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IMAGES OF CHINA

I. THE IDEA OF 'CHINA' IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS

ARTHUR HUCK*

In an elegant paper written in 1964 Coral Bell surveyed the relations between Australia and China up to that point. She noted that 'a vague sense of China as a distinctly alarming force is woven into the original fabric of Australian national attitudes', and that 'attitudes toward China may justly be regarded as the central or catalytic element in Australian diplomatic alignments since 1949'.¹ Australia from that time has pursued a policy of non-recognition of Communist China and close alliance with the United States. This policy has not been unchallenged by opinion leaders and politicians but the government has confidently assumed widespread support for it. Throughout her discussion more than one ambiguity in Australian positions was noted. A continuous concern with the Chinese threat has been matched since 1960 with a continued interest in selling wheat to China and allowing trade in general to expand. Although China is supposed to have presented the main threat to the stability of Asia since 1949 she has not figured very precisely in Australian defence calculations. Australian policy makers have talked very generally about the problem of China and the danger of Chinese communism but in their actual policy calculations China has often seemed of very remote concern.

The vagueness about the China threat has produced a wide range of reaction from rage to scepticism. A statement like Senator Paltridge's, for example, made in 1965, has been fairly typical of official pronouncements:

There is no reason to suppose that at present China has particular interest in Australia, but if it were able to extend its political and military domination through South-East Asia, Australia's position on the periphery would become very difficult indeed. For this reason the containment of the Communist Chinese threat has become a primary Australian objective.²

The richer type of rhetoric may still be found in the lectures delivered by Sir Robert Menzies at the University of Texas at the end of 1969. In his lecture on 'The Responsibilities of Power' he discusses 'the aggressive

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(The substance of this paper was presented at the Conferencia del Pacifico at Vina del Mar, Chile, September 29, 1970.)

¹ Coral, Bell, 'Australia and China: Power Balance and Policy,' in: A. M. Halpern (Ed.), *Policies Toward China: Views from Six Continents* (McGraw-Hill, for the Council on Foreign Relations, 1965), pp. 167, 165. A detailed study up to 1964 has also been published by H. S. Albinski, in his *Australian Policies and Attitudes Toward China* (Princeton, 1965).

² Quoted by D. E. Kennedy in G. Greenwood and N. Harper (Eds.), *Australia in World Affairs 1961-65*. (Cheshire, 1968), p. 400.

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Communism of Continental China (which) presents a grave threat in Asia'; he refers to 'the menace of Chinese Communism with its primitive Marx-Engels gospel of aggression and violence', and concludes:

'To allow Continental China to absorb Asia, or a large area of Asia, chiefly by subversion, while with her enormous population she moves towards the possession of Nuclear and Thermo-nuclear weapons, would mean that in no more than another generation the world would find itself confronted by another crisis which would once more impose great strains on the resources and will of the free world.'

How far, it might be asked, do such statements reflect detailed threat assessments and how far merely endorse what are believed to be prevailing attitudes?⁴

There is no obvious answer to such a question and not even any obvious way to begin to answer it. This paper will indicate three lines of enquiry which could be considered relevant. It will not deal with the bulk of writing on Australian defence which mostly follows well-worn lines.

*The Logic of Threat Statements*⁵

In the first place there are clearly logical difficulties in the consideration of any 'threat' statements. Any discussion of 'threat perceptions' seems to imply that there is something fairly obvious to be perceived. Unfortunately this is not the case.

The ordinary notion of someone threatening someone else is readily intelligible even if it cannot be described in two words. In a bargaining situation if A threatens B then, in a simple case, he is saying, 'If you do such and such (harmful to my interests) then I will do such and such (harmful to yours)', or 'If you don't do such and such (which I want) then I will do such and such (harmful to you).' For B to be impressed he has to be convinced that A means what he says and could carry out his threat, that is he must be convinced of A's resolution and his capacity to carry it out. I find myself in essential agreement with George Kent in stressing the *conditional* nature of threat statements.⁶ That is to say, the truth about any threat situation cannot be discovered simply by looking at

³ Mimeographed copy of Lecture No. 3 delivered at the University of Texas, Nov. 24, 1969.

