

# Fear of Japan: The Formation of Japanese Invasion Novels in Australian Literature

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In the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the opening decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Australia's uneasiness with Asian presence both inside and outside the country was reaching its height. It was a time when Australian nationalism was stirred with the movement toward the federation in 1901, and there was an enthusiastic atmosphere in the society which encouraged the establishment of a 'utopia'-like white settlement. The increasing number of Chinese present in Australia, especially after the gold rush, was becoming a threat inside Australia, and Japan's naval movements and imperial aspirations in the Pacific, a menace from the outside to the safety of Australia.

Australia seemed to react to each movement of Japan, as if it had fallen into a "Japan syndrome," as Frei calls it.<sup>1</sup> When Japan defeated China in 1895, Australia decided to make Japan the major target of an Australian immigration restriction bill the following year. After Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, a league for Australian national defence was founded. Members of this league as well as other Australians strongly advocated the compulsory military service, which was eventually realised by the commonwealth government. Even the British-Japanese alliance of 1902 did not help Australians lessen their fear of Japan. Australians regarded themselves as part of the British Empire even after the federation. However, for Australia, this treaty did not necessarily ensure non-aggression between Australia and Japan.

Many cartoons and drawings published in periodicals in Australia during that time show how Australians looked at themselves. They are often depicted as immature and untried. In one case, a young boy surrounded by shrewd old Asians trying to take over the boy's place; in another, a young woman who is about to be harassed by sly and cunning Asian men. This self-image of Australia as an inexperienced, and innocent youth shows their fear as an isolated, defenceless Occidental country surrounded by menacing Orientals.

Thus, socialists like William Lane strongly advocated the necessity of establishing a utopia-like society for workers, within a 'closed continent, of

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building up a free community apart from the world.’ Lane also wrote, under the pseudonym of “Sketcher,” a Chinese invasion story called “White or Yellow? A Story of the Race War of AD 1908,” which was published in a periodical called the *Boomerang* in 1888. Nationalists were also eager to educate the majority to be independent and prepare for possible action from “the East” (actually, geographically, it was “the North” to them.) Articles of that period published in Australia reflect the atmosphere, targeting Japan as their potential enemy. For example, in “The Sham of Our Defence: Our Toy Army and Our Tiny Fleet”, the author insists on ‘the need for Real Military Training and the Provision of Super-Dreadnoughts’, for he strongly believes that ‘[i]f Japan is not the enemy, then there is no enemy.’<sup>2</sup> Another writer tries to persuade Australians to be colour-conscious in his article entitled “White, Yellow, and Brown: The Present Situation of White Australia in a Pacific that is rapidly becoming Browner”. In his article the author, Randolph Bedford, asserts the alliance between England and Japan is ‘a bad example’ and that such folly will give Japan ‘a jumping-off place for an Australian invasion afterwards’.<sup>3</sup> Australians were thus becoming conscious of their geo-political situation and possible racial conflicts.

This was also a period when Australian prose writing started to flourish, outnumbering verse in publication.<sup>4</sup> Some writers started to choose Asia as the subjects or settings for their novels and stories. Among them, such expatriate writers and journalists as James Murdoch, Carlton Dawe, Rosa Praed, and A.G. Hales visited Japan and employed Japanese settings and characters in their novels.<sup>5</sup> Their firsthand experiences in Japan are reflected in their works, thus forming a new category in Australian literature. However, their plots, especially those of male writers, tended to fall into John L. Long’s “Madame Butterfly” category with some variations, in which a Western man meets a Japanese woman, often from a cha-ya, has a brief affair, and discards her in the end.<sup>6</sup> They sought an exotic atmosphere for their romance, and gained more latitude in firing their imagination by using Japanese settings.<sup>7</sup> Other writers in Australia published their romantic stories in some of many periodicals that had started to appear one after another in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and had become a convenient means for writers who were unable to publish in book form. Both male and female writers, professional and amateur, used exotic Japanese backgrounds again as a place where “extraordinary” events and “miraculous” encounters could happen in their stories.

