Empires of the Sun: towards a post-multicultural Australian politics

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Introduction

The participation of people of Chinese descent in Australian politics has emerged as a critical question in contemporary Australian democracy. Whether discussing the Chinese "push" that was key to unseating John Howard in Bennelong (Saville 2007), or the China connections that undid MPs Michael Johnson and Joel Fitzgibbon (Baker et al. 2010), or the Stern Hu case (Callick 2010), the debate about the Chinese (including the usefulness of that composite label for such a diverse set of social groups) calls for a new set of theoretical parameters to locate and analyse the Chinese presence. This paper proposes that the Chinese question in all its dimensions

generates the first case of a "post-multicultural" politics, one that can more usefully be framed through the use of the "empire" concept (Jakubowicz 2003).

The land that came to be called Australia was seized by the British empire; the society established there transmuted over time into an ongoing Australian empire project. From the outset the modern Chinese imperial project, originally rather inchoate and demographic under the Qing rather than military or institutional (lacking those capacities), was constituted in Australian politics as the threatening "Other" in terms of race, sexuality, economy and religiosity. The Chinese were portrayed as dangerous on all fronts; this apprehension embedded them in the Australian political imaginary albeit in a negative form, despite their fast dwindling presence after Federation as a consequence of White Australia. The past generation and a half have seen a reinvigoration of the presence of Chinese in Australia and as Australians, following the ending of White Australia. The new Chinese presence, this time supported by a rapidly re-empowered Chinese imperial capacity borne by increasing political and economic resources, has clear economic impacts - but the political questions (both empirical and theoretical) are less obvious . How has Australian politics been affected by these changes, and in what sense has the Chinese presence ensured an imperially-inflected globally-alerted national politics in Australia?

The paper uses the term "empire" and its adjectival form "imperial" in a consciously provocative approach to the study of multicultural societies. "Multicultural" in its policy/analytical applications refers to national societies affected by global population flows, and the internal challenges generated by the rapid emergence of diasporic communities. Multicultural approaches analyse the national political, economic and cultural history of the society under review, and the anthropological and socio-cultural transformations wrought by upon it and the incoming peoples by their interaction. Explanation tends to be sought then in the specificity of the society, rather than viewing each society as framed by the modern world system of nation states.

The concept of "empire project" moves us into a wider frame of reference, both geographically and historically, by suggesting that many modern states manifest some of the characteristics of empires (even if the word is an anathema to them). These include an expansionary view of political, economic or cultural boundaries, a transformational approach seeking to form a unitary

"people" addressed to the diversity of incoming populations within those boundaries, and a subordination of challenges to the hegemony of the economic and politico-cultural elites especially where these arise either from Indigenous populations that have been "conquered" or from incoming diasporas that owe allegiance elsewhere.

"Australian empire project" provides a short-hand term that captures these multiple dynamics, proposing that these three crucial parameters of boundary expansion and protection, Indigenous subordination, and diversity transformation (or "normalisation" (Foucault1977), set up an energetic pyramid of forces that are integrally tied together. External and internal economic, environmental and political changes are both constrained by and place pressure on these parameters. For the first time in its modern history, Australia now has to engage on two fronts with another imperial project, that of China. On two of the key external parameters - boundaries and cultural normalisation - Australia and China are now more deeply engaged than Australia has been since Federation, when White Australia had the effect of forcing cultural disengagement (with a then far less politically and economically coherent and powerful China).

Context
Two weeks out from the August 2010 Federal election former Prime Minister and local member for Bennelong John Howard was seen on TV spruiking support from a Chinese audience for the Liberal Party in the adjacent seat of Bradfield. Fifteen years ago it had been Howard's equivocal position on the rise of Pauline Hanson and her racist speech, and his rumoured blocking of Hong Kong-born state politician Helen Sham-Ho's bid for Liberal Senate pre-selection, that had triggered a mini-split in the NSW Liberal branch. One immediate outcome of that split was the creation of the Unity (團結 Tuan Jei) Party, which seemed to offer an opposite perspective to that of Hanson's One Nation. Unity had an attraction for former key political players in the NSW Liberal Party, winning a state Legislative Council seat for its leader Dr Peter Wong.

