

## From Henry Parkes to Geoffrey Blainey: A Stronger or Persistent Strain of ‘White Australia’

*Takao Fujikawa*

### Introduction

In the mid 1980s Geoffrey Blainey’s criticism of Asian immigration touched off a flood of immigration debates. Although his views were repudiated by major parties, revisionist interpretation of Australian society and history has never died out. The criticism of ‘black armband’ view of history and ‘history wars’ followed suit. Hansonism was repudiated, but was finally embraced into mainstream politics as stringent border controls and changed meaning of multiculturalism. It is easy to see a great divide between Keith Windschuttle and ‘our’ history and attribute resurrected ‘racism’ to him. Or attribute him to resurrected ‘racism’. However, why is ‘racism’ so persistent?

It may be because racism or so called colour-blind racism, a milder but persistent strain of racism has always been part of modern democratic society. ‘The great divide’ might be more of ideological rather than of real nature. Blainey quite clearly refutes a type of racism by his definition. By doing so he distances himself from the Social Darwinist tradition of ‘White Australia’. Yet was history of ‘White Australia’ so white and so racist that everyone can distance oneself from it? In this paper I want to trace a persistent strain of ‘White Australia’ into the nineteenth century by analyzing the statements by Henry Parkes when such phrase hardly existed.

### Liberal democracy

In her *History of the White Australia Policy* Myra Willard stated, “In the formation of their policy the leaders of the people were not actuated by any idea of the inferiority of the mentality or physique of the excluded peoples.” Though she also contradictorily conceded in the footnote, “(I)t is not always true of the people’s representatives as a whole – They consequently were more open to the influences of race prejudice, and judged Asiatic peoples by their coolie representatives in Australia”<sup>(1)</sup>. Such inconsistency disappears in Keith Windschuttle’s argument where he asserts that the White Australia Policy was a rational and progressive product of its times based on civic patriotism rather

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(1) Myra Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1923, p.191.

than racial nationalism. He quotes the former sentence from Willard, but disregards her discreet footnote as a historian.<sup>(2)</sup>

According to Willard Australians believed that, “because of this fundamental dissimilarity, Asiatics would be equally dangerous to their nationality, whether they remained an alien element in the population, or gradually fused racially with them.”<sup>(3)</sup> The former would lead to racial division, and the latter to the death of their British-Australian nationality. It is not surprising that a conservative historian like Windschuttle endorses Willard’s argument. However, from a totally different stand point, this perspective was parallelly repeated also by Phil Griffiths, a Marxist historian. He describes these two possibilities as objections to allowing Australian colonies to become a slave-style regime on the one hand and to destroying parliamentary democracy on the other. Both referred to Tasmania’s young Attorney-General, Andrew Inglis Clark as supporting evidence.<sup>(4)</sup>

Griffiths asserts that “this strategic concern” was critically important and frequently overlooked by researchers, and he also maintains that White Australia owed far more to Mill than Social Darwinism. At this point Griffiths clearly diverges from Willard and Windschuttle, and becomes a critic of liberal (bourgeois) democracy in the nineteenth century.<sup>(5)</sup> The argument here assumes some resemblance to that of Ann Curthoys. She argues that the exclusion of immigrants on the basis of race or national culture is an integral part of liberal democracy.<sup>(6)</sup>

Griffiths then refers to Henry Reynolds’s article on racism and national discourses where Reynolds maintains that the egalitarianism based on the individual could be one of the most powerful arguments used against indigenous causes.<sup>(7)</sup> Interestingly Reynolds also quotes James Stephen’s reflection on the causes of the white man’s hatred towards the black and regards his reflection as a penetrating insight. However, Stephen, permanent Under-secretary for the Colonial Office, was one who was accredited with the genesis of ‘White Australia’ and with whose perspective colonial liberals like Henry Parkes would have willingly identified themselves.

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(2) Keith Windschuttle, *The White Australia Policy: Race and Shame in the Australian History Wars*, Sydney: Macleay Press, 2004, pp.8-9, p.284; for the more recent reappraisal of ‘White Australia’ policy, see Gwenda Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, Carlton North: Scribe Publications, 2005; Sean Brawley, *The White Peril: Foreign Relations and Asian Immigration to Australasia and North America 1919-1978*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 1995 is suggestive on a number of aspects.

(3) Willard, op.cit, pp.191-2.

(4) Phil Griffiths, “Towards White Australia: The Shadow of Mill and the Spectre of Slavery in the 1880s Debates on Chinese Immigration”, Paper presented to the 11th Biennial National Conference of the Australian Historical Association, Brisbane, 4 July 2002, pp.1-2 (Retrieved from Racism and Class in Australian History Work by Phil Griffiths, Canberra, Australia: <http://members.optusnet.com.au/~griff52/racism.html>, 3/11/2008); from more theoretical point of view Andrew Markus’s analysis of the dominant type of race relations may be helpful, Andrew Markus, *Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia and California 1850-1901*, Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, pp.242-245.