⁴ For a sustained critique of Australian policy see Gregory Clark, *In Fear of China* (Lansdowne, 1967), which questions the rationality of most of the government's assumptions about China.

⁵ The following points are developed more fully in Arthur Huck, 'Threats and Dangers,' *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, 2, 1969, pp. 1-5.

⁶ George Kent, *The Effect of Threats* (Ohio, 1967).

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it; a more or less elaborate set of conditional statements has to be investigated.

Such complexities are usually understood in ordinary situations and do not have to be spelled out. And it is usually understood that there may be a great variety of response to different sorts of threats—delaying tactics, counter threats, quicker surrender. But this sophistication is often lost when the notion of threats is extended from individuals in a bargaining situation to countries.

When we talk of a country as posing a threat what are we talking about? The answer is usually given in terms of military hardware; if country C has a great deal of military apparatus it must be a threat to its neighbours. This, of course, is not obvious at all. Between country C and neighbour X there may be the most stable conditions of friendship. Neighbour Y on the other hand may be an old enemy who naturally feels threatened by C's massive armaments. Piles of arms in themselves are always dangerous: if they are there someone will always want to use them. A threat, however, has not been defined until numbers of conditions can be ascertained—not only who is threatening to do what to whom, but with what degree of serious intent and with what credible expectation of being able to carry it out.

The air of fantasy which so often surrounds discussions of military threats by non-military men (soldiers, contrary to the popular image, are often extremely pragmatic and rational in these matters) is often due to the failure to ask such questions with any degree of precision, or to ask them at all.

A dose of strategic analysis and a whiff of rationality will not however, dispose of the problems of assessing national threats. In the first place there is the ancient problem of the highly elliptical nature of all statements about any country, China, Russia, America, wanting or threatening anything—as if 'China', 'Russia', 'America' were the names of individuals and the entities so named acted like individuals. The alternative, locution, talking about 'The Chinese', 'The Russians', 'The Americans' wanting or threatening something is possibly even more tendentious. (It has been dubbed 'tribalism' by Alistair Buchan).

The very use of these terms necessarily raises questions of national image, national stereotypes and national identity which have little to do with rational calculations of probabilities. What national images do the terms convey? How fixed are the different national stereotypes? How strong a feeling of national identity do people who use these terms have themselves? Strategic analysts, defence planners and government ministers are no more immune to the influence of such usage than anyone else.

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Attitudes to Threats

A concern with the extra-rational bases of many important attitudes has underlain a number of recent Australian political studies. R. W. Connell in his doctoral thesis on *The Child's Construction of Politics*⁷ studied the development of political belief among a sample of Sydney children ranging in age from 5 to 16. He found that the subject of the Vietnam war and the children's knowledge of it was of great importance, and that, although most of the children were opposed to the war, most also supported Australian intervention in it.

In explaining this apparent paradox, the 'threat' schema is of basic importance. Australian intervention in a horrifying war is supported if it is seen as a means of preventing the war coming to Australia. Once this link is made, the more horrible the war appears, the stronger will be the motive for supporting intervention . . . what is feared is a *re-creation of the Vietnam war in Australia* (pp. 523-24).

Connell argues that the knowledge of Vietnam has been assimilated to a tradition including 'the experience of the World Wars, the long-standing fear of being taken over by Asians, and the newer fear of international Communism' (p. 533). This tradition is realised among children at a very early age. His study suggests that the children's views are not simply an echoing of adult thoughts; some of the diffuse fears of the younger children are projected into the adult material and incorporate it. The prevailing threat schemas are thus likely to continue in Australia for some time; the Vietnam war may have simply reinforced them.