No other ethnic community was being accorded quite the same level of care and attention from the former Prime Minister, who had lost Bennelong in 2007 under an organising onslaught that had allied young activists from many different Asian communities with a broader progressive community coalition (Saville 2007). During that election campaign, Saville reports that "Robert" (a nom de guerre) offered the support of a group of Chinese senior figures to the ALP

candidate Maxine McKew, under the tag "MSG" (Maxine Support Group); when the vote is in and she has been victorious, he texts her: "The Emperor has lost his mandate from Heaven" (Saville 2007, pp. 45, 161). By 2010, the new emperor (former PM Kevin Rudd) /empress (new PM Julia Gillard) would come perilously close to the same fate.

Seven days out from the election and Kevin Rudd was in Bennelong, talking to children and their parents at the Feng Hua Mandarin Saturday morning school, held in the Eastwood Public School. He was trying to repair the damage done to his fervent supporter Maxine McKew among her Asian supporters by the bloody way he has been dispatched as Prime Minister, and their loss of confidence in the ALP's commitment to issues of human rights and racial justice. Later Rudd shared Yum Cha at King's Seafood restaurant, and was tearful as the Chinese kids moved from English to Mandarin for the last verse of "Edelweiss" from the "Sound of Music", a film about children as refugees fleeing for their lives (Saville 2010; Marx 2010).

The energy invested by former Prime Ministers in salvaging the damaged relations between their parties and the Chinese communities, suggests that the emergence of the Chinese in the political agenda of contemporary Australia reflects something more than a just one dimension of multiculturalism common to all immigrant communities - by pointing to political concentration, financial resources, and international linkages.

With the concentration of Chinese Australian voters in particular usually middle-class and therefore swinging electorates and their presence there in large numbers (Coughlan 2008), they have the capacity in closely-fought elections to swing seats and change governments. For this to occur *en-masse*, it requires some sort of trigger to vote according to an "ethnic" rather than economic or partisan sensibility (whatever "ethnic" may imply - depending on one's perspective it may mean in relation to Australian Chinese a perception of trans-national economic self-interest, a sense of Confucian value-based moral and efficacy assessment of the competing political parties, or a sensitivity to any taint of racism attached to candidates or policies).

China-born Australians and their families are heavily concentrated in key occupations, including IT, medicine and commerce, as well as real estate and international trade (Coughlan 2008). They

are on average therefore quite well-off economically, and can direct their discretionary financial resources in support of their favoured political parties or candidates. Indeed the Unity Party's Peter Wong had previously been a key fund-raiser for the NSW Division of the Liberal Party, and his resignation in the late 1990s had significant financial impact on the Division. As is noted below, the involvement of the Chinese communities in political fund-raising had already had wider ramifications in the Australian political system.

In relation to Chinese communities and relations, Australia now experiences two separate though interacting processes – one which relates to the internal problems of the Australian empire project, responding to the immigrant, racialised, ethno-national differentiation and class status of Chinese settlers; the other which is the consequence of the inter-imperial relations of Australia and China. This paper aims to introduce the dynamics of each of these dimensions, point to zones where they overlap, and suggest the research implications of this descriptive analysis.

Empire and social order

Much of the debate about cultural diversity and political life in modern democracies has been examined through the lens of "multiculturalism". Modood for instance argues that "a sense of belonging to one's country is necessary to make a success of a multicultural society" (Modood 2007, p.150). It requires "a citizenship and the right to make a claim on the national identity in which negative difference is challenged and supplanted by positive difference" (Modood 2007, p.153). Here the focus is on "the nation" as a political form. Yet as Negri, Hardt and Zolo have argued, the (national) "people is not an immediate nor an eternal identity, but rather the result of a complex process, which is proper to a specific social formation and historical period" (Negri et al. 2008, p.82). The key to the construction of the people is representation, both culturally and politically.

In a period of globalization, which arguably has been the characteristic political geography of the modern epoch, nation states exist in relation only to each other, and many perform as though they were empires. Empires are essentially multicultural collectivities governed by a central force, with a hierarchical structure of cultural power, in which the organisation of diversity reflects the interests of the dominant political grouping. The social technologies necessary to

turn the populations of their territories into a people, presents a central challenge for all empires. The Australian nation displays the three important imperial characteristics referred to above; namely a history of competition with other empires for control of territory (politically and/or economically), the unresolved challenge in relation to the place of the Indigenous inhabitants in the nation, and the challenge of transforming incoming populations into part of the Australian people .

