

at what the author believes are the unique contributions Murdoch made in Australia at this crucial period of the Japan-Australia relationship.

1.2 Murdoch's Contributions

In the history of any nation, there is a rare moment when the knowledge of a scholar is called upon to assist its leaders in determining the nation's direction. Murdoch's knowledge of Japan was called upon, though indirectly, at the critical moment in the Australia-Japan relationship. Murdoch responded to it in earnest. Aware of being the one who had most immediate knowledge of Japan, Murdoch attempted desperately to alert Australian leaders to their errors in interpreting Japan's intentions and to the imminent danger their errors could cause. Although his advice fell short of changing the mainstream thinking of Australian leaders, a number of documents remain today as evidence of his conscientious effort.

In the course of investigating Murdoch's life, guided by Meaney's excellent work, *Fears and Phobias* (Meaney 1996), the author came upon a number of letters and documents, which vividly describe Murdoch's efforts in this sphere. They also give a glimpse into that crucial moment in Australia's history relative to Japan.

In order to discuss Murdoch's contributions in this sphere, it is necessary to introduce Edmund L. Piesse, the Director of Military Intelligence between 1916-19, head of the Pacific Branch and Foreign Affairs Section of the Prime Minister's Department between 1919-23. Murdoch's major contributions took the form of being a personal friend and adviser to Piesse.

As previously mentioned, after Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905, Australia's attention was keenly turned to Japan. The policy-makers, their official advisers, and those intellectuals, who had an interest in foreign affairs, began serious assessment of both Japan's intentions and British policy in the Pacific. Piesse was among those who drew little comfort from the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. He did not hold much faith in the willingness and capability of Britain to protect Australia from the threat of Japan in

the Pacific.

When Britain became involved in the European war in 1914, Piesse responded in accordance with the strict intent of Australia's defence planning. He made clear that his first concern was Australia's security in the Pacific, and stated that he had 'no mind to volunteer for a European war'. He further declared that he was 'bound only to serve in the defence of Australia' (Meaney 1996). After Japan entered the war as Britain's ally, rather than feeling complacent, Piesse feared that Japan might take advantage of the war to further its ambitions in Asia and the Pacific.

Piesse needed reliable information sources in order to make his own assessment of the current situation and to predict Japan's future policy directions. He was uneasy with the long-standing arrangements in the Commonwealth, in which Australia heavily relied on Britain for intelligence information, including that which concerned the Pacific. He was afraid that Australia could risk its own security by constantly looking to Britain for vital intelligence information. He reasoned that the British viewed the Far Eastern question from a different perspective, and that British representatives were not always sympathetic to Australia's interests.

In November 1917, in response to Defence Minister Pearce's request for advice, Piesse suggested that Australia should establish its own Foreign Affairs section, rather than relying on Britain. The proposed section could provide the Australian government with full and reliable information relating to all Australian concerns, such as Japan's attitude to the 'White Australia Policy', the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and, more generally, the need for defence against Far Eastern nations. What Piesse was proposing was, in effect, the creation of an Australian Foreign Office (*ibid.*: 12-13).

Piesse also recommended that the Australian government should make more use of Murdoch's expert knowledge of Japan. The government supported the decision by the University of Sydney to promote Murdoch to a professorship in Oriental Studies, and provided the funds for the chair on the condition that Murdoch would travel to Japan during the long

vacation period. Underlining this understanding was that the information Murdoch obtained through his extensive contacts in Japan would be made available to the government (Piesse 1918).

