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## 史 CONTENTS

- 1 A Stinking Tradition: Tsuda Sōkichi's View of China  
*Joël Joos*
- 27 Drury's Occupation of Macau and China's Response to Early Modern Imperialism  
*Frederic Wakeman, Jr.*
- 35 On the *Sheng-wu Ch'in-cheng lu* 聖武親征錄  
*Igor de Rachewitz*
- 53 The Press and the Rise of Peking Opera Singers to National Stardom:  
The Case of *Theater Illustrated* (1912–17)  
*Catherine V. Yeh*
- 87 Compliance, Dissent and the Containment of China  
*Timothy Kendall*

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Errata In the previous issue of *East Asian History* (No.27) an incorrect character was given on p.57 for Wen-hsin Yeh. The characters should read:  
叶文心

## COMPLIANCE, DISSENT AND THE CONTAINMENT OF CHINA

 Timothy Kendall

The United States' policy of containment was first outlined in a speech made by President Truman in March 1947,<sup>1</sup> in which he asked Congress to provide economic assistance to the two countries that formed the gateway between the Middle East and Europe—Greece and Turkey.<sup>2</sup> Responding to appeals from the two governments, the President claimed that it was imperative that assistance be granted if Greece and Turkey were to resist annexation by communists. Truman declared: “that totalitarian regimes imposed upon free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States.” Thus he prompted Congress “to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”<sup>3</sup> Even though Truman did not use the word “containment” within the body of his speech, the Truman Doctrine, as it became known, represented the beginning of America’s crusade against the spread of international communism. From this moment, a campaign was developed to inform the American public of the value of containment as foreign policy. Two years later, when China was said to have been *lost* to communism, the policy of containment grew from a scheme for curbing the spread of Soviet communism into a comprehensive strategy for dealing with all forms of the communist menace.

In Australia, the call for the rigid containment and isolation of China became one of the hallmarks of the Menzies period of government. Prime Minister Menzies believed that communist China’s “extreme and aggressive posture” was a direct threat to Australia and New Zealand and he suggested that Southeast Asia and the Pacific represented communism’s most likely avenues of advance.<sup>4</sup> After the outbreak of the Korean War, Menzies spoke continually about the dangers of Chinese communist expansion and, for more

Much of the research for this paper was conducted when I spent time in Canberra on a “National Visiting Scholarship for Doctoral Candidates.” I am grateful to the Australian National University’s Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies and to the Division of Pacific and Asian History for this opportunity. I would also like to thank Kitty Eggerking for her editorial comments.

<sup>1</sup> “The Truman Doctrine” as it appears in Charles Gati, ed., *Caging the Bear: Containment and the Cold War* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), pp.3–8.

<sup>2</sup> This resulted from the fact that after the Second World War, Britain substantially reduced aid to both Greece and Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> “The Truman Doctrine” as it appears in Gati, *Caging the Bear*, pp.6–7.

<sup>4</sup> This expression is drawn from Robert Menzies in *The Measure of the Years* (London: Coronet, 1972), p.54. In a lecture delivered at the University of Texas in 1969—three years after he finished his reign as leader of the Liberal Party—Menzies continues to speak of “absorption,” “subversion” and “crisis”; see the speech, “The Responsibilities of Power” in Arthur Huck’s “Images of China,” *Australian Outlook*, 24.3 (1970): 310.

<sup>5</sup> The guerrillas of Ho Chi Minh had been fighting the French since 1946; the Malayan Communist Party was in action against the British colonial government; the communist-led Huks in the Philippines were challenging the newly-independent Manila regime; and the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI) was proving to be a formidable force in Indonesia.

<sup>6</sup> The idea that China acted as a “touchstone” is used by Stephen Fitzgerald in *Talking with China: The Australian Labor Party visit and Peking’s foreign policy* (Canberra: Contemporary China Papers Number 4, Australian National University Press, 1972), p.5.

than fifteen years, the Australian public was told that if Chinese communism was not contained, then communist forces, either Chinese or Chinese-backed, would sweep down through Thailand, Indo-China, Indonesia and into Australia. Before long, Australia’s foreign policy and defence commitments were dominated by the objective of containing communism. The fear of a communist advance prompted Australia to commit to a series of defence treaties and to develop aid programs to support the emerging post-colonial nations of Southeast Asia. ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States Treaty), SEATO (South-East Asian Treaty Organisation) (and later ASEAN [Association of South-East Asian Nations]) united many of the non-communist countries of the region and committed the United States to the defence of Australasia.

This sense of fear was intensified by the perception that the political changes that had occurred throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific since the Second World War would result in the further spread of communism. Indigenous nationalist movements in many parts of Southeast Asia had forced the withdrawal of Dutch, French, Portuguese and English administrations from the region as numerous Southeast Asian nations became independent of European colonial rule: the Philippines (1946), Burma (1948), Indonesia (1949), Vietnam (divided in 1954) and Malaya (1957). These newly independent post-colonial administrations transformed the international environment and broke down many traditional channels of power. The Menzies government feared that many of these newly formed Southeast Asian states would experience periods of political instability and felt that these nationalist movements were vulnerable to communist incursion.<sup>5</sup> By 1951, Australia began using its growing number of diplomatic placements in the region to monitor changes in these newly independent Southeast Asian countries; the outlines of the Colombo Plan permitted Australia to establish a network of diplomatic missions in the non-communist countries to whom they gave aid.

While the Australian government’s strategy of containing communism began as a foreign policy initiative, it soon became a military undertaking—as seen in the deployment of Australian troops to Korea (1950–53), Malaya (1955–60), Malaysia (1963–66) and Vietnam (1965–72). Beyond these aspects, the policy of containment was also used to determine the political status of Australian citizens. Throughout this article, I suggest that the ideology of containment did not simply produce various “truths” about China, to which Australians were required to submit, but that the concept became a touchstone by which the Australian government measured individuals’ commitment to the fight against communism.<sup>6</sup> I hope to demonstrate how the concept of containment was used to measure an individual’s loyalty through identifying how the Australian government responded to Australians—both communists and non-communists—who visited the PRC during the 1950s and 1960s. As the first part of my argument, I examine how Australians who were at odds with the government’s ideological position were suspected of subversion and placed under government surveillance. Then, I attempt

to dismiss the popular assumption that the Australian government roundly condemned and ridiculed all those who travelled to China during the Cold War. In its place, I offer a new interpretation of archival materials to suggest that the Australian government actually encouraged “politically reliable” Australians to visit China. Indeed, the government considered these individuals a conduit through whom it might obtain critical information about the changes that were taking place within the People’s Republic.

### *ASIO and the Regulation of Dissent*

As soon as the Liberal Party is returned to office the Communist Party in Australia will become an illegal organisation. Those who preach, teach or advocate Communism will be treated as treasonable agents.

*Robert Menzies (1949)*<sup>7</sup>

Once he replaced Ben Chifley as Prime Minister in 1949, Robert Menzies introduced legislation to ban the thirty-year-old Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and other organisations, which in the government’s opinion were substantially communist.<sup>8</sup> When the High Court of Australia ruled the Communist Party Dissolution Act unconstitutional on 9 March 1951, Menzies tried to change the constitution by putting the question of abolishing the CPA to a referendum. This second attempt to ban the CPA via referendum was also defeated,<sup>9</sup> A few years later, after granting the Petrovs political asylum (April 1954), Menzies announced that a Royal Commission would investigate the allegations of espionage and subversion that were levelled against the CPA.<sup>10</sup> While the Royal Commission failed to reveal a Soviet spy network in Australia, it was pivotal in deciding the outcome of the 1954 federal election.<sup>11</sup>

Five years after having taken office, Menzies had failed in his pledge to make communism unlawful, but still he continued to operate under the assumption that the CPA was acting unlawfully. Unable to eliminate the CPA through law, Menzies used the recently formed Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) to monitor, intimidate and vilify communists. ASIO’s charter of duties, as laid down by the Menzies government in 1952, included:

... such matters as communism, subversive activity, espionage and sabotage, vetting reports on persons who are liable to be security risks, dossiers kept and maintained on communists and suspects, advice and assistance to the local defence planning committee and a number of matters about aliens and so on. There are some matters relating to subversive elements, surveillance of public bodies of communist influence and also of industrial organisations ... assisting other Government departments to organise security systems.<sup>12</sup>

Menzies’ ideology of containment was no longer confined to a foreign policy objective that sought to contain communism in Eastern Europe or

<sup>7</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 March 1949.

