which the British sailor is everywhere famous,” the paper wrote when the *Protector* docked in Adelaide.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Evans, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>304</sup> <https://maas.museum/magazine/2018/10/ming-dynasty-temple-bell/>

<sup>305</sup> *Advertiser*, 7 January 1901, p. 7.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

Yet despite returning home with an abundance of the spoils of war, many of the servicemen who spent time in China returned feeling deflated and disillusioned. The military campaign against the Boxers was more or less over by the time they reached northern China, leaving the Australians with little to do except for some policing work and other jobs like fighting fires and dealing with sanitation issues. The promise of military glory on the battlefields of a foreign land was not to be forthcoming. Many also felt that their cause had been overshadowed by the Boer War in South Africa, to which the Australian colonies had committed far more troops. These negative sentiments were summed up in the poetry of Able Seaman William Bertotto, who kept a detailed diary of the contingent's short time in China:

Nobody knows what happened to us, nobody knows or cares  
Only those who fought old Kruger are allowed to put on airs ....  
Nobody cared when we landed, only those we came to save  
But those we left behind us will ne'er have a stone to their grave ....  
We are back on board our ships again, back from the jaws of Hell  
And the soldiers can finish the racket, we have cleared the road so well.<sup>308</sup>

Whilst the Australian "bluejackets" may have felt disheartened by their experiences in northern China, the newspaper coverage of their escapades was unprecedented. Never before had an Australian military campaign in Asia been covered by designated war correspondents. The backdrop for the campaign was also a renewed cyclical wave of anti-Chinese agitation as the nation's founding fathers prepared to enshrine a White Australia Policy as the centrepiece of a newly federated Australia.

The principal aim of my thesis has been to critically examine how these Australian journalists covering the Boxer Rebellion interpreted and represented China

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<sup>308</sup> William Bertotto quoted in Nicholls, op. cit., p. 134.



for an Australian domestic audience and the role that their dispatches from China played in informing public discourse back in Australia.

Chapter 1 provided a broad overview of the role of the press in encouraging anti-Chinese sentiment in the Australian colonies in the late 19th century. It showed that anti-Chinese racism has been deeply embedded in Australia's national psyche since the early years of European settlement. Australia's vibrant colonial newspapers both encouraged and reflected this phenomenon, which was at its worst during the gold rushes of the 1850s but continued to flare up over subsequent decades. Periodicals like the *Bulletin* and *Boomerang* were particularly strident in their xenophobic condemnation of the Chinese amid warnings that Australia was in danger of being overwhelmed by "yellow hordes".

The decision of the Australian colonies in mid-1900 to answer the clarion call of the British government to lend support to the military campaign in China therefore occurred at a prescient time in the development of the country's national consciousness. This decision to once again contribute to Britain's imperialist project was at odds with the views of many who argued for a more independent and robust form of Australian nationalism.

Evaluating the role played by the media at such a critical juncture in Australian history would be difficult in any time period, but is especially so in an era like the early 1900s that pre-dates the modern opinion poll. In his study of Australia-China relations, Eric Andrews argues that "in the absence of opinion polls and modern methods of statistical collection and analysis, it is impossible to determine the impact of such writing."<sup>309</sup> Yet he also notes that Wynne's coverage in the *Daily Telegraph* in particular was "clearly directed towards the debate on the Immigration Restriction Bill, and racist arguments were widely used in federal parliament when the Bill was discussed."<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Andrews, op. cit. p. 32.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

McWhinney also concludes that Wynne's "hard racist attitude, coming from the centre of events in China and the very source of Chinese migration to Australia, must have had some influence on the opinion of Australian readers."<sup>311</sup>

Yet despite the near impossibility of establishing a direct causal link between press coverage of events like the Boxer military intervention and public attitudes, it is perhaps possible to ascertain some form of interplay between media representations of China and the Chinese people and Australian public perception. There are two key elements to consider in such an evaluation: did the newspaper coverage of Australia's military involvement in the Boxer Rebellion from reporters such as Wynne, John Wallace of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and George Morrison (an Australian writing for the London *Times*) have any discernible impact on Australian attitudes towards China as a sovereign nation? And was there any impact on how the Australian populace subsequently viewed Chinese people?

Australian engagement with Asia, and particularly with China, was virtually non-existent throughout the 19th century. Our perception of China as a nation was rudimentary at best and xenophobic in the extreme. During much of the 1800s the main threat from China was not seen to be a military one, but was instead the fear that Australia would be swamped by teeming hordes of Chinese immigrants.

Allied military successes against the Boxers in the lead-up to (and after) the 55-day siege of the foreign legations in Peking in 1900 accentuated this belief that the Chinese nation did not pose an immediate military threat to Australia. This was in contrast with grudging respect for the military discipline of the Japanese troops fighting in northern China, who would go on to inflict an embarrassing defeat on the Russian army in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05.

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<sup>311</sup> McWhinney, op. cit., p. 144.