The successive policy models of immigrant admission and settlement, adopted by Australia since Federation, can be usefully explicated from this perspective. The racially defined restrictions encompassed in the clearly named "Immigration Restriction Act" of 1901, which were motivated by fear of and disdain for the Chinese diaspora, represented a first technology of control (Lake & Reynolds 2008). Contemporary debates a century later about settlement procedures explore the tensions between the different priorities implicit in the competing policy discourses of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and citizenship (Jakubowicz 2009)

Australia's colonial history is well known; the outpost of the British empire that became a clutch of colonies, which finally united in a "Commonwealth", a federation of states with their distinctive histories, ethno-cultural profiles, and political philosophies. The new Commonwealth was immediately challenged by the sturdiness of its raison d'être, drawn from a multitude of factors ranging from guaranteeing free trade between colonies, and ensuring tariff-protected industries against the world outside, to ensuring a racially homogenous working class paradise. John Fitzgerald has noted the strong support for Federation from Australia's Chinese communities, who saw in free trade the opening up of their unimpeded travel between colonies that previously had restricted and punitively taxed their movement. Many Chinese Australians of the day celebrated Australian democratic ideals, its egalitarian ethos, and its anti-feudal ideology and thrust towards modernity (Fitzgerald 2007; Lowe et al. 1879). They were, as we know, to be grievously betrayed, their mere presence traduced, their culture portrayed as an anathema, and their aspirations discarded as threatening and poisonous. White Australia was more than just an attempt to keep out people of colour; it was a drive to remove people of colour and scrub the society free of the taint of non-White "blood".

White Australia was then a very real "imperial" moment, through which the Empire mantle carried by the British, was passed across to the new Nation. Even the British were less than enthusiastic about some dimensions of the handover; the Colonial and Foreign Office was firmly opposed to the use of race as a divider of peoples, acquiescing finally to the infamous dictation test as a racial proxy (Lake & Reynolds 2008). The test, first developed in Natal in South Africa to be used to limit Indian immigration (thus explaining the exhaustive list of language options that could be used to trip up any prospective Indian polyglot), was then introduced into the new Commonwealth.

A colonial precursor to the national imperial project was the attempt of Queensland to annex south eastern New Guinea (Papua) in the 1880s. The British government refused to allow this, finally taking on the task itself when Germany formally seized northern New Guinea, with the Dutch already possessing the West. Britain only passed the colonial role to Australia after Federation (which presumably was somehow to restrain the Queenslanders' excessive abuses and exploitation of the Papuan indigenous peoples, in the wake of its Kanaka "black-birding" history).

Cyril Pearl in his biography of Herbert Morrison, later to be White Australia's closest link to the unfolding drama of the end of the Chinese Imperial period, quotes from the Melbourne *Leader* newspaper in June 1883,

> We cannot let the islands of the Pacific pass into the hands of dangerous neighbours, and it is not only the European powers who can be dangerous to us. Settlements of Chinamen or Malays will infallibly be formed… If Chinamen enter in, they will be the out-post of a possible Chinese invasion. (Pearl 1967, p.42).

So the major imperial challenges to the Australian empire project did not come mainly from Holland, Germany or France, but rather from China and Japan. The China challenge was until quite recently ethno-cultural and economic, rather than diplomatic or military, but Australia's actions, attitudes and perspectives are still determined today by the instability of the many dimensions of the inter-imperial engagement. As the Chinese state has grown in economic power and political reach, Australia's contemporary worries about China's expanding regional role and investment in Australian economic resources sits over these historic racially-inflected attitudes.

From the outset the Australian colonies were closely linked to China, with the British China treaty ports and the Australian colonies developing a significant economic relationship. British colonial attitudes towards the Chinese were translated into the Australian colonial milieu; there were families with Chinese servants, and Chinese workers were widespread as shepherds, gardeners, cooks and shopkeepers. This was more like the Straits Colonies than life in the Home Counties. Chinese "coolie" labour was in Australia even before the Opium Wars. The free movement of Chinese into Australia accelerated with the various gold rushes, until in the 1880s the Northern Queensland Palmer River rush saw some 90% of the miners as Chinese. So there were tens of thousands of Chinese craftsmen, workers, businessmen and even some politicians when Federation crashed down on them, and the doors for entry effectively closed.

