

## 4) Identity Formation in Australia

Given the difference between the composition of British and Australian society, one would expect significant differences to develop quite early on, and these to lead to a development of an authentically “Australian” consciousness, which would eventually find a political voice in nationalism. But this is not in fact what happened.

Certainly, Australia was different. Prior to the gold rush of 1851, the population consisted of three groups, convicts and ex-convicts, free settlers and those actually born in Australia. Of those with British origins, both the convicts and the settlers came from the pauper class and differed little in background or social outlook from each other. Early travelers to Australia noted that the convicts tended to influence the attitudes of the settlers more than they were influenced by them.

In early nineteenth century Britain, aristocratic and upper middle-class manners and values tended to give its prevailing tone to society as a whole. In early Australia, convict and working-class attitudes strongly influenced those of the whole community. These attitudes, modified and often accentuated by the new environment, early came to be considered distinctively “colonial” or Australian.<sup>36</sup>

Even in Britain itself, as the 19th century progressed and the lower classes increasingly found—or were granted—a political voice, aristocratic values were in retreat to those of the middle and working classes. But in Australia, at least prior to the gold rush, there was no middle class to speak of. Working class manners were Australian manners and Australia has already begun to develop a distinctive society.

Analysis of the population makeup and records of social attitudes by social historians such as Ward shows that distinctively Australian attitudes which had already emerged had become stabilized enough and widespread enough to persist in the population even after the huge numbers of immigrants the gold rush brought—the population of Australia’s eastern states increased nearly threefold between 1851 and 1861. However, as Ward says: “social attitudes and traditions are learnt from parents, playmates,

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<sup>36</sup> Ward, Russell (1955) “Social Roots of Australian Nationalism,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 1, (2): p175.

friends, and teachers and, in the case of “new chums,” from “old colonial hands.” In this way even children of quite well to do settlers acquired working class attitudes and manners.

It might be thought that convicts and working class paupers would have little love for Britain, from which both groups had been cast out. And any anti-British attitudes could only have been strengthened by the large number of incomers, both among the convicts, settlers and the gold rush “new chums” of Irish ancestry. Irish-born immigrants accounted for 25 percent of Australia’s foreign-born population in 1871. The majority of these were Catholics and, of the free settlers, most were driven to immigrate to Australia by the poverty in Ireland, a situation for which the British government was widely held responsible by the Catholic community a situation which would be expected to make the Irish in Australia all the more Anglophobe. Certainly, this was the case among the large number of Irish immigrants to the United States.

With a society very different to that of Britain, a felling among many of the population of rejection from the “mother country” and a large Irish contingent with a genuine antipathy toward Britain, Australia might have been expected to develop a strong national consciousness with, at the social level, a pronounced Anglophobia and politically a commitment to republicanism—in the manner of the post-1776 American colonies. But this was not, in fact, what happened.

This is not to say that there was no nationalist feeling. Charles Grimshaw calls the late 1880s and 1890s the period of “the awakening of an Australian national consciousness.” They were “pivotal years for the understanding of Australian nationalism for it was at this time that a vocal and assertive Australianism manifested itself.”<sup>37</sup> Stephen Alomes has said:

Radicals of the 1880s hoped that Young Australia, untrammelled by the deferential cultures and deeply etched habits of the centuries, would produce a better and class-free world. The emerging industrial unions and labor movement, the radical press and even reform movements envisaged a new Australia. Radicals dreamed of an Australian republic free from

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<sup>37</sup> Grimshaw, Charles (1958) “Australian nationalism and the Imperial connection 1900-1914,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 3, (2): p161.