<sup>8</sup> The Communist Party of Australia was established in 1920, three years after the Russian revolution. Encouraged by the war-time alliance with the USSR and the defeat of fascism in Europe, the CPA reached its peak membership of 23,000 in 1945. Ten years later, however, its numbers had dwindled to 8,000. In 1964, inspired by the Sino-Soviet feud, the CPA split and Ted Hill established a breakaway (pro-Chinese) faction—the CPA *Marxist-Leninist*. The CPA (*M-L*) was intransigently Stalinist and followed the Chinese on questions of policy and organisation. In 1945, four years before becoming Prime Minister for the second time, Robert Menzies claimed that his party would out-argue, not outlaw, communism. Alastair Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia: A Short History* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1969), p.107.

<sup>9</sup> There were 2,317,927 YES votes and 2,370,009 NO votes; a NO majority of less than 2.5%; New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia had NO majorities. *Australia’s First Cold War 1945–1953*, vol.1: *Society, Communism and Culture*, eds, Ann Curthoys and John Merritt, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984), p.133.

<sup>10</sup> The Royal Commission began in the month following the Petrov Affair and lasted fifteen months.

<sup>11</sup> The opposition leader, H.V. Evatt (who became leader after Chifley died in June 1951) became embroiled in the controversy over communist subversion when he attempted to defend Allan Dalziel, a member of his staff who was found to have supplied information to the Soviet Embassy. Capitalising on this, /OVER

/Menzies endeavoured to discredit Evatt and the ALP and went on to win the election.

<sup>12</sup> Commonwealth Senate: *Hansard*, 21 August 1973. In the period following the Second World War, Britain's MI5 and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA, which was founded in 1947) had urged Prime Minister Chifley to establish a local security service to guard against the infiltration of Russian spy rings into Australia. By 1948, the US claimed that the CPA "had become the focal point of World Revolution in the Southwest Pacific" this comment was made in March 1948 by the US Labor attaché, Webster Powell, as quoted by David McKnight, *Australia's Spies and their Secrets* (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1994, p.9). It was further claimed that the CPA had infiltrated the government and that classified documents were being leaked from Australia to the Soviet Union. As a result, the US placed a ban on the transmission of classified information to Australia. Chifley, and the then Attorney-General Evatt, who had opposed the creation of a national intelligence-gathering agency, were placed under further pressure by the British government, as this ban interfered with the transfer of technical information that was essential to the British nuclear tests at Woomera. After sustained pressure by the US and British governments, Chifley eventually conceded, and the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation was founded on 8 February 1949.

<sup>13</sup> National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation), Commonwealth Records, Ralph Siward Gibson, A6119/79/1367.

<sup>14</sup> The suggestion that the Menzies government wanted to intern 10,000 communists and communist sympathisers is made by David McKnight, *Australia's Spies and their Secrets*.

North and Southeast Asia; rather, it developed into a policy that attempted to guard against subversion or revolt from within. Throughout the Cold War, ASIO dedicated the vast majority of its resources to monitoring communist activity in Australia and became central to the endeavour of regulating Australian interests in the People's Republic of China.

Consider the following assessment of Ralph Gibson, a member of the Central Committee of the CPA, recorded by an ASIO field officer during an interview with Edward Coulson, a former member of the CPA, on 12 January 1961:

Speaking about Ralph GIBSON, Coulson said, "Ralph GIBSON is eccentric, there is no doubt about that. He is a very dangerous man and if war ever broke out, I think that he would have to be put away for his own safety." ... I said to COULSON—do you think that GIBSON would have to be put away on account of something stupid he may say during a war with Russia—and COULSON replied—"yes, I think he is stupid enough to do anything, if there were a war with Russia" ... <sup>13</sup>

Coulson's comments are of interest not merely because they are considered to represent some type of incontrovertible 'truth' about Gibson's character, but also because they reinforce the suggestion that one of ASIO's principal functions was to maintain dossiers on the 10,000 communists, communist sympathisers, left-wing unionists and fellow travellers that the Menzies government wanted to intern in the event of a real war against communism.<sup>14</sup> The aim of ASIO dossiers was to establish profiles on those subjects who, like Ralph Gibson, were legitimately expressing their dissent but were nevertheless considered to represent some type of threat to the social and political order. Most of those who were considered a security risk had some sort of connection with the Communist Party of Australia. Within such a context, the designation "communist" automatically suggested that the subject under surveillance was dangerous and that their behaviour was both transgressive and potentially criminal. That these communists were not, in reality, guilty of any specific crime seems to have made little or no difference to either the Australian government or ASIO. Over time, ASIO was utilised to extend the Menzies government's level of executive control. ASIO's files, which were intricately and painstakingly cross-referenced, mapped a vast 'underworld' of CPA members, left-wing persons and supporters of the communist 'front.' The sheer number of ASIO dossiers suggests that the security organisation was intended to become a major instrument of social control—that is, a major regulatory or disciplinary 'technology.'

In the context of Australian relations with China, it could be argued that Australian interests were managed as much by the institutions of rule as they were by the ideology of containment—the stories about falling dominoes, invasions, fifth columns, communist insurrection and subversion. Such a distinction is significant because it suggests that state power does not simply manifest overtly, by subjugation or constraint, but that community



activity can be regulated discursively or epistemologically, without the direct imposition of the law. As a consequence, it is only those who do not learn to successfully regulate their own moral, social and economic behaviours who need to be exposed to the direct rule of law. In fact, in many “liberal” regimes of government (where it could be argued that the social management and regulation of individuals is based on the illusion that citizens possess freedom and autonomy), those who fail to self-regulate ‘voluntarily’ are the ones who run the risk of having their behaviour modified by the state.

In *Writers Defiled: Security Surveillance of Australian Authors and Intellectuals*, Fiona Capp suggests that when reading an ASIO file, we must first decide what kind of story we are reading “in order that the words on the page become meaningful.”<sup>15</sup> Capp’s strategy is to read the dossier as a form of biography, or, more particularly, as “incriminating biography.” Capp’s notion of the incriminating biography can be linked to Foucault’s concept of governmentality to facilitate a discussion about the way that the technologies of governance operate to supervise and regulate Australian interest in China. In this instance, biography—as a narrative modality—becomes a disciplinary technology, or an instrument of control, that directly intervenes in the management of social life. An individual’s political credibility is determined by the biography or life story that the state writes for them. In turn, the biography determines an individual’s security risk and the level of state intervention that is considered necessary in the subject’s day-to-day life. The labours of the security agency do not only create an archive that contains the profiles of potential offenders, but the agency, through its very existence, prompts would-be subjects to self-regulate, or become subjected to surveillance. Because citizens who do not voluntarily self-regulate and adopt the government’s ideological position are then exposed to the scrutiny of the state’s security agencies, it could be argued that the bureaucratic biography is intended to produce “acquiescent social subjects.”<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the Cold War, stories about falling dominoes and the like were used to justify the government’s adoption of the US policy of containment and expose and exploit the Labor Party’s soft line on communism. Beyond this, such stories were also used to validate the government’s regime of surveillance and justify the subjugation of the constitutional rights of many Australians. While claiming to protect Australians from the threat of totalitarianism, ASIO’s activities eroded the democratic freedoms of many Australians. Over time, ASIO was not simply used to create an archive of information about potential political subversives, but was also used to facilitate Menzies’ war against the Left. ASIO collected information for party-political purposes, screened appointments to both academia and the public service and monitored the activities of left-wing academics, politicians and journalists. ASIO was also used to discredit members of the ALP, denounce adversaries, condemn political “radicals” and stymie the careers of those who espoused or offered alternative political ideologies.

<sup>15</sup> Fiona Capp: *Writers Defiled: Security Surveillance of Australian Authors and Intellectuals* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1993), p.3.