Fear of Empire today

The March 2010 Lowy Institute survey of Australians' attitudes to international affairs and China argued that "that Australians are increasingly conscious of China's rise and are starting to grapple with its implications. Indeed China looms so large that Australians have developed a somewhat exaggerated view of its global weight" (Shearer 2010). China's economic role through the purchase of raw materials had seen Australia safely through the GFC (Laurenceson 2008); 73% of Australians (up 10% from 2008) thought China's growth had been good for Australia. About the same proportion thought though that China's aim was to dominate Asia (up 9% since 2008). While happy to sell commodities to China, Australians were more reluctant to sell freehold to China – 57% thought the government allowed too much investment (up 7%). In addition 46% thought China would become a military threat within 20 years (up 5%). Meanwhile 2/3 believed Australia was soft on China's transgression of human rights. Clive Palmer a Queensland billionaire mining magnate summarised the complexity when in September 2009 he condemned as racist the government's insistence that Chinese investments receive Treasury approval, claiming in relation to $1.8 trillion of Chinese reserve capital "We've got the opportunity to grab that if our politicians could only be fair and treat the Chinese people and Chinese government with the dignity they deserve" (Marriner, 2009). Together these stories suggest a mix of moral superiority, greed and fear, a fairly traditional combination for imperialist endeavours.

Apart from the Foreign Investment Review Board criteria for differentiating Chinese from other sources of capital inflow, the government amended the Commonwealth Electoral Act in 2009 to outlaw foreign property donations to Australian political parties or involvement in political campaigns. In this it was following on the US government that had banned foreign donations after a series of major scandals.

The arguments for the banning of foreign donations drew heavily on the activities of Chinese corporations or individuals, and their involvement in Australian party funding, or in the suspected overly comfortable and financial relationship with Ministers. The legislative changes sustained the right of foreign entities and individuals to use Australian-derived assets to make declarable donations, but not foreign funds. There was growing concern about the activities of some Chinese companies and individuals – for instance the Defence Minister resigned over undeclared business and other links (Sharp2009; Baker et al. 2010).

Examples suggest the issues. Figures released by the Australian Electoral Commission in early 2009(http://periodicdisclosures.aec.gov.au) covering the 2007 Federal election identified Macau gaming figure Stanley Ho as the source of $400,000 to the NSW ALP (and another $100,000 from Anthony Chan who shared a Hong Kong address with Ho). Ho had unsuccessfully sought a share in the second Sydney casino license, having been blocked there (and in Melbourne). His Gold Coast based company Hungtat had a $600,000 donation to the NSW ALP returned, while his fourth wife Angela Leong had her $500,000 returned by the federal ALP following "a due diligence assessment". Ho was successful however in having a lunch meeting with former Premier Morris Iemma in 2006, after he donated $48,000 to the NSW ALP.

The Commission also identified a stream of funding to both the ALP and the Liberal Party from companies associated with Chau Chuk Wing, including Kingold, Kingson, and Chun Yip. (The names are wonderful – the Old King is the father's major vehicle, the Son King is run by son Eric). Up to $1.6 million may have gone to the ALP, and $400,000 to the Liberals (Snow et al. 2009). The Chau group has a long history in Australia and in the past decade has had financial dealings with Charles Sturt University, the University of Western Sydney and most recently with

the University of Technology, Sydney. From before 2006 Chau's daughter Winky Chau, now an executive in the family's New Express media empire, was community relations adviser to NSW ALP Premier Bob Carr and later Premier Morris Iemma, providing Iemma's bridge to the Chinese community. She would later set up a company with Iemma (MW and W Asia Pacific Partnerships Pty Ltd registered February 2009) that is involved in business links between Australia and China.

This type of detail reflects a much wider pattern of imperial inter-engagement, suggested by the range of government, corporate and political contacts that have been laid down over the past twenty years. At the heart of the imperial issue lies the issue of economic control. This paper does not canvas that huge issue in any detail, rather pointing to the need for a systematic analysis of the economic penetration of Australia within the framework of the proposed imperial model (Laurenceson 2008). The picture of Australian national apprehension of China reflects the many different interests that Australians have – ranging from primary producers and resource companies, through secondary industry and infrastructure providers, and then the tertiary sector such as finance, and education. The most significant factor relates to the scale and interdependence of economic relations, where the Chinese economy now plays a determining role in the viability of the Australian economy. For the first time since early British empire days a foreign power now has control over significant parts of the Australian economy; unlike the British example or even Japan, China has a central state strategy that ties together the role of Chinese entities in Australia (as it does elsewhere in the Pacific and in Africa and South America). The China trade played a critical role in the survival of Australia through the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), with mineral exports and international education key areas of robust expansion (DFAT 2010).

