

The unexpected embassy: establishing, maintaining and ending Australian diplomatic representation in Taipei

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Introduction

One of the more peculiar episodes in Australian diplomacy during the Cold War was the decision made by Prime Minister Harold Holt in 1966 to open a diplomatic mission in Taipei. Hitherto, diplomatic relations with the Nationalist Chinese government on Taiwan, though existent, had not been considered a priority. Indeed, in what one scholar has termed a ‘policy of ambivalence’ (Klintworth 1993, 4-24), the Australian government had made an effort to keep Taipei at ‘arm’s length’ after 1949. Despite the generally anti-communist rhetoric adopted in Canberra throughout the early Cold War, there had long been a sense amongst Australian politicians of both the Left and Right that Chiang Kai-shek’s government was untrustworthy (Albinski 1965, 7-9). This attitude hardened following the offshore islands crises of the 1950s, when Australian diplomats had been left embarrassed and irritated by what they saw as recklessness on the part of Chiang Kai-shek (Edwards 2006, 62). As a result, Australia maintained a nominal alliance with the Chinese Nationalists, but did little to elevate or strengthen that relationship, thus setting Canberra somewhere between Washington’s position of full-fledged support for the Nationalists and London’s recognition of Beijing. While the presence of a Nationalist Chinese embassy in Australia was tolerated, for instance, this was on condition that it be headed (until 1959) by a *chargé d’affaires*—not an ambassador.

All this makes the establishment of the Australian embassy in Taipei intriguing, and a number of explanations have been put forward for the decision. One theory holds that Holt’s decision to open the embassy was an entirely impulsive one, having been made at—of all places—a dinner party hosted by Nationalist Chinese diplomats (Frame 2005, 286-287). Others have suggested that the decision was taken due to a combination

of external factors, including developments in mainland China (i.e., the Cultural Revolution) and Vietnam (Jacobs 2004, 38). The Australian press of the day read the decision in far less nuanced terms, arguing that Holt had simply ‘caved in’ to Australia’s ‘Taiwan lobby’ (*Sun Herald* 1966; *Sydney Morning Herald* 1967).

However, why an Australian embassy was established at all in Taipei is only half the question, for the embassy’s import went far beyond its opening. The story of the embassy’s day-to-day operations; debates over how best to manage the bilateral relationship; and the general role of the embassy—both before and after its establishment—as a symbol of Australia-Taiwan relations, all shed light on wider issues, such as the ways in which western governments worked with and against the Nationalists in that ‘twilight period’ before the major shift of allegiances in the 1970s, and what role (pro-Nationalist) ‘China lobbies’ played in shaping Taiwan policy in countries such as Australia. It is these questions that I shall be exploring today.

Official and non-official relations

Australia’s first official representation to China had been in the form of a trade commissioner who operated out of offices on the Shanghai Bund from 1939 to 1941. It took war with Japan to force the forging of a closer relationship: a Nationalist mission was opened in Australia in September 1941; a reciprocal Australian legation was opened in Chungking a few months later (and followed the Nationalists back to Nanking after the end of the war).¹ While Chiang Kai-shek’s flight from the mainland prompted the closure of this mission in late 1949, the Nationalists themselves continued to maintain an embassy in Canberra (Jacobs 2004).

Apart from this embassy, however, the Nationalists also had other forms of representation in Australia. From the early the 1950s onwards, Nationalist diplomats

¹ Chinese toponyms shall be given in ‘Postal System’ Romanisation throughout this paper.

worked to cultivate a circle of sympathetic parliamentarians, public figures and media personalities who supported the Nationalist regime, and who would speak publicly (and ‘in club’) on Chiang Kai-shek’s behalf. By far the most vocal and visible of these was the Liberal member of parliament Wilfrid Kent Hughes. Kent Hughes had the unusual distinction (for an Australian politician of his generation) of being both vehemently anti-Communist and intensely interested in the cultures and history of Asia (Howard 1972, 164-168; Killen 1985, 6). His concern over matters Taiwanese appears to have originated in his sojourn on the island as a prisoner of the Japanese during the Second World War. Kent Hughes’ relative seniority within the Liberal Party—he served for a time on the front bench—made him the natural leader of a group that came to be known collectively as the ‘Formosan lobby’ or ‘Taiwan lobby’. He, and a small band of others from various political parties, visited Taiwan regularly and often raised Taiwan-related issues in parliament.