(5) Ibid., p.2, p.9, p.10.

(6) Ann Curthoys, “Liberalism and Exclusionism: A Prehistory of the White Australia Policy”, in Laksiri Jayasuriya, Jan Gothard, and David Walker, eds, *Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation*, Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2003, pp.9-10.

(7) Henry Reynolds, “Racism and Other National Discourses” in Geoffrey Gray and Christine Winter, *The Resurgence of Racism: Howard, Hanson and the Race Debate*, Clayton: Monash Publications in History, 1997, p.33.

Reynolds emphasizes the importance of “liberal nationalism” and states that “(i)t seems to me, then, that we could have had Australian nationalism much as it was, with restrictive immigration, with deportation of the Kanakas, with restrictions on Aborigines, if it had just been based on Mill’s liberal nationalism and not on Social Darwinism. In other words there are extremely important and powerful currents – not only liberal nationalism but also developmentalism and egalitarianism—that are not the same as racism in its classical sense but with which we still have to contend.”<sup>(8)</sup> Griffiths agrees that White Australia owed far more to Mill than Social Darwinism. In the following pages I will trace a stronger or persistent strain of ‘White Australia’ by examining the liberal nationalism of Henry Parkes rather than his classical racism.<sup>(9)</sup>

Against the background of conservative endorsement of ‘White Australia’ policy, it is understandable that recent Australian research tends to focus on the Social Darwinist side of ‘White Australia’ in the near past. However it seems to me that the emphasis on Social Darwinist type of racism could be used to shield the contemporary colour-blind racism from our view and effectively alienate the racist past from the present liberal democracy.<sup>(10)</sup> Moreover, it has also been apparent to Japanese observers that there was the global colour line around the Pacific Rim in the first half of the twentieth century as it was a political reality for Japan to live with for nearly a century. This view of the racially divided world, in turn, is frequently used as a justification for Japanese revisionist history, which now attempts to deny the responsibility of the old militarist and colonialist regime.

## The Indian coolies and Chinese

Henry Parkes was first elected to the New South Wales Parliament in 1854. At first he was considered a politician in a small radical minority group. He then built himself a liberal political faction and advanced his political career as a major player in nineteenth century New South Wales politics. He was Premier in 1881 and 1888 when major Chinese immigration restriction bills were passed.<sup>(11)</sup>

In 1854 Parkes chaired the select committee on Asiatic labor and he had come to occupy a prominent place in Asian immigration issues since then. The report from the committee reached the conclusion that a colonial protectorate for contract workers from Asia would be necessary, “both for the purpose of securing justice to the friendless immigrant, and as a measure of

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(8) Ibid., pp.36-37.

(9) Classical racism could be easily reconstructed from Parkes’s speech as well as that of a prominent politician like Alfred Deakin by looking at their arguments as a whole.

(10) cf. Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2002; Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*, Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008.

(11) Two biographies of Henry Parkes, A.W. Martin, *Henry Parkes: A Biography*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1980 and Robert Travers, *Grand Old Man of Australian Politics: The Life and Times of Sir Henry Parkes*, Kenthurst, NSW: Kangaroo Press, 1992 are not very useful for analysing his ideas on ethnic and racial difference.

precaution against the introduction of malignant and infectious diseases.”<sup>(12)</sup> However, the report also stated that the experiment with Asian contract workers failed and would not be resumed. The report besides mentioned that the introduction of Eurasians from India in which Parkes was involved as a recruiter of compositors for his newspaper, the *Empire*, was a failure. Hence there was actually no need for the protectorate. Parkes was then not a relentless agitator against Asian immigrants. He assumed, at least, an ambivalent attitude towards Asian indentured labour, which was probably no more contradictory than a free trade labour government introducing so-called ‘guest workers’ from the Pacific nations.

