

1993

The Australian media and the 'push to Asia'

Jefferson Lee

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PERTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**The Australian Media
and the 'Push to Asia':
A Working Paper
Jefferson Lee**

**CENTRE FOR ASIAN COMMUNICATION
AND MEDIA STUDIES
OCCASIONAL PAPER**

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1. "The Push to Asia" and the Australian Media Response: An Outline of the Issue.

In 1989 the Garnaut Report appeared arguing Australian trade would have to take on a new Asian focus.¹ The Hawke Government began to implement its recommendations in 1990-91. But it was not until the ascendancy of the Keating administration that in 1992 the Federal Government launched a major national initiative to integrate Australia more closely with the Australian-Pacific Region. Various federal politicians and departmental spokespersons argued with a great deal of urgency that "Asia" was a potential economic lifeline for Australia well into the 21st Century. Federal Minister Dawkins said the time had come for Australia "to be enmeshed with the dynamism of the Asian-Pacific region". Prime Minister Keating addressing the region said Australia was "a friend you can rely on". Foreign Minister Evans said we were "not Asian but alongside Asia".²

The Federal Government initiative called for a reorientation of our national economic focus towards the Asian-Pacific Region. The urgency of the issue implied a major revolution in our way of interacting and communicating with the region at all levels. Apart from commerce, trade and investment, there were calls to overhaul cultural and educational exchanges, to rethink defence, foreign policy and regional security issues, and most importantly, for the Australian media to "get on board" by giving greater emphasis to reporting the region in a fair, accurate, comprehensive and positive light.

In short, the Federal Government was calling for not just individuals to take up the Asian challenge but for key institutions to accept that they had a responsibility in helping the Federal Government's new Asia-Pacific agenda to succeed. Beyond this lay a somewhat rhetorical clarion call for all Australians to readjust the very way we as a nation consider our place within the region. A re-examining of the self-image of a shared national identity, even a deeper questioning of long held and long cherished notions of national values - real and mythical, was not beyond the pale. This process of self-reflection and redefining was about breaking down barriers between Australian economic and financial markets and the region. The immediate and even the medium to long-term key objectives were persistently defined as Australian business, industry, goods and services finding a niche, a

¹ *Garnaut Report, Australia and the North East Asian Ascendancy*, AGPS, Canberra, 1989.

² Patrice de Beer, 'Australia - 'white tribe of Asia's' dilemma,' *Guardian Weekly*, 7.3.93, p.16.

place in the sun, a market share, within the "greater Asia" marketplace.

Definitions of where this "greater Asia" was exactly were many and varied, to the point that some began to argue that public references to "Asia" were quickly degenerating into a cliché at best, and a disguise for a new "cargo cult" mentality at worst. Amidst confusion and conflict in the public mind, accusations arose that the "Push to Asia" was being driven by the hidden persuaders, the "economic rationists", who had kept economics at the forefront of the political debate and media commentary in Australia.³ That aside, there was still a general agreement that "Asia", (now akin to motherhood), would become the economic powerhouse of the 21st century and the region of the globe from where most growth and investment was expected to occur in the immediate future. Australia's nirvana!

To convey this message to the Australian people and to the region itself, the Federal Government has sought to enlist the support of the Australian media in a campaign for greater regional integration. It has also sought to influence the way the Australian media projects images of Australia to the region and the way it projects the images of Asia to the Australian people, be they newspaper and magazine readers, radio listeners or television viewers.

This *Working Paper* for the Edith Cowan University **Centre for Asian Communications and Media Studies** seeks to examine the ways in which the Australian media has responded to the Federal Government's "Push to Asia". A focus of this paper will be the media coverage surrounding the Prime Minister Paul Keating's two major regional tours in Asia during 1992. The first tour was in April and focused on Australian-Indonesian relations. The second tour was in September and focused on Australian-Japanese relations.

The methodology employed in this paper will be through content analysis. It will survey and sample some of the leading domestic press coverage, concentrating on page one headlines, editorials, features and commentary by leading columnists. Where possible reference will be made to the electronic media. A more detailed study would naturally sub-divide the media more closely. It would distinguish to a greater extent than here, between reports by foreign editors, Asian specialists, overseas-based correspondents and general political reporters. It would also examine the angle presented by business and trade-related journalists within their specialist columns and supplements as opposed to coverage in the general news

³See Kenneth Davidson, 'Heroes and Heretics', *Age*, 17.6.93, p.13.

reports.

Thus this paper will inevitably fall short of a comprehensive press and media overview. It seeks to position the examples cited within the context of a pre-existing press debate about Australian-Asian foreign (and economic) relations and the related issue of Australian-Asian media relations.

2. The Historical Background of Australian-Asian Relations.

(a) Redefining "Asia" in the wake of the renewed " Push to Asia".

When we talk of Australia's economic "Push to Asia" it immediately raises the question of "where is Asia?". Most contemporary commentators stress that *geographically* speaking Asia is so broad that the term "Asians" defies homogeneity.⁴ Within each Asian country there is usually a cultural, ethnic and religious diversity that renders any universal application of what should be *the* appropriate Australian response to "Asia" confusing at best. In short, there is not one "Asia", but many. As Viberto Selochan, has pointed out, "...many Australians see Southeast Asia as an amorphous mass, and fail to take into account the myriad differences between and within the countries of the region". He noted the warning from fellow scholar Robin Lim, that in international politics, "thinking in stereotypes about other countries is a deeply ingrained habit".⁵

But in answering the question with which "Asia" does Australia now seeks to identify itself *economically*, attention is usually drawn to the numerous press articles in the business, features and foreign trade sections of the daily papers, ministerial papers and keynote addresses at home, while abroad the supportive evidence is provided by the OECD forecasts, IMF papers and the international press. Within all of these sources one can find evidence supporting the view, firstly, that the East and Northeast Asian regions, secondly, the Southeast Asian nations of ASEAN, and thirdly, the Asian-Pacific region as a whole, are the projected growth areas into

⁴For example DFAT staffers are regulars here. Paul Callaghan, talk to Monash CSEAS, November 1992, where he argued semi-rhetorically that "there was no such thing as Asia" and Alison Broinowski's similarly all-encompassing definition of "Asia" at the Centre for Independent Journalism Seminar on Foreign Affairs Reporting, State Library, NSW, 1992.

⁵Viberto Selochan, 'New Directions and New Thinking in Australia-Southeast Asia Relations', *Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations*, working paper No. 62, at Introduction, p.1.

the 21st Century. ⁶

This then is the starting point for a line of thinking that projects that should Australia successfully harness itself through reciprocal trading arrangements to these regions, ultimately, we stand a better chance of prospering in the future. One leading advocate of this "Push to Asia" strategy is Foreign Minister Senator Evans. He paints the broad picture with the view, "Given that Australian exports to Southeast and Northeast Asia now make up 59% of our total exports, Asian economic growth constitutes the most important single external factor influencing Australia's prospects." ⁷ As one press commentator noted, our existing trade surplus with Asia "bailed us out" of our trade deficit imbalances with the EC and US.

But once we move away from generalising about the region strong differences of opinion inevitably emerge over the weighting of importance of the individual countries. Writer Mike Ticher in "From Yellow Peril to Main Game", a special supplement for *Australian Left Review* in August 1992, pointed out the enormous discrepancies between the nations of East and Southeast Asia. He queried whether the Asian 'basket-cases' (Philippines, Burma?) were as appealing to us as the Asian 'powerhouses' (Malaysia, Thailand?) or the Asian 'tigers' (Taiwan, Korea?).⁸ In the same supplement, Rowan Callick, a regular correspondent for the *Financial Review* in Pacific affairs, bemoaned that the target countries for our "Asia thrust" had "lurked unstated", in much of the copious media commentary, until *The Australian* newspaper's foreign editor Greg Sheridan had identified Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines as of prime concern.⁹ Yet, Callick noted, it is commonly understood that Japan, Korea and Taiwan are also vital, if not primary, elements of Australia's desired expansion into the region. Others, of course, have identified China as the leading hope for our future prosperity.

This confusion suggested, although we could narrow down "Asia" to a favoured shortlist of trading partners, the broader problems of definition still remained. When

⁶ For example see Richard Nixon, 'Run free with the Asian tigers to avoid poverty traps', *The Australian*, 8.1.92, p.9 and Special Report, 'Asia's high tech quest, Can the tigers compete worldwide', *International Business Week*, 30.11.92.

⁷ Gareth Evans, 'AUSTRALIA IN ASIA: AN OVERVIEW, Australia links capabilities to regional growth,' *Asia Today*, (Sydney), October 1992, p.11.

⁸ Mike Ticher, 'Into Asia?', introduction to the 'From Yellow Peril to Main Game' supplement, *Australian Left Review*, No. 142, August 1992, pp. 26-40, at p.26.

⁹ Rowan Callick, 'So Long SOPAC', *Australian Left Review*, No. 142, August 1992, at p. 29.

answering the question of what we mean by "Asia", Ticher argued the contemporary assumption was one that defined it in terms of potential economic advantage whereby countries like India and Pakistan would normally rate inclusion, yet they were "clearly not what most Australians meant when they use the term". If confirmation was needed, the Indian High Commissioner to Australia recently stated, "there can be no Asia without an India, just as there can be no Europe without an Italy".¹⁰ His comment was a belated acknowledgement of the apparent marginalisation of South Asia and the Indian sub-continent in the current media flurry and excitement over Asia.¹¹

But if India was not quite the Asia that the Australian media sought refuge within, for some writers it seemed, neither was the Pacific. In Ticher's viewpoint the Pacific Islands failed to match Keating's idea of the "dynamic, populous and booming 'Asia' with which we should be associated".¹² Callick saw just such a view as shortsighted, even counterproductive. In this context he noted Sheridan writing in *The Australian* in support of the Federal Government's "Asianisation" strategy, at one stage, advocated Australia's "disengagement" from the South Pacific ostensibly because of the Pacific's remoteness from the "Main Game".¹³ For Callick, such a viewpoint, "overlooked our dependence on trade, which today meant truly world trade, and our relationship with the region which constituted our only sphere of influence: the South Pacific".¹⁴

By way of example Callick pointed to our loss of Fiji's petroleum oil import market to Malaysia, to the detriment of both Australian exporters and Fijian consumers.¹⁵ Callick argued this loss of market demonstrated the shallowness of the "Sheridan view" which he saw as linked to the "one-track mind" of the "Canberra coterie" that

¹⁰ Speech to the 'Media Images' of Asia/Australia: Cross-Cultural Reflections' conference, University of Canberra, November 27-28th 1992.

¹¹ When the Australian Foreign Minister opened the India-Australia Institute at La Trobe University in 1992 not one journalist could muster enough interest to raise a question when prompted by the Chair. More media attention was devoted on the day to the anti-Evans demonstration mounted by East Timor activists outside the official function.

¹² M. Ticher, op. cit., *Australian Left Review*, p. 26.

¹³ Greg Sheridan, 'Forget the Pacific minnows, we've got bigger fish to fry', *Australian*, 15.7.92, p.11.

¹⁴ R. Callick, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁵ R. Callick, op. cit., p. 30.

snubs the South Pacific Forum. The Canberra lobby were said to have ignored our unique role in supporting the security and defence of our Pacific neighbours (with Australian made patrol boats), ignored the fact that the Pacific is an ideal "nursery" for Australian exporters and forgotten that Oceania is the largest long term employment destination for expatriates from Australia. Callick believed that if Australia couldn't maintain its influence in the Pacific, where it has a head start, it was unlikely to crack the Asian "Main Game".¹⁶

The inference was therefore that Prime Minister Keating, along with like-minded people in the media, were fostering a particular kind of mental map or image onto the Australian electorate as to where Asia was and who constituted it. For Ticher and Callick this image of Asia was one that fitted the bill only on some occasions. It was one that became associated as much with values and opportunities as much as it did with simple questions of geography. Of the two, Callick proved the most vitriolic and remained highly critical of those who wished to impose any specific Asian framework onto Australia's regional aspirations. He identified a particular creed behind this new design with his passing comment, "For the new 'Main Game' is simply the old 'Yellow Peril' inverted. For inscrutable, untrustworthy, inferior, read today hard-working, cohesive, superior - especially in economic affairs. It is no coincidence that this formula comes from the Canberra team that bought us 'economic rationalism'." ¹⁷

Thus the Philippines could be described as a source of cheap labour and tax-free haven. Alternatively, it was a nation of depressed economic circumstances imposed by a corrupt military elite. Its position within the Australian media constructions of the "push to Asia" thus involved personal value judgements that could be derived from perceived economic objectives or a desire to foster a harmonious bilateral relationship fulfilling the needs and aspirations of both Australians and Filipinos. Seldom could one have both objectives in mind. And yet 'economic rationalists' argue this is precisely the objective - to raise living standards by injecting Australian capital into the depressed, low wage parts of Asia.

But in this context the Philippines may rate exclusion from this 'mental map' of Asia for reasons other than the level of its GNP or growth rate. If it has in common with

¹⁶As Australian journalist Jemima Garrett noted recently, the South Pacific Forum may soon turn to Asia itself through the infrastructure of APEC membership. See 'The Asian Connection', *Pacific Island Monthly*, November 1992, p. 9.

¹⁷ R. Callick, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

say, India or Fiji, a work ethic perceived as inferior to that which the Canberra "rationalists" sought to emulate with the more disciplined economies of Japan, Taiwan and Singapore for example. In such a case, Canberra could be said to be seeking an image of Asia that relates more directly to its own domestic economic agendas, or at least those values that the "economic dries" see as their Asian panacea.¹⁸

(b) "Asia" and the Contemporary Debate over "National Identity".

But just assuming that Canberra was correct in strategic terms with its quest to identify Australia with one main focus in Asia. There still remained other dangers of projecting a closed-ended image of Asia as the "Main Game". Assuming there was agreement in Australia of roughly *where* we meant when we talked of Asia, and of whom we were dealing with when we talked of Australia's "shift to Asia". The desire to reconcile geographical and economic necessity still had to confront the issue of whether Australia as a nation was willing to surrender the entrenched, historically-grounded, European foundations of its political and cultural institutions.¹⁹ Engrossed in this debate was whether Australians wanted to face the challenge of a new Asian imperative if it meant a redefinition of such fundamental tenets as national identity.

Asia has been perceived historically in Australia through European eyes. For Europeans, Asia was the "Far East", an unknown 'Other'. Thus for Australians, Asia was thought of and imagined from within a similar cultural framework; indeed, usually as somewhere "more distant" and "more exotic" than even Europe itself. Even for politicians, in the past, it was somewhere to fly over rather than go to. Despite geographical proximity to Australia and significant historical encounters with our continent, Asia has remained for most Australians, until recently, one of the unknown 'Other', along with the other great 'Other', Aboriginal society. Thus the Australian understanding of the "East" was said to "conform to an orientalist thematic" whereby 'Asia' was seen as essentially different to the "West". It was "its

¹⁸ A number of media commentators, for example Ken Davidson in the *Age*, persistently relate "the push to Asia" with the economic agenda of the "economic rationalists" in the Federal bureaucracy of Treasury and their supporters.

¹⁹ See Carolyn Jones, 'Australia risks falling behind in law, human rights, Lessons from Europe', Higher Education Supplement, *Australian*, 27.1.93, p.16, where Professor Alisdair Davidson argued, "while the future presumably lies primarily in Asia economically, the world is becoming more Europeanised politically.....".

opposite or darker side".²⁰

Throughout 1992, one of the leading media advocates of greater Australian engagement with Asia was the (Asian) Regional Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Alison Broinowski. In her book *The Yellow Lady*, Broinowski draws on *Orientalism*, the seminal text of Edward Said, to exemplify how Australia "invented" Asia in the image of certain European myths of the Orient.²¹ In a similar vein, a recent paper by Donald Horne reflected back on the "Living with Asia" chapter from his mid-sixties book *The Lucky Country*. Horne pointed out that Australians "conceptualised" a number of different visions of Asia as part of establishing our relations with Asia. He argued the "gamut of attitudes", from good to bad, still existed. He advocated a continual "reconceptualisation" as a means of breaking away from the negative stereotypes.²²

Underlying the question Horne has posed of how we need to constantly (re)conceptualise Asia lies another debate. This concerns the current reworking in the domestic sphere of Australian national identity in a way that now accepts and incorporates the vision of Australia as a 'multicultural society'.²³ By the 1990s, after two decades of debate, the political consensus was now settling in favour of a multicultural society. As if to show how far the debate has moved on, the most recent challenge to notions of a continuing Anglo-Saxon hegemony over national identity revolves around whether "traditional" Australia will now accept a multicultural mix with an in-built Asian ascendancy.²⁴ In the light of this trend, there has been no shortage of press articles arguing over the composition of our future immigration intake. Into this milieu Keating launched his "Push to Asia" quest in early 1992. But political fears and anxiety of losing the electoral 'middle ground' here was said to explain why the Federal Government projected a tougher media

²⁰ Julie Stephens 'Butterflies, china dolls and temptresses: imagining 'Asian' women', a review of *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* by Alison Broinowski, *Australian Women's Book Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3, September 1992, pp.16-18 at p.16.

²¹ Julie Stephens, *Australian Women's Book Review*, *ibid.*, pp.16-18.

²² Donald Horne, 'Reconceptualising Australia', *The Sydney Papers*, Vol. 4 No. 3, Winter 1992, p. 2.

²³ See Stephen Castles et. al., *Mistaken Identity*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1988.

²⁴ An example of the opening up of this debate can be found in a report on Population Conference in the September 1992 issue of *Asia Report Magazine*, (F. Chong, ed., Sydney).

image in its response to Asian new 'boat people' seeking refugee status.

A Saulwick Poll of April 1992 found that some 70% of Australians wanted to remain separate from Asia, while a similar number of those polled thought Asians felt the same way about Australians. Alison Broinowski examined the poll from the reverse perspective, revealing over a quarter of all Australians already perceived themselves as part of Asia and believed we were seen as such by our neighbours. Yet from the Australian media's point of view the poll was interpreted as a rejection of Keating's "push to Asia" strategy.²⁵ In opposition to this view Broinowski argued, "... that (such a result) was not what the poll proved. The PM had talked about Australia's growing engagement with Asia in trade and investment, defence and peacekeeping - what we are doing. The Saulwick poll talked about national identity - who we are." ²⁶

Broinowski identified Keating himself as having contributed to the media's confusion over the two separate issues as he frequently ran them together as though they were one issue. She cited his April 1992 address to the Asia-Australia Institute where Keating said, "Menzies-style Anglophilia was holding Australia back from realising its destiny as an Asian-Pacific nation". Again in Jakarta, with his remarks about the flag which implied "republicanism was a means of gaining acceptance in Asia". Broinowski reflected that the loudest opponents of these remarks were people (conservative Constitutional monarchists in the business community?) who wanted Australia to "come to terms" with Asia (for economic reasons), but don't intend to do so themselves (culturally). She argued from this observation that those who harp on our ineptitude in Asia maybe pursuing a new form of "cultural cringe".
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In one press column in mid-April 1992 the *Sydney Morning Herald* foreign editor Warren Osmond seemed to agree with this Broinowski criticism. Headed, "Keating's

²⁵ The *Sydney Morning Herald* positioned the poll result on page one, immediately opposite its lead article where Keating was outlining our "Asian destiny" in the context of his Indonesian visit. See 'Don't flirt with Asia', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21.4.92.

²⁶ A. Broinowski, 'Beyond the Cringe', *Australian Left Review*, op. cit., p.27. The subtlety of this was lost on Stuart Littlemore on his *Media Watch* comment on the Saulwick poll that "Mr Keating is attempting to lead Australian opinions rather than reflecting established perceptions." One could argue that is what is expected of a Prime Minister?

²⁷ A. Broinowski, op. cit., *ALR*, p.27. A classic example here was the comment on Alan Jones' 2UE report (loc. cit.) where Jones sings out the growth rates of the Asian "tigers" (all nearly double figures) and then heaves a sign of disgust at Australia's miserable 0.5% growth rate.

foreign policy cliches", the Osmond article argued, "Keating has no developed view of the world, and so far he has sketched only two themes in search of a foreign policy. The first is his anti-British outlook; incipient republicanism; the second is an "Asia First", or, more vaguely, "Asia-Pacific First" future for Australian foreign policy, which merely repeated in a low grade way the Hawke-Evans policy legacy." Osmond contended this amounted to support for a "de facto Eurasian" society; one that was able to "trade more successfully with Asia and better survive a breakdown of GATT". He concluded, "The Hawke-Keating policy eschewed the *identity* question and tightly focused on Australia's feasible *roles* as a middle-level diplomatic power with vital links to many world regions, not just one." ²⁸

Broinowski grounded her pro-Asianist optimism here on the historical factor. She maintained there were Australians who wanted to "come to terms" with Asia ever since 1788. Trade and migration between Australia and Asia existed from the earliest days of European settlement. As mere colonies of the expansive British Empire contact with the other Asian members of the British family such as China, Fiji, India and elsewhere was common. The historical connection was taken up elsewhere in the media. Professor Bolton pointed out in his 1992 *Boyer Lectures* that Australia sold horses to India and sandalwood to China in the 1840s. Bolton argued: "these industries (the horses kept going to India for a century) show that Australia has been quite aware of the South and East Asian markets for considerably longer than the past few years".²⁹

But the historical break from Asia was also widely commented upon. The end of colonialism, marked by Australia's Federation in 1900, saw the erection of tariff barriers and the White Australia Policy. This marked a retreat from Asia. Japanese traders and others were compelled to desist from contact with the new Australia. But Broinowski builds on this legacy to position Australia as having a distinctive place as the gradual decline of European colonial domination in Asia proceeded throughout the 20th Century. She noted how we began to accept the decline of Empire but still hedged our bets with the new uncertainties imposed upon us by geography. Our inherited Anglo-Saxon superiority lingered in the post-colonial era

²⁸ Warren Osmond, 'Keating's foreign policy cliches', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13.4.92.

²⁹ Jamie Collins, 'The lie in Advance Australia Fair', Higher Education Supplement, *The Australian*, 18.11.92, p.16, reporting on Boyer lectures by Professor Bolton.

with the foreign policy ideal of "helping Asians less fortunate than ourselves".³⁰ Parts of Asia then became an insurance policy for us against communism.

Broinowski explained how this failure to break from the colonial vision of Asia has left us with a "bifurcated" vision: where "defence and foreign policy in the North Atlantic" was awkwardly balanced with "trade and investment in the Western Pacific". Hence, she suggests, this was why there was no move by Australia to exclude the US and Canada from the APEC grouping in 1989. Nor had we broken away from the "Europeans and Others Group" at the United Nations.³¹ In a separate article she argued "... such concepts as the Third World, North-South, the Western Alliance and so on were rooted not in rational appraisal of today's world but in atavistic, archetypal beliefs in selfhood and Otherness West means what represents *us*, and East means *them*...." ³²

Broinowski's criticisms of our colonial legacy were nowhere more clearly expressed than in our treatment of refugees. As Melbourne academic Julie Stephens pointed out: "The year [1992] has brought other paradoxes. Like a mantra, the new government and business axiom that we are now 'part of Asia' is repeated with monotonous and meaningless regularity. Yet images of Cambodian refugees in all-but-wire cages (another form of Australian greeting) raise questions about which 'Asia' it is that we are supposed to be part of. Keating's patting of the Queen seems to have prompted more discussion about reshaping Australian links with the region than either the predicament of 'Asian' refugees here in Australia or, indeed, the massacre in East Timor." ³³

But while Broinowski remained the *Yellow Lady*, a sceptical, conscience and critic of Australia's inadequate responses to Asia in the past, she did surprisingly acknowledge some progress at the government level during 1992. She argued the Keating Government's 'Push to Asia' was moving beyond mere rhetoric and that,

³⁰One wonders whether encoded here is a rationalisation for Australia ditching its program of free education for overseas students for the current "marketplace-driven" full cost recovery arrangements.

³¹ A. Broinowski, op.cit., *Australian Left Review*, pp. 27-28.

³²A. Broinowski, 'The Yellow Lady and Asia', *The Sydney Papers*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Winter 1992, p. 27.

³³ J. Stephens, op. cit., p. 17. As a number of writers have noted, the reception of refugees here could well relate to a White Man inability to come to terms with the original dispossession of the Aboriginals.

while Asia will always be a place where "history versus geography and Western tradition versus Asia-Pacific location" collide with one another within Australian thinking, the recent endorsement of "Asia literacy" at a government level could be perceived as an honest attempt to "redefine" and "rediscover" our place in Asia.³⁴ Part of this process Broinowski noted elsewhere, involved the other side of 'cultural exchange' where she advocated that Australian culture (as opposed to its European roots) should receive greater exposure in Asia itself.³⁵

But in attempting to grapple with the current Australian confusion over "national identity" and "self image" from within the government bureaucracy Broinowski could be criticised for retreating into the language and rhetoric of the 'economic rationalists'. At one point she argued if we projected ourselves as "failures" and "antipodeans" towards Asia we would be seen as such. She argued from this point that Australians were not "antipodeans" or "Asians" but "members of the Asia-Pacific hemisphere", who, if they decided to do it, could become the world's leading resource-nation on "Asian" affairs by the end of the decade. Thus she felt it was "antipodean to see as barriers what are in fact opportunities". On this point Broinowski concluded "we don't have to lift the barriers: what we have to lift is our game."³⁶

But has Broinowski here become an unwitting partner in the very "cultural cringe" she has urged others to throw off? Is she endorsing a government, business and media led Asia strategy in a disguised capitulation to a 'minimalist' position? Prominent among her critics was the Melbourne academic and feminist Julie Stephens who suggested praise for *The Yellow Lady* in the popular press, in its highlighting Australian cultural ignorance of Asia, served to complement, rather than challenge, the narrow economism of the Keating led "Push to Asia" agenda.

Stephens maintained that Keating had no qualms in supporting a ditching of the non-profitable sentimentality of British colonial rituals (history) in order to "come to terms" with the profitable markets of Asian capital (geography). In doing so, Keating wished to ignore other aspects of our historical links with Asia, such as solidarity between the Australian working class and the exploited workers of Asia, epitomised

³⁴ A. Broinowski, *ALR*, op. cit., p. 28.

³⁵ Also reported in the *Financial Review* article.

³⁶ A. Broinowski, op. cit., paper, International Development Programme Conference, Canberra, November 1992.

by the wharfies strikes for Indonesian independence in the late 1940s, and again, against Japanese militarism over Manchuria. These aspects of Australian-Asian relations, were coincidentally, according to Stephens, passed over in a superficial way by the popular press reviewers of Broinowski's book. Instead, they centred on her "culturally" orientated study, a focus which Stephens felt gave too much limelight to the racist luminaries of Australia's "Asianist" pioneers, (such as artist Norman Lindsay), and offered insufficient weight to the those Australians who were consciously anti-racists and anti-imperialist. ³⁷

In short, Stephens felt the Broinowski cultural focus on Asia served as a distraction, in a way that disguised the negative aspects of Keating's economic agenda, namely, the ensuring that the anti-imperialist tradition was written out of contemporary Australian-Asian relations. Thus behind the all-embracing rhetoric of the "Push to Asia", encapsulated in the thousand "cultural" blossoms of the *Yellow Lady* (book), was a priority given over to the cementing of contacts between the Australian and Asian elites in place of genuine people-to-people contacts. Thus the prevailing view of "national interest" placed government-to-government and business-to-business contacts within the region as the key indispensable focus of the Asian-Australian exchange. ³⁸ Some would no doubt defend this as the natural order of things or as a true reflection of the power distribution within society. Others would argue this connection is a debasement of the true meaning of cultural exchange and can only proceed in the interests of the few and against the democratic interest of the many. ³⁹

* The English Language Debate.

Another area of concern was the perception that the "push to Asia" involved the loss of a shared European cultural and educational heritage. This issue came to the fore as part of the media debate over changing the Australian flag early in 1992

³⁷ J. Stephens , op. cit., p.18.

³⁸ As P.J. Boyce noted in his introduction to *Diplomacy in the Marketplace: Australia in World Affairs 1981-90*, p.1, "From the accession to power of the first Hawke Labor Government in March 1983 external policy meant primarily foreign *economic* policies, and the issues addressed were interfaced with domestic economic issues to an unprecedented degree."

³⁹ An instructive press article here would be Humphrey McQueen, 'Indonesia's noble Solzhenitsyn', *Weekend Australian*, 22-23.2.93, p. 32. The Australian-Indonesian Institute refused to fund the translation of one of Indonesia's best writers because he was a former political prisoner and it may have embarrassed the Indonesian Government to have supported him. McQueen concluded that cultural exchange was sacrificed in order to avoid any potential disruption to bilateral trade. See later.

during the Keating visit to Indonesia. Media debate on the flag and Republican issues aside, the issue was also fought out in a range of articles in the *Higher Education Supplement* of Wednesday's *Australian* newspaper over the push for more Asian language teaching in secondary and tertiary institutions. Here the concept of Asian languages, taught and spoken in Australian society as a whole, in addition to their use as a tool in Asian business dealings, was perceived by some commentators as a threat to our mother tongue, the English language.

