AUSTRALIA'S ASIA

From yellow peril to Asian century

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INTRODUCTION: AUSTRALIA’S ASIA

David Walker and Agnieszka Sobocinska

Unprecedented Asia
Strange things happen when Australians look north. Asia seems to take on exaggerated shapes that lurch between extremes: from becalmed innocence to menace, from dazzling wealth to atrocious poverty, from the gorgeous Orient to monstrous Asia. Australians have frequently felt uncertain about what might happen in the shifting region to their north. There is a disorienting sense that the continent is unchanging and yet changing so fast we cannot keep up. Rising Asia has long been presented as a test for Australians: a test of their geographical and cultural knowledge, of their sympathies and of their willingness to learn from and adapt to new geo-political and economic realities. Many critics would argue that it is a test the nation has consistently failed, giving rise to repeated injunctions for Australians to become Asia-literate. Such calls are often accompanied by a warning that time is running out, that backward Australia must adapt to an increasingly prosperous and educated Asia if it is to survive.

The problem of a nation poorly equipped to address the region it inhabits has been compounded by repeated claims that
we face an all-new Asia. In announcing a White Paper investigating *Australia in the Asian Century* in September 2011, Prime Minister Julia Gillard referred to a new China, a new India and an increasingly confident Asia-Pacific region. She twice insisted that ‘we have not been here before’. Gillard is not alone in making this claim. From the first line, Hugh White’s controversial *Power Shift: Australia’s future between Washington and Beijing* claims that ‘we will have to start thinking about our place in the world all over again from the ground up, and make choices we have never before faced’. Michael Wesley, in *There Goes the Neighbourhood: Australia and the rise of Asia*, agrees that history is no guide, as this ‘strange new world’ presents challenges that are ‘further outside our established routines, expectations and historical models than any we’ve had to deal with before’.

While it is inevitably true that all futures are new, it does not follow that they are wholly unprecedented. For a century or more, Australians have been warning each other that a ‘new’ Asia looms just over the horizon. One of the arguments of this book is that ‘unprecedented Asia’ has emerged over time as an appealing, though largely inaccurate, fiction. Some of the appeal of this trope derives from the fact that it dispenses with the need to address the untidy – and sometimes awkward – history of Australia’s past encounters with Asia. There is no better way to shed historical baggage than by declaring it trivial and irrelevant. Unprecedented Asia has the further benefit of dramatising the work of politicians, academics and commentators. It converts those who are concerned with Australia’s Asian future into visionaries, bravely going where none have gone before.

Yet we have been here before. The rhetorical strategies of Gillard, White and Wesley – admonishing comments about
Australians’ ignorance of Asia followed by exhortations to wake up – have occurred so often as to be a regular feature of Australian life. They are as Australian as Vegemite, only older. In 1915, Prime Minister Andrew Fisher made the same point about Japan’s rise: it had ‘no parallel in our history’. Indeed, Japan’s rise to great power status in the late nineteenth century was at least as rapid as China’s rise today; moreover, coming at a time when Asian races were widely considered inferior, it was conceptually more confronting. Australians have long known, suspected or feared that China would rise to world-power status, too. Much of Australia’s Cold War was premised on this belief. The sense of crisis was heightened by the decolonisation of much of Asia – a transformation at least as dramatic as the changes that have given rise to today’s ‘Asian Century’. Casting his eye over post-war Asia, journalist George Johnston thought that ‘we stand at the very beginning of another great cycle of civilisation’ that, one day, ‘will push the centre of gravity of civilisation back to the Orient’.

The Asian Century construct is premised on the region’s rising economic power; and we have been here before, too. While the rise of ‘Chindia’ has a pleasingly twenty-first century ring to it, it represents a return to a long-term status quo. Asia dominated the global economy before the industrial revolution, accounting for over half the world’s economic output at a time when Western economies made up less than a quarter. More recently, Japan’s post-war rise to global powerhouse was as precipitous, and in the long shadow cast by Japan’s brutality to Australian POWs, perhaps more disturbing than the contemporary situation. Anticipating his twenty-first century counterparts by fifty years, popular author Colin Simpson again thought that
Japan’s rise had no precedent, as ‘history is happening so fast… that the attitudes taken in any book about any country can get out of date between the pen and the printer’.7

The idea that ‘Asia’ would have a determining influence on Australia’s future also has a long history. Indeed, it is a central theme in our national story. Successive generations have been told that their future would be increasingly Asian, with the clear implication that that would also mean ‘less Australian’. Through the 1880s, ‘Rising Asia’ became shorthand for a looming geo-political conflict. Writing in 1888, the Queensland labour activist William Lane thought all-out race war was just a generation away. He imagined Australia fighting to determine whether it would have a ‘white’ or a ‘yellow’ future. Whatever the outcome, there was no question that emerging Asia would completely transform Australia. While Lane wrote of invasion, his primary purpose was to instil the idea that Asia would become an undeniable geo-political force.

