

*Australians Going Native: Race, Hybridity and Cultural Anamorphism in G.E. Morrison's An Australian in China*

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**Abstract:** This essay explores the notion of ambivalence in colonial modes of representation of Asian subjects in *An Australian in China* (1895) by G.E. Morrison (1862–1920). Morrison's attitudes and judgements about the Chinese reflect a complex set of attitudes that reflect a British Imperial stance inflected by pre-Federation bias toward Western values and toward a dominant Australian tendency to use Western standards of democracy and egalitarianism to judge the shortcomings of its Asian neighbours, as argued by D'Cruz and Steele (2003 33–4). Morrison's ambivalence has an origin in the fear that the Chinese would perhaps become more successful economic colonisers than white people. But if Morrison was ambivalent about Asians, caught between admiration for, and an anxiety about the Chinese especially, was he one of those Australians cited as those unable to “engage with constructive and continuous relations with Asia” (D'Cruz and Steel 34)? I argue that Morrison is not simply a eugenicist or anti-Asian racist, but re-iterates a British imperialist grand narrative on best-practice colonial governance and an example of how knowledge of the orient may be acquired so as to serve Imperial interests. Within this narrative *all* races have strengths and weaknesses, and this “melange” must be managed by enlightened white British administrators in order to ensure cultural harmony throughout the empire, and especially where British geo-political interests are at stake. This multiculturalism is segregationist but may also allow room for hybrid or cross-cultural cultures to take root through intermarriage of chosen white elites and selected subalterns (much as plant breeders select seed stock). While Morrison may praise far-flung edges of empire and those regions that the British engages with for reasons of trade, he argues that predominantly white colonies like those in Australia should remain white. Like a benign object suddenly appearing as the anamorphic skull in a Holbein portrait (Reading 26), viewed from a certain angle, what seems like Morrison's affection for China can just as easily appear as a form of aversion and suspicion.

**Keywords:** Imperialism; whiteness; ambivalence

All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives. (Benedict Anderson 204)



Figure 1: Morrison in Chinese clothes, Yunan, 1890s.  
(Source: *An Australian in China*, 1895, frontispiece)

This article explores the notion of ambivalence in colonial modes of representation of Asian subjects in *An Australian in China* (1895) by G.E. Morrison (1862–1920). A young Scots-Anglo Melbourne doctor and aspiring journalist and travel writer, George Morrison travelled in disguise from Shanghai to British Burma in 1894 “by riverboat, sedan chair, mule and pony and frequently on foot” (Bonavia vi). *An Australian in China* is a chronicle that blends adventure with journalistic ethnography of China’s and Burma’s numerous ethnic groups. After the book’s publication Morrison became *The Times* correspondent for China and the Far East and went on to play an important role as an advisor to British interests. Morrison appeals as a liberal-minded humanist who was free of the worst racial bigotry of his time, and was frank in reversing negative representations of the Chinese. In his papers Morrison paid tribute to the generosity of the Chinese: “I cannot speak too highly of the invariable courtesy that was shown to me by all classes of Chinese, from the highest officials to the humblest of coolies” (Woodhouse 5).

Morrison has inspired a number of contemporary scholarly and popular fictional works. Following on from Cyril Pearl’s biography *Morrison of Peking* (1967), Thomson and Macklin’s *The Man Who Died Twice* (2004) describes Morrison as a journalist of heroic proportions: “On his father’s side he came from robust, adventurous Nordic stock who made their way to the Outer Hebrides and over the centuries were drawn into the Scottish mainstream” (Thomson and Macklin 4):

He was to journalism what Don Bradman was to cricket. His Australian background provided an earthy, clear-eyed cynicism toward politics and politicians. His British attachments ... gave him an imperial framework within which he operated quite happily. But he resisted that sense of ineffable superiority of so many of the representatives of Imperial Britain at the time. (349)

Thompson and Macklin’s description nostalgically re-iterates the myth of the Australian who is both part of the British Empire but cynical of it, and their biography underestimates Morrison’s aversion to Chinese becoming Australian citizens. Impressed with Morrison’s journey, the late contemporary journalist Angus McDonald re-traced and documented it in *The Five Foot Road: In Search of a Vanished China* (1995). More recently Morrison has been the template for the hero of Linda Jaivin’s novel *A Most Immoral Woman*, a figure of Anglo-Celtic strength, cleverness, worldliness, high taste, and virile good looks (Jaivin 2009).

