

Port Towns and Diplomacy: Japanese Naval Visits to Britain and Australia in the Early Twentieth Century

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The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1905 was a watershed moment for the presence of the Royal Navy in the Pacific. Although it allowed the Royal Navy to concentrate its fleets in European waters, this strategy caused resentment due to the underlying fear of the ‘Yellow Peril’, especially in the British dominions of Australia and New Zealand. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance presented some challenges to the received Edwardian racial hierarchy and the idea of British military supremacy. This article demonstrates how the ‘port town’ not only became a place of mediation where high-level international diplomacy mingled with the face-to-face experience of an alliance ‘in practice’, but also a space through which issues such as Otherness and imperial security were contested and explored.

The 1902 Anglo-Japanese Alliance marked the end of Britain’s ‘splendid isolation’.¹ Such an alliance presented some interesting complications when courting diplomatic, military, and public opinion in Britain because the Japanese did not neatly fit into the concept of ‘Western’ Edwardian racial hierarchy as they were not White, nor were they European by geography or descent.²

¹ Nicolas Lambert, ‘Economy or Empire? The Fleet Unit Concept and the Quest for Collective Security in the Pacific, 1909-1914’, in K. Neilson and G. Kennedy, eds., *Far Flung Lines: Essays in Honour of Donald M. Schurman*, (Abingdon, 2009), 55.

² Traditional allies for the Western Powers were European or White settler dominions such as the United States.

Certainly there were complex cultural and racial hierarchies to negotiate as a consequence of an alliance with rising non-White and non-European nation. Rotem Kowner has argued that the Japanese posed a particular conundrum for the West at this time as they ‘defied’ the tacit rules of the colonial encounter by not being submissive or uncivilised.³ He highlighted the creation of a discourse in response to a perceived threat which cast the Japanese as inferior and marked them as a ‘menacing Other’.⁴ Prior to the Imperial Japanese Navy’s (IJN) convincing victory against the Russian Fleet at Tsushima (1905) Japan was indulged very much like a child, or an upstart, on the world stage.⁵ After this time ‘they were perceived as aggressive, insolent, and even dangerous imperialists.’⁶ However, this article will revise Kowner’s assertion and add nuance to the perception of pre-First World War interracial hostility by highlighting how the narrative of the ‘menacing Other’ was complicated by the spirit of alliance and diplomacy. Indeed, Anthony Best argued that due to the underlying fear so-called ‘Yellow Peril’ Britain and Japan had to ‘finesse the racial and cultural divide’ following the Alliance rather than pursue a campaign of racially-based hostility. This, he has maintained, was achieved by high-level court diplomacy and the bestowal of titles and decorations to Japanese royalty.⁷

³ Rotem Kowner, ‘Lighter than Yellow, But not Enough’: Western Discourse on the Japanese ‘Race’, 1854-1904.’

The Historical Journal, 43, No. 1 (2000), 104.

⁴ Kowner, ‘Lighter than Yellow’, 105.

⁵ See for example the *Punch* cartoon entitled ‘The Infant Phenomenon. Little Jap lecturing on the Art of War to the European Representatives’, produced during the Sino-Japanese War. *Punch* (London), 22 December 1894.

⁶ Kowner, ‘Lighter than Yellow’, 130.

⁷ Antony Best, ‘Race, Monarchy, and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902-1922’, *Social Science Japan Journal*, 9, No. 2 (2006), 171.

An overlooked arena within which world politics was played out was the port town, or port city.⁸ Recent scholarship on the social and cultural history of ports has highlighted how these areas served as the threshold between the urban space and the maritime world; often leading to cultural exchanges which could challenge established ‘norms’ and boundaries.⁹ Port towns and cities thus become contact zones where these established values were reassessed and negotiated via face-to-face interaction with the Other. This article, therefore, will highlight the importance of place and space in assessing powerful cultural interactions *in situ*; experienced by multiple agents including the ruling elites and civic powers, and filtered down to the public via discourse in the local press and lavish public ceremonies such as parades and ‘showing the flag’. Taking Jan Rüger’s concept of ‘naval theatre’ and combining it with the idea of the urban maritime space as a contact zone, I will argue that port towns and cities, such as Portsmouth, Melbourne and Sydney, were vital components in the ideological battle within the British World to reconcile the public on issues of imperial security. Although the Japanese allies were treated with the respect and due ceremony bestowed on any other visiting White allies, due to the varied preoccupations of the host ports the surrounding discourse in the British and Australian settings produced quite different focuses. Portsmouth’s encounter with the IJN normalised and, to a large extent, un-Othered the Japanese by showcasing their affinity with naval traditions. Moreover, they were presented as non-threatening as they were a valued customer of British shipbuilding technology. In Melbourne and Sydney, however, discourse was punctuated with an underlying suspicion of the motives of their

⁸ Portsmouth did not become a city until 1926.

⁹ Brad Beaven, Karl Bell and Rob James, ‘Introduction’, in B. Beaven, K. Bell and R. James, eds., *Port Towns and Urban Cultures. International Histories of the Waterfront, c.1700-2000* (Basingstoke, 2016), 1.

new guardians in the Pacific, and heightened calls for a Dominion Navy which would endow Australia with greater security in its own waters.

