**Journey: from Frank Clune’s exotic Orient to menacing Asia**

*David Walker, Peking University, China*

From the 1930s to the 1970s, Frank Clune was one of Australia’s most popular writers and broadcasters. He was also a tireless networker who understood the value of powerful friends in government and in the new worlds of radio and international travel. His larrikin, knockabout image no doubt helped reassure his readers that he was not interested in literary pretensions. He was a story teller with an eye for interesting facts and new worlds. Clune understood that travel was set to grow dramatically through the twentieth century. While air travel was available only to a tiny minority in the 1930s, Clune appreciated that it had already shrunk distances and would ultimately put new travel destinations within reach of ordinary people. Travel was about to be democratised.\(^{(1)}\) Even for Australians unable to travel there was the appeal of following the adventures, mishaps and discoveries of one of their own, a real Australian and quite a prankster.

Clune’s primary interests were audiences, influence and money. He was an accountant by profession and approached writing as a business. It was a business that allowed him to live in affluent Vaucluse, Sydney. While some of his more literary contemporaries muttered about the corrupting influence of the new technologies – radio, cinema, the gramophone – Clune saw new audiences and an opportunity through broadcasting to create a bigger market for his books.\(^{(2)}\) The timing was just right. Clune was in his mid-thirties when the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) was created in 1932.\(^{(3)}\) Broadcasting to the nation was a weighty responsibility made more so by the belief that radio had an obligation to educate and inform the nation not just entertain it.\(^{(4)}\) Voice and accent mattered. Clune’s accent was considered too broadly Australian, too uneducated by ABC management.\(^{(5)}\) Clune countered by pointing out that for “he-man” topics like explorers and bushrangers his Australian accent was just right.\(^{(6)}\) Despite his accent, by 1938 Clune was giving regular ABC talks. While broadcasting was not intended for the likes of him, listeners seemed to like what they heard.

Always interested in the next big thing, by the late 1930s Clune was looking for new fields to conquer. Australia’s place in the Pacific seemed a subject worth thinking about for an author who titled his autobiography “try anything once.”\(^{(7)}\) Wandering through “awakening” Asia promised tempting new themes and a growing readership. Australians had taken to radio with considerable enthusiasm. In the six years from 1929 the number of radio stations across the nation jumped from 20 to 68. By 1940, 1,212,000 households in Australia had radio licenses, a proportion of the population second only to the United States.\(^{(8)}\) It was the latest thing in communication and Clune was going to be part of it.
The creation of the Department of External Affairs in 1935, though a small and tentative step, signaled that Australia was about to establish its own diplomatic presence, particularly so in the Pacific. The ABC saw an opportunity to foster a deeper understanding of the region when it began to broadcast Japanese language lessons from 1936, the first nation in the world to use radio for this purpose. ABC management was surprised by the keen public response. Clune saw new opportunities for a travel writer and broadcaster and all the more so if others could be persuaded to pick up some of the travel costs in return for favorable publicity in his books. His motto may have been “try anything once,” but “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours” was not such a bad fit either.

For Clune, prophecy seemed the best approach to a region about which he knew very little. Awakening Asia had been the subject of prophetic utterances for some time. It seemed a safe bet to suggest that the world knew all too little about a region that was bound to grow in importance over coming decades. As true as this may have been in general, it seemed all the more true for Australians in particular. Asia was on their doorstep. It was time for some entertaining geography lessons. Clune brought a buoyant and optimistic spirit to his first Asian adventures. He was still a young man, he loved travel and he was getting paid to see the world. In the 1930s, the European powers still held sway throughout Asia. The white man was respected and waited on. His word carried weight. In entering this world, Clune found himself among people who understood the “native mind” and knew that the controlling presence of the white man was best for the East. Here was an utterly intoxicating vision of power, authority and, most important of all, prestige.

By the late 1950s, it was clear - even to Clune himself - that the European withdrawal from Asia was now irreversible. Clune’s twenty year hope that Asia might remain a stage on which Europeans found new ways of demonstrating their mastery had died and with it his earlier receptivity to the region. Flight to Formosa, published in 1958, was Clune’s last book on Asia. In it he acknowledged Singapore and Hong Kong as “the last footholds of the white man in Eastern Asia- toeholds on a volcano...” The dream of white prestige that had meant so much to the young Frank Clune had disappeared.