European royalty and nobility, free from class and corruption and free from the poles of great wealth and grinding poverty found in Dickensian England.<sup>38</sup>

But this was not to be the dominant Australian attitude. Alomes points out that when in 1885 the forces of the Mahdi defeated a British army in the Sudan, killing General Charles Gordon, the heroic soldier-ascetic who had built his enormous reputation in China during the Taiping Rebellion, Australians responded with a feverish display of pro-British imperial patriotism. “Statues to Gordon were raised near the parliament of Victoria and streets were named after him in most Australian cities.”<sup>39</sup>

The fact is that Australian nationalism was displayed in sports—the defeat of the English cricket team in 1878 led to a massive outpouring of nationalistic pride, and a similar defeat 20 year later caused the radical nationalist cultural magazine the *Bulletin* to say “the ruthless rout of English cricket will do—and has done—more to enhance the cause of Australian nationality than even could be achieved by miles of erudite essays and impassioned appeal.” But it was not displayed beyond this. Some historians speculate that, in fact, sporting triumph, as a kind of emotional Fool’s Gold, took the place of genuine national aspirations and helped the consolidation of an “imperial hegemony” of loyalty to Britain. There is some truth in this. But the racism that was another strong feature of Australian society also had much to do with the Australians’ wish, on the far side of the world, in a country whose black Aborigines were profoundly alien and whose nearest neighbors were large countries of Asians ruled by what the Australians considered to be “second-rate” European powers—the Dutch, the Spanish—to associate themselves with the global superpower of the day, the British empire. Alomes describes as the dominant mode of thought, “images of the racial unity, of the ‘crimson thread of kinship’ of the British.”<sup>40</sup>

He also notes that the education system was:

An education into British history, the British role in political progress and

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<sup>38</sup> Alomes, Stephan (1988) “Australian Nationalism in the Eras of Imperialism and ‘Internationalism’,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 34, (3): p321.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p326.

the glories of English literature ... racial ideology, northern hemisphere biology and Mercator's projection (which made the northern hemisphere larger than the southern hemisphere) as well as imperial pink on maps in school classrooms all reinforced a British imperial view of experience.<sup>41</sup>

Australian nationalism became submerged in what Alomes calls imperial nationalism, "which integrated Australia further into the British world and reinforced its sense of Britishness.

By the time of federation in 1900, there were two facets to Australian identity. There was what we might call a territorial consciousness, a sense that Australia was a different place, with a different social structure and mores, and different economic and political interests from Britain. But could this be called a national consciousness? Among the republicans and the subscribers to the *Bulletin*, there was certainly a strong national consciousness, usually to be found with separatist sentiments. But subscribers to the *Bulletin* constituted a particularly well-informed, highly cultured and political radicalized group; they were not representative of Australians as a whole. For most Australians until the 1970s, national consciousness showed itself in sport, and the thrashing of England at cricket was always a great source of national pleasure. But the idea of separation from Britain was not popular.

There is a huge contrast between an Australian nationalism that rarely showed itself beyond the sports field, compared with the visceral, militant, often violent nationalisms of Europe, or even the chest thumping flag waving patriotism of the United States. But, as Jeff Archer points out, in Australia, "the struggle for the nation-state was a rather limp affair."<sup>42</sup>

Archer maintains, and surely he is right, that the reason for the lack of ideological nationalism in Australia is the lack of drama in Australia's relationship with its colonial power.

The doctrines of nationality and imperialism in Britain were defusing, compromising affairs, designed to protect a newly developed economic

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Archer, Jeff (1990) "'But Is It Australian Nationalism?'" *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 36, (1): p86.

elite by wrapping them in the invented tradition of antique monarchy. This bag of cultural contradictions was imported into a country where the bulk of the population felt itself to be Australian British. A confused nationality was imported from Britain and was transformed by limp Australian resistance into an even more confused Australian nationality.<sup>43</sup>

Archer says: “There is no doubt that the language of nationalism has always been an important part of Australian political discourse. The slogans and the speeches sometimes echo the trenchant claims of ideological nationalism, but whether the local variety should be closely identified with so potent an ideology is seriously open to question.” And he is aware that a more vigorous nationalism might develop in the future in Australia, and thinks that it would only be a bad thing, leading away from the casual easy-going cynicism that overly nationalistic claims are met with in modern Australia to a tub-thumping belligerence, perhaps racially based that would fracture society and turn it into a much uglier place.