Japanese expansion and Western suspicion

The article will concentrate on two, almost simultaneous, visits of the Imperial Japanese Navy to Portsmouth in Britain, and Melbourne and Sydney in Australia in 1906. Using a comparative approach it will explore how national and international discourses on diplomatic relations were mediated and understood in provincial Britain and the outposts of the British Empire. The alliance with Japan, however, was conceived amid a heightened threat to the British Isles from the growing Imperial German Navy. The role of the Royal Navy in the defence of British shores gained increasing public interest during the Edwardian period due to the escalation of the Naval Arms Race with Germany and the other world powers. The Naval Defence Act (1889) created the ‘Two Power Standard’, whereby the Royal Navy pledged to be twice as large as any other nation’s navy.¹⁰ However, the rise of the German Imperial Navy, and German expansion into the Pacific with the annexation of New Guinea in 1884 meant that naval defence of the Empire had become more onerous. The alliance with Japan has retrospectively been rationalised as a convenience which allowed the Royal Navy to reduce costs and secure areas of interest in the far reaches of the British Empire by concentrating their fleets in European, and ultimately Home Waters, in order to ward off the German threat to the British Isles.¹¹ However, the growing influence of Japan following the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War, especially after

¹⁰ D. Redford and P. D. Grove, *The Royal Navy Since 1900* (London, 2014), 20.

¹¹ Redford and Grove, *The Royal Navy*, 20; John Beeler, ‘Steam, Strategy and Shurman Imperial Defence in the Post Crimean Era, 1856-1905’, in K. Neilson and G. Kennedy, eds., *Far Flung Lines: Essays in Honour of Donald M. Schurman*, (Abingdon, 2009), 27.

their emphatic victory at the Battle of Tsushima (1905), meant that the balance of power in the Pacific had shifted considerably by the time the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was renewed.

The Alliance raised suspicions and distrust among contemporary British defence experts and catalysed serious debates about imperial security across the Empire. Certainly, it precipitated suspicion in the Antipodes, leading to the formation of the Australian and New Zealand navies before the First World War.¹² In the higher echelons of the British Navy Admiralty, officials harboured suspicions over Japan's reliability as an ally. Prior to the Alliance in 1901, British military attaché in Tokyo, Lieutenant-Colonel John Churchill argued that:

I cannot imagine that any European Power is likely to ally itself with Japan, since what are the two most powerful sentiments in the world, viz; race and religion, are opposed to such an alliance, to say nothing of more practical considerations.¹³

Moreover, First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Walter Kerr asserted in his correspondence to Lord Selbourne, the First Lord of the Admiralty, in October of the same year that he felt that the 'continued goodwill of an Oriental nation' was uncertain as a basis for the security of British interests in East Asia.¹⁴

Certainly nationalist elements Australia and New Zealand were very wary of the idea that they would have to rely on Japan's presence in the Pacific to protect them from invasion.¹⁵ Australians and New Zealanders were distrustful of the Japanese, who were regarded as

¹² John C. Mitcham, 'Navalism and Greater Britain, 1897-1914', in D. Redford, ed., *Maritime Culture and Identity: The Sea, Culture and the Modern World* (London, 2014), 209.

¹³ The National Archives, FO46/547. Lt-Col Churchill to Directorate of Military Intelligence, 23 May 1901. Quoted in Best, 'Race, Monarchy', 173.

¹⁴ Correspondence between Kerr and Selbourne, 05 October 1901, quoted in Best, "Race, Monarchy", 173.

¹⁵ Mitcham, *Race and Imperial Defence in the British World, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, 2016), 209.

expansionist and a threat to the antipodes themselves. Indeed, this critical alliance to safeguard the Pacific was conceived at a time when questions were being asked about Australia's coastal defence. Australia's politicians were keen to create their own Dominion Navy, either to assert increasing independence from Britain, or to answer increasing demands from navalist agencies like the Naval Defence League for the Dominions to 'pay their way' in the defence of the Empire. In addition to the hopes of building a strong defence force the country had been active in securing a White Australia policy. Australia's Federal Immigration Restriction Act (1901) was specifically designed to exclude non-White, and specifically Asian, settlement in the country. Labour politician, and later Prime Minister of Australia, Billy Hughes labelled the spread of Asian immigration through the unpopulated areas of Queensland as a 'leprous curse' and argued that it threatened to make the newly Federalised Australia 'a country no longer fit for the white man, because it will shortly be a country where no white man can compete with our cheap, industrious and virtuous, but undesirable Japanese and Chinese friends.'¹⁶

The visits to Britain and Australia in 1906 would have absorbed some of these diplomatic tensions and mistrust. It is interesting, therefore, to explore how the Alliance was 'sold' to the public of Britain and the Greater British World. The timing of the visits was an important factor, coming as they did after the Japanese victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, and after the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1905. Of primacy to the Japanese agenda was to seek to redress the imbalances of formerly 'Unequal Treaties.' The visit to Portsmouth from 27 May to 8 June 1906 was conducted under the auspices of showing off their newly-constructed state-of-the-art battleships, the *Katori* and *Kashima*, which they had taken command of from the shipyards

¹⁶ W. M. Hughes, '12 Sept 1901,' *Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives*, Vol. 37 (1901), c. 4822.