In one form or another, Australia’s imagined Asian crisis has hovered just over the horizon ever since. As historian Neville Meaney has argued, defending Australia against a potential Asian threat has long formed the centrepiece of Australia’s foreign and defence policies. Japan’s victory over the Russian fleet in the Pacific in 1905 precipitated decades of policy designed to prevent Japan from threatening white Australia.8 In the mindset of the times, Australia was a continent adrift in an alien sea, its settler population far removed from the British homeland. Prime Minister Billy Hughes thought Australia was ‘a tiny drop in a coloured ocean’, and therefore on the front line of the much-discussed rise of Asia. He was not alone. The American race theorist Lothrop Stoddard had made a similar claim in The
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Rising Tide of Color. In the 1920s British journalist Fleetwood Chidell drew on Lane’s dichotomy to warn against the threat of Japan in Australia – White or Yellow?

Invasion scares were rife as the Japanese advanced through South-East Asia during World War II. They also continued into the Cold War, by which time China’s red spear points had become the focus of existential anxieties. In 1955, Prime Minister Robert Menzies spoke with dread of the day when ‘the aggressor is actually landing in Australia’. By 1958, the British writer and moralist Malcolm Muggeridge warned that this day would come within fifteen years. Shadowy fears lurked even as relations with Asia warmed.

In the 1990s, as Australia embarked on a program of Asian ‘engagement’ under Prime Minister Paul Keating, John Marsden’s popular Tomorrow series thrilled adolescent readers by portraying the invasion of Australia from an unspecified but clearly Asian source. Later in the same decade, Pauline Hanson, as leader of the One Nation party, argued that the dangers posed by Asia were more fact than fiction, and that Australia had been invaded by Asian immigrants. Fear had come to the forefront of national politics. The sense of vulnerability also shaped academic thought and serious commentary. In the late 1990s, Asianist and former diplomat Stephen FitzGerald published Is Australia an Asian Country? its subtitle asking ‘can Australia survive in an East Asian future?’ A generation earlier, Donald Horne had written his famous account of Australia, The Lucky Country, because ‘in the future it might be of interest to know what the huge continent was like...before it was peopled from all over Asia’. Almost fifty years on, the sentiment remains very familiar. The fact that these warnings are now largely forgotten does not mean that the rise of Asia had gone unnoticed by earlier generations.
or, if noticed, was considered inconsequential. It simply reveals Australians’ habit of forgetting the past, and assuming that theirs is the first generation to face a rising Asia.

Defensive gestures have always been accompanied by dreams of untold riches. Asia’s huge population may have been read as a threat, but it also promised vast new markets. Wesley’s recent claim that the Asian Century has drawn a new ‘map of financial and economic power’ recalls Brisbane Telegraph editor T. W. Heney’s 1919 advice that ‘every Australian businessman should carry a map of China in his head’. Wesley’s exhortation that Australians ‘wake up!’ to Asia’s markets also echoes that of popular author Frank Clune, who returned from his 1939 tour of South-East Asia’s markets crying ‘Wake up Australia!’ Waking up a sleeping public remains an essential accompaniment to warnings about the rise of Asia. Yet, despite contemporary claims of complacency, Asian markets have increasingly dominated Australian trade since the signing of the first bilateral commercial agreement with Japan in 1957. The decades following the normalisation of diplomatic relations with China in 1972 were also characterised by a concerted attempt to enter this giant economy, to the extent that Australia’s first Ambassador to the People’s Republic, Stephen FitzGerald, worried that we were placing ‘exaggerated importance’ on China over and above other markets. Again, we have been here before.