By 1917, Piesse himself had started his study of the Japanese language in order to read Japanese newspapers and other source materials by himself. He also befriended Murdoch and came to respect the scholar. Piesse valued Murdoch's living knowledge of Japan and his intelligent perception as a man who had lived in Japan for nearly twenty five years. Murdoch in turn encouraged Piesse in his study of the language. Murdoch's influence, together with the information Piesse himself was able to gather through his own reading of Japanese material, gradually began to modify Piesse's hitherto held perception of Japan. Piesse had held an alarmist view of Japan when he took up the office of the Director of Military Intelligence in 1916. By 1918, he had become a more moderate and realistic observer of Japan. Meaney describes the better informed Piesse of 1918 by drawing attention to the informal submission Piesse made to Pearce, the Defence Minister, in 1918:

Piesse, instead of stressing the danger from Japan, raised doubts about Australia's preoccupation with that country and therefore about the level of defence expenditure. After reviewing the 'records about Japan in all the Departments', he considered that 'our policy of defence against Japan is inadequately supported by evidence. It was his view that 'hitherto her eyes have not been turned to us', and he added that Japanese public opinion 'is coming to have more influence and there is a growing opposition to any aggressive policy that might lead to war.' (Meaney 1996:12)

During the long vacation of 1918 -1919, Murdoch travelled to Japan and stayed from October 1918 to March 1919. His primary mission, besides the obvious purpose of collecting materials for teaching, was to obtain first-hand knowledge of Japan's policy in this uncertain period immediately following the war. Before his departure for Japan, Piesse and Murdoch established a direct personal channel of communication. Murdoch was to

write to Piesse at his home, addressing him as Mr. McCrae. McCrae was Mrs Piesse's maiden name. This precaution was taken to avoid the possible interception of letters by the Japanese authorities.

In his first letter addressed to Mr. McCrae from Japan on 6th December 1918, Murdoch's tone was optimistic:

Things now in Japan are vastly better than they were last year. The set-back that militarism has met with in Europe has its effect here; (Murdoch 1918a)

Murdoch further reported that the Japanese seemed to be fully alive to the danger in which militarism would result, and that 'some publishers have opened a great fight against militarism'. He further commented that 'the outlook seems to be improving' and that Japan was 'much more amenable to "sweet reasonableness" than it has been for the last decade or so' (ibid.).

Murdoch seemed to have made full use of the extensive contacts with a wide range of people, both amongst Japanese and foreign residents, that he had in Japan.

I've been very busy here, have had to meet all kinds of people, from Ambassadors and Vice-Ministers down to my friends the journalists. (Murdoch 1918b)

Murdoch was granted an interview with Shidehara Kijūrō, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs. He also had two sessions of meetings, each lasting two hours, with Roland Morris, the American Ambassador, which he reported as very useful. Murdoch's efforts in Japan were focused on gaining the most up-to-date information from the widest possible range of sources, so that he could paint an accurate picture of the current situation in Japan. It is evident that he conducted this work more as a conscientious scholar, rather than as a politically motivated envoy.

While Murdoch was still in Japan, the Peace Conference was proceeding in Paris with Prime Minister William Hughes heading the Australian

delegation. The situation which developed there shook Murdoch's optimism to the foundations. He had to make a quick re-assessment of the new political situation in Japan, which was developing as the result of the Paris Conference. At the Paris Conference, Hughes spearheaded the opposition to the Japanese delegates' desire to include a racial equality clause in the League of Nations Covenant. Japan reacted as news arrived from Paris. Murdoch had the opportunity to observe at first hand what effects it had on Japan. On his way home, hardly waiting for his ship to reach Australian shores, while still being kept in quarantine, he wrote to Piesse, sounding an alarm bell,

This racial discrimination agitation extends all over Japan; and it has been engineered by the military party. It may very well become dangerous if not met properly. I talked to the Japanese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs about the matter and I have had several dinners with my journalistic friends where I debated on the matter. ... This racial discrimination business is the most important thing just now... (Murdoch 1919a)

Piesse, through his own reading of Japanese newspapers, was already aware of new developments in Japan. Information brought back by Murdoch, and the scholar's perception of events, further alerted Piesse to potential danger. On 24th March, shortly after receiving briefings from Murdoch,⁹ Piesse sent the Chief of the General Staff a memorandum concerning 'The Present Movement in Japan against Racial Discrimination', which was based on Japanese press reports, 'as interpreted by a gentleman lately from the East' (Piesse 1919a). It is no doubt that the gentleman referred to was Murdoch.