of Barrow and Newcastle. The visits to Australia was undertaken by a training squadron of three ships, *Hashidate*, *Itsukushima*, and *Matushima*, which were used to provide naval cadets of the IJN with seafaring experience. The squadron called at Port Arthur, Wei Hai Wei, and other Chinese ports, before descending to Manila in the Philippines, the Australian territory of Thursday Island, and then Townsville in Queensland. They were received in Melbourne on 9 May, before departing on 17 May to reach Sydney on 21 May. It left Sydney to return to Japan on 28 May.¹⁷

Naval theatre and the port

Rüger argued that between 1880 and 1914 Spithead off the shore of Portsmouth was ‘formalized as a ritual arena for the display of the monarch’s ‘ocean throne’.’¹⁸ Importantly, this naval theatre, which included such spectacles as fleet reviews and battleship launches, could be interpreted by its audience in a number of ways as it allowed for ‘the projection of local, regional, national and imperial loyalties.’¹⁹ Indeed, John C. Mitcham has argued that through the deployment of naval theatre the Royal Navy espoused a concept of a ‘Sea Empire’; allowing the far sinews of the Empire to unite under a unified identity which could breed loyalty to the British metropole.²⁰ However, this notion often excluded the participation of non-White citizens of Empire. Although army regiments of Sikhs and Ghurkhas were co-opted into Imperial Britain’s military tapestry through the concept of ‘martial races’, such extensions were not afforded in a maritime capacity.²¹

¹⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 May 1906.

¹⁸ Rüger, *The Great Naval Game. Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, 2007), 19.

¹⁹ Rüger, *The Great Naval Game*, 35.

²⁰ Mitcham, ‘Navalism and Greater Britain’, 284.

²¹ For examples of ‘martial races’ see Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester, 2004).

Certainly, the acceptance of a ‘gifted’ ship from the Federated States of Malaya in 1912, subsequently named HMS *Malaya*, garnered less attention from the British press than White Dominion ‘gift’ ships such as HMS *Australia* and HMS *New Zealand*.²² The acceptance into the fold of an Asian ally with power in the Pacific and who was also independent of British rule was thus a departure from the narrative of Britain’s Sea Empire. The incorporation of the IJN into Britain’s Sea Empire therefore had to be carefully choreographed. However, there was no one-size-fits-all template for hospitality for the IJN, and each port showcased its own brand of imperial culture to its visitors.²³

By the turn of the twentieth century Portsmouth had become a place of international entertainment and diplomacy whereby the concept of ‘civic pride’ had become conflated with wider notions of imperial duty.²⁴ The staging of events of national and international maritime significance such as naval reviews, ship launches, and visits by royalty and foreign dignitaries ensured that Portsmouth’s played a significant role in the Empire’s international relations. The town’s Royal Naval Dockyard proudly built the Navy’s capital ships, and although *Katori* and *Kashima* were built in private shipyards, the Imperial Japanese Navy’s visit stood as an important litmus test for navalist sentiment in the wider British maritime community. Portsmouth Mayor Sir George Couzens boasted at a welcome luncheon for the IJN fleet that ‘sailors of any nation can always reckon upon a hearty welcome and cordial hospitality at Portsmouth.’²⁵ However, the

²² Mitcham, ‘Navalism and Greater Britain’, 285.

²³ See Brad Beaven’s study on Portsmouth, Leeds and Coventry in Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire: Patriotism, Popular Culture and the City, 1870-1939* (Manchester, 2012), 36-37.

²⁴ Beaven, *Visions of Empire*, 14.

²⁵ *Army and Navy Gazette* (London), 09 June 1906.

presence of the Royal Navy in the town was not wholly beneficial to the municipal government. The Admiralty, as the major employer and landowner in the town, had very little interest in the town's affairs and it was often 'left to 'seek its own salvation' in regards to providing the prerequisite public infrastructure of modern civic society such as prestigious municipal buildings, housing, sanitation and transport links.²⁶ Although the Portsmouth Corporation was hospitable and accommodating, acknowledging as they did their importance in the communication of the British imperial message, it is important to note that this relationship was entered into on the civic elite's own terms. A lavish banquet in the Town Hall was provided for their guests who sat underneath a flag of the borough's arms "'supported" by the Union Jack and the flag of Nippon.'²⁷ Indeed the visit of the Imperial Japanese Navy, like many other international fleet visits, provided a perfect opportunity to showcase Portsmouth on the world stage. Mayor Couzens acted as ambassador to Portsmouth as a great naval and imperial town when he declared

In the name of the inhabitants of Portsmouth I wish our guests a safe return to the Land of the Rising Sun in their new battleships, and express the hope that they will come again to Portsmouth. Here, as elsewhere in the British Dominions, they may rely, at all times, upon an affectionate and hearty welcome.²⁸

In Australia on the other hand, the visit of the Japanese Navy was taken as an opportunity to showcase the *country* on a world stage. In the fledgling years of its Federacy, Australia's displays of hospitality signalled as much to the British Imperial metropole as they did to the visiting Japanese Navy. Visitors in both cities were greeted in auspicious public buildings by Federal and State leaders, the local civic elite, and businessmen. In Melbourne, they were invited to call on the

²⁶ John Field, 'Wealth, Styles of Life and Social Tone amongst Portsmouth's Middle Class, 1800-1875' in R. J.

Morris, ed., *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-century Towns* (Leicester, 1986), 75-77.

²⁷ *EN*, 06 June 1906.