Within the 'traditionalist' camp were Professors John Passmore and Lachlan Chipman who saw Australia losing more than it would gain in ditching our English and European scholarship.⁴⁰ The 'Asianist' camp promoted the concept of 'cultural exchange' between Australia and Asia arguing both continents would become more aware of their respective cultural heritages. In an article from the *Financial Review*, 'Towards regional cultural exchange', the head of the English School at the University of WA, Associate Professor Bruce Bennett, was quoted from his address to the International Development Programme Conference in Canberra in November 1992. He outlined the necessity for changes to the existing Australian literature and books on Asia which were currently "typified by characters doing little more than exploring Asia". The Bennett thesis maintained that a deeper understanding of Asia would allow a deeper understanding of our own culture in a way that would be "enhancing rather than diminishing our sense of cultural independence from the old and middle masters of our destiny".⁴¹

The Bennett argument thus rejected the notion that the "Push to Asia" was a new form of "cultural cringing",⁴² preferring to see it as a liberating force from the existing one espoused by the 'traditionalists' and the 'Anglophiles'. Bennett also pushed the issue beyond the 'cargo cult' mentality of those who pictured Asia only in terms of pure economic advantage claiming this vision fell short of a true cultural exchange. He argued: "Language and culture are inseparable. It is not surprising therefore, that national cultural studies (of both Australia and Asia) are emerging as an essential point of entry to those understandings which a narrow belief in

⁴⁰ See A. Broinowski, op. cit., IDP Conference, Canberra, November 1992.

⁴¹ M. Dwyer, 'Towards regional cultural exchange', *Financial Review*, 24.11.92.

⁴² The "cultural cringe" argument was put consistently in the media by ALP back-bencher from Kalgoorlie WA, Graham Campbell.

commerce and trade denies." 43

Queensland academic Martin Stuart-Fox saw the problem as more related to the fallacious attempts to even define "Asia" or Australian national "identity" as fixed concepts. He argued national identity was something that was always fluid or in "perpetual evolution". He argued, "...just as there is no monolithic 'Asia' threatening cultural imperialism (over Australia), there is no reified Australian 'cultural identity' which we should or can preserve like some exotic insect in amber". Fox argued the real danger was the opposite. Asian ethnic minorities in Australia, like other ethnic groups, are more at risk that they will lose their cultural diversity and be swallowed up by the dominant Australian values.⁴⁴ Indeed, a number of Asian countries have been reported in the Australian press as fearing for the survival of their own cultural heritage because of the all-pervasiveness of the English language.⁴⁵

In an article that attempted to find a middle ground on the foreign language issue, Florence Chong wrote in *The Australian* in December 1992, "If the Federal Government's goal in moving towards compulsory Asian language learning makes young Australians more sensitive to Asian cultures, it's a goal worth pursuing". But, she argued, it was "potentially dangerous" to force the issue as "some talkback radio reaction has revealed how sensitive the issue of compulsory foreign language learning is". Chong maintained, in terms of business exchanges with Asia, the advantage of speaking a foreign tongue was a "flawed" argument. The article, headed "Cash talks louder than bad Japanese", noted Asian businesses were happy to work through interpreters, provided "etiquette and common courtesy" were observed by Australians while engaged in business dealings.⁴⁶

But the language debate has continued. In a speech to a conference on Australian trade with the emerging market economies of Eastern Europe in April 1993 Tim Fischer, the National Party head, described the Australian Government emphasis

⁴³This dual exposure to Asian and Australian Studies was a dominant theme of *The Australian* newspaper's grappling with the issue. See James Mackie, 'East and West: the best of both worlds', *Australian*, 15.12.92, p.11 and Martin Thomas 'Two-way street to Asia', *Australian*, 16.12.92, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Martin Stuart-Fox, 'Engaging "Asia" ', *Asian Studies Review*, Vol.16, No.3, pp.95-99. Fellow academic Alan Healy was more critical of the academic profession and their Eurocentrism - see his letter 'Scholars are blind to Asia', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27.4.92, p.12.

⁴⁵ See Andre Malan, 'East is East - but English is universal', *West Australian*, 16.10.92, p.11.

⁴⁶ Florence Chong, 'Cash talks louder than bad Japanese', *The Australian*, 16.12.92, p. 9.

on Asian languages as "wrong-headed".⁴⁷ The *Age* played up the paranoid aspect of this issue with the heading "Fischer wars on push for Asian tongues".⁴⁸ This headline overstated the divisiveness of the Fischer position as he had asserted merely that language teaching alone would not improve trade without the simultaneous understanding of culture. Further, Fischer did not oppose Asian language teaching as such. He was, however, critical of the an overemphasis on them to the detriment of European languages which he argued were easier to learn and perhaps just as rewarding to the Australian economy.

3. The Australian-Asian Media Relations.

(a) The Historical Straight-jacket: Structural Limitations on Reporting Asia.

Media analyst Rod Tiffen argued that news coverage of Asia tells us as much about Australia as it does about Asia. Up until 1975, Cold War concerns dominated. Asian nationalism, problems of nation building, post-war colonial legacies, were all ignored or distorted by the Australian media. But Whitlam's visit to China and the Vietnam War created the momentum for a coming to terms with the region by the 1980s at the same time as multiculturalism was gaining acceptance domestically. Tiffen argued the media lagged behind public opinion in all these significant areas.⁴⁹

This lag was partly explained by the fact that, apart from a few notable individual efforts, the Australian media never started to discover South East Asia until the mid 1960s. Journalists, editors and the public at the time were informed through the narrow news prism of the domino theory and South East Asia. In the context of the Vietnam War and Sukarno's uncertainty, Asia was seen as a time bomb on our doorstep. Ironically the region itself outside of Indochina at this time was entering a period of unparalleled political stability, "The Suharto era, whose end is not yet clearly in sight, actually began before the Menzies era finished. Lee Kwan Yew ruled Singapore for over a quarter of a century. President Marcos reigned in the Philippines for 20 years, while Ne Win has outlasted him in Burma. UMNO

⁴⁷ Fischer no doubt had noted the hardline emanating from an Ethnic Affairs Commission funded NATI foreign language teacher (Ms Bell) who argued on *SBS-TV* news 4.2.93 that Australians were "arrogant" when they refused to learn foreign languages for improved trade relations.

⁴⁸ Margaret Easterbrook, 'Fischer wars on push for Asian tongues', *Age*, 28.4.93, p.12.

⁴⁹ Rod Tiffen, address to Centre for Continuing Education course 'Australia and Asia, Sydney University, October 1992.

remained the ruling party throughout Malaysia." 50

According to Tiffen, the Australian media since the 1960s has stereotyped persistently the region into four major images: the next domino, the corrupt military dictatorship, the latest economic miracle, the exotic East. But rather than presenting just one of these flawed images constantly, the Australian media "shuffled the pack". He offers the example of Thailand. Thailand was presented as a "new tiger" or "economic miracle" for a number of years. Then the violence associated with the military coup in Bangkok in May 1992 swept onto the front pages and television screens against a backdrop of dead silence about the events leading up to it. Thus the image of Thailand as "economic miracle" was replaced with "corrupt military dictatorship" image.

When, in the 1990s, the Australian media look at East and Southeast Asia, "the security concerns of the sixties have given way to the threats and opportunities of the region's economic dynamism" according to Tiffen. In spite of this change, Tiffen argues, "the prisms defining newsworthiness, the stimuli to which our media respond, are still very narrow". One of the greatest problems here is that the social and political changes accompanying economic growth in Asia are seldom explored by the Australian media. Hinting at this media superficiality Tiffen asked: "how different is Malaysian government and politics now from 20 years ago? What in the Australian media prepared us for the strength and courage of the protest movement in Bangkok in mid 1992? Are our media ready for grappling with the onset of the post-Suharto politics in Indonesia?"

Journalist and diplomat Nicholas Jose, after residing in China for some time, reflected on the inevitable restraints imposed when writing about Asia. He maintained that from the level of the editor's desk there are only three basic stories on China: The "free-wheeling Capitalist Road" story, with a focus on Southern China and its market potential, the "Oriental communist despot" story, like compulsory abortions and fly eradication campaigns to boost the Olympics bid, the "freak story", like the giant sturgeon in the Yangtse River that helped to fill the "stay in touch" column of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.⁵¹ Jose argued this format exists because newspapers are commercial organisations whose coverage is constrained by "what the readership wants". He argued news items on countries like China have

⁵⁰ Rod Tiffin, *Backgrounders*, Vol. 3, No.10, 5 June 1992, p. 5.

⁵¹ Nicholas Jose at the 'Asia-Australia: Cross Cultural Media Images' Conference, Canberra, November 27-28th 1992.

to fit onto the page in a pattern that reflects the pre-existing notions of how the readership "reads" a particular country. In terms of China this pattern is fixed by these three stereotypes.⁵²

While the Australian press has a long history of racism and patronising attitudes to Asia, Tiffen maintained one of the ironies of the current situation was that the contemporary era offered a much improved performance by Australian journalists reporting Asia. He argued the degree of professionalism was high. However a generally reflection may argue the standard of reporting still varied from one journalist to another. Factors that may influence here include whether the journalist was resident in Asia, how well-briefed they were, language skills, the experience of the journalist, whether they were on assignment in Asia, a whistle-stop tour, part of the press contingent of some visiting politician or major event, such as the Cambodian elections, and so on.

The Australian media's reliance on whistle-stop tours of poorly-briefed and language-deficient journalists was a "cost related" factor argued Paul Kelly, editor of the *Australian*, during a National Press Club address, "..... Australia's current media commitment to and coverage of Asia fails to recognise fully its importance to us as a nation. We don't have enough journalists in the region. We don't have sufficient expertise in its diverse politics, economics and social issues." ⁵³ Kelly identified "scarce resources" as a factor restraining the media from greater coverage of Asian affairs. It required \$125,000 to \$250,000 annually to maintain a foreign post. But given the financial crisis that faced the Australian media in the late 1980s, and the media's pre-existing commitment to maintain a global coverage, the Asian-Pacific region obviously doesn't receive as many resources as it warrants.⁵⁴

Kelly identified a number of other reasons for the failure of the Australian media to perform in Asia. One related to their primary responsibility in Australia which is to "lead debate and reflect popular taste". He argued the cultural similarity of Britain and America to Australia meant their media were "more accessible for our

⁵² Jose argues that even in the 'up-market' intellectual publications like *The Independent Monthly* you can see the "heavy hands of marketing" at play.

⁵³ Paul Kelly, 'Australlian media representations of Asia', *Backgrounder*, Vol. 3, No. 10, 5 June 1992, p. 2.

⁵⁴ P. Kelly, *Backgrounder*, *ibid.*, p. 2.

audiences and, therefore, there is greater consumer demand for this type of northern hemisphere foreign coverage". Thus our coverage of Asia is restricted by an inbuilt Eurocentrism in the marketplace as the media must reflect the "cultural predilections" of their market. In this context, Kelly argues the Australian media are still trying to sort out their own division of responsibility between "leading the debate" and "reflecting popular taste."⁵⁵

But despite a perception of an overall increase in professionalism by Australian media reportage of Asia, our coverage, particularly when it is critical or hostile to the Asian regimes, has remained a very volatile element in bilateral relations with Asia. This volatility reflects a definite shift in the power balance within the political arena of Asian-Australian relations. It also reflects the increasing power of the media and communications industries to agenda-set in an era of rapid technological change. It may also reveal how Asian regimes fall for the temptation of invoking Australia's colonial past, and "foreign influences" generally, for use as a 'whipping horse' for their own domestic policy failures and, in this context, the central role the media play in exposing human rights violations makes them especially vulnerable.

Australian news reports on Asian affairs, despite the reputed professional approach of many of the journalists, still faces a surprising plethora of critics not just in Asia but in Australia itself.⁵⁶ One of the more outspoken was journalist Kalinga Seneviratne who claimed the Australian domestic media over recent years were permeated by an "Anglo-centric concept of truth" when reporting Asian issues. He offered the example of where the Australian media unfairly portrayed Asian migrant communities as having imported historical conflicts and ethnic divisions into their local community inside Australia.⁵⁷ Seneviratne outlined an example from his Sri Lankan homeland where inter-ethnic strife was reported as existing in Australia

⁵⁵ P. Kelly, *Backgrounder*, *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Not all critics of the media are politicians, business community or other journalists. Jazz musician Graeme Bell castigated the coverage of his band's tour of China. He argued in the June 1990 newsletter of the Australia-China Friendship Society "Don't take any notice of Peter Ellingsen's article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*. It was a vicious right-wing bias and complete inaccuracy and gave the impression that the audience in Beijing were pushed around by soldiers and that we had to be protected. It was all completely untrue...."

⁵⁷ See Kalinga Seneviratne, Paper Foreign Correspondents Seminar, Sydney, September 1992. See also article by the same author 'Is the Australian media accessible to Diverse Viewpoints?', *Viva*, October 1991, p. 21.

without any evidence. It was just assumed by the media to have occurred.⁵⁸

(b) The Federal Government Response to a Changing Regional Environment and Its Impact on Asian-Australian Media Relations.

The Federal Government has always maintained a media profile throughout Asia through its departmental publications. Apart from supplying the Asian media with a growing array of publications from the DFAT directly, many other bodies such as Austrade, the International Development Program and Australian Tourist Commission have their own publicity machines performing a semi-government role as roving ambassadors. One acknowledgement of the influence of these bodies was when Prime Minister Keating criticised the Australian Tourist Commission advertisements screening on television sets throughout Asia. Keating argued the continued use of Paul Hogan and Greg Norman as icons sent the "wrong image" of Australia to Asia. He argued the revised effort by the ATC would ensure that "Asians will see Australia as a land of fine dining, sophisticated shopping, farm life, Aboriginal culture and wide open spaces under the catchcry "Australia, the feeling is magic"."⁵⁹

The Keating concern for how the images Australia were projected into the region was not a one-off comment. It reflected a new government philosophy on Asian-Australian media exchanges. In a paper presented in 1991 to a Pacific Journalists' Conference, DFAT media liaison staffer Sue Boyd outlined how the Federal Government had adopted a policy of shifting the emphasis of Australian foreign relations more towards the region. In order to do this the government rationalised it was important to keep both the Australian public and the Asian region informed about policy shifts. Boyd argued when implementing new policies the government cannot afford to neglect the media and must keep them fully informed. Hence the number of government briefing and background papers, conferences, press liaison contacts has increased to match government policy initiatives in the Asian-Pacific region. The issue here is whether a journalist snowballed with government information will then short-cut any critical investigation of the "Push to Asia" strategy

⁵⁸ K. Seneviratne, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Mark Whittaker, 'Gurus trade in Hoges, Norman', *Weekend Australian*, 29-30.8.92, p. 3.

they may be undertaking.⁶⁰

Boyd's defence of a need for greater government input into the media, at a time of an increasingly sophisticated and globalised trading environment, was backed up by fellow DFAT staffer Sandi Logan, who argued recently: "Challenges such as how to influence opinion in an increasingly sophisticated region with access to more sources of information have given the Department the opportunity to exploit the latest development in communications. DFAT is committed to effective public affairs programs in Australia and overseas, mindful that images and perception exert considerable influence on attitudes and intentions. In turn this can affect trade and other interests. As a consequence, Australia's Asian and Pacific region public affairs strategies are designed to deal with the ever-changing and often challenging developments of the global village." ⁶¹

Thus, as the current Federal Labor Government re-orientates its foreign economic policy towards a more regionalist and Asianist direction, in the light of the threatened trade blocs in the Northern Hemisphere, Asian-Australian media relations and foreign policy reporting generally are calculated as playing a more vital, sensitive, and potentially, a more controversial or disruptive role, in Government foreign policy-making.⁶² Without defining the Australian media as being in opposition to the government objectives, the Federal Government now seeks to play an activist role in combating the repercussions of any negative reporting. Thus there is the tendency to ensure both the journalists covering the the region and the public at large are aware of the official view.

Quite apart from the regular reporting of public speeches and press releases, direct contributions to the press on foreign affairs issues, under the name of the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Defence Minister, Immigration Minister and others, positioned on the key editorial and features pages of the press, is now a more frequent occurrence. As far as the Departmental of Foreign Affairs and Trade is

⁶⁰ As Philip Schlesinger points out, government's are often torn between exploiting the "system sustaining" potentialities of journalists or containing their "boat rocking qualities", particularly during crises. See P. Schlesinger, *Media, State, Nation: Political Violence, Collective Identities*, London, Sage, 1991, p. 3.

⁶¹ Sandi Logan, 'Australia, Asia and the Pacific: Regional Media Issues', Paper at the Journalism Education Association Conference, Newcastle, November 29-December 2nd 1992, University of Newcastle.

⁶² See Senator Evans address to the 'Asia-Australia: Cross-Cultural Media Images' Conference, Canberra, November 1992.

concerned, key officials or ex-officials are encouraged to write articles for everything from specialist magazines, trade publications to the daily press in a prolific and strategic manner. Former secretary to the DFAT Richard Woolcott in an issue of the *Financial Review* wrote 'Foreign Affairs role defined for the 90s'. The thrust of his argument was "Australia is an isolated continent. It is not a member of a large bloc. We do not have a powerful neighbour on which to rely for protection. Our markets stretch across the globe. To maintain these existing markets, and to open up new ones, will require intensified efforts by both governments and business..."⁶³ These "intensified efforts" undoubtedly involve a closer policing of what the domestic media are saying about regional politics.

In this context, both Richard Woolcott, as outgoing head of the DFAT and Alison Broinowski, as Head of the Asian Regional section of the DFAT, maintained a high media profile throughout the government's "Push to Asia" 1992 crusade. Woolcott's role emerged most clearly in his June 1992 address to the Sydney Institute where he made a head-on assault on the media critics of the Federal Government's policy over East Timor and Indonesia. He complained that critics of the government were inaccurate, had misplaced priorities and were given too much space by the media. His comments were written up extensively in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Australian* and elsewhere, in the form of both feature articles and prominent news reports. Space offered to replies was sporadic and confined to the letters columns.⁶⁴

One of the ironies here is that the comparative debate on Asian and Australian media argues the Asian regimes exercise more direct control over the content of their mass media and attempt to police content more closely than in Australia using the dictate that the media must broadly reflect the national priorities and aspirations of the respective government. This process of intervention is often defended as "development journalism" or similar phrases. Contrawise to this definition, the Australian media is believed to be more robust, open to dissenting views and independent from government. While the extent of this touted independence in the state-media relations in Australia has been the subject of debate for many

⁶³Richard Woolcott, 'Foreign Affairs role defined for the 90s', *Financial Review*, 18.2.92, p.15.

⁶⁴ Richard Woolcott, *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 1992, *Australian*, June 1992. Broinowski's role was more subtle. In the context of condemning stereotypes of Asia, she placed the need to overcome our deficiencies within the framework of the government's current priorities. See Chapter 2, op. cit and 'Lessons to be learned in our own backyard', *Australian*, 23.6.93, p.18.

decades,⁶⁵ the current "Push to Asia" appears to coincide with a far greater level of government media intervention, suggesting the distinctions between our media and theirs may not be as wide as often envisaged.

*** The Federal Government Policy of "Disassociation" from Embarrassing Media Comment.**

Nevertheless there are still restraints imposed by the "liberal" press axiom in Australia. So much so that the Federal Government has felt compelled to employ an additional fall-back or "damage control" measure in the wake of damaging political criticisms of Australian media content launched by certain Asian regimes. This new government defence mechanism has been exercised in a number of different ways. In November 1992 the Foreign Minister Senator Evans rationalised government action in a speech that was critical of Australian media reporting of Asia.⁶⁶ Evans argued the media were sometimes aggravating regional differences and unfairly undermining government diplomacy where they identified Federal Government soft-peddalling on certain bilateral issues, when clearly, the government had no choice in the matter. Evans maintained this media grandstanding was sometimes doing great damage to our regional bilateral relations. As a result the government had no choice but to disassociate itself from the media's coverage.⁶⁷

Senator Evans referred specifically to the media coverage of his visit to Malaysia to patch up a break down of bilateral relations caused by the Malaysian furore over the *Embassy* television drama series. On that occasion Senator Evans apologised to the Malaysian Government for any offence the series caused in Malaysia and disassociated the Australian Government from the producers of the ABC television series. Many Australian media commentators saw this apology as fawning and expressed outrage that the Malaysians should attempt to influence

⁶⁵ Two of the recent contributions to the debate are Derek Parker, *The Courtesans, The Press Gallery in the Hawke Era*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991 and Graham Coddington, *Government Management of the Media*, Deakin Uni. Press, Geelong, 1991.

⁶⁶ Senator Evans address to 'Asia-Australia: Cross Cultural Media Images' Conference, Uni. of Canberra, November 1992. Contrast the reports in the *Australian* and *Sydney Morning Herald* the next day.

⁶⁷ In defence of this policy Senator Evans has observed, "The extent to which foreign ministers uniquely suffer from the Australian media lash should not be exaggerated: an all pervasive scepticism about the motives and performance of those in high places is a distinctive national habit". See Gareth Evans & Bruce Grant, *Australian Foreign Relations In the World of the 1990s*, MUP, 1991, pp. 50-52, at p.52.

Australian television content. 68

In a subsequent incident over the feature film *Turtle Beach* which had received indirect government assistance through the Film Finance Corporation, a federally-funded body, the government pre-empted a Malaysian response by withdrawing its sponsorship credit and apologising in advance of the film's release. It was aided by the fact that the domestic media debate over the accuracy of the film's content was conducted in an academic vacuum whereby foreign affairs journalists were allowed to preview the film well in advance of both the artistic previews and the eventual release date. Given the foreign affairs writers almost unanimously canned the film and given the distributors mistake in delaying its release until well after this debate, the film predictably was a box office flop. This flop was in turn interpreted by the conservative media's political commentators as a vindication of the Federal Government's stand.

There is no doubt the Federal Government has adopted an apologetic and cautious stand within the region itself as a general policy. The Evans-Malaysia apologies were backed up by other senior Cabinet Ministers touring the region. Federal Treasurer, John Dawkins, in May 1992, outlined in a Singapore press conference how Canberra was sensitive to statements critical of countries in the region. While defending Australian press freedoms, Dawkins at the same time indicated there would be a continuance of the policy of government disassociation from independent press reports found to be potentially damaging to our trading interests.⁶⁹

But this policy of 'disassociation', however pleasing to neighbouring regimes, ran the risk of undermining the Federal Government's credibility on the domestic front. A Federal Ministry of the Environment school kit was withdrawn from circulation, following DFAT intervention, when it was discovered the kit contained criticism of the destructive environmental policies of three overseas governments, two of them in the Asian region.⁷⁰ The DFAT took the extraordinary step of issuing an apology and disassociation to the three Embassies concerned in Canberra even before the

⁶⁸ See for example David Jenkins 'Hawke's forelock in Australia's way', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29.10.91, p.11 and editorial, 'Malaysia's right to be offended', *Australian*, 17.2.92, p.8. The legacy of this press outrage has carried over to the Gillespie case. See Ray Chesterton, 'Gareth's policy means having to say we're sorry', *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, 6.8.92, p.12.

⁶⁹ John Dawkins statement to the press in Singapore, May 1992, Radio Australia report.

⁷⁰ See Peter Cronau report, *Broadside*, August 1992.

kit was circulated. Apart from inevitable claims from the parliamentary Opposition about government inconsistency between departments there was a more fundamental issue. This was an inevitable temptation for overseas governments to now assert that the 'disassociation' policy was an admission that the Australian media reports, (in this case an item from the domestic education curriculum), were not only damaging, but false. The implications for any foreign or locally-based journalists who wished to stand by the veracity of their reports was thereby seriously jeopardised.

This 'sanitising' role of government media interventions emerged in a more subtle fashion when at a National Press Club forum, the Deputy Secretary of DFAT, Geoff Forrester, argued the media issue goes to the heart of the debate about the nature of the Asia-Australia relationship. It was one where: "That debate almost invariably assumes Australia's relations with the highly diverse communities of Asia are uneasy, exotic and unequal. Analysts quickly point to clashes of values and contrasts of levels of economic advancement. Some play on the contrast of geographical proximity with the hitherto lack of depth and sense of common future which has hitherto seemed to mark relations. There are past colonialist and white overtones in most of our relations." But, concludes Forrester, these differences are all "bridgeable" with "persistent hard work directed at understanding the languages, values, beliefs and administrative, social and business systems of each other." ⁷¹

Clearly it is at this point, the media as the cutting edge of relations with Asia, where the Australian government, those business interests with developing Asian interests, along with other lobbyists who support the economics-driven "push to Asia", would all anticipate the Australian media to compliantly perform as both educator or agitator for the cause.⁷² This offers good cause to investigate whether the media has the capacity or inclination to fulfil such a role as a key facilitator and fast-tracker in the "push to Asia" equation. The ABC television diplomatic correspondent Micheal Maher recently maintained that there were few examples where the government did not have the whip hand in foreign affairs reporting. He

⁷¹ Geoff Forrester, 'Australia, Asia and the media: where do we stand?', *Backgrounder*, Vol. 3, No.10, 5 June 1992, p. 2. Government bureaucrats like Forrester are often reported in the media. For example, in February 1992 William Ferris, Chairman of Austrade, warned Australia to tread carefully in condemning human rights abuses by its Asian trading partners because "there were commercial consequences every time Australia took a stance on a domestic moral issue in another country", *West Australian*, press report February 1992.

⁷² A good example here is Prime Minister Keating's speech at the launching of the new ATVI satellite television service into Asia.

could instance only a handful of instances where the media coverage of a foreign affairs issue actually precipitated a shift in government policy.⁷³

However, the view from the media minders and bureaucrats on the media-state power balance is a different one. Former DFAT media head Sue Boyd credited the media with greater influence than journalist Maher was prepared to concede. She regarded the media as an "active player in the public domain" and argued it was "naive" to portray the media as a "disinterested player" or as simply some transmission belt in the government's developing relations with Asia.⁷⁴ For this reason, she maintained, the DFAT adopts an interventionist response whenever it finds the media are not on the team.

This often involved intervention in those cases where the concept of a "free media" was not shared by our neighbours and coverage by Australian journalists was correspondingly hostile. Boyd instances here the Australian media coverage of Malaysia, Fiji, PNG and East Timor as ready examples where the media may "err" in a manner "irresponsible", or may just "reveal" (some fact) and "embarrass" (the government). In any such circumstance, according to Boyd, this necessitates the DFAT devoting "some effort to working out how to manage this element, in the interests of our overall national interests."⁷⁵ The implication here is that smooth bilateral diplomacy was always the overriding concern and issues like the truth in reporting or exposing human rights violations, are accorded by default a lower priority in DFAT eyes. Issues such as media censorship by repressive neighbours will inevitably become casualties as the government's department takes corrective measures in the interests of broader diplomacy.

As international relations academic Peter Boyce has pointed out, since the advent of the Hawke ALP Government in 1983 foreign relations have been seen mainly through the prism of foreign economic relations. With trade and economics the driving force, one must now ponder the extent to which there is a natural tendency for media managers and diplomats to smother or counteract the more unsavoury or exploitative side of bilateral trade relations whenever such embarrassing evidence is unearthed by journalists and other altruistic interlopers.

⁷³ See Micheal Maher's chapter in *Diplomacy in the Marketplace*, op. cit.

⁷⁴ Sue Boyd, 'The Media and Foreign Policy', *The Sydney Papers*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Autumn 1992, p. 15.

⁷⁵ S. Boyd, 'The Media and Foreign Policy', *The Sydney Papers*, *ibid.*, p. 17.

(c) The Institutional Response of the Australian Media to the New Challenge of Asia.

Leaving aside issues of cultural biases, alluded to by Tiffen, Broinowski, Forrester and others above, the tradition view of the Australian media is that they are diversified, liberal and pluralist. As an institution, the media within capitalist societies like Australia must maintain advertising revenues and profit seeking for shareholders as their bottom line.⁷⁶ Hence the way the media fit the Federal Government's "push to Asia" agenda into their copy space and programming must be influenced to some degree by the marketplace. Whether the media will stress the issue of "Asia" within its reporting of economics, human rights, cultural exchange, foreign policy or diplomacy will be determined by the expectations of advertisers and the perceived interests of readers and viewers, who are in essence the consumers of the 'product'.