So why do we continue to insist that we haven’t? And what is the outcome of such thinking? A fixation on the future inevitably lends itself to a literature of exhortation in which knowing authorities admonish a public too lazy, backward or ignorant to understand the increasingly Asian world bearing down upon them. This might heighten the drama of Australia’s
impending Asian encounter, but it also reduces the content of the debate. The notion that Australia’s Asian future presents a more dramatic challenge than anything Australia has faced before dismisses a long history of encounters with Asia. If what is looming over the horizon is unprecedented, there can be little value in considering the history of Australia’s responses to Asia. The theatrics increase the risk that discussions of future Australian relations with Asia are removed from the actualities of past relations and present policies.

Why do we need a firmer sense of history? For a start, a historical awareness of Australians’ reflexive responses to Asia, including the notion that Asia is always unprecedented and probably disruptive, can help put contemporary anxieties into context. If we do not understand the rise of Asia in historical terms, but place it outside of history, we are more likely to feel at the mercy of forces beyond our comprehension. Seen as sudden and cataclysmic, Australia’s Asian encounter is overdramatised: we are taken into the realm of floods, storms and tsunamis that sweep down upon vulnerable, unsuspecting populations without warning. A sense of history lays bare the ways in which the language of Asian encounter has been conditioned to produce a heightened sense of excitement and menace. It helps us identify ways in which current exhortations reproduce Orientalist patterns. By looking to the past, we can uncover the patterns of exhortatory rhetoric that have done more to sensationalise Asian encounters than clarify the extent and direction of change. It is understandable that Australians may have some difficulty considering the rise of Asia calmly when Asia has been routinely invoked as a terminal threat. But recognising the routine can be useful in itself.
Australia’s Asian pasts

*Australia’s Asia* examines the Asian dimensions of Australian history from the nineteenth century to the present. While many would accept that Australia’s proximity to Asia has played an increasingly important role since the 1970s, Australia and Asia have had longer and more fascinating ties than most would realise. Rather than being something new that Australians are confronting for the first time, proximity to and contact with Asia pre-dates European settlement. Macassan sailors – from islands in what is now Indonesia – had established trade connections with a number of Aboriginal nations well before white settlement. Links to Java and India were vital during the early years of settlement, and connections with Asia multiplied during the nineteenth century. They were accompanied by a growing realisation that while the Australian colonies were British, they were located on the edge of Asia. Over the next two hundred years, the Asia ‘without’ and the Asia ‘within’ were constituted by the lives, imaginings and cross-cultural contacts of Asians and Australians.

This longer trajectory establishes a different, more elusive, history of Australian contact with Asia. It points to the fact that Australia’s northern and western regions have their own histories that differ substantially from the dominant southern and eastern coast narratives. It also serves to unsettle some things we now take for granted, including whether Europeans had the capacity to colonise the Australian continent in the first place. It was widely accepted well into the 1920s that the tropical north was not suited for European settlement. Such anxieties carried a troubling undertone: perhaps Asian settlers would push Europeans aside just as Europeans had displaced the ‘evanescent’ Indigenous
population. Australia’s Asian destiny, a regularly invoked and just as regularly suppressed theme, has acted as a shadow narrative to the more triumphalist stories of white settlement and the conquest of a hard land. *Australia’s Asia* provides the basis for a reading of our past that recognises Asia as an ongoing formative presence near the centre of our national history rather than as a minor and readily ignored influence on the fringes.¹⁷

Much of the attraction in arguing for a fresh focus on our history lies in uncovering unknown connections and untold stories, in finding new sources and novel ways of viewing Australia’s past. Many of the pieces in this historical puzzle are missing, obscured or difficult to interpret. Even the language we use points to an often confusing lexicon. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, China went by various names: Cathay, the Middle Kingdom, the Celestial or Flowery Kingdom. It was variously part of the Orient or Far East. The Chinese, too, went by a number of names, some of which had a scientific or anthropological gloss – Tartars, Turanians, Mongolians – while others were simply derogatory: asiatics, orientals, celestials, coolies, chows, chinks, John Chinaman. Japan was the name commonly used but was also known as Nippon, Dai Nippon and the Mikado. It attracted frequent references to the yellow torrent or tide, the yellow hordes and the yellow agony alongside the better known yellow peril. While India proved a relatively stable name, its inhabitants were commonly referred to as coolies, Hindoos, Lascars or Afghans. The slippage of Indian to refer to any number of peoples from the Americas to the Pacific Islands further complicated the picture, as did European colonisers’ tendency to brand any new acquisitions The Indies. What is now Indonesia was once the Netherlands
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or Dutch East Indies – but it was more widely known as the Spice Islands. Indonesians were referred to as Malays, Javans, Macassans, or most often by the generic ‘natives’.

