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Conspicuous Hospitality: Cultivating a New Racial Etiquette in Australia, 1930–1960

David Walker

In Australia there are opposing tendencies at work . . . . There are certain qualities—virtues, they may be called—that come of repeating themselves, to form some integral part of the life of the community. The foremost of these good qualities is hospitality. And here a singular anomaly presents itself. Politically the Australians are the most exclusive and the most inhospitable race on earth.¹

From the 1930s the need for Australia to cultivate closer ties with Asia attracted increasing support among intellectuals and within government. In 1934 the federal government dispatched a “Goodwill Mission” to the “East”—the Netherlands East Indies, China and Japan. Led by the Attorney-General, John Latham, this was the first mission of its kind by an Australian government to Asia. Trade and security were the dominant concerns, but the cultivation of “goodwill” and the development of a new racial etiquette among Australians were also important considerations.

If events in Asia were to play an increasingly important role in Australia's future, as seemed apparent, knowing the countries and cultures of the region was vital. This chapter examines a period of transition from the 1930s to the early 1960s when old certitudes about "White Australia" came under increasing scrutiny. There were substantial changes over the following decades, including the formal abandonment of the White Australia Policy and the growth of multiculturalism, which, although vital to an understanding of modern Australia, fall outside the particular historical focus of this chapter.2

Goodwill, friendship and hospitality are hardly precise categories and for that reason may not have attracted historical scrutiny or analysis from students of International Relations. Yet, one of the consequences of a shrinking and more internationalised world is the breakdown of insularity and, with it, increasing cross-cultural contact. In the space of a generation, from the late 1930s to the early 1960s, Australia changed from being a nation largely apart from Asia to one increasingly involved with Asia and, according to some, part of Asia. In this period it was no longer sufficient to express goodwill, it was increasingly necessary to find ways of representing goodwill as an Australian attribute. In more recent years, as tourism has assumed a larger role in the economy, service and hospitality have come to the fore. There is now an established hospitality industry, replete with diplomas and a literature of its own. In the 1950s and 1960s it was not tourism but the need for an improved image in Asia that fuelled the drive to have Australia represented as an hospitable nation whose people

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were largely free of racial superiority. To do this, a case emerged that the practices associated with hospitality in outback Australia might also inspire a new and more racially inclusive spirit of regional engagement. The belief that it might prove possible for the nation to change from an often narrowly conceived "bush" hospitality to something much broader required a considerable leap of faith and imagination.

The hospitality owed to strangers is deeply embedded in the teachings of all the major religions. Classical societies ritualised the relations between host and stranger; so too in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism hospitality assumes powerful moral dimensions. Hospitality, like other values, is also historical, in that its meaning and conduct varies over time and place. For a wide variety of cultures, hospitality has provided a moral pillar around which social order can be maintained. Private hospitality was integrated into a "matrix of beliefs that were shared and articulated publicly," and so regulated social behaviour. The host-guest relationship, then, had religious and social implications that regulated and reinforced social relationships between different groups. It consolidates a moral universe in which the host-guest relationship helped define the culture. Tom Selwyn observes that where host and guest formulate a new relationship, acts of hospitality can be structurally transformative. "Hospitality converts," Tom Selwyn argues, "strangers into familiars, enemies into friends ... outsiders into insiders." "Hospitality" was commonly invoked through the 1950s as an Australian attribute.


How much transformation occurred within that culture as a result of contact with non-white guests is a question deserving fuller scrutiny than it has so far received.

In some of the more popular accounts of Australia in the 1930s there was a considerable emphasis on the hospitable nature of the Australian people. William Hatfield travelled extensively throughout Australia and was the author of some of the bestselling accounts of Australian life, including *Australia through the Windscreen* and *I Find Australia*. He experienced this hospitable friendliness on his first journey inland, and noted: "I struck the same thing wherever I went in the back country, right through the years." Hospitality, he insisted, was a particular Australian gift, explaining that "No matter where you chose to stop and yarn, you could help yourself from the billy of hot tea standing near the fire, or roll a cigarette from the owner's pouch .... The poorest wayfarer's table is yours if you'll share it, the length and breadth of the great wide Bush."

Such an "atmosphere of easygoing friendliness," Hatfield assures us, "is no mere superficiality," associating it with "the man on the land ... the pioneer spirit, a legacy from the times when to every colonist another colonist was a possible friend and ally in case of emergency." Hatfield's explanation for this phenomenon of hospitality was a familiar one: the hardships of Australian settlement, the floods, droughts and bushfires, and particularly the isolation, had fostered a spirit of co-operation.