²⁸ *EN*, 06 June 1906.

Chairman of the Stock Exchange, the Chamber of Commerce and the Law Courts; all signals of the thriving infrastructure of a self-governing Western Democracy.²⁹ John Griffiths characterised the Australian civic elites of this period as upper-middle class ‘who were most closely identified with the British middle classes’ and ‘exercised power by recourse to the British link through ... largely London-based imperial institutions.’³⁰ In line with their desire to fulfil their imperial duty. The Australian hosts’ display of hospitality signalled an incorporation of the Japanese on the global-local stage, which accommodated the requirements of the metropole’s politics. At odds with this, however, was a strong call for independence and Griffiths has also noted the tenancy of the Australian working classes in general to reject ‘the frippery of the Empire’ and to only accept ‘the imperial project when it offered scope for colonial development.’³¹ This analysis of port town diplomacy, therefore, underlines the assertion that the influence and reception of imperial discourses were plural and meant differing things at different times, or in different circumstances, to a range of different people. Although the patterns of hospitality and the overall rhetoric of the visits were similar, the visits of the Japanese Imperial Navy had very different implications across of the British World.

During the visits in provincial Britain and two major cities in Australia Japanese naval men were presented as equals, which forced the port town populace to confront notions of perceived cultural difference. Thus, the port town became an important testing ground through which to cement the Alliance and legitimise it to the public. Moreover, it served as projection to their Japanese allies that the British were committed, and had faith and goodwill which extended beyond

²⁹ *The Examiner* (Launceston, Tasmania), 17 May 1906.

³⁰ John Griffiths, *Imperial Culture in Antipodean Cities, 1880-1939* (Basingstoke, 2014), 27.

³¹ Griffiths, *Imperial Culture*, 27.

the chambers of the metropole's diplomats. To recycle Best's phrase, at a 'port town'-level, the diplomatic cultural divide was 'finessed' by incorporating Japan into the Western concept of 'civilised society'. This was achieved especially during the visits by accentuating the naval culture shared between Britain and Japan, and showing how 'Westernised' the Japanese visitors were.

However, it is important that historians view the exchange between the Imperial Japanese Navy and the public as something also borne from Japan's need to galvanise their allies and promote themselves as a legitimate world power. In addition to reviewing how the British public incorporated and received the Japanese, we must also note the ways in which the Japanese facilitated this response. Ruling Japanese attitudes towards Westernisation was somewhat ambivalent. The reforms instituted after the Meiji *Ishin* in 1868 were geared towards revoking the raft of unequal treaties brokered by American and European countries and the desire to compete with the West on equal terms, which was also gaining momentum amongst its citizens.³² The institution of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902 and its revision in 1905 were steps towards international recognition and parity. Certainly, at the forefront of the Japanese assertion for parity with the West was the creation of legitimate Western-style armed forces. While the army were moulded on French and Prussian models, Britain's Royal Navy was the paragon for the creation of Japan's sea-going force.³³ The Japanese 'showing the flag' around the British Empire, exactly

³² This event has been translated as the 'Meiji Restoration'; however, it is more accurate to describe as 'Renovation', which takes into account notions of renewal and future-planning rather than a sense of traditionalism and retrospection. Janet E. Hunter, *The Emergence of Modern Japan: An Introductory History since 1853* (London; New York, 1989), 8-9; S. Kadota, 'The Japanese Embassy in London and its Buildings', in Ian Nish, ed., *Japanese Envoys in Britain, 1862-1964* (Leiden, 2007), 3.

³³ Hunter, *The Emergence*, 270.

mirrored the tactics of the Royal Navy. J. Charles Schencking contends that Japan had cultivated a thriving naval culture inspired by British naval pageantry and a pro-naval press which was used to garner public favour and raise funds for Japanese naval expansion.³⁴ Driven by a ‘constructed consciousness of a South Seas destiny’, the Japanese were active agents in building their own image, which arguably downplayed threats to their allies in Britain and the British Empire.³⁵ In addition to the host cities’ agendas, therefore, this elaborate naval theatre was employed by the Japanese in order to emphasise their ‘Westernisation’ and shared affinities with naval militarism.

However, the Japanese also accentuated their unique national identity. Certainly, a conscious and unconscious hybrid of modernising practices which incorporated Western models and Japanese ‘tradition’ was viewed favourably by many cultural commentators and policy makers.³⁶ The practice of 'military orientalism' whereby the West fetishised and revered Eastern ways of war, such as the ancient practice of *Bushidō* (the way of the warrior) were highly regarded in military circles.³⁷ The display of such traditional and innate martial attributes can be evidenced through existing photographs showing displays of Jiu Jitsu and bamboo sword fighting on board

³⁴ J. C. Schencking, ‘The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Japanese Navy’, in P. P. O’Brien (ed.) *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902-1922* (London, 2004), 123-128. See also his monograph *Making Waves . Politics, Propaganda and the Emergence of the Imperial Japanese Navy 1868-1922* (Stanford, 2005), especially Chapter 5.

³⁵ J. C. Schencking, ‘The Imperial Japanese Navy and the Constructed Consciousness of a South Sea Destiny, 1872-1921’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 33, No. 4 (1999), 771.

³⁶ Hunter, *The Emergence*, 19.