This article will argue that *An Australian in China* is not simply the work of a eugenicist or anti-Asian racist, but it re-iterates a British imperialist grand narrative on best-practice colonial governance and an example of how knowledge of the orient may be acquired so as to serve Imperial interests. Within this narrative *all* races have strengths and weaknesses, and this “melange” must be managed by enlightened white British administrators in order to ensure cultural harmony throughout the empire, and especially where British geo-political interests are at stake. This multiculturalism is segregationist but may also allow room for hybrid or cross-cultural cultures to take root through intermarriage of chosen white elites and selected subalterns (much as plant breeders select seed stock). Morrison’s ambivalence has an origin in the fear expressed in his book that a foreign Asian presence in Australia would change Australia for the worse. While Morrison may praise far-flung edges of empire and those regions that the British engages with for reasons of trade, he argues that predominantly white colonies like those in Australia should remain white. In passages on British Empire Burma, Morrison puts forward a comical and ironic picture of a multi-ethnic colonial model managed by white Army officers and subalterns, with officers married to native women who nurture a “mixed race” population, all of which shows the outer fringes of the British Empire (and where it borders a much more singularly Chinese empire) as somewhat farcical. Morrison is “pushing” eugenicist buttons, by hinting that miscegenation (racial biological mixing) can bring about forms of cultural chaos which present challenges for colonial governance. Morrison is a realist however, and for him British Burma contradicts the view that a superior white race will bring about the demise of the weaker races, simply because on the Asian fringes of the Empire whites are outnumbered by Asians, *unlike Australia*.

The relativistic message of *An Australian in China* is that if one is to do business with the other, and to have them work for us, we must respect those humane qualities we all share. But in the final analysis, everyone must stick to their place in the scheme of things, and all races have strengths and weaknesses. Of the Chinese he employed Morrison utilised notably positive stereotypes of how smart, economically efficient, resilient, and useful they were: “no people in the world so scrupulously polite” (196) and of the Cantonese: “as enterprising as the Scotch ... canny, and successful” (222). But this praise could also be read as a sign of Chinese threat—their canniness is an untrustworthy trait, while their physical abilities are akin to a form of hybrid animal species. In a description of shooting rapids in south-west China, Morrison resorted to a figure of the boy coolie, and writes how he “sat in the boat stripped and shivering, for shipwreck seemed certain, and I did not wish to be drowned like a rat. For cool daring I never saw the equal of my boys, and *their nicety of judgment was remarkable*” (19, my emphasis). Elsewhere Morrison denigrates their language but praises their skills: “To hear my boys jabber in their unintelligible speech, you pictured disorder, and disaster, and wild excitement; to see them act you witnessed such coolness, skill, daring as you had rarely seen before” (20–21); and compares the Chinese with “human beasts of burden” (90). Morrison’s praise for the fitter specimens was offset by his obsession with the cases of physical deformity: one coolie was, “so long and thin, so grotesque in his gait, and afforded me such frequent amusement, that I would not willingly have exchanged him for the most active coolie in China” (235). While one coolie was “of rare ugliness”, another, an opium addict, was “the thinnest man I ever saw outside a Bowery dime-show” (219). For a doctor, Morrison’s concern with disease was understandable, but his manner of description is laden with disgust when he writes of “a goitrous mother suckling her imbecile child” (227).