Multicultural politics and Chinese diversity
The second dynamic relates to the presence of Chinese people in Australia as citizens, settlers, transient workers, students, business people, government officials, "refugees" and tourists. The diversity within the category reflects the complexity of the Chinese diaspora, and the political argument about what it means to be Chinese and to which power is allegiance owed. PR China is a vast country itself encompassing enormous diversity, and the Chinese extend far beyond

PRC. The development of greater Han nationalism that has characterized the state ideology over the past twenty years (Feng 2010), has been extremely influential on the new generation of PRC-born people who have migrated to Australia, and has been used to argue a transnational Han solidarity (as expressed for instance in virtual Huaren networks such as http://www.huaren.org/chinese-communities/australia). Yet they are only one part of the story.

The diversity of those who have been labeled as "Chinese" by at least one stakeholder, includes the following categories:

      a. Australian-born of many generations of settlement (the White Australia survivors) whose forebears came from China

      b. The Colombo Plan generation – mainly English-speaking tertiary educated Chinese diaspora from Singapore, Malaysia, etc. Some were Chinese Malay leftists who came to Australia in the post- Malay insurgency period. Others came from Taiwan or Indonesia.

      c. Post white Australia entrants, mainly diasporic as in (b) but including significant groups from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos as refugees, boat people, and orderly departure entrants.

      d. Skilled and other entrants who were able to leave China after the end of the Cultural Revolution and the opening up of economic reforms

      e. The June 4/Tiananmen generation – political, economic and in some cases opportunistic refugees

      f. Hong Kong residents leaving in preparation for the 1997 re-unification with the PRC.

      g. Professional and business people from Taiwan and PRC

      h. "Colonised" non-Han peoples, especially those from Tibet and Xinjiang.

      i. Sponsored immigrants of the current generation

      j. Students who gained permanent residence after completion of studies

      k. Visa category 457 skilled sponsored workers

      l. Short term visitors who converted to permanent through applying for on-shore refugee consideration (often claiming to be persecuted Christians or Falun Gong) (RRT 2008)

      m. Short term business managers and skilled workers associated with major Chinese development projects

n. Chinese government officials and quasi-officials, including those engaged in monitoring all these other groups (RRT 2007, 2008).

There may indeed be other groups, and of course there are significant provincial/regional variations in migration histories, languages spoken, skill levels and education (Collins& Reid 1995).

Coghlan's work on the demography of Australia's Chinese population points to some important characteristics, especially of the PR China born settlers. Table 1 draws on his comparison of Chinese and Vietnamese settlement, which argues that the Chinese are more concentrated by locality than the Vietnamese (2009). Tracking PR China born residents, those claiming Chinese heritage (includes many from non-PRC) and speakers of Chinese languages, Coghlan demonstrates the ways in which the different meanings of "Chinese" can provide different pictures of the Chinese presence.

Table 1 Number and percentage of Australia's total population by ancestry, birthplace and language, 1976-2006 (Census data)

Year	Ancestry: Chinese		Country of Birth: PRC		Speakers of Chinese languages	
1976			19542	0.14		
1981			25883	0.18		
1986	201165	1.29	36595	0.24	127959	0.89
1991			77882	0.46	247563	1.59
1996			111009	0.62	344319	1.92
2001	556554	2.97	142780	0.75	401357	2.19
2006	669890	3.37	206589	1.03	500467	2.50

From: Coughlan 2009, p.164

Given the high proportion of "Chinese" living in the Sydney SD in 2006, a closer examination of their situation reveals how the different criteria produce rather different perspectives. About 53% of all Australian PR Chinese live in the Sydney SD, comprising some 71% of the "Chinese" population there (PRC, HK, Taiwan); they may moreover have been long-term residents of Hong Kong or Taiwan prior to immigration.