³⁷ Porter, ‘Military Orientalism? British Observers of the Japanese Way of War, 1904-1910’, *War and Society*, 26, No. 1 (2007), 3.

the *Katori* while visiting Portsmouth.³⁸ This Orientalist reimagining of the way the Japanese state moulded its citizens for war through ascetic practice, systems of honour and rigorous discipline was seen as a welcome panacea for many of the perceived deficits in Edwardian society, which following the Boer War, was experiencing a crisis centring on notions of the degeneracy of the so-called British ‘race’.

While this may have been comforting for the British, a departure from a Western navalist imperial narrative unsettled the Australians. Certainly it was significant that the visit was conducted by a training squadron of naval cadets, which would lessen the direct threat of a fully-equipped and trained battle fleet in Australian waters. The visit of a young navy with an impressive training squadron also satisfied those who believed in investing in the military training of Australians for the defence of their own shores. Moreover, the prestige of the visit was still assured by the touting of the Squadron’s commander, Rear-Admiral Shimamura, as Chief of Staff to Admiral Togo during the Russo-Japanese War.³⁹ In published interviews with the Japanese Commander Shimamura’s credentials as a product of Royal Navy training. This was further consolidated by foregrounding his service the IJN against the Chinese during the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), and mention of his many decorations for distinguished service and heroism.⁴⁰ Indeed, when directly quizzed about Australia’s immigration policy Shimamura tactfully demurred ‘About that I cannot speak; but your harbour is very beautiful.’⁴¹

³⁸ M. E. Pescott-Frost collection, Portsmouth History Centre; *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 08 June 1906. Later

references to the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) will be abbreviated *EN*.

³⁹ *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 02 March 1906.

⁴⁰ *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 22 May 1906; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 May 1906.

⁴¹ *EN*, 21 May 1906.

Rather than being presented, or presenting themselves, as the menacing Other, this ‘port-town diplomacy’ showcased the Japanese as equals, not as inferior, as Kowner suggests. During the visits lavish naval pageantry and entertainments were provided on a par with any other programme of entertainment to a Western nation.⁴² Official engagements included various tours of naval training establishments, evening banquets and lavish parties in the naval barracks, civic banquets and parades through the urban space, sporting events and trips to the theatre. The amount of coverage in the local press in both countries can show us how important the visit was regarded by the middle-class cultural commentators of the town, and also how it served as a way to allay the fears of the population over the ascendancy of their unfamiliar allies.

What is striking about the visits to Portsmouth and the two Australian cities is the difference in onus on who was hosting their visitors, which was predicated by the specific balances of power within the port town. In Portsmouth the Royal Navy are central in organising the programme of events. The civic input is present, but a lighter touch. In Australia where the Royal Navy was less dominant Japanese officers were courted by Federal and Civic dignitaries, and the cadets were even indulged by days out funded by local businesses.⁴³ It is telling that on saying goodbye to the Superintendent at Royal Naval House, Sydney, Rear-Admiral Shimamura noted that that it was the only place he had not been entertained in.⁴⁴

During the visit to Portsmouth naval officials stressed the affinities between Japan as a naval nation. At an official Royal Navy reception to welcome the Japanese officers, Commander-

⁴² See for reference the reporting of the visit of the French Northern Squadron in August 1905. *EN*, 07 August 1905.

⁴³ Sydney Ferries hosted a trip to Parramatta, up the river from central Sydney. *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*, 26 May 1906.

⁴⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 May 1906.

in-Chief Admiral Sir Archibald Douglas KCB praised the progress of the IJN and their impressive naval victory at Tsushima where the ‘Japanese Naval men had proved what they were worth, and what they were made of.’⁴⁵ The qualities of a martial race, very similar with those the British bestowed on themselves, were lauded as admiration was conveyed for their ‘splendid devotion’ to their county, their Emperor, their bravery and their skill. However, it was stated that their success was

... coupled with the fact – and this was most important – that they were always determined to possess the best ships and the best weapons that could be procured.⁴⁶

This directly referred to the fact that *Katori* and *Kashima*, like their predecessors, had been built by British shipbuilding companies. Captains Sakamoto and Ijichi themselves were also trained by Admiral Douglas. Douglas claimed that ‘Everyone in the British Empire held the Japanese in the highest esteem’ and likened the two naval nations by claiming that ‘the Japanese and British sailors were really one at heart.’ He added that:

The two countries were now allied by a Treaty, in which they were bound to protect each other’s interest. They were happy in having such a compact, for Englishmen knew that the Japanese Navy was not only well abreast of the times, but the Japanese officers and men knew well how to manipulate ships and weapons, They would never fall behind, nor yet be found wanting.⁴⁷

This parity was extended throughout the trip where in speech, and in print, the two nations were depicted as kindred. However, there were undertones of condescension in their remarks which belied the British tendency to act as patron and master to its young Japanese naval protégé. For example, at a Warrant Officers’ luncheon at HMS Excellent Gunnery School, Chief Gunner W.

⁴⁵ *EN*, 04 June 1906.

⁴⁶ *EN*, 04 June 1906.

⁴⁷ *EN*, 04 June 1906.