Lest he be judged too pro-Chinese, Morrison comments on Chinese stereotypes of the foreign white devil. At one point forced to undress before swimming across the Yangtse River, Morrison records this experience: “Boys and ragamuffins hanging about the shipping saw me

and ran towards me yelling, ‘Yang kweitze, Yang kweitze’ (foreign devil, foreign devil)” (26). Taking observations, hearsay and anecdotes, Morrison patches together an ethnography of a race that he admires for its strength, but which is also alien in its otherness:

No people are more cruel in their punishments than the Chinese, and obviously the reason is that the sensory nervous system of a Chinaman is either blunted or of arrested development. Can anyone doubt this who witnesses the stoicism with which a Chinaman can endure physical pain when sustaining surgical operation without chloroform, the comfort with which he can sleep amid the noise of gunfire and the indifference with which he contemplates the sufferings of lower animals, and the inflictions of tortures on higher? (104)

Morrison’s attitudes and judgements about the Chinese enact a complex set of attitudes that reflect a British Imperial stance inflected by a pre-Federation bias toward Western values. Morrison evinces a dominant Australian tendency to use Western standards of democracy and egalitarianism to judge the shortcomings of its Asian neighbours, as argued by D’Cruz and Steele (2003 33-4). But if Morrison was ambivalent about Asians, caught between admiration for, and an anxiety about, Australia’s Asian neighbours, was he one of those Australians cited as unable to “engage with constructive and continuous relations with Asia” (D’Cruz and Steele 34)? Certainly, his memoir rejects the stereotype of the inferior Chinese and chooses a more subtle form of vilification: that the Chinese are so tough and resilient that they can easily outwork the white Australian, and are therefore an economic threat to white workers: “There is not room for both in Australia” (224). While he praises the hard working Chinese he meets in China and presents China as a place far more civilised than the barbarous images propagated by anti-Asianists, he cannot countenance any form of multiracial Federation. Such a stance was consistent with his subsequent work as a correspondent and political advisor promoting and protecting British interests in China, especially where British dominance of trade was threatened by Russian incursions in Manchuria. Morrison’s articles in *The Times* were instrumental in the formation of an Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1902, even though the policy was criticised as an unacceptable compromise with the so-called “yellow race” (Woodhouse 10-13).

Ambivalence reveals itself in the intent and manner of Morrison’s self-representation as a white subject dressed as a Chinaman. As Bhabha puts it, this in-betweenness is a form of “flawed colonial mimesis” (87), a trope that “conceals no presence or identity behind its mask” (88) but a “*metonymy of presence*” (89, italics in the original). It is an eccentric and erratic strategy for asserting, in a slightly farcical manner, colonial authority. Going native suggests some kind of transcendence of anxiety produced at the contact zone of white and other, but it is entirely a strategic and conscious disguise. By rendering himself as a slightly exotic trope to his readership Morrison signals openness to cultural transformation, but at the same time devalues it as a form of disguise that allows him to travel more freely in foreign lands. The explorer who has “gone native” becomes a sign that the anxieties attendant on adopting/adapting to foreign ways have been overcome in some way. But this does not mean whiteness is disavowed; indeed the white gentleman who travels acquires prosperity, and high quality costume is a sign that certain privileges have been won, and that whiteness has acquired ever more exotic signs of privilege.

Morrison “moved seamlessly, with a stop or two between, from Geelong to Peking to become a powerful figure in this world” (Walker 231). Clearly, the colonial means of travel and the

ability to slum it in Asia were part of a certain celebrity that middle class white men enjoyed, while the British influence in China still lasted. For Morrison, travel afforded a certain construction of celebrity, a consciously selection of symbolic choices, using a method of improvised bricolage (Pieterse 220) that clearly helped in his self-promotion. This “bricoleur effect” begins when fragments and emblems from one culture and discourse are reassembled in another (Hall 294), with the main purpose of judging what is acceptable and unacceptable to Westerners.

Morrison’s exploits fascinated readers in Sydney, Melbourne, and London with an interest in Chinoiserie and Japonisme. After *The Mikado* played to packed houses in Melbourne in 1885, dressing in Japanese clothes became a mania among the middle classes (Broinowski 12). Morrison’s self-orientalising was already a strategy and form of advertising employed by James “Rajah” Inglis, tea merchant and NSW State politician, who wore a turban in his successful business dealings with Indian tea merchants (see Figure 2).