A study by Alan Hughes of *Psychological Dispositions and Political Attitudes*⁸ included an elaborate analysis of two surveys carried out in 1963 and 1966. The major survey, based on a sample of 395 voters in Melbourne and Sydney, contained a number of questions on foreign policy and defence. Hughes was concerned to establish what connections, if any, could be established between such dispositions as could be measured on standardised scales and tendencies to adopt certain ranges of political opinion. Relating the findings of the opinion questions with the measurement of Anxiety, Ethnocentrism, Alienation—the 'Alienation Tryptych'—and Authoritarianism, was necessarily a complex operation particularly as no single 'Left-Right' continuum can justifiably be applied to the range of opinion findings. The answers to policy questions, he found, tend to be grouped in clusters, and to generalise from a radical opinion on the issues in one cluster to those in another will often be unjustified. After additional factor analysis he con-

⁷R. W. Connell, *The Child's Construction of Politics* (Ph.D. thesis, Department of Government, University of Sydney, 1969).

⁸Alan Hughes (Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1970).

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structed three indices measuring three sets of 'Left-Right' opinions; these he named after the 'Left' end of the continua, as 'Established' domestic radicalism (mainly related to socio-economic issues in domestic politics), 'Conscience' radicalism (apparently related to 'nurturance' and sympathetic concern for the 'other') and 'Defence Leftism' ('dove-hawk' issues of foreign policy and alliance). He also constructed a separate scale for Libertarianism.

The questions most closely related to the subject of this paper concerned Communism in Asia and the danger of attack on Australia. These two with their results were as follows:

Do you think that <i>Communism</i> in Asia is	
a <i>great</i> danger to Australia's security	62%
a minor danger to Australia's security	26%
OR	
no danger to Australia's security	11%
Undecided	1%
	100

Do you think Australia may be in <i>grave danger of attack</i> at some time in the next <i>ten</i> years	34%
OR	

Do you think there is little danger of an <i>attack</i> on Australia in the next <i>ten</i> years	59%
Undecided	7%
	100

When the results were analysed in detail Hughes found that

There is a slight tendency for 'Conscience radicals' to assess Communism in Asia as less threatening than those conservative on this index, and strong tendencies for 'hawks' and anti-libertarians to see Asian Communism as more threatening. 'Hawks' as might be expected are somewhat apprehensive of external attack, while 'doves' one might say are prone to a sense of security.'

In his general conclusions, however, he did not find that opinions on the 'Left-Right' continuum in foreign and defence policy are strongly influenced by dispositional factors,¹⁰ unlike the other two 'main dimensions

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 406, 407.

¹⁰ Jonathan King (*The China Threat*, Department of Political Science, University of Melbourne, 1969) similarly found that an attempt to apply a standard neuroticism scale to a sample of Labor and non-Labor voters was inconclusive in relation to their 'China threat' pictures.

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of radicalism, Conscience radicalism and Established socio-economic radicalism, which are susceptible to high and moderate degrees of influence, respectively, by psychological disposition’, and unlike libertarianism which is also strongly influenced by disposition. The exception here appears to be Authoritarianism which is related, but not very strongly, to a perception of Communism as a danger to Australia.

Survey Findings

The author of this paper has followed two lines of enquiry related to Australian perceptions of China and the Chinese. One concerned the Chinese in Australia and Australian attitudes to Asian immigration. The findings of this have been published.¹¹ The other covered a number of surveys from 1967 to 1970 which sought to establish in some detail the dimensions of Australian threat pictures. The complete findings from these surveys have not been published.

In the earlier study a questionnaire on the desirability of different race-nation groups was administered to an Australian sample of 474 in 1964. This replicated as far as possible a 1948 study by Oeser and Hammond. The results indicated a considerable softening of attitudes towards European migrant groups since 1948 but no very great shift in attitudes towards the Chinese. Total opposition to Chinese immigration (the ‘keep them out’ group) was not as high as is usually believed, a finding which is consistent with other polls which have indicated since the war a tendency to favour some relaxation of the White Australia policy. The results of Hammond’s 1948 findings can be compared with a 1964 sub-sample for Melbourne in Table I.

¹¹ Arthur Huck, *The Chinese in Australia* (Longmans, 1968).