There were also formal changes of name that reflected the region’s political dynamism. Siam, also known as the Elephant Kingdom, became Thailand. French Indochina fragmented into the independent states of Cambodia and Laos, as well as the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (better known as North Vietnam) and the Republic of Vietnam (usually referred to as South Vietnam). The Cold War brought new terms and more confusion. China became Red China or the Red Empire to Communism’s opponents; New China, People’s China or the PRC to its supporters. The ‘alternative New China’, Taiwan, was also known as Formosa, Republican China or ROC. The variety of terms suggests a region that was simultaneously ubiquitous and elusive. Australians were concerned with Asia’s looming presence, but it was never easy to determine who Asians were, or what they were like. Asia was difficult to grasp.

One reason why Australians have found knowing ‘Asia’ so difficult is that no such entity exists. The continent is home to a great variety of peoples, languages, cultures and political systems. There has never been one Asia that Australia can engage, and fears of ‘Asian invasion’ – as well as hopes for ‘Asian engagement’ or even ‘Asia literacy’ – are equally improbable. Even containing a single nation can be difficult: Australian ideas about Java and Bali, for example, have often been starkly opposed despite the fact that they are adjacent islands within a single nation. Anxieties about Java’s dark undercurrents have haunted Australians in a way that the warm sentiments evoked by Bali have not – even after the Bali bombings. Such opposing ideas
complicate the notion of forming coherent perceptions of even a single nation, and highlight the impossibility of ever ‘knowing’ Asia. But there should be no sense of disappointment that Asia cannot be reduced to simple, stable and agreed meanings.

Similarly, Australian representations of Asia resist easy interpretation. While consistent warnings about impending threats from the north might imply a straightforward fear of Asian invasion, the fact that so many wake-up calls were needed suggests otherwise. There would hardly have been a need to continually remind the population of impending danger if invasion anxiety was as deep-seated as is often claimed. The yellow peril may have been advancing, but critics complained that Australians were too relaxed and comfortable to take proper notice. In Kenneth McKay’s *The Yellow Wave*, an invasion story published in 1897, the dangers are presented in stark terms: the Russians and the Chinese plan to overwhelm the Australian colonies. Terrible things are afoot. Yet the population fails to recognise the danger. Some inconclusive bar-room speculation about the threat is quickly put aside after a messenger brings news of the Melbourne Cup: all talk turns to horses, jockeys and betting. This is a community so besotted by sport that geo-political threats fail to register.

Furthermore, while the invasion narrative may appear to look outwards to ‘Asia’, it serves to size up and evaluate the nation itself. Themes as central to Australian history and identity as the bush legend and the concept of Australia as an empty continent owe a good deal to the proximity of Asia. While the figure of the bushman served a number of purposes in the late nineteenth century, one of them was as the idealised race patriot best equipped to repel invasive Asia. Moreover, Australia’s apparent
emptiness appeared particularly striking when contrasted, as it so often was, with crowded Asia. While the rise of Asia and the various threats from the north posed questions that the nation was obliged to answer, they also served particular interests and causes. Warnings of imminent demise were used to quicken discipline and patriotic resolve and build the case for military preparedness – and the high levels of expenditure this required – from the 1880s through to the Australian Government’s 2009 Defence White Paper. Warnings that Australia may miss the boat on Asian markets have also been advanced by business groups, politicians and academics since the early twentieth century. Asia has served as a mirror, forcing Australians to take stock of who they are, and who they wish to be.

The story is further complicated by the fact that Australian attitudes to Asia have been imprinted by broader, transnational patterns. The time of white settlement in 1788 coincided with the period when the broader ‘West’ began to impose its power – economic, political, racial and cultural – upon the ‘East’. These wider categories have structured Australian self-perceptions as a specially endowed, skilful and well-governed people. Australians have long identified culturally as part of the prosperous ‘West’, and Australian attitudes to Asia form one thread in a transnational history that now sees collective Asia once again returning to the centre of world events.