6 William Hatfield, *I Find Australia*, p. 44.
7 William Hatfield, *I Find Australia*, p. 78.
8 William Hatfield, *Australia through the Windscreen*, p. 19.
Settlers had to help each other out. It was also assumed that Australians had lost or discarded much of the stiffness and formality attributed to the class-conscious English. Egalitarian Australians, such observers maintained, were not like that; nor could they afford to be in a demanding continent where survival dictated collectivist approaches to settlement. "Australian society is built up on the principle that a man is as good as the next," the English traveller Thomas Wood commented. "Titles and decorations," he continued, "which carry some weight in other countries carry none here; unless—very important—the holder is considered a good fellow on his own account. ... At the same time no distinction is considered high enough to justify aloofness on the one hand or servility on the other."

Wood had come to Australia in connexion with his work, in 1931, and was so taken by the experience that he stayed on for another year. Arnold Haskell, the ballet critic, was another English visitor who saw this spirit of egalitarianism as a key element in Australian hospitality. Haskell also came out for reasons connected with his work, but unexpectedly fell in love with the place and wrote his book, *Waltzing Matilda*, in celebration of the fact. Haskell relates how, as a guest of the government, he was assigned an official driver for a four-day trip through the country and describes trying to engage in conversation with his driver, who was at first somewhat stand-offish and monosyllabic, a bit suspicious of this visiting English dignitary. The driver thawed only when Haskell got them to stop at a pub and bought drinks,


whereupon he “brightened up and began to talk,” a change brought about, Haskell explains, not by the drink itself (which was non-alcoholic), but by “the offer.” From that point on, the driver became his “delightful companion,” Haskell says; “He treated me as an equal and I was pleased, he treated me as his friend and I was delighted. Australia is like that; a country entirely free from servility.” Owing to the country’s isolation, “The Australian is immensely interested in the stranger and eager to hear what he has to say,” much more interested, Haskell observes, than an Englishman would be and “also far more familiar.” According, a visiting stranger “interests him but in no sense overawes him”: that is the character of the exchange. “And so, whoever he is, he treats you as his equal, and if you behave normally ... then you are accepted as a friend from the word go; if not, there will be very little pretence. ... It is this ... that makes the quality of the hospitality.”

Unlike Wood and Haskell, Hatfield had a special status as something of an insider-outsider from having spent more than twenty years living and working in the bush, but it was because he later toured Australia as an outsider, an Englishman, that his observations gained the authority of independent testimony. Such views could not be dismissed as the special pleading of the locals. Indeed, even if the locals did recognize their talent for friendliness—like Malcolm Uren avowing to Thomas Wood, in Cobbers, “we’re a hospitable race”—it bestowed a particular cachet to have that pointed out to them by an outside observer. Wood relates how he had been told, before even reaching Australia that its people “are the most hospitable” his well-travelled English informant

12 Arnold L. Haskell, op. cit., p. 252.
had “ever come across in the whole of my life.” 14 Thomas Wood’s account of Australian society, Cobbers, first published in 1934 and reprinted many times thereafter, was written from the outside, but it reinforced Hatfield’s message. Wood’s own observation was that Australia had a “national genius for hospitality” 15 and, as if in recognition of this, in his book the terms “friendliness” and “hospitality” are simply indexed “passim.” 16 Hatfield and Wood did not create the idea of “hospitable Australia,” but they certainly popularised it in the 1930s and 1940s. 17 Australians were growing accustomed to hearing themselves described as a uniquely hospitable race.

These English writers no doubt told Australians what they wanted to hear and they evidently wanted to hear that, unlike the English, they were a friendly, out-going people. In reality, while the strangers in question may have been outsiders, they were not so dissimilar culturally from their Australian hosts. As Wood himself conceded, “the Empire itself, so far as the white races are concerned, is, in my experience, nothing less than a chain of affiliated clubs, which never fail to give the right kind of welcome to the right kind of new-comer.” 18 The White Australia Policy not only reinforced the view that there was a wrong kind of new-

14 Thomas Wood, op. cit., p. 4.
17 Evidence that this theme was established well before that can be seen, for example, in Captain W. K. Harris’s 1913 “Account of the Longest Overland Journey ever Attempted in Australia with a Single Horse,” in which the first chapter, entitled “The Hospitality of Outback Australia,” extols “The exceeding great kindness and hospitality which are such innate features in the make-up of the Australian.” See W. K. Harris, Outback in Australia, 1913, Letchworth: Garden City P, 1919, pp. 1-6.
18 Thomas Wood, op. cit., p. 58.
comer, it also ensured that there were relatively few opportunities to test the extent of Australian hospitality in circumstances where the strangers were either racially different or unused to British practices. While hospitality was widely regarded, even celebrated, as an Australian attribute, it had hardly been tested in the demanding world of inter-cultural and inter-racial exchange. These challenges lay just over the horizon.