About 230,000 people claim to speak at least one of the named Chinese languages (Cantonese, Mandarin, Other), far higher than the 150,000 who were born in one of the Chinas. Of these about 125,000 speak Cantonese, and 97,000 Mandarin, with 12,000 speaking Other languages (Teochew, Hokkien and Hakka). About 290,000 claim Chinese ancestry, of whom 270,000 had both parents born overseas, with only 6000 having both born in Australia. Mandarin speakers (from the mainland and Taiwan) have a lower likelihood of being Australian citizens than Cantonese speakers (61%:86%), reflecting the historical political press for Australian citizenship among Hong Kong and Macau origin settlers, perhaps the reluctance of many PRC citizens to give up their PRC citizenship, and also recency of arrival. However to confuse matters slightly, over a thousand Sydney residents born in China claimed both Russian Orthodox religious affiliation and Russian ancestry, while over 400 claimed Russian Orthodoxy and Chinese ancestry (ABS Census 2006).

This diversity has been well documented (eg Ang 2000, 2001), as its effects contribute to an apparent impossibility of a unified or cohesive Chinese political presence in Australia. North American studies have pointed to the relatively low level of formal political representations of Chinese communities in the USA and Canada, relative to their size (Freedman 2000; Fernando 2006). Three reasons are suggested for this situation among those who accept such claims: a) community fragmentation absorbs energy in intra-communal struggles for influence; b) the focus in the first generation on economic establishment and success absorbs most of the creative energy available to recent settlers – they would be more interested in Chinese schools than in Chinese politicians; and c) power is exerted through influence networks (mobilizing *guanxi*) (Hutchings & Murray 2002) rather than through access to authoritative institutional roles in the host society (Chin 1997; Kwok 2008; Gao 2006, 2009). Even so this population is well educated and well placed in the developing knowledge economy; in 2006, 15.7% held postgraduate

degrees (All Australians 3.9%), 24.6% held Bachelor degrees (16.2%), while 37.0% held no qualifications (45.2%). They were strongly represented in the fields of IT at 10.7% (3.5%) and Management and Commerce at 32.1% (20.8%).

The complexity of the "Chinese", among who are people who would reject that appellation (and whose struggle against the Chinese state has spilled over into Australia), clearly does render any single unified body representing a Chinese interest rather difficult to create. This could be contrasted with the African Communities Council of Australia, the Australian Arabic Council and the Arab Australia Council, and even the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia. These federated bodies seek to provide a common voice for groups that seek a unified outcome.

"Chinese" is therefore not such a bridging label as might commonly be thought. But this may be no different to what might be said of earlier immigrant communities, and their marginalisation through the first generation of settlement (Zappala 1998). Multicultural political analysis as a branch of interest group politics, constructs a view of Australian society that frames ethnic communities as interest groups – with specific, usually first generation, concerns (Jupp 1984; Jupp et al. 1989; Kymlicka 2007; Levey 2008; Lopez 2000; Modood 2007). The standard rhetoric of multiculturalism usually seeks to mobilise wider social support through foregrounding concepts such as productive diversity, and arguing for its role in enhancing cosmopolitan capabilities in society (including bi-lingualism and intercultural communication competence). In practice a multicultural polity depends on well-organised ethnically-focused organisations able to both articulate the particular interests of their groups, and engage in coalitions with similar groups to deliver broader policy outcomes that provide individual benefits to the groups, and to their constituencies (Levey 2008).

One of the more salient characteristics of "Chinese" communities therefore can be found in the multiplicity of groups and institutions, and their interlinkage with commercial or quasi-commercial enterprises. Some of these organisations are purely local, some are international but locally-focused (eg clan groups), while some are trans-national (China/Australia) and others

international (eg diasporic multi-nation associations) (Lever-Tracy et al. 1996; Suryadinata 2004).

"Multicultural democracy" (Kymlicka 2007) refers to a system of liberal democracy in which cultural-descent groups are recognised as legitimate actors, and in which cultural heritage issues are legitimately part of the political debate. However there can be theoretical tension between conceiving of the political system as a distributive environment for competing interest groups, and viewing it as a dynamic arena for redistributive justice and the overcoming of discrimination and marginalisation. This tension becomes especially apparent where the nation state involved has a history of racially-biased legislation, and newly immigrating communities still experience racism (Fernando 2007). The Australian political system is still influenced by racist histories, while Asian immigrants still experience some forms of racism, and multicultural democracy has as one of its tasks the working through of these issues, towards equitable participation.