The Asia within
While accounts of endangered Australia and unprecedented Asia are important themes, they can, if taken in isolation, create a history too sharply divided between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Asia may emerge from such a construction as entirely different, an
unassimilable presence that threatens Australianness. Yet, Asia – real or imagined – is embedded in the Australian story. The first Chinese settler, known to posterity only as ‘Ahuto’, arrived in 1803 – fifteen years after the First Fleet. Afghan traders provided a vital service in early colonial Australia, supplying settlers with the essentials of frontier living. The gold rushes that began in the 1850s attracted a significant number of Chinese prospectors. Some of them struck it rich; others returned home empty-handed. Many remained in Australia after the gold fever had subsided.¹⁹

Asia was never simply an external force to be resisted, placated or engaged. Even during the high point of the White Australia Policy several communities, particularly the northern port towns of Broome, Darwin and Cairns, had large Asian–Australian populations that sometimes outnumbered white residents.²⁰ Closely connected as these towns were to other imperial trading ports, their way of life resembled that of Singapore or Hong Kong as much as Sydney or Melbourne. Furthermore, while Chinese migrants were stigmatised, particularly at times of social stress, they were neither altogether voiceless nor without supporters willing to speak up for them. Alongside the master narrative of antipathy, there were always stories of adaptation, accommodation and mutual respect as Chinese, Japanese and Malays lived and worked alongside white neighbours. Even during periods of heightened anxiety, there were invariably those who were considered too well disposed towards Asia, too willing to see good qualities in peoples and cultures that others thought of as a menace. These Asian dimensions of the Australian past are frequently poorly recorded or difficult to decipher. Current work is uncovering an array of
unexpected and largely unnoticed sporting links – including
Australian tours by Chinese soccer teams, Japanese swimmers
and Filipino boxers – through the 1920s and 1930s.21 This is
a history of fragments, clues and false leads. In some instances,
the best accounts we have are in local or family histories. But
uncovering these pasts reminds us that Asia has always been a
force shaping Australia from within, and that it is part of our
shared history.

Moreover, the story of Australia and Asia doesn’t end with
Australian ideas and initiatives (or the lack of them). A range of
Asian actors have influenced Australian–Asian relations. The first
Chinese government officials arrived in 1887 to report on the
conditions faced by their nationals. Thereafter, a steady stream of
official and unofficial emissaries, initially from China and Japan
but eventually from every Asian nation, followed, and many left
their imprint on the Australia–Asia relationship. Connections
extended beyond diplomatic channels. Approximately 6000
Indonesians were based in Australia during World War II, and
the range of relationships they formed with white Australians
helped rouse popular support for independence after the war’s
end.22 Asia has also affected Australia in other ways. Australians
have headed to Asia for well over a century, and in recent years
the holiday to Asia has become so common as to qualify as
a shared national experience.23

Australian enthusiasm for Asia is as old as its anxiety and
would form an intriguing history in its own right. All those
calls for Australians to pay attention had mixed results, and
sometimes evoked a deep fascination rather than antipathy or
distrust. National crises, for example, had the surprising out-
come of increasing, rather than curtailing, contacts. While the
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Pacific War brought the nightmare of an Asian foe to Australia’s doorstep, it also led to unprecedented cooperation with Asians as allies. Australian soldiers and civilian prisoners of war resided in Asia for several years; as Hank Nelson and Christina Twomey have shown, their experiences left deep impressions ranging from fanatical hatred to sincere and ongoing esteem. Individual encounters precipitated a broader awareness, and the post-war period saw a growing interest in and enthusiasm for what was being seen as Australia’s ‘neighbourhood’. Journalists and academics including Peter Russo, Denis Warner and Herb Feith made their careers exploring and writing about Asia. As Alison Broinowski has shown, the region also provided inspiration to artists such as Margaret Preston, Donald Friend and Ian Fairweather. It served as muse for poets including Nancy Keesing and Harold Stewart and composers such as Peter Sculthorpe. Asian aesthetics underpinned the careers of designers Florence Broadhurst and Jamie Durie, and the region’s flavours inspired noted chefs including Charmaine Solomon, Neil Perry and Bill Granger. Australian children have increasingly been influenced by television shows such as Monkey, Pokemon and Dragon Ball Z. Individual fascinations combine to form an inexorable undercurrent, and a quiet, slowly building popular interest has underpinned political moves towards formal engagement.