TABLE I
A.—DESIRABILITY AS IMMIGRANTS OF EIGHT RACE-NATION GROUPS
(1948 Melbourne sample, n = 370)

	Keep Them Out %	Let Only a Few In %	Allow Them to Come In %	Try to Get Them to Come %	
NEGROES	77	13	7	3	100
JEWS	58	25	13	4	100
ITALIANS	45	34	17	4	100
GREEKS	32	42	18	8	100
CHINESE	24	44	22	10	100
GERMANS	30	34	22	14	100
IRISH	16	19	40	25	100
ENGLISH	2	7	28	63	100

(After O. A. Oeser and S. B. Hammond (Eds.), *Social Structure and Personality in a City*, 1954, p. 55.)

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TABLE I

B.—DESIRABILITY AS IMMIGRANTS OF EIGHT RACE-NATION GROUPS
(1964 Melbourne sub-sample, n = 103)

	Keep Them Out %	Let Only a Few In %	Allow Them to Come In %	Try to Get Them to Come %	
NEGROES	33	49	18	—	100
CHINESE	21	59	19	1	100
ITALIANS	19	34	40	7	100
GREEKS	11	39	46	4	100
JEWS	14	18	62	6	100
GERMANS	1	18	56	25	100
IRISH	2	9	65	24	100
ENGLISH	1	2	46	51	100

Respondents in 1964 were also asked: 'If a limited number of Asian migrants were admitted to Australia which would you prefer?' This question was followed by a list of seven Asian national groups to be marked with preferences 1 to 7, 1 for the most preferred to 7 for the least. The results indicated a clear first preference for Indians with a clear non-preference for Japanese and Indonesians, with Malays, Pakistanis, Filipinos and Chinese occupying the intermediate positions. The pattern of preferences for Indians and Indonesians was very straightforward: more people gave first preference to Indians than to any other group; fewer people gave first preference to Indonesians than to any other group, and more people gave them seventh preference. It is natural to think that the current political-military image of Indonesia had a strong influence on their non-preference and that an 'ex-enemy' identification still clung to the Japanese. The pattern of Chinese preferences was not so regular or clear. Nearly as many voted 1 for Chinese as voted 7. There was a strong cluster of 5's and 6's but the less favourable votes were not as high as for Japanese and Indonesians. A complex of factors could here be reasonably inferred; no single determinant could be expected to have produced such a pattern.

TABLE II

PREFERENCES FOR ASIAN MIGRANTS
(1964 Australian Sample, n = 474)

	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	6 %	7 %	Not Established %	
INDIANS	28	22	13	12	9	5	3	8	100
MALAYS	22	13	16	21	11	6	3	8	100
PAKISTANIS	7	23	21	15	13	9	4	8	100
FILIPINOS	12	16	15	19	16	11	3	8	100
CHINESE	14	9	10	9	15	19	16	8	100
JAPANESE	6	7	10	9	12	20	28	8	100
INDONESIANS	4	3	7	7	15	20	35	9	100

In November 1967 the following question was inserted in the Australian Gallup Poll (Poll No. 194):

'In your opinion are there any countries which are a *threat* to Australia's security?'

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Those who said they thought there were some countries which did threaten Australia’s security were asked to say which ones they were. This question was repeated in 1968 (Poll No. 198) and in 1969 (Poll No. 203) with very similar results. It was intended to repeat the question once more in 1970 but before this could be arranged a slightly different question was asked:

‘In your opinion, is Australia likely to be *menaced* by any country in the next ten years, requiring *more* spending on defence?’

Again those who replied affirmatively were asked to name the countries.

These questions, of course, could have been refined by the addition of further questions about the intensity of the perceived threat, the country considered most threatening and so on, but considerations of expense kept them simple.

The results showed some very stable patterns and it can be assumed fairly confidently that the last question tapped much the same response as the first three despite the difference in wording and emphasis.

Each Gallup Poll interviews about 2,000 voters and in the Gallup tables the answers by 90 sex-locality groups throughout Australia are weighted to their correct proportions in the number of electors enrolled at the time. In this case the original cards for all four surveys have also been put together to provide a total of 8,208 which have been reanalysed as a whole.