Australian Chinese and racism
As already discussed the Chinese have a long and unfortunate history as the Australian national "Other". With the end of the White Australia policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the arrival after 1975 of large numbers of Vietnamese Chinese, the doorway has apparently opened. The presence of Chinese increased dramatically after 1991, with the so-called June 4 immigrants, given open refuge after the Tiananmen events. Yet the racism that has been a defining characteristic of Australia's empire project in the past has not simply dissipated. While Kevin Dunn (2003) has found that Australians are less (but even so still) prejudiced against "Asians" than they are against Muslims and Indigenous people, Booth et al. (2009) identified the Chinese as the group most likely to suffer discrimination in employment on the basis merely of their names. Forrest and Dunn (2007) have also noted the quite high rates of racism and discrimination reported by Chinese Australians at work and in public.

Critics have argued that one of the major problems with Australian multiculturalism lies in systematic failure by government to engage with residual racism; indeed denial of racism has been a more likely response by government when confronted with inter-communal violence, than any sustained strategy of intervention. Even the Government's own Australian Human Rights

Commission has criticised government inaction on racism in its submission to the United Nations (AHRC 2010).

From the Blainey period on Australian Chinese have been involved in anti-racism politics, seeking both recognition as equal members of Australian society, and government action to reduce discrimination and prejudice. In part their strong support for McKew in Bennelong in 2007 reflected the view in the Chinese (and other Asian) communities that the Liberal Party under John Howard had adopted views that they experienced as racist, and that Howard symbolically represented the last embers of White Australia. However Chinese community leaders have expressed disappointment with the failure of the ALP government to adopt a Bill of Rights, to advance a policy on multiculturalism, or to signal a public commitment against racism.

Next steps

The "Chinese" question thus presents the first case of a post multicultural politics, characterised by large scale economic ties to Australia, operated through the entities of an imperial nation state, supported by a significant government bureaucracy (through the consulates and related agencies) and interacting with many different civil society organisations. In 2008/9 the collectivity of identifiable Chinese (PR China, HK, Macau, Taiwan) made up the largest of the non-British immigrant intakes (especially with the inclusion of students in DIAC NOM figures after 2006).

With the growing presence of China as a global power, international studies of Chinese immigrants in national political life have sought to bring together studies of "immigrant" enclaves and their political practices, with studies of transnational networks. Freedman (2000) in her examination of Chinese in the political life of the USA found that the two key assumptions widely held in the scholarly literature and "in popular opinion", that the Chinese are pawns of their homeland governments, and that they are politically passive preferring to concentrate on economic advancement, were not upheld by recent research. Freedman distinguishes between political influence and political participation, noting influence is a function of economic power, while participation is a function of the political system's openness to new entrants (2000, p.183). This is a useful distinction with valuable indications for Australian research. Fernando (2007)

working from within a paradigm of "critical multiculturalism", extends the terrain of Freedman's study into a comparison of Toronto and Los Angeles. She takes on the same contradiction between economic success and apparent political exclusion. The problem she argues lies in the tension between a racialised state structure and a public ideology of equality, producing a "democratic deficit". Multiculturalism as an ideology may disguise the realities of unequal access to power, where active blocking by existing power elites denies access to the formal political system.

The two empires projects now overlap, and are deeply implicated in each others' futures, as they have been in the past. The relative size differences obviously point to the dominance of the PRC in the politico-economic relationship, over the Australia/Taiwan and other diasporic ties. However the China relationship, while a key determinant of this post-multicultural world, does not encompass the whole picture.

China has voiced its own perception of this challenge. The former Chinese ambassador Zhang Junsai, said on his departure that Australia has become a crucial testing ground for China's relations with the West and other Asia-Pacific countries. Speaking with The Australian's Rowan Callick in September 2010, Zhang said that "there is no conflict of interest, not in history nor in territory" though he recognised the rising apprehension reflected in public discourse and government defence thinking (Callick 2010).

For Australia's (post) multicultural democracy to ensure the allegiance of its diverse population, it has to ensure the pathways to participation are open and the moralities of liberal pluralism are firmly embedded and fully exercised (Galligan and Roberts, 2008). The points of tension lie exactly at the intersections of ethno-nationalisms, imperial interests and political systems. Australia's empire project has to ensure that the emerging Australian ethno-nationalism includes rather than marginalizes its "Chinese" citizens, and embeds Australia's Chinese histories as part of the common national narrative (Lake 2008).

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