Thus, this was a period when Australian attitudes toward Japan as seen in its literature were both romantic and hostile, without a middle ground. Some short stories published in periodicals depicting Japanese characters as pearl divers and courtesans in Australia, carried a harsh and resentful tone about the presence of

the Japanese. Actually, the Japanese were very few in number; for example, about 3555 stayed in Australia,<sup>8</sup> and they were seldom seen by the majority of Australians. However, Japanese characters were described as an unfavourable group, and they were seldom given faces or names. In one of the stories, for example, Japanese divers working for Australians are subordinate characters and typical villains who try to cheat their employers and are punished. The cunning and shrewdness of the Japanese, Australians' 'natural enemy', are emphasised by their foolish, vicious behaviour and justifies their punishment by the Australians.<sup>9</sup> These Japanese are often depicted not as individuals but as a group or "mass". This group treatment is often observed in stories whose topic is the hostile relationship between Australians and Asians. This non-individualised description of the Japanese may be one of the typical representations of Asians in Australian writing 'as a faceless mass in enormous numbers', thus letting them represent a menace and threat to Australia.<sup>10</sup> As was mentioned previously, political activists and politicians, as well as journalists and writers, were trying to establish a "utopia" for whites only, and other races were not included as part of the nation. As Meaney and others have pointed out, social Darwinism gave 'a pseudo-scientific authority' to the idea, and it justified their exclusion of the Aborigines and other races in their scheme.<sup>11</sup> Officially, as seen in the commonwealth parliamentary debates on the Immigration Restriction Bill of 1901-1902, the exclusion of coloured races was "not based upon any claim of superiority" of the Australians; it was simply because of the impossibility of other races' blending with them.<sup>12</sup>

Invasion novels, or what Meaney calls, invasion "scare" novels, started to appear in such a colour-conscious atmosphere in the Australian society. Japan was, (and maybe still is) always Australia's "problem", and its southward movements were Australia's constant fear. Britain's potential enemy and possible invader, was either Germany or France, that is, their "equals."<sup>13</sup> However, in the case of Australia, the psychological effect of the race issue was a dominant fear, as well as a physical threat to Australian security. Such "Nanshin-ronsha" (Southward protagonists) of Japan as Shiga Shigetaka, Suganuma Teifu, Taguchi Ukichi, and Takekoshi Yosaburo had started to claim their nation's possibility in the South in the 1880s, and their "Southward-ho!" fanfare must have echoed in the ears of already sensitive Australians. Japan's southward movement was more economical than political, ideological and strategic until the 1930's, and Australia was not really Japan's target, anyway. Some Australians were aware of this; E.L. Piesse, Director of Military Intelligence, was influenced by Murdoch's 'less alarmist and more sophisticated view of Japan,' and concluded that from what he had learned Japan rarely showed any sign of interest in Australia.<sup>14</sup> However, in general,

journalists and politicians gave strong warnings against Japan to Australians.

One of the most fearful things for Australians was that their vast and empty continent might become the target of over-populated Asian countries. Japan's southward movement did not necessarily mean an actual war to them, but rather a so-called "peaceful penetration". As Ball points out, what Australia feared most was that Japan's 'millions must burst out and overwhelm the most available country,' and that 'the gravest danger of Australia [was] that other countries [might] deprive Japan of her legitimate sphere of expansion and divert it to Australia.'<sup>15</sup> One of the invasion novels that adopted this theme was C.H. Kirmess's "The Commonwealth Crisis".