TABLE III
THREATS TO AUSTRALIA’S SECURITY

	1967	1968	1969	1970	1967-70
	%	%	%	%	%
Some countries threaten Australia	51.6	52.4	50.7	53.6	52.6
None threaten Australia	32.00	34.4	36.4	36.1	47.4
Can't say	16.4	13.2	12.9	10.3]
	100	100	100	100	100

TABLE IV
THREATS TO AUSTRALIA’S SECURITY: COUNTRIES NAMED

	1967	1968	1969	1970	1967-70
	%	%	%	%	%
China	30.8	31.7	30.1	27.1	30.2
Russia	13.0	11.3	16.3	15.0	13.8
North Vietnam	9.4	13.5	9.0	6.9	9.6
Indonesia	7.1	5.9	7.8	10.2	8.0
Japan	4.1	4.9	7.4	7.8	6.1
America	1.9	2.5	2.8	1.0	2.0
Germany	.6	.5	.6	.4	.5

Note: The percentage here represent the proportion of the total questioned who named the particular country; some named more than one.

The first noteworthy finding is that only a little over half the electorate agree that some country threatens Australia. About a third think that no country threatens Australia and the rest can't say. This pattern has been very stable over the past four years. (See Table III.)

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Of those who can name countries which threaten Australia the largest group does name China, but the figure is perhaps not as great as might be expected: some 30% of those interviewed name China. About 14% name Russia, 10% North Vietnam, 8% Indonesia and 6% Japan. Only very small percentages name America or Germany. (See Table IV.) A few people say 'Communist countries' are a threat without naming any specific one; very few name countries not listed in Table IV.

Those who say that there are countries which threaten Australia are very evenly distributed; they do not vary by State or sex, nor does age appear to make much difference. It is possible that people under 21 react differently from their elders but this cannot be discovered from Polls which interview only voters. Those who live outside the capital cities appear to be a little more threat conscious than those who live in them, and Catholics appear slightly more threat conscious than other denominations.

Variations begin to appear more interestingly when particular countries are looked at. Capital cities are slightly less concerned than 'Country Areas' (defined as all except the capital cities) about China, Russia, North Vietnam and Indonesia but slightly more concerned about Japan. Country areas are slightly less concerned about Japan and slightly more concerned about the others. Women appear to be less worried about China and Indonesia than men, more worried about Russia, North Vietnam and Japan. Catholics are slightly more worried about China and Indonesia, Anglicans slightly more about Russia and Japan. (See Table V.) There do appear to be some variations by age which reflect historical experience; the under 40's are less concerned about Japan and Russia and more concerned about

TABLE V
THREAT PERCEPTIONS 1967-70

Respondents n =	Total Aust.	See a threat	China a threat	Russia	North Viet.	Indon- esia	Japan
	8208	4273	2479	1135	784	645	502
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Capital Cities	64.2	62.7	63.9	56.4	58.3	60.9	66.9
Country Areas	35.8	37.3	36.1	43.6	41.7	39.1	33.1
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Male	52.7	52.4	57.2	46.3	45.0	58.6	44.2
Female	47.3	47.6	42.8	53.7	55.0	41.4	55.8
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Catholics	23.4	25.0	26.9	23.3	25.1	27.2	22.7
Anglicans	37.4	37.4	36.0	39.9	38.6	36.4	39.6

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China and North Vietnam; older people are more concerned about Japan and Russia. The young are slightly more concerned about China than the old. (See Table VI.)

