

Robert Menzies

INSTITUTE

From Far East to Near North: Australia's Engagement with Asia 1941-1972

Dr Zachary Gorman, Historian
of the Robert Menzies Institute
at the University of Melbourne



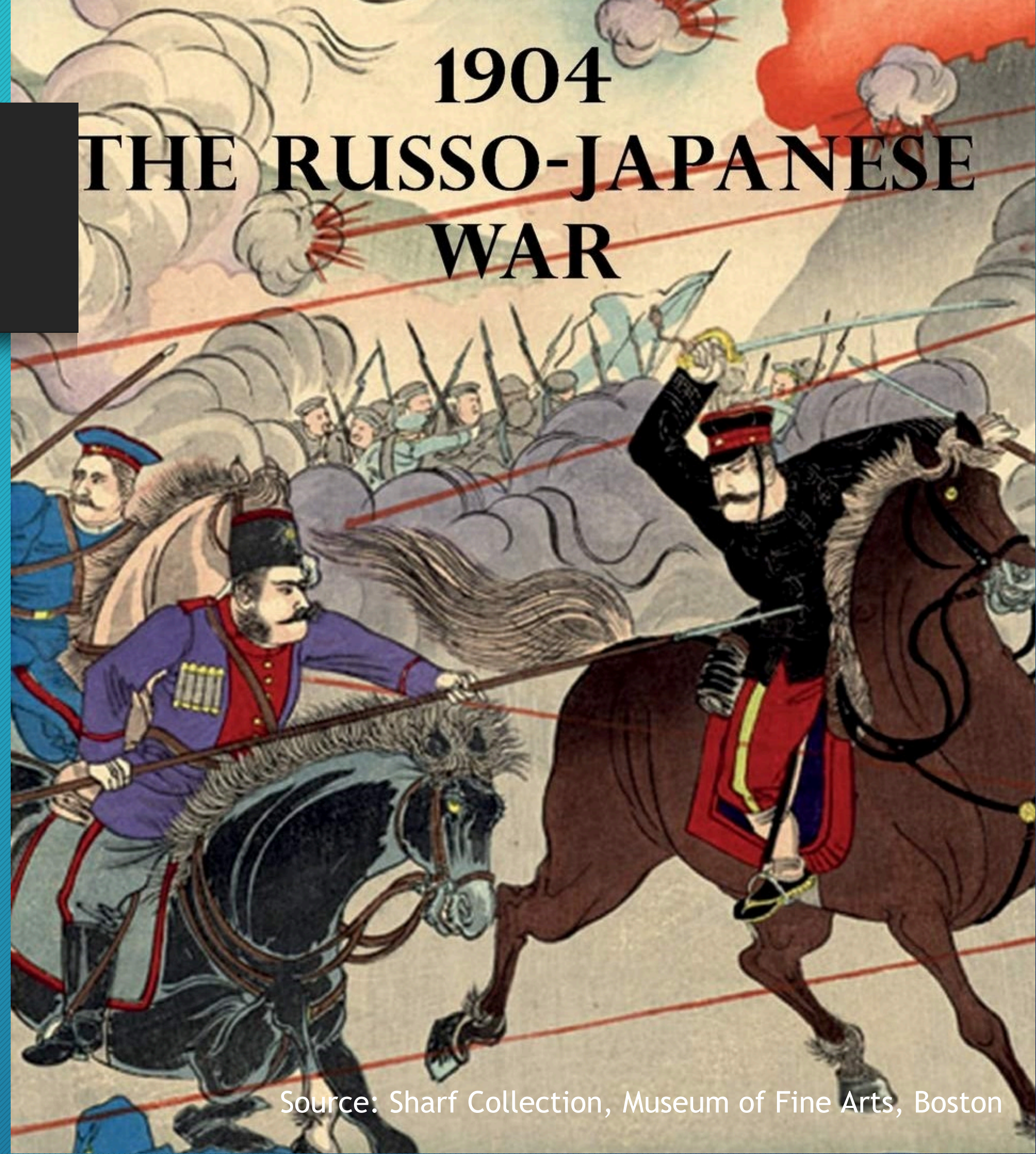
Menzies in Japan, April 1957

Source: Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne

When did Engagement Begin?