In highlighting the existing inadequacies academic Rod Tiffen has argued, the structure of the Australian media has ensured that news information made available to the Australian public about Asia is controlled and narrowed down by key decision makers in Australia. He maintained while foreign news *content* was not a "direct systematic expression of any one person's or organisation's ideology" owing to the ideological diversity and ambiguity of sources, nevertheless the *processes* of *newsmaking* were not "politically neutral or ideologically inert". Thus asserted Tiffen, "News values, assumptions about audience interests and attitudes, production and format demands of news organisations, the differing priority and authority accorded to different news sources, all constitute a very considerable and limiting prism through which Southeast Asia news is filtered in Australia."⁷⁷

More broadly speaking, if we accept the notion that the Australian media have attempted to fulfil the role of a 'fourth estate' or 'watchdog' here, it may be hard to criticise and analyse the value judgements involved as to which of the many competing images of Asia deserved an airing in the Australian media. Editors and foreign editors could rightly fall back on the defence that the competing images of Asia would be reflected differently across different sections of the media, whether

⁷⁶The ABC and SBS have been the exceptions here, until recently at least. A letter in the *Australian* 16.6.93 suggested with its number of advertisement's SBS should be referred to as the four commercial network.

⁷⁷ Rodney Tiffen, *The News From Southeast Asia: The Sociology of Newsmaking*, ISEAS, Singapore, 1978, p.5.

within the overall content of one newspaper, or between newspapers. We have to acknowledge here that the quality press often give greater emphasis to foreign affairs reporting than the tabloid press.

But deciding how to reassess content in the light of the new "Asia" is not the only challenge. Care must be taken when examining the rhetoric for change as in the superficially reformist demand for a new breed of journalists. Editor-in-chief of *The Australian* Paul Kelly has argued that regionally-based correspondents must become more "sophisticated", taking into account the changing relationship between Australia and the region. Part of this "sophistication" involved, according to Kelly, a new look at the issue of briefings for foreign correspondents. He asked whether someone sent to Jakarta should be briefed to cover "corruption in Jakarta" or "other issues which we might consider to be far more important to the Indonesia-Australia relationship".⁷⁸

This issue of the new "Asia" also related to an institutional debate about the "tone and content" of news coverage. Kelly conceded there was an inbuilt tension over Australian regional reporting but still advocated far more subtlety because the region should not be reported in a similar way to "coverage of factional difficulties inside the Labor Party". He argued here, "in a sense Australian politics and the Australian media have grown together and the culture produced is a very assertive and very aggressive one". But in reporting the region, Kelly felt journalists had to be "clever" in deciding what tone to use. This argument over the tone of reporting was also supported recently in a paper by long-time, Singapore-based, Australian journalist Ilsa Sharp.⁷⁹

Apart from the newspaper editors who selectively cull in a narrow way the available information, debate in the media about Asia and Australia's foreign policy options is restricted mainly to politicians and a few pressure groups.⁸⁰ One DFAT policy maker has pointed out that his department began each day by analysing the foreign affairs coverage offered by the few select columnists on foreign affairs from the nation's morning papers. The official expressed a belief that this small group of writers "covered the spectrum" of political opinion and thus monitoring this copy

⁷⁸Paul Kelly address, National Press Club, June 1992. See *Backgrounder* article op. cit.

⁷⁹ Ilsa Sharp, talk at Edith Cowan University, Asian Communications and Media Studies Centre, 25.11.92.

⁸⁰ Rod Tiffen, lecture for Continuing Education Course 'Australia and Asia', October 1992, Sydney University.

enabled the department to gauge its policy priorities by assessing the level of criticism or support emanating from these selective newspaper columnists.⁸¹

Clearly, given the close working relationship between the foreign news editor desks and the DFAT, where a mutual dependency must inevitably grow out of privileged background briefings to journalists on the one hand and "responsible" and "sensitive" reporting on the other, it is highly dubious if, over time, the DFAT officials would be able to discern any real diversity of opinion on foreign affairs reporting in the print media by focusing their attention on such a narrow range of contributors.⁸² Certainly this example demonstrates how the news is filtered at every level in a way that tends to narrow policy options.

It would be remiss not to mention here that such indications of a collaborative media-state relationship conforms to the neo-marxist and radical media critiques of the "pluralist model" of the Australian press. One of the more popular dissenting viewpoints comes from American philosopher and media critic Noam Chomsky in his documentary *Manufacturing Consent*.⁸³ His theory contends liberal democracies police their domestic airwaves and print media in indirect ways, creating what he calls "necessary illusions" about media freedom and public access. The Chomsky model maintains that newsflows are regulated by a number of "filters", hidden gatekeepers, that disguise themselves behind normative ideas like "market forces" and "newsworthiness" and the "exigencies of production". When these fail to reinforce the status quo the system resorts to "flak" or the discrediting of pressure groups by defining them as outside the mainstream. To achieve this objective the media invariably prioritizes "victims" into "worthy" or "unworthy" cases for either public sympathy or derision.⁸⁴

Clearly neither economic profits or human rights are taboo subjects in the current "Push to Asia". But the current priority given to one over the other issue within the

⁸¹Paul Callinan, DFAT staffer, at a seminar at the Monash University, Centre for South East Asian Studies, November 1992.

⁸²Although Mark Baker, foreign editor of the *Age*, denied that the press were influenced by DFAT strategies. He did however concede that the *Age*, like other newspapers, accepted the broad parameters of the Federal Government's "Push to Asia" strategy. (Interview with author 13.5.93).

⁸³Screened on SBS-TV during December 1992.

⁸⁴Two existing studies partially employing the Chomsky approach are G.C. Gunn & J. Lee, *Cambodia Watching Down Under*, Institute of Asian Studies, Bangkok, 1991 and Tracy Woods, *Propaganda: Press, Policy and East Timor*, Thesis, Faculty of Communication, Uni. of Canberra, 1992.

media offers preliminary evidence that supports the Chomsky suppositions. It reflects firstly the commercial nature of the Australian media. Media reporting of the shifting Indonesian-Australian diplomacy is a case in point. For historical reasons the East Timor human rights issue has been a festering sore in bilateral relations. The Federal Government's new commercially focused "Push to Asia" involved a revamping of relations with our immediate Indonesian neighbour. Later in this paper will be an examination of how the Government sort to re-organise the media's agenda to give greater accent to bilateral trade and defence relations with Indonesia while at the same time marginalising the Timorese human rights issue. The Timorese rapidly shift from worthy to unworthy "victims" in the eyes of the key media brokers.

*** Some Institutional Responses to the Keating Initiative: The Print Media and the "Push to Asia".**

Starting from the premise that the "Push to Asia" is predominantly a Federal Government and business community driven agenda,⁸⁵ and is primarily about opening up economic opportunities for Australian business in the region, it would be useful to examine to what degree the media have actually "Asianised" their content in response to the challenge. For a preliminary study of the changes in the domestic news input into coverage devoted to Asia may in itself be revealing in the light of the structural problems of regional newsflows alluded to in the earlier pages.

A preliminary investigation of the print media reveals, not surprisingly, that the quality daily press such as the *Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* and to a much lesser extent *The Age*, along with the financial press such as the *Financial Review*, *Business Review Weekly*,⁸⁶ *Australian Business Monthly*⁸⁷ and a number of newer specialist magazines, have taken up the issue with far more relish than their tabloid counterparts or the electronic media. Leaving aside the issue of whether the issue has become a preoccupation of the foreign desk of daily newspapers, it would be useful to begin with a quick survey the general news

⁸⁵ In *The Australian* newspaper's "Asia link" series, , Tim Blue wrote, "The Business Council of Australia, comprised of the chief executives of the largest 80 Australian companies, is a firm advocate of greater Australian involvement in Asia." (*Australian*, 17.11.92, p.42).

⁸⁶ For example see Tim Duncan and Robert Gottliebsen, 'Why our companies have snubbed Asia', *Business Review Weekly*, 17.3.89, pp. 20-27.

⁸⁷ See for example the 'Business in Asia' column, Sabam Siagian, 'Neighbours: What Indonesia wants from us', *Australian Business Monthly*, January 1993, pp.111-113.

sections of the press.

Of all the papers surveyed *The Australian* seemed to have taken the "Push to Asia" the most seriously in both editorial response and in terms of actual changes in content of the paper to reflect this new priority. Its foreign editor Greg Sheridan has pursued the issue in column after column with a missionary zeal. In spite of the prominent changes at the *Australian*, the paper's editor-in-chief, Paul Kelly, remained critical of the depth of economic, financial and investment reporting of the region by the Australian press as a whole. He believed these too much attention was still paid to developments in the UK, the US and Japan. He argued, "We need to bear in mind the fact that "North East Asia" are very much the "surplus nations", and they will invest in Australia. This has been a factor neglected by the media. Given the rapid change in the region economically, it now behoves the media to re-assess the nature of their regional coverage in areas like "aviation, transport, economics, finance, tourism", he added. ⁸⁸

In line with this dictate, *The Australian* newspaper ran a "Special Survey" series in August 1992 focusing on individual countries within the North and Southeast Asian regions which examined bilateral relations and their investment potential for Australia.⁸⁹ In November 1992 the same newspaper, over a two week period, ran a series of supplements in its main news pages under the masthead of "Asia link". The introduction to this supplement argued, "Attention that once was focused on Europe and the U.S now is firmly on the (Asian-Pacific) markets". The series analysed banking and financial world with the "pin-pointing of trends, the potential investment hot spots - and danger spots". Other articles followed, on construction and infrastructure, property, tourism, travel, educational and cultural links, the opportunities for manufacturing exporters, in particular those prepared to move off-shore; a concluding article ran with the familiar theme of the need for Australia to "lift our game".⁹⁰

In its efforts to integrate the Asian theme throughout its overall content *The Australian* ran regular supplements on business, higher education, communications and aviation which all gave increasing emphasis to the Asian market. The most pronounced change came in the financial pages. *The Business*

⁸⁸ Paul Kelly, National Press Club, June 1992, op. cit.

⁸⁹ For example see the supplement on Thailand, *The Australian*, 12.8.92, pp. 9-12.

⁹⁰ *The Australian*, "Asia link" series, Monday 16.11.92 up to Friday 27.11.92.

Australian supplement now carried an *Asian Business News* section and a regular column entitled *Asian Business* by Florence Chong. This change of format was partially at the expense of the daily page on Australian culture and entertainment. This was a move that reflected the changing Asianist priority but was nonetheless unpopular with the many devotees of the page on Australian culture. It demonstrated an incidental way in which the Asia issue was impinging on the national identity issue.

Amongst the other 'quality' or non-tabloid press in Australia are the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Age* and *Canberra Times*. All three have invariably staffed their foreign desks with journalists who are either Asian 'literate' or on occasion even Asia specialists.⁹¹ These papers tended to depend on their regular Australian-based contributors as well as correspondents in Asia, such as Lindsay Murdoch from his Singapore base, in order to keep pace with the Federal Government's new Asianist agenda and monitor the region's reaction. Most news from the region found in these papers was still featured either under the heading of "world news" or "the region" and at least in part derivative of wire service file. However there was an increasing flow of reports from regionally-based correspondents and domestic journalists reporting on assignment.

The Sydney Morning Herald in early 1992 ran a series of feature articles analysing Australia's future and the Asian region. Under the banner of "ASIA: OUR ROAD TO SURVIVAL" the paper addressed diplomacy, defence and foreign affairs, trade and cultural links. In a similar manner to the *Australian*, the series was written in the style of a collection of pep talks, anecdotes, risk analysis and suggestions for Australian businesses about to take up the cudgels and expand into Asia. The series was strung together by a range of staff national affairs correspondents with some input from former overseas correspondents and foreign affairs staff. It clearly reflected that the new priority in Asia was the promotion of Australian business links with the region.

Typical here was an article by former Asian-based correspondent Louise Williams on the Australian funded Laos-Thailand friendship bridge.⁹² The article avoided mention of fears by Laos people that the bridge, by providing greater outside

⁹¹In the case of the *Herald*, however, one of the most recent foreign editors, Warren Osmond was said to have a greater interest in Europe than Asia.

⁹² Louise Williams, 'Friendship bridge straddles troubled waters', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6.5.92, p. 8.

access to its largely unspoilt countryside, may lead to a more rapid decimation of its rainforest stock by Thai and Japanese logging companies. Nor were the Lao fears of cultural domination by Thai and Western influence mentioned. The emphasis was on the positive role Australia was playing in developing business links. The focus was narrow and avoided mentioning any potential negative social implications of such investments. Yet the author is renowned for just such broader interpretations on Asian development issues. The point at issue is that the paper appears to have given a brief to the journalist to come up with an article on economics and not social conditions. It raises the issue of whether Asia in becoming "our road to survival" is also becoming their own road to destruction?⁹³

An adjoining article attempted to examine the efforts being made by Austrade, Australian tertiary institutions and long established Australian enterprises to "bridge the cultural gap" between Australia and Asia. The emphasis here was on what sort of knowledge of Asian culture would be necessary for our businesses to prosper in Asia.⁹⁴ The paper also examined the economic value to the Australian economy of Asian tourism in an article that focused on Japanese honeymooners.⁹⁵ The following day was an article noting the success of the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation in finding market niches in large construction projects in Asia.⁹⁶ Another article in the series saw foreign affairs writers David Jenkins, who had toured the region, speaking to "academics, policy-makers, businessmen and diplomats" posing the question "How do Asians see Australia's role in the Asian-Pacific?"⁹⁷

Yet another article from the *Herald* concentrated on the trade with Asia issue arguing "expanding trade to the booming markets of Asia will take more than a levelling of the playing field". The article explored the implications for Australian

⁹³Although not touched on in this paper, as far as Indochina as a whole goes, the plethora of press articles extolling the virtues of Vietnam re-embracing the "marketplace", and how Australia's unique position will enable us to exploit this opportunity, should not be overlooked. The latest push comes from American media magnate Rupert Murdoch. See Margaret Harris, 'Murdoch sets out to conquer Asia', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27.4.93, p. 36.

⁹⁴ Margaret Harris, Suzanne Mostyn, Anne Bernasek, "The know-how we need now", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6.5.92, p. 8.

⁹⁵ Ibid., *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6.5.92, p.13.

⁹⁶ Mike Steketee and Karen Maley, 'Trade tigers ride a pragmatic road', and Suzanne Mostyn, 'Our Snowy men beat the tender trap', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7.5.92.

⁹⁷ David Jenkins, 'Seven ways to get on with the neighbours', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8.5.92.

industry of the current policy of reduced tariff protectionism. It concluded that "pragmatic" politicians now recognised that this policy in itself was no panacea for the future, but also pointed out that "the intellectual battle in the bureaucracy still seems to be dominated by the dries in bodies such as the Treasury and Industry Commission".⁹⁸

Foreign editor of *The Age*, Mark Baker felt that his paper had made regular comment on Keating's "Push to Asia" but had not gone in for large supplements of the *Herald* and *Australian* which he saw as aimed primarily at garnishing extra advertising revenue. He argued the *Age* was the paper with the longest links to Asia having maintained correspondents in the ASEAN region continuously since the 1960s and in China since 1973. While a number of correspondents and columnists writing for the *Age* have been critical of the Keating strategy,⁹⁹ Baker felt the overall editorial position of the paper was supportive of the Federal Government initiative. The critical response by some of the *Age's* columnists analysed the "push to Asia" as national policy, and not as some other capital city dailies did, as a reflection of regional concerns.¹⁰⁰ Baker maintained parochial Victorian concerns about employment in the TCF and car manufacturing industries was incidental, not the driving force behind criticisms of the Canberra strategy.

This should be compared to Western Australian press response to the Federal Government's initiative in November 1992 to encourage the ALP Lawrence Government to host an *Inter Asia* Conference in Perth to give the "push to Asia" a more decentralised and regional focus.¹⁰¹ The conference was attended primarily by international Asian delegates and local representatives of the corporate sector. In spite of a political hostility to both the Lawrence ALP Government and the Keating ALP Government, the leading Perth daily newspaper, the *West Australian*, responded positively to this initiative with an expensive four page cover wrap-around supplement to its normal edition on the opening day.

One explanation for this generous endorsement response was the perception that

⁹⁸ Mike Steketee and Karen Maley, 'Trade tigers ride a pragmatic road', and Suzanne Mostyn, 'Our Snowy men beat the tender trap', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7.5.92.

⁹⁹ See Ken Davidson, 'Wish as hard as we like, we cannot become part of Asia', *Age*, 29.4.93, p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Mark Baker, by author 14.5.93.

¹⁰¹ See DFAT publication *Insight* in November 1992 on the Federal Government's role in initiating this conference.

newspapers such as the *West Australian* performed the role of advocate for a regional focus on national affairs. It carefully examined the economic potential for Western Australian involvement within the "Push to Asia" strategy of Canberra. In concentrating on the economic issue - food and mineral exports and Asian financial imports - the paper reflected similar priorities to those of Canberra. Where parochialism crept in was in the minutiae of arguments like Perth should become the logical city to spearhead greater Australian links with Asia because it was on the same time zone as the business markets and stock exchanges of Northeast Asia.¹⁰² Elsewhere in the *West Australian*, a regular *Asia Desk* column appeared in the under the pen of Andre Malan. Malan's *Into Asia* Conference post mortem in the form of news commentary highlighted how the "Push to Asia" was still largely a Government-business initiative with, so far, little real interest shown by people outside the business community.¹⁰³

The *Adelaide Advertiser* often responded with its own parochial concerns with Australian-Japan relations placed at the centre of its "Push to Asia" coverage. In the run up to Keating's visit to Japan the dispute with Opposition leader Hewson was seen through the prism of how trade wars and tariffs would impact on the local car industry and whether the Japan visit would kick-start the Multi Function Polis. Similarly, the *Northern Territory News* reacted to the Keating initiative as a reassuring confirmation the Northern Territory Government's on-going emphasis of building business links between the Northern Territory and Indonesia and the continuation of its ill-fated "free trade zone" which had come under severe criticism in the national media for the exploitation of imported Chinese labourers.¹⁰⁴ The *News* has religiously reported complaints by local politicians that the Federal Government was trying to steal its limelight on the developing regional trade links emanating from Darwin in a show of assertive independence from Canberra.

¹⁰² See *West Australian*, 16.11.92, cover wrap-around. Investigation may reveal that this was actually an expensive paid advertisement.

¹⁰³ The *Asia Desk* editor of the same paper, Andre Malan, offered a commentary at the end of the conference entitled 'A long wait to see if talkfest pays off', *West Australian*, 21.11.92, p.8, where he argued "Picking up most of the bill for this expensive talkfest was the WA taxpayer. In return, we are told, the state will receive export contracts, new investment and job-creating projects." Malan commented on the lack of interstate and overseas media, the poor weather and heavy government input. He conceded that 'person to person' business contacts were made but concluded it would be a long time before one could measure the benefits of the conference.

¹⁰⁴ See also *Dateline*, Saturday, 24.10.92, a programme on the growing business links between the Northern Territory and Indonesia.

The *Financial Review* maintained Rowan Callick's *Pacific Viewpoint* column on Pacific affairs and although it now gave a greater emphasis to Asian business news, it did not run a specific column on Asia, preferring to incorporate such coverage either under editorial leaders, 'regional news' pages, regular columnists such as Michael Byrnes in Hong Kong, special supplements on Asian business, or profile supplements on individual Asian countries. As with the *Australian* newspaper, such supplements usually couched business news in the 'risk analysis' style of presentation and primarily served as advertising revenue raises. A significant factor with the *Financial Review* was the large number of government foreign affairs and trade bureaucrats who appeared regularly in its columns outlining government strategy on Asia. Undoubtedly this reflected the targeted audience of its readership which was heavily weighted in favour of the business community and economically-inclined intellectuals.

*** Australian Television and "The Push to Asia".**

Radio and television variations in coverage of Asia would be justified by electronic media producers in a similar way to print editors, by reference to issues of market demand and viewer/listener satisfaction. Naturally different expectations arise over whether we are talking about news, current affairs, television drama, arts or sports coverage. Television, as primarily a vehicle for entertainment or "infotainment" is inevitably Eurocentric. The issue of Asian content is satirised each Monday evening on the ABC-TV's *This Sporting Life* ; compere "Roy Slaven" offers the absurd introduction "Hello viewers, and *Hello Asia*" in what could only be a tongue-in-cheek send-up of the Keating strategy.¹⁰⁵

Overall, television is seen as less responsive to the Federal Government's "Push to Asia", except on occasions like a Prime Ministerial visit to a regional capital such as the Indonesian and Japanese visits of 1992, or in the context of a national affairs debate such as during the March 1993 election, or in the context of crisis diplomacy such as the peace-keeping commitment to Cambodia and the Gillespie custody wrangle with Malaysia. Commercial television international news coverage, with its brevity and heavy dependence of wire service reports, remained the prisoner of the "floods and coups" formula for international news for reporting Asia or anywhere else.

¹⁰⁵"Slaven" is effectively saying, as if a programme which consisted of lewd jokes and innuendoes about local footy stars, etc., replete with Australian slang and vernacular, could at all be comprehended by even the most articulate of our Northern neighbours.

Reporting of Thailand on Australian television is a good example. Thailand virtually disappeared from the news footage following the massive coverage given to the military and police massacres surrounding its parliamentary crisis in 1992. Apart from the semi-titillating documentaries on the risk of AIDS for Western tourists on "sex holidays", Thailand only re-emerged in May 1993 as a leading news item after a massive fire and tragic loss of life in a toy factory in Bangkok. Seldom a word about developmental or economic issues or even a follow up on parliamentary and constitutional issues following the crisis of 1992. Issues like tragedies, natural disasters and AIDS, prostitution are inevitably the main focus of scanty coverage of this country.

The ABC fields far more correspondents in the region and inevitably performed better than commercial stations in regional news and current affairs coverage.¹⁰⁶ SBS, with its charter aimed at greater international sources and focus, also offered a more detailed view of Asia. It should be noted here that staff at the "non-commercial" ABC and SBS television have fought vigorously to maintain their "fourth estate" role in the face of growing government pressure to impose greater editorial control, through regulatory bodies and executive intervention, as well as offering public resistance to continual moves to totally commercialise their operations. Behind this struggle it is widely believed there is an on-going desire to protect the integrity of current affairs and news reporting which includes its regional focus.

ABC television's current affairs has consistently covered the Asian region far better than commercial television, with correspondents in India, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, China and elsewhere. The focus of hard-edged current affairs programs like *Four Corners* usually has a specific country emphasis, such as Cambodia or Indonesia, where the dilemma of preserving human rights under authoritarian rule would invariably figure high on the agenda. *Foreign Correspondent* would attempt the smorgasbord approach, where serious reporting from war fronts would be balanced with the joys of Japanese bath houses (culture) and the massive changes in southern China's economy (economics). The program angles these vignettes usually with the specific focus of change or nations in transition and if applicable,

¹⁰⁶ However a breakdown of the Channel Nine networks comprehensive coverage of the Cambodia War over the past 10 years supplied to me by Peter Meakin suggests that a lot more research is necessary before any definitive conclusion could be drawn. Over a ten year period *Sixty Minutes*, *Sunday* and *A Current Affair* all produced special documentaries on the Cambodia issue. I base my assumption on the extraordinary number of hours the commercial stations devote to non-Asian issues like soaps and sports.

how it affects Australia. On the other hand, *Lateline* adopted "the more business with Asia perspective" or dealt with Asia as part of the big themes of human rights, the UN and the post-Cold War international security balance.

The opening of Australian Television International (ATVI) in March 1993 was regarded as a big step forward in projecting Australian television to the region and also in providing regional news to an Australian audience through a half hour late-night bulletin. The launch featured heavily in the run up to the Federal elections. The daily press pontificated that ATVI could become an embarrassment for the government's "Push to Asia" drive if it focused on "human rights" abuses in Asia. Keating, the ABC executives and the rest of Cabinet countered by denying this would not be the case. They emphasised "responsible and "sensitive" reporting would be the order of the day and the nation should take pride in our first television flagship across Asia.¹⁰⁷

The debate over funding the new ATVI satellite television station raised other important considerations about the future of "serious listening" programming on Radio Australia and Radio National. The fear here was that self-funding requirements would soon mean no government funding, eventual financial starvation and the muzzling of the critical edge of Australian public broadcasting. As Graham Dobell has demonstrated, many ordinary people in the Asian-Pacific region still rely on Radio Australia and the ABC to report on their country's internal affairs. Radio Australia is still perceived widely throughout the region as one of the few sources of independent news from a non government-controlled avenue.¹⁰⁸

However it is worth recalling the views of an Australian journalist of Asian descent, Kalinga Seveneratne, whose analysis of both the ABC and SBS news and current affairs reporting was highly critical. His study argued that both stations were "Anglo-Centric" at the management level and took a hotchpotch approach to presenting the

¹⁰⁷Privately, one ABC producer conceded to me that hard-edged episodes of say human rights in Indonesia profiles from *Four Corners* would most likely not see the light of day on ATVI. (Interview, with unnamed ABC producer, November 1992).

¹⁰⁸ See Graeme Dobell's chapter in AIDAB, 'Australia's Media Treatment of the developing world. How does it rate?' *International Development Issues*, No. 6, Canberra, AGPS, 1989. Jemima Garrett gave a report on the continuing censorship and government control of the Pacific media on ABC Radio's *International Report*, 16.6.93.

Asian region to Australian viewers.¹⁰⁹ As if to confirm this viewpoint, regular viewers of the ABC's *Foreign Correspondent*, *Four Corners*, *7.30 Report*, and to a lesser extent *Lateline*, may find room for argument over the lack of non-Anglo 'talking heads' when Australia's position on Asian-Pacific regional politics and international relations were discussed on current affairs programmes since the Sevensatne study was completed in 1991. The most recent example concerning SBS-TV was a letter-writing campaign by the Australian Khmer community demanding representation on the *Dateline* forum scheduled to discuss the John Pilger documentary *Return to the Killing Fields* and the Cambodian elections in May 1993.¹¹⁰

But whatever problems the ABC and SBS have in getting across a legitimate view of Asia, they pail into insignificance when placed along side the 'popular' commercial television shows. Paul Kelly at the National Press Club made an observation about the marked differences in standard between the 'quality' and 'popular' print media coverage devoted to Asia, arguing the 'popular' approach was to see Asia as a "freak show". This barb is probably more relevant when we consider the Australian television and Asia. On Saturday 5th December 1992 in the 6.30 P.M. time slot a good comparison of the 'quality' versus 'popular' television coverage of Asian affairs was gleaned from two simultaneously screened television documentaries on national television.

Firstly, the SBS-TV *Dateline* current affairs programme covered the political future of Indonesia. In this programme Max Lane, former diplomat, academic and human rights activist on Indonesian affairs was interviewed. Lane argued that pressure was being applied the Suharto dynasty from three sources; the Army dissidents who don't like being used just to prop up Suharto dynasty and would like a greater share of the (economic and political) action; the middle class business interests who are opposed to monopolisation (Suharto's family dynasty) in the atmosphere of a growing deregulated economic market inside Indonesia; the student movement aligned with the peasantry campaigning over specific reform issues, although some of them see it as a rebuilding of the pre-1965 movement for genuine democracy.

¹⁰⁹ Kalinga Sevensatne, paper on SBS-TV during the foreign correspondents Seminar organised by the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism in 1991. His study gave a breakdown of the last episode of the SBS-TV's now defunct programme *Asia Report* to demonstrate it was tokenistic, trivialised development issues and showed a total Westernised perspective on Asia.

¹¹⁰ Information supplied by Khmer activists in Melbourne 14.5.93.

Overall it was a hard-hitting critical programme that argued Indonesia would either move further down the road of liberalisation or a Suharto imposed Presidential backlash would see a new round of repression.¹¹¹

The second, or 'popular' programme was shown on the Kerry Packer-owned, Channel Nine network, the travel documentary programme known as *The World Around Us*. It began with a picture of Balinese dance culture. The program promoted all the stereotypes of Indonesia as an exotic destination. It concentrated on the colourful (for Westerners) fascination in the Bali dance traditions and rituals. It argued one dance was devised in the "1930s" just for the Western tourists. It showed the luxury resort town Sunar without mentioning the one five star hotel, the Bali Beach Hotel on the beach (Japanese financed with war reparation money) stood alone in the skyline because of protests over the scale of its construction and the local opposition to any further construction along that magnitude. The programme only emphasised Bali as an exotic tourist destination - showing fat, middle-aged pale-skinned Australians lounging around the cocktail pool at the hotel with drinks in hand or taking snapshots of a burial ceremony or dance festival. No mention of the Australians who had lived their for ages blending with the local customs.

Then there was a glimpse of a remote village on the northern end of the island which prompted the dubious remark that the camera crew were possibly the first whites the locals had ever seen. The pace of Indonesian development would eventually engulf this village and its customs and way of life the narrator told us. This point was presented as some inevitable march of (Western) progress. The programme continually stressed the need for on-going (Western) Australian tourism as a necessity towards improving the living standards of the locals. No attempt was made to explain the tensions between the Balinese and Jakarta over control of the wealth and decision-making over the islands tourist industry or the negative impact tourism has had in commercialising local rituals and customs. If viewed in Indonesia, this programme could only reinforce the idea that Australians were fat and lazy holiday seekers.¹¹²

But whatever the problems of these two television approaches to presenting Asia, noting here that interpretations will always be subjective and determined in part by

¹¹¹ SBS-TV *Dateline*, Sat. 5.12.92.