Clune was born into the tough world of working class Woolloomooloo in Sydney in 1893. He grew up at a time when speculation about Australia’s possible Asian futures was common. Japan was a rising Pacific power and as each year passed it seemed to draw closer to Australia’s empty north. Clune was then an alert newspaper boy accustomed to shouting headlines on street corners. The news of Japan’s victory over Russia in 1905 and the splash made by Japanese Training Squadron visits to Australia in 1903 and 1906 did not escape his notice. Clune recalled that he sold many more copies of the Star and Evening News on the day the headline read “Admiral Togo Sinks Russian Fleet.” Young Frank was struck by the way his “customers stood

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around in eager groups reading the tactics of Togo with bated breath."{13} It did not escape his notice that he had profited from Togo’s victory. The extra coins in his pocket jangled cheerfully with every step.

Clune left home at fifteen to see the world, returning in time to enlist in the AIF. While still in his early twenties, he was wounded at Gallipoli and returned to Australia. It was a promising start for an aspiring popular writer to already have the magic words “Gallipoli” and “digger” in his biography. Clune worked particularly hard at being an authentic Australian and like many authentic Australians of his generation he had more than a passing interest in Japan. Clune took this interest further than most in 1924 when he enrolled in a Japanese language class at the University of Sydney in the hope of becoming a commercial traveller in Japan. It soon became apparent that it would take a good deal longer to learn the language than he first anticipated.{14} Clune may also have felt out of place in that world. The Professor of Japanese at the University of Sydney, A.L. Sadler, was a rather rarefied English gentleman, kind enough to those he felt had an aptitude for Japanese, dismissive of those he felt did not.{15}

Although he presented himself as a man of the people, Clune understood the value of connections. As he tells the story, the trip that formed the basis for his first book with an Asian setting, Sky High to Shanghai, was hatched on the golf course with the Managing Director of the ABC, Charles Moses. Clune persuaded Moses that he should be sent to the “orient” to gather material for ABC broadcasts.{16} Asian topics were receiving considerable coverage and promised to attract a wide audience.{17} Towards the end of 1938, the ABC agreed to finance Clune’s China trip, asking him for eight National Talks and paying in advance for four of them.{18} An internal ABC memorandum noted: “The talks he broadcasts about his various travels seem always to be particularly popular.”{19}

Sky High to Shanghai was published by Angus and Robertson in 1939. It had a handsome yellow cover with a dragon on it to evoke the Orient. It is a typical Clune product: a mix of commentary in diary form interspersed with historical narratives on famous people and places. George Ernest Morrison and W. H. Donald (to whom he received a letter of introduction) are covered in some detail as Australian journalists who achieved great fame and influence in China.{20} There was a pattern here of seeing the Orient as a sphere in which charismatic Australians achieved a dominance that appeared to affirm a natural, racial aptitude for leadership and an equally natural Oriental talent for subservience. The Orient exhibited the qualities expected of it. It was incapable of governing itself and was timeless, enduring, inscrutable, crowded and given to inflicting and enduring pain. In Shanghai Clune saw suffering unlike anything he had experienced before among the thousands of refugees who had crowded into the city following the Japanese invasion of China.{21}
Clune also exhibited more than a passing interest in the religions and philosophies of China noting, in particular, the subtlety of mind that produced the “Analects of Confucius.” Into the 1940s, the Chinese were credited by Clune with immense patience and considerable intellectual prowess. It invariably followed that while they might well make loyal allies they could just as quickly turn into formidable adversaries. In Shanghai Clune was struck by the volatile combination of Chinese intellect and terrible suffering. Shanghai was a desperate city. “I realised with a pang,” Clune wrote, “that seven million Australians, like myself, are almost totally ignorant of the dignity and culture of our neighbours of the Near North.” (22)