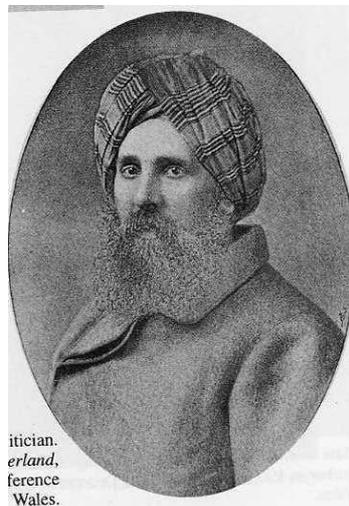


Figure 2: James “Rajah” Inglis (source: Walker 145)

Changing dress facilitated a gain in power/knowledge: “not so much a fantasy of changing into the other as about the ability to know and possess the other while secretly and finally remaining the same” (Dixon 112). No reader of the time would accept Morrison as a truly half-caste blend of Asian and Western, as the notion of true cross-cultural blending with “the yellow race” was seen to be monstrous (disfiguring, paradoxical, abnormal). Thus it was better to display such ambivalence as a performance or survival strategy. Morrison’s anamorphosis is thus a strategy for attaining power through camouflage and surveillance, and a means of avoiding those Chinese who would disrespect him as a foreign traveller:

My chief efforts, I knew, throughout my journey would be applied in the direction of inducing the Chinese to treat me with the respect that was undoubtedly due to one who, in their own words, had done them the “exalted honour” of visiting “their mean and contemptible country.” (52)

He hires the “indispensable token of respectability”, a sedan chair, “for the honour and the glory of the thing” and to avoid having to wait in line at ferries, or having to take the worst room in an inn. Ethnic disguise was clearly a practical means of getting around (Jose 80). Orientalist dress facilitated movement and was never intended to conceal the white colonial underneath. Morrison writes: “by never verging from my position of superiority, I gained the

respect of the Chinese” (230). By becoming the white Mandarin standing among coolies, porters, cooks and guides, Morrison conveniently appropriated Mandarin feudal power, without needing to become a real Mandarin. Morrison chose to document other self-Orientalising techniques. He gave himself a Chinese name (Figure 3), and included a picture of his Chinese passport in his book.



Figure 3: Morrison’s name in Pin Yin script.  
(Source: *An Australian in China* 5)

Morrison also boasted that he had learned a smattering of Mandarin, no more than any backpacker would need to get by in China today: “a dozen useful words and phrases ... rehearsed in the morning to a member of the Inland Mission” (51). According to Bonavia, Morrison “managed to communicate quite effectively with his coolies, either by gesture or by repetition or simply by shouting, as the Anglo-Saxon is said to do when confronted with language barriers” (Bonavia vii).

In its optimistic, positive and liberal minded tone, *An Australian in China* is thus an exception to more common Australian preconceptions about Asia as simply a zone of monstrosity, of deviousness, laziness, ugliness and filth (Broinowski 12). Many Australian writers of the 1890s depicted Asia as

a highly mobile entity ... itself a source of both fascination and threat, a space of “teeming millions” whose greater population growth might threaten the last enclave of European society in the Far East. Asia was an unstable entity of fluid representations, and was “no more knowable than Dr Fu Manchu himself” (Walker 11).

Morrison’s views certainly pre-empt *The Bulletin*’s anti-China stance in and 1895 edition which argued for “Australia for the Australians—the cheap Chinaman, the cheap nigger, and the cheap European pauper to be absolutely excluded” (Burke, 18). But Morrison is more strategic in presenting himself as the gentleman Orientalist who uses rationality to achieve knowledge/power about his subject and does his “duty to preserve the type of the British nation” (Burke, 14-15). Quoting other Western experts serves to bolster Western authority: “‘A Chinaman has the most unscrupulous stomach in the world’, says Meadows” (87). This fulfils colonialist and imperialist agendas for gathering knowledge of the East in order to gain power over it (Said 495), and his book is a suitable platform for putting forward seemingly logical and empirically reliable evidence to make an argument that the Chinese were best when confined to China itself.