¹¹² Ch 9 television, *The World Around Us*. 5.12.92.

Overall it was a hard-hitting critical programme that argued Indonesia would either move further down the road of liberalisation or a Suharto imposed Presidential backlash would see a new round of repression.¹¹¹

The second, or 'popular' programme was shown on the Kerry Packer-owned, Channel Nine network, the travel documentary programme known as *The World Around Us*. It began with a picture of Balinese dance culture. The program promoted all the stereotypes of Indonesia as an exotic destination. It concentrated on the colourful (for Westerners) fascination in the Bali dance traditions and rituals. It argued one dance was devised in the "1930s" just for the Western tourists. It showed the luxury resort town Sunar without mentioning the one five star hotel, the Bali Beach Hotel on the beach (Japanese financed with war reparation money) stood alone in the skyline because of protests over the scale of its construction and the local opposition to any further construction along that magnitude. The programme only emphasised Bali as an exotic tourist destination - showing fat, middle-aged pale-skinned Australians lounging around the cocktail pool at the hotel with drinks in hand or taking snapshots of a burial ceremony or dance festival. No mention of the Australians who had lived their for ages blending with the local customs.

Then there was a glimpse of a remote village on the northern end of the island which prompted the dubious remark that the camera crew were possibly the first whites the locals had ever seen. The pace of Indonesian development would eventually engulf this village and its customs and way of life the narrator told us. This point was presented as some inevitable march of (Western) progress. The programme continually stressed the need for on-going (Western) Australian tourism as a necessity towards improving the living standards of the locals. No attempt was made to explain the tensions between the Balinese and Jakarta over control of the wealth and decision-making over the islands tourist industry or the negative impact tourism has had in commercialising local rituals and customs. If viewed in Indonesia, this programme could only reinforce the idea that Australians were fat and lazy holiday seekers.¹¹²

But whatever the problems of these two television approaches to presenting Asia, noting here that interpretations will always be subjective and determined in part by

¹¹¹ SBS-TV *Dateline*, Sat. 5.12.92.

¹¹² Ch 9 television, *The World Around Us*. 5.12.92.

taste, it is worth remembering that many of the deficiencies of the Australian media's approach to Asia lie deeper than just cultural bias of writer, producer and camera operator. Tiffen has asserted that the malaise was as much a structural one, not unrelated to the extravagances of the spending in the media industry in Australia during the 1980s. Pessimistically, he argued, "... The last six years has been a sad time in Australian media, with closures, bankruptcies and redundancies. The 1990s promises to be a more dynamic period for our region than for our news media, and we cannot have great confidence that they will measure up to the challenges which reporting the region will pose."¹¹³

(d) The Asian View of the Australian Media and Its Impact on the Australian Media Coverage of the Region.

As a number of Australian journalists have pointed out the Australian media, and Western media generally, has been the "fall guy" for the growing assertiveness of Asian regimes. Criticism has emerged in the Australian media through correspondent reports on Asian press conferences by politicians, business leaders and military heads, statements issued from regional and international forums. The steady flow of Asian leaders to Australia and the high profile of certain local Asian diplomats has also ensured that the Asian view of the Australian media gets across to the Australian public. Unfortunately Australian media criticisms of Asian regimes are often not as privileged. Apart from Radio Australia, Australian commentary does not have an immediate mass audience in Asia.

In the June 1992 National Press Club seminar on Australian-Asian press relations visiting Indonesian journalist, Goenawan Mohamad, argued "... one shouldn't expect too much from the press, or exaggerate its role in constructing or deconstructing inter-state relations. A newspaper is not a very generous institution. It is owned (especially in the Australian case) by people who want to accumulate immense wealth. It sells stories, and a story is usually defined by what the editor thinks the readers want to read. And normally, it has to have drama or a unique idea or a charming style. In other words, a normal newspaper has its built-in limit when writing about other countries." He also observed: "The problem is that the Australian press is not famous for its humility. It finds the Indonesian Government's

¹¹³ Rod Tiffen, National Press Club address, see *Backgrounder*, op. cit. This view would have to be weighed up against the plus side where technological change continues to make the job easier. The satellite link with Phnom Penh is just one example. I have not dealt with radio to any extent here but clearly phone linked interviews to the region have given radio an edge over other mediums from the point of view of immediacy.

aversion to it a kind of inverted compliment. Being accustomed to being feared by politicians, businessmen and others, it has less incentive to doubt its infallibility. It has less reason to examine its own motives as well as its own prejudices. It hardly makes time to appreciate the difficulty of knowing other people in other societies."¹¹⁴

Mohamad questioned the notion of "cross-cultural" reporting. The difference in reporting between an Indonesian journalist in Australia and an Australian in Indonesia was not "cultural" or "racial" bias, but mainly the "historical distance from the realities of poverty and other traumas". He argued, "for any Indonesian journalist living today, poverty is an integral part of a common memory, even of a current reality. For an Australian journalist born after the Second World War, poverty is almost a remote, alien thing. His immediate society (normally not an Aboriginal one) is practically free from a traumatic past." He argued, visiting Australian reporters were predictable, "You normally find a mention of slums and slum dwellers, of the gap between rich and poor. Then there will be a hint of violence and repression (potential or otherwise), or of corruption and bureaucratic clumsiness. Occasionally there will be a description of the atmosphere of squalor, with its strange odours and colours, or about the intense sensation of the local climate. Sometimes you will also read some anecdotes of exotic beliefs and habits of the people, as a way of explaining the prevailing 'culture of inactivity'."

Mohamad doesn't argue these Western images are a misrepresentation, only that a proper perspective is required to avoid a poor picture of the realities. By "proper perspective" he means "a way of looking at poverty as something that has a long history and a complex origin". To illustrate his point he quotes the Australian writer Christopher Koch from his book *The Year of Living Dangerously*, where Koch argues most Australians become children again when they enter the slums of Asia. He broadens this by pointing out that most Australian journalists don't acknowledge this naivete on entering Asia. They become a victim of the "Wilkes syndrome". Wilkes was the Australian writer in Blanche d'Alpuget's *Turtle Beach* who assumes she knows Malaysia because she was there twenty years before. She has a trace of scorn for Malaysians and "hardly has any talks with the common people of Malaysia, whose fear, worries and bitterness are the origin of the tragic event she writes about". Mohamad says her method of reporting is "I know, I come, I

¹¹⁴ Goenawan Mohamad, 'Do the media really matter?', *Backgrounder*, 5.6.92, pp.4-5. Mohamad gave a similar speech to the Sydney Institute, see *Sydney Papers* Vol. 4, No. 3, Winter 1992, pp. 67-70.

judge".¹¹⁵

Criticism of Australian journalism has also appeared in the Australian media from Asian politicians. The *Business Australian*, reported prominently the Malaysia's Minister for International Trade, Dato Seri Rafidah Aziz during her visit to Australia in July 1992. She came to initiate a new chapter in the commercial and economic relations between Australia and Malaysia and to attend the Malaysia-Australia Joint Trade Committee. Aziz described the relationship between the two countries as "strained in the recent past" because of the "misrepresentation" of facts by sections of the Australian media which put Malaysia in "a bad light". She added, Malaysia would react to what was being (wrongly) presented and "as a result of chain reactions the private sector was affected..." But now she wanted to ensure the Australian private sector that there should not be "the perception of undue risks in investing in Malaysia".¹¹⁶

Another example is the high press profile of the Indonesian Ambassador Sabam Siagian. In his benign appeals for our local media to treat the stories of human rights abuses in East Timor with scepticism Siagian displayed an articulate ability to exploit the Australian media's liberalism. Imploring journalistic notions of objectivity and pleas for both sides of the argument get a fair run, Siagian was persuasive to the point where some reporters forgot that censorship on the issue was imposed primarily by the Indonesians denial of access to East Timor.¹¹⁷ Thus in reality, the Siagian notion that the media-derived 'truth' lies between the Fretilin-Indonesian extremes, can sometimes be obfuscating.

Siagian was also adept at presenting the arguments of leading Australian opinion makers back onto his Australian audiences. While never conceding so much as a

¹¹⁵ Blanche d'Alpuget argues the fault lies more in the nature of the Australian film industry which is so susceptible to international market forces that virtually any attempt to adequately reconstruct a written novel on film is doomed to some degree of failure. See her article 'From Novel to Film: The Transformation of *Turtle Beach*', *The Sydney Papers*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Autumn 1992, pp. 107-113.

¹¹⁶ Florence Chong, 'Malaysia trade at the top of minister's agenda', *Business Australian*, 14.7.92, p.19. See also *Lateline*, Monday 21.9.92 where Aziz argued, "Australia should show more understanding" before raising "human rights" issues. Dr Mahathir's views on the subject are found in *Asia Today*, (Sydney), October 1992, cover story.

¹¹⁷ While Siagian at the Darwin forum, loc. cit., claimed the Indonesian press agenda set the issues for the 1992 Indonesian elections Louise Williams 'Asia's axe falls on the free press', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1.10.86., pointed out that six years earlier it was precisely because the regional press had already been muzzled that ASEAN political heads were attempting to clamp down on the one dissenting voice - the foreign media.

hint that there may be an element of colonialism and racism with Indonesian military actions in East Timor and West Irian, Siagian silenced many of his local critics through cleverly exploiting Australia's legacy of 'post-colonial' guilt over its racist and anti-Asian past.¹¹⁸ Similarly, criticism of Indonesian human rights abuses are deflected by suggestions that the 'Australian pot' is calling the 'Indonesian kettle' black.¹¹⁹ Evidence suggests that this line of thinking has permeated and tempered the critical edge of some of the more seasoned 'Indonesia watchers' in the Australian media.¹²⁰

These examples highlight one of the problems posed by a Australian-based domestic media that is largely ignorant of Asian affairs. Visiting Asian politicians are often critical of Australian policy in areas where similar criticisms could be made of their policy. Historically, Lee Kuan Yew and Dr Mahathir on the Indochinese refugee issue are a case in point. The Australian domestic media sometimes go beyond the needs of protocol in offering deference and respect to such visiting dignitaries. Their ignorance of those countries usually results in a case of obsequiousness displayed by the media and they fail to pick up on obvious inaccuracies in a way that sometimes costs the regionally based correspondents some of their credibility.

In recent years criticism of the Australian media from regional leaders has been sharp. Criticisms scapegoating the Australian media or government by Asian leaders are sometimes domestically inspired. Asian responses can be out of all

¹¹⁸ In a forum on 'The Press and Cultural Sensitivities' in Darwin, Siagian noted that journalists in industrialised countries were concerned with individual rights but that in developing countries the focus is on collective interests. "In a world where domination over, and interference between, states are still painful reality, no country should assume the role of judge over other countries." See *Press Council News*, Vol. 4, No. 3, August 1992, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ In one public submission responding to the East Timor massacre Siagian went into extensive detail on how white Australia has never atoned for Myall Creek and similar massacres of Aboriginals in the 19th Century.

¹²⁰ It could be argued that Siagian is merely running with the ball thrown to him by Australia's own conservative media commentators who rally against preaching to Asia on human rights issues because it acts as a restraint on trade. Greg Sheridan's 'Swim with Asian tide or we'll be beached', *Australian*, 8.4.92, p. 13, is instructive here. That paper's conversion (?) to the Asian viewpoint is demonstrated by Ali Alatas becoming their 'chief correspondent' on the Vienna Human Rights Conference. See Ali Alatas' 'Putting the world to rights' *Australian*, 16.6.93, p. 9. Portugal attacked Indonesia over East Timor two days later (18.6.93) at the same forum.

proportion to the original offending press report.¹²¹ At other times, of course, the criticisms made by foreign governments and political leaders are justified. Incidents often blow over but not always quickly. For example the Australian media position towards Indonesia deteriorated after the 1975 death of Australian journalists. Critical articles since have resulted in restricted access for Australian journalists. But even when the thaw came in 1989 and journalists with the Senator Evans visit were all given visas the wounds had not healed. The return visit by Ali Alitas to Australia "did little to heal the deep wounds from the media's viewpoint". The *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial on 8 March 1989 said, "our society values the tradition of free and vigorous media even if that risks some ignorant, misinformed and sensationalist reporting. But if all reporting was impeccable it would still, at times, raise the ire of our neighbours."¹²²

(e) The Tensions between Australian Business and Media in their Responses to the Asia Challenge.

A common response from Australian journalists when asked about the failures of Australia in Asia is to point the finger at the business community. On returning from a week long study tour of Asia in 1992, a producer of a radio documentary series on Asia for Perth ABC station 6PR argued that many of the political and business leaders he had interviewed in Asia felt the Australian business community often arrived in Asia poorly briefed about local business customs and with unrealistic expectations. Australian businessmen were often criticised in Asia for their sometimes naive approach when they frequently attempted to adopt "roughhouse" tactics to deal clinching in Asia only to come unstuck and lose the contract.¹²³ On a *Dateline* programme on Australian-Indonesian business relations, screened nationally on SBS-TV in November 1992, it was pointed out that many businessmen went from Australia to Asia dressed casually as though they are on a

¹²¹Louise Williams 'Asia's axe falls on the free press', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1.10.86., pointed out that six years earlier it was precisely because the regional press had already been muzzled that ASEAN political heads were attempting to clamp down on the one dissenting voice - the foreign media. See also David Flint 'Others must live with our free press', *Age*, 7.5.87, p.13 and Michael Byrnes, 'Australian press is the fall guy in South-East Asia', *Financial Review*, 22.5.87, p.8

¹²²AIDAB, 'Australia's Media Treatment of the developing world. How does it rate?' *International Development Issues*, No. 6, AGPS, 1989. Introduction, Annemaree O'Keeffe, pp.1-2,

¹²³ Interview by the author with John Moseley, producer Kevin Hume, *Drive Time* programme, ABC Radio 6WF, in November 1992. Moseley was recounting the views of a journalist based in Hong Kong who had critically observed the behaviour of visiting Australian business people.

holiday, whereas their Asian hosts presented themselves in more formal attire. The result was the Australians were not taken seriously in negotiations.¹²⁴

Journalists are not alone when one attempts to pin-point what the critics of Australian business in Asia have said. A similar criticism was made by a successful Australian businessman operating in Hong Kong who pointed out in an interview with the *Australian* newspaper that there are no short cuts. He argued Australians can't expect to invest in Asia without recognizing local sensibilities. As the *Australian* reported, "Dr Wynhoven warned local companies against moving into Asian markets merely to escape the recession in Australia. For an Australian business to be successful in Asia, it had to be in the region for the long term to allow time for its managers to understand and blend into the corporate culture of the chosen country."¹²⁵

In July 1992 *Dateline* ran a program on how Asian-based businessmen view Australia. The programme interviewed delegates from the *Asia 2010* Conference. The programme concluded our problem was a mixture of local work practices and local attitudes to Asia. It began with an attack on Australian "work practices" where the narrator informed the viewing audience that the arrival of most of the delegates was delayed by a baggage handlers strike. Comments aired on the programme ranged from, Peter Wood a businessman from Hong Kong who described Australia as "half in and half out" of Asia, to Jim Maxwell, from Maxwell & Associates (Singapore), who posed the question "Is your loyalty and mindset really in the US and Europe?" Then Mr Tan Keok Tin from the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers argued, "Unions are too powerful. They can override government. They can make demands for increases in wages without corresponding increases in productivity".¹²⁶

Academic Viberto Selochan saw Australia's poor standing in business terms within the region as related to Asian perceptions of the Australian economy. Pushing a line similar to the Business Council of Australia Selochan argued, "Southeast Asian countries see Australia as a small player in the region.....with rigid trade and industry policies, inefficient manufacturing and service industries and a recalcitrant labour force. Major restructuring is, however, being undertaken in the Australian

¹²⁴*Dateline* special programme on Northern Territory business links with Asia, November 1992.

¹²⁵ Cameron Stewart, "'Media 'threaten' ties with Asia", *Weekend Australian* 7-8.3.92, p.6.

¹²⁶*Dateline*, Thursday 23.7.92.

economy. Deregulation and liberalisation are making for a much more competitive environment..." 127

A *Lateline* special entitled "The Asian Connection"¹²⁸ had academic Bob Fagan identifying our sale of unprocessed and semi-processed goods, without value-added inputs, as the primary cause of our poor performance in the Asian export market. But maintaining market share after establishing a foothold in Asia with finished products was seen as an increasing worry for Australian business. Examples were given of Asian countries, taking advantage of the small scale of Australian operators, who either ignored contractual good-will or disregarded inadequate Asian patenting laws. The result was Australian-designed innovations were duplicated and then re-marketed from Asian countries leaving the Australian manufacturer with surplus product that could not be sold and a lost market share. Examples ranged from the export of Australian ambulances to Malaysia to concrete pumps to Japan.

From these examples it would appear there is no consensus on Australian business in Asia within the media. The broad range of opinions on Australian business in Asia was also supported by evidence gathered by *Sydney Morning Herald* foreign affairs writers David Jenkins when he toured the region speaking to "academics, policy-makers, businessmen and diplomats". Jenkins argued that Australia was held "in higher esteem than some Australians imagine" as many Asian decision-makers have a "soft spot" for us. Perhaps reflecting the range of people Jenkins interviewed, it was argued, "the region is worried by our attitude to the work ethic, irritated by our tendency to moralise and puzzled by our obsession with guilt and self-flagellation". Overall the advice offered came down to things like establishing national targets, cashing in on educational strengths, making more use of Asian Australians, seeking out Asian opinions and doing more homework on Asia.¹²⁹

Not just our business culture and manners but also our political system are sometimes seen in Asia as justifiably lacking in propriety. As retired diplomat and journalist Malcolm Booker, in his 'world review' column in the *Canberra Times* in March 1992,¹³⁰ noted, outspoken criticism in Australia against the Thai military

¹²⁷ Viberto Selachan, op. cit., p. 5.

¹²⁸ ABC-TV *Lateline*, 21.2.93.

¹²⁹ David Jenkins, 'Seven ways to get on with the neighbours', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8.5.92.

¹³⁰ Malcolm Booker, "Outlook for democracy is dubious", *Canberra Times*, 31.3.92.

crack-down and corruption was of limited impact, mainly because "Australian comment is also regarded as hypocritical. The record of some of our state governments is known in Southeast Asia; and it is sometimes pointed out that although our 'corporate cowboys' have mostly escaped jail they have done at least as much damage to the national interest as their Thai counterparts."

But as Tiffen pointed out in his June speech to the National Press Club the front page of *The Australian* newspaper on the previous Friday had three leading stories centred around government corruption and scandals. Tiffen asked, "Where else in the region might we have seen a front page like that..?" He concluded not in Beijing, Hanoi or the ASEAN countries. Perhaps in a more restrained way in Tokyo or Manila. It was in this light that we should read the Booker article and that of Louise Williams who wrote an article for the *Herald* which included comments from an Australian businessman who was surprised to find out that corruption was a way of life in Asian business in the form of "gifts".¹³¹

*** The Pressure for Greater Censorship of Journalists and Writers.**

As mentioned earlier, the Federal and State Governments' "Push to Asia" has been projected primarily as economics - a trade and investment push. This involves closer diplomatic ties at government-to-government level and closer collaboration between business elites. Australian media criticism of Asian regimes, their business propriety, human rights records and administrative styles, all act as impediments to the smooth flowing of this diplomacy. In such a climate political pressure is inevitably exerted on journalists and editors to report "responsibly".

Earlier we discussed how the Federal Government responds to pressure from Asia to bring journalists into line with calls for "sensitivity" in reporting. The business community also has reacted critically. Many feel Australian journalists should be more selective when making criticisms of Asian regimes. But they are also critical of government diplomatic initiatives over human rights abuses in the Asian region as an impediment to unrestrained trade and commerce. Examples of such criticisms abound in the Australian press. The business view is often supported by conservative political and economic columnists from the media.

In March 1992 the *Weekend Australian* ran an article by foreign affairs reporter,

¹³¹ Louise Williams, "Friendship bridge straddles troubled waters", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6.5.92, p. 8.

Cameron Stewart, under the heading, "Media 'threaten' ties with Asia",¹³² where Dr. Jack Wynhoven, the Chief Executive of Connell Wagner, a Melbourne-based engineering firm, claimed, "Australia should adopt a more passive approach to events in Asia if it wanted to safeguard and develop its business links with the region, (as) judgemental attitudes towards events in Asia could threaten the growth of Australian business interests in the region". Asserting that the Australian media had not been "as constructive as it could be", in its coverage of the Dili massacre and the *Turtle Beach* incident, Wynhoven maintained, "people do things differently in Asia. We've got to understand that they have a different culture to ours. It doesn't mean their culture is wrong, it is just different".

Fred Hilmer, one of the authors of the Business Council of Australia's 1992 study of Australian-Asian business links, has commented, "...We have some historic links that are a plus but at the same time we do our best to make them a minus. For example, through the production of television shows and in the latest *Far East Economic Review* the main mention of Australia is our tremendous record on human rights and our ability to lecture the world on them. But when you deal with the Koreans, Singaporeans and others from Asia, their agenda is very clearly business and the other agendas are kept separate...."¹³³

Pressure on journalists to conform with the Federal Government position of accepting uncritically the economic dimensions of the 'Push to Asia' agenda has emanated from key journalists and foreign editors in Australia who lay claims to have greater expertise and insight than their journalistic and diplomatic colleagues. Greg Sheridan warned the readers of his column in *The Australian* that in Kuala Lumpur there was "a feeling that Australia has far too often lectured Malaysia about its internal affairs The Malaysians are not alone in feeling that Australia's propensity to lecture everyone on everything is offensive.....They wish that we would just shut up for a while."¹³⁴ Implied within the Sheridan article was the idea that if we are going to successfully break into the Asian economic miracle, and of course that means Indonesia as well, then we need greater censorship over our domestic TV drama series, more stringent control over any feature films set in

¹³²Cameron Stewart, "Media 'threaten' ties with Asia", *Weekend Australian* 7-8.3.92, p. 6.

¹³³Fred Hilmer & Terry Arcus, 'Australian Business in Asia: Climbing the Mountains', *The Sydney Papers*, Winter 1992, p.129.

¹³⁴Greg Sheridan's 'Swim with Asian tide or we'll be beached', *The Australian*, 8.4.92, p.13.

Asia,¹³⁵ greater muzzling of environmentalists trying to save the Penan tribe or Malaysian rainforests¹³⁶ and a reversal of our views on capital punishment.¹³⁷

Similarly with Indonesia, in September 1991, the *Sydney Morning Herald* foreign affairs specialist, David Jenkins, acknowledged Sabam Siagian as "Jakarta's blunt speaking ambassador" and then claimed "we should be grateful that Jakarta has sent an Ambassador who is prepared to discuss such matters (as secessionism) openly, even if only in the context of explaining why "fragmentation" (i.e. East Timor independence) is "not an option."¹³⁸ Behind this sympathetic recording of the views of the Indonesian Ambassador was the belief that human rights abuses in East Timor should not interfere with the Australian-Indonesian business exchanges.

Peter Robinson in the *SydneySun-Herald* adopted another Siagian-style criticism of local journalists with a 'clean up your own backyard-first' theme. On the *Lusitania Expresso* issue Robinson argued, "Our sense of shame is often visible in the media - in a crude insensitivity to other people's feelings or to ordinary commonsense". He attacked TV reporters aboard the *Lusitania Expresso* for reiterating the ship was "in danger of being blown out of the water" by "sinister Indonesian frigates that were shadowing it". In a condescending tone he added, "(Well of course Indonesian ships were shadowing it. After all, it [the *Lusitania*] had announced its clear intention of violating their territorial integrity. In the event, as one might have expected, there was no story. It was a shameless beat-up)."¹³⁹

Whatever the truth of Robinson's accusation about TV sensationalism, his use of the *Lusitania* issue to prove there is an anti-Asian strand in our regional journalism begged many questions. One was still left wondering which side Robinson would

¹³⁵Sheridan makes a reference to the ABC Drama series *Embassy* causing difficulties for Australian businesses in Malaysia. This problem was averted over *Turtle Beach*, he argues, because of the Senator Evans disassociation from the film and the "extremely critical reviews and commentary which *Turtle Beach* aroused within Australia".

¹³⁶See Chris Murphy's column in the *Sun Herald*, 21.6.92 about the Sydney magistrate threatening heavy gaol sentences for peaceful anti-logging protesters facing minor obstruction charges. See also *Broadside*, No. 2, 10.6.92, p.1 "Evans told Kelly, Dump the Kit", where DFAT now censors environment kits to school kids because they are, amongst other things, critical of Malaysia's handling of the Penan issue.

¹³⁷Bob Hawke's criticism of the Barlow & Chalmers hangings as "barbaric".

¹³⁸David Jenkins, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30.9.91.

¹³⁹Peter Robinson, *Sun-Herald*, (Sydney)15.3.92, p. 32.

have come down on had the protest boat pushed on to Dili and come under Indonesian attack with lose of life? If attacked, would those on board the *Lusitania* in solidarity with the victims of the Dili massacre become somehow responsible for their own deaths or injury? According to Robinson's logic, they were guilty of "crude insensitivity" to "other people's feelings" with their lack of "ordinary commonsense". Were Robinson's "other people" the Admirals and Generals of the Indonesian military? Clearly, it wasn't the East Timorese; for they were crying out for international witnesses to the atrocities besetting them presumably would have welcomed the *Lusitania* ?

Clearly, it's difficult to a mount a case against Indonesian pressure for censorship of the Australian press when senior Australian journalists and editors demand the same, under the banner of purging our suspected anti-Asian or colonial-remnant biases. The yardstick here must surely be which Asia, and more specifically which Asians, do we seek to avoid offending, and why?¹⁴⁰ In short, business-as-usual with Asia means agreeing with, or at best ignoring, the human rights abuses in the region. No doubt the relatives of the Dili massacre will feel the Sheridan and Robinson prognosis is already in full swing as regards to East Timor.¹⁴¹

*** Television Drama: the Issues of Sovereignty and Media Freedom.**

In the mid 1980s ABC television satirical drama programmes like *The Dingo Principle* threatened Australian agriculture exports to the Middle East countries when the various foreign embassies reacted sharply to the depiction of Arabs in a number of the television skits. As in many other cases related to foreign affairs reporting there was the mistaken assumption by the foreign country that because the ABC received government funding it was therefore an arm of government policy. Some media commentators in Australia have taken criticisms of ABC drama by overseas governments as an opportunity to make a concerted attack on the ABC as a whole and called for the Federal Government to more closely regulate the content of the ABC. Behind their arguments about protecting valuable trade markets was not so much a desire for diplomatic sensitivity as a secret wish to

¹⁴⁰A point elaborated upon by Alison Broinowski, Regional Secretary to DFAT, in the Foreign Correspondents Seminar, State Library, Sydney, May 1992, see Occasional Papers No. 4, CIJ, U.T.S., Broadway.

¹⁴¹Sheridan appears to be in regular supply of departmental leaks. Another example was his "Bid for deal on Cambodian immigration", *The Weekend Australian*, 6-7.4.91, p.6 where he sourced "Confidential Dept of Immigration Documents".

muzzle a national media outlet that has been long assumed to offer a more critical edge on foreign affairs reporting the commercial networks.

By the end of the 1980s the pattern was repeated. This time it involved Asian nations closer to home. Again the pressure mounted in the domestic media for government intervention. The increasing sensitivity of the "media damage" issue was demonstrated by the Malaysian Government's call for greater Australian Government control over our domestic media during the *Embassy* affair. The fact that the most serious complaints centred not on any claims concerning inaccurate reporting by news journalists covering Malaysia, but related to two works of fiction a television drama series called *Embassy* and a feature film called *Turtle Beach*, both aimed at an Australia viewing audience, illustrates the complexity of the issue.

Many people felt the Malaysian Government's protests were hollow. It was claimed the protests were designed to fulfil a hidden political agenda that ranged further than television drama. They also felt the Evans/Hawke apologies to Malaysia were diplomatic conveniences that allowed them to skirt the more difficult aspects of our bilateral relations with Malaysia. For example, the Malaysian Government has accused the Australian Government of failing to use strong arm tactics to restrain protesters against the import of rainforest timber from Malaysia. Although not initially directed against the Australian media these diplomatic protests identified the media as fanning the conflicts by reporting the issue.

Interestingly, the imprisonment of two Australians in Malaysia in late 1991 for supporting the Penans received only sporadic coverage in the Australian press. Whether this was a result of an anti-'greenie' backlash in the Australian media, or whether it reflected the success of the Australian government's 'damage control' philosophy of seeking a more 'responsible' press attitude to reporting on Malaysia, was somewhat uncertain. Significantly, the early release and deportation of the two Australians in Sarawak went virtually unreported outside of Radio Australia and ABC regional radio in Melbourne.