Clune went to considerable lengths to deny any suggestion that he was either a deep thinker or a writer with serious literary ambitions. He had a very low opinion of “intellectuals” and did not want to be regarded as one. His homemade writing and improvised vocabulary was the despair of literary critics and educated reviewers alike. (23) When Clune sought to characterise the response to Asia, it was Australia’s ignorance that struck him as noteworthy and something that should change. This could be interpreted as an admission of defeat. Asia was so difficult to comprehend that sensible commentary was almost impossible. On the other hand, Australia’s ignorance of Asia was an infinitely renewable topic and justification enough for Clune to do yet more travelling, writing and broadcasting. He appointed himself:

an unofficial educator for the Australian public on the history and geography, not only of Australia but of all those countries nearer to us than Europe or America, that our official education system sometimes ignores. (24)

As the role of an educator did not sit well with Clune’s admissions of ignorance, he became a “fact-finder” instead. (25) It was a fascinating turn for Clune to present himself as the person best-placed to make Australians more aware of Asia. (26) In underlining the shortcomings of the “official education system”, Clune added his voice to those calling for a curriculum that recognised Australia’s proximity to Asia.

While he confessed to being ignorant about Australia’s near north and always made it plain that he confined his intellectual paddling to the shallow end of the pool, Clune nevertheless worked hard at exploring what it might mean to be an Australian in Asia. Some of these meanings contradicted the rhetorical confessions of ignorance, by presenting Australians as clever and adaptable people who could be expected to crop up almost anywhere in Asia holding positions of authority. “Chinese” Morrison fitted the bill exactly in Clune’s rendering of his story. Here was a Geelong boy with an appetite for adventure who had become the London Times correspondent in Peking and an adviser to the Chinese Nationalist government. Clune wove such stories into the fabric of the nation’s history. In effect, Asia was incorporated into the territories in which Australians would prove themselves. Clune was not so much inclined to see
Australia as part of Asia, but wrote of Asia as a new sphere in which to test Australian qualities, a new arena in which Australians might have their adventurous spirit and character recognized.

In fact, Morrison was a resolutely British figure who underwent some Australianisation in order to meet the requirements of Clune’s folksy nationalism. Even so, Clune considered him a fine example of the white man who had risen to a position of great influence and authority in the East. This was an enduring Orientalist motif and one that fed the hope, or perhaps the fantasy, of individual Europeans holding immense sway over the teeming East. In the foreground of these set pieces of Eastern portraiture stood the steady and commanding figure of the white man, while the swirling masses of Asia formed the background.

Clune showed an insistently tribal attachment to the Australian abroad in Asia. He told of how he and a friend were waiting for service at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo late one night. There were some Englishmen at another table vainly ringing a bell for service. Clune decided that it was time for a “brace of cooees” followed by the “yip, yip, yip of drovers calling their dogs to heel.” The Englishmen turned pale. Twenty startled waitresses rushed in to take orders. They had certainly been brought to heel. A different and later version of this story has a “bluff and self-confident extrovert”, a description that suits Clune exactly, signal his arrival in Tokyo by issuing a series of cooees in the Imperial Hotel at cocktail hour to a mixed audience of the best people. The astonished crowd were invited to “Take a look at a fair dinkum Aussie.” Was this another version of the story or had the cooee become an obligatory call for the visiting Australian? There is no record of Sir John Latham making his presence known in Japan in this manner. The Imperial Hotel provided a striking stage for Clune’s rendering of the authentic Australian in Asia. Central to the performance was a commitment to break all the known rules of diplomacy. Lovable Australians had no need for artifice.

In another scene set in a Tokyo restaurant Clune described his meeting with the Australian academic and writer, Peter Russo, and Clune’s Japanese assistant, Miss Phoebe Hatsu Imajo. Clune observed that despite his “cosmopolitan veneer, Peter is an Australian to the bone” so he knew he would play along. Miss Imajo wanted to know more about Australia. Clune and Russo responded to her earnest questions with absurd answers. Told that the Australian national dish was goanna, Miss Imajo asked for the correct spelling, as she took down a careful note. And so it went on, the two clever Australians providing silly answers which the assiduous Miss Imajo took down word for word. Being Australian was an in-joke that no outsider could be expected to understand. In Clune’s world of 1939, Australians might know and govern Asians, but Asians could not hope to know Australians.