<sup>16</sup> Capp, *Writers Defiled*, p.4. The files created on CPA members were maintained in anticipation that they would be used against the subject in some form of disciplinary action and for many communists, government surveillance resulted in their exclusion from employment. In the autobiography *Between the Lines* (Melbourne: Sybylla Press, 1988), Bernice Morris exposes the way that the Australian government blacklisted her husband, Dave Morris. The government’s ‘security interference’ frequently resulted in employment becoming, inexplicably, ‘unavailable’. After years of unemployment, Dave Morris was eventually employed as an engineer with the Hydro Electric Commission of Tasmania. After moving from Melbourne to Tasmania, Morris was sacked within three days. Following his sacking, Morris wrote to both Colonel Spry (head of ASIO) and Prime Minister Menzies. Bernice Morris explains that in his reply, Menzies admitted to interfering in Morris’ employment with the HEC. Menzies said that the security service had “felt obliged to draw [the HEC’s] attention to the relevant parts of the report of the Royal Commission on Espionage.” Menzies added that, “a security clearance is an almost inevitable prerequisite to a professional appointment in the Commonwealth [public] service” (B. Morris, *Between the Lines*, p.148). After Dave Morris returned to Melbourne, the CPA arranged for the Morris family to move to China. Four years later they moved to Moscow. Dave Morris died of prostate cancer in Moscow in 1969.

While continuing to examine the way that the ASIO dossier was intended to guard against infiltration and subversion, the next section of this paper exposes how Australian communists managed to escape government surveillance and travel to China during the early 1950s. After investigating this failure of the state security apparatus, I proceed to examine the way that the Menzies government assessed the potential threat of non-communists with China interests.

### *Living outside Biography: Slipping through the Surveillance Net*

<sup>17</sup>Transporting a group of this size to China, without the consent or knowledge of the Australian government, was a clandestine operation. Before their departure, members of the delegation were called to the CPA headquarters in Sydney and were offered the opportunity of visiting China. They were told that under no circumstances were they to tell family or friends where they were going. They were cautioned against writing letters home, for fear they would be traced by ASIO. Cadres were instructed to leave their parents' addresses with CPA leaders in Sydney. Letters written by friends and family in Australia would then be collected by the CPA and hand delivered by CPA leaders who occasionally visited Peking. The 1951 study group departed from Australia by sea and travelled to Marseilles. From Marseilles, members travelled to Geneva and then on to Prague where arrangements were made to travel to the USSR. After staying in Moscow for a week, they made the ten-day train trip to Peking.

<sup>18</sup>The first CPA study group was led by Eric Aarons and included the prominent communists Ernie and Lila Thornton, John Sendy and Keith McEwan. Accounts of the experiences of this study group appear in John Sendy's *Comrades Come Rally!* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1978), and Keith McEwan's *Once a Jolly Comrade* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1966). A further account appears in Eric Aarons, "As I saw the Sixties," *Australian Left Review* 27 (October-November, 1970): 60–73. These texts belong to a rich sub-genre of memoirs written by Australian communists (others /OVER

Shortly after 1949, the new Chinese government decided to continue the Soviet practice of inviting foreign communists to form "study groups" and travel to China. Cadres lived in Peking, met communists from other countries and became schooled in matters of party organisation and Marxist-Leninist theory. Such educational initiatives were expected to contribute to the advancement of international communism and assist in developing communist movements in the participants' respective home countries. As a result of these programs, six delegations and seventy Australian communists visited China throughout the 1950s. The first study group of CPA members lived in China between 1951–54; thirteen Australian cadres, aged in their late twenties and early thirties, lived in a newly constructed educational institution and received a Sino-Soviet education. The location of the institution, somewhere outside Peking, remained secret, as the Chinese government believed that American spies were identifying or exposing Western "friends of China."<sup>17</sup>

The college in which these Australian cadres lived contained sufficient living quarters, instruction rooms and dining halls to accommodate several hundred people, and they lived among communists from North and Southeast Asia—in particular, Japanese, Burmese, Indonesians and Thais. It was intended that this group of CPA cadres would learn communist history and theory while developing the skills of party building. Having experienced the new revolutionary society firsthand, it was hoped that these cadres would later return to Australia and emerge as the new generation of CPA leadership.<sup>18</sup>

Upon arriving in Peking, the CPA cadres went through a process of proletarianisation. They were given Chinese clothes, took Chinese names and ate simple Chinese food. They studied party building, political economy, the foundation of Marxism-Leninism, the history of the Chinese revolution, dialectical and historical materialism and the history of the Australian labour movement—for ten hours a day, six days a week. In an endeavour to "cut off their bourgeois tails," students were regularly prompted to make 'introspections' or self-criticisms. This involved exposing their bourgeois inclinations and identifying their ideological weaknesses. The most common weaknesses were those considered to be characteristic of capitalist or feudal societies:

individualism, hedonism and selfishness. Because of the relatively secret nature of the institution, students were prevented from freely moving around Peking. This meant that they lived on the fringes of the city, participated in limited extra-curricular activities and had few opportunities to meet Chinese comrades. During the first few years, the students were only permitted to travel outside the institute on special occasions such as May Day and National Day, or when they were granted annual holidays. It was not until 1954 that these regulations were relaxed and students were bused into Peking for shopping on Sunday afternoons.

Some members of the 1951–54 study group—John Sendy, Bernie Taft and Keith McEwan—have written memoirs describing their experience of living in China. The group leader, Eric Aarons, has written a further, yet shorter, account. While the details included in these four accounts are, by and large, the same, they provide rather different summaries of the experience of living in revolutionary China. Both Sendy and Aarons claimed to have been overwhelmed by the experience. In *Comrades Come Rally!* Sendy quotes Aarons:

The three years, 1951–54, I and others spent in China made a deep emotional and intellectual impact. To experience, even if only by proximity, the creative energy, spirit of self-sacrifice and mass involvement of a great revolution, and hear first hand analyses by people who had taken part, is to add a new dimension for people from a country like Australia where nothing like that has ever happened.<sup>19</sup>

While this quotation suggests that a certain energy was drawn from the revolution, McEwan's text reflects more on the isolation and loneliness of the experience. McEwan, who claimed to be more psychologically than politically affected, suggests that the eagerness and enthusiasm of the cadres were slowly replaced by boredom and fatigue, as the cadres found themselves estranged from Chinese society and isolated from the revolutionary experience. McEwan points out that they were unable to form relationships with Chinese people and that even the Chinese staff with whom they lived in the college (lecturers, translators, chefs, drivers, etc.) were housed in separate quarters and ate in different dining rooms.

Both Sendy and McEwan devote large sections of their accounts to describing the occasional interruptions to their daily schedules: excursions to Peking, national celebrations, annual vacations spent in coastal cities, tours down the Yangzi River and occasional bouts of drunkenness. Beyond these moments the students remained disconnected from both the revolution and the affairs of the world generally. CPA cadres obtained news of the outside world by listening to the Australian Broadcasting Commission's (ABC) overseas broadcasts. This was how they learned of the failure of Menzies' anticommunist referendum and of the Royal Commission into Espionage. Such information reinforced their fears that they would suffer discrimination and reprisals upon returning to Australia. Fearing government harassment or vilification, it was decided that their return to Australia should be as covert as their departure.

/include Gibson, Grey, Morris, Taft, Sharpley). As the title of McEwan's text (*Once a Jolly Comrade*) suggests, this is an account of a former CPA member who became disillusioned with party practices (in particular, the coercive forces that prompted members to maintain the party line). In contrast, Sendy's *Comrades Come Rally!* contains the recollections of a long-serving cadre who was to become the vice-president of the CPA. Offering something of a counter-history of post-war Australia, these memoirs present a portrait of the Australian communist movement while revealing the types of discrimination Australian communists experienced during the 1950s–1970s. Many of these memoirs remained unwritten until much of the heat went out of the Cold War and when authors considered it safe to come out.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Aarons, "As I saw the Sixties," p.6. Also quoted by John Sendy, *Comrades Come Rally!* p.90.

<sup>20</sup> The 1955 group was led by Laurie Aarons (brother of Eric) and included Ted Bacon, Elliott Johnson, Harry Stanistreet, Harry Bocquet, Alec Robertson, Joyce Stevens and Bernie Taft. For an account of this trip, see Bernie Taft's *Crossing the Party Line* (Newham: Scribe, 1994). John Hughes, Claude Jones, Doug Olive and Ralph Gibson (who is mentioned in the above quotation from an ASIO file) led the subsequent groups. Beside the CPA study groups there were a number of other Australian communists who visited China during the 1950s. Numerous CPA members travelled in various union delegations and CPA leaders made regular China trips. Beyond this, there was a further category of Australian who lived in China during the 1950s and early 1960s, the *waiguo zhuanjia*, the foreign expert, or "Friend of China" (e.g., Dave and Bernice Morris). These foreign experts usually worked in China as translators, teachers, technicians and propagandists. It was not until after 1962 that the Chinese government began to accept non-communist foreign experts. These non-communists were principally employed as language teachers.