I hope that we continue to live in quiet times. Politically more interesting, more dramatic, times could result in a genuine widespread Australian nationalism. This would involve a retreat from apathy and skepticism. Heroic politics would be unleashed. Australians would believe in their historical destiny. There would be martyrs. I hope not to see such times.

It is a feature of Australia—and also of Taiwan—that some of the more radical nationalists are among its academics. For them the lack of development of a radical Australian nationalism is something not only to be regretted but also to be explained, and if possible explained away. Many scholars of Australian nationalism have assumed an inherent antipathy between that phenomenon and “Britishness” and have tried to recast history as a Whiggish teleological progression toward the—for them—sacred goal of republicanism. Writes the historian Neville Meaney:

Among a significant number of scholars, especially those concerned with the central questions of national history such as civic community, cultural identity, federation, republic, war and foreign relations, there has been a tendency to assume that European Australians have been engaged from

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p91.

early in their history in an inexorable struggle for national independence.<sup>44</sup>

As Russell McGregor writes:

The radical nationalists of the post-Second World War era posited an innate antipathy. They construed British loyalties and identities as impediments to the realization of true Australian nationhood, often as cloaks for capitalist class interests; and yearned for the day when a home-spun, working class-based national character would lay to rest the last vestiges of colonial origins... their representation of Britishness and Australian nationalism as irreconcilable antagonists recurs persistently through Australian historiography.<sup>45</sup>

Meaney gives an interesting list of historical events which have been called to support the “inexorable struggle” thesis, all of which were, in some sense, supposed to make a break with subservience to Britain and the Empire. But this simply does not reflect the historical reality, generalizing across a population mildly Anglophillic, or otherwise indifferent, the sentiments of the *Bulletin*.

Australia, with its background as a penal settlement, as a last resort for the pauperized “free settlers,” with its large Irish contingent, should have been a breeding ground for a resentful and belligerent nationalism directed against Britain, the fact is that it wasn’t—and the radical historians’ explanations of why this should be so sometimes seethe with indignation at their compatriots. As Meaney says: “For all its protagonists this version of Australian history has been presented as the story of ‘thwarted’ nationalism.”<sup>46</sup> He continues: “It was ‘thwarted’ because unfortunate circumstances, the need for British protection, cultural hegemonic practices or British manipulations aided and abetted by local ‘Anglo-Australians’ had frustrated again and again the achievement of the national destiny.”

He then points out that there are serious problems with this account. One of them

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<sup>44</sup> Meaney, Neville (2001) “Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of nationalism in Australian History and Historiography,” *Australian Historical Studies*, 32, (16): p76.

<sup>45</sup> McGregor, Russell (2006) “The Necessity Of Britishness: Ethno-Cultural Roots Of Australian Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism*, 12, (3): p494.

<sup>46</sup> Meaney (2001) *Op. cit.*, p87.

is “nationalism’s own teleological view of history, namely that all history is a struggle by ‘peoples’ towards achieving self-realization, most commonly in independent sovereign states.” Basically, nationalism assumes a Whiggish teleology, then looks for supporting evidence. But, in fact, “nationalism is a historically contingent, socially constructed idea or myth about a ‘people’.” And in Australia this myth had a serious problem gaining traction in the collective imagination. Meaney is worth quoting at length here:

The evidence that Australians in [the 1870s to the 1960s] thought of themselves primarily as a British people is overwhelming. Though the full picture cannot be shown here it is worth bearing in mind some of the more outstanding elements. The oaths of loyalty in public schools were British.... As for history curricula, whether in school or university, Australian history when it was taught was most often taught as a footnote to the grand story of the British peoples’ great Empire.... Empire Day for most was celebrated as a sacred occasion; Australia Day by contrast was a secular picnic.... Australia introduced Empire Day a decade before Britain did, and it was always celebrated more widely and more devoutly in Australia than in Britain.