Clune’s performances as a rough diamond unused to the usages of the polite world were always more effective when they drew a scornful gaze from upper class English folk, especially women. While English hauteur was a favourite target in Sky High to Shanghai, at the same

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time British power in the East was something Clune took very seriously. While he declared that his sympathies lay with the ordinary people, the victimised masses, there was no suggestion that they should be allowed to better their lot in Australia. The purpose in knowing Asia better was not necessarily to improve the circumstances of Asian people, but to teach Australians to step more carefully through the Asian minefield. The tough lad from Sydney’s Woolloomooloo wanted Australians to become street wise about their dangerous Asian neighbourhood.

In Clune’s travel stories, “Australia” and “Asia” were constructed as sharply contrasted entities. The deceptions practised on Miss Imajo notwithstanding, Clune liked to see himself as the representative of an open and youthful people new to the world stage. He was merely a collector of impressions, an artless storyteller and man of the people. Honest Frank Clune, the white Australian in Asia, soon found himself in a world of bewildering complexities: historical, geographical, cultural and linguistic. Asian complexity had a way of making Australia appear disconcertingly naïve, a country that might easily be taken for a ride. The first lesson of Asian survival as presented in Sky High to Shanghai was to recognise that Asia was devious and deceptive, a world of plots, spies and clever disguises in which truth was always an early casualty. One of Clune’s most insistent messages was that this turbulent world was now on Australia’s doorstep.

If proximity to Asia was a key theme in Sky High to Shanghai it was even more so in his second Asian adventure, To the Isles of Spice. A map on the inside cover shows just how close northern Australia is to all the scattered islands of the Netherlands East Indies. A photograph of Queen Wilhelmina “Beloved Ruler of the Netherlands” served as a reminder of who was in control here. At Enrekang Clune admired the sight of Javanese and Amboynese soldiers “commanded by white officers” drilling in the sun as a symbol of the “might and majesty” of this distant European queen. There was also what was to become a standard reference in Clune’s Asia-related books to the trading opportunities that lay to Australia’s north “if we could pull up our socks and go get it.” Clune often sounded this warning note about chances going wasted.

All Aboard for Singapore appeared in 1941, his third book in as many years, consolidating Clune’s reputation as a commentator on Australia’s relations with the Near North. In northern Queensland he turned to the old chestnut: the startling contrast between the “empty north” and crowded Java with its 40 million people in an area about the size of Victoria. Clune was a convert to the view that climate and soil quality “dooms Australia forever to be sparsely peopled over four-fifths of its terrain.” When the English-born geographer, Griffith Taylor, expressed a similar view in the 1920s, journalists and politicians had bayed for his blood. At the time, the talk was of “Australia unlimited.” Any questioning of this at that time was considered defeatist, an open invitation for hungry Asia to enter the continent en masse and thereby
complete the unfinished task of settlement. By the late 1930s opinions were changing. Australia was now being presented as empty, not because white Australians were too lazy or too hostile to foreigners to accept more immigrants, but because the continent, large though it may have been, could not support a large population. In putting this view, Clune had the advantage, unlike Taylor, of being known as a white Australia stalwart: “We Australians go to it and do the work ourselves, so as to avoid the problems of miscegenation, caused by mixed races of sahibs and serfs.”(42) The spectre of miscegenation allowed Clune’s continued promotion of racial purity as a principal that supported human dignity in Australia and Asia alike.

One place Clune really took to was “beautiful Bali.” He saw this “perfect holiday isle” where the local “belles don’t wear blouses” as an attractive potential tourist destination for Australians, particularly males, in search of a holiday. (43) At the same he was alert to the importance of Australians maintaining their racial responsibilities:

We have to keep up the White Man’s prestige, and try to look the part of bosses of the world, God’s Chosen People, enlightening the poor benighted heathen with our culture and commerce. (44)

At this time Clune still felt able to adopt a somewhat flippant tone towards “white prestige.” A decade later he was appreciably less jaunty. Clune was also alert to opportunities for Europeans living in Asia to come to Australia, where he thought they could seek respite from the tropics or find educational opportunities. (45) Clune was quick to button-hole the manager of Burns Philp in Surabaya to hear more about these possibilities.