On 7 July, earlier in the same year, Parkes, in moving the resolutions on immigration and especially coolie immigration, stated that “(t)he want of population to be supplied must, he believed, be made up of the Great Germanic Nations of Europe” ... “from which they all sprang”. He similarly emphasized the importance of upholding the dignity of labour, for which they should not introduce “a class which could not fail to be looked upon as a degraded class”. By doing so, he referred to the same feeling acting in the United States. Yet, while denouncing the Indian coolies, he, in contrast, praised the Chinese to the extent that he asserted that “the Chinese who had been introduced into this colony had done well; and he fully believed, with the trading spirit and enterprise they possessed, that many of these persons would be found among the leading tradesmen of the colony.” Finally he maintained that “what he complained of was, not that these men should come to the colony, but that they should be introduced, in a special way, for the advantage of a special interest.”<sup>(13)</sup>

Parkes’s objection was based on the view that Indian coolie immigration was an inferior class of colonists who had to leave the colony, were forced to do the work required of them without hope, did not and could not feel attached themselves permanently to the soil. Apparently he felt superior to Indian coolies, but he also sought to maintain his version of ‘democratic’ nature of society. One of his greatest objections was to the fact that the Indian immigration was ‘guest workers’ who could not “share in the interest of every class, and in none more than another”. He clearly recognized that the indentured workers might well undermine the basis of democratic society because of their unequal status in the colony. The resolutions he proposed were more apparently racist, aiming at “a coloured or inferior race”, but the argument by Parkes was more nuanced and could have been even more so if politically corrected for being suitable for our contemporary taste.

On 15 August 1854 Parkes moved another resolution, this time specifically on the Indian coolie immigration, which resulted in the above-mentioned committee. Setting aside “the advisability of the introduction of men of colour”, he demanded an enquiry as to the protection of Indian coolies in the colony and “in order to prevent the introduction of any malignant disease

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(12) “Report from the Select Committee on Asiatic Labor”, *NSW Legislative Council, Votes and proceedings of the Legislative Council* [microform], 1854-55, vol.2, 919-23, p.5.

(13) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July 1854.

into the colony”. He succeeded in this attempt by limiting the purpose of the enquiry chiefly to the protection of immigrants. It is nonetheless noteworthy that disease already occupied a prominent place in one of the earliest enquiries into Asian immigration.<sup>(14)</sup>

### Aftermath of the golden age

In 1858 Chinese immigrants started to arrive at Sydney in a sufficient number to give alarm to many New South Wales politicians. On 9 April Charles Cowper, Premier, moved the second reading of the Chinese immigration restriction bill, on which lively debate ensued. Parkes opposed the bill because he believed that it was not stringent enough to be of prohibitory character. He maintained that the popular feeling would not countenance a population of this nature. Although he stated that the Chinese were generally “well conducted, and obedient to the law, and interfered with no man’s rights”, he predicted that it would change when they became numerous. He emphasized the possible arrival of a large number of Chinese, which would change “the character of these colonies.” On 20 May the definition of Chinese became a topic of the debate and British subjects were excluded from the application of the bill. We do not know if Parkes supported this revision or not.<sup>(15)</sup>

On 15 June Parkes urged the government to proceed immediately with the Chinese restriction bill. On 18 June the discussion on the bill was resumed in the committee of the whole. In support of making the bill more restrictive, he argued that the Chinese were in every way more objectionable than convicts, and that he could not tolerate “the immigration of an inferior and degraded race like this”. On June 24 an amendment, though unsuccessful, was proposed to make special arrangements to make sure that the Chinese immigrants did not suffer from small-pox.<sup>(16)</sup> The bill was passed by the Legislative Assembly, but rejected by the Legislative Council by 17 to 4. Only the Lambing Flat riots in 1860–61 would eventually enable the government to enact the Chinese immigration restriction law in NSW.

The debate over another Chinese immigration restriction bill started in view of repeated riots against the Chinese on the Lambing Flat goldfields near the present town of Young. This debate witnessed a well-developed argument by Parkes on the immigration restriction. On 7 March 1861 he presented a petition to the Legislative Assembly from Sydney’s mercantile firms for the protection of the Chinese at Lambing Flat. On the following day John Lucas moved the second reading of the Chinese immigration regulation bill as a private member’s bill by bitterly denouncing the character of Chinese immigrants.<sup>(17)</sup>

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(14) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 August 1854; it must be pointed out that “Report from the Select Committee on Asiatic Labor” did not provide a detailed picture of Parkes’s objections to Asian indentured workers as Curthoys asserts. It is a more neutral document as far as pros and cons of indentured labour were concerned.

(15) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 April 1858, 21 May 1858.

(16) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 June 1858, 19 June 1858, 25 June 1858, and 1 July 1858.

(17) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 March 1861, 9 March 1861.