If one had fears that the Government was attempting to "manage" Australian media coverage on Malaysia then the *Turtle Beach* saga was seen by some as another nail in the coffin of free speech. Clearly certain incidents in *Turtle Beach* were fallacious. Clearly, the producer's defence that it was a "work of fiction" was undermined by the script's narrative which presents itself as a political chronology of contemporary Malaysian history. Yet many still asked if the media beat ups and the Federal government's "disassociation" was going too far. As if to demonstrate

how far Australia had capitulated the Malaysia's Minister for International Trade, Dato Seri Rafidah Aziz during her visit to Australia in July 1992 warned us, "unless the Australian Government moved quickly to disassociate itself when incidents occurred, its silence could be construed as condoning them".¹⁴²

Writer and critic Humphrey McQueen ridiculed the suggestion that rulers like Mahathir and Aziz do not understand the complexities of an independent media in a democratic society. He argued this view in itself was "another form of prejudice". On the contrary, he argued, they "understand quite well. Problems arise because they oppose the concept of a free press, suppress criticism at home and seek to bully us into silence." McQueen opposed the Federal Government's policy of disassociation as "opening the way for every thug in power to demand that their version of events be taken as the truth." Here he queried how the government would handle Tiananmen Square, Burma, Marcos, etc., if it had to respond with this new policy.¹⁴³

On a related issue, one of the Malaysian Government's demands was that the Australian media should write positive things about Malaysia. Journalist and script-writer Nicholas Jose, questioned the ethics of responding to such a requests of sympathetic script-writing. He argued, "How many times has one feltthis serves the interests of those you are talking to and identifies writing with propaganda and advertising copy?" Jose further suggested that the dilemma here was unavoidable when we are dealing with cultural forms that constitute a part of the media but lie outside the daily news flow pattern as was the case of the *Embassy* drama series. He argued one seldom wants to write something that is untrue - unless it's a work of fiction.

Ironically, fiction may indeed reveal more about a society than contemporary news reporting. Jose believed the contents of a fictional work could be defended as the writer's licence and should not be subject to censorship. This was because television drama had an inbuilt format that prevented any writer from always reflecting the truth. He instanced the scripting of *The Avenue of Eternal Peace*, a

¹⁴²Florence Chong, 'Malaysia trade at the top of minister's agenda', *Business Australian*, 14.7.92, p.19.

¹⁴³Humphrey McQueen in the *Australian Book Review*, December 1991 - January 1992, pp. 42-43.

mini-series for Australian television about China,¹⁴⁴ where allowances had to be made for discrepancies with the truth as television scripts in his view have "basically only ten different plots" and thus cannot be true to history. Inevitably, they must be re-written to fit the constraints of the television (mini-series) form.¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless it remains a fact that Australian culture - and this includes film and television drama series - are increasingly part of our drive to Asia. As the Garnaut Report noted: "Northeast Asian impressions of Australia have been considerably informed by the film and television industry, which has dealt on those aspects of Australia which appeal to tourists." Naturally the image of Asia depicted in our films will also inform Asians of how we view them. Similarly, how Australians view Asia will be in part informed by films from Asia.

A conference called 'Filmlinks' was held in July 1990 attempted to bridge the cultural divide between Australian and Asian filmmakers. It discussed the vexed issue of the political impact of film on Asia. A report on the conference indicated a varied response. However it was clear that Asians were at times offended by how they were portrayed in Australian produced films. But more often the problem was that Australian films have little impact because they receive so little circulation in the region. On the other hand, Asian films in Australia face different barriers related to Asian illiteracy in both local film audiences and critics alike.¹⁴⁶ Thus the problem of circulation, or getting enough of each other's product, may be a source of censorship quite independently of any government edict.

***4. Recurring Themes in the Media's 'Push to Asia' Debate.**

(a) The "Push to Asia" as a Threat to Australian "Liberal Values".

As Peter Boyce international relations academic pointed out in the introduction to *Diplomacy in the Marketplace: Australia in World Affairs 1981-90* : "...physical security, economic well-being and preservation of political culture, remain the first

¹⁴⁴A television mini-series on the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989.

¹⁴⁵Nicholas Jose at the 'Asia-Australia Media Images' Conference, Canberra, November 27-28th 1992.

¹⁴⁶See Georgia Wallace-Crabbe, 'Paedophiles & Pisspots: Changing Asian perception of Australia', *Filmnews*, October 1990, pp.5-6.

three foreign policy priorities of any sophisticated national government".¹⁴⁷ There is a fear that in the current "Push to Asia" we may be jettisoning a valued political culture in our desire to achieve the first two of these three basic objectives. As Mike Ticher posed the dilemma, "Are we working on the assumption that democracy and liberalism flow naturally from economic growth, so that co-operation with Asian countries will help to make them more like us politically? Such an approach would seem to sit oddly with the view that it is us who should be learning from 'Asia' about how to run our economy".¹⁴⁸ Indeed, both sides of this equation warrant some examination.

Perceptions of Asia have been dominated for a long time by the defence-first orientation. Traditionally the notion of an 'Asian threat' to Australia has underpinned all else. It is widely perceived now that the racist underpinnings of our earlier days with the White Australia Policy have been eclipsed by more contemporary ideas around an accommodation with Asia in the light of that 'Asian threat' failing to materialise in a military sense since World War Two. Part of this reconciliation is a revised consensus over the Vietnam War. Related aspects are the development of Australia as a multicultural society and the decline of the notion of a communist threat manifested through aggressive Asian nationalism.

But even if economics and trade have replaced defence as our primary Asian concern, Ticher questions whether "getting closer to" Asia in order to share in its development raises the question of how much Australia will have to compromise its "liberal democratic values" in order to fit in with the rest of the region. The notion that the closer we are to our Asian neighbours, the more they will emulate our liberal democratic political model, is one that is popular with politicians, diplomats and businessmen alike. Usually it is thrown into the media debate in response to challenges as to the morality of business links with some despised military regime. From here it is then argued that Australian investment is necessary for economic

¹⁴⁷P.J. Boyce, Introduction, *Diplomacy in the Marketplace, Australia in World Affairs 1981-90*, Boyce & Angel (eds.), Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1992, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸M. Ticher, 'Into Asia?', introduction to the 'From Yellow Peril to Main Game' supplement, *Australian Left Review*, No. 142, August 1992, pp. 26-40 at p. 26.

growth which would in turn create the conditions for political liberalisation.¹⁴⁹

One line of thinking argues closer contact will reveal some innate superiority of our own political system over the authoritarian models of our neighbours. Part of this argument is based on the belief that increased trading will sporn industrial growth and create demand for not just economic liberalisation but political liberalisation and democratic reform from within rigid regimes. The newly emerging middle class of Asia - the "mobile phone" rebels of Bangkok or the Indonesian "middle class" are seen as agents for creating such positive reforms. Similarly, in the wake of the Tiananmen Square incident, it was argued that lifting trade embargoes against China would act as an encouragement to the political liberalisation that was temporarily 'still-born' by the events of 1989. Under-pinning this hope was the "end of history" argument where in the post-Cold War era communism was seen as in perpetual decline and the triumph of liberal democracy has its own inevitable momentum to succeed.

This vision of a causal link between freer or unimpeded trade (push to Asia) and political liberalisation inside Asian regimes has many Australian advocates from government advisers to media commentators. However, as academic James Cotton, a vociferous critic of this viewpoint, has argued, "despite decades of rapid growth and conscious efforts to adapt a variety of Western institutions and practices, the Asian Newly Industrialising Countries, ... while capitalist, are far from liberal democratic. As their economies mature they have adopted democratic political forms, but usually without liberal content."¹⁵⁰ Cotton goes on to demonstrate how the (Asian) elites perpetuate themselves within the electoral and parliamentary systems by maintaining authority structures through Confucian values that run counter to the Western democratic tradition. But Cotton does concede that in some places the "long-maintained corporatist controls have began

¹⁴⁹ Such as the *Dateline* programme questioning BHP's investments in Burma (Myanmar) in 1990. Again in December 1992 when the Liberal Opposition appeared on the ABC television news during a protest outside the Burmese Embassy in Canberra and argued the ALP did not want to affect trade links by implementing a ban on trade and aid to Burma (Myanmar).

¹⁵⁰ James Cotton, 'History Reborn', *Australian Left Review*, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

to unravel".¹⁵¹

Cotton's view has been echoed by recent reports in the Australian media about the trend against Western style democracy in Asia. The *Age's* Singapore-based regional correspondent, Lindsay Murdoch, called it "East Asia's new allergy".¹⁵² Murdoch noted there was "a growing challenge to pressure for Asian democratic reform in the light of Western economic and social crises". He reported Lee Kuan Yew receiving a warm reception for the idea of discipline over democracy when speaking in the Philippines, a country where "America's robust style of democracy has long been cherished". A few days later Lee stated in Tokyo that "with few exceptions, democracy has not brought good government to developing countries". Murdoch concludes, "Underlying the anti-Western rhetoric is a belief that Asia's own brand of soft authoritarianism is superior to the Western model of government, which developing nations have, for decades, been under pressure to emulate".¹⁵³

Murdoch argued that the economic crisis in countries like Australia, the US and the UK was being used as a justification for promoting the "Asian way" which implied "authoritarianism, underpinning a disciplined, modern, technology-based society." This form of state polis was preferred to the "excessive rights of the individual" esteemed in the West. Murdoch quoted Dr. Noordin Sopiee, the Director-General of Malaysia's Institute of Strategic and International Affairs, where he argued the differences between the cultural and value systems of East Asia and Western nations were "becoming increasingly evident" and would lead to "greater friction".¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ J. Cotton, 'History Reborn, *ALR*, *ibid.*, at p. 35. But the alternative view can be found in Philip Bowring, 'Singapore exhibits little sign of throwing off paternalism', *Canberra Times*, 21.9.92, p.11. An anti-privatisation leaflet, attacking the Kennett programme, from ALP MLC David Henshaw cited Singapore (along with Korea and Japan) as three Asian regimes to be emulated economically and politically. He put this down to their strong public sectors. (Electoral Newsletter, No. 6, June 1993).

¹⁵² Lindsay Murdoch, 'East Asia's new allergy', *Age*, 25.11.92, p.13.

¹⁵³ Interestingly the regionally-based *Far East Economic Review* December 10th 1992, gave the leader of the Philippines Fidel Ramos equal billing with Lee in its report on the Manila address. Ramos was advocating adherence to the Western democratic model. Is this another example of Australian journalism getting the Asian debate out of proportion?

¹⁵⁴ Part of the problem is that "democracy" is a culturally relative term and all regimes claim to be democratic in some way. This issue and the changing nature of state power in Asian regimes is dealt with more fully in Kevin Hewison, Richard Robison and Garry Rodan, (eds.), *Southeast Asia in the 1990s, Authoritarianism, Democracy & Capitalism*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1993, chapters 1&2.

Andre Malan headed one of his *Asia Desk* columns in the *West Australian*, 'Democracy giant sleeping, not dead'. He argued, "Democracy is taking second place to authoritarianism as East Asian economies become more and more successful".¹⁵⁵ Malan quoted "World Bank and other policy sources" as arguing the success of "authoritarian" regimes meant the "ballot box" vision of development may be "flawed". In the same column a week earlier Malan speculated on whether the generals in Thailand would allow that country to make the transition to a Western style democracy with 'Democracy a tall order for generals'. This article quoted from a lecture by a visiting Thai academic to Murdoch University, Chai-anan Samudavanija, who linked the generals' interference in politics with their financial dealings such as commissions on foreign arms imports to highlight how 'market forces' can retard the trend towards democratisation.

Editor-in-Chief of *The Australian*, Paul Kelly, took a positive view of the issue from the perspective of an improving climate for Australian media access to Asia. He argued, "The dynamic change underway in Asia means that it is becoming easier for the Australian media to cover the region. Virtually all of the region is undergoing liberalisation of one sort or another. Relatively quickly in South Korea and Taiwan. Slowly in China. Dramatically in Thailand. This is a major historical change that is now underway." However, even Kelly had reservations about the extent to which this liberalisation would flow on and create a liberal democratic press in the region, while nevertheless arguing it was important for the Australian media not to "exaggerate the obstacles". Optimistically he believed that technological change would transform the "standards and values" in the region and bring a "sense of freedom" that would be "redefined and extended" over the next ten years.¹⁵⁶

The second aspect of how the "push to Asia" was perceived as a threat to Australian "liberal values" was the notion that we must an Asian lifestyle or way of

¹⁵⁵A. Malan, 'Democracy giant sleeping, not dead', *West Australian*, 13.11.92, p.11. See also Micheal Casey 'Asia unmoved by tribal claims', *West Australian* 7.7.92 and the same author 'Democracy a tall order for generals', *West Australian*, 6.11.92, p.11.

¹⁵⁶ P. Kelly, op. cit., *Backgrounder*, p.3. Kelly's view should be compared to his roving foreign editor Greg Sheridan who recently discussed these issues with former Indonesian foreign minister Dr Mochtar Kusumaatmadja. Mochtar concluded on the subject of current Asian thinking that, "Whereas once America was the model of the future....In so far as there is any partial model it is Japan." His prognosis for Australia was summed up by: "The fact that South-East Asians are a bit more authoritarian than we are does not mean there is some ineffable, unbridgeable cultural gap between us. In many ways they are much like we were in the 1950s. And perhaps in some ways we ourselves were better off then." See Greg Sheridan, 'Asia shows there's life outside Westminster', *Australian*, 14.4.93, p.9.

living. The greatest fear here was over a change in work culture. An article in the *Perth News*,¹⁵⁷ by Mayor of Perth and former Liberal Party Senator, Reg Withers, highlighted the way that the "Push to Asia" could generate these fears. In the context of a Western Australian Government-sponsored *Inter-Asia* conference which advocated the expansion of that state's connections with Asia, Withers promoted the Tory political line. He argued that Perth as an "Asian" city, in order to attract more Asian tourism and investment, should become more like Asia, by adopting 24 hour-a-day shop trading in the CBD. This would necessitate employing extra closed circuit police monitoring of shopping plazas to make it "safe" for shoppers and traders.

Encapsulated in this article, but not mentioned, were fears of loss of economic security by middle and working class Australians alike, as a result of declining disposable income levels and cutbacks on traditional leisure time, while the "Push to Asia" grows apace. The Withers article neglected to mention fears of small shopkeepers over the threats to their livelihood posed by greater competition from and loss of market share to the powerful CBD department stores. Nor were the fears of civil libertarians over greater regulation of the population through extended police surveillance measures to bring about the 'Asian-style' shoppers' paradise mentioned. Nor the fear that an "Asian" business style involved giving up penalty rates, fixed working hours and job permanency and the Australian concept of 'the good weekend'. Asian values in this sense can be seen as undermining the liberal values of an Australian middle class.¹⁵⁸

Beyond the concerns over the lack of democratic traditions and fears for economic security in the Asia equation was the threat to the ultimate of "liberal values", freedom of speech. Humphrey McQueen in his *Weekend Australian* column greeted with derision the failure of a Federal Government-funded body, the Australia-Indonesia Institute, to fulfil its charter and assist financially with the translation into English of a banned Indonesian text by celebrated writer Pramoedya Anata Toer. This reticence implied Indonesia decided how Australian tax-payers had their money spent for them. McQueen argued, "While telling Australians not to impose liberal democratic values on Indonesia, our government is importing into our cultural

¹⁵⁷ Peter Barber, '\$300,000 campaign aims to put life back into the city', *Perth News*, Vol.1 No. 11, Wednesday 18th November 1992, pp.1-2. Withers said Asian tourists coming to Perth have "24-hour, 7 day-a-week shopping at home.....we must offer them shopping hours that are better than the ones they get at home." (p.2).

¹⁵⁸ See later comments on micro-economic reform and the Asia debate, Chapter 4 (b).

life the standards of a dictatorship."

In the same column, McQueen chided the Liberal Opposition when its spokesperson on trade returned from Asia to warn us that criticism of human rights violations in ASEAN countries would cost us exports. "What has happened to the Tory document that market economies would guarantee political liberty?", asked McQueen.¹⁵⁹ Was Australia giving ground here that it may later regret having lost?

(b) The 'Globalisation' of the Economy in the face of Australia becoming the 'Poor White Trash of Asia':

*** Asia Equals Working Harder For Less?**

The Hawke-Keating Government's deregulation of the financial markets in Australia throughout the 1980s was projected as part of an attempt to invigorate the Australian economy with a more 'global' and, now in the 1990s, with a more 'regional' outlook. Thus the domestic debate around tariff protection of the manufacturing sector and the labour-intensive TCF industries has become thoroughly enmeshed with the debate over the economic 'push to Asia'. In a major policy speech in 1989 Foreign Minister Evans argued our "economic success in South-East Asia will depend primarily on the strength of the Australian economy, and the success of efforts to restructure it into an internationally competitive entity". Typical of the press commentary was an editorial in the *Adelaide Advertiser* which commended "Bob Hawke's visionary Asian-Pacific Economic Co-operation grouping", but then complained, Hawke was "not pushing restructuring enough" and further, was ignoring the "chorus for dramatic change" found in the Garnaut Report and the "prognostications" of Industry Minister John Button.¹⁶⁰

These views reflected another developing trend, the reframing of the public debate over Australia's lack of international competitiveness as somehow directly linked with the growth rates of countries in the Asian region.¹⁶¹ The high-rating Sydney radio commentator, Alan Jones, on one programme rattled off the national growth in output for some of the 'Asian tigers' like Taiwan, Korea and Singapore (almost double figures). He then scoffed at Australia's miserable performance by

¹⁵⁹H. McQueen, 'Indonesia's noble Solzhenitsyn', *The Weekend Australian*, 22-23.2.92, p. 32.

¹⁶⁰ Editorial, *Adelaide Advertiser*, 9.12.89.

¹⁶¹ The 'economic dry' was best exemplified in Richard Blandy, 'Rational policies made Asian nations prosper', *Age*, 3.2.93, p.13.

comparison (0.5%). In the next breath, Jones called for total dismantling of week-end penalty rates, overtime, holiday loadings, a cut-back on public holidays and a demand for Australians to work harder or lift their game. These (employer-initiated) demands have been presented to the public as a cure-all panacea for our economic woes.¹⁶²

Thus disciplining the workforce, the notion of working harder for less, the entire 'micro-economic reform' agenda, all slide into being the threats and preconditions for Australia joining the Asian economic miracle.¹⁶³ This suggests that resistance to Keating's "push to Asia" from working class, trade union and ALP sources may increase as more traditional Labor supporters perceive "Asia" as just another rhetorical device employed by the captains of industry, politicians and their supportive media spokespeople, to implement the policies of the "economic rationalists" and further erode the Australian workers' living standards. The "level playing field" is often seen by this group as a cause of unemployment and not a "long run panacea".

***Foreign Takeovers and Foreign Investment : The Arnotts Case.**

Yet a greater schism existed between the products of Australian-owned companies and transnational corporations. These divisions were reflected in the media coverage of industry rationalisation in the context of foreign investment and foreign takeovers. As the Arnotts-Campbell debacle showed, these divisions were increasingly focused on the issue of access, and potential access, to the "lucrative" Asian markets. In the Arnotts case the Australian Government and its FIRB was exposed as powerless or unwilling to intervene "in the national interest" in what is increasingly a trans-national corporation controlled "marketplace".¹⁶⁴

The media focus was divided. As Glenda Korporaal commented in an opinion column for the *Age* entitled, 'Mixed signals on foreign funds', the ABC's *Four Corners* television special on the Arnotts-Campbell battle played on emotional patriotism and Arnotts' nostalgic reputation as a national icon. She implied the

¹⁶² Sydney Radio station, 2UE Monday 19.10.92.

¹⁶³ Typical here is the letter to the editor, Rajan Natarajan, 'Asia's lesson for us is to drop class warfare', *Age*, 11.11.92, p.12 where the writer equated Asian economic success with "the absence of confrontationist trade unions".

¹⁶⁴ The P.P.McGuinness column in *The Australian* was instructive here in pushing the "government hands off" line in favour of "marketplace rules". He was not alone as most economic commentators fell into line behind him.

program failed to highlight how the Federal Government had already watered down controls over foreign takeovers to a 'do nothing' philosophy, as evidenced by the Bundaberg Sugar case in 1991. Korporaal argued that the *Four Corners* program thus only served to undermine Australia's credibility as a reliable base for foreign fund investors at a time when American Pension fund investors were in Australia on a feasibility study. Her view was supported by Robin Bromby in her 'Arnotts uproar waste of breath' article for the *Business Australian*. Bromby took the view "... being part of the world business economy now means the national ownership of any companyis a matter of who is prepared to pay the most."¹⁶⁵

It should be noted that neither Korporaal nor Bromby, in the respective articles mentioned here, examined the implications of the Campbell takeover from within the context of Australia's "Push to Asia".¹⁶⁶ A separate article by Elizabeth Fry, published in the *Business Australian* after the takeover was complete, noted the view of one analyst as, "Campbell have done very little in Asia, despite the fact that it has given a good impression of achievement in the region and it has nothing to offer Arnotts technologically." The same analyst reflected on the fact that Arnotts was poised for major expansion in the Asian marketplace and that this benefit would now flow to the US food giant and not to an Australian manufacturer; in short, "Arnotts needs Asia and Campbell needs Arnotts..."¹⁶⁷ In a separate article, Bryan Frith revealed the politics of the issue by pointing out that Campbells had belated got around opposition to its 51% stake in Arnotts by claiming this level of equity was "now" a pre-condition before any commitment to expand into the Asian market would be made.¹⁶⁸

Clearly if the Federal Government was serious about the "Push to Asia" they should have acted here. Arnotts was in the Asian market and poised for expansion. Now Campbells have been handed on a plate access to all the Arnotts ground work with no guarantee that Campbells will in the long run use the Australian plants for its Asian expansion. While Frith called for a clarification of disclosure laws involved in

¹⁶⁵Robin Bromby, 'Arnotts uproar waste of breath', *Business Australian*, 6.-7.2.93, p.31.

¹⁶⁶Glenda Korporaal, 'Mixed signals on foreign funds', *Age*, 11.11.92, p.19.

¹⁶⁷Elizabeth Fry, 'Campbell poised to mop up after win', *Business Australian*, 6-7.2.93, p.31. It would take another study to examine the press before these post-mortems. A preliminary study indicated the pre-takeover press coverage was more ambivalent on the ethics of Campbell's actions.

¹⁶⁸The implication being that Campbells could well expand into Asia under the Arnotts brand name and then replace supplies with the Campbells' product. See Brian Frith, 'Biscuit bid demonstrates need for full disclosure laws', *The Business Australian*, 6-7.2.93, p.31.

takeovers, the more fundamental issue, on the existing power of the Federal Government to intervene and deny Campbells permission to increase its stakes in an Australian company, was side-stepped by most media commentators. They argued in favour of the precedent of doing nothing. Thus despite enormous public interest the media role was determined by a handful of financial and economics writers who generally reinforced Canberra's "economic dries" with cries of "letting the marketplace rule" and "no government intervention".

The whole media debate attempted to contain public outrage over the Arnotts sale. The "national interest", encapsulated by the protection of an Australian-owned company, poised to enter the "Asian market", was buried by the media's portrayal of key institutional shareholders (like AMP) as the sole legitimate participants. The Federal Government's role as legal regulator was largely ignored and thus its failure to act escaped criticism. The whole process was repeated shortly afterwards with Conrad Black increasing his share holding in Fairfax. Again the government sat on their hands by retreating to a cheap face-saving PR campaign over "Buy Australian products".

***The Export Led Recovery and the Media.**

Increasingly, although not exclusively, the arguments have focused on Asia as both a source of export markets and a source of foreign investment. The media presentation of the issues are invariably from an 'economic dry' perspective. One example of the "macro" argument was *The Australian* newspaper's 'Run free with the Asian tigers to avoid poverty traps', where an article extracted from a book by former US President Nixon argued, "the success of the four Asian tigers - Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea - provide the blueprint by which Third World nations can transform their economies from poverty to prosperity" based upon "free-market institutions", "investment in human capital", small government, "creating conditions that attract foreign investment", "making exports the engine of economic growth".¹⁶⁹ An example on the "micro" side of economics comes from the *Asian Business* section of the *Australian* which claimed 'Fruit veg exports nobbled' by "high government charges, taxes and competition between suppliers trying to service the same market".¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹Richard Nixon 'Run free with the Asian tigers to avoid poverty traps.' *The Australian*, 8.1.92, p.9. From the book *Seize the Moment: America's Challenge in a One Superpower World 1992*.

¹⁷⁰ *The Australian*, 17.11.92, p. 40.

In a similar vein, the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran an opinion piece in September 1992 by conservative columnist Gerard Henderson, under the heading 'The new Aust: a lean, mean trade machine'.¹⁷¹ It began: "Despite all the political rhetoric, protectionism in Australia is a lost cause. As Paul Keating said in Tokyo last week, the Australia of 'high tariffs on manufacturing' is a thing of the past." Henderson encapsulates a lot of the Australian manufacturing industry fears, particularly in the TCF trade unions, over the 'push to Asia' leading to further job losses. He presented a report card on Keating and the Australian economy which suggested things were moving in the right direction with the "10% inflation psychology" broken and "reform in industrial relations" in wharfs, transport and telecommunications. Henderson is addressing the issues of lower labour costs, falling wages and sackings (compulsory redundancies) here but doesn't say as much. By use of the word "reform" he was avoiding the issue of the fate of all those made redundant by such changes in "work practices".

But to raise the issue of the casualties of the new industrial changes leaves one open to the charge of being what Henderson calls the "cultural pessimists". Top of Henderson's list here was the ABC *Four Corners* programme on unemployment in the Adelaide suburb of Elizabeth - where a depressed suburb is depicted as apparently reflecting of the decline of the Australian manufacturing industry as a major employer of youth.¹⁷² Henderson presents the counter-argument: "In spite of the recession and resulting high unemployment, there is some good news on the manufacturing front. In his address to the 1992 Manufacturing Outlook Conference, Dr. Bob Hawkins, director of the Bureau of Industry Economics, pointed out that, 'Australian manufactured exports....are now 63% higher than the recorded levels of 1988-89.'" Henderson then quotes some OECD figures to suggest the reduction in protectionism has benefitted the local manufacturers.

Henderson then related these predictions, statistics and assertions about the domestic picture back to Keating in Japan: "The Prime Minister's message to Japanese business leaders was important. Australia has changed significantly over

¹⁷¹Gerard Henderson, 'The new Aust: a lean, mean trade machine' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29.9.92, p.13.

¹⁷²In spite of Henderson's criticisms, the programme in fact had a different agenda. The main emphasis of the program was on the government's failure to provide adequate retraining schemes for people made redundant from the manufacturing industry. The programme did not venture as far as advocating a resurgence of tariff protection to save further job erosions in manufacturing.

the last decade. Unfortunately the degree of this metamorphosis has not been understood by many Australians." To illustrate this lack of understanding, Henderson points to "cultural whingeism" over the Asian trade debate. He argues that resistance to it comes from cultural conservatives who can't break their umbilical cord with Europe and rush to argue we have nothing in common with Asia culturally.¹⁷³

His second category of "whingers" here are the ill-informed, like ABC Radio journalist Maxine McKew who interviewed Tokyo-based academic Gregory Clark. McKew tentatively suggested the 'whole thrust' of Australia's trade policy has been to "promote trade with Asia". Professor Clark, the "cultural pessimist", replied, "What thrust are you talking about? I am sitting in Japan (and) I don't feel it very much.... It's all talk." Henderson argued that McKew should have challenged Clark here. He reached again for his statistics and concluded, "Unfortunately McKew was caught short on facts. Total Australian exports as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product have increased from 14.7% in 1982-83 to more than 18% by the end of 1991. Much of this increase has taken place in the Asian Pacific region which now contains eight of Australia's first eleven export markets. Perhaps someone should tell Clark."

But there are many ways of interpreting statistics, as one left-wing weekly newspaper argued, "Media comments on recent ABS figures suggest that 'Australia's new drive for manufactured exports has kept up its momentum in the year to June'. Exports of what the Treasury calls 'elaborately transformed goods' (ETMs) - that is, goods which have undergone a variety of stages of transformation from the basic raw materials stage - went up by 14% in the last 12 months, or quadrupled over the last 10 years. In that time their share of Australia's merchandise exports has risen from 12.3% to 18.6%."¹⁷⁴

These figures conform to those offered by Henderson, but the interpretation of what it means for Australia in the longer term differ. The article noted, "This trend has been seized upon as another sign that is supposed to signal economic recovery for

¹⁷³Here Henderson would undoubtedly find common ground with the diplomat Alison Broinowski. See her paper at the IDP Conference November 1992 and surrounding press comments over the resistance to Asian languages taking higher priority in educational institutions.

¹⁷⁴ Editorial, 'Behind the rise in manufactured exports', *The Vanguard*, 26.8.92, p.4. (*Vanguard* is a Melbourne-based Marxist weekly newspaper).

Australia and an end to the depression...The rapid decline of Australia's manufacturing base in recent years has hardly been a secret. To suggest that this is being accompanied by a manufacturing-led recovery doesn't add up, whichever way you look at it. Truth lies under the surface of the statistics. The increase in ETM exports has been concentrated in chemicals, computers, car engines and some pre-fabricated buildings. Add to the ETMs some increase in processed metals."