Anzac Day was commemorated as Australian Britons’ contribution to the Empire’s cause. The Union Flag led the march.... The Returned Sailors’, Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Imperial League of Australia and its successor the Returned Servicemen’s League, which assumed the custodianship of the Anzac myth, were unwavering in their loyalty to the British Crown. And, certainly until the 1970s, the RSL was not at odds with popular opinion.... In Australia, unlike Britain, at the beginning or end of most public occasions, concerts, plays, films, dances, even sporting finals the “National Anthem,” namely “God Save the King” or “God save the Queen,” was played and everyone stood to show respect for the crowned symbol of the British peoples.<sup>47</sup>

There are two questions to answer here. First, why did a cohesive Australian nationalism not develop? And why was “Britishness” the dominant identity?

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p79-80.

For Archer, the lack of ideological nationalism is a function of the lack of drama between Australia and Britain—and in this sense may be contrasted with the drama of the relationship between Britain and its American colonies.

But the answer lies beyond this. As we have seen with the 13 Colonies, it was precisely the British—in fact English—background of the American colonists, suffused as they were in the doctrines of the British enlightenment, especially the political ideas of John Locke, the intellectual and emotional legacy of the civil wars 130 years before and some 400 years of squabbling between the king and the merchant classes, as represented by their parliament, over the right of the executive to tax only with the consent of those taxed. The “Americans” rebelled because of their understanding of their rights as Englishmen.

McGregor’s answer to the Australian question is similar. The Australians saw themselves as British because they lacked the means to see themselves in any other way. The colonists needed a set of values and institutions around which their society could cohere and the only models they had were British ones. But nation-building needed more than civic models. “Cohesive nationhood demanded a long and glorious past, and that this could be secured only by annexing British history,” as McGregor says. Earlier I quoted Renan’s remarks that “a heroic past, great men, glory, this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea.” Where could Australians find this past, this “rich legacy of memories ... the heritage ... the culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice, and devotion” unless they looked to Britain?

Knowing what we do about the development of national identity, the question above seems rhetorical. McGregor himself says: “Australian nationalists cleaved to a myth of Britishness not (usually) because they were toadies of Empire or spineless semi-patriots, but because the Britannic repertory provided a vital source of the myths on which national solidarity and community depended.”<sup>48</sup>

There were in fact alternatives and McGregor considers them. They were to annex the Aboriginal heritage in some way. Or to more forcefully assert the positive virtues of settler history. But neither of these were practicable.

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<sup>48</sup> McGregor (2006) *Op. cit.*, p503 .

While much is made today of the Aboriginal heritage,<sup>49</sup> this was simply not an option a century ago. Remember the White Australia policy was introduced in 1901 and remained in place until 1973. And that Aborigines were not counted as Australian citizens until 1948, and only received the vote in state elections in West Australia and Queensland in the 1960s. It is easy to say that Aboriginal culture and society was not respected enough to provide a kind of model for the settlers. But this hardly describes the conceptual gulf between white and black. Aboriginal society was stuck in the Stone Age, white Australia is one of the few societies actually created since the industrial revolution. To the settlers, Aborigines had no history in the sense in which they understood it, so no historical heritage which might be co-opted. “Relics of humanity in a prehistoric phase, their past was inglorious, their present deplorable and their future inevitable extinction.”<sup>50</sup>

The other possibility would be to assert the positive aspects of the settler experience. This is something that has been used to strong nation-building effect in the United States with its Pilgrim Fathers founding legend (it is worth noting that the Massachusetts Bay Colony was, in fact, the second to be founded, after Jamestown in present-day Virginia, which was a purely commercial venture). This myth of “chosenness” effectively blotted out the American colonies’ past as a penal settlement. But there was no such historical experience that could be valorized in the same way in Australia. As McGregor puts it:

Australian history, in the view of most contemporaries, was far from glorious. It began with Botany Bay as the dumping ground for the refuse of Britain, and continued as a tale that, when not actually sordid, was devoid of grandeur or even drama.... Late-nineteenth century Australians did possess distinctively Australian cultural attributes and a recognizably Australian heritage of art, literature, popular customs, sporting prowess and so forth. Nationalist publicists of the day, such as the *Bulletin* magazine, did their best to promote the home-grown cultural product. However, such cultural fragments did not add up to the rich and complex heritage essential for a people to imagine itself as a community of destiny. Henry Lawson’s shearers and Banjo Paterson’s swagmen may have been

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<sup>49</sup> The parallel with Taiwan will be developed later.