On this occasion Parkes asserted that he “did not intend to base his support of the exclusion of Chinese – by an abuse of Chinese nation” and that “had no sympathy in that extravagant and unjustifiable abuse”. He believed that the Chinese were “a sober, steady, industrious, and powerful body of people.” However, he asserted that the Chinese came as an alien element to live apart and worked only for their advantage, and carried gold to China, which “was destined to be the natural enemy of this country.” He argued that “(h)is opposition to them was the opposition of enemy to enemy. He admitted, if hon. members chose, that with us they had equal power, were equal in moral character, in industrial power, equal in courage, and in power of endurance”, but he regarded them as belonging to the enemy nation, and thought of them as “aliens to us in religion, in social rights, everything that was respected and regarded”, and he believed that they might eventually “overwhelm the present inhabitants”. Thus, he argued, “they had the duty of self-preservation to perform, and in this respect were quite justified in putting an end to an immigration that threatened their very existence.”<sup>(18)</sup>

For Parkes, “To call this measure un-English was also absurd”, because England would have acted in a more drastic manner if she had faced with the Chinese immigrants in the same proportion to the entire population as did New South Wales. Parkes was to prove right. In 1968 the British government proposed to restrict the entry of citizens of the United Kingdom who “have no substantial connection with this country”, that is, the Kenyan Asians who had legitimately acquired UK passports. Ironically for the Secretary of State for Home Affairs of UK, “This is a unique situation. There has been no precedent for it, as far as I know.” Though the British government backed off because of international pressure, such attitude was reflected on the Immigration Act of 1971, which “had significant racial implications”, by attempting to limit the access of non-whites to the territory in colour-blind terms.<sup>(19)</sup>

On 5 April during the debate on the bill in the committee of the whole, Parkes explained the meaning of the self-preservation. He stated,

“The circumstance of any great body of men living in state of disability in any country had always exercised a demoralising influence on the public mind of that country. Such had been the tendency of slavery in the United States – and such had also been the tendency of convictism in the earlier days of the colony. This inroad of Chinese could not fail to damage and denationalise the character of the country in proportion as it expanded. These people did not come here in a manner that was at all calculated to promote the welfare and advance the interests of the community”.<sup>(20)</sup>

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(18) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March 1861.

(19) John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.150-151.

(20) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April 1861.

To what extent did such a view reflect the genuine thoughts of Parkes? Did Parkes sincerely want to uphold the equality of people in the colony? Or was it the mere rhetorical means to achieve the end? On 24 April Charles Cowper, Premier, moved the second reading of the Goldfields bill of 1861, by which a separate area would be set aside for aliens, namely the Chinese, and that the commissioner would have the discretionary power of refusing miners' right to any alien. The response by Parkes to this bill was intriguing. He disapproved this bill,

“as he considered it opposed to our whole system of government and jurisprudence. He had always opposed the introduction of Chinese into the colony, because he felt that if they were permitted to come here, their being here would, in a short time, cause the existence of a separate and distinct class in our community. This bill would even to a great extent cause the existence of the same danger. The colony had always made a boast of the equality of all its denizens before the law, but how was this boast to be maintained if they took one class of the community and pointed out to them the spot on which only they should be allowed to work. Keep them out of the colony if they would, but, once admit them, and then they would be placed upon the same footing as the rest of the population.”<sup>(21)</sup>

Parkes even said, “Why they would not be able to support themselves and so would be thrown into competition with the ordinary labour of the country”? He objected to the discrimination against the Chinese within the country because that would produce a separate class of people within community. He was basically consistent both against and for the Chinese at least on this score. On 10 April Parkes presented a petition from 118 former Chinese residents at Lambing Flat. On 9 May he requested the appointment of commissioners to investigate the cases of the Chinese who claimed the compensation for loss sustained by the riot at Lambing Flat.<sup>(22)</sup> Nevertheless, his insistence on the equality was also limited. He was willing to grant the Chinese the right of naturalization, but at the same time wanted to exclude them “entirely from the exercise of the elective franchise.”<sup>(23)</sup>

The Chinese immigration bill was overwhelmingly passed by the Legislative Assembly, but again rejected by the Legislative Council. However, later in the year, a similar bill was reintroduced by the government and finally approved by the Council.<sup>(24)</sup>

In 1866 when the number of Chinese immigrants apparently decreased, the Chinese immigration restriction repeal bill was introduced into the Legislative Assembly by John Dumore Lang, who was arguably the first republican politician in Australia. In opposing the bill, Parkes further disclosed his principle on his opposition to Chinese immigration. He first

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(21) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 April 1861.

(22) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 April 1861, 11 April 1861, 10 May 1861.

(23) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 April 1861.