<sup>21</sup> Thornton became a well-known communist sympathiser after *China Pictorial* printed a photograph of him at an International Labour Day celebration (May 1952, p.6). He had been in Peking representing the World Federation of Trade Unions (NAA: ASIO, Commonwealth Records: Ernest Thornton, A6119/43/397). The government knew that Riley had attended the World Congress of Mothers in Peking. E.F. (Ted) Hill was a well-known communist who had made various trips to China. Senior communists like Hill, who were considered to represent a significant threat to Australian democracy, were placed under constant surveillance. His extraordinarily large ASIO dossier contains thousands of pages of interception reports (phone taps).

<sup>22</sup> NAA: *China-Relations with Australia-Visits by Australians*, A1838/278/3107/38/12/2, pt.1. The Department of External Affairs began keeping records on those who visited China in 1948 when W. Macmahon Ball led a delegation through Southeast Asia in May-June 1948. Part One of *China-Relations with Australia--Visits by Australians* contains a list of all Australians known to have travelled to

Before leaving China, the students burned their records and notes and then travelled to different socialist countries in Eastern Europe. After spending weeks and even months in Eastern European capitals, they returned to Australia at intervals in an attempt to disguise their collective absence. The CPA leadership insisted that they tell no one that they had been in China.

Altogether, six CPA study groups travelled to Peking during the 1950s. A second group of CPA cadres went to China in 1955 and remained for one year. Between 1957–60, a further four study groups visited China for periods of up to six months.<sup>20</sup> The Department of External Affairs and the Department of Immigration maintained records on all those Australians who they knew to have visited China during the Cold War, and their records indicate that they knew of only three CPA members visiting China—Ernie Thornton, Ted Hill and Betty Riley.<sup>21</sup> While both Departments suspected that other Australian communists had visited China throughout the period, these records suggest that the Australian government was unaware of these study tours.<sup>22</sup>

While ASIO had confirmed that John Sendy, E.J. Aarons and K. McEwan had departed Australia as passengers aboard the Italian liner the *S S Surriento* for Marseilles, it could not establish where the three had travelled thereafter. By March 1953, it was believed that the three had visited the Berlin Youth Festival, but, a short time later, this was reviewed and a memorandum was issued asking whether or not McEwan had visited the festival. A later memorandum called for further information about the countries he had visited and the people of security interest with whom he associated.<sup>23</sup> By June 1953, ASIO reported that McEwan was in Norway "undergoing a five year course of training in Communist propaganda."<sup>24</sup> Nothing is known of Taft's whereabouts from 1950 to 1953. In ASIO's records he simply reappears at a CPA meeting towards the end of 1954. Aarons' whereabouts was unknown until 10 December 1954 when he returned to Sydney from Amsterdam.<sup>25</sup> Little more was known about Sendy. Once they were found to have returned to Australia, ASIO resumed its surveillance of members of the first study group and continued producing their incriminating biographies, as if they had not left Australia. ASIO agents recorded that many of the returnees continued their work for the communist movement in Australia; many began conducting classes at the Marx School in Sydney or Melbourne, lecturing on dialectal and historical materialism, Marxism and the arts, Marxist theory and the state, political economy, the communist manifesto and so on.

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/China between 1948 and 1956, but fails to record the members of the 1951 and 1955 study groups. The inaccuracy of the records is further reflected in the fact that they failed to note the visit of Australia's first union delegation to China in 1952.

<sup>23</sup> NAA: ASIO, Commonwealth Records: Keith McEwan, A6199/82/2137, memorandum dated 16 September 1957.

<sup>24</sup> NAA: ASIO, Commonwealth Records: E.J. Aarons, A6119/2/105, memorandum 5442. This is, of course, untrue.

<sup>25</sup> NAA: ASIO, Commonwealth Records: E.J. Aarons, A6119/2/105 (dated 13 December 1954). Aarons had travelled under the name of Barons and told the Boarding Officer that he had been living in Poland.

Despite the Menzies government's efforts to eradicate communism in Australia—via the Communist party Dissolution Act, the referendum to ban the CPA, the Royal Commission into Espionage and finally through the use of intimidation and surveillance—the government's security agencies remained unaware of the international activities of CPA cadres. The security agency had not only failed to transform communists like Sendy, Aarons and McEwan into more acquiescent social subjects, but it had also failed to eliminate or contain communist activity in Australia.

### *Visiting China during the Cold War: Short-term Visits by Non-Communists*

At that time—early 1951—it was considered rather disloyal for an Australian even to contemplate going to “Red China.” As far as the Australia of Robert Menzies was concerned, People's China was an “outcast” and Australian passports were stamped “Not Valid for Red China.” Fortunately I had taken the precaution of getting a new British passport before leaving Budapest, specifically endorsed as valid for the China of Mao Tse-tung.

*Wilfred Burchett*<sup>26</sup>

Between 1949 and 1956, a number of journalists, businessmen and peace delegates travelled from Australia to China. Most of these visitors travelled privately or joined delegations in Peking, Hong Kong or the Soviet Union. These trips were made without consulting the Australian government and in most cases government departments remained unaware of such visits until after their conclusion. While the Australian government maintained a record of those Australians it knew to have visited China during this period, it was apparently not particularly concerned that non-communists visited China at this time. The visits received little attention from the press and were not considered to represent any significant threat to national security.<sup>27</sup>

By early 1956, however, this official disinterest was replaced with concern as the Chinese government began inviting more and more Australian delegations to visit. These delegations were composed entirely of Australians and included senior academic, religious and community figures, individuals whose influence was considered to extend throughout the Australian community. As a result of these invitations, a number of left-wing writers, high-profile academics, church leaders and union representatives began approaching the Australian government for permission to travel to communist China. Initially, the Departments of External Affairs and Immigration were unsure of what the official response to such requests should be. By the time that individuals began making applications to the Department of Immigration for the necessary travel documentation, the government realised that it was necessary to develop an official position on

<sup>26</sup> Wilfred Burchett, *At the Barricades* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1981), p.154. While Burchett remained sympathetic to communist movements across the world, he never in fact joined a communist party in or outside Australia.

<sup>27</sup> Records held by the Department of External Affairs and the Department of Immigration state that there were visits by journalists (Selwyn Speight of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and Reg Leonard of the *Herald*); businessmen (Millis and Dekyvere) and other Australians who attended various congresses and colloquia such as the World Congress of Mothers (CPA member, Betty Riley) and the 1952 Peking Peace Conference (Jessie Street, W.E. Gollan, Wilfred Burchett, Ken Gott and a minister of the Uniting Church, Reverend Victor James). NAA: *China-Relations with Australia—Visits by Australians*, A1838/278/3107/12/2, pt.1. However, these government records are by no means complete. The government was unaware of numerous visits by other Australians; further references can be found in Part II of Lachlan Strahan's *Australia's China: Changing Perceptions from the 1930s to the 1990s* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and in the writings of communists, Aarons, Sendy, McEwan, et al.

<sup>28</sup> This frequently repeated phrase came to represent the official attitude, NAA: *China-Relations with Australia---Visits by Australians*, A1838/278/3107/38/12/2, pt.1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. H.C. Menzies visited during March/April 1956.

<sup>30</sup> H.E. Holt's Letter to R.G. Casey, 1 March 1956 (NAA: *Australia-China Society*: A6980/T1 S250116).

<sup>31</sup> The Australia-China Society was established in 1951. Modelled on the China Society of Great Britain, it was established "as a non-political society interested in the promotion of knowledge of Chinese culture and art in Australia" (C.P. FitzGerald and P.H. Partridge: *Report to the Council of the Australian National University on the Visit to China of the Australian Cultural Delegation*, Australian National University, Canberra, 1956). The ACS, with branches in Sydney and Melbourne, had a membership of about 500 and sought to advance a greater understanding of China among Australians. It conducted lectures, exhibitions and circulated maps and literature to government departments, schools and to the public. Through the 1950s, the organisation's founder, C.P. FitzGerald, was keen to promote the ACS as a non-political organisation. Two years prior to leading the 1958 trip to China, FitzGerald sent a letter to the government explaining that the delegation would not include communists or "fellow travellers." In an effort to reduce the Society's political status he promised the government that he would not to invite the prominent communists Katherine Susannah Pritchard or Frank Hardy.