"Manufactured exports to Asia now take up some 67% of Australia's total manufactured exports. This reveals a trend in which Australia's economy is becoming more closely integrated with this part of the world. But Asia is also the heartland of the operation of the Japanese multinational corporations. In recent years these corporations have invested a great deal to expand their productive capacity in countries such as Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines. In fact the current trend is to move off-shore from Japan to overcome a serious over-production crisis at home and to take advantage of cheap labour and other privileges offered by these countries. The region is being subordinated to the interests of the biggest Japanese capitalists and their allies in the various countries. Australia is also part of this picture."

It was also noted, "Australia enters the scene mainly as a supplier of raw materials. But to a limited extent, Australia also acts as a supplier of certain manufactures which are inputs in the production process. The finished goods are made in the Asian sweatshops and then exported to Australia and other places. So the rise in Australia's manufactured exports is not such a good thing at all. The situation highlights the importance of the make-up of exports. This is far more significant than the mere percentage increases. As it stands, the current increase has been influenced by systematic dismantling of Australia's existing manufacturing base."

The paper concluded, "It is a characteristic of imperialism, that producing commodities from the ground to the finished item in the one place is less and less common. The global multinationals arrange production in the way that best suits their profits and their strategic interests. Australia is being relegated to carrying out only portion of the total process, which is now being divided between a range of countries.¹⁷⁵ What is needed is positive action to rebuild Australia's manufacturing base in an all-round way, so that the whole process can be carried out here.

¹⁷⁵ See David McKenzie, 'Toyota comes to the party on car plan', *Business Age*, 17.6.93, p.17-18. In formally accepting the Federal Government's car plan Toyota would open a new plant at Altona at the expense of 500 jobs from existing plants. Cars would be exported to the Thai market but import credits would have to improve to compensate.

Foreign trade could then be carried out on more favourable terms. But of course this presupposes that Australia has freed itself from the hold of the foreign multinationals and set in place a production system which is geared to serve the needs of the people. This is the real issue at the heart of the problem."¹⁷⁶

From this it can be seen that the "Main Game" of Australia's "push to Asia" is seen by the mainstream press as based on the premise that Australia is locked into a global system that is increasingly interdependent in the production process. However articles from the left-wing press such as that quoted above, represent the "protectionist" position and maintain that the players are not equal. The mainstream press are accused of saying little on the question of Australia's weaker bargaining position in relation to our main trading partners, except to argue that this is an ingredient of why we must capitulate. The issue of Australian sovereignty and greater control of what is produced and consumed in Australia, in the main, seldom enters the debate in the mass media.¹⁷⁷

***The Media and the Asian Labour Market.**

Nor does the issue of 'slave labour' in the Asian marketplace enter the Australian debate very often. A rare exception was the article in the *West Australian* in October 1992 also noted: ".... The integration of Australia into the Asian region places the trade union movement in a difficult moral dilemma. The wages and working conditions of our poorer neighbours are now more than just a distant concern against which Australian unions can express their disapproval - they might, in fact, determine the fate of the labour movement in Australia. Ironically, it is the lure of Asia's cheap labour to Australian-based manufacturing companies which looms as a real threat to the Australian living standards unions have fought hard to get."

Admittedly this article was outlining the Union movement's reservations about the 'push to Asia', but as such it was a rare article within the general media flow. Seldom does the Australian media give a breakdown of wealth distribution within the developing Asian economies. One is left to assume that the 'Chuppies of China' or the 'mobile phone users' of Bangkok are almost a majority of the population? The answer to this issue probably lies in reports on labour trends. As the *West*

¹⁷⁶ Editorial, 'Behind the rise in manufactured exports', *The Vanguard*, 26.8.92, p.4.

¹⁷⁷ ASIA DESK Micheal Casey 'Unions face up to foreign free-for-all', *West Australian*, 2.10.92, p.11.

Australian noted: "While in Australia unions are responding to calls for greater cooperation with management, workers in the developing nations to our north are taking on a new found militancy..... The West's industrial revolution is over. But in places like Indonesia and Thailand, Dickens' world of sweatshops and underpaid juveniles working 14 hour days is real.....In Indonesia where the minimum wage is a dollar a day, workers have no access to independent trade unions and face the threat of military intervention if industrial action is deemed to be against the public interest."¹⁷⁸

Strikes are on the increase. One last year was in the Nike shoe factory paying below the dollar a day even though the shoes sell in Australia at \$100 a pair. "Critics of the multinational company ...say the minimum production costs in its factories in South East Asia are a symbol of how the West's tastes in fashion are satisfied at the expense of the oppressed labourers." This seldom mentioned side of the 'Asian miracle' prompted TLC Co-ordinator Rob Lambert to argue: "If we fail to develop a borderless solidarity that is properly structured and resourced, the conditions of workers everywhere in the region will in the long term, be reduced to the slave-like conditions of Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines."¹⁷⁹

The media often reflected existing employer divisions between import and export-orientated industries but seldom from the employee perspective. This came out clearly over the media's treatment of the Northern Territory's "Trade Zone Partnership" with Indonesia and China and the use of "guest workers" from China. The "partnership with Asia" political rhetoric here was revealed as a thinly disguised international division of labour between Australia and Asia. Northern Territory Government spokesman Hatton envisaged the "partnership" as one which "linked manufacturing operations, with labour-intensive work done in Indonesia and elsewhere, with automated and technological work, quality control and packaging done in Australia".¹⁸⁰

While the conditions of Indonesian workers in the "partnership" has not been an issue with the media the import of Chinese "guest workers" has been billed as a major scandal. The media seized upon and exposed the "slave like" conditions of

¹⁷⁸ On 16.6.93, it was reported widely in the media that Australia had praised Indonesia at the Vienna Human Rights Conference.

¹⁷⁹ ASIA DESK Micheal Casey 'Unions face up to foreign free-for-all', *West Australian*, 2.10.92, p.11.

¹⁸⁰ William Tyler, "Territory Dreaming?" *Social Alternatives*, January 1993, p. 55.

the Chinese guest workers. Similar to the "economic refugees" landing on our coastline, these Asian employees were depicted within a racist framework as either stealing local jobs or undermining Australian workers living standards. The real media focus of blame should have been on the Northern Territory administration, the Australian Government and the Australian trade union movement for not adequately police the system to ensure minimum standards were observed.¹⁸¹

(c) The "Push to Asia" and Changes in Australian "Regional Security" Perceptions.

In a recent book devoted to rethinking Australian security, Jan Pettman argues that the 'national interest', indeed the nation-state or 'Australia', are constructs that are often taken as given entities, in a way that that belies how such "problematic concepts" involve "socially constructed identities".¹⁸² The media reinforce "state-centric realism, where it is each state for itself or with its allies in a world of ungoverned and aggressive competition, with war as the ultimate sanction and preparation for war the ultimate security".¹⁸³

She argues states become persons and sub-national ethnic conflicts become "subversive" by definition. The concept of "nation" is an "imagined community, (with) contested political identities". Different discourses create inclusion and exclusion. She argues the state and sovereignty have "internal and external" aspects that are often disguised in defence and foreign policy debates to a stage where the state, (defender of sovereignty), is often reified as a "single and fixed entity". This "homogenisation" of the state in foreign policy/defence debates denies access to groups outside the dominant viewpoint and relegates dissenting as "treacherous or un-Australian".

Pettman argues the "instability" lamented by realists is "often a symptom of people's insecurity and resistance in the face of their government's policies and actions". Internationally the 'personalisation' of state-to-state relations, (represented in the media by the warmth of the Keating-Suharto exchange), is one where the Australian government's declared interest in "closer relations with existing

¹⁸¹ In a case of the pot calling the kettle black see Louise Williams, 'Evans moves on Chinese 'slave labour' imports', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21.6.93, p.3

¹⁸² Jan Pettman, 'National Identity and Security', Chapter 2 in Gary Smith & St John Kettle (eds), *Threats Without Enemies Rethinking Australia's Security*, Sydney, Pluto, 1992, at p. 53.

¹⁸³ J. Pettman, *ibid.*, p. 54.

governments in the region" is fulfilled; only to be confronted with the human rights dilemma of sub-groups like the East Timorese. Similarly, in the Australian domestic arena, notions of "security" are constructed within the media that conform to the masculinist Anzac and Western Alliance traditions; with exclusion of Aborigines, ethnic minorities, (such as Arabs during the Gulf War), and women.¹⁸⁴

In the context of the "Push to Asia" Pittman notes that "immigration and investment policies are connected with, though not necessarily articulated together with, more militarised notions of defence of the nation."¹⁸⁵ As immigration and investment shifts from Europe to Asia the media reinterprets these relationships. In a post-Cold War world where "economic security" takes priority Australia's relative power is seen as declining and notions of (colonial) dominance are gradually replaced by notions of interdependence and collective regional security.

But even here, as Graeme Cheeseman noted, "Australia's latest regional security initiatives, while described in the language of common security, are little more than an attempt to reinstitute the kind of collective security measures that operated under SEATO and ANZUS."¹⁸⁶ Not surprisingly, the media have been all too willing to swallow the rhetoric of Senator Evans and the "constructive engagement" line in their coverage of the issue. Thus Pittman argues the alternative version of "security" must move beyond the "conventional geo-strategic" concerns¹⁸⁷ where "states and governments may have more in common with each other than with many of 'their' people". She advocates moving beyond "state-centric" models to use "non-state actors" in extending the "moral and political community against violence".¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ For women "security" is most immediately threatened by male violence and the very same masculinist constructions that dominate constructions of the nation-state in Australia. See page 62 where Pettman examines how the notion of 'citizenship' relates to arms-bearing with the implication for women being a "partial shift from private patriarchy to public patriarchy - from dependence on a particular male to dependence on the state". Then compare this with the media calls to exclude women from the Defence forces as in Brig. Phillip J. Greville, 'Ideology the enemy of the military', *The Australian*, 19.1.93, p.11.

¹⁸⁵J. Pettman, *ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁸⁶*Threats Without Enemies*, (Smith & Kettle op. cit.), Chapter 12, Graeme Cheeseman, 'An Effective and Affordable Defence for Australia', p. 313.

¹⁸⁷ J. Pettman, *op. cit.*, p.66.

¹⁸⁸A clear example of this process at work was when the Australian Government was excluded from the Regional Meeting on Human Rights in Bangkok in early 1993. The alternative conference organised by the NGO forum to coincide with the main event gave

But the media have largely contained the debate surrounding regional security and the "push to Asia" to the interests and definitions imposed by the politicians. Security has been redefined largely in terms of either "economic security" or "regional defence cooperation". In terms of the latter, the successes, such as the Cambodian peace-keeping operation and joint naval exercises receive a high media profile, while the negatives, Timor, Bougainville, Burma, go under-exposed. As to "economic security", the issue underpins nearly all others but remains nebulous. Seldom does the media expose exactly whose "economic security" is being protected by regional trading arrangements.

In answering why there is currently a preoccupation with the economic link between Australia and Asia, Viberto Selochan looked to our ambivalence over closer security relations with Asia in the post-World War Two, post-independence era. He argued that back in the 1970s the relationship was "uncomplicated" as Australia "continued to provide aid and support Asian countries' aspirations as long as their economies were not competitive". But the 'take off' of industrialisation in these countries soon demanded access to Australian markets. Our response was inadequate and remained high tariffs and a pre-occupation with security concerns. We continued to perceive our Asian partners as a security buffer and as a mesh against the Soviet Union. By the end of the 1970s Professor MacMahon Ball was warning in the *Melbourne Age* that it was clear Australia could no longer delay closer economic ties with Asian countries lest we become the "poor whites of Asia".¹⁸⁹

Developing economic links with Asia posed less thorny issues than resolving human rights problems and, as Selochan suggests, the last decade has seen more than an element of opportunism or pragmatism in contemporary Australian foreign affairs thinking on Asia. He noted, "in the 1990s, the Federal government talks of the relationship largely in terms of economic co-operation, investment opportunities and markets".¹⁹⁰ An economics first approach resolved the defence dilemma of not wishing to plunge into immediate closer military ties with Asian nations long perceived as either a threat or a buffer. The past could be reconciled by arguing

the NGO's a high media profile to counter narrowly defined interests of the nation-state representatives, or in the case of Australia, observers.

¹⁸⁹ Cited in V. Selochan, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ Viberto Selochan, *ibid.*, p. 5. He instances the Senator Evans talk at Monash University opening of the Institute for Contemporary Asian Studies on 19 July 1990 and Bob Hawke's address to the University of NSW where he said Australia "needed to meet the challenging standards of the fast growing economies....of Southeast Asia." (See *The Australian* 21.10.90).

closer economic links with these same countries would enhance national security.

The press accepted the axioms of the Federal Government's new regional security agenda. The editorial of the *Adelaide Advertiser* on December 9th, 1989,¹⁹¹ entitled 'Security is more than guns', coincided with a major policy speech by Senator Evans. It is a good example of media compliance with the government. *The Advertiser* began with Senator Evans' late 1989 parliamentary statement defining Australia's place in the region as "the most significant overview of Australia's regional security in four years", where "Australia's place in a changing world depends not only on the military; it also depends on business, diplomats, economic policies and the Australian people." Implied here was the assumption that the Australian people (as a whole) had a real stake in going along with the agenda of the military, bureaucratic, political, diplomatic and business elite wherein key decision-makers redefined Australia's future in terms of a somewhat nebulous "Push to Asia".

The *Advertiser* credited the Evans statement with defusing "some of the silly noises about Defence Minister Beazley becoming a militaristic Rambo". The context of this aside was the widely reported criticism of Beazley's 'beefing up' our defence portfolio in a way that potentially threatened our Northern neighbours and by default undermined the economic diplomacy being pushed through the other bureaucratic arm of foreign policy - the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.¹⁹²

The origins of this apparent contradiction lay in the 1980s "self-reliance" posture, beginning with the new policy guide-lines in June 1984. Related to this new posture was the 'Cooksey Review' of defence exports in 1986 which recommended greater defence-related exports "for reasons of economies of scale, a more balanced workload for industry, export revenue and employment prospects",¹⁹³ while *The Defence of Australia* White Paper in 1987 consolidated the drive for acquisition of greater capital equipment. Australian Defence industries subsequently sought to expand military production for both local use and the export market. This was at a time when some ASEAN countries were pursuing a regional arms race under the

¹⁹¹ Editorial, 'Security is more than guns', *Adelaide Advertiser*, December 9th, 1989, p.26.

¹⁹² For an exposition of the contradictions between Defence Dept. strategy and DFAT here vis-a-vis Asia, see Gary Smith, 'Two Rhetorics of Region', Ch. 4, pp.111-132 in Graeme Cheeseman & St John Kettle, *The New Australian Militarism: Undermining Our Future Security*, Pluto, Sydney, 1990.

¹⁹³ Stewart Woodman, 'Defence and Industry: A Strategic Perspective', *Working Paper* No.257, Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, RSPS/ANU, Canberra, p.12.

euphemism of a balanced forced structure in the post-Cold War age. Australia, it seems, wanted a more "secure" region, but also one into which it could off-load surplus arms.

The *Advertiser* editorial disguised elite ambivalence on this issue by attempting to discredit the disarmament lobby as "peaceniks". Extreme media hostility to the peace movement over the AIDEX arms exhibition protests in late 1991 where the emphasis was on public violence rather than the need for regional disarmament showed again how the media sought to let the Federal Government off the hook over arms exports. To contain and manage the peace lobby even further, the Federal Government had moved to incorporate the Defence portfolio under the umbrella of its broader, regionally-orientated "Push to Asia" economic objectives. Through privatisation and corporatisation increased defence spending could be disguised as part of Australia's manufacturing industry "export drive" to Asia, while joint multilateral exercises could be presented as regional "cooperation" thus denying the reality that Australia was fueling the regional arms race and promoting militarisation of the region.

This submerging of the defence exports issue under the "Push to Asia" economic banner won media support. On this issue, the *Advertiser* editorial reminded its readers, "... This is particularly relevant to South Australia, with Adelaide's concentration on defence technology". Thus defence-related regional trade objectives, (some of which were potentially of dubious moral value to Australia's international human rights postures in foreign affairs), were increasingly recast by the mass media as a parochial domestic necessity involving the preservation of local jobs.¹⁹⁴ But the difference from before was that defence exports were seen as an imperative of a successful "push to Asia". The other side of the picture, as Peter Cronau in the marginal left-wing paper *Broadside* documented, had been left unstated. Cronau revealed that defence equipment exports had grown from \$9.9 million in 1985 to \$168.9 million in 1991. Most of these exports, many of which had been manufactured and exported with tax-payer subsidy, were destined for the Asian market.

This process of exporting arms as commodities was accelerated by Beazley's successor, Senator Ray, with his 1991 Force Structure Review. The 'defence

¹⁹⁴ As was reported on ABC-TV News, 17.12.92, the South Australian submarines under construction are arguably unsuitable for Australian conditions and have undergone a cost blow-out. Was it a case of defining defence needs too closely to export ambitions?

exports equals regional trade' strategy developed rapidly despite public opposition during the AIDEX Arms Exhibition and the Avalon Air Show in 1991-92. As Cronau noted, the increasing "commercialisation" of defence expenditure enabled "foreign policy to assist Australian arms exporters increase sales in the region." This commercialisation strategy partially removed the Defence Minister from inevitable criticisms over the eventual deployment of such weaponry in contentious areas. It also reduce debate on arms exports in the media lest such debate jeopardise a "push to Asia" that included defence exports as part of an all or nothing package.¹⁹⁵

Another aspect of the linkage of the arms trade to regional economic strategies was the public advocacy by Defence Department bureaucrats for overseas defence intelligence units, (based in the Foreign Affairs & Trade Department), to gather economic information useful for "promoting Australian (defence) exports" and to help in "identifying and developing (defence) market niches". Here it was argued, "Defence exports will never be our most popular or politically attractive (export). They are, however, important - they should become more so."¹⁹⁶ Thus the linking of our defence exports as part of the general framework of our unquestioned 'Asian thrust' market diplomacy would appear to have been designed to lessen avenues for press criticism.

The *Advertiser* editorial also interpreted the Evans speech under review as a further implementation of the 1987 *Dibb Report*, which was said to have incorporated "some lessons from the Vietnam war and buried the concept of forward defence". Concomitantly, with our reduced dependency on US protection, Australia opted for a military that was "self-reliant and regionally co-operative". It was one that was not a "regional police officer", but one that still involved "protecting our interests abroad", which might mean "defending Australian nationals or businesses". But this "military flexibility" was overridden by the need for "comprehensive engagement" with Southeast Asia to overcome "mutual ignorance"

¹⁹⁵ The Federal Government has used the 'arms length' strategy a number of times. The OTC (now AOTC) went into Cambodia whilst a Western embargo was still in force in 1988-89. More recently, AIDAB has been criticised for para-military training of the PNG police force for use against highlanders and on Bougainville. On the issue of the sale of air force weaponry to Pakistan the Government was not so lucky. India responded critically. It was this criticism which partially precipitated the current policy.

¹⁹⁶ Peter Cronau, two page special on the arms race and Asia, *Broadside*, May 1992.

as was the case with our bilateral relations with Indonesia.¹⁹⁷

The *Advertiser* then quoted Senator Evans as defining regional security as involving Australia's improved understanding and inter-action to overcome the "significant image problem we still tend to have (within the region)." Evans was advocating a "multidimensional approach which included, according to the *Advertiser*, "non-military cooperation (drugs, AIDS, refugees and so forth), diplomacy and cultural exchanges, immigration policies, increased information and education", to make us part of the "powerhouse of the 21st century" where local businesses were "prodded" towards a "foreign investment culture".

Thus from the *Advertiser* standpoint, Australia's future success as part of Asia had an external and a domestic component. By his "broadening the understanding of what constitutes security" Foreign Minister Evans had thus "reassured" our "physical security" and thereby satisfied the external component of national security which was after all the "first obligation of any government". However, the domestic component or second stage of the Asia strategy had, according to the *Advertiser*, a "long way to go". This involved "restructuring, in government policies, in business approaches and in community attitudes" before we can be fully confident of our place in the new world. That, and "not mere guns", was the "hard lesson" of the Evans statement.

Clearly, what is implied is that "restructuring" and "micro-economic reform" are both positioned here by the *Advertiser* as essential components of our future "physical security" as well as a pre-condition for any real economic recovery. The message is that only by meeting such preconditions can we ever successfully push or integrate ourselves with Asia. What is at stake here is how the media and the Federal Government have redefined the political rhetoric of Australian-Asian relations in a way that links foreign policy *objectives* more tightly with domestic economic *policy*. What is implied here is that the Government and media elevation of the "push to Asia" strategy as an unassailable and pre-determined truism must inevitably restrict the margins of debate on issues such tariffs, foreign investment, defence spending

¹⁹⁷ See chapter on Keating in Indonesia (ch. 5, loc. cit.) for comment on the press failure to pick up on the inconsistencies of the Defence Cooperation Agreement reached with Indonesian Minister Murdani.

and immigration within the domestic media.¹⁹⁸

(d) The Aid, Trade and Human Rights Dilemma.

Both the Federal Government and the media have grappled with the issue of the extent to which Australia's foreign economic relations with Asian countries should be predicated upon an *a priori* guarantee by those trading partners that they improve their human rights records either now or in the future. At one end of the scale here is the suggestion that Australia has no moral obligation to discuss human rights issues in conjunction with trade issues. This view is stated as 'business is business', political and moral issues should not intrude into the marketplace, to link human rights and trade is to do irreparable harm to our bilateral relations or we should be seeking out points of unity with foreign governments and not niggling over points of division.

One of the initiators of the Federal Government's 'push to Asia' strategy and author of the *Garnaut Report*, Ross Garnaut, was quoted in the *West Australian*, in November 1992, as calling on "Australia to be less insulting and more analytical about human rights in Asia". Garnaut was quoted as having made the following generalised remarks, "crass, ignorant and inaccurate treatment of human rights was likely to be counter-productive to the advancement of human rights..... Careful analysis of the real effects of our actions will usually argue for less rather than more overt and public pressure, less noise and less activismThe genuine Australian interest in the expansion of personal liberty in East Asia and the genuinely Australian values of truth and fairness require us to be analytic, to weigh the whole context, to be accurate, and to do what is effective."¹⁹⁹

The Garnaut view, echoing the 'softly, softly' approach of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, appears apologetic for human rights abuses. The press account doesn't identify any specific example of where human rights protests have been "inaccurate", or cases where "less noise" has achieved positive results. A similar line was expressed by former Indonesian Ambassador and DFAT head Dick

¹⁹⁸ Some commentators still relate the ALP deregulation/privatisation strategy as locking Australia in to a "global" situation (e.g. Scott Burchell on Romona Cavall ABC-2RN 18.6.93). However since 1992 many now argue we are committed to certain domestic policies because of our Asian "regional" strategy (e.g. the Henderson article, *op. cit.*).

¹⁹⁹A. Malan, 'Democracy giant sleeping, not dead', *West Australian*, 13.11.92, p.11.

Woolcott in his widely reported speech to the Sydney Institute in May 1992.²⁰⁰ Woolcott's comments were less generalised. He specifically attacked the pro-East Timor lobby in Australia and castigated those protesting against human rights abuses in East Timor for giving "excessive weight" to the issue, detrimentally affecting other "important aspects" of our bilateral relations within Indonesia which include "economic and commercial links" and "defence cooperation".²⁰¹

At the other end of the scale is the argument that Australia should impose trade embargoes, lift existing ones, threaten trade sanctions or merely refrain from entering trading agreements (or trade discussions) in the first place when human rights are being violated. Protagonists here argue that human rights do, or should, have a superior ranking in foreign policy and international relations where Australia is concerned. This is usually backed up by the belief that trade and human rights are integrally linked. Further, to ignore the link will harm not just the 'victims' in the other country but also Australia's own standing in the international community. Thus we cannot be 'a good neighbour' by profiting on the misery of others who are too repressed to speak out for themselves.²⁰²

As Mike Ticher argues in the *Australian Left Review*: "... Paul Keating has staked much on his attempt to redefine Australia's relationship with Asia....his statements on Australia's need to 'come to terms with', or to 'become part of' Asia have opened up the debate on how Australia should reconcile its history with its geography... 'Asia' (is) on the mainstream domestic political agenda." This means that Australia has no choice but to stay closely in touch with developments inside the region. But how to react to those rapid changes is still problematic; as Ticher maintains, an aspect of Keating's Asia drive remains "rhetoric" in that it still leaves the big questions unresolved. He illustrates this point by noting the uncertainty

²⁰⁰Richard Woolcott, 'Myths and Realities in our approach to Indonesia', Sydney Institute, 26 May 1992. See press coverage of this speech Greg Sheridan, 'Indonesia critics peddle propaganda: diplomat, Former head of foreign affairs says our biggest neighbour gets a bashing from media', *The Australian* 27.5.92, p.5 and Warren Osmond, 'East Timor fight a 'lost cause'', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27.5.92, p.9 and R. Woolcott, 'Indonesia: our distorted picture', *SMH*, 27.5.92, 15.

²⁰¹See references to Woolcott, op. cit.

²⁰²A recent articulation of this position was from the organisation 'Aidwatch' whose spokesperson Lee Rianne argued Australia's aid policy in the Philippines, through loans to the World Bank, etc. was undermining human rights and preventing economically sustainable development. ABC Radio, 2BL, 26.5.93.

among politicians, diplomats, journalists and the public alike,²⁰³ as to whether a preoccupation with democracy and human rights issues will be the "greatest contribution" Australia can make to Asia or whether it will be trashed as the "cultural baggage", a hindrance to our making successful inroads into the region.²⁰⁴

Another emerging strand of contention was the pleas by the business community for the Federal Government to follow the pattern of Japan and other aid delivery countries where aid was locked in as an export subsidy to the commercial sector of the donor country. This trend, already widely used, has come under increasing criticism in the media from the NGO sector because it deprives them of valuable funds for emergency and developmental people-to-people aid. The media sown much confusion on this issue and tended to side with the commercial donors rather than the NGO lobby.

In 1993 the NGO aid organisations were going on a media offensive against the business aid approach of the government's "push to Asia". On ABC radio's PM Australian Catholic Relief head Micheal Whiteley said there was "little value in Australian business moving to Asia simply to take advantage of low wage rates". He instanced the footwear industry and jeans manufacturers in the Philippines who had moved their operations to Asia and were "paying people wages that were not enough to live on". Referring to prostitution he also condemned Australia's "entertainment links" in Thailand and the the Philippines as "very negative". He was concerned that business concerns were lobbying in the media for greater "developmental import financing facilities" and calling this "aid" when it was effectively a business subsidy.²⁰⁵

(e) The Asian Immigration-Refugee Undercurrents within the Domestic Media.

***The Cheap Labour Scare.**

There is a widely held perception that Australia's 'push to Asia' is really a policy of disguised job losses with our 'open door' attitude to imports of which Asian imports

²⁰³Note the admission by Senator Schacht to the media 7.12.92 that Australia has deliberately soft-pedalled the human rights issue with our Asian neighbours in order to accommodate our bilateral interests.

²⁰⁴ M. Ticher, 'Into Asia?', *Australian Left Review*, No. 142, August 1992, p. 26.

²⁰⁵ABC Radio, *PM*, 16.4.93.

are the most visible. This policy is viewed as part of the further erosion of Australia's sovereignty as we integrate into Japan's regional division of labour, capital and markets. Many Australians fear their jobs being displaced by 'cheap Asian labour' and 'imports'. This fear has kept alive the issue of an 'Asian invasion' in the media. For example, in December 1992 the *Hinch* current affairs television program ran an item showing the jobs of SAFCOL workers in South Australia as under threat by the import of "sub-standard", "dumped" tuna from Thailand. The following week the Melbourne edition of the *7.30 Report* covered the release of a government report on the seven oil tankers disasters on the Australian coastline. All employed cheap Asian crews - from Thailand, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Burma - in sub-standard "rustbuckets", on 'flag of convenience' ships, registered in Liberia and the Panama.²⁰⁶

During an SBS-TV *Dateline* program in October 1992, examining aspects of Australia's "push to Asia", the issue of exploitation of imported labour from China was raised. The Chinese guest workers were operating in a "free trade zone" in the Northern Territory. *Dateline* showed a number of women working in a garment factory. It then gave a break down of their wages to show they were being forced to live on \$120 a month after paying taxes to both the NT government and the Chinese Government at home. The item suggested clearly that they were being exploited and that this business co-operation offered up a bad example for future co-operation with other countries such as Indonesia.²⁰⁷

Similarly, Japanese investment in Australia in golf courses, tourist resorts, supermarket chains, and more recently, the issue of Japanese tour companies insisting that tour guides be provided from Japan even when Japanese-speaking Australians are available, are all issues that have received a lot of publicity in the media, if not with more than a tinge of xenophobia. The logic of opposing Japanese imperialism from Australia as a strategy to will benefit the Japanese workforce is lost in the media amid the rhetoric of "national interest" where MITI is perceived to represent the Japanese interest. So to is the notion of increasing the real wages of the exploited Asian workforce as the only means of effectively protecting Australian competitiveness.