In the memorandum, Piesse reported that 'all Japan is boiling with this cry for racial equality'. Alerted to the danger that this sensitive issue could be exploited by the factions in the Japan's military for their expansionist purposes, Piesse, in the memorandum, made a recommendation to the effect that Western leaders should consider this issue in a more sympathetic manner. He further recommended that they meet 'the reasonable wishes' of Japan's public opinion, in the hope of assisting those

democratic forces opposed to the militarists and imperialists. Piesse severely criticised Prime Minister Hughes' opposition to Japan's proposal for recognition of racial equality. He referred to Hughes' speeches at the Paris Conference and declared that those speeches 'could not fail to be offensive to a high spirited people'. Piesse further stated that the effect on Japan that Hughes' speeches had made was 'most serious', that they had helped to weaken liberal influences on Japanese policy and had given ammunition to those ultra-nationalists who desired to keep Japan out of the League of Nations (ibid.).

Three days after sending the memorandum, Piesse wrote to Watt, the Acting Prime Minister, with whom he had close personal contact, describing a set of proposals prepared by Murdoch for the purpose of appeasing the Japanese. The proposals included the recommendation that 'the Australian government accord Japanese the same right of entry as Europeans' and that 'the government should delete from the Naturalisation Act the provision forbidding the naturalisation of Asians' (Piesse 1919b; Watt 1919).

In the meantime, Murdoch continued his efforts to be in close touch with developments in Japan. The information coming from Japan was disturbing and only served to increase his anxiety. Hughes' strong opposition to Japan's proposal of the racial equality clause was coming from the Prime Minister's notion that the proposal, if adopted, would seriously pose a threat to the 'White Australia Policy'. On this Murdoch wrote to Piesse:

We can maintain the White Australia policy intact I believe, if we go about it in the right way: and that, too, without any fighting, and with very little unpleasantness. If we continue to play the game of the Japanese Military clique, it is quite possible that there will be something a good deal worse than a little unpleasantness. the military coterie, just when it was beginning to be otherwise discredited, has been able to range the whole Empire (of Japan) as an integral unit behind them.
(Murdoch 1919b)

In his letter to Piesse two weeks later, Murdoch's tone carried more urgency. Murdoch warned, in his characteristic style, of the possibility that this racial issue would develop into an outbreak of hostilities.

If we give Japan the opportunity of rising as the champion of the coloured races, we are playing a sorry game for ourselves.
(Murdoch 1919c)

He went further and even made his prediction on the far-reaching consequences:

We drive Japan to seek alliances, and by 1938 or so, we have Germany, Russia and Japan acting together - Japan in control over the inexhaustible resources of China. (ibid.)

Considering that the letter was written in 1919, this was a remarkable prediction and demonstrates the extent of the grasp that this well-travelled scholar had on the situation involving Japan.

One month later, the news on the further developments at the Paris Peace Conference did not ease Piesse's anxiety. He confided his disquiet in his letter to Lt. Commander J. G. Latham, a former director of Naval Intelligence and a member of the Australian delegation at the Peace Conference:

The whole business in Paris seems to have gone badly for us, from our apparent lack of cordiality towards the United States to the barren victory over racial discrimination. How much better it would have been to accept the Japanese amendment in one of its least noxious forms and rely on the opportunities the Covenant of the League gives to protect ourselves from any unfavourable interpretation. As it is we have been perhaps the chief factor in consolidating the whole Japanese nation behind the imperialists - and it needs little imagination to see how serious that may be with Japan's now assured opportunities expanding her power through China's resources. (Piesse 1919c)

In May 1919, the Cabinet agreed to establish a Pacific Branch of the Prime Minister's Department, the forerunner of the Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs. In the same month, Piesse was appointed to the post of Director of the Pacific Branch. Although Piesse was the initial instigator of the idea of Australia's own Foreign Affairs office, Piesse's appointment came as a surprise in the light of his severe criticism of Prime Minister Hughes for the latter's lack of diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference. It is understood, however, that the acting Prime Minister Watt had been a strong supporter of Piesse.