(24) See *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 September 1861, 17 October 1861.

repudiated the argument against the Chinese based on the notion of Chinese inferiority. He then criticized the supporters of Chinese immigration. He stated:

“He should like to see the advocate of Chinese immigration, who was prepared to extend his principles to their full consequences, and accept freely these Chinese, admitting them to all the privileges he himself enjoyed, receiving them into his family, and willing to accept matrimonial alliances with them. If he would not do that, it was obvious he did not wish to maintain that equality of rights that we had, after a struggle, established in the country. The conclusions could not be escaped from that, the object was to introduce a dependent class, and to erect ourselves into a dominant class. – he stood up here as a citizen of the country – a representative of the people – to resist by every effort the bringing into this country a class of persons who should only have a permissive existence. – We were here to found a British colony, – and one condition of the British character was that the people from the humblest to the highest should be free and equal, socially and politically. The Act which had been denounced received the sanction of the constituencies, and by a country constitutionally governed”.<sup>(25)</sup>

Parkes justified the discriminative measure against the Chinese apparently on the principle based on liberal and egalitarian nationalism rather than on racial inferiority. He thus succeeded in burying the bill in the Assembly. In 1867, however, he unsuccessfully opposed a similar bill on the same ground.<sup>(26)</sup>

### The seamen’s strike

On 5 March 1879, Parkes as Colonial Secretary, introduced a Chinese immigration restriction Bill into the Legislative Assembly after the seamen’s strike against the employment of Chinese on an inter-colonial scale. In the debate Parkes, after briefly referring to the strike as the reason for bringing in the bill, employed a similar rhetoric emphasizing Chinese incapability of “mingling with people of English origin” and of assisting in “the founding of nations on the English model”. At the same time he asserted as before that “he had never joined in any attempt to darken the character of the Chinese”. He then stated:

“He was altogether opposed to the introduction of any class of people into this country on any secondary conditions whatever, on any conditions other than the conditions of freedom and equality under which we live ourselves. Now the question arose: Were the gentlemen who were in favour of unrestricted Chinese immigration prepared to

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(25) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 August 1866.

(26) See *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 September 1867, 5 October 1867.



admit the Chinese when they came to this country to a perfect equality with the other classes of the country? If they were not, then he said the mere prospect of creating an inferior and degraded class in the country was in itself sufficient to induce us to resist in every possible way the increase of these people among our population.”<sup>(27)</sup>

In order to support the bill he then extensively quoted ‘Chinese problems’ from the documents of the Pacific states and the speeches of the United States Congress. On the other hand, Michael Fitzpatrick, the leader of the Opposition, objected to the bill because he thought that inferior races could be employed for menial jobs in the northern part of the colony, which would have the effect of elevating the English workman to a higher status.<sup>(28)</sup> He also maintained that the temporary nature of Chinese immigration could not harm the character of the British colony. Parkes’s rhetoric therefore was not so hollow as having no concrete adversary. His argument in support of equality had a reality as long as a group of politicians approved a racially stratified society.

According to Parkes, the Chinese immigration was to be prevented not because the Chinese were inferior, but because they would be placed on an inferior position by colonists like the Opposition leader and would become a separate class, which eventually was to undermine the conditions of freedom and equality. This is a liberal, democratic and nationalist argument against the Chinese at least as pernicious as, and potentially more so than Social Darwinist indictment.

Yet, despite his opposition to the creation of an inferior class, Parkes himself supported the clause to prevent Chinese immigrants from acquiring real estate. He thus contradicted himself by attempting to create inequality within the colonial society. One of the principal objections raised against this clause was that there was no necessity for “depriving Chinese of the rights of citizenship when they were once admitted here”; a remarkably similar argument to the one Parkes had used against the Goldfields bill of 1861.<sup>(29)</sup>

## Towards White Australia

Although the bill of 1879 was passed in the Legislative Assembly, it was overwhelmingly rejected by the Legislative Council. After the inter-colonial conference in 1880, a new Chinese immigration restriction bill was again introduced into the Legislative Assembly by Parkes in line with the principles agreed upon at the conference. The bill passed through the Parliament in 1881.

In introducing this bill Parkes claimed “to have taken the same course, and to have entertained precisely the same views over a period of twenty years”. This assertion seems to me

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(27) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 March 1879.

(28) *Ibid.*

(29) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March 1879.

more or less true as his rhetorical justification for the restriction. He used arguments against the Chinese repeatedly on democratic and nationalist rather than racial grounds, although he quoted racially derogatory texts extensively from committee reports, parliamentary debates and other sources without directly denouncing Chinese inferiority and degradation.<sup>(30)</sup>

He maintained, as before, that he objected to Chinese immigration, not because they were inferior, but because they did not help the permanent settlement, that they could not promote the progress of a British population, that they might easily outnumber the British population, and that they would interfere with the manual labour in the colony and produce social discords.<sup>(31)</sup>