The scale of the challenge soon became apparent. In the late 1940s, Arthur Calwell, as Minister for Immigration in the Chifley Labor government, aroused enmity throughout the region for his aggressive and inflexible administration of the White Australia Policy. Calwell deported non-Europeans from Australia with such zeal that it appeared that only the removal of the last drop of non-European blood would satisfy him. It was a sign of the times that the second "Goodwill Mission" to Asia in 1948 attracted bitter criticism from journalists in the region. It was clear that a newly independent Asia was not willing to accept racial humiliation in silence. The leader of the mission, academic and occasional diplomat, William Macmahon Ball, returned to Australia in 1948 with a warning that Australians had a lot to learn about good manners and racial etiquette. He made it clear that there was no time to lose: "Goodwill towards these people must become a national habit, built on respect for the racial sensibilities and national aims of our neighbours." 19 This was a call for a new code of racial conduct.

From the late 1940s, there was an increasing acceptance among political leaders of the need to broaden Australian sympathies and reduce the open expression of racial prejudice. For one of the most trenchant critics of the White Australia Policy, Rev. Alan Walker, the policy was radically flawed on at least two counts. It offended Christian principles of brotherhood and it aggravated Australia's crippling isolation: "The soul of Australia is parochial. Visitors to our shores tell of many an incident which reveals a narrowness of outlook and limitations in understanding."20 The Rev. Walker believed that adherence to the White Australia Policy virtually ensured that Australians would fail to meet their international obligations and in so doing remain a socially backward people forever at odds with the coloured world. The test of hospitality was changing from a self-congratulatory celebration of how the "white club" treated its own to a more critical scrutiny of whom it snubbed and excluded.

The urgent call for a new spirit of conciliation is evident in the proliferation of neighbourly references in accounts of Australia's place in the region. A display of welcoming friendliness seemed a feasible way of addressing Australia's newly discovered proximity to Asia. R. G. Casey, Australia's Minister for External Affairs through the 1950s, helped set the tone by calling his account of Australia in the world, Friends and Neighbours.21 The language is painfully bland and evasive, but its purpose was clear: to promote an image of a youthful and innocent people whose only desire was to live on friendly terms with others. If their neighbours needed help, Australians would be happy to provide it; after all, wasn't

helping others the Australian way? This comforting portrait of a warm-hearted if not particularly sophisticated people was designed to alert the locals to a new standard of racial etiquette while also sending a reassuring message of friendliness to the region.

Through the 1950s “Good Neighbour Councils” were formed across Australia with the express purpose of extending a helping hand to newcomers from European countries. In retrospect, the language of “neighbourliness” may appear glib, patronizing and barely worth examining. But the attempt to broaden the meaning of hospitality and extend its applications to people who, in the 1930s and earlier, would not normally have been included does merit analysis. The term had also found its way into the preamble of the United Nations charter, a reliable guide to the new vocabularies of post-war international etiquette. The preamble invited the nations of the world “to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours.” The attempt to create a culture of tolerance and neighbourliness had emerged as an important internationalising project. Percy Spender reflected this in Australia’s parliament in March 1950, as he acknowledged the difficulty of reconciling Australia’s history and its geography: “We live side by side with the countries of South and South-East Asia,” he proclaimed, “and we desire to be on good-neighbour terms with them.” In the Australian case, it was an attempt to equip an insular culture with the means to acknowledge difference, but it was also designed to educate the nation to the need for an image more suited to the post-war


world. Critics would have seen this as an attempt to conceal a complex and compromising history of racial exclusion behind some opportunistic image making.