<sup>32</sup> The members of the delegation were: Professors FitzGerald and Partridge of the ANU; Dr Leonard Cox, Trustee of the National Gallery of Victoria; A. Penfold, Director of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney; Professor A. Davis, Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney; A. Lindsay, ACS secretary; the author Alan Marshall and the artists, G. Lewers, Elaine Haxton, D. Annand and C. Bush.

<sup>33</sup> C.P. FitzGerald, an English-South African (China specialist) who had come to Australia after having spent years in China, was appointed Foundation Professor of Far Eastern History at the Australian National University in 1950. In 1954, members of

Australian visits to China. The government was clearly compromised; it did not want groups of Australian nationals travelling to communist countries, and yet it did not want to be seen to be publicly preventing or restricting such travel. As a result, in 1956, the Australian government adopted an official policy of being "neither commendatory or [*sic*] condemnatory" of Australians who intended to travel to communist countries.<sup>28</sup> The government stated that while Australian passports were not valid for communist countries, passports would be validated on request. The government, however, was less liberal with its own employees. Following the semi-official visit of the Australian Trade Commissioner in Hong Kong, H. C. Menzies, Cabinet decided in April 1956 that "it was undesirable that any government official or any officer of a government instrumentality should be a member of a group visiting China."<sup>29</sup> Further, and in spite of the innocuousness of the official rhetoric—*neither commendatory nor condemnatory*—the government's reaction was not altogether neutral; it wanted ASIO to be aware of those Australians who made applications to visit China. The Minister for Immigration (H.E. Holt) informed the Minister for External Affairs (R.G. Casey) that "if a request is made, it is granted as a matter of course subject only to the applicant giving a statement for reasons of travel which is passed to A.S.I.O."<sup>30</sup> As a result, many of the applications to travel to communist China could result in ongoing government surveillance.

The most controversial Australian delegation to visit China in 1956 was the Australia-China Society (ACS) Cultural Delegation.<sup>31</sup> It was the first exclusively Australian delegation invited to the PRC and included a number of outspoken advocates for the formal recognition of the People's Republic. The eleven-member delegation, comprised of senior academics, museum curators and artists, was invited by the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with foreign countries.<sup>32</sup> The tour was led by Professor C. P. FitzGerald, who was also the founder and National President of the Australia-China Society.<sup>33</sup> The delegation spent a month travelling throughout China, visiting areas of cultural significance. FitzGerald claimed that the motivation for the trip was an investigation of the possibilities of establishing cultural and educational exchanges between China and Australia. In his record of the visit, FitzGerald described meeting Zhou Enlai to discuss the possibility of exchanges and detailed some of the changes he observed since 1949.<sup>34</sup>

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the Menzies government slandered FitzGerald when he signed a letter that was published in *The Canberra Times* that called for the recognition of the Chinese communist government.

<sup>34</sup> C.P. FitzGerald and P.H. Partridge, *Report to the Council*. This text contains a detailed account of the trip and was

submitted to the Department of External Affairs. It had been FitzGerald's application to the government that had prompted the development of an official response to requests to visit China. The application, made on behalf of the delegation by FitzGerald, bewildered the bureaucracy and all levels of government gave consideration to it.

The level of government concern over the ACS visit is reflected in the files that ASIO had been keeping on FitzGerald. ASIO had begun monitoring FitzGerald in 1951 after he participated in a radio program about contemporary life in communist China. In Parliament, during question time, enraged members complained to the Prime Minister that the national broadcaster, the ABC, had aired a radio discussion about communist China by the “notorious party liners” FitzGerald and Dr Peter Russo of the Melbourne *Argus*.<sup>35</sup> In 1953, FitzGerald became embroiled in further controversy over a series of public statements he made about China; his ASIO file contains an assessment of the press responses to these statements. The file also reveals that after the May 1956 visit, ASIO’s surveillance of FitzGerald increased. ASIO officers began attending FitzGerald’s public lectures, and the file contains detailed reports of lectures he gave in Tasmania immediately after his China visit.<sup>36</sup> It appears the Regional Director of ASIO (Tasmania) recorded the contents of the lectures and sent them to ASIO’s head office in Collins Street, Melbourne. The FitzGerald file also contains various newspaper clippings that summarised the speeches and lectures FitzGerald made in other Australian cities when he returned from China.<sup>37</sup> Overall however, ASIO’s “summary of information made against C. P. FitzGerald” is fairly innocuous. It includes a short biography, newspaper clippings and details about addresses, phone numbers and car registrations.<sup>38</sup>

Two other delegations visited the PRC in 1956—one, a trade union (May–June), the other from the Church of England (November 1956). In the following year a number of other groups visited: delegations of university students (February 1957), doctors (May), and Methodist ministers who attended the Colombo Peace Conference (June). H. V. Evatt caused a political controversy by allowing an ALP parliamentary delegation to visit China in July of 1957. There were also subsequent visits by the Australia-China Society (1958, 1960) and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU; annually between 1957–60).<sup>39</sup> After the start of the Great Leap Forward (1958–60), however, the numbers of foreigners invited to China diminished substantially.

### *Cold War Cartographers: Adding to the Government Archive*

In the final section of my argument, I show how the ideology of containment played a pivotal role in determining the way that Australians came to imagine, interpret and describe China throughout the Cold War. I do this by examining some of the reports by “politically reliable” Australians who visited China during the late 1950s and early 1960s. I argue that as the government’s knowledge of China was confined to the accounts of those who subscribed to their philosophy of containing communism, their reports became an exercise in wish-fulfilment. Visitors did not only look for signs of a

<sup>35</sup> *Hansard*, Wednesday 4 July 1951.

<sup>36</sup> Upon his return to Australia, FitzGerald gave a series of public lectures. He gave two lectures in Tasmania (Burnie, 29 October 1956 and Rosebury, 30 October 1956), both of which were attended by ASIO representatives.

<sup>37</sup> *Tribune*, 6 June 1956, 20 June 1956, 27 June 1956; *Daily Telegraph*, 21 June 1956, 23 June 1956; *Age*, 14 April 1956, 25 June 1956; *Mercury*, 25 June 1956; and, *Guardian*, 21 June 1956.

<sup>38</sup> Many ASIO files contain newspaper clippings, biographical information, political summaries and interception reports (phone taps).

<sup>39</sup> While Australia’s first union delegation (the Sheet Metal Workers’ Union) visited the People’s Republic in 1952, the first ACTU visit did not occur until 1957.

growing security threat, but they presented an image of China that confirmed and reinforced the stereotypes held by the government of the day. The intelligence that the government sought was predetermined by its ideology of containment, and the information produced for government was used to justify anxieties and confirm stereotypes about Chinese communist aggression and expansionism. The collected intelligence was, in turn, used to perpetuate the government's attitude toward China and validate its vigilant response to the "insurrection and subversion" of communism. This adds support to my argument that what begins as an institutional discourse about the political management of Australian citizens, rapidly becomes part of a much wider and more discursive realm of the imaginary.

The assumption that the Australian government prohibited Australians from travelling to China during the Cold War is a result of a frequently articulated, even stereotypical, post-Cold War narrative, which goes something like this. Throughout the 1950s, large sectors of the Australian community began to enjoy a period of sustained economic prosperity. For those who had experienced the hardships and privations of the depression and the Second World War, the post-war era represented a period of both opportunity and optimism. Yet, behind the façade of suburban prosperity there existed a society deeply uncertain about the political and social changes that were occurring internationally. The Cold War had begun and Australian political leaders were speaking of an "arc of instability" to the country's north. In an effort to protect the nation's vast and undefended shores from the threat of communism, the government entered a series of defence treaties. The eurocentrism and conservative ideals of the Menzies government also gave rise to an isolationist foreign policy; Australian society became increasingly parochial and insular. Australians became nervous about the erosion of moral standards and anxious about the nation's increasingly complex racial, cultural and religious character. An atmosphere of intolerance and suspicion developed with constant talk of an impending threat or crisis. Those who held alternative social and political attitudes were accused of being subversive and even "un-Australian." It was to become an age of spies, subversives, infiltrators and informers ... .