"The Commonwealth Crisis" appeared first in the *Lone Hand* as a serialised novel from 1908 to 1909 (eleven issues) and made into a book form in 1909 with, as Meaney defines, a more nationalistic title, *The Australian Crisis*.<sup>16</sup> In the foreword of the novel, the author asserts that this novel has been written to warn of 'a coloured invasion of Australian territory', and that his intention is to inform of the dangers 'to which the neighbourhood of overcrowded Asia exposes the thinly populated Commonwealth of Australia.' The author also asserts that it 'deals exclusively with realities,' and occasionally interpolates facts and figures. In this way the author makes this novel journalistic and political with a realistic and urgent tone.<sup>17</sup> The author's identity is not clear, and Meaney concludes that Kirmess was a pseudonym for Frank Fox, the editor of the *Lone Hand* at the time of the publication. He was also one of the chief members of the Australian National Defence League, thus being very conscious of national security as a journalist and activist.<sup>18</sup>

The form of this novel is a retrospective from the year 1922 upon events supposed to have happened in 1912. The novel begins with a Japanese army of six thousand secretly landing on the shores of Northern Territory for a 'peaceful invasion'. Already trained in Formosa, where the climate was similar to that of Northern parts of Australia, they were ready for colonial life. When the commonwealth government finds out about their landing, the Japanese government explains that it is an unofficial migration without the authority of the "Mikado", the Emperor. However, it is a well-planned colonisation, because Japan needed to find a colony for its constant famine and the increase in its population. Australia starts its resistance against this invasion.

In the development of the plot, the author's intention as is shown in the foreword becomes clear. First to note is that the author strongly warns and urges his readers to prepare against the invasion. When a Thomas Burt discovers the invasion, he is not believed by his neighbours nor the local bureaucrats. He and

another discoverer of the invasion are 'half-marked as "jokers of promise," whose present attempt has failed rather badly.' In fact, 'tropical Australia was suffering from a surfeit of warnings against the Asiatic menace. Its white inhabitants had one dominant desire: to hear no more about it.' (67) This delays the action Australia should have taken, allows the Japanese to enter the country, and eventually leads to the armed clash. Here the contemporary Australians' negative attitude toward or tendency of avoiding reality is emphasised.

Secondly, the author makes it an issue that Britain is indifferent to Australia and fails to support it. Britain, considering the alliance with Japan to be valuable in Asia and the Pacific, but having bonded with the dominion, is in a dilemma. Consequently, it slows its objection, and by doing so, makes Australia irritated. The English wonder 'how far they should commit themselves in defence of the principles of racial exclusiveness which were not shared by the masses in the United Kingdom.' (73) and are unconcerned about 'the significance of race contrasts' in Australia. (187) Eventually, in other British self-governing dominions, 'Maoriland, Canada, [and] South Africa, and the United States, the Defence League of All the Whites was organised'; however, Britain's reaction to this is to warn these dominions with financial sanctions. Australian stocks are 'knocked out' in the London market, and it causes further economic problems in Australia.

Britain's detachment and Australia's consciousness of their independence from Britain was often revealed in Australian writing during that period. We can observe the mixed feelings of Australians about their relationship with Britain in one of Kenneth Mackay's poems. Mackay was a colonel, who had also published a Chinese invasion novel called *The Yellow Wave* in 1895, as well as other prose and verse. In his poem he regards Australians as 'sons of the Empire', and 'whene'er she calls, then on land and sea — [their] swords from their sheaths will leap,' however, they would 'fight not as dependents — but equal peers.'<sup>19</sup>

As Ball points out, the difference in interests very much affected the attitude of Britain and other dominions including Australia, toward the Pacific. Britain's interests were principally commercial, and the dominions' personal. These dominions believed 'that lives, the happiness and the personal well-being of its subjects [might] be in question' because of the race issue, and that 'the danger [might] be held to arise from a race whose civilisation [was] alien and whose victory would mean deprivation of privileges and traditions which [had] grown into the life of a people'<sup>20</sup> In reality, especially after the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in August 1905 when Britain's capital ships were withdrawn from the Pacific, and after the riots and repressive legislation against the Japanese in the United States, Australia's anxiety over possible racial conflicts in the Pacific without any aid from Britain was serious.