Extending the boundaries of hospitality and improving Australia's reputation as a hospitable nation was far from straightforward. At a time when the White Australia Policy was still in force, the hospitality extended to people of Asian background was highly qualified. Every effort might be made to make such visitors feel at home, but they always had to be reminded that immigration was quite out of the question. They were encouraged to feel at home within Australia, but not to call Australia home. Accordingly, every effort was made in the 1950s and 1960s to establish the absence of a "colour bar" in Australia as the key indicator of a friendly and receptive culture rather than have immigration itself as the measure of Australian hospitality. In fact, the refusal to allow Asian immigration intensified both the affirmations of friendliness and avuncular denials of prejudice. Convincing people of Asian background that Australians were well-disposed towards them, but did not want them as immigrants, was no easy task, but it would be a mistake to imagine that the Menzies government believed it to be an impossible one. On the contrary, if Asian visitors to Australia were lavished with hospitality while also being insulated as far as possible from racial insults, it seemed possible to hope that Australia might yet manage to remain white, while also escaping criticism for wanting to do so. If "superior" white was the wrong way to go, "hospitable" white was likely to prove both more effective in the region and better suited to Australian self-representations.

Australia's relationship with India proved to be a vital test of the possibilities and limits of hospitality and particularly so during the period from 1953 to 1956 when General Cariappa served
as India’s High Commissioner to Australia and New Zealand. It is hard to imagine a figure better-placed than General Cariappa to expose the limits of Australian hospitality and the racial basis of the immigration program. Cariappa had served the Empire well as a soldier and in doing so helped make Australia more secure. He spoke the beautifully rounded English of well-educated officers and was thoroughly attuned to British customs and practices. He smoked, as a gentleman should, personally initialled Sobranie cigarettes, enjoyed a drink and observed no dietary restrictions. We glimpse him addressing a crowd in V. S. Naipaul’s, An Area of Darkness: “On a high floodlit platform ... General Cariappa, the former commander-in-chief, erect, dark-suited, was addressing a small, relaxed crowd in Sandhurst-accented Hindustani.”

Cariappa was undoubtedly a man’s man, but he had an extensive record collection, danced divinely and enjoyed playing cards in mixed company. He was everything an English gentleman should be, everything except white.

As India’s pre-eminent soldier after Independence, General Cariappa was appointed by Prime Minister Nehru to head the Indian army. His role as Commander-in-Chief is not the subject of this chapter, although Cariappa is credited with keeping the Indian army out of politics. At the time of his appointment as High Commissioner, Cariappa was a household name in India and remains so today. Very few Australians now know of General Cariappa, but in the 1950s no diplomat serving in Canberra had a higher profile or travelled more widely than the General.

Nehru’s reasons for appointing Cariappa as High Commissioner are not altogether clear, a subject that Indian historians are better

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placed to explain than students of Australian history. The Cariappa family speculate that having such a popular General a long way from home may have removed a potential political rival. This may be so, although Nehru's place was secure in 1952/53 whereas Cariappa had not paid his dues as an aspirant to political office. It seems more likely that Nehru may have dispatched Cariappa to Australasia because he was a person of real standing and one whose very "British" presence challenged the racial exclusivity that underpinned the White Australia Policy. While he was in Australia, Cariappa drew upon two interrelated claims in pressing the case for closer ties between India and Australia. He insisted that the Commonwealth was a family of nations and that "family" members had special reasons to look after each other. This was certainly a test of hospitality. Cariappa also stressed that as an ex-serviceman he had much in common with his Australian counterparts.

It is apparent from his private papers that the General was quite a favourite among the upper echelons of Australian society and particularly, it would appear, among titled ladies. His marriage had ended a number of years earlier and this, no doubt, made him an object of interest and concern. Cariappa had persuaded a niece, Sagarie Chengappa, to accompany him and his ten-year-old daughter, Nalini, to Canberra. Sagarie was just twenty and the responsibility of acting as a hostess in a strange culture was a considerable burden made heavier by her strong preference to pursue her legal studies in India. Cariappa was clearly an attractive and charming man, but he was also a strict disciplinarian. Shoes had to be polished to within an inch of their lives, clothes had to be just so, dinners were exactingly formal, not an easy household for a twenty-year-old to preside over as hostess. Moreover, she was not allowed to forget that India's reputation appeared to rest on the conduct of the household.
It was natural enough for Cariappa to be welcomed into the best homes, where a strong British ethos, reinforced by the honours system, set the tone. Although there were exceptions, there was a considerable British patriotism in this class and, in the manner suggested by David Cannadine's *Ornamentalism*, a more worldly and accepting response to racial difference. 25 As a “Sandhurst man” who had stood by the Empire in its hour of need, Cariappa could be accepted on equal terms as a gentleman. Among ordinary Australians and particularly so in the labour movement, the titled classes were suspect when it came to White Australia and racial purity. They appeared to fraternize with non-Europeans all too readily and some made it known that while Australians may have prided themselves on being racially pure they were often inferior types. The more General Cariappa was courted by the wealthy elite, the more suspicion his presence aroused among those who feared that he was plotting to flood Australia with coloured labour.