G. Jones toasted the Emperor of Japan and stated that ‘there had been ample proof lately that Japan was a well-governed country.’⁴⁸ Indeed, there were other references made to Japan as being the ‘England of the East’ throughout the visit.⁴⁹ One journalist infantilised and Anglicised the Japanese visitors by commenting that ‘Their whole demeanour justified the fanciful description applied to them ‘The happy children of England in the East.’⁵⁰

Whereas this brand of navalism worked inside the home of the Royal Navy, Australia’s navalist sentiments were predicated on the desire for increased coastal defence, especially in the context of a rising Japanese naval force. The call for Australia to build its own navy had two distinct arguments which fell into both nationalist and imperialist camps. The imperialist argument was in favour of contributing to the cost of their naval and merchant shipping defence as a duty to the Commonwealth. On the other hand, the nationalist reasoning for a navy was create a country capable of its own coastal defence, and would be a step towards independence from the mother country. For example, comments from the right-leaning *Brisbane Courier* outlined the precariousness of the Australian situation. Their editorial, published the day after the Japanese Training Squadron arrived in Melbourne, used the rise of the IJN as a platform from which to espouse their views on building up an effective cadet force, ready for an Australian naval force ‘manned and maintained by Australians.’⁵¹

On the other end of the political spectrum, Australian Labour Party-affiliated newspaper *The Worker*, which had a pro-White Australia, pro-Commonwealth stance, commented in the

⁴⁸ *EN*, 04 June 1906.

⁴⁹ *EN*, 07 June 1906.

⁵⁰ *EN*, 07 June 1906.

⁵¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 10 May 1906.

months before the Japanese visit that current geopolitical tensions were affecting Australia as never before. It speculated on the likelihood of a war with the US or Japan, before it stated:

Germany, England's most likely antagonist, is steadily creating a powerful navy. Germany is growing stronger in the Pacific, and has a naval base within easy striking distance of the Australian seaboard. Military experts are continually warning us that we are in a defenceless and unprepared condition. We want to keep the Commonwealth for a white English-speaking race. What are we going to do about it, and when?⁵²

Indeed, the distrust of the Japanese, and the issue of pan-Asian alliance echoed in the editorial of Victoria's leading newspaper, *The Age*.

... it might easily happen that during some great conflagration of war China and Japan would become the allies of some Power hostile to Britain, and to be led into aggressive tactics toward the Commonwealth. Though the present alliance between Britain and Japan makes for the maintenance of stability in the East, there is no more guarantee that it could stand the shocks originating in international complications ... The very presence of a portion of a Japanese fleet on a friendly mission in our waters is a reminder that Japan has put itself at the head of the East in securing a share of sea power, and that Australia must take serious stock of the great national problem of providing in the most efficient way for local and imperial defence.⁵³

The solution, according to the editor Gottlieb Schuler, was to populate Australia with 'our own white stock who should make Australia their fatherland.' On the issue of defence, he stated that Australia had 'no natural taste for militarism', but would need to 'approach the question ... with the most intelligent foresight and prudence.'⁵⁴

Melbourne's *Weekly Times*, however, was happy to welcome the Squadron as 'Allies of Great Britain' arguing that Japan's role in quelling Russia's influence in China 'Struck a great blow on the behalf of British interests in the Far East.' The newspaper asserted, however, that the Japanese

⁵² *The Worker* (Sydney), 01 March 1906.

⁵³ *The Age* (Melbourne), 12 May 1906.

⁵⁴ *The Age* (Melbourne), 12 May 1906.

would not have been successful without the British Navy preserving a clear field for them during the Russo-Japanese War, and added that ‘the officers and the men ... are assured of a cordial reception by all sections of the community.’⁵⁵

The importance of a mutually reinforced relationship was highlighted during a banquet hosted by the Lord Mayor of Sydney. In front of many of New South Wales’s highest dignitaries including the Governor-General of Australia, Lord Northcote, Rear-Admiral Shimimura proclaimed that the courtesy shown to Japanese Squadron now, and during their previous visit in 1903, had been interpreted as evidence that Australia recognised the Japanese as allies. He hoped the treaty would be renewed ‘again and again, not for the purpose of aggression, but as a safeguard of the eternal peace of the world’ and further added:

The Japanese successes on the sea were largely due to the ships built on the finest models of the British Navy, commanded and officered by men who had learned their profession in the British Navy.⁵⁶

Whereas British reports were largely self-congratulatory, the Australian press used the visit of the Japanese training Squadron to make parallels with their own position on the world stage. Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* made connections with the simultaneous visit to Britain to take ownership of two British-built warships, reasoning that ‘so now in this outpost of Empire Australians now extend an equally sincere and admiring greeting ...’ However, the Editor was quick to assert the significance and advantages of the Japanese visit to Australia:

Her appearance upon the stage of history as one of the first-class Powers of the world synchronises with the development of Australia from a loose connection of independent self-governing colonies into a united country, which already presents many of the characteristics of a nation, allied with, rather than subject to, Great Britain.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Weekly Times* (Melbourne), 12 May 1906.

⁵⁶ *The National Advocate* (Bathurst), 23 May 1906.

⁵⁷ *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 22 May 1906.

Comparing Japan to Australia, the Editor noted the similarities of their styles of constitutional government, a mutual aim for ‘progressive and liberal domestic legislation for their people’ and high regard for ‘enlightened humanitarian principles.’⁵⁸ The commentary goes on to espouse the virtue of better trade relations with Japan in the hopes of replicating links that New York had with Liverpool and London.