<sup>50</sup> McGregor (2006) *Op. cit.*, p503.

handy emblems of Australian egalitarianism, but nationhood required a repertoire of grander, and more heroic and profound symbols than these.<sup>51</sup>

Once again, we return to Renan's remark that a nation is a community who together have done grand thing and seek to do grand things in the future. For Australia there simply was not enough grandeur in its past. Britishness, on the other hand, offered a lot.

The term ['British'] captured a set of political values and traditions more than cultural or social practices. It meant, in rhetoric at least, a commitment to parliament, and rule of law, to a benign, even lovable monarch, and minimal interference in people's liberty, combined with an imperialistic notion of progress and destiny meaning, roughly, the expansion of trade, education, Christianity, and rationalism at the expense of tradition, superstition and emotion... .

Britishness was also minimally cultural. To be British meant to be civilized, that is, materially more advanced and therefore culturally superior to the native populations whose territories the British forces felt destined to occupy. It meant being clothed rather than naked despite the heat, and having wives who were quiet and orderly, and also clothed. It meant also going about things without too much fuss or self- advertisement.<sup>52</sup>

Britishness was the source of heritage, history, culture and symbols that made Australia heir to a glorious past.

#### **4.1) Modern Evolution and the Failure of Republicanism**

Everyone involved in the debate about Australia's future, from republic multiculturalists to diehard Anglophile monarchists admits that the country has changed significantly since the formal end of the White Australia policy in 1973. Five elements have contributed to this.

The first generation of non-British migrants after World War II were more interested in establishing themselves economically in a society where to have other than

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Irving, Helen (1999) *To Constitute a Nation: a Cultural History of Australia's Constitution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: p73.

Anglo-Celtic roots was to be a second-class citizen. But by the 1970s their children, the first generation to be born in Australia itself, has begun to make an impact socially, economically and politically.<sup>53</sup> With no British roots, and no little resentment toward the Anglophile status quo in Australia, one in which their parents had struggled, they had little love of Britain and, importantly, they had alternative heroes and myths to root their identity.

The end of the White Australia policy also meant the beginning of large-scale immigration from Asia. Since the 1980s, Australia has seen large numbers of immigrants from India, Vietnam and China. Not only have these immigrants contributed to the skewing of Australian culture away from its Anglo-Celtic roots, they have both been enthusiastic champions for and embracers of Australia's on-off interest—usually on the ascendant under Labor governments and downplayed during Liberal ones—in recasting itself as a multicultural Asian society, rather than an expatriate European one.

An international environment more sympathetic to human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples meant that Aboriginal culture began to be treated with more respect in mainstream Australian society. If Aboriginal culture did not make enough sense to the Anglo-Irish settlers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to even merit the world culture, this was by no means the case from the 1970s onwards, once again providing Australians with an alternative way of seeing themselves—as a community of destiny, with white settlement grafted onto to Aboriginal roots.

Global politics also did much to estrange the two countries. After World War II, Australia's primary defense ally had been not Britain but the United States. But it was Britain's entry into the European Economic Community in 1973 (the forerunner of today's European Union), with the subsequent placing of import tariffs on Australian exports hitherto granted exemption as a hangover from "imperial preference" schemes, which did most to persuade many Australians that the two countries were drifting apart.

And finally the fiasco over the dismissal of the Whitlam government, commonly—if mistakenly—understood as an assault of Australia's sovereignty and democracy by the old imperial power, also resulted in a sizable shift in Australian sentiment.