Cariappa was certainly critical of the White Australia Policy and was offended by it. He also pressed the case for Indian and Pakistani ex-servicemen to settle in Australia. He believed they had demonstrated their loyalty during the war and would fit in well, given their British training and good character as soldiers. In Cariappa's eyes, these men were worthy members of the Commonwealth family, making it all the more appropriate to treat them with consideration. It galled Cariappa that citizens from former enemy countries, particularly Germany and Italy, were welcomed into Australia, while the door remained firmly shut against his countrymen. Protestations that Australians were an open and friendly people without racial prejudice rang hollow to Cariappa. Cariappa’s compatriot, Sripati Chandrasekhar also felt

inclined to criticize: his 1954 *Hungry People and Empty Lands* detected among Australians some recognition of the racial problems caused by white prejudice. More hopeful than analytical, he also thought Australians might be recognizing that "no country is entitled to hold or control a vast territory and vast resources simply to protect its cultural heritage, in a world too where large areas are suffering from intense over-population and land hunger." For his part, Cariappa was in no doubt that colour prejudice determined who was allowed into Australia and who was not.

These tensions erupted into open controversy in June 1954, when a reporter from the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* (22 June 1954) interviewed Cariappa. He was reported to have said that Australia's immigration policy had more to do with skin colour than character and might result in turning millions in India and Pakistan away from the Commonwealth and towards communism. Cariappa believed that a country that made frequent references to the Commonwealth as a family while also turning away family members as potential immigrants on the grounds of their race endangered the Commonwealth ideal and emboldened its critics. Cariappa's remarks generated a great deal of comment in the media, irritable responses from the federal government and bellicose denunciations of Cariappa's undiplomatic conduct from Calwell and the Labor opposition. Some media reports of the incident noted that Cariappa had merely raised in public an issue that had previously been

27 Sripati Chandrasekhar, op. cit., p. 81.
28 For an examination of this controversy, see David Walker, "General Cariappa Encounters 'White Australia': Australia, India and the Commonwealth," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34.3 (2006): pp. 389-406.
addressed in private discussions. He had done little more than state the obvious. However, the bulk of media commentary persisted with the view that Cariappa and other like-minded critics of Australian immigration policies were mistaken in seeing race and colour prejudice as important factors in either policy formation or the population at large (Age 23 June 1954).

Writing to the Courier-Mail, a “Gallipoli veteran,” A. E. Rayment, claimed it was possible to take “the offence out of our immigration laws” without significant change to the policy itself. He claimed that Australians had no racial animosity: “we do not consider that colour of skin is any indication of character.”29 However, he still wanted white settlers: “we do have a prejudice in favour of white skins and consider that any wholesale mixing of the races would ultimately result in the disappearance of the whites.”30

General Cariappa was routinely criticized for his failure to understand that racial prejudice was virtually unknown in Australia. Indeed, raising the issue at all could be interpreted as a sign of immaturity. Walter Crocker, Australia’s leading diplomat in the 1950s and High Commissioner in New Delhi in June 1954 when the Cariappa controversy first emerged, was particularly critical of what he considered Cariappa’s ignorance and ineptitude. From Crocker’s perspective, raising the issue of racial prejudice at all was a sign of instability. He reported from Delhi that he thought Cariappa was mentally unstable.31 Cariappa had not identified a weakness in Australian policy or Australian attitudes on race but, according to Crocker, had revealed a disabling weakness in his own character.

30 A. E. Rayment, op. cit., p. 2.
31 Walter Crocker to Secretary, Dept. External Affairs, Canberra, 2 Sept 1954, Crocker papers, Series 10, V2.2, U of Adelaide Archives.
Crocker was closely associated with Australian diplomatic initiatives in Asia. Through the 1930s he had accumulated considerable diplomatic experience in Africa and had worked with the League of Nations in Geneva. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Crocker enlisted in the British Army, spending much of his time in Africa. After demobilization he was appointed chief of the Africa Section of the United Nations Secretariat in New York, a position he held until 1949. By the time he left the UN to become foundation Professor of International Relations at the newly established Australian National University in Canberra in 1950, Crocker was a seasoned internationalist and a respected author on international issues, including *The Japanese Population Problem: The Coming Crisis.* He was then entering his fifties and it appeared that Crocker would see out his working life as an academic. However, in 1951 Casey lured Crocker back to the diplomatic service, where he remained for the next eighteen years. He served in two of the most important of Australia's Asian postings, India (1952-55 and 1958-61) and Indonesia (1955-56). Crocker brought a lifetime of experience and sustained reflection to the theory and practice of diplomacy and to the need for Australia to understand Asia in particular and the non-European world in general.