Going native in the manner Morrison frames it here is thus not “passing” in any authentic sense, as the barriers between white and Asian are preserved despite appearances. *An Australian in China* in a powerful example of how photography and text works in tandem to maintain this distance. In Figure 1 for example Morrison is centre stage, and careful to respect a protocol of space and distance. There is respect paid to Chinese conventions that govern the boss-figure’s relationship to his employees. Morrison is at home with his “hard-working” charges deferentially standing back and away from “the boss”, who is elevated above his “boys”. But of course we, the readers, know Morrison is the white outsider who is also a comfortable insider, albeit an insider who is also slightly outside and in control. This paradoxical position denotes how the white body can never mask itself completely and nor does it attempt to.

Protected by a kind of cultural camouflage, the Orientalist can go about accumulating knowledge of his environment, while at the same time re-enforcing Western epistemologies. In contrast to his attitude towards Western wisdom, Morrison is ambivalent on indigenous or local wisdoms: “[D]oubt must always be thrown upon statistics derived from Chinese sources. The Chinese and Japanese disregard for accuracy is characteristic of all Orientals” (99). But elsewhere he praises the exactitudes of the banking system and the memory of the Chinese: “Memory is the secret of success in China, not originality” (167). Confucian values are selectively praised when they facilitate British Imperial influence in China, but he sees not use for it outside of this context. Confucian standards insofar as they applied to a country of “civilized and organized heathenism ... [are] as nearly satisfactory as could be hoped for” (139–40).

Despite his apparent respect for the autonomy of Chinese cultural practices, the essentialising in *An Australian in China* reveals an anxiety to appease the central tenets of the nascent white Australia ideology, and this is remarkably prescient of arguments against “refugees” and asylum seekers today, that those from failed Eastern states (as China had been in Morrison’s day) seeking a life in Australia are competing colonialists, “Which is to be our colonist, the Asiatic or the Englishman?” (223–4). *An Australian in China* implies that Chinese industry in female child slavery and other cruelties strengthens the view that China’s feudalism was completely incompatible with the liberalism proclaimed by proponents of the European-Australian labour force, who were unlikely to acknowledge the hypocrisy of the Kanak trade in places like North Queensland (see Reynolds 2003). But China’s weakness and feudalism facilitates a useful market for Britain. Like a latter day Pliny the Elder writing back to the Roman Emperor, Morrison detailed geographical descriptions of the outer boundaries of the British Empire, advised on the condition of those boundaries, their points of advantage and disadvantage, potential economic resources, and advised on areas of possible annexation: “China disheartened could need but little persuasion to accede to the just demand of England that the frontier of Burma shall be the true south-Western frontier China—the Salween River” (239).

When he reached British Burma, Morrison would write that his heroes among the British administration were the young officials he met along the way. On reaching Bhamo, a town in northern Burma, Morrison’s account erases all trace of the violence of colonial invasion and ironically mocks the hybridity of a provincial British colony:

a wonderful mixture of types.... Nowhere in the world, not even in Macao, is there a greater intermingling of races. Here live in cheerful promiscuity Britishers and Chinese, Shans and Kachins, Sikhs and Madrasis, Punjabis,

Arabs, German Jews and French adventurers, American missionaries and Japanese ladies. (284)

Morrison completes his chronicle with an ironic description of St John's College in colonial Rangoon, a school that served the Empire's programme for educating its *métis* administrators. St John's (founded 1869) was modelled on British Indian institutions intended to segregate Eurasians and Anglo-Indians and through education eradicate the social evil of mixed race populations (Edwards 285). Morrison's description was intended to argue the case for the white custodianship of a multi-racial society in which order would be ensured through the cultivation for colonial service of subaltern non-white and Eurasian races. St John's College was very much a product of the margins of Empire, and according to Morrison

a curiosity ... with perhaps the finest collections of cross-breeds in existence ... which consisted of close to 550 Asiatics of fifteen different nationalities ... both pure and blended with the native Burmese, and the resulting half-breeds have crossed with other half-breeds (290).