For his first major task as the Director, Piesse proposed an extensive tour of the Far East to make his own assessment of the situation in the region. The Cabinet accepted his proposal. From September 1919 to March 1920, Piesse travelled to Portuguese Timor, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, French Indo-China and China. One of his major tasks was to evaluate Japanese influence on, and penetration of the region. The grand tour ended with his five-week stay in Japan.

In Japan, Piesse consulted with wide range of people, including representatives from Britain and the United States. Piesse considered, however, that the most important discussion he had conducted in Japan was the one with Masanao Hanihara, Japan's Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs. The meeting took place at Gaimusho on 25th December 1919. Also present at the meeting was S. Shimizu, Consul-General of Japan at Sydney. The content of this discussion is found today in the 'Notes of Statements' made by Piesse and in Hanihara's written reply, both kept in the Australian Archives.

In the meeting, Piesse raised multiple issues concerning the two countries, including Australia's anxiety about Japan's so called 'southward expansion', her policy towards China, trade and attitudes of the Japanese press. Rather than describing each issue discussed, however, we will focus on the racial discrimination issue alone, as this issue caused the major difference of opinion between Piesse and mainstream Australian leaders.

Explaining his position as ‘a personal and unofficial capacity’, Piesse made his presentation in remarkably candid manner. He first explained the historical background which led Australia to the restrictive immigration policy, known as the ‘White Australia Policy’, although he avoided the terminology. He then described how the ‘events of the Peace Conference have given rise to further anxiety’.

The Japanese proposal in regard to the removal of restrictions on immigration seemed to threaten what most Australians regard as an absolutely vital policy. (Piesse 1919d, underline by Piesse)

In the meeting, Hanihara, instead of making an immediate response, requested Piesse for the written note of his statements, and promised him a written response at a later date. Piesse received Hanihara’s response in Manila on his way home on 20th February 1920.

In his response, Hanihara expressed that he valued Piesse’s information all the more as it was given in ‘all candour and unreserve’. On the issue of Japan’s proposal on racial equality at the Paris Conference, Hanihara states Japan’s position in very clear terms;

...the utterances of Japanese delegates and steps taken by them at the Conference, demonstrate that Japan’s object was not “the removal of restrictions on immigration”, but the elimination of racial discrimination - a discrimination which, for no reason but of the colour of skin deprives men of equal opportunity in life and often subjects them to an unbearable humiliation.
(Hanihara 1920)

Hanihara went further to assure Piesse that he ‘does not hesitate to admit the unwarrantableness of any attempt to deprive a state of its right to restrict immigration’, and that ‘Japan would never agree to an international agreement of the kind’. Hanihara, however, once again reiterated that Japan ‘strongly opposes a discrimination because of race’.

Japan’s frustration towards the western powers of the time was brought to

light when Hanihara stated in a later part of the response:

Japan has the misfortune of being a non-Christian and non-white Power, and has in consequence to undergo experiences, which are not even dreamt of by a European or American Power. All she (Japan) wants is a fair and equal opportunity for her people's legitimate and peaceful activities. (ibid.)