In 1956 Crocker's *The Racial Factor in International Affairs* was published by the Australian National University in Canberra. It was the single most important statement by a senior Australian figure on the question of race in the post-war world. It was an

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acknowledgement that racial etiquette was a vital consideration in the conduct of international affairs. The sensitivities aroused during the Cariappa controversy had certainly brought the issue to public notice and may well have been a factor in the decision to publish Crocker's lecture. It provided a means of addressing a profoundly important issue, but without the federal government being identified with the views expressed.

On three occasions within the first two pages of his published lecture Crocker identified accusations of racial prejudice with "emotionalism." Crocker makes no reference to General Cariappa, but it can be inferred that in raising the issue of race Cariappa had also succumbed to emotionalism. Crocker did not acknowledge and perhaps did not recognize that attributing poor emotional control to people who felt discriminated against on the grounds of race was in itself racist. There appeared to be no way, in his terms, that an aggrieved Indian, or the racially aggrieved more generally, could raise their grievance without appearing immature in doing so. Such people were readily dismissed as exceptionally thin-skinned.35

The logic of self-preservation was fundamental to Crocker's argument. He maintained that European power and prestige had been in decline since the beginning of the 20th century as Asian and African peoples mastered Western technology. The gap was closing, but the Second World War accelerated the pace of change so dramatically that in a matter of a few years, so Crocker argued, Asia and Africa achieved levels of equality that may have taken half a century or more had there been no war. In a world in which Europeans represented a minority whose influence and prestige was in decline, Crocker maintained that claims to superiority and displays of racial prejudice were dangerous folly. There

35 W. R. Crocker, The Racial Factor in International Relations, pp. 11-12.
was no change more urgent than a comprehensive disavowal of "white" superiority. Crocker insisted that Australians may have been white but they did not consider themselves superior on that account. He repeated the post-war mantra that Australians were among the least prejudiced people in the world.36

Crocker was drawn to the psychology of race and to the view that apparently small slights could develop into enduring grievances. Since the race problem was located in the mind of both the perpetrators of racial prejudice and their victims, the key to solving racial tensions lay, so it appeared, in a change of attitude. Crocker cited Gandhi's experience in South Africa to show the repeated insults to which coloured people were subjected, and while he did not make light of these systematic acts of discrimination, he also referred to circumstances in which apparently minor or distant insults had produced what seemed to him a wildly disproportionate response. It followed that the white world, which had been the cause of so much "wounded self-esteem," had to learn the error of its ways. It had to learn that the open expression of racial prejudice might well produce a deadly and destructive backlash from the coloured world.37 A decade earlier Pearl Buck, perhaps the most influential writer on matters oriental, had issued a similar warning, which was repeated by Rev. Alan Walker:

The white people are a minority in the world. They had better learn to get along with coloured peoples. What are the white peoples going to do with this embarrassing world where God in His inscrutable wisdom made us a minority people and Satan in his malicious mischief gave us a majority complex?38

36 W. R. Crocker, The Racial Factor in International Relations, p. 15.
38 Alan Walker, op. cit., np.
The psychological view of race presumed that the coloured world did not understand the rules and disciplines of civilized discourse. Logic and rationality were, according to this view, primarily European attributes. They made diplomacy possible. Crocker left no doubt that many of those who claimed to be the victims of racial prejudice were emotionally unbalanced, hence the unpredictable excesses grouped under the catch-all of "emotionalism." This style of analysis was apparent in some of the reporting of the famous gathering of Asian and African nations in Bandung in 1955, an event that Crocker had attended as an observer. For some, the long, florid speeches and passionate rhetoric pointed unequivocally to childishness and instability. These were people who lacked self-control. Then again, too much self-control in an Asian leader could appear sinister. It was a very fine line.39

If racial grievances could be traced to "emotionalism" and psychological causes, it followed that the best way of dealing with the problem was to employ psychological strategies in return. Europeans had to learn that coloured people were extremely sensitive about real and perceived racial slights, so much so that it was better to run the risk of being too polite and courteous than not courteous enough. If the disadvantage of race being "in the mind" was the emotional volatility that surrounded the issue, the benefit was that such a grievance could be addressed without the need to sacrifice European living standards; it was not resources that needed redistribution but "esteem" in the hope that this might result in fewer bruised egos among non-Europeans. Crocker concluded his address with a plea for behavioural change: "it is common sense and a matter of self-interest to be scrupulously

courteous, always avoiding the provocative and always cultivating the conciliatory approach on both sides." The message for white Australia was clear: Australians would have to show that they did not consider themselves superior to coloured people. If Australians could establish their reputation for friendliness, it was just possible that they might also be accepted as a people free of racial prejudice and therefore entitled to be left to develop and populate the country as they saw fit. In short, a change of manners accompanied by a firm repudiation of racial superiority might well avoid the need to change the immigration policy itself.