The Japanese Squadron were in Sydney during Empire Day, which for some commentators provided an object lesson in the ‘Japanese Spirit’ which was taken to be ‘the care taken to instil love of country and loyalty to its rulers in the minds of the young.’⁵⁹ Indeed, if it could be coupled with

‘... a very wide extension of the cadet movement, so that all schoolboys could come into its scope ... we would have, as the Japanese have, enormously added to both the spirit and strength of the nation.’⁶⁰

Thus the IJN’s presence was an object lesson in how to achieve naval progress and imbed national character.

Public reactions to the visits

Finessing the cultural gap in the port town setting was still somewhat tricky, especially during encounters with the public. One sticking point for local missionaries was the concern for the ‘mortal souls’ of the Japanese sailors. Indeed, in Portsmouth, the very first engagement of the lower deck crew was a reception by naval welfare philanthropist, Miss Agnes Weston.⁶¹ During

⁵⁸ *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 22 May 1906.

⁵⁹ *The Sydney Mail and the New South Wales Advertiser*, 30 May 1906.

⁶⁰ *The Sydney Mail and the New South Wales Advertiser*, 30 May 1906.

⁶¹ *EN*, 04 June 1906.

her speech Miss Weston capitalised on the naval affinities between the two nations and made parallels between Admiral Nelson and Admiral Togo. Before they left, however, sailors were gifted a little book of Testaments in the Japanese language. She explained to the men that ‘It is a good Book, and upon its teaching this Institute has been built. We hope you take them away, and read and prize them.’ Thus for Weston, the visit of the Japanese sailors became a civilising mission whereby those yet to be converted to Christianity came to *her*, rather than having to travel to them. Graciously, the Japanese spokesperson, an unnamed Chief Petty Officer, thanked their hosts for the hospitality, and spoke about the notoriety of Miss Weston and her work in Japan saying that, as British Naval men have looked upon her as a mother, they have done so too.⁶² Certainly, there was a level of ‘Westernising’ that the Japanese representatives undertook and did much to assure the British public of their reverence for British naval hero Admiral Nelson during the interaction. In Sydney, the New South Wales Missionary Association (NSWMA) were less inclusive and invited only ‘Christians from the Japanese Squadron’ to afternoon tea at their depot where they were addressed by the pastor and told of the work of the Japanese Mission. This was followed by a service at the Mariners’ Church.⁶³ Unlike Weston’s open-armed gesture to the Japanese, the NSWMA had very little uptake in their endeavours with only sixteen men from the squadron in attendance.

Alteration in opinions about how the Japanese conducted themselves was based around Western, British, constructs of civilisation; enabling the Japanese to be accepted as trusted and worthy allies. During a municipal tram tour of Portsmouth which a contingent of 200 Japanese sailors shared with around 100 Crimean War veterans, an old British veteran was reported to

⁶² *EN*, 04 June 1906.

⁶³ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 May 1906.

exclaim, “My word! When I saw them at the Shimonoseki affair, fifty years ago ... they were savages. What a change!”⁶⁴ Perhaps a sign of public ambivalence can be hinted at by comparing their reception in various places in the town. Arriving at Portsmouth Town Hall after their tram tour, the Japanese naval men were loudly cheered. However, a report on the Japanese Navy attending the Theatre Royal in the afternoon painted a different picture of the local reception to their Japanese guests. Upon leaving the theatre the men were escorted by the band of the HMS *Prince of Wales*, which played them back to the Dockyard. However, it was reported that, although an ‘immense crowd’ gathered to see the Japanese pass, ‘there was very little cheering.’⁶⁵ This may very well be due to the level of public engagement. Within the civic spaces of the town, local pride could mingle with the festivity of the event. However, those outside the theatre were not engulfed in the pageantry of the visit, and ‘ownership’ of the space was considered in a different light.

In Australia the visitors certainly attracted a crowd. It was reported that 18,000 members of the public visited Port Melbourne to indulge in visiting the ships of the Japanese Training Squadron on Sunday 13 May.⁶⁶ On Wednesday 16 May 600 Japanese sailors, accompanied by Naval Reserves and the crew of HMS *Psyche*, were led through the decorated streets of Melbourne by the Naval Reserve Band to the Zoological Gardens. Their procession through the main thoroughfares of city to Victorian Government-led entertainments was observed by the State of Victoria’s Premier, Thomas Bent, several of his Ministers, the Lord Mayor, and an estimated

⁶⁴ *EN*, 07 June 1906.

⁶⁵ *EN*, 07 June 1906.

⁶⁶ *The Examiner* (Melbourne), 17 May 1906.

50,000 spectators.⁶⁷ This occupation of space in the port city, as argued by the Melbourne magazine *Table Talk*, roused a patriotic but wary and resigned tone.

The presence of the uniformed and disciplined Japs, many of whom have come out of Titanic battlefields in Asia, made the same chord of nationality vibrate in a different way. The Japanese are here as friends, allies and guests. The British alliance and other considerations, it is believed, will never permit their landing on these shores in any other capacity. And so the brave little brown men have been cordially welcomed.⁶⁸

The reports from the Australian national and provincial press usually recorded the utmost cordiality and civility in the ways in which the Japanese guests were treated. However, one report in a Tasmanian daily newspaper *The Examiner* noted how after a ‘judicious’ welcome and a toast to the Trustees of the Melbourne Zoological Gardens, Victorian Premier Thomas Bent exclaimed that it would be of no use to talk in ‘pigeon English’ before turning to his Minister of Education saying ‘Here, you can propose these Japs after.’⁶⁹ Interestingly, the report later takes pains to highlight the excellent English language skills of the Japanese in the speeches that followed.