Clune was reassured that the Netherlands East Indies was “armed to the teeth and, like a porcupine, bristling at all points.”(46) At his next stop in Singapore there was more good news. Clune was gratified to find that his suite in the sumptuous Seaview Hotel, was next to that of Air Chief Marshall, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, Commander-in-Chief, Far East. Of all the long journeys Clune undertook as a writer and traveller, there was no longer journey for a young Catholic lad from working class Sydney than that from Woolloomooloo to his room in the Seaview Hotel. It was typical of Clune to sing the praises of the hotel in which he was staying or the airline that had flown him there in return for a little help with his travel expenses. As to Brooke-Popham, he was more than happy to sing his praises too. Clune found him to be one of “the keenest-brained men in the British Empire.”(47) Clune was all ears as Brooke-Popham told him how Britain was determined to defend Singapore, which he judged to be a near impregnable fortress from which Britain would never withdraw or retreat. (48) Within months, Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies had fallen to the Japanese and Brooke-Popham was under a cloud. In his determination to register only the good news about Europe’s hold over Asia, Clune was unable to grasp the speed at which the colonial East he so loved, with its luxury hotels, expensive cocktails, crisp imperialists and orientalist trappings would decolonise. His
longing for the return of this lost world is apparent in Pacific Parade, published in 1945 where he looks back to the pre-war period: “The Dutch at that time were our nearest foreign neighbours, and will be so again unless all prophecies are useless.”

Although India had long been on Clune’s list of travel destinations, it was not until the end of 1943 that he found a way of getting there. He went with his usual letters of introduction, one to Lord Wavell, the newly appointed Viceroy to India and another from H.V. Evatt, Minister for External Affairs. While Clune saw and interviewed a number of Indians he was particularly impressed by India’s top British officials, including Wavell (“a man’s man with a keen eye”) just as he had been by Brooke-Popham, a man’s man with “piercing eyes.” Alert appearances, big brains, firm handshakes and a commanding gaze were clear signs of British superiority. Clune’s Song of India was published by Invincible Press in 1946. Here he spelt out his thoughts on the future of British India:

The British may be absorbed by India, or they may even quit of their own free will - but one thing is certain, they won’t be forced out of India, either by the Indians or by anyone else!

A year later Britain was forced out of India.

Despite his show of confidence, Clune knew that he was out of his depth in India. He admitted that his was “only a book of fleeting impressions, by an outsider who has tried to convey some glimpses of the multi-variegated Indian scene.” Nevertheless, India reinvigorated Clune’s insistence that Australians needed to know more about Asia. He now claimed “Asia is our biggest, nearest, and most logical market for two-way trade.” He went on: “It is quite clear that Australia’s future is in the Pacific and Indian Oceans rather than in the Atlantic- and the sooner we recognize this fact the better.”

Clune was a mouthpiece for the Department of External Affairs, another generous sponsor, as he was in arguing that these trading opportunities could hardly develop unless Australians established closer bonds of “mutual understanding” with their northern neighbours. Through the 1940s there was no-one who made this point more often or to a larger public.

In India Clune quickly discovered that the White Australia policy was one of the few things Indians would ask about and it was an obvious cause of resentment. When interviewed by the Bombay Morning Standard, Clune presented the official explanation of the policy. It had nothing to do with race and there was no racial discrimination against Indians in Australia. It was entirely an economic matter because no Australian would tolerate an erosion of the basic wage upon which their standard of living rested. Following the interview Clune admitted to quite a lot of hostile correspondence and “lot of argument in various parts of India.” He was annoyed by the “slickness of Indian propagandists.” He wrote privately that he wanted to “haul off and tell some of those Brahminical dialecticians that we don’t want any more … half-
caste complexities” in Australia.\(^{(57)}\) As a travelling salesman for White Australia, Clune found India hard going and not least because many of his adversaries/customers were so annoyingly articulate. The label on the product he was selling was clearly misleading.