Morrison praised what he saw as the school's resemblance to public schools in England, such as the students' ability to pass Latin and mathematics, and noted the power they wielded over large tracts of territory. As ideal Victorian civil servants, they fulfilled Morrison's idea of a noble caste; they possessed qualities that made them superior to all but the Mandarins, who Morrison believed shared a similar breeding and knowledge to that of British ruling classes. For Morrison, therefore, class was at least equally important in running an empire as race. Eurasians are of a better class as their fathers are Englishmen who, Morrison was amused to recall, are the pioneers of such interbreeding with the natives who "in the earlier days when morals had not attained the strictness that now characterises them, gallantly served their country in Burma" (290).

In other words, Morrison provocatively and ironically suggests that these white men had a duty to serve the Empire through miscegenation. While Morrison adhered to the hierarchy that placed white above Asian, he chose to elevate the Burmese Eurasians above Chinese and Burmese, on account of their British heritage: "the best half-caste in the East is, of course, the Eurasian of British parentage". The Chinese are even less cognate to Westerners than the Burmese, and Burmese women are more "available" to Western exploitation: "no woman in the world is more catholic in her tastes than the Burmese" (290). Undoubtedly Morrison was echoing the British colonial administration's view that the most useful native bureaucrat was not the pure-bred native at all, but the Eurasian subaltern who had been carefully selected and assimilated into the ranks of British colonial Administration, a mimic-man who was "one of us, but not quite". The Eurasian was one part of a civilising mission that aimed for an ordered interaction of races in which everyone knew their place in relation to those with power and those subject to it. Ordered interaction must appear natural, necessary and harmonious (Hill 631).

This view reflects Gobineau's eugenicist argument that the mixing of white races with other peoples conferred civilisation and vitality on those others (Hill 631). Hybridisation in the Asian colonies was desirable since weaker races would die out anyway, thus strengthening the white man's hold on empires. But in the white colonies of Australia hybridisation was understood to result in the complete demise of the white race. Morrison resisted this notion to some extent due to his confidence in his own strength to survive contagion with the other. Though he dressed like a Mandarin, he wrote and spoke in the idiom of the "Enlightened"

British Imperialist. In this sense, his Anglo-Australianness was never erased by his Chinese dress, but was facilitated by it.

Despite its ambivalent Sinophilia, *An Australian in China* privileges a European self who conquers the symbolic space of China, and follows a dominant “allegory of imperial continuance” (Slemon 54). Writing of British accounts of climbing Mount Everest, for example, Stephen Slemon identifies a grand narrative of Western border patrolling. Travel writing is “cross-culturalism [which] becomes definitive of travel in the contact zones, where nations join together in the making of freely negotiated but profoundly unequal commercial relations” (Slemon 63). The overall aim of *An Australian in China* is imperial métissage: various discourses—artistic, military, sexual—are woven together in order to provide a body of knowledge that legitimates the colonial mission and casts colonial subjects “in either a harmonious or menacing light” (Hill 632–31). In Morrison’s catalogue of Asian imperial subjects there is the assumption that colonised peoples cannot display themselves but need to be displayed within the frame of a racial evolutionary hierarchy that distinguished civilised members of the empire from the less civilised, and subjects of industrial progress from those who still laboured under pre-industrial conditions. A racist cultural taxonomy in turn could justify different political policies. For the Empire to hold together, differences need to be defined, the menacing distinguished from the passive.

But beyond this racist determinism in the economic and political sphere, Morrison echoed a softer socio-cultural view of colonial tolerance. While British soldiers kept control in Burma and could marry Asian women, the same dynamic could occur for the Western ruler co-opting Chinese women in their own country, should it fall to foreign powers. Morrison was ambivalent about *male* Chinese power, and there is no doubt that he was unequivocally chauvinistic towards Asian women, for they were in fact the “weaker” sex and would therefore not pose a threat to the white man’s dominance, even if the white man were to take Asian women as bearers of their offspring. Chinese women represented evidence for the colonial view that Imperial China’s weak administration had ceded the masculine right of governance of its citizens to the more “masculine” European Russian, and Japanese interests. In short, Morrison’s descriptions of Chinese women hint that China was willing to be taken by the masculine West.