The bill, while aiming more strictly to prevent the Chinese workers from landing on New South Wales, actually created a second class of residents in the colony by placing any ship carrying a Chinese under quarantine, by providing for the responsibility for the Chinese residents already in the colony to obtain an exemption certificate, and by prohibiting the Chinese from holding real property. Parkes, while adopting apparently discriminatory measures against the Chinese, justified this on the usual reasons for the maintenance of equality and “the same political rights and privileges” in society. He believed that the inferior class “would be an eternal curse to the country.”<sup>(32)</sup>

Parkes’s contradictory statements were castigated by W.J. Foster, a member of the Legislative Assembly. On the clause dealing with the right of holding real property Foster stated:

“The Colonial Secretary had said that it was very undesirable to have here people who would not be absorbed among the population. The honorable gentleman at the same time agreed that a moderate number of Chinese could be absorbed; but it seemed to him that this clause would tend to prevent that absorption. If we were about to make pariahs of the Chinese who had come into the colony; if we were about to treat them rather as brutes who had no proper place of abode than as human beings, it would almost better to at once exterminate them – to drive them into the sea. Let us keep the Chinese out of the colony if we could; but, having them here, let us treat them as human beings.”<sup>(33)</sup>

The argument reminds us of Parkes when he opposed the the Goldfields bill of 1861. Foster sarcastically added that “(i)f it were the intention of the Government that the Chinese should be treated as mere brutes, he could understand their reason for inserting this provision in the Bill.”<sup>(34)</sup> On the third reading of the bill, Parkes reiterated his view on the bill. He admitted that his argument is inconsistent, but retorted, “Of course it is objectionable to pass a measure

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(30) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, vol.5, p.94.

(31) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, vol.5, pp.94-95.

(32) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, vol.5, p.100.

(33) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, vol.5, p.349.

(34) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, vol.5, p.350.

which imposes on one class of persons disabilities not imposed on other classes, and nothing but absolute necessity can justify our taking that course”.<sup>(35)</sup> Here Parkes seems to be much closer to us, who discriminate people on ethnic and religious grounds on the pretext of waging the War on Terror from “absolute necessity”.

In the debate in response to the Legislative Council’s amendments, Parkes repeated his usual argument despite the discriminatory measures he introduced by himself and the sarcastic criticism by W.J. Forster against them. He stated, “I desire to see all persons who come here put on an equal footing, and it is because I cannot place Chinese on a footing of equality with ourselves that I wish to restrict their coming here. If they come here, I wish to put them on an equal footing.”<sup>(36)</sup>

Parkes’s argument became increasingly otiose and empty, while the Chinese were decisively characterized as incapable of assimilating with the British. The 1880’s debates also saw a slight change in his reasoning. He virtually asserted that he could not accept Chinese immigrants because he himself could not treat them equally, and that they should be excluded because the unequal treatment would make them an inferior class in society. Practically speaking the racial discrimination by Parkes made the exclusion of Chinese essential to the preservation of the ideal of equal society. In other words Parkes’s efforts to create an equal society depended on the exclusion of the Chinese as he would not treat them equally. We now see the process that discrimination created exclusion and exclusion in turn created discrimination and vice versa.

## Our contemporary world

On 3 May 1888, the SS *Afghan* sailed to Sydney with Chinese passengers who had not been allowed to disembark at Melbourne. On her arrival it was immediately placed in quarantine and riotous anti-Chinese demonstrations ensued. In such circumstances Parkes introduced a more prohibitive and discriminatory Chinese immigration restriction bill. His argument in support of the bill was similar to those on former occasions. The bill passed through the first and second readings and the committee of the whole in the Legislative Assembly just in one day. However, the bill was amended in the Legislative Council so that internal discriminatory measures against the Chinese such as restrictions on residence and work were eliminated.<sup>(37)</sup>

It was extremely ironical that the attempts to create a second class of citizens in colonial society were initiated by Parkes and were considerably constrained by the Legislative Council. Thwarting the possibility of producing such a class was originally one of the main reasons why, Parkes maintained, he had objected to the Chinese immigration. In contrast the Legislative Council had been overwhelmingly not only in favour of free trade of people as well as goods, but

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(35) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, vol.5, p.414.

(36) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, vol.6, p.1368

(37) See *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, vol.32, p.4696, pp.4756-4836; vol.33, pp.4856-83, pp.5014-16, pp.5032-35, p.5106, p.5109.

also supportive of hierarchical society. Although the members of the Legislative Council were no less racist than Parkes and largely less consistent than he, they played the role of mitigating the severity of discriminatory measures against the Chinese immigrants.