Much recent political and academic discourse has reduced the 1950s and 1960s to a one-dimensional metaphor for all that is considered conservative, backward looking, suburban, paranoid and intolerant in Australia. Whether or not these notions accurately represent the social and political culture of the Menzies era, such a portrayal has reinforced a series of assumptions about the types of exchanges that occurred between the Australian government and those who travelled to the People's Republic of China during the Cold War. It has prompted the belief that all Australians who travelled to the PRC were considered to be communist sympathisers, insurgent revolutionaries, and potential collaborators in a communist overthrow of Australian democracy. Here, I want to suggest that this type of narrative has come to act as something of a stereotype, a stereotype that replicates the simple binaries of the Cold



War. The Australian government did not universally condemn and ridicule all those who travelled to the People's Republic during the 1950s and 1960s; rather, a number of non-communist Australians were encouraged to visit China. In examining some of the exchanges that took place between the Department of External Affairs and these "politically reliable" Australians, I suggest that the government considered these individuals to be a conduit through which it could draw critical information about the changes taking place within the People's Republic.

The Australian government distinguished card-carrying communists or CPA members, who openly sympathised with the Chinese regime, from other non-communists who had made visits to China. The distinction is made clear by a comment by R.G. Casey, the Minister of External Affairs, in the House of Representatives in May 1957. Asked what steps the government was taking "to ensure that trips to Communist China ... (were) not being used to further communist activities in Australia," Casey replied:

The Government has consistently taken the attitude that it neither encourages or discourages such invitations from the Government of Communist China to groups of personalities in Australia to visit China. It is left to the good sense of the individual visitor not to be—I think I might say—taken in by the obvious propaganda to which the visitors will be exposed when they are in China. I think that if one looks at the composition of the groups that have been invited to, and have visited, Communist China over the last twelve months, one will see that there is no great fear that the groups as I recall them will be taken in. The particular groups, as I remember them, included a group from the National Union of Australian University Students, Professor Fitzgerald's [*sic*] group, a group led by His Grace the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, a group of trade unionists led by the President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions and, more lately, a group of doctors. I have been kept informed of the names of the members of these groups, and I think that very few, if any, of the individuals making them up can be said to be in any way tinged with the type of politics which would make them susceptible to propaganda of the kind which undoubtedly they would receive when they reached Communist China. As to the motive of the Communist Chinese Government in inviting these groups, I can only say that it enhances its prestige to have groups of personalities of that consequence—in this case Australians—visiting China, and I take it that it would expect the groups, when they return home, to talk tolerantly, or even sympathetically, about what they saw in China. I do not myself believe that there is any evidence that the visitors to China have not been individuals of the type who might be sympathetic with what they found in Communist China and I expect that the Government will continue to adopt the attitude that it neither encourages or discourages such visits. I think that we can rely on the good sense of decent Australians in that respect.<sup>40</sup>

Implicit in Casey's statement is the suggestion that communism's coercive force may mislead political radicals. However, these comments are devoid of

<sup>40</sup> NAA: *China-Relations with Australia—Visits by Australians*, NAA: A1838/280 3107/38/12/2, pt.2.

<sup>41</sup> What Casey's statement may suggest is that government departments and agencies may have held conflicting and contradictory attitudes towards Australians who visited China. While the Department of External Affairs, the Department of Immigration and ASIO frequently collaborated in an attempt to monitor Australian visitors to China, they did not necessarily agree on who was considered to constitute a threat. Therefore, while ASIO was busy monitoring the movements of "notorious party-liners" like FitzGerald, Casey did not appear to be particularly concerned by FitzGerald's interest in contemporary China. Nor did he think that the members of the delegations mentioned above, were provocateurs or channels for communist infiltration in Australia. Therefore, some visitors to China (like FitzGerald) may have been considered to be simultaneously a suitable target for government surveillance and a source of new information about China. One explanation for Casey's liberalism may be found in the fact that he and his Department had been in regular contact with many Australians who had visited China. For that matter, Casey used these non-communists as an essential source of vital information about the PRC.

<sup>42</sup> This was particularly common in 1956. FitzGerald, for example, was interviewed on 30 July 1956. Government records indicate that he spoke about population, communist doctrine, police repression, Formosa and the Kuomintang. Professor Partridge (who accompanied FitzGerald) was interviewed about Chinese-Russian cooperation, collectivisation, and the attitude to overseas Chinese nationalism. Selwyn Speight was "interrogated" by Department officers on 10 August 1956 and a 44-page document was produced, which included the 12 articles he published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in May-June 1956. Harry Menzies, Australian Government Trade Commissioner in Hong Kong, was also interviewed on 15 May 1956. NAA: *China-Relations with Australia—Visits by Australians*, A1838/278/3107/38/12/2, pt.1. While some of these individuals had to be co-opted by government representatives, numerous visitors, keen to collaborate with the government in the collection of information about China, volunteered their services before leaving for that country. The

the inflammatory rhetoric which was frequently used by Menzies. The extract clearly distinguishes those who are "taken in" from those who have the "good sense of decent Australians" and reflects a tolerance for the activities of non-communists.<sup>41</sup>

As explained above, by 1956, the Chinese government had begun inviting a number of Australian delegations to visit the PRC. Australian passport holders who wanted to take up the offer were required to apply to the Australian government for travel documentation. This allowed the government to keep records on Australians visiting China and, if necessary, have their activities in Australia monitored by ASIO. While the Australian government took the official position that it neither "commended nor condemned" Australians wanting to visit the PRC, it, from April 1956, prohibited its officers from travelling to China. This, combined with the fact that there were no Australian government representatives in China, meant that the Australian government received little information about what was happening behind the "bamboo curtain." Most of the information that the government received about China was gleaned from press reports or foreign intelligence organisations. As a result, the Australian government began to rely on members of delegations to provide up-to-date information about the changes in China.

In 1956, the Department of External Affairs started debriefing members of delegations recently returned from China. In the period 1956–65, interviews (or "interrogations" as they were called) were conducted with journalists, doctors, religious leaders, scientists, academics and members of the Australia-China Society.<sup>42</sup> It would appear that the members of delegations collaborated with the Australian government because they believed that China represented a genuine threat to Australian interests.<sup>43</sup> The members of these delegations were encouraged to write reports about what they had observed in China, and their reports were then analysed, assessed and circulated between various government departments, security organisations and foreign legations. The exchanges that took place between the government and visitors to China reveal that the Australian government neither prevented nor deterred non-communist Australians from travelling to the People's Republic; rather, these visitors were co-opted to produce an archive of information about the changes occurring within China.

Throughout the Cold War, the Australian government relied upon this

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/journalist Francis James, who accompanied the Anglican mission to China in November 1956, had contacted the Department of External Affairs in advance of his China trip to ask "what to look out for" (17 August 1956). When he returned to Australia, James wrote to Mr James Plimmsoll of External Affairs claiming, "Of the whole delegation, all were 'sucked in,' in my judgement, with the exception of Marcus Loane and myself." James wished to arrange

/a time to offer a report of his perceptions of China.

<sup>43</sup> C.P. FitzGerald's case was a little different. The account he presented to External Affairs was the same report that he had written for an ANU committee. This text, which spoke specifically about the activities of the delegation, did not seek to expose any hidden truth about what lay behind the "bamboo curtain."

network of surveyors to map the unknown communist terrain and generate new information about China. I use the word “surveyors” because these individuals were not trained intelligence officers but, for the most part, ordinary civilians—passive intelligence gatherers, who collected data that was exploited by Australian strategists and the allied nations. These intelligence gatherers were from a variety of backgrounds and had different types of expertise. Most of the information they collected was security information: it focused on standards of living, the visibility of Chinese security personnel, China’s ports, naval vessels, the presence of Russians in Chinese cities, China’s attitudes toward Taiwan and so on. The information they collected was considered central to the objective of containing Chinese communism. It was believed that the production of an archive of intelligence information would assist Australia and its allies contain China and prevent the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific. It also appears that this information was then used to validate a range of anxieties about communist aggression and expansionism.