²⁰⁶ *Hinch*, Channel 10 network, 7.12.92 and *7.30 Report*, ABC-TV, Melbourne edition, 17.12.92.

²⁰⁷ *Dateline* Sat 24.10.92 Program on the growing business links between the Northern Territory and Indonesia. Reporter, Mark Carey. Producer, Lucinda Hambly.

*The Immigration-Refugee Scare.

The immigration issue was fanned by the media in 1991 after key sections over the media editorialised that the 'bipartisan' support for current immigration policies had led to an ossification of the national debate where both the Government and Opposition ran the risk of becoming immune from genuine expressions of public opinion. This media call for a renewed national debate spilled over into a series of exchanges in the media linking immigration and unemployment in a way that could only be described as damaging to national cohesion and unity. Thus the arrival of a small number of Chinese and Cambodian boat people between 1989 -1992 became the centre of yet another media initiated debate over not just our refugee policy (whether to repatriate "economic refugees") but the broader issue of whether our immigration policy leaned too much in favour of Asian countries.

The issue of refugees cut right across the Keating 'push to Asia' strategy. Firstly, the Hawke four year reprieve for Chinese students was approaching its deadline. Secondly, the detaining of Cambodian boat people in what was widely described as inhuman conditions in Port Hedland ran counter to the positive image of Australia in the Cambodian Peace Keeping mission. Illustrating how this was sending contradictory messages to the region was Julie Stephens: "Consider the contradictory images of 'Asia' circulating in Australia at the moment. 'Desert Hunt for Asians': such was the historically resonant headline used on the Melbourne *Age's* front page on 17 February this year to depict the rescue of 37 Chinese nationals who had walked for ten days in some of the country's harshest terrain, after their boat was beached on the Northwest coast. Sergeant Micheal Harper of Wyndham, active in the rescue operation, concluded: 'If they've come all the way from China, then they've made Superman look like a sheila. A camel would drop, out there.'"208

Stephens argued that this 'superhuman' aspect of surviving in the outback environment "underpinned" most media reports. She added: "The inhospitality of the outback (and the alienness of the 'Asians') was set against the practical 'G'day mate' bush myth response of the Australians who first encounters these Chinese women and men wandering into a cattle station the size of a small 'Third World' country. While the hospitality of the station owners was portrayed as quintessentially 'Australian', it was also understood as necessarily temporary. Fortress logic eclipsed any prospect of a positive identification of Australia as a

208J. Stephens, p.16.

refuge, and public debate was dominated by calls to properly 'man' the outposts."²⁰⁹

Clearly the media picture created is that Australia wants an (economic) push to Asia, but not an (immigrant) push from Asia, unless it is one that we can regulate on our terms, such as with a selective family reunion program, business migration or Chinese guest workers in the Northern Territory 'free trade zones'. In referring to the Chinese boat people issue, Stephens argued: "Telescoped in this 'invasion' episode (Chinese boat people) were all the ambiguities of Australia's official attitude towards 'Asia', as well as the fear lodged so tenaciously at the heart of Australia's historical relationship with the region."²¹⁰

Clearly the current media projection of the Federal Government's new 'hard line' against 'economic refugees' and the changes in Orderly Departure programs may achieve more than its stated objective of 'sending a message to the region' over our territorial sovereignty. Because of the evident callousness of the policy, it also raises fears of an anti-Asian bias in neighbouring countries. In the sense that the message is we want Asian money, but not Asians, the media may be co-operating in projecting a Government view that in the long run may undermine the 'economic push' towards Asia.²¹¹

In an article in the *Asian Studies Review*, academic Martin Stuart-Fox argued the issue of Asian immigration is "emotive". However he pointed out the proportion of Asian immigrants would still take decades to significantly affect Australia's ethnic composition. He argued there were substantial benefits in terms of regional links in having a "dynamic trading" Chinese community. Only recently has there been evidence of this viewpoint reflected in the press.²¹² Ethnic Chinese have been

²⁰⁹J. Stephens, p. 16.

²¹⁰J. Stephens, p. 17.

²¹¹A spokeswoman from the Refugee Council of Australia told this author in an interview in 1992 that there was clear evidence that a feature article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on an alleged Chinese 'boat people' racket relied in part from inaccurate information supplied by the Dept. of Immigration on the issue. Other examples of journalists running the government line on refugees have been documented. However as former Immigration Minister Gerry Hand points out, the restrictive political asylum criteria used by his Department was often (unfairly) criticised by the media.

²¹²The Melbourne *Herald-Sun* devoted a whole page to exploring the central role of "Overseas Chinese" in Asian business and how they will be central to Australia's expansion into the region in Tye Kim Khat, 'The masters of Asia', *Herald-Sun*, 25.3.93, p.13.

dealt with negatively with a number of television programs interviewing disaffected business migration scheme recipients who have returned to Hong Kong because they were unable to find employment in Australia.²¹³ On the bright side, perhaps reflecting how the media have a 'flavour of the month' in terms of Asia's diverse ethnics, there has been the series of feature articles on the Vietnamese refugee success stories who are now expanding Australia's business connection with Vietnam.²¹⁴

5. Keating's Indonesia Visit (April 1992): A Case Study of the Media Response.

(a) Background: From the Colonial Legacy towards Improving Bilateral Relations in the Late 1980s.

Australia's bilateral relations with Indonesia have proven to be a rather sticky issue over the past two decades. Principally this involved what Tiffen called the extraordinary sensitivity shown by parts of the Indonesian Government to what appears in Australian news."²¹⁵ While significant sections of the Australian population had supported the decolonisation process in Indonesia after World War Two, a fear of Indonesia became a real security concern during the Cold War as Australia saw dangers in the Non Aligned Movement, Indonesia's incorporation of Dutch New Guinea (Irian Jaya), and later, with Sukarnoism and 'guided democracy'. The Australian press shared a lot of responsibility for spreading ignorance about Indonesian nation building objectives in the post-war decades up to the mid-1960s.²¹⁶

Indonesia, as Australia's largest and most immediate neighbour, has always been important to us. After the formation of ASEAN, Indonesia became even more crucial to our relations with Asia as a whole. The last two decades have seen the East Timor issue, and particularly the Australian media coverage of the issue, as the major blot on joint relations. The death of six Australian journalists during the

²¹³ *Lateline* in mid 1992 devoted a whole programme to one disgruntled family who had returned to Hong Kong because the "professional" bread-winner could not find employment in Australia. But when not depicted as whingeing, the Hong Kong business migrants were dishonest; other media reports commented on how many came to Australia, invested in "non-entrepreneurial" real estate and then returned to Hong Kong to await the inevitable 1997 exodus.

²¹⁴ The *Bulletin*, the *Business Review Weekly* and the *Age Weekend Magazine* have all run features along these lines.

²¹⁵ Rod Tiffen, speech to National Press Club, June 1992.

²¹⁶ R. Tiffen, *ibid.*

invasion of Timor in 1975 ensured that the issue was kept alive within the Australian media even after the Fraser Government accepted the formal incorporation of East Timor as part of Indonesia.

The issue came to a head in the early 1980s with the expulsion of the ABC *Radio Australia* correspondent from Jakarta following a *Radio Australia* short wave report concerning famine in East Timor. Indonesia claimed the report was inaccurate. The irony was the report came from wire service sources and not the *Radio Australia* Jakarta correspondent.²¹⁷ Bilateral political relations improved after the Australian Prime Minister Hawke appeared on Indonesian television during an official visit in July 1985 and declared Australia recognised Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor. This process continued into the late 1980s with successive Australian Foreign Ministers forging closer ASEAN links, particularly over the Cambodian peace process and other aspects of regional security.

Nevertheless the Australian press relations with Indonesia did not improve. The restrictive policy on Australian journalists was inflamed by press reports of Indonesian corruption and nepotism during the 'Jenkins Affair' and the Robison book issue in 1986. Retaliatory action by Indonesia, which included a ban on all journalists, provoked a savage response from the Australian media.²¹⁸ Throughout

²¹⁷In fact, the two news items questioned both came to *Radio Australia* through agency sources and not the ABC's Jakarta desk. One item complained of by Indonesian Defence Minister Murdani was a quotation attributed to Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar conceding the famine conditions in East Timor were approaching those of Biafra. Commenting at the time, *Sydney Morning Herald* foreign editor, Peter Hastings, lamented the closure of the ABC Jakarta bureau as "typical overkill". He suggested ominously that the Australian media would have to be "patient" and "wait for better days". P.Hastings, 'ABC's Closure a Typical Overkill', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24.6.80, p.7.

²¹⁸Australian press coverage during the period following could be characterized by both its paucity and hostility towards Indonesia. For example, the usually staid and conservative national daily, *The Australian*, in August 1986 was prepared to begin its World News lead with the heading "Jakarta braced for UN mauling on East Timor" with a despatch from Robin Osborne reporting that the UN Committee on Decolonisation was to consider East Timor in its next session. The accompanying subtitle with this article referred to East Timor as Indonesia's "bugbear".

In September 1986, an editorial in *The Weekend Australian*, 'Indonesia proves it's no friend', argued: "The Indonesian Government's latest insult to this country ought to convince even the most easy going Australians that when we are dealing with the regime in Jakarta we are dealing with irrational and uncivilised people. Not content with banning Australian newspapers from circulating in Indonesia, ... (they) have now refused aircraft from the RAAF permission to land in Indonesia." Why? "General Murdani's ... motive was to show the displeasure of the publication in Australia of a book by Dr. Richard Robison, a scholar living in Perth."

the 1980s, Indonesian human rights issues and the East Timor question were never far from the surface and created friction between Australian journalists and politicians because of real and threatened trade and diplomatic retaliation by Indonesia in response to negative Australian press coverage.

But media criticism of Indonesia was far from a unanimous out-cry. In a 1986 retrospective article on the 1975 Timor invasion, the foreign affairs editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Peter Hastings, defended the annexation on the grounds that it "tidied up the map". This view was not atypical of the thinking of other foreign editors and leader writers who gradually fell into line with efforts by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as it explored avenues for repairing media initiated damage to our bilateral relationship with Indonesia.²¹⁹

It was not until late in 1988 that the first full-time Australian correspondent was allowed to resume work as a resident inside Indonesia. This concession to the Australian media corps reflected an improvements in bilateral relations between Australia and Indonesia Governments. As the Federal Government ignored the demands of the East Timor lobby and pursued economic objectives such as the Timor Gap Treaty and bilateral military and cultural cooperation, media coverage of Timor and related human rights issues waxed and waned accordingly. As part of the "push to Asia" in the late 1980s and early 1990s co-operation at a government-to-government level, and later at the level of public service, academia and cultural exchange, saw a flourishing of the relationship. Timor was marginalised and became the piquant of a few persistent reporters and letter writers.

(b) 1991: The New Media Highwater Mark over East Timor.

In 1991 the Portuguese Government proposed sending a delegation of politicians and journalists to East Timor to investigate claims of continuing human rights violations. The proposed visit received a lot of attention in the Australian media for three reasons. Earlier visits by the Pope and the US's Indonesian Ambassador had been marked by demonstrations in support of East Timorese independence being brutally suppressed. Secondly, Portugal had mounted a World Court challenge to

²¹⁹Peter Hastings, 'East Timor? War of Facts and Figures', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20.4.87. As David Jenkins recently pointed out, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30.11.91, p.21, Hastings viewpoint before the invasion was expressed in an article in September 1974 on the eve of Whitlam's visit to Suharto. Hastings wrote "One hopes...Whitlam is in no rush to have Indonesia swallow the place...a wise policy for both Indonesia and Australia may be to persuade the Portuguese to stay on a while...."

the Australia-Indonesia Timor Gap Treaty for oil exploration. Thirdly, the Portuguese delegation's visit had been stalled by an Indonesian refusal to allow the Portuguese-based, but Australian born journalist, Jill Jolliffe, permission to make the tour.²²⁰

The police repression surrounding the Pope and Ambassador's visits to Timor provided precedents for a harsh media reaction in Australia to the civilian repression that occurred during the Santa Cruz massacre in November 1991 in Dili where civilians were gunned down in mass by army units. However, there were qualitative differences in media coverage between the Santa Cruz massacre and earlier repression. Quite apart from the severity and large numbers of immediate casualties, for the first time since the 1975 invasion, Western news journalists successfully smuggled out of East Timor graphic film footage of the massacre of hundreds of unarmed civilians. The injuries sustained by Western journalists and observers further authenticated massacre claims. A global television audience reacted in shock. Many governments condemned Indonesia.²²¹ Such protests cut across the bilateral 'bridge building' carefully fostered by the Australian Government with Indonesia, albeit at the expense of the Timorese.

As before, press condemnation was not a united chorus. While news stories carried by the Australian press in the lead up to the proposed Portuguese visit tended to accentuate the growing tensions inside Dili, feature articles in the quality press tended to follow the Senator Evans/DFAT line of stressing the importance of building up solid bilateral relations between Australia and Indonesia as part of the "Push to Asia" and as a prelude to then Prime Minister Hawke's proposed visit scheduled for early 1993. As such, the bottom line of these articles was we should be sympathetic to Indonesia and her dilemma.

A good example of this feature article style were the *Sydney Morning Herald* piece by David Jenkins 'Can Indonesia maintain its unity in diversity'.²²² As a backgrounder to the proposed Portuguese visit, the Jenkins article reflected on a possible solution to the Timor crisis - a soft option pursued by Australian ALP and

²²⁰ See Andrew McMillan's book, *Death in Dili*, 1992, for examples of Australian press coverage of these incidents.

²²¹ For a more detailed analysis of the Australian media coverage see Jefferson Lee, 'Australian Media and the Dili Massacre', paper, Asian Studies Association of Australia Conference, UNE, Armidale, July 1992. Updated in the forthcoming volume by G.C. Gunn & J. Lee, *East Timor Calling*.

²²² David Jenkins, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30.9.91.

progressive liberals - advocating a form of regional autonomy for East Timor within greater Indonesia. Jenkins was sceptical of an Indonesian acceptance because of their desire for "national unity". He noted that an earlier granting regional autonomy in Aceh had been "whittled away". He concluded the Portuguese influence in Europe coupled with the military and diplomatic cleverness of the Fretilin leadership presented Indonesia with an "extraordinary difficult dilemma".

Another article in this mode was written by Hal Hill, Head of the Indonesia project in the ANU Research School of Pacific Studies and published in *The Australian* ²²³ entitled 'Indonesia: hopeful trends emerging'. Hill began by arguing that Australia was developing stronger ties than ever before with Indonesia. He described our relationship over the past 40 years as at times "brittle" with the big hiccups being East Timor in 1975 and the 'Jenkins affair' a decade later. But since the late 1980s, "new and more hopeful trends emerged". He then outlined a shopping list of proposals to improve trade and diplomatic relations between us. The issue of human rights in East Timor, or elsewhere in Indonesia, did not rate a mention in the Hill synopsis of the important bilateral issues. The Hill article, like that of Jenkins, was a good example of the Hawke-Keating Government's success in media diplomacy in its quest for improved relations with Asia.

(c) The Media Response to the Dili Massacre of November 1991 - A Critical or Compliant Media?

East Timor was thus being cast into the mould of an inevitable irritant that had to be carefully managed in the interests of the wider agenda. At the time of the Dili massacre political relations between Australia and Indonesia were at their closest for some time. The press were keen to point this out to their readership and their response to the Dili events was in some ways tempered by this fact. However, to give credit where it's due, sections of the Australian media since the Indonesian invasion in 1975, have continued to gather evidence, often under extreme duress, and have given publicity favourable to the East Timorese independence cause in the face of apparent Government and public indifference.

The immediate response of the Australian media to the November 1991 Dili massacre was outrage. But when the dust settled, the key media brokers endorsed the bipartisan consensus of the politicians by reiterating an "understanding" of the

²²³Hal Hill, *The Australian*, 24.10.91. Hill is head of the Federal Government funded 'Indonesia Project' which produces academic assessments of the Indonesian economy.

"legitimacy" of Indonesian claims to East Timor and its annexation and incorporation of the former Portuguese colony. By way of example, in July 1992, when the Australian Foreign Minister Senator Evans asked the Australian ambassador in Jakarta to convey his "deep distress and extreme regret" at Major-General Mantiri having "no qualms about ordering his troops to shoot at unarmed demonstrators again the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran the item in five short paragraphs at the very back of its news section on page eleven.²²⁴

Behind this apparent media-government consensus to 'bury Timor' lay a number of other factors. Media proprietors and editors alike were no doubt cautious to avoid a repetition of the earlier breakdown of bilateral relations with Indonesia caused by harsh Australian press criticisms of Indonesia's Timor policy and the Jenkins affair in 1986. Thus key sections of the media, specifically press feature writers and academic commentators from the Canberra-based 'Indonesia lobby', cautioned the public and politicians against over-hasty reactions to the Dili massacre. Behind this writing was a desire to see the 'long-term' picture, where on-going bilateral relations with Indonesia, particularly in the area of trade, were perceived as more strategically significant than a pre-occupation with interests of human rights of the East Timorese. Such a coalescence or consensus between key media and government policy makers inevitably raised the issue of press 'management' in Australian foreign affairs reporting.

Worse still was the prominence given to those who belittled genuine outrage in conspiratorial terms. Bob Santamaria column in *The Weekend Australian* presented the *Lusitania Expresso* as a contrived move by Portugal to covert the oil in the East Timor Sea. He dismissed Portugal's support for decolonisation and buried the human rights issue beneath the cloud of European Common Market versus Australian-Indonesian trade rivalry.²²⁵ His article was typical of the influential circle of media commentators who narrowly defined Australia's 'national interests' in Asia as purely a set of economic objectives. The Timor Gap Treaty which has come under challenge in the World Court by Portugal - the sole power

²²⁴ Amanda Meade, 'Massacre chief condemned', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9.7.92, p.11.

²²⁵B. A. Santamaria, 'Portraying Indonesia: sense without censure', *Weekend Australian*, 25-26.4.92, p.22. The reply to mainstream position of blaming Portugal for East Timor's misfortunes can be found in the column by Humphrey McQueen in the same paper. McQueen argued in a subsequent column that Australia had conceded too much of its own sovereignty in the East Timor Gap Treaty in what was a blatant give away of our national estate to Indonesia.

recognised by the UN as concerned with the decolonisation process in Timor - was symptomatic of this narrow definition.

Pro-Timor activists condemned the Australian government's failure to take a harder line on the official Indonesian Government inquiry into the Dili massacre. On this issue the Australian press were divided.²²⁶ They initially offered extensive publicity to the protesters cause giving good coverage to the more dramatic events such as Indonesian flag burning episodes, the overseas reaction to Dili massacre and the placement of symbolic white crosses outside the Indonesian Embassy by picketers. However, the media, taken as a whole, eventually appeared to fall in behind supporting the Federal Government's soft-peddling its own criticisms. This was most clearly demonstrated by editorial endorsement of Senator Evans accepting the *bona fides* of the Jakarta inquiry into the massacre.²²⁷

Such pro-Jakarta sentiment was evident when the *Financial Review* offered space for Gavin Williams, a former DFAT Jakarta Embassy staffer turned lobbyist, to contextualize the Keating visit to Indonesia. Williams urged Keating to "demonstrate that rather than being simply a negative, carping nation we are relevant to Indonesia and can be a positive force in Indonesia's drive for economic development". Appearing prominently on the eve of the Keating visit the Williams article served to agenda-set key sectors of public opinion by providing a press focus that argued the trip should be "a commercial catalyst and not a political symbol". In short, the message was to forget East Timor.²²⁸

²²⁶Significant articles in defence of the Timorese were by David Lesser and James Dunn in *The Bulletin* in late 1991. Such strident criticism's of the Federal Government may well have been a factor in the Australian Consolidated Press management decision to move against the Lyndall Crisp, editor of the *Bulletin* some months after.

²²⁷ See Tracy Woods, *Propaganda: Press, Policy and East Timor*, Faculty of Communication, University of Canberra, Canberra, 1992 for a detailed breakdown of the media treatment.

²²⁸G. Williams, "Building on opportunities in Indonesia", *Financial Review*, 13.4.92,p.10. Williams was described as the "now manager, international trade and investment, with Hill and Knowlton's Canberra office. The role of this US-based public relations consultancy in manipulating news on global conflicts, in particular the Gulf War, was revealed on ABC-2RN, *Background Briefing* " We Don't Organize Coups", Tuesday 30.6.92.(repeat). The *Financial Review* published the Williams article in bold.

(d) The Keating Visit to Indonesia - April 1992: Pushing to Asia in the Shadow of Dili?

The Federal Government has largely set the press agenda on what is meant by "the push to Asia", its interpretation and the arenas of its potential success. By the eve of the Keating visit most of the press fell into line and defined good relations between Canberra and Jakarta as a centre-piece of the 'push to Asia' policy.²²⁹ Jakarta was often depicted as a lynch-pin; the key to commercial success with the rest of the ASEAN nations and a potential ally inside ASEAN against the Malaysian 'anti-Australia' position over our APEC membership.

Canberra's briefing of staff from the foreign news desk of *The Australian* newspaper on the eve of Keating's Indonesia trip suggested a conscious effort by the DFAT to more directly 'manage' the key sections of the media in their foreign affairs coverage of the sensitive issue of Indonesia. This sensitivity was exacerbated by a continuation of the restricted access for Australian journalists, politicians and human rights observers to East Timor, and in some cases, Indonesia generally, in the wake of the Dili massacre. The on-going feud between Indonesia and sections of the Australian media had taken on a renewed focus by early 1992. Media speculation and active participation by journalists in the *Lusitania Expresso* protest inflamed the tensions with a war of words emanating from Jakarta.

The Kerry O'Brien-Sabam Siagian exchange on the ABC-TV program *Lateline* at the start of the Keating visit to Jakarta was perhaps the most potent example of this rekindled adversity.²³⁰ It occurred the same evening that Keating spoke with President Suharto. The *Lateline* program hooked up to Jakarta with anchorman Kerry O'Brien confronting Ambassador Sabam Siagian (who was back in Jakarta for the Keating visit). O'Brien complained directly of the restrictions placed on his camera crew during their background visit prior to the Keating tour. This complaint was in response to Siagian attempting to side-step the broader censorship issue by claiming even the ABC had been given access to film in Indonesia. Siagian

²²⁹An example here was Tim Satchell, 'Asian ties save Australia: PM', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 8.4.92, p. 7.

²³⁰ ABC-TV *Lateline* programme (21.4.92). Note this program followed directly on from a *Four Corners* special, highly critical of the Indonesian military in East Timor, which rescreened vivid film clippings from the Dili massacre. B.A. Santamaria in his weekly column in *The Weekend Australian* (25-26/4/92) was highly critical of the ABC for this juxtaposition. He argued it was designed to embarrass the Indonesian Ambassador and undermine the Keating agenda of good relations with our neighbours Indonesia,

responded to O'Brien's rejoinder by issuing him and the ABC film crew with a fresh invitation to re-apply for another visa to Indonesia.²³¹

But as Stuart Littlemore's *Media Watch* post mortem on the media coverage of the Keating visit screened on Monday 27th April showed, the O'Brien confrontation was more the media exception than the rule. The Canberra-based press gallery that accompanied Keating to Jakarta showed little of the fire and brimstone of the *Lateline* program. At the outset it was clear the PM's press entourage were not Indonesian specialists. Littlemore's analysis concluded the journalists didn't do their homework and they failed to ask the difficult questions. Littlemore unkindly concluded the majority of the press contingent in Jakarta were thus little more than "junketeers".

But Littlemore's disdainful remarks perhaps overlooked the extent to which the Keating visit had been cleverly stage-managed at both the Canberra and Jakarta ends. The media had been conditioned for weeks by the Federal Government stressing the importance of the visit to our "Push to Asia" strategy. Keating, we were often reminded, was making his inaugural Prime Ministerial overseas visit to Jakarta and not to the traditional first ports of call of Europe or America. The fact that both the Australian and Indonesian Governments were using the visit to enhance their own domestic political capital should have encouraged the media to more closely scrutinise the government's motives behind the timing of the tour and its relationship with the "Push to Asia".

The large Australian contingent of predominantly domestic and national affairs correspondents who were granted visas to Indonesia inevitably scored the tour as a plus for the Federal Government's "Push to Asia" mission. It was reflected in the filing of reports. Difficult issues like Timor, West Irian and the PNG border issue were skirted in preference to comparative trivial details often garnished from government press backgrounders. The beat-ups were over the so-called advantage to Australia of Anita Keating's Dutch background, or the spectacle of garrish street billboard's showing Keating, Suharto, and their two wives, side-by-side in a picture of glowing harmony and the deliberate insertion into Keating's speech of the contrived diplomatic *faux pas* concerning the Australian flag and republican issues.

²³¹The thrust of the O'Brien cajolery was his implied suggestion that the ongoing issue of Australian journalists being denied access to Indonesia over the previous decade was an indication that the Indonesian authorities had something to hide.

The latter issue, in turn, was viewed as having struck a positive chord with Suharto.

But if coverage of diplomatic manoeuvres of the tour was found wanting, treatment of regional security issues was even more abysmal. *MediaWatch* criticised praiseworthy media coverage over the defence co-operation agreement reached with Indonesia. The Keating-Motchar meeting where this was set in train was viewed by *MediaWatch* as hypocritical on Australia's part. The Australian press all but forgot the Mochtar-Diro bribery scandal where the same Indonesian Defence Minister had bribed his disgraced PNG counterpart during an arms sale agreement.²³² Here, Littlemore stopped short of suggesting any corruption would be involved with the new Australian deal, but he was still left pondering the sincerity of Keating's media outburst two days later concerning the lack of law and order in PNG when viewed in the context of his eagerness to arm with Australian weapons and training those responsible for the Dili massacre. Littlemore questioned the media's inability to draw out these important connections or even get beyond back-slapping the politicians all round.

As part of this post mortem of the Keating tour, *MediaWatch*²³³ examined the pre-Jakarta promotion of the tour in the Australian press. He questioned the credibility of *The Australian's* front page 'scoop' on Monday 20th April, where foreign affairs writer Tony Parkinson previewed the Keating Indonesia visit. Given the private briefing to Parkinson included comments attributed to "senior government sources", Littlemore pondered whether this interview, and subsequent "leaks" to the same journalist, was a case of DFAT media management in action, or just a case of Murdoch journalists "writing to instructions".²³⁴

Less cynical analysis may argue that the relationship between *The Australian's* foreign affairs staff and the DFAT in this case may well have been a case of normal journalistic cultivation of reliable sources on government policy. Nevertheless, Parkinson's fellow staffer, Greg Sheridan had penned 'Swim with Asian tide or we'll be beached', in *The Australian*, earlier in April. This article read like a DFAT 'damage control' script. The article was a subtle echo of the DFAT line calling for

²³²However Littlemore did praise the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial, 22.4.92, which referred to \$US139,000 bribe by Diro to Benny Murdani (who Keating was then meeting and offering new arms deals and foreign military aid).

²³³ ABC-TV *MediaWatch*, Monday 27th April 1992. (episode 105).

²³⁴ *The Australian*, 20.4.92, p. 1.

the media to drop the human rights agenda in favor of profit-seeking through greater trade with Asia. The article no doubt found a willing readership with the Indonesian Ambassador and perhaps with his Chinese and Burmese counterparts as well.²³⁵

In the same vein of press-government complicity during the Keating-Indonesia exchange, was an *Adelaide Advertiser* front page lead 'The Giant at our doorstep' which accented how Indonesia was "redefining the value of human rights". Littlemore castigated this extended article for its total reliance on such anonymous sources as "one government advisor", "one legal rights lawyer", "one senior government advisor", etc. The implication of the article for Littlemore was twofold. Firstly, the journalist was so keen not to disrupt the sensitive Australian-Indonesian media relations that all comments from officials had to be anonymously contributed. Secondly, it was clearly apparent that the paper was doing little more than mimicking the government line. Littlemore contemptuously suggested that such papers as the *Advertiser* appeared to be little more than mouthpieces for the Federal Government.²³⁶

Similarly, Littlemore reproached the *Sydney Morning Herald* feature writer Peter Hartcher who wrote on Tuesday 21st under 'The bewitching charm of togetherness' of "one Cabinet Minister" who had argued "concern about human rights varies inversely with the distance from the abuse". But the shame was reserved for the *Herald's* editorial later in the same edition, 'Keating and Indonesia', which threw up the exact same axiom without any attribution to its original source. In a similar vein, argued Littlemore, *The Australian's* Greg Sheridan front-paged the orthodoxy of the Indonesian trip with 'PM pursues Asian role for the nation', while the editorialist laid down the diplomatic rules with 'Keating's overseas odyssey' where "Mr Keating will of course raise Australia's concerns about human rights in East Timor. The Indonesians will expect him to do this and will not react adversely." Littlemore expressed doubt over how far Keating would pursue the human rights issue and

²³⁵*Australian*, 8.4.92, p.13. The relationship between the DFAT and the media would require a much broader study than undertaken here. Suffice is to say the Ministry and its Department actively intervene with press conferences, press releases and briefings to journalists with the aim of both 'agenda-setting' policy debates and 'damage control' exercises to marginalise dissident voices from either the Opposition, the Democrats or the lobby groups and protest movements.