This reform strategy was at its height in the 1950s and its purpose was not to dilute immigration restrictions and weaken the White Australia Policy, but to maintain it. Crocker recognized that it was not easy to sustain the argument that a people without racial prejudice might still claim the right to exclude non-Europeans. Australians were not discriminating on the grounds of race, Crocker maintained, but were seeking to avoid "communal problems" of a kind that had caused so much tension and bloodshed, not least in India following partition. To accommodate those who argued that it was not necessary to impose an absolute exclusion on non-European immigration in order to avoid a communal problem, Crocker conceded that small numbers of non-Europeans might be allowed to settle in Australia. It was Crocker's hope that Australia could present itself to the world, and more particularly Asia, as a hospitable neighbour with no racial prejudices and no history of discrimination: "The good nature and friendliness of the average Australian fortunately predisposes him to being a good neighbour, as Asian students coming to Australia are discovering."  

40 W. R. Crocker, The Racial Factor in International Relations, p. 34.  
41 W. R. Crocker, The Racial Factor in International Relations, p. 32.
The Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, followed a line very similar to Crocker's, with the important exception that he did not believe in a quota system for non-European immigrants. In April 1958 Denis Warner, one of Australia's leading journalists specializing in Asia, interviewed the Prime Minister on "Meet the Press," a leading current affairs television program. The topic was "migration questions." Warner was consistently anti-communist in his views and was far from being a political radical, but his travels through Asia and his contacts with people high and low had convinced him that the White Australia Policy was an acute liability and a barrier to Australia's acceptance in the region. While showing his Prime Minister the respect common to the press corps of the day, Warner nonetheless probed what he saw as the contradictions in the government's position on race and immigration.

It was Menzies' gift to appear at once imperturbable and the voice of sweet reason. Cricket analogies appealed to him. Menzies showed no sign that Warner was sending down some curly deliveries. He began by acknowledging that the post-war immigration program had been vital in building Australia's population and was adamant that the program had to continue. In rejecting the idea of a quota for non-European immigrants, Menzies insisted that his position had nothing to do with feelings of superiority. He did not have the "faintest idea that we are superior to the people of Asia. Of course we are not." It is not so much the literal meaning of the words themselves that matters here, but the air of bewildered astonishment that a proposition so ludicrous could be expressed at all. In Menzies' view, racial superiority and colour prejudice were largely absent from Australia and, that |

42 Transcript from the tape-recording of the Prime Minister's comments on migration questions at the "Meet the Press" interview on TV station HSV 7, Melbourne, 27/4/1958. NAA: A446/182, 1961/65971.
being the case, it was his intention not to "reproduce in Australia a
state of affairs in which prejudices existed and social divisions and
dislikes existed on the basis of colour." These were represented as
disorders that afflicted other societies.

White Australia had long held the view that it was an island
of good health in a sea of disease. In the 19th century these were
typically infectious diseases like smallpox, cholera and the plague.
In arguing as he did, Menzies extended this understanding of
Australia's freedom from disease to include healthy attitudes
towards others. It followed that, as a psychologically healthy
people, Australians enjoyed social harmony and a pleasing absence
of colour prejudice. Just as smallpox had been represented as
something imported into the continent from Asia in the late 19th
century, so too was colour prejudice represented as foreign to
Australia: Australians did not think that way and to imagine they
did was taken as a sign of ignorance.

Warner was not convinced and asked: "Are you aware, Sir,
that this total exclusion of Asians is regarded as an unwarranted
insult by us to most of our Asian neighbours?" Menzies admitted
that he had heard something to that effect, "but I am bound to say
it has never been said to me." We may never know what General
Cariappa said to Menzies in private, but his niece Sagarie noted
that he once emerged from a discussion with Menzies saying, in
a conspiratorial whisper, that he had raised the subject of White
Australia.43 He may not have called it an "unwarranted insult,"
but nor could he have expressed satisfaction with a policy that
offended him deeply. Warner countered Menzies' denial by saying
he could find "many students now in Melbourne who would be
delighted to come and tell you just what I have said."