Since the 1970s, the idea that Australia needed a new narrative of identity, free

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<sup>53</sup> For example, by the early 1980s Melbourne was the second largest Greek city in the world after Athens.

from the kow-tow to the British heritage that may regarded as having held Australia back for so long, has received considerable support. Whilst debate has raged—and in fact still rages—as to what kind of society Australia should be, the announcement of the New Agenda For Multicultural Australia by the conservative Howard government in 1999 is a mark of just how far opinion has evolved away from the idea of ethnic solidarity and ethno-nationalism which underwrote both the White Australia policy and the old-style Anglophillia, to the idea of a multicultural “civic nationalism”—a nationalism based on respect for the institutions of Australian society which allow people to maintain their cultural differences yet equally flourish in a tolerant and anti-discriminatory environment.

This might be government policy, but is it a reflection of a changed national consciousness? Or is it a map of where it is hoped national consciousness may be led. Certainly, some academic observers seem less than convinced about the birth of a new national consciousness. Alomes, for example, suggests that in the mid-1970s, after the Whitlam dismissal there was an appetite for a new separatist nationalism, but little to fill it. “Despite the growing popular appeal of nationalism it lacked appropriate channels for political development.”<sup>54</sup> What evolved was a peculiar empty form of nationalism, based more on advertising jingles and the referencing of advertisements, lacking in any historical consciousness, an empty jingoism.

The ersatz nationalism expressed in corporate advertising, and in such campaigns as Advance Australia and Enterprise Australia, inevitably made little reference to fundamental social questions related to nationalism such as land rights or foreign ownership of industry. While reformists and radicals sought to return ‘Ayers Rock’ to ‘Mum’, for McDonalds it was simply a model for a hamburger. Multi-culturalism too was marginalized to the world of patriotic T-shirts (which have been worn predominantly by young people of migrant parentage), folk dancing and cuisine. In this predominant 1980s nationalism, Aboriginals and ethnically diverse Australians, and history itself, are used mainly for the provision of local color.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Alomes (1988) *Op. cit.* p328.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

The weakness, even emptiness, of the new nationalism showed itself in the campaign for a republic which culminated in a referendum vote on Nov. 6, 1999.<sup>56</sup> The total national yes vote was 45.13 percent. Under the Australian Constitution, the referendum would only have passed if there was a majority national “yes” vote and a “yes” vote in at least four of Australia’s six states (its two territories contribute to the national vote but are not “states” for this purpose). In no state was there a majority “yes” vote, although Victoria came closest with 49.84 percent.

In the subsequent decade, there has been much debate about why the referendum on a republic failed. After all, the “yes” campaign had the support of ousted Labor prime minister Gough Whitlam, his successor, the Liberal Malcolm Fraser, almost all the cultural elite and the media, although John Howard, the prime minister of the day was in the monarchy camp.

Certainly one problem the “yes” campaign had was the model of republic that they endorsed. Under this, a president would be chosen by the houses of parliament. He would have the constitutional powers of the governor general, but would play no active part in day-to-day politics. Many Australian voters were opposed to this because they saw it as an attempt by the political elite to keep power for themselves. If there was to be a president, they asked, why can we not elect him directly? The short answer to this is that this into how parliamentary systems under a presidency (India, Ireland) usually work—and those countries which have both an elected president and a parliamentary system such as France and Taiwan face endless turf wars over the limitations of prime ministerial and presidential power.

This argument played well to well-educated voters but not to the less well educated. The result was that the republicans did themselves no favors by appearing to suggest that anti-republicans were simply too stupid to see the merits of republicanism.<sup>57</sup>

Since the referendum, republicans have suggested that tactical “no” voting by republicans who supported an elected, rather than selected, president was responsible for

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<sup>56</sup> The question voters had to answer “yes” or “no” to was whether they approved of a proposed law “To alter the Constitution to establish the Commonwealth of Australia as a republic with the Queen and Governor-General being replaced by a President appointed by a two-thirds majority of the members of the Commonwealth Parliament.”

<sup>57</sup> Agence France Presse (1999, 11/05) “Monarchists Set to Win Australia Referendum.”

the defeat. This remains debatable. What is more likely is that as John Howard said, republicans “haven’t persuaded us that this country will be better if it became a republic.”