TABLE VI
THREAT PERCEPTIONS 1967-70 BY AGE

Respondents n =	Total Aust.	See a threat	China a threat	Russia	North Viet.	Indon- esia	Japan
	8208	4273	2479	1135	784	654	502
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
21-29 years	18.2	17.7	19.5	14.8	21.8	15.7	8.8
30-39 years	21.6	21.4	22.0	18.9	24.7	19.7	12.5
40-49 years	23.1	23.8	24.1	22.7	23.2	28.3	23.5
50-59 years	17.4	17.8	16.7	20.4	17.5	18.3	22.7
60 years or more	19.8	19.3	17.7	23.3	12.8	17.9	32.5

None of these variations, however, is of any importance compared with the differences related to political position. There may be some crudities in the analysis here in that in the first three surveys respondents were asked their voting intention (as well as how they had last voted) but in the fourth they were only asked how they had last voted. Generally speaking, however, political position may be taken as reasonably established.

There are marked differences in the general threat position of the voters for different parties. Of those who vote for the Australian Labor Party (A.L.P.) some 44.8 per cent. think that some countries threaten Australia, of those who vote for the Liberal and Country Parties combined (L.C.P.) 58.5 per cent. think so, and Democratic Labor Party voters reach 61.8 per cent. (Figures from 1967-70.)

The differences are even more striking if attitudes to China are looked at over the four years by party allegiance; in the general population roughly one adult in three thinks China presents a threat, but only one A.L.P. voter in five thinks so, whereas two D.L.P. voters in five think so. L.C.P. voters are closer to the D.L.P. position. (See Table VII.)

TABLE VII
CHINA VIEWED AS A THREAT, BY POLITICAL PARTY

		Percentage of Voters		
		A.L.P.	L.C.P.	D.L.P.
1967	Poll	22.0	38.8	41.0
1968		22.9	38.9	36.0
1969		23.0	34.5	44.2
1970		22.4	33.4	32.7

Table VIII shows in more detail threat perceptions by political party. A.L.P. voters are less threat conscious than others, less concerned about China, Russia, North Vietnam and Indonesia and slightly more concerned

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about Japan. L.C.P. and D.L.P. voters are more concerned about all of these, except Japan.¹³

TABLE VIII
THREAT PERCEPTIONS 1967-70 BY VOTE

Respondents n =	Total Aust.	See a threat	China a threat	Russia	North Viet.	Indon- esia	Japan
	8208	4273	2479	1135	784	654	502
VOTE	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
A.L.P.	40.1	34.5	30.2	34.7	30.6	32.9	42.8
L.C.P.	46.2	51.9	56.0	53.3	55.2	50.2	44.8
D.L.P.	6.3	7.5	8.4	7.1	7.7	8.9	5.8
Other Party or No Answer	7.5	6.2	5.5	4.8	6.5	8.1	6.6
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

From the figures given in Tables VI - VIII it can be seen that a 'strong' line on China has clearly been electorally wise for the governing parties.¹⁴ Nevertheless the assumption that China is a probable or possible enemy had not by any means been universally held by the electorate.

Australians in general are not as obsessed by the 'China threat' or even by the threat of Asian Communism as is commonly believed. Despite the widespread assumption that China has been of vital importance in Australian politics at the levels of policy planning in foreign affairs and defence, in discussions at the level of 'informed opinion' and at the grass roots level, there seems considerable reason to doubt whether 'China' has meant the same thing in different contexts. 'China' often appears more like a free-floating symbol which is utilised in very different ways by different operators and charged with very different value by different groups. Its relation to any objective China often appears quite adventitious.

¹³Murray Goot's *Policies and Partisans: Australian Electoral Opinion 1941-1968* (Sydney, 1969) has stressed the high degree of bipartisan responses on External Affairs issues over the past thirty years. It could be argued, however, that the issues, like those relating to defence, on which there was *not* a high level of agreement between Liberal and non-Liberal supporters, were of considerably more importance than those on which there was. I owe this point to Max Edwards, who is continuing in Melbourne a study of the place of China in Australian foreign policy with particular emphasis on politicians' images of China in the period 1960-70.

¹⁴Cf. the conclusion of Murray Goot, in 'Red, White and Brown: Australian Attitudes to the World Since the Thirties' (*Australian Outlook*, August 1970): '... if most of Australia's foreign and defence policies over the last three decades had been decided by snap referenda they might not have been very different from those the Government actually pursued.'