More aggressive Australians in "The Commonwealth Crisis," irritated by the slow reaction of the government, form a self-defence league called the "White Guard". Members are shearers, skin-hunters, drovers, station-hands, prospectors and adventurous vagrants, thus inheriting Australia's bush tradition – "the mateship." Men have traditionally helped each other out in the harsh life of the Australian outback, and this manly spirit of mutual support is often regarded as the core of Australian ethos. This "White Guard" is a voluntary campaign, and their eagerness and ambition, as well as romantic yearnings for adventure are of the same kind of mythical depiction as the volunteers who went to the Great War and the Boer War in later years. The inactivity and self-centredness on the part of the commonwealth government is very much emphasised. The episode of the White Guard reflects the author's message to ordinary Australians to stand up and take action. Fox, the editor and presumably author of this novel, together with others established the National Defence League in 1906. The battle between the White Guard and the Japanese invaders is fierce, the beloved commander-in-chief falls, and the White Guard, although heroic, are exterminated. The novel ends with the Japanese colony still in the Northern Territory with Britain's mediation, and the author concludes with a bitter propaganda, telling Australians to beware of the Asian invasion and to promote white settlement in the North.

It was in the same year that the first Japanese consulate in Townsville, Queensland was closed, and the movement to expel the Japanese from Australia was reaching its height that this novel was serialised. When the Chinese commissioners visited Queensland to see the living conditions of the Chinese coolies, many Australians took it as the sign of investigation for possible expansion of Chinese immigration; and Lane's Chinese invasion novel appeared the following year. "The Commonwealth Crisis" also reflects the contemporary events in the Australian society. In the story, when the British Government takes economic sanctions against Australia's Act to compel Asiatics in Australia to register, Australia becomes a 'wounded giant groping blindly round...for something he might wreak vengeance on—for some victim.'(421) The Australians' boycott of and eventual assault of the Asians in towns and country begin. The author believes that Australians have generosity, out of which they have avoided 'the infliction of personal revenge on private individuals for failings of the race to which [the Asians belong]'; however, there is no way to prevent this 'anti-colour riot' now, and 'the unfortunate coloured aliens still residing in the country' are targeted, as happened in reality.(422)

- 185 Another invasion novel, "The Day the Big Shells Came," was published in 1909 in  
(38) the *Bulletin*, one of the major periodicals as the *Lone Hand*. It is a short story

rather than a novel, and an ordinary Sydneyite, who is called 'Didn't Think Australian,' is the protagonist. He 'didn't think' Australians should be independent, nor build up their own defence force to prepare for the possible invasion. He 'didn't think' that 'Asia had already discovered Australia, and was doing some hard thinking about ways and means of how to take possession of it from a nation of Didn't-Thinkers.' He works in the city, goes back to his house in a suburb, spends a quiet evening, and presumes that tomorrow will also be another ordinary day; however, 'the big shells come,' and the Japanese start to attack Sydney. The 'Didn't Think Australian' does not bear arms and is unable to protect himself and his family. Eventually the Japanese march on and invade his house. Strangely, the first Japanese to break into the house is 'a quiet little Jap gentleman whom he had often seen in the streets of Sydney—a merchant or something—smoking a little black pipe and wearing a hard black hat.' But it was a disguise, and the merchant is now wearing his military uniform; under his mask he is a fierce, wicked soldier who intends to take over the house. The 'Didn't Think Australian's' unprepared resistance against the Japanese invasion has no effect, and the story comes to a bleak end with his death.

The author Arthur Adams was a journalist-novelist-playwright, and his 'forte was urban social comedy.' He introduced a tragicomical figure into the invasion novel and let him represent Australians as a whole. While this story is not as politically demagogic as "The Commonwealth Crisis," its aim is also to warn of the ignorant and indifferent Australians of the Japanese menace. (This warning became real to Sydneyites when Japanese submarines came to attack Sydney harbour, failed and brewed themselves up at the beginning of the Pacific War in 1942.)