Piesse sent Hanihara's response to Prime Minister Hughes on 17th March 1920. Conscious that Hughes interpreted Japan's proposal of racial equality at the Peace Conference as posing a threat to Australia's immigration policy, Piesse, in his cover letter, called the Prime Minister's attention to the following:

Of the opinions expressed by Mr. Hanihara in this statement, the most interesting to Australia is the admission of "the unwarrantableness of any attempt to deprive a state of its right to restrict immigration". (Piesse 1920a)

Two days later, on 22nd March 1920, Piesse sent a comprehensive report to the Prime Minister based on his own observations in Japan. In it, he endeavoured to paint an accurate picture of the Japanese situation, and urged that Australia should understand the reasons behind Japan's policy, rather than interpreting her intentions as purely that of the imperialists. He referred to the commonly held view in Australia and in the West that Japan had a policy of acquiring territory for the sake of acquisition. Piesse stated:

In Japan, I found a very different view taken by nearly all of the British and American residents with whom I spoke. They considered that expansion for expansion's sake played only a small part in determining Japan's policy. They held that the reasons for expansion were rather the need of satisfying economic wants and of security against overseas attack: (Piesse 1920b)

Piesse went on painstakingly to explain the situation in which Japan was

placed:

Japan, like many countries of Europe, is reaching, or has already reached, the stage at which she can exist only by obtaining food from distant agricultural countries and paying for it by exports of her own manufactures. Japanese Imperialism, (in the opinions of the experts Piesse met in Japan), is nothing more than the policy of safeguarding supplies of food, and of raw materials and of ensuring access to markets. (ibid.)

Of the prevailing fear of Japan felt in Australia, Piesse stated:

So far as it concerned Australia, both diplomatists and naval and military attaches told me that they never heard Australia mentioned by the Japanese with whom they mixed: and that it was quite incredible to them that Japan could have any plans of aggression in the immediate future against Australia. (ibid.)

The nine-page report prepared by Piesse is comprehensive, touching all the vital issues Japan faced at that time. His interpretation of Japan's situation was as close to accuracy as any outsider could perceive at that time. The painstakingly prepared report, however, fell on deaf ears as far as Australia's leaders were concerned. The report reached the Government at the time when it was considering the defence expenditure of 1920 - 1921. The recommendations contained in the report ran counter to the advice given by the British Admiralty and Australia's own defence authorities. Meaney describes the ideas held by British advisers and Australia's defence authorities:

They reflected earlier strategic perspective which had hardened into dogma, almost a racially based dogma, and they appealed to the bureaucratic ambitions of the armed forces. (Meaney 1996: 26-27)

Meaney went on to say:

Hughes and Pearce, like their defence advisers, could not easily

overcome their fear of the 'Yellow Peril'. (ibid.:27)

History took the course as we know it today. Piesse, much assisted by Murdoch's information and his encouragement, made desperate efforts to break the dogma held by authorities and open their eyes to the true picture of the situation. Although Piesse's efforts, and Murdoch's efforts behind it, did not save the deteriorating relations between Australia and Japan, the value of those efforts should still be appraised today.

The issues involving Australia and Japan during the turbulent era between the two wars were complex and interrelated. It was, however, intentional that this study focused only on the racial equality issue, as the purpose of the discussion was to examine Murdoch's involvement in the issue. The evidence highlights Murdoch's effort to influence Australian leaders with an accurate interpretation of the Japanese situation, which few other Australians could provide at the time.

Neither does this report intend to exaggerate Murdoch's influence over Piesse. Piesse himself looked for truth. Murdoch was simply an instrument for that purpose, and a very conscientious one. Another fact not to be overlooked was that Murdoch also made his own effort. He met a number of people of influence, including the Prime Minister, to discuss Japan. His endeavours continued until his death. There remains a letter written by Murdoch to Prime Minister Hughes only a few months before his death, requesting one more meeting to discuss the possible danger of 'America drifting into war with Japan within the next ten years (Murdoch 1921)'. It is not known whether or not Murdoch was granted the meeting.

In 1923, less than two years after Murdoch's death, Piesse resigned from the Pacific Branch. It is reported that he had felt increasingly ineffectual in his post at the helm of the Branch (Walker and Ingleson 1989:305). Murdoch's death together with Piesse's departure from his key post certainly deprived Australian leaders of opportunities for informed discussion on Japan. It is easy to speculate that this provided less restraint to the rising voices of alarmists in the country.