The Chinese immigration restriction act of 1888 virtually prohibited the immigration of Chinese into Australia. In the following decades eventually all other non-white peoples with a few exceptions would be prevented from migrating to Australia. As that story has been well told in many histories, we now proceed to the analysis of the implications of Parkes's rhetoric.<sup>(38)</sup>

Richard Ely, when comparing Parkes with Andrew Inglis Clark, found in Parkes's argument against the Chinese, "the *topos* in its subtle form". In his definition a *topos* is formulaic structure of presentation where the underlying formula is familiar to hearers or readers. "In its subtle form, something like a rhetorical tour de force is aimed at: the characteristics called praiseworthy became the reason for undesirability of Chinese immigration"<sup>(39)</sup> I am not sure that his definition applies to Parkes's rhetoric in its entirety. However, I want to consider the relevance of the anti-Chinese rhetoric in the subtle form, or in my words a stronger or persistent strain of 'White Australia' to our contemporary world. To put it shortly, "Is Parkes still relevant to us?"

As I argued above, Parkes was not only persistent in attempting to prevent Chinese immigration, but also consistent in his rhetoric on so-called Chinese problem, a rhetoric "in its subtle form", over three decades. Moreover while he was arguably one of the most influential individuals in the development of 'White Australia', he was clearly not such a Social Darwinist as Blainey could distance himself from. He is thus in a sense probably still with us.<sup>(40)</sup>

By comparing Parkes's rhetoric with that of Blainey on immigration issues as part of nationalist tradition, I want to argue for the relevance of Parkes and liberal rhetoric to the present society. I believe that Parkes's anti-Chinese stance is an integral part of Australian democracy as it developed just as *All for Australia*, a book which is removed by some historians from the 'list' of works of Blainey as polemical, therefore non-history, is an integral part of Blainey as a historian. On the one hand Parkes was one of the founding fathers of the Commonwealth of Australia, while Blainey's contribution to Australian history writing is undeniable. However, their tacit approval of racial prejudice was inextricably bound up with such achievements on the other. Any attempt to salvage better part of them separately from the darker side poses a serious risk of uncritically accepting, approving and reenacting a stronger or persistent strain of

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(38) See, for reference, Gwenda Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, p.242, note 5.

(39) Andrew Inglis Clark, "Inglis Clark's 1888 'Memorandum' on Chinese Immigration" with an introduction and commentary by Richard Ely in Richard Ely, with M. Haward and James Warden (eds.), *A Living Force: Andrew Inglis Clark and the Ideal of Commonwealth*, Hobart: Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, 2001, pp.88-89 (Retrieved from University of Tasmania, Essays: [http://www.utas.edu.au/history\\_classics/clark/essays.html](http://www.utas.edu.au/history_classics/clark/essays.html) 4/11/2008).

(40) It is extremely doubtful to me that Parkes exploited the anti-Chinese sentiment in 1888 when it appeared to be a popular issue of some moment as Huttenback or Windschuttle maintained; see Keith Windschuttle, op.cit, p.93; R.A. Huttenback maintained that "Henry Parkes was a devout white supremacist and passionately anti-Chinese", and that Parkes was far from displeased when the building of Parliament was invaded by anti-Chinese demonstrators as he found an opportunity to use this incident for more stringent legislation (R.A. Huttenback, *Racism and Empire*, London: Cornell University Press, p.79, p.109).

‘White Australia’. This salvage could be done even with the emphatic denunciation of Social Darwinist type of racism. With this view in mind I want to ask firstly to what extent Blainey is similar to Parkes?

Parkes denounced the people who characterized the Chinese with derogatory terms. He thereby rhetorically distanced himself from ‘the influences of race prejudice’. Similarly Blainey, by adopting the narrow definition of racism, racism based on Social Darwinism, asserts that he and most Australians are not racists. Instead he blames people using these terms for seeing “race where it should not be seen”. In forms suitable to contemporary colour-blind society, Blainey even more tactfully distanced himself from race prejudice.<sup>(41)</sup>

Parkes tried to avoid holding the Chinese responsible for the introduction of the Chinese restriction bill. Its main reasons for the exclusion were that the Chinese would constitute a second class of citizens and that the British character of the colony should be preserved. Parkes argued, if not always, that it was not the Chinese but the colonists that would give rise to an inferior class of residents in the colony. Likewise Blainey claims that he is not blaming the migrants while referring to the old Australians’ legitimate grievances because of them.<sup>(42)</sup>

Parkes justified discrimination against the Chinese by resorting to liberal and egalitarian nationalism, whereas Blainey legitimates himself in the name of Australian democracy<sup>(43)</sup>, which has become so successfully sacrosanct that a radio personality airing racial prejudice through the media is now an indisputable right in Australia. Parkes tried to avoid personal observation of the Chinese and made use of other people’s observations to prove that the Chinese were unfit as colonists, just as Blainey quotes “the feelings of the silent majority” from residents “in the invaded suburbs”.<sup>(44)</sup>