- Problems with periodisation
- Indigenous Australians develop trade networks with Indonesia
- State & Federal 'Commercial Agents' predate diplomatic network
- NSW Premier Joseph Carruthers violate British neutrality to sell 12,000 horse during Russo-Japanese War (1904-5)
- Japanese Consulate est in Townsville 1896, Chinese Consulate est in Melbourne 1909. But not reciprocated as Britain handle Australia's international relations

1904 THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR



Source: Sharf Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

War as spur to Engagement

- League of Nations mark beginning of Australia's 'independent' diplomacy
- Billy Hughes oppose racial equality clause
- 'What Great Britain calls the Far East is to us the Near North. Little given as I am to encouraging exaggerated ideas of Dominion independence and separatism... I have become convinced that in the Pacific Australia must regard herself as a principal, providing herself with her own information and maintaining her own diplomatic contacts with foreign powers... I look forward to the day when we will have a concert of Pacific powers, pacific in both senses of the word'



Dispatch of the 'Ministers'

- 'Ministers' (Ambassadors) sent to Japan, China & USA 1940-41
- Frederic Eggleston graduate from China to USA suggest relative equality of the diplomatic postings
- Delegation in China's wartime capital of Chungking feature first Chinese-Australian diplomat in translator Charles Lee
- Dead ends: engagement with Japan severed by the outbreak of war in the Pacific, engagement with China severed by Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War