The book indexes Chinese women’s positive traits as: “benevolence”, “beauty of women”, “friendliness”, “good nature”, “true felicity” and so on. Morrison goes as far as placing Chinese women as equals in beauty to European women: “I have seen girls in China who would be considered beautiful in any capital in Europe” (13). Morrison writes how his racism was moderated by the Chinese women he met: “I went to China possessed with the strong racial antipathy to the Chinese common to my countrymen, but that feeling has long since given way to one of lively sympathy and gratitude” (92). Morrison re-iterated the Confucian belief that girls were a “necessary evil to be endured ... as the possible mothers of men. Yet the condition of women in China is far superior to that of any other heathen country”. Compared to Western women, their lot was not one to envy, but “she is happy in her own way nevertheless” (139–40). Such an idealisation of the Burmese half-caste and praise for Chinese female beauty are acceptable because, in the end, they are harmless to the white order of the Empire. More menacing is the political and economic threat of the Chinese male worker.

Thus Morrison must argue that Australia (and therefore the Western presence in Asia) must maintain its essential whiteness embodied in the Australian/British masculine citizen.

Morrison's readers were, after all, those citizens in Melbourne, Sydney and London who may have shared his emotional ambivalence for the Chinese: that any fascinated "love" for the Chinese would reach a political/cultural limit defined by pre-Federation Australia's racist anxieties.

### **Conclusion**

Morrison's imaginary China presents an anamorphic apparition that could appear both desirable and disgusting. Morrison's anxiety or ambivalence about China mixes praise for an *orientalist* China which can then co-exist with his demonisation of Chinese *immigrants* to Australia. This contradiction constitutes what Nicholas Jose calls "a subtle kind of racism that prevented him from allowing the workability of systems other than his own" (Jose 78). *An Australian in China* reveals not so much a cynical desire that Australians must get to know Asia in order to do business with them, but in some of its passages to some extent it unlearns the racist Asian stereotypes so many Australians had grown up with. As Aijaz Ahmad writes: "cross-fertilisation of cultures has been endemic to all movements of people ... and all such movements in history have involved the travel, contact, transmutation, hybridisation of ideas, values and behavioural norms" (quoted in Werbner 142).

*An Australian in China* sheds light on how the struggle to negotiate race relations was conditional upon the fluid cultural and geographic features of the East/West border, as Morrison experiences its exotic pleasures and juxtaposes these with new horrors. This shopping list of exotic novelties suggests Asia is a vast cultural emporium of pleasure and disgust that Morrison is ambivalent towards from the beginning. Such ambivalence begins with the contradictions in Morrison's argument: that Asia's diversity, dynamism and resilience of its peoples cannot be reconciled with its economic and class extremes and its weak social structure. Thus a Eurasian Australia, and Australia with Chinese, is clearly not viable. While it was politically acceptable to appear an exotic Oriental-colonial, it was threatening to a definition of Australian citizenship based on the white race. Cultural hybridity could not be extended into condition of Australian citizenship. Travelling across/between borders can be defined as a hybridising process in which colonial distinctions between the East and West are coded and recoded in terms of performances and gestures that illustrate the extent to which a colonial subjectivity is fluid; but while cultural boundaries could be crossed, national ones could not.

Since Morrison's time, the connection between Australia and Asia continues to involve a desire for difference and "self-orientalisation"—a concept Tony Mitchell (2000) applies, for example, to contemporary cultural flows between Japan and Australia. For the Australian in Asia, going native has been a strategy for creative appropriation of the culture of another, and its absorption into one's own identity. Going native is also an expression of positive affect the foreigner feels for the other, an expression of respect and a sign that one desires to resemble the other. China, for Morrison, was both the thing he admired and feared, the sign of both Sinophilia and Sinophobia, and this ambivalence was reflected in (or fed) his readership, which was keen to learn from his extraordinary experiences in China, a country which evoked both fascination and fear. Morrison represents a continuing ambivalence in Australia's predisposition towards China as business partner, neighbour and source of tourism, and as a rival competitor of regional space and resources. His writing reflects the difficulty of bringing together this bifocal vision of two imbricated spaces, China and Australia. Like a benign object suddenly appearing as the anamorphic skull in a Holbein portrait (Reading 26), viewed from a certain angle, what seems like Morrison's affection for China can just as easily appear as a form of aversion and suspicion.

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