Asia has also infused Australian self-perceptions. As with earlier images of Australia as an empty continent peopled by hardy bushmen, Australian political and civic identity has been defined in relation to Asia. In the first decades of the twentieth century, portrayals of Australia as progressive, developed and modern took place against a tableau of ‘backward’ Asia. Asia’s
‘filth’ reinforced Australia’s cleanliness; its degraded coolies underscored Australia’s status as the workingman’s paradise; its erratic governments made Australia appear progressive. It was commonly supposed that the treatment of women as ‘mere chattels’ was the defining mark of the East. The lowly status of Asian women affirmed the progressive character of white Australia while also reinforcing the dangers that would befall the continent should it ever become ‘more Asian’. For some, the treatment of women was the final, unbridgeable gap between civilised Australia and barbarous, unchanging Asia. As late as the 1960s, travel writer Colin Simpson considered male dominance to be ‘the mark of the primitive’; and he maintained that ‘the streak of it shows in the Japanese pattern’ for all of its post-war advancements. Australians pointed to their early enfranchisement of women as proof that theirs was a higher order of civilisation. This has proven a resilient theme, and much in evidence in recent denunciations of militant Islam. Australia’s modernity continues to be defined against the apparent backwardness of an Asian Other.

Repeated references to crowded and dysfunctional Asia served as a reminder that its political system and its social values set Australia apart. Australians considered themselves fortunate when they contrasted their situation to that in Asia. Australian women were told that they had little cause for complaint when their lives were compared with those of their Asian sisters. Generations grew up knowing that they were lucky – they were not subjected to Asian poverty, squalor, despotism or chaos. It always frustrated Donald Horne that people misunderstood his ironic use of the term ‘lucky country’, but it could hardly have been otherwise in a society so conscious of its own good fortune.
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Being ‘not Asian’ might be considered a curious identity, but it has a meaning in the Australian context that deserves greater consideration. With the Asian Century upon us, the balance has tipped again: the benefits of being in and of Asia grow more apparent and find more support. The logic of disconnecting from Asia has increasingly been replaced by new vocabularies of connection.

The role played by Asia in helping define Australia’s self has never been adequately acknowledged by Australian historians. When Asia does appear in Australian history, it is typically in work by specialists focusing on Australian–Asian contacts, rather than in general or survey histories. It rarely features in mainstream labour history, despite the fact that the construct of Australia as a ‘workingman’s paradise’ was premised on a contrast with Asian coolie labour.28 Similarly, Asia rarely figures in gender history, despite the many ways in which race, proximity to Asia and gender were intertwined in Australia’s past. Historians of international relations have come closest to recognising Asia’s importance in Australian developments, but even here many continue to study connections between Australia and Britain, or Australia and the United States, to the exclusion of Asia.29

When historians write a ‘national’ story they tend to sweep away the loose ends and fragments along with the dead ends, the missed opportunities, and the otherwise lost or obscured histories. As Greg Lockhart argues in this collection, Asia tends to be seen as one of these loose ends, and is often excised. Part of the reason stems from the desire to create a distinctively national story. The establishment of academic specialisations in Australian history and literature from the 1950s were important markers on the path of cultural decolonisation. They served
as a statement of the nation’s independence. To muddle the story with cross-cultural connections could be seen as diluting this independent narrative, and could therefore be regarded as weakening, rather than strengthening, the national culture.

There is too much in the encounter with Asia that points to beliefs and attitudes that contemporary Australia would prefer not to be reminded of, not least a history of racial exclusivity and anti-Asian sentiment. While – to take an iconic example – it is possible for each generation to find an inspirational (though not uncontested) past in the Anzac legend with its enduring stories of sacrifice and courage, the same is not the case for the connection to Asia, which can all too easily turn into a fragmented, morally complex and often politically embarrassing story. When it comes to Asia, the quest has been largely ahistorical and often motivated by the desire to claim, as lonely visionaries or precursors, those who were the first to ‘discover’ the importance of Asia to Australia. The list of these ‘firsts’ is long, and underlines the lack of historical memory about Australian relations with Asia.

The Asian dimension of Australian history
Keeping Asia out of Australian history comes at a cost. It glosses over the richness of the nation’s past, and so helps diminish it. This volume argues the case for acknowledging the breadth of the Asian dimension of Australian history. We believe that Australia’s past cannot be surgically separated from the region and the world, no matter how much we may desire a neatly defined ‘national’ history. Our history may well become less tidy and self-contained if we acknowledge the role played by connections with Asia and the world. It will be a harder story
Kate Bagnall’s research interests focus on the history of Chinese Australian families, the administration of the White Australia Policy and the documentary heritage of Australia’s Chinese communities. Her groundbreaking PhD was the first large-scale study of intimate relationships between Chinese men and white women in Australia. Kate first visited China in the late 1980s and she has periodically worked and studied there over the past fifteen years, including undertaking fieldwork research in the qiaoxiang villages of Guangdong province.

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