In January 1945 Clune told his literary collaborator, P.R. Stephensen, that the Brahmans he had encountered were “slimy, twisting sons of bitches” who could out talk just about anyone he cared to name. He had been “robbed, cheated, mucked around, starved, double-crossed and generally driven to desperation by the Indians.”\(^{(58)}\) Clune added that had he written frankly about India, there was a fair chance that a war would have broken out. That he did not write frankly confirms Clune’s status as a semi-official traveller who did not want to cause trouble for Evatt or the Department of External Affairs. Government policy was to promote mutual understanding and as Clune wanted to maintain his links to government, his ABC broadcasts and his travelling habit it seemed prudent to toe the line. Part of “the line” was to affirm that Britain would remain in India indefinitely, although Clune confided to Stephensen that the “day of the White Man in India is numbered.” Even so, this numbering was generous. In another “decade or so,” he predicted, the Muslims would have the “slimy Hindu Brahmans on the run.”\(^{(59)}\)

Like many at that time, Clune thought highly of the martial qualities of India’s Muslims. Clune predicted that a new Mughal Empire would emerge in India with Mr Jinnah at its head. Where Clune thought Muslims capable of manliness and discipline, he hated Hindu intellectuals for their volubility and, to his eyes, their effeminacy. Clune’s venomous response to India points to the fragility of White Australia when subjected to articulate and invariably sceptical Asian interrogation.

Clune restated his views on immigration and “Australia’s Empty Lands” in two articles for the New Delhi Statesman in August 1947.\(^{(60)}\) The Department of External Affairs felt that they gave “a good presentation of our case.” Arthur Calwell hoped the articles would:

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... dispel the belief, so widely held in India, that our unwillingness to admit non-Europeans is based on an assumption of racial superiority and is not dictated by social and economic grounds.\(^{(61)}\)
\end{quote}

Despite the familiar hope, there is no evidence that Clune persuaded any of the Indians he met that the White Australia policy was based on economic and social considerations, not race.

In his Statesman articles Clune attributed Australia’s policy to the “wise desire to avoid internecine strife and the problems of miscegenation.” As for the “empty north,” it was empty not out of a selfish desire to keep others out, but because geography and climate kept it so. In conclusion, Clune returned to “mutual understanding, mutual friendship, mutual trade” between Australia and India.\(^{(62)}\) There was an increasingly scripted quality to his calls to know and understand Asia.
Clune’s articles for the Statesman and his popularity with the reading public enabled him to visit Japan in late 1948.\textsuperscript{63} He went as a government-sponsored “unofficial investigator” to examine allegations that Australian troops were contracting venereal diseases as they fraternised with Japanese women. Clune duly did what was expected of him and reported that Australian troops were all very well disciplined and that any complaints about their conduct were entirely groundless.

The Prologue to Ashes of Hiroshima is dated May 1949, just months before the communist revolution brought Mao Zedong to power in China. Once again Clune ended his prologue with an appeal for Australians to know Asia better. Yet Clune was reluctant to acknowledge that the ground was shifting. He stuck to his old beliefs. As criticism of the White Australia policy grew more frequent, denunciation of his critics grew more strident. Clune labelled them all as “preachers who are renegades from the faith of their forefathers” whose “tremendous exertions, sacrifices and hard work” had “subdued, occupied and civilized” a difficult continent.\textsuperscript{64} Clune maintained that to criticise White Australia was to betray “our white grandparents” and accused his critics of wanting to “hand over our lands to the Asiatics.”\textsuperscript{65}

The ideal of the hard working pioneer battling immense odds to tame the land stood in sharp contrast to the degenerationist fear that white Australians were an inferior breed so softened by urban comforts that they would prove easy prey for predatory Asia. From the 1930s to the 1960s Clune was among the most popular exponents of the pioneering legend. In his treatment of the subject it was “Asia” that appeared soft and degenerate, not Australia. At the same time, the rise of Asia gave the celebration of pioneering virtues particular urgency. For Clune, one of the clearest signs of White Australia’s superiority over Asia was the passion for clearing the land. Uncleared and uninhabited jungles convinced him that Asia was not land hungry, as was so often claimed, but “lacking in energy.” Sturdy Australian axemen would show them how things should be done.\textsuperscript{66}