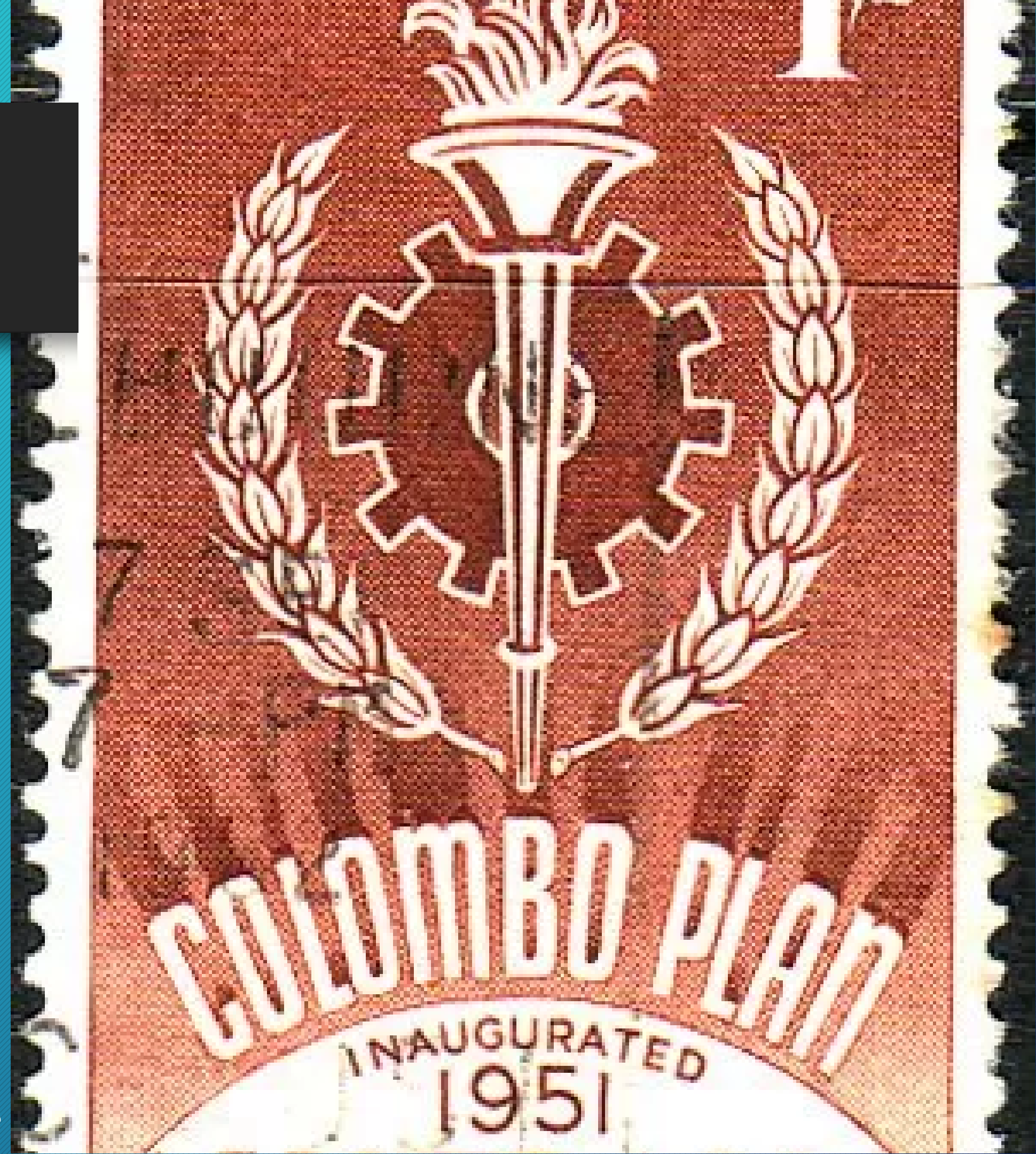


Source: Sir Keith and Lady Waller Collection, National Library of Australia

‘Developmental’ Diplomacy

- Seek Asian allies in fight against global communism, but Commonwealth connections equally important
- Australia disappointed at India’s non-alignment, but relieved by Indonesia’s
- Australian aid spending peak at 0.48% of GDP in 1967-8, currently sitting at 0.18% of GDP
- Economic development as the antidote to communism
- ‘Colombo Plan’ conceived by Percy Spender & others at 1950 meeting in Ceylon/Sri Lanka. Initially just for the Commonwealth nations but quickly expanded

Source: Commonwealth Stamp Store



International Students vs White Australia Policy

- Colombo Plan & fee paying students allowed to bypass the policy
- Foster gratitude & goodwill amongst a generation of future Asian leaders
- Policy not dismantled until 1966 onwards, but significantly liberalised during 1950s. Dictation test abolished 1958
- International criticism pick up in 1960s rather than 50s
- Some Asian countries maintain their own systems of discrimination, hence less likely to object to Australia's



Malaya/Malaysia

- Aus fight two conflicts to defend: Malayan Emergency (1948-60) & Konfrontasi (1963-66)
- Positive relationship with Britain lay platform for Australia's engagement
- Major aid recipient & student source. 300,000 graduates of Australian Universities living in Malaysia
- Former Aus Governor General William McKell help draft Malayan Constitution
- Defence cooperation program, including enduring Aus military base at Penang: RMAF Butterworth



Source: RAAF Fire Service

Japan

- Aus occupation forces stationed until 1952
- 'Soft' Peace Treaty of San Francisco signed 1951, aim at economic rebuild & western embrace
- Petition of 100,000 signatures protest ratification
- Australia sponsor Japan's readmission into community of nations
- 1957 commerce agreement re-orientate Australia's trade towards Asia. By early 1970s Japan had replaced Britain as Australia's no. 1 trading partner



Source: Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne

Indonesia

- Dutch East Indies a wartime ally
- United Nations Committee for Good Offices on Indonesia see Aus act as 'midwife' to the birth of an independent Indonesia
- Expansionism in West New Guinea, Borneo & East Timor cause tensions
- Nuanced approach epitomised by Aus training Indonesian military officers simultaneous with fighting a clandestine war against them during Konfrontasi
- Accusations of 'appeasement' but no.1 priority of 'relative' peace achieved



Source: Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne

South Vietnam/SEATO

- Enthusiastic embrace of President Ngo Dinh Diem during 1957 visit contrast with tensions surrounding Kishi
- Signed 1954 by US, UK, NZ, France, Thailand, Philippines, Pakistan. South Vietnam, Cambodia & Laos non-signatories but covered by treaty's provisions
- Asian allies visited in line with SEATO meetings
- Fall far short of NATO model, dissolved 1977
- Large foreign aid investment, but not celebrated in the manner of Colombo
- Fraser Gov's subsequent embrace of South Vietnamese refugees a key moment in birth of multi-cultural Australia



Menzies's visit to SEATO Ally the Philippines in 1957

Source: Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne

China & Taiwan (Formosa)

- Positive for West that Taiwan take China's UN Security Council seat
- Aus urge restraint during Taiwan Strait crises of 1954 & 1958, not as pro-Taiwan as USA
- British desire to keep Hong Kong see it recognise People's Republic & stay out of Vietnam
- Pro-Taiwan rhetoric increase 1966-72
- Harry Menzies's 1956 Trade Tour lead to huge wheat sales by the early 1960s
- Aus initially side with Soviets in Sino-Soviet Split



Source: Unknown USAID Photographer

Conclusion

- Whitlam's groundbreaking July 1971 visit to PRC make Taiwan an election issue, but partly facilitated by American rapprochement with China, so not as radical as McMahon made out
- Harold Wilson's 1968 announcement of British withdrawal 'East of Suez'
- 1973 Britain finally join European Economic Community (later EU) after previous attempts blocked by France
- Britain arguably left Australia, rather than Australia leaving Britain, but writing was on the wall for long enough that we were well prepared



Source: National Archives of Australia