The difference is that Parkes depended on evidence from the above such as Congressional or Parliamentary reports, while Blainey does so from the below like an old woman in Campsie, a suburb in Sydney. Blainey adopts the stance of a populist as Andrew Markus argues.<sup>(45)</sup> ‘Real’ as well as ‘prejudiced’ view of ordinary people could sometimes be more authentic and legitimate because Blainey claims that he speaks for the majority of Australians against elitist manipulation from Canberra. His authority to do this comes from his interpretation of history as an expert<sup>(46)</sup>

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(41) Geoffrey Blainey, *All for Australia*, North Ryde: Methuen Haynes, 1984, pp.39-40; as for further analysis of Blainey’s stance on immigration issues, see Andrew Markus and M.C. Ricklefs eds, *Surrender Australia? Essays in the Study and Uses of History: Geoffrey Blainey and Asian immigration*, Sydney : George Allen & Unwin, 1985, Deborah Gare, Geoffrey Bolton, Stuart Macintyre, Tom Stannage eds., *The Fuss that never Ended: The Life and Work of Geoffrey Blainey*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003 and M.C. Ricklefs, “The Asian immigration controversies of 1984-85, 1988-89 and 1996-97: A historical review” in *The Resurgence of Racism: Howard, Hanson and the Race Debate* ed. by Geoffrey Gray and Christine Winter, Clayton: Department of History, Monash University, 1997.

(42) Geoffrey Blainey, op.cit, p.134.

(43) Ibid, pp.44-50.

(44) Ibid, p.123.

(45) Andrew Markus, “The Politics of Race” in *The Fuss that never Ended*, pp.106-7.

(46) Geoffrey Blainey, op.cit., pp.22-23.

and his views sitting “very much in the middle ground”<sup>(47)</sup>. Parkes was different. He needed more ‘objective’ evidence to support his argument to differentiate himself from the ‘rubble’ of society. He also might have still lived, at least in the beginning, in the world where ‘people’ and ‘nation’ were not distinctly diverged, an ideal state where all residents were supposed to live in equality. The ideal continued to be the core of his rhetoric and influenced his argumentation.

Both Parkes and Blainey needed ‘real’ societies as models to draw lessons. Parkes frequently referred to the United States as a racially mixed society where ‘the blacks’, a second class of citizens endangered democratic institutions and the strife over it caused the Civil War. He also alluded to convict society as a dystopia from which they had just escaped. Blainey often mentioned the gold rush era which convinced Australians that a multicultural society did not work.<sup>(48)</sup>

There are other differences between them as they live in worlds a century apart. Parkes lived in nineteenth century New South Wales, part of the British Empire which forced him to face with the right of British subjects of Chinese origin. Meanwhile Blainey lives in an established nation-state which is bound to respect the right of any citizen irrespective of ethnic or racial origin, and in which international human rights play a more prominent role. Nevertheless, Blainey quoted the phrase from Parkes to conclude his *All for Australia*: “The crimson thread of kinship runs through us all”. “That crimson thread is vital for any nation” according to Blainey, and if Australians of this generation “are too eager to become ‘part of Asia’”, they could easily create tensions and troubles which would damage the future of Australia. Parkes in another guise is still vividly alive at least for Blainey’s personal conviction<sup>(49)</sup>.

To what extent then is Parkes relevant to the present society? This is ultimately the matter Australians will have to decide. However, there are indicators which suggest the degree of relevance between Parkes and contemporary society; the popularity of Blainey among the Australian public, the extent of acceptance of revisionist criticism of recent Australian historical scholarship as ‘black armband’ view of history, and the emerging nationalist culture in Australia. The ease with which such examples could be enumerated is itself an indicator of the structural relevance. Then what is the structural relevance? It is the discrepancy between globalizing capitalist economy and democracy in national mould. But this is another and longer story to tell elsewhere. What I maintain now is that Parkes’s nationalistic democracy is strong enough to be revived in contemporary society, especially when it was accommodated into explicitly colour-blind but implicitly colour-conscious mode of media atmosphere.

“The leaders of the people” who helped to build White Australia were aware that racism was objectionable at least in some respects, and therefore they developed a stronger or persistent strain of rhetorical defence of ‘White Australia’ or the anti-Chinese rhetoric in the subtle form.

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(47) Ibid, p.31.

(48) Ibid., p.22, p.102.

(49) Ibid., pp.158-163.

That rhetoric reincarnated in the present society could be skilfully defended by condemning Social Darwinism. The denial of apparent racism and race prejudice in the past could be used to help that rhetoric in the present to work as history in balance.