In making his case for the sturdy pioneer as the emblematic Australian, Clune joined those who saw the settlement of the continent as a masculine achievement. Similarly, the maintenance of white Australia and an effective resistance to incursions from Asia would depend upon the male as the animating spirit of the nation.\textsuperscript{67} The “study pioneers” of the nineteenth century settler frontier now needed to be born again as the “he-men” who would resist encroaching Asia in the twentieth century. Writing to Calwell in 1946 on immigration policies and declining birth rates, Clune maintained that the only way to restore the birth rate was to reverse fifty years of female emancipation. It was necessary to remove women from paid employment and “drive them back into the home as breeders, their proper function.” The emancipation of women, he told Calwell, “means race-suicide and that is what has happened here.”\textsuperscript{68} There was a growing apprehension that without change in gender roles the nation was heading for disaster.
Clune also linked the undesirable softness he perceived in many Asians with a fatalism that he considered profoundly "Asian." Here he drew upon some enduring theories about character and climate: the Asiatic was given to "dumb suffering under disasters" like earthquakes and floods whereas Europeans faced "a more constant struggle against predictable adversities" and were toughened by them, not made "soft and fatalistic." This produced sharply divergent mentalities, "an uncrossable mental gulf between Asiatics and ourselves." (69) For this reason there could be no compromise with the White Australia policy. The fatalism also pointed to a lack of creative intelligence. Clune repeatedly referred to the Japanese in particular, as "stupid," a nation of "regimented robots, pre-conditioned automata instinctive slaves." (70) As the forces of decolonisation gained momentum through the late 1940s, Clune seized upon the defeat of Japan as evidence that "the White Man generally, is terribly tough and ultimately invincible." (71) It was a bold prophet, or a compromised one who, in 1949, was prepared to stand by his prediction that the White Man would not be driven from Asia.

Clune's generic White Man invariably found expression in outstanding individuals and for the most part military heroes. In Ashes of Hiroshima, General Macarthur played this role to perfection. (72) He was bold, energetic and decisive and had that penetrating gaze Clune so admired. Macarthur obliged Clune with an interview and his signed photograph which duly appeared at the front of Ashes of Hiroshima. At the other end of the scale stood the "slippery intellectuals" who maintained their unwanted criticism of the White Australia policy and their undesirable counterparts the "slimy" Hindus. Both were portrayed as sly and unmanly. (73)

As events overtook Clune's book on Japan he was forced to write a "Postscript" and then a "Postscript to the Postscript." (74) A book that started out as a sustained attack upon the "stupid", "robotic" and "wooden headed" Japanese, a people who lacked the creativity and philosophical depth of the Chinese, ended by arguing that the Japanese should be re-invented as allies now that robotic China was fully incorporated into the Soviet sphere of influence. As Clune saw it, World War III now loomed as a battle between Communism and Democracy. Clune hoped that despite the immense changes that had overtaken the world since he began his journey to Japan in September 1948, his readers might nevertheless consider his book "still timely." (75) This was an abject appeal from an author who loved to be thought thoroughly up to date. By 1960, Clune was in his late sixties. Everywhere he turned he saw evidence that the old, pioneering Australia had faded away to be replaced by new, feminine fads and fashions. He feared that Australians were losing faith in being white and as they did so threatening Asia drew ever closer.