What the referendum really showed was that Australia’s anti-elitism—as we have seen, a characteristic of the “Australian” character since early colonial days—was stronger than its new nationalism. It also showed that there was much truth in Alomes’ perceptions of the shallowness of a “post-British” national consciousness. Jeff Archer sums it up well:

Australia is a land where beliefs often do not add up to coherent doctrines, where culture is fragmented and frequently not constrained by nationality. If ideological nationalism is rare, it is not because there are alternative senses of belonging. Rather, the most migrant society in an era characterized by migration has misplaced even the nostalgia for belonging; our culture has the confidence of misplaced ennui.<sup>58</sup>

## 4.2) Identity in Australia: Some Conclusions

For Australian nationalists, their own country has been a long disappointment. While from the beginning of its establishment in the 1780s, Australia had a radically different social mixture from the country from which its incomers came—Britain and Ireland—and quickly developed a very different society in terms of social background and mores. Australia itself, where land was to be had simply by claiming it, but could prove brutally hard to tame, was a different country; vast, open, unconstrained either geographically or socially. Even prior to the gold rush era it had already produced a distinctively “Australian” character. And yet, 150 years later, with the British Empire itself nothing but a historical memory and with mass immigration changing the ethnic balance substantially, at the 1999 referendum it was still unable to gain enough support to remove the symbolic and constitutional link to Britain provided by having the Queen of England as the head of state.

Radical nationalist academics have tried to explain the attachment to the U.K. in terms of betrayal. Ordinary Australians, the posit, have been natural republicans, but their interests have always been sacrificed by a ruling class whose capitalist interests found a

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<sup>58</sup> Archer, *op. cit.* p91.

greater use of retaining the tie to Britain—though what this should be has seldom been adequately explained.

One theme of radical nationalist is that working class, Labor-voting, egalitarian Australians are natural republicans, whereas the bourgeois *trahison des clercs* is responsible for the failure of this republicanism ever to bear fruit. Yet the 1999 referendum showed the middle class embraced republicanism to a far greater extent than the working class—indeed the pro-republicans criticized anti-republican voters as being not educated enough to properly understand the issues (thereby almost certainly doing their cause no good, incidentally).

In fact, modern historians like Meaney and McGregor have shown that pro-British sentiment has been a constant factor of Australian life, at least until the 1980s. McGregor in particular, points out that national identity does not grow in a vacuum, but evolves from roots and for Australia those roots lay in Britain. Australians looked to Britain for political institutions, for culture, and most importantly as a source of values, traditions, role models and history. Australia's own stock of these important elements in self-definition was too poor. Its origins as a penal colony were too lacking in grandeur to provide a suitable foundation myth of the caliber of the American Pilgrim Fathers, its struggles, for example the Eureka Stockade incident—a revolt a gold miners in the Ballarat goldfields that provoked an armed skirmish—too minor, compared with the events of 1776-84, to sanctify the goal of separatism. Australia's origins were too shameful and its subsequent history too undramatic to breed a deeply felt sense of separatism, while it looked for somewhere to provide the social and political models that a new country needed to both organize its affairs to provide some kind of social cohesion. Naturally, it looked to Britain; it simply could not, as we have seen, look anywhere else.

The moral of this is that just as Australian radical nationalists tended to think there was a natural antipathy between Australians and Britain, that in some way only failed to cut the link between them because of constant betrayal or compromise, it is natural to think, perhaps because of the spectacular example of the United States, that immigrant societies will eventually develop a consciousness at odds with their mother country and go a separate and independent way. Even in the case of the United States, the cleavage that led to separation was based on shared ideas. And in the case of Australia, this drifting apart is simply not as inevitable as is commonly believed.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that national consciousness formation

will be weak if there is no panoply of rousing historical narrative to inform a sense of cultural uniqueness, using Australia as an example of where this is demonstrably true. Now let us look at how this applies to Taiwan.