This incident however, paled in comparison to the actions of Queensland Senator Anderson Dawson⁷⁰ later that month when he published his response to an invitation to an ‘At Home’ aboard the *Hashidate* in Melbourne. Dawson declined on the grounds that it would be hypocritical to accept Rear-Admiral Shimamura’s hospitality, and in an open letter which was widely condemned by his contemporaries in the Senate,⁷¹ he reasoned:

⁶⁷ *The Examiner* (Melbourne), 17 May 1906.

⁶⁸ *Table Talk* (Melbourne), 17 May 1906.

⁶⁹ *The Examiner* (Melbourne), 17 May 1906.

⁷⁰ Dawson was the First Labour Prime Minister of any nation. He was Minister of Defence in 1904.

⁷¹ *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 31 May 1906.

I do not trust you. I think the day will dawn when Australia will rue the day it showered so much “gush” on you ... This is candid, and not meant in any way personal to you, but to you as a people. Whether I am right or wrong, history will prove.⁷²

Indeed, although most commentators and public figures rebuked Dawson for his remarks, their grounds were nearly always for the fact that he had been discourteous. His warnings were only thinly dismissed by reasoning that, the Australians had to trust their Japanese allies.

Conversely, stereotypes could be undermined by one-to-one encounters where the Japanese visitors were able to be judged on a personal level, which did not always fit with the perceived notions of racial difference. Parallels were drawn between Britain’s most recent ally, the visiting French sailors a year previously, and the Japanese. The *Evening News* reported that the Japanese sailors ‘seem to bid fair to outrival the French in the matter of politeness.’ The report recalled an anecdote of a ‘street loafer’ who assisted three Japanese sailors in finding the correct tram to get back to the Dockyard. Although hoping for a tip to compensate his troubles the man seemed to be pleased to settle for big smiles, doffed caps and, as the paper wrote, a ‘Tank you very much.’⁷³ This highlighted the complications that the British public had with meeting another culture face-to-face. When they did they could see that, apart from the language barrier and perhaps not understanding the concept of giving a tip, they were no different from Britain’s closest European neighbours.

Similarly, the press in Sydney noted that although shore leave was freely given, and the locals were ‘prepared to “spoil” them with kindness’, no stories which showed the visitors abusing that

⁷² *Evening News* (Sydney), 21 May 1906; *The Watchman* (Sydney), 26 May 1906.

⁷³ *EN*, 05 June 1906.

kindness were reported.⁷⁴ Although still constituted through the lens of racial Othering, both Portsmouth and Australian experiences were positive.

Conclusions

Subsequent geopolitical changes, such as an alliance with Russia in 1907, and the establishment of Australian and New Zealand navies rendered the Alliance less attractive to the British. Certainly, as Keith Neilson argued, by the First World War, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was seen as ‘leash, rather than a life-line’ to the British. This was further exacerbated when the Japanese were thought to have exploited the War to acquire German territories in the Far East.⁷⁵

However, we can learn much about the cross-imperial negotiation of race and encounters with Otherness within this short period. During the visits an uneasy parity was established by the Admiralty and reportage in the local press based on concepts of ‘civilisation’. These were legitimised to the public upon the criteria of Japanese naval prowess, and their established links with the Royal Navy and British technology. The IJN were also engineers of their own image, and through the spectacle and rhetoric of a shared naval culture, the people of Portsmouth, Melbourne and Sydney, and by extension those with vested interests following the events, were able to process complex narratives surrounding the discourse of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The port town thus became a place of mediation where high-level international diplomacy mingled with the face-to-

⁷⁴ *The Sydney Mail and the New South Wales Advertiser*, 30 May 1906.

⁷⁵ Keith Neilson, ‘The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and British Strategic Foreign Policy’, in P. P. O’Brien (ed.) *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902-1922* (London, 2004), 59.

face experience of an alliance ‘in practice’ and a space through which issues such as racial difference and imperial security were wrestled with and explored.

Importantly, however, the message was interpreted differently from metropole to periphery. Whereas the Japanese naval visit to Portsmouth did little to destabilise British faith in its naval supremacy, it opened up questions for Australia in relation to the country’s geopolitical position and its ability to defend itself. Certainly, in 1907 the Western Australia-published newspaper *The Australian*, which argued that Prime Minister Alfred Deakin’s proposals for the construction of a national navy was almost unanimously accepted by the wider population due to the rising threat of Japan in the Pacific.⁷⁶

Through reportage and elaborate naval and civic ceremony, and by the physical presence and encounters with the Imperial Japanese sailors themselves, citizens of the British Empire were able to un-Other their ally and consider the Japanese as fit to sit at the table of the (White) World Powers. The host ports were also able to push their own agendas for advancement within the British Imperial framework. Although some ingrained stereotypes and assumptions still remained, through the lens of ‘port town diplomacy’ we can see how the British public was able to understand the Alliance with Japan and use it as a fulcrum to open up wider debates on concepts of race and cultural fluidity during the height of the British Empire.

⁷⁶*The Australian* (Perth), 20 December 1907.