In his correspondence with Calwell (among others) Clune made his private views very clear. He supported Calwell's deportation of Malay seamen who had married white women: "We've enough Brindle Bastards [Clune's emphasis] in this country." (76) While pressing this point, he urged Calwell to persuade the Department of Information to buy 10,000 copies of his book,
Roaming Around Australia, for distribution to prospective immigrants, an offer Calwell deflected.\(^{(77)}\) Clune was adamant that keeping Australia white was essential to defence and security. He thought the policy had saved Australia in 1942 by preventing the emergence of an Asian fifth column as it faced the Japanese advance. On similar grounds he opposed any softening of the policy through establishment of a quota system for Asian entry arguing that any small intake of immigrants would soon become a flood given “Asian” breeding habits. Asian women he maintained, were as “blindly fertile as shoals of fish or swarms of grasshoppers.”\(^{(78)}\)

In the 1950s, Clune’s list of those who conspired against his defence of white Australia grew markedly longer. He believed that the United Nations was pushing a “One World” philosophy in which “all races will be mixed, mongrelized and bastardized to destroy Christianity and the White Man’s superiority.”\(^{(79)}\) Having once denied that notions of white superiority had any place in his thinking or in the case for maintaining Australia as a white continent, he now gave up pretending otherwise. Into the 1960s, Clune became increasingly strident in his views, signing off with the greeting, “best wishes for purity of race,” while denouncing every form of racial mixing as a plot designed to bring down the West in general and White Australia in particular.\(^{(80)}\) The old call to know Asia had turned into an embittered diatribe against the countries and cultures to Australia’s north. With no institutional constraints to help discipline his thinking, and with his hopes for white dominance in Asia defeated, Clune became a case study of outspoken racial animosities and resentments.

Frank Clune grew up with White Australia. He was seven years old and selling newspapers when the Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed and the White Australia policy was introduced. As a boy born into a Catholic family in working class Sydney there were barriers to personal advancement and social acceptance, particularly so as he had left school at 14. Yet he had two particular advantages. He was male and he was white. Both helped considerably in getting him into the spacious apartment at the Seaview Hotel, Singapore, next to Brooke-Popham, the Empire’s man in Asia. Clune had barely glimpsed this world of white privilege and prestige, where doors opened to him that would normally have been firmly closed, when it began to change. Within a decade of his first trip to the fabled East, it was clear that the old order was changing and the day of the “White Man,” with all its freedoms and entitlements and its happy knack of bestowing superiority even on the likes of him, was disappearing. It had not gone, but Clune could see that it was going and with it the seductive dream of white authority in Asia. For all his mocking references to “white prestige,” Clune’s increasingly bitter recriminations at the loss of this colonial world showed how much white prestige had meant to him. Clune was not the prophet of a new, decolonised Asia, but the author of obituaries for the receding Orient.
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(3) Ken Inglis, *This is the ABC,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 1983.


(6) National Archives of Australia, *Australian Broadcasting Commission*, SP1474/1, Correspondence with Frank Clune Esq., Frank Clune, ‘Letter to the Chairman ABC, 20 March 1941’.


(9) Murray, *Watching the Sun Rise*.


(13) Frank Clune, *Sky high to Shanghai: an account of my oriental travels in the spring of 1938, with side glances at the history, geography and politics of the Asiatic littoral / written with charity to all and malice to none*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1939, p. 88.

(14) Ibid., p.34.


(21) Ibid., pp.346-354.

(22) Ibid., p.214.

(23) See for example; ‘More Cluning’, *The Publicist*, July 1941 and ‘Psst! The slang man’s a-comin’!’, *Daily Telegraph*, July 6 1940.


(27) *Shanghai*, pp.258-275.

(28) Ibid., pp.54.

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(31) *Shanghai*, p.52.

(32) Ibid, p.52-54.


(34) Frank Clune *To the Isles of Spice with Frank Clunes: a vagabond voyage by air from Botany Bay to Darwin, Bathurst Island, Timor, Java, Borneo Celebes and French Indo-China*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1940.


(37) Ibid, p.146.

(38) Frank Clune, *All Aboard to Singapore: A Trip by Qantas Flying Boat from Sydney to Malaya*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1941.

(39) Ibid, p.83.


(41) A term popularised by E J Brady in *Australia Unlimited*, G Robertson, Melbourne, 1918.

(42) Clune *Singapore*, p.62.


(44) Ibid, p.126.

(45) Ibid, p.146.


(48) Frank Clune ‘Will hold Singapore whatever happens’, Smith’s Weekly, 28 December 1940, P R Stephensen Papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney, MS 1284/64(127).


(50) Ibid, p.45.


(52) Ibid, p.81.


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