The authors of these Japanese invasion novels, as well as other invasion novels, were journalists who were able to obtain firsthand information of Australia and its surroundings. They wrote not only to inform the readers but also to educate them. Thus, as Ouyang and Meaney point out, these invasion novels are more political than "scientific" or "dystopian",<sup>21</sup> and they were written and published as a means to reveal Australia's nationalistic consciousness. As a result, there is scarcely any description of the Japanese as individuals in these novels. They are mostly treated as a group or "mass," which forms a threatening and uncanny figure that harasses the Australians. These novels are not meant to convey human natures and characteristics, but rather to give strong messages to enlighten, and perhaps, to brainwash the general public. For that purpose, there is no need to describe the enemy personally. Actually, there seems to be no need to describe the Australians, either; the 'Didn't Think Australian' is presented only as one of the ordinary Australians.

In "The Commonwealth Crisis," the first character Thomas Burt does not play any important role later except being a member of the White Guard. Many other Australian characters are also not fully individualised. In these invasion novels, not the individuals but the nations are the chief characters, thus each nation's position, ambition, motives and consequent actions seem to be the authors' main interest.

As mentioned previously, the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when these invasion novels were written, was the period when Australia was trying to establish itself as a nation. Politically it was becoming independent from the "Mother Country"; while Australians tried to support themselves both physically and mentally, geographical and racial issues were becoming obvious in the society. It was a consensus in Australia to exclude the Japanese as well as other Asians on the ground that it was necessary to protect Australian workers from Asians who were willing to work in hard conditions for low wages. In addition, they believed that racial and cultural differences would cause social friction, thus hampering the establishment and development of the nation. Meaney also points out that "race" was a most important factor in defining the 'good community' in Australia.<sup>22</sup> Japanese invasion novels were written and published as a result of this Australian self-awareness and its consequent social movements. When Australia's inward nationalism rose and met Japan's imperialism which showed in its outward (or, southward) expansion, the category of invasion novels in Australian literature was formed.

## Notes

1 Henry Frei, *Japan's Southward Movement and Australia*, 1991, 2.

2 Richard Arthur, *The Lone Hand*, May 1, 1911, 1-6.

3 *The Lone Hand*, July 1911, 224-8.

4 Ken Stewart, *The 1890s*, 27.

5 Murdoch was originally from Scotland, and after teaching as well as doing some journalistic writing in Australia, he went to Japan as a newspaper correspondent. Later, when he was appointed professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney, he also became an adviser to Australian foreign intelligence.

6 Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impression of Asia*, 106.

7 Spivak also argues women of different races are 'made to carry all that is hidden and denied in white women' by white, male writers. Cited in the introduction to Katherine S. Prichard's *Coonardoo* by Drusilla Modjeska.

8 Macmahon Ball, *Australia and Japan*, 18.

9 "The Mates of Torres" by George Randolph Bedford, serialised in the *Lone Hand*, from January to May 1911.

10 Ouyang Yu, "Australian Invention of Chinese Invasion: A Century of Paranoia 1888-1988, *Australian Literary Studies*, v.17, May, 1995, 76.

11 Meaney "The Yellow Peril, Invasion Scare Novels and Australian Political Culture", *The 1890s*, 229, or Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*, 68-9.

12 Ball, op.cit., 7-8.



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- 13 Examples of such invasion novels of England are: George Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking*, 1871, William Le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910*, 1916, and so on.
- 14 Neville Meaney, *Fears & Phobias: E.L. Piesse and the Problem of Japan 1909-39*, 9-13.
- 15 Ball, op.cit., 16.
- 16 Meaney "The Yellow Peril, Invasion Scare Novels and Australian Political Culture", 229.
- 17 This interpolation of facts and figures appears only in the first serialised version. My citation is from the serialised version.
- 18 Meaney, op.cit., 347.
- 19 "Sons of the Empire" from *Songs of A Sunlit Land*, 1908.
- 20 Ball, op.cit., 15.
- 21 Albinski and Ikin cited in Ouyang's "Australian Invention of Chinese Invasion: A Century of Paranoia 1888-1988", 74.
- 22 Meaney, op.cit., 262-3.

This paper was first read at the symposium of Australia New Zealand Literary Society of Japan held at Doshisha University on 15 November 1997.

Acknowledgement:

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Patricia Wells for her suggestion in polishing this paper.