²³⁶*MediaWatch*, 27.4.92., quoting the *Adelaide Advertiser*, 21.4.92, p.1

glibly added, "We'll see".²³⁷

In an adjoining Sheridan article, 'Regional role demands mental revolution', where Keating was interviewed, Littlemore was a little kinder to the journalist. He pointed out that Sheridan had questioned Keating about the Australia-Indonesian-PNG relationship with, "...The Indonesian view is that we have a responsibility to ensure the stability of PNG and that if we don't, it might, - because of the extent of its internal problems - have to take a larger role there." To which Littlemore opined, "It's a good question, but the answer (from Keating) seemed evasive."²³⁸

On the 21st Tuesday April, the second day of Keating's visit, the *ABC News* noted the Keating's speech contained "one short neutral paragraph on East Timor", whereas *SBS-TV News* emphasised President Suharto's speech dwelled at length on the human rights issues in a somewhat contrite way. Littlemore argued that not only the ABC-TV, but also the print media journalists travelling with Keating, failed to pick up on this major concession by Suharto in their reports the next day. Instead they ran with the Keating line that East Timor should be played down as it presented a barrier to our good diplomatic relations.²³⁹

Hence Littlemore makes a general conclusion that the travelling press gallery were not up to scratch during this tour as they failed to raise the difficult questions, nor in this case keep up the pressure for answers once they were raised.²⁴⁰ In their defence it could be argued the climate of Djakarta is more tropical than Sydney and the pressure on the press contingent to conform far greater. By contrast, nearly all the press cartoonists in capital dailies back home were lampooning Keating's sincerity on East Timor during the Indonesia visit. Littlemore described the cartoonists as "markedly tougher than the journalists" travelling with Keating.

²³⁷ See also *Dateline* 24/4/92 Paul Murphy compere, on the "Dili massacre" issue. The *Hinch* Programme Wed. 22/4/92 also ran a segment under the heading "Dollars Before Dili".

²³⁸ *Australian*, 21.4.92, p.4 .See *MediaWatch*, op. sit. Compare with *Sunday Age* 26.4.92 on the PNG visit.

²³⁹ Littlemore accuses the local press of "giving away" the foreign aid "bargaining chip" for human rights citing: 'No deals on aid and human rights', editorial, *Adelaide Advertiser*, 24.4.92. See also *SBS News* 24/4/92 who quote Keating saying: "I made my position clear where we stand on human rights. It must be balanced with Suharto's contribution to stability in the region."

²⁴⁰ Given the furore over AIDAB funded police training for Bougainville and the highlands that blew up in the Australian media towards the end of 1992 it was obvious that the Federal Government was signalling its acceptance of a greater role for Australia in PNG security during the Indonesia tour.

He described Tanner's cartoon in the *Age* as "sceptical" the *Brisbane Courier Mail's* suggested Keating couldn't face East Timor, the *Advertiser* comment was "supine", while Moir in the *Sydney Morning Herald* showed Keating naively stumbling upon a whitewashing of a wall by the Indonesian leader - to remove the blood of the Dili massacre. A similar theme was taken by Tandberg in the *Age* where Keating was depicted addressing Suharto as the "elder statesman of the region". In the next frame he asks his advisor "Did I forget anything?". The reply was "Only a few East Timorese who didn't have the chance to grow old".²⁴¹

Another aspect of this tour which the media failed to pick up on was how Keating had already backed himself into a corner on the issue by allowing the Indonesians claim that the Australian press had offended Indonesia over its Dili coverage to go unchallenged. Thus the *Canberra Times* headed 'Tough first day for Keating, Suharto calls for respect' where Suharto made "a strong reminder to Australia that Indonesia will not tolerate criticism of its affairs". Similarly, the *Australian* ran 'Hard Suharto line to conciliatory Keating. PM heaps praise on Indonesian President', where "a firm warning from Suharto that Australia should not interfere in Indonesia's affairs" was the order of the day.²⁴² The *Financial Review* line was "PM wants the media to focus less on Dili."²⁴³

Littlemore suggested as well that the travelling media entourage were attempting to bury not just the Timor issue but also West Papua and the OPM. This drew comment on the Wednesday of the Keating visit columnist Peter Robinson in the *Financial Review*,²⁴⁴ prompting a Littlemore barb over the author's lack of guts to even mention "West Irian" by name, lest it upset the Indonesians. Littlemore plugged Robin Osborne's *Secret War in West Papua* book and added, "I doubt that too many (journalists) on the junket had heard of it", concluding, "we should all

²⁴¹Tandberg, *Age* Wednesday 24.4.92.

²⁴² Both quotes from press, Wednesday 22.4.92, see *Media Watch* 27.4.92.

²⁴³ *Financial Review* 24.4.92.

²⁴⁴ *Financial Review* 22.4.92.

come down on their failure to ask difficult questions".²⁴⁵

(e) Aftermath.

One must conclude that the Keating visit was seen as a success by the Australian media. The media projected the relations between the two countries as close and harmonious. They commented positively on increasing contact at all levels - economic, political, cultural, defence co-operation and in terms of improved Australian media access. In terms of Keating's domestic popularity the tour was a very successful manipulation of the Australian media. Keating emerged statesmanlike, as a leader who had repaired a damaged relationship with a vital neighbour. The stage-managed controversies over republicanism, the flag and the significance of Kokoda served to dampen critics on the Left at home who failed to keep Timor, Indonesian human rights or West Papua on the media agenda once the anticipated Ruxtonites and Liberal Party reaction, with Union Jack waving and pro-Monarchist sentiment stole the local media limelight. Keating knew that such responses would prove insignificant or even counter-productive in the final wash up. Not so the Labor Left where Keating knew the Timor issue was an Achilles heel.

The caustic bitterness of Littlemore's *MediaWatch* analysis was symptomatic of the disappointment from the Left felt on the issue of Timor. Littlemore's tendency to blame the journalists was an underestimating of the brilliance of Keating's minders. He was not alone in this regard. In another reflection on the media role, Rod Tiffen's post mortem to the National Press Club in June 1992 began by arguing that the "adversarial" role of the Australian media, its "priorities and style", were "not widely diffused throughout the region". But, he argued, the reputation of the Australian press as a "consistently combative and adversarial institution" had taken a beating over Keating's visit to Indonesia as the press had failed in its "adversarial" role and "scrutiny of government actions and claims was much less probing". With the wisdom of hindsight, Tiffen complained, "When he (Keating) made the claim that he was inaugurating a new policy towards Indonesia, nowhere in the media did I see an examination of how it resembled or differed from Whitlam's, Fraser's and Hawke's policies. No-one asked the Foreign Minister how it differed from his

²⁴⁵In the PNG leg of the tour the media were more concerned about the symbolism of Keating's ground-kissing when the party was one wreath short for a memorial ceremony for the Kokoda veterans, an event that Keating claimed was more significant for the Anzac legend than perhaps the Gallipoli landing. This neatly tied in the anti-British republicanism with the "Push to Asia", but in so doing distracted the media from the *real politik* of PNG/West Papua and regional security in a similar way to the flag issue in Jakarta tended to bury the Dili conundrum.

existing policies, or what they had been lacking before Mr Keating's intervention. Rather, news coverage reported the Prime Minister's self-proclaimed policy breakthrough at face value."²⁴⁶

Part of the explanation for this apparent laxity related to the centrality that Indonesian Ambassador Sabam Siagian has assumed within the Australian media debate on Indonesia. On both bilateral Indonesian contacts and East Timor policy formulations Siagian's influence has been clearly in evidence as a major player. Whether this influence was a reflection of Canberra's 'bipartisan' defence policy or a mark of the extent to which the press is intrepid with 'affairs Indonesian' remains a speculative matter. But clearly, no other Ambassador, even the American one, could lay claim to anywhere near the same degree of influence within in the media debate over Australia's regional foreign policy.²⁴⁷

The Santa Cruz massacre media coverage was an example of Siagian influence. One example was *The Australian* front page coverage on 14th October, two days after the massacre which featured Siagian's viewpoint.²⁴⁸ When this viewpoint was clearly demonstrated to be incorrect - over the extent to which civilian protesters were armed and the issue of the number of casualties at Santa Cruz - there was no evidence of a retraction or correction within the *Australian* or elsewhere in the press. While Siagian's intervention into the media debate was no different in form from any other standard Embassy-based 'denial of atrocity' press release, the Ambassador's style of intervention is such that the public will read his remarks as carrying more weight than other diplomats in similar positions.²⁴⁹

Another factor in this apparent media acquiescence on Timor during the Keating visit was the counter-attack mounted in the aftermath of the tour by respected authorities close to the Federal Government. Not to be outdone here was the retiring Secretary to the DFAT and former Ambassador to Indonesia, Richard Woolcott. His speech to the Sydney Institute think tank in early June was reported in depth in most quality dailies. It's publication in the *Sydney Morning Herald* drew

²⁴⁶Rod Tiffen, National Press Club address, June 1992.

²⁴⁷ See references in J. Lee 'Australian Media and Dili Massacre', ASAA paper, op.sit.

²⁴⁸ *Australian*, 14.11.91, p.1.

²⁴⁹ Siagian's authority in this regard is reflected by a number of factors. His personal friendship with Foreign Minister Evans, his journalist background, his capacity to engage in debate with a wide number of Australians, etc. All of these factors are positive attributes. The problem is that many journalists forget his role is essentially to represent the views of a foreign government.

a critical response in the letters page, but the same report went apparently unnoticed by readers of *The Australian*. Woolcott went to great lengths to whitewash not just the Indonesians, but also the DFAT complicity in apologizing for the aggression in East Timor.²⁵⁰

One must conclude that most of the media now concurred with the Federal Government that the East Timor 'irritant' should be seen as embarrassing not only to our relations with Indonesia, but in turn, represented a negative force bearing on our status with ASEAN countries generally.²⁵¹ Encapsulated here is the media's acceptance that the "Push to Asia" has higher stakes - stakes that are predominantly economic ones. But the competing voice remains. As the former Australian Consul to Dili, Mr. James Dunn, argued in *The Bulletin*, until the issue of human rights is presented as universal, transnational and unqualified within the Australian media, the media must bear some degree of responsibility for the world's shortcomings.²⁵²

6. Conclusion.

***The Australian Media and Asia: From Colonial Legacy to a new "Cultural Cringe"?**

In all quarters of the Australian media, indeed from all areas of Australian society, evidence can be found which demonstrates our viewing of our Asian neighbours is still tinged in many ways by stereotyped Eurocentrism. An immediate response would be to point out that many Asians still view Australia through an equally myopic vista of "koalas" and "pisspots". While it is axiomatic that these cultural misconceptions are an inevitable by-product of national difference and historical development and that greater media interaction at all levels could serve to bridge this cultural divide, that is not the focus of this paper. This paper has sought to survey the Australian media response to the Federal Government's "push to Asia" strategy. It's our media performance, not theirs, which is under scrutiny.

²⁵⁰ Dick Woolcott speech and letters, *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 1992 op. cit.

²⁵¹ It has been the international reaction to the Dili massacre, from the UN HRC and US Congress and the Timorese solidarity movement that has prevented this apparent media consensus in Australia from burying the Timorese issue.

²⁵² James Dunn, *The Bulletin*, November 1991. See also his address to the Centre For Independent Journalism seminar on Foreign Correspondents, State Library, May 1992. (CIJ Paper, No. 4).

Historically, media analyst Rod Tiffen observed, in a 1976 study that focused on Indonesia but had broader application, there was a "tendency (of the Australian press) to report events without providing the context in which they occur and by leaving important questions concerning them unanswered". As one explanation here he offered, "Australia's international relations with Indonesia (then over West Irian) coloured the Australian press treatment of internal Indonesian affairs."²⁵³ Indeed, in the wake of the Dili massacre coverage, Indonesian authorities have attempted paper over their genocidal record in Timor by counter-claims that the Australian press "colonial legacy" is still in place. While acknowledging such thinking amongst journalists does still exist, and indeed may be inevitable given we are still "European" in cultural background, the current use and abuse of the anti-colonialist argument must come under greater scrutiny to ensure it is not a cover for one or other form of "neo-colonialism".

In a sense, the Australian colonial involvement in Asia under the tutelage of the British, Americans, and in our own right in the Pacific, has left its indelible imprint on the national psyche. How this imprint has been reworked by the Federal Government as part of its "Push to Asia" strategy has been the subject of intense media debate. In the current case study, it was clear that Keating's visit to Indonesia, took place against a broader domestic debate about the nature of Australian society, its national composition and its national identity. The media response to the memorial presentation at Kokoda in April and the invitation to the Japanese Emperor to visit Australia in September are just two examples; in this case, reworking Australia's Anzac legend within the context of the "push to Asia".

Doug White has argued that Keating's reworking a "sense of history" into our Asian war entanglements was part of a broader process where "historical intuition" has been built into current policies by his speech writers. But while Keating's new nationalism is one that is informed by a "series of solidarities" it is not born out of struggle itself. It is a nationalism that in fact asks for no solidarity at all from citizenry apart from the token acknowledgement that our past is littered with examples of struggle against "monarchies, dictatorships and foreign regimes". It is the "minimalist" republic that can appeal to Anglo-Saxons and migrants alike because it works up "no hatreds and no exclusions". The new nationalism defines national interests as those of the economy.²⁵⁴

²⁵³Rod Tiffen, PHD thesis, Monash University, 1976, Chapter 4, p. 331 and p.321.

²⁵⁴ Doug White, 'The minimalist nation', *Arena Magazine*, June-July 1993, pp.4-5.

Thus the issues of Republicanism, the proposal to change the national flag to take on a more Australian quality, the future composition of Australia ethnically, on the surface all domestic media issues, have now become interconnected with the foreign policy debate over the efficacy of Keating's style of Asian diplomacy. Here, Keating ensured the media registered his political briefings over 'our Asian future', and the importance of 'Asian trading partners', as an integral part of the debate over Australia's changing national identity. The media responded. By way of example here was the elevation of Keating's comments on the flag in Jakarta to a symbolic gesture of deference to Asia, rather than simply a stage-managed "breach of protocol".

In their interpretation of the meaning of events such as this protocol incident many of the conservative commentators in both political and media circles relied on antiquated allegiances to the Monarchy, claiming such actions were pure treachery of our British heritage. This reflex response meant the conservatives lost the plot and were dismissed by the Keating supporters as having trivialised the debate on our future role in Asia. Again, with the touching up of the Queen incident, Keating himself ensured a similar response. On both occasions he was clearly introducing deliberate distractions which disguised inaction over policy issues like East Timor and unemployment. More importantly, explaining the negative implications of the "Push to Asia" could be conveniently side-stepped amidst claims that the Opposition were "out of touch". The public were thereby lulled into a false sense of security. They are accepting the "minimalist" Republican programme on the false assumption that it will only tinker at the edges of our social fabric.

However, as White argues, the Keating agenda involves far more fundamental changes, that threaten existing arrangements in a different way to those envisaged by Opposition party scare-mongering. This is because replacing the monarchy is part of the process whereby Australia becomes a more "congenial location for investors, entrepreneurs and marketeers orientated to our newly powerful relatives to the near north". It necessitates a touch of "Australian despotism", so that we can match Singapore, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia. White argues that Keating "draws on selected aspects of an Australian tradition and avoids others" to bring about, "neither an independent Australia, nor a new Britannia, but a new Department of Asia." In order to achieve this objective the "decentred" qualities of multiculturalism and the "residual desire for local control" of state governments will

inevitably be sacrificed.²⁵⁵

Keating's success in this areas in part reflects the degree of dependence of the National Press Gallery and other journalists on the Government-of-the-day for their interpretation of the "Push to Asia". Caution should be exercised here as the extent to which foreign editors and foreign news feature writers are prone to obtaining the 'inside story' on pending diplomatic initiatives by reliance on background briefings and strategic leaks remains largely unexplored. Nevertheless, political bipartisanship in foreign policy has no doubt influenced the media agenda. Some argue media foreign policy debates are now a limited and tame exchange by a circle of like-minded 'experts'. The voices of marginal lobby groups, whatever the strength of their argument are largely excluded from participation in the debate. Increasing press ownership concentration in Australia also militates against the development of a new breed of critical journalists.

To a large extent, the mass media in the early 1990s has allowed the Federal Government to set the press agenda on what is meant by "the push to Asia", how it is interpreted and how successful it has been. The reasons for this involve a variety of factors not least of which is the Federal Government constantly stressing how the media must be "responsible" and pay due regard to the diplomatic "sensitivities" of our neighbours. The Hawke and Keating Governments' success in their media diplomacy here reflects both the proximity of Asia to Australia, the immediacy of response from those countries and the fact that the government has the whip-hand in that it can often choose to simply ignore the media but not our neighbours response.

Events such as the Canberra briefing for *The Australian* and *Adelaide Advertiser* newspapers on the eve of Keating's Indonesia trip suggest a growing influence and 'management' by the government in foreign affairs reporting. This suspicion is supported by statements from the government bureaucracy. As Sue Boyd from the DFAT recently pointed out, "(The DFAT) provide regular background briefings to the Canberra-based Parliamentary press and maintain regular personal and telephone contact with editors, foreign editors, feature writers and leader writers in the capital cities."²⁵⁶

One of the ironies of the current situation is that, unlike Australia, press freedom in

²⁵⁵D. White, *Arena*, *ibid.*, pp.4-5.

²⁵⁶ Sue Boyd, 'The Media and foreign policy', *Sydney Papers*, Autumn 1992, p.15.

the Asian-Pacific region is expanding in some regards as journalists and media institutions gain greater access to technological change and develop support networks and stronger trade unions and associations. In the past few years media organisations have sprung up to represent the rights of indigenous journalists. Economic growth in these countries has also allowed an expanding capital base to develop opening up the potential for a more independent local media in many countries. Ironically these democratic trends are the ones least exposed in the Australian media. By contrast, the more sycophantic journalists and editors from the Asian region's media are more likely to be offered a wide and uncritical exposure by the Australian media.

In this regard, a mark of our "enmeshing" with Asia was the closing of the communication gap with regional leaders. Regional leaders in defence, politics, media and business and diplomacy have become regular visitors to Australia. They were feted by the domestic media for a reaction as to how Australia, or the Australian media, were perceived in the respective countries. There was a certain uniformity in the Asian leaders response here. They invariably argued the Australian media and politicians remain too critical and misinformed. In response to such criticisms, the domestic press and Australian-based foreign affairs reporters have been too "diplomatic" to tackle such criticisms with any real rigour. Some concluded cynically from this reticence that the long-regarded timidity of the regional press was catching on fast in Australia. Increasing monopolisation of media ownership in Australia and the downturn in job security has no doubt was another factor in the creation of a stifled atmosphere for both foreign and domestic reporting.

This growing lack of a critical media culture has meant that the media in the main have failed to expose how much of the Federal Government's "push to Asia" strategy is based on hope and supposition. As Kenneth Davidson, one of the few persistent critics has pointed out in the *Age*, "Professor Garnaut's report is based on the free trade *ideal* in which Australia's resource-rich economy is the ideal complement to Asia's rapidly developing industrial economies." Davidson argues the argument that the Asian market will incorporate Australia within its projected growth in the coming decades and, if we position ourselves correctly by changing our business orientation, then Asia will, as a matter of course, protect our existing standards of living from the negative impacts of the emerging European

and American trade blocs, is indeed largely supposition.²⁵⁷

The missing dimension in this strategy is a failure to take cognizance of the nomadic nature of global capitalism. Expansion of capital into new markets is based on the sole desire to maximise profits and to this extent another dictum "the world doesn't owe Australia any guarantees as to our standard of living" is only too true. Admittedly, Keating is only too aware that his promised "Republicanism" does not promise any economic miracles. His Employment Minister, Ralph Willis, recently conceded the downside of the "push to Asia" through his "restructuring the workforce into unemployment" statement which implied that unless Australian labour costs are reduced to those of the Asian marketplace then the local manufacturing sector will continue to decline.

As to the replacement industries in the post-industrial society - information technologies - there is little evidence that Australia can compete here at all. The region power (Japan) is only too willing to off-load some of its previous manufacturing dominance onto its neighbouring countries (including Australia) to avoid the implications of a high valued yen and more expensive domestic labour market. But this does not mean Japan will off load its lead in R&D or the micro-chip revolution onto Australia. We can only expect to see the end product of this revolution - a more automated factory and less jobs. It's no surprise the "sunrise industry" line about new "high-Tech" industries has taken a back seat in the current glamour over what we can sell to Asia. However, Keating's June 1993 trip to Korea stressed we were now desiring to sell "intelligence and not just minerals" to Asia.

But rhetoric aside, the media debate has fallen back onto petty quibbles over how much longer we can sell our education industry to Asia and whether learning Japanese, Mandarin or Indonesian from high school level will enhance our marketability in Asia in the future in business and tourism. What's unstated is that language skills and cultural familiarity in themselves won't overcome the central role of Japanese imperialism in the region. The drive to profit maximisation and not cultural familiarity will remain the primary determinant of investment patterns. Similarly, although Australia currently stresses the edge it has in education standards, and markets this expertise as part of the "Push to Asia", Asia is rapidly bridging the gap as foreign capital that we have relied upon for decades is relocated.

²⁵⁷K. Davidson, 'Heroes and heretics', *Age*, 17.6.93, p.13.

Coupled with this is the fact that there is no national panacea in our selected involvement in the high wage end of the expanding Asian labour market, particularly with the specialised skills needed to run the new information technology of the future. Such highly paid Australians will shift countries according to the needs of capital. The "brain drain" in Australia is partially a reflection of this trend. It is cheaper for Japan and other countries to poach the brightest of our scientists and incorporate them into their own economy, than to invest heavily in Australian R&D. Thus labor force mobility for the elite sections of the Australian workforce needed in Asia it is argued will do little to improve the lot of the average Australian workers who has lost their jobs in "the push to Asia". Skilled workers moving off-shore are following new jobs created by Australian business as they shift their own operations off-shore to take advantage of lower labour costs, proximity to consumer market and government incentives to relocate.²⁵⁸

Even Australia's good fortune to have accepted as recent immigrants a cross-section of the entrepreneurial mercantile class from Hong Kong and Vietnam will not in itself guarantee us a larger share of the future Chinese and Vietnamese markets. This ethnically-based rentier class is not known for their indigeneous patriotism. They may well benefit in the export-import game of shifting capital and consumer goods and services throughout Asia. But whatever spin-offs occur this in itself is no real source of economic security for Australia. To assume their ability to network with "Overseas Chinese" or "Overseas Vietnamese" will ensure an Asian market share for Australia ignores their role as merely facilitators for the movement of overseas-controlled capital.

Among the feature and foreign news writers of the Australian press were few who have pointed to these apparent shortfalls in the "Push to Asia" strategy. The most prominent sceptic was Ken Davidson in the *Age*. He argued that "... The Keating Government's hope that Australia's economic salvation lies in unilaterally opening our markets to the world then being dragged along by the economic successes in Asia, with Japan replacing the US as our great and powerful friend is no less infantile than the policies of the Menzies Government in the 1960s which wanted to tie the US down permanently in Asia as a protector for Australia by encouraging US involvement in Vietnam". He added, "The real source of Australia's problems is a culture of dependence. Mr Keating is following the Menzies tradition, despite the guff about getting rid of the monarchy, which serves to hide the fatuity of aspiring to

²⁵⁸ See Bruce Jones, 'Benefits in offshore development', *Sun Herald*, 20.6.93, p.37.

independence by becoming Asian, and seeing no contradiction in the congruent policy of selling prime Australian assets to foreigners." 259

Part of any understanding of the media's role in the "Push to Asia" must begin with an analysis of how existing media ownership in Australia places commercial interests as paramount to their affairs. In this sense human rights issues emanating from our trading partners will often be perceived as restraints on trade where media exposure of ill deeds acts as a deterrent to either country's investment policies. Media depiction of regional events is also constrained by the necessity to report within a given political framework that is predicated on the necessity of upholding a US-dominated, post-World War Two global order. Australia's role in this order is one of junior partner (to the dominant US imperialism) in both the strategic and economic sense. In a political sense we are ideological bedfellows.²⁶⁰

But even when the foreign editor for the Murdoch-owned *Australian* suggests our expanded regional role in the Asian-Pacific region must take into account the expanded role of Japanese investment, this does not involve a real contradiction.²⁶¹ It merely tells us that a former Australian, who became an American media baron, now sees the Asian market as the most lucrative area for expansion. The media will inevitably reflect this nomadic nature of global capitalism.

As the Australian media itself succumbs to increasing foreign ownership, it will feel even less need to view issues within the prism of "national interests". Foreign news will increasingly be filtered in a way that militates against than disclosure of any unsavoury aspect of the "Push to Asia". As the state becomes more responsive to the needs of international capital, a foreign dominated and controlled media must inevitably reflect similar "global" marketplace concerns. As was pointed out earlier when the media now discuss defence-related questions the missing dimension in the debate about "national" and "regional" security is often the unexplored territory

²⁵⁹Kenneth Davidson, 'Wish as hard as we like, we cannot become part of Asia', *Age*, 29.4.93, p.15.

²⁶⁰Stated another way, we are a junior partner in the American dominated Western alliance. The significance of this fact is often overlooked. At a discussion on Portugal's challenge in the World Court to the East Timor Gap Treaty, at the Uni of NSW in May 1992, a legal representative of the DFAT argued the Portuguese position was contrary to Australia's "national interests". I argued that the list of companies granted exploration leases read like a Who's Who of US and Japanese oil companies and that whether our "national interest" coincides with the interests of foreign-owned corporations is a moot point.

²⁶¹Greg Sheridan, *The Australian*, Sheridan argued that our future belonged to Asia. He foreshadowed it may soon be an Asia dominated by the Rising Sun rather than Uncle Sam.

of just *whose* security we concerned about.²⁶²

The phasing in of this agenda has often seen the media scapegoated by Australian businesses as they attempt to secure themselves in the Asian marketplace. The media is presented as an obstacle to progress in cementing business deals. In this context the journalists become divided between those whose beat it is to pursue exposure politics, or 'hard-edged' news coverage, versus those who see their function promotion or public relations for the corporate and government sectors. As a journalist from the financial sector of the *West Australian* put it to me "There is a general feeling in the region that Australian journalists should stop moralising about human rights and just shut up for a while and concentrate on solving the Aboriginal problem."²⁶³

The counter view is that business bring themselves undone and seek to blame the media for their failure in Asia. This trend is sometimes extended to Government's and Foreign Minister's who implement policies that beg for criticism, but can't handle the flack when it does appear. An example of such a view was expressed at a Canberra Conference on cross-cultural exchange with Asia. Here it was argued our media's silence on the abuse of human rights in Fiji during Colonel Rambuka's tour of Australia in late 1992 was "disguised racism". The speaker in question argued that it did not mean we now respect the Fijians. It only meant we condoned the racism against Indian Fijians. He concluded from this that "Rambuka's lot" would hold us more in contempt than if we stood up to them and complained.²⁶⁴

Throughout the "Push to Asia" debate in Australia the voices of the poor, the dispossessed, the war ravaged and the landless of the Asian region have never been articulated. But Government and media "appeasement" of human rights violations throughout the region merely reflect a similar insidious process occurring domestically. There has been no clear articulation of a voice from the Aboriginal

²⁶²The Chomsky view, outlined in his recent documentary film 'Manufacture of Consent', screened at Sydney Film Festival, June 1992, holds true if we consider how the media, including the ABC, have adopted a position of closure over the media's dissenting voices on East Timor and Bougainville. See Max Watts and Norm Dixon, 'The ABC's Bougainville Deception', *Green Left Weekly*, 23.6.93, p.2.

²⁶³Journalist "x" at the Inter Asia Conference Monday 9.11.92. He did not wish to be named as he described his job as being one where "We're just public servants you know....we can't make public statements unless authorised".

²⁶⁴ Speaker Uni of Canberra Conference, Asia-Australian Media Images, November 27-28th 1992, Canberra.

community, the women's movement, or even that section of the refugee and immigrant groups who have been drawn from the Asian region to Australia. Until the government's much touted phrase of "people-to-people exchange" is implemented across the region, and people are allowed to move freely across all borders, whether by access to new satellite technologies, access to media columns, or access to unimpeded travel, then the government's cultural exchanges ambitions are of limited value. The current emphasis on business-to-business and government-to-government exchanges can only result in Australia's "enmeshing" with the region in a tokenistic and opportunistic way.

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