43 Sagarie Muthanna, Personal communication, January 2006.
There was a familiar answer to Warner's allegation. Crocker had used it in his 1956 lecture when he stated that Asian students had discovered the "good nature and friendliness of the average Australian." Menzies said that he had been informed that when Asian students went home they "tell their friends and relatives that they have never been in a place where they have found less colour consciousness than in Australia." It was the standard official response to allegations of the kind raised by Warner and others like him who had travelled widely through Asia and kept in regular contact with Asian people living in Australia. Asian student opinion was appropriated to support the view that Australia was the least colour conscious nation in the world. It was a finding that Menzies was happy to repeat.

There was, nonetheless, an element of truth in this claim. Asian visitors to Australia in the era of the White Australia Policy often expressed some anxiety at visiting a country that set such store on remaining white. There was a common expectation that they might experience racial insults and "colour bar" restrictions in their access to restaurants, theatres and public transport. When Laksiri Jayasuriya arrived at Sydney University as a private student from Ceylon in the early 1950s, he was showered with hospitality, invited into people's homes and given every encouragement to join in.44 In retrospect, it appeared to be a community determined to show that its racist reputation was undeserved. By the late 1950s, Richard Casey presided over an Asian Visitors Program, funded by Colombo Plan money and designed to show Asian leaders of opinion, particularly journalists, that Australians were not a colour conscious people. Casey also saw to it that all Australian cities had formed Australia–Asia Associations to ensure that Asian visitors

were looked after. Hospitality was encouraged and supported in the knowledge that Australia’s reputation was at stake. The objective was to disentangle the White Australia Policy from allegations of racial superiority. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the elimination of feelings of racial superiority was considered a national priority and not, as it might seem, in order to relax and modify the White Australia Policy but to maintain it. In a similar manner the term “White Australia” was never used in official documents and Casey repeatedly discouraged its use among journalists.45

While Menzies steadfastly denied that there was any element of racial discrimination in Australia’s immigration policy, the Cariappa controversy made the pretence that much harder to sustain. Cariappa may have behaved indiscreetly and undiplomatically, but he could not be dismissed as ignorant or out of touch with Asian opinion. Veteran journalists like Warner knew the policy was widely regarded in the region as an insult, just as they knew that it was a question constantly under review in the Department of External Affairs. At the height of the Cariappa controversy in July 1954 one of the senior figures in the Press Gallery, Douglas Wilkie, pointed to the widening gap between what Australians wanted to believe about their immigration policy and how it was perceived in the region: “The plea that our White Australia Policy is purely economic, and not based on racial prejudice, may satisfy us. But to most Asians it sounds like poppycock.”46 Wilkie had no faith in the official strategy of maintaining that “informed Asians” understood and accepted the White Australia Policy. However, as sceptical as he was, even Wilkie clung to the hope that Asian opinion could be effectively

placated and conciliated by the introduction of a quota system. This, he believed, would help “preserve the White Australia doctrine” while also purging it “of its offensiveness to Asians.”

Preserving the doctrine remained the focus of attention.

Through the 1950s the Australian government placed enormous faith in winning acceptance in Asia, if not support, by declaring Australians to be a hospitable people free from colour consciousness. This strategy was prompted by the belief that the Second World War had accelerated the pace of change in the non-European world, while simultaneously reducing European power and influence. In a world growing increasingly “coloured,” the white races would have to not only shed pretensions to superiority but adopt a new and more conciliatory racial etiquette. In Australia, which had been so explicit about the preservation of a “white nation,” the denial of racial superiority was considered particularly critical as was the need to cultivate a reputation for hospitality. These strategies were not designed to reform Australian immigration laws, but to prolong White Australia. This is not to deny that an increased exposure to Asia through the 1950s also created genuine interest and deeper cross-cultural awareness.

The ambiguities in this process are apparent in one of the final acts of the Cariappa drama. In 1960 Prime Minister Menzies floated the idea that Governors-General should be drawn from Commonwealth countries. He made it known that General Cariappa might well be a suitable Governor-General for Australia. It seems an unlikely proposition; but, for all his criticisms of the White Australia Policy, Cariappa liked Australia and, though still a comparatively young man, had found no fulfilling role in

47 Douglas Wilkie, op. cit., p. 6.
India. Moreover, it appeared that he and Menzies got on rather well. The advantages for Menzies are also apparent. It would surely demonstrate that Australia was a country without colour consciousness if it was prepared to welcome General Cariappa as Governor-General. Unhappily for historians, this was not to be.

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