Reports made to the Department of External Affairs range in their complexity and their specificity. Some contain general information about the availability of food and water while others contain detailed descriptions of Chinese submarines and nuclear facilities. Here, I focus on two of the more interesting accounts presented to government, both of which are taken from the records of the Department of External Affairs, which are held at the National Archives of Australia. The first is a transcript written by a government officer, who, in spite of the government ban, inadvertently visited China in early 1956; the second text was prepared by an External Affairs officer after interviewing Professor T. M. Cherry, the President of the Academy of Sciences, and Sir Mark Oliphant of the Australian National University, who were part of a scientific delegation in mid-1964. It happened that their trip had coincided with the detonation of China’s first atomic bomb.

K.C.O. Shann, Australia’s Ambassador to the Philippines, travelled aboard a German passenger-cargo ship from Hong Kong to Japan via China. *En route* the ship called at two Chinese ports, Shanghai and the naval base, Qingdao. Shann’s account of the trip begins in a slightly apologetic tone, as it was understood that he visited China when Australian government officers were prohibited from making such visits, even though there was some ambiguity about whether calling at a Chinese port constituted a breach.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, Shann suggests that the value of his observations outweigh the breach of protocol:

I hope that the Department will agree, when it has read what I have to report about China, that the accident of the vessel calling at Chinese ports in fact turned out to be an extremely valuable experience . . . . I do have some extremely vivid impressions of the restricted area that I saw, and I must say that the impressions that I got are not at all like those which I

<sup>44</sup> This was the way that Stephen FitzGerald and his wife first visited China in 1965—aboard a Norwegian ship headed for Japan. FitzGerald had sought permission from External Affairs to which they had responded: “We shall leave it to you to decide whether or not to go ashore—and if you do we shall be interested in your comments.” NAA: *China-Relations with Australia—Visits by Australians*, A1838/280/3107/38/12/2, pt.3.

<sup>45</sup> NAA: *China-Relations with Australia—Visits by Australians*, A1838/278/3107/38/12/2, pt.1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

had been led to expect from other sources.<sup>45</sup>

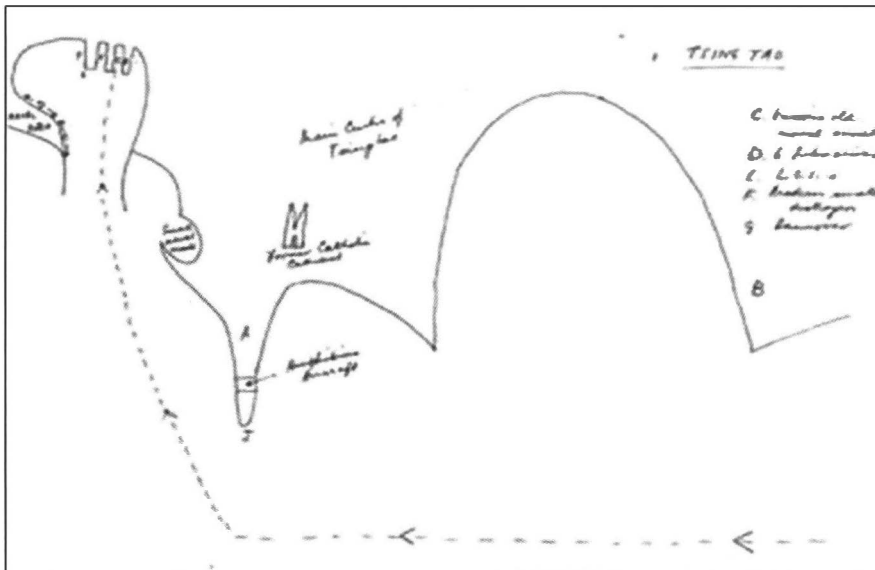
Shann goes on to suggest that the Department might encourage officers in the region to spend their leave in a similar way. After offering a description of the *Hannover* cargo-passenger ship, Shann describes the type of craft he observed in Qingdao:

As we arrived, four very slow and not very modern-looking patrol vessels were leaving the port, and in the port (the positions of the shipping are identified in the attached map) there were five L.C.I.'s [*sic*]: three old 1910-type gun boats; six large modern submarines (on four of which the following numbers appeared in very large letters—400, 402, 403, 203); three very small modern destroyers, and a lot of smaller naval craft. In addition there were five large amphibious aircraft drawn up on a ramp (see map) and two large radio stations, one at point A on the map—with 28 masts and one at point B with 6. The outline of the three modern destroyers and of the amphibious aircraft I have tried to draw in attachment 3.<sup>46</sup>

Shann's hand-drawn maps of the ports of Qingdao, Shanghai (Figures 1 and 2), together with sketches of the submarines he observed at the Qingdao naval base, accompany eight typed pages of analysis. (He also attached to his

### Figure 1

K.C.O. Shann's illustration of Tsing Tao (Qingdao), May 1956 (NAA: *China-Relations with Australia—Visits by Australians*, A1838/278/3107/38/12/2, pt.1). It reads: C. Various old naval vessels, D. 6 Submarines, E. L.C.I.'s, F. Modern small destroyers, G. Hannover (the passenger-cargo ship on which Shann travelled) [courtesy of the National Archives of Australia]



report, a piece of rock from the mountains that surround Qingdao.) Shann went on to describe the public transport system and the quality of goods available at the local shops, before commenting on the number of sailors he observed and to speculate on the size of Qingdao's naval establishment: the state of naval craft, evidence of ship building and amphibious craft. His description of Shanghai elaborated on the impressive buildings along the Huangpu River, the types of vessels he observed and the quality of the wharves and harbour. Shann also commented on the presence of Russians in both cities and explains that posters around the port called for the "liberation" of Taiwan.

Following its submission to the Department of External Affairs, Shann's text was summarised. (Shann's observations were considered to be of intelligence value, despite the fact that it was widely known that the Chinese had no navy worth speaking of.) The summary of Shann's text is followed by the suggestion that the information should be disseminated in order to confirm other "Interrogation Reports on Tsingdao and Shanghai from sources connected with shipping" and further that, "Some of our posts might be given, if not the whole report, at least certain portions ..."<sup>47</sup> The interest that was generated by this account indicates the demand for current information about the state of Chinese ports and naval craft.

While most debriefings with those returning from China were conducted in Canberra, government representatives in Hong Kong also conducted interviews. There is, for example, a transcript of an interview conducted between Australian government representatives at the Australian Government Trade Commission and the members of the delegation of Australian doctors who visited China in June 1957. Government officers in Hong Kong played an important role in the collection of this information and often the interviews in Australia were the result of tip-offs by Australian government employees in Hong Kong. If government officers in Hong Kong met with Australians who had come from the PRC, they would alert External Affairs in Canberra. For example, during the mid-1960s, Stephen FitzGerald, who was Second Secretary at the High Commission, wrote to External Affairs (29 June 1965) advising that Professor Helen Turner, an animal geneticist with CSIRO, would be worth interviewing on return to Australia, since she had visited places "which are not usually on the tourist runs."<sup>48</sup>

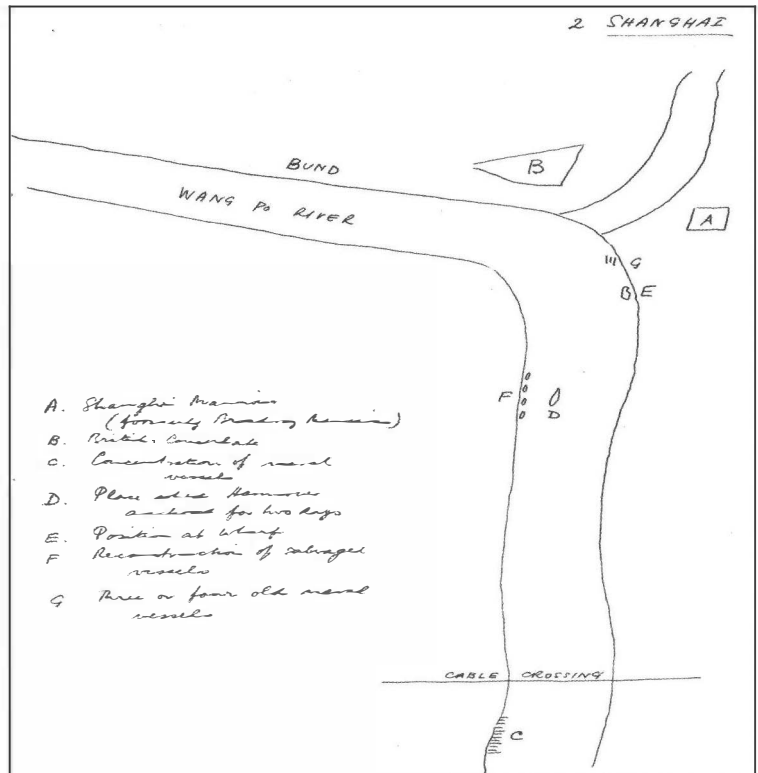
I turn now to the observations made by the group of Australian scientists who visited China in 1964. Before the 1964 Australian Scientific Delegation had left for China, Professor Cherry, as President of the Australian Academy of Sciences, had contacted External Affairs to explain that the Academia Sinica to send a group of

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, memorandum dated 31 May 1956.