Whilst the eventual failure of the Boxer Rebellion convinced editorial writers on Australian papers, taking their lead from reporting by Wynne and Wallace, that China remained militarily weak, “it also made them wonder if she was not ‘awakening’.”<sup>312</sup> Such sentiments were most clearly on display at the height of the uprising in June and July 1900. In an article ominously entitled “The Mongol Awakening”, the *Daily Telegraph* (Wynne’s paper) expressed surprise at some of the earlier successes of the Chinese rebels. “Not only have the Boxers proved themselves to be possessed of the most improved modern weapons,” the newspaper said. “But they have shown an ability to use them against trained European troops which will come as a revelation to those who have been accustomed to look upon China as an impossible military power.” The newspaper went on to warn:

The yellow giant, who was believed to be dying, may only have been in a heavy slumber, from which he is about to awake. If so it might be somewhat awkward for all those who have been calculating upon his inevitable demise.<sup>313</sup>

The Melbourne *Argus* expressed similar sentiments, noting that the events in China would “profoundly affect both Australian politics and the Australian character.”<sup>314</sup> Commenting after some initial victories for the Boxer army in 1900, the newspaper warned that further wins for the Chinese rebels could see “a pagan state created, a vast, armed and victorious power, within a few days’ sail of our own shores.” This would find Australia living beneath a “changed political sky.”<sup>315</sup> The paper quite rightly pointed out that Australia’s close geographical relations with Asia “have not yet affected our imagination or our politics; for the East has been in its normal state of slumber.” But it

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<sup>312</sup> Andrews, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>313</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 3 July 1900, p. 4.

<sup>314</sup> *Argus*, 21 July 1900, p. 12.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

cautioned that “if the East permanently awakens, this must profoundly affect Australia and Australians.”<sup>316</sup>

The *Daily Telegraph* returned to the same theme several weeks later, once again noting that Australia “is perilously near to China and would be in a position of great danger if the mighty forces of empire, now dormant, could be awakened.”<sup>317</sup> The newspaper also suggests that Australia needed to make its own policy decisions with respect to China, as the exercise of their potential power would have a greater impact on Australia than on other Western countries. It concludes that “the Chinese question is very much an Australian one, vastly more so than the South African war was.”<sup>318</sup> Similar views were expressed by some parliamentarians in Australia’s colonial legislatures and in the new national parliament from 1901, with some MPs warning of the possibility of a “tremendous influx” of Chinese migrants as a result of the destabilising impact on China of the Boxer Rebellion.<sup>319</sup>

Whilst metaphors of awakening giants characterised Australian perceptions of the Chinese state in the late 19th century, attitudes towards Chinese people in Australia were dominated by racial stereotypes that had become fixed due to decades of tension with migrants from China. Throughout this period the Australian colonies experienced recurring episodes of anti-Chinese agitation, each of them a result of temporary increases in Chinese immigration. These episodes repeatedly led to violence and were usually followed by legislative efforts to impose tougher restrictions on Chinese entry into Australia.

The racial stereotypes of the Chinese people that came to the fore during these periods of unrest portrayed them as cunning, duplicitous, dirty and depraved. These stereotypes were, to a large extent, driven by “ignorance of the Orient and fear of things

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 27 July 1900.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> McWhinney, op. cit. p. 127.

not understood.”<sup>320</sup> But they were also influenced by pre-conceived notions of British racial superiority.<sup>321</sup> In their coverage of the Boxer Rebellion, Wynne, Wallace and Morrison all reinforced these racist stereotypes in their dispatches from China, fuelling anti-Chinese prejudices at a critical point in Australia’s birth as a modern nation. The “shameless immorality” of the Chinese made Wynne “shudder”, while Wallace found Peking to “indescribably dirty” and “reeking with vile smells.”<sup>322</sup> McWhinney argues that the major impact of Australia’s involvement in the Boxer Rebellion “was to bring racism once more to the fore in public references to the Chinese and to harden racist attitudes towards them.”<sup>323</sup>

Many of the views of Wynne and Wallace, as well as those of Morrison and Banjo Paterson, reflected an anti-Chinese xenophobia that had been percolating in colonial Australia for decades. But 19th century Australia’s vibrant press must also have played a considerable role in helping to mould the opinions of a radicalised and increasing literate rural and urban working class. The *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*, which both enjoyed healthy circulations, gave extensive coverage to the Boxer Rebellion. Sensational newspaper headlines, as well as lengthy articles from their correspondents, echoed community fears that China was potentially an “awakening giant” and that the Chinese who had migrated to Australia were a threat to white workers and their womenfolk.

Although the Boxer Rebellion eventually proved to be a relatively minor military operation for Australian servicemen, the Australian press committed considerable resources to its coverage. With Australian nationhood just around the corner and immigration restrictions high on the agenda of incoming lawmakers, on-the-ground news stories and analysis about China gained extra weight. But the press, across a variety of publications, was also active in promoting its views about how a federated

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<sup>320</sup> Wilson Evans, *Deeds Not Words*, Melbourne, The Hawthorn Press, 1971, pp. 88-89.

<sup>321</sup> McWhinney, op. cit., p. 133.

<sup>322</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 19 January 1901, p. 5., *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 November 1900, p. 5.

<sup>323</sup> McWhinney, op. cit., p. 129. Also see Andrews, op. cit., p. 31.

Australia would look and the policy directions it would follow. When it came to issues concerning China, the Australian turn-of-the-century press was both an opinion-maker and an opinion-taker.

This thesis forms part of a more extensive research project that will consider the role of Australian journalists reporting from China across a much lengthier timeframe, encompassing much of the 20th century. This project, in the form of a PhD thesis at Macquarie University, will also examine the role of other media platforms that have become more important over the past century or so, including radio, television and online news and social media outlets.

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