<sup>48</sup> S.A. FitzGerald, Second Secretary, Australia Government Trade Commission, Hong Kong: File No. 221.4.8.2, Memorandum No.196, NAA: *China-Relations with Australia—Visits by Australians*, A1838/280/3107/38/12/2 pt.3. His letter outlines her itinerary and general impressions of the PRC.

## Figure 2

*K. C. O. Shann's illustration of Shanghai, May 1956 (NAA: China-Relations with Australia—Visits by Australians, A1838/278/3107/38/12/2, pt. 1). It reads: A. Shanghai Mansions (formerly Broadway Mansions), B. British Consulate, C. Concentration of naval vessels, D. Place where Hannover anchored for two days, E. Position of wharf, F. reconstruction of salvaged vessels, G. Three or four old naval vessels [courtesy of the National Archives of Australia]*



<sup>49</sup> NAA: *China-RelationswithAustralia--Visits by Australians*, A1838/280/3107/38/12/2, pt.3.

<sup>50</sup> In June 1965, the American nuclear physicist Ralph Lapp wrote an article for the American magazine, *Life International*. The article was written in reaction to China's second nuclear test and seeks to explain the seriousness of Chinese nuclear threat. Lapp outlines China's nuclear capabilities and gestures towards a projection of China's future nuclear might: "China can, in a very few years become the most dangerous nuclear power of all—not because the Chinese leaders can match the US might, but because they do not understand nuclear war and therefore may not be rationally deterred from starting one. General Lo Jui-ching, chief of staff of the Chinese army, recently stated this attitude in *Red Flag*, the ideological mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party. General Lo wrote that the psychological preparation of the Chinese masses for conventional *and even nuclear war* 'must be given first priority'" (Ralph E. Lapp: "The Nuclear Power of China," *Life International* 38.11 (June, 1965, pp.70-8). The article combines Cold War fear with an imperialist and orientalist logic. While Khrushchev is represented as a political pariah, he is considered to clearly grasp "the essential nature of nuclear weapons." Mao, on the other hand, is considered the greater menace because he has it "all mixed up." This exemplifies the type of distinction that was frequently made (in both Australia and the US) between the nature of the Chinese and Soviet threat. Here, as elsewhere, the discourses of orientalism inform the perception that the Chinese represent a "mindless menace." Like others, Lapp considered Chinese nuclear warheads the weapons of insurgency, while British and American nuclear weapons represented a hope of containing communism and protecting the "free world."

Australian scientists to China. Cherry explained that the scientists wished to go, and he was inquiring about the government's attitude to such a visit. Patrick Shaw, First Assistant Secretary, made notes of the conversation. Cherry was told three things, each of which reinforces the claim that the Australian government encouraged non-communists to share their experiences of China with the government. The record of the conversation reads:

- a) "I [Shaw] said that Ministers had indicated that they accepted that an exchange of views and visits by scientists and cultural groups could be to our advantage";
- b) "We [External Affairs] would not willingly sponsor travel documents for an Australian scientist whose mission to a Communist country we believed would be more of a political than a scientific nature";
- c) "I [Shaw] said that we were anxious to build up our knowledge of China and asked whether Professor Cherry would be willing to talk to us after he returned. Professor Cherry was very ready to agree to this ... . He said that he would consult further so as to put together the information which he and his colleagues might obtain in the course of their visit which would be of most interest to ourselves. I thanked him for his willingness to help in this way."<sup>49</sup>

This exchange between Cherry and Shaw reinforces the suggestion that the Australian government relied upon the visits of Australian specialists to "build up" their knowledge of China. Moreover, it reinforces the idea that ideology determined the Australian government's assessment of who was considered fit to visit China. In such a climate, an individual's political reliability was far more important than their understanding of China, its language or culture. Observations made by specialists like Cherry and Oliphant were considered essential to understanding the extent of the Chinese nuclear threat: by 1964, China was considered to be a significant nuclear threat, as Mao had broken with Khrushchev over a nuclear test ban, and China had been preparing to detonate its first bomb.<sup>50</sup>

In October 1964, External Affairs produced a six-page report based on the interview with the Oliphant/Cherry delegation. It contains numerous subject headings: Itinerary, General Impressions, Tertiary Education, Scientific and Technological Developments, Nuclear Developments, Missiles, Aircraft, Agriculture, Birth Control, Future Progress and Scientific Contact with Australia. The report's primary focus is, however, on the recent scientific and technological developments in China, paying specific attention to nuclear development and missile production. Oliphant and Cherry explain that the delegation had visited the No.1 and No.2 atomic energy plants in Peking. While they were not told of the test that had occurred during their visit, Oliphant claims that

he was aware of something happening because some three hundred of the one thousand scientists were absent from the Peking plants. He adds that the atomic explosion was a product of U235 and not plutonium:

Sir Mark said that he was himself sure that the Chinese were quite capable of producing all the U235 which they had required for their recent explosion. He said that we would not be in a position to tell how much they were producing until the second device was exploded . . . . When asked about the extent of the diversion of resources involved in the nuclear effort, Sir Mark said that he felt that this was over-emphasized. Certainly there was some diversion. In terms of personnel, it was not serious. "Tens" not "hundreds" of scientists were involved, although these would be top-line people.<sup>51</sup>

This text, like that of Shann, was then widely distributed throughout security agencies and diplomatic posts in Washington, London, Wellington, Ottawa, Tokyo, New Delhi, Hong Kong and Paris.

### *Compliance and Containment*

Because of the absence of government representatives in China, the Australian government relied heavily on Australian citizens to act as passive intelligence gatherers. These archival records show how the Australian government encouraged or co-opted "politically reliable" visitors in this task. In examining these records, I have attempted to demonstrate how the ideology of containment played a pivotal role in determining the way that Australians came to imagine, interpret and describe China throughout the Cold War.

Despite the fact that many Australian political leaders spoke with great conviction and certitude about the threat that China presented to the "free world," the Australian government remained largely ignorant of developments in China. It was unaware of the attitudes of the Chinese leadership, unsure of the nature of China's regional relations and ignorant of the relationship that existed between the CPA and the PRC. Because of this information shortfall, the Australian government relied on the observations of those Australian citizens who had visited China. Government records reveal the way that it encouraged politically reliable visitors to act as intelligence gatherers and map the changes occurring within the People's Republic. Government officers, scientists, doctors, academics and journalists, who had visited China for only three or four weeks, became responsible for the provision of intelligence information. Motivated by the objective of containing communism, these reports became an exercise in wish-fulfilment. These reports (which were produced by individuals who had little prior knowledge of China and usually

<sup>51</sup> NAA: *China-Relations with Australia*—Visits by Australians, A1838/280/3107/38/12/2, pt.3.

no Chinese language skills) were considered to constitute a valuable, accurate and authentic form of knowledge about the PRC. They, in turn, were used to justify the Cold War anxieties of the Australian government and confirm stereotypes about Chinese communist aggression and expansionism.

This article has explored the way that the ideology of containment operated as the guiding principle in the Australian government's foreign and domestic undertakings. It has suggested that the ideology of containment was used as a touchstone by which the Australian government measured an individual's commitment to the fight against communism. This claim has been supported by the suggestion that those Australians who endorsed the policy of containment were exploited by government strategists to chart and record the changes taking place across People's China, while those who did not support the government's ideological position were subjected to surveillance by intelligence agencies. It is hoped that this reading of the archive has revealed the way that Australian perceptions of China were regulated by the ideology of containment and added some complexity to the way we understand the exchanges that took place between the Australian government and those Australians who visited China throughout this period.

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