By the late-1950s, Chiang’s regime had also managed to find support in the shape of ‘...interconnected lobbies and associations [that] promoted the Nationalist cause’ (Strahan 1996, 209). The Nationalists had attempted to counter communist Chinese influence in Australia by inviting members of the professions and trade-union leaders to visit Taiwan. The result was a group of influential individuals with experience of the island and positive comments to make about Nationalist rule there. For instance, it was a leader of the Federated Clerks Union, J. E. Henry who was responsible for forming, in 1958, the first formal pro-Nationalist organisation—the Australia-Free China Association.² In the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was a formerly-Trotskyist barrister from Sydney, Kenneth Gee, who maintained the New South Wales Branch of the same group, doing so after joining a trade union delegation to Taiwan and returning with a

² *Australia Free China Association, Annual Report 1961/1962*. AH: Waijiaobu; 172-8; 1055, Aozhou Ziyou Zhongguo Xiehui, August 1957–May 1964.

favourable impression of developments there.³

There was also an extra link in the chain of (dis)information and ideology which tied this nascent ‘Taiwan lobby’ in Australia directly to Taipei. This came in the form of pro-Nationalist Australian journalists and commentators, the best known of whom was W. G. Goddard. Goddard was employed by Taiwan’s Government Information Office to undertake public lecture tours and produce written material that favoured Taipei’s official position from 1954 onwards, and he provided both MPs and others with information regarding Taiwan. Goddard was the quasi-scholarly voice of Australia’s emerging ‘Taiwan lobby’ (Taylor 2007).

As Ross Koen (1974) has argued in what is undoubtedly still the most thorough study of the topic to date, the roots of the (pro-Nationalist) ‘China lobby’ in the United States can be found in the close personal connections that individual Americans (such as Henry Luce and Alfred Kohlberg) maintained with sections of the Nationalist Chinese leadership; in genuine Nationalist attempts to influence policy-making in Washington; and in a deep-seated belief, held within sections of American society, that the relationship between the United States and China was unique. Yet for Australia—and indeed, for most other societies—no parallel tradition existed. Political support for Nationalist China was supplied by a small circle of individuals who, for what were often highly personal reasons, sympathised with the position taken by the Nationalists. But there was no history of large-scale Australian church or military involvement in China, scarce empathy for China (Nationalist *or* Communist) amongst the public, and little sense that Australia had any kind of mission in Asia. Moreover, even *if* the Nationalists had sought to wield wider influence, with no congress to influence a president, Australia proved a difficult place in which to foster influence.

Thus, Australia’s small ‘Taiwan lobby’ found itself with far less to lobby for. It

³ Interview with Kenneth Gee, QC, Sydney, 4 January 2006.

could not, as the US ‘China lobby’ did, urge its government to increase military aid for Chiang Kai-shek; nor could it welcome visiting Nationalist dignitaries to Australian shores while the Menzies government remained largely reluctant to issue visas to any. There was only one major issue of policy that people such as Kent Hughes, Henry and Goddard could, and did, regularly lobby for, and that was Australian diplomatic representation in Taipei. It is instructive, for example, that the one matter of policy that was decided upon at the inaugural meeting of the Australia-Free China Association in August 1959, for example, was to ‘request that the Australian Government ...send diplomatic representatives to Taipei’.⁴ And it is also indicative that when this development—arguably the single most important success of the lobby—finally occurred, it did so during the ambassadorship of Chen Chi-mai, a figure who had been instrumental in establishing the American ‘China lobby’ in the mid-1940s before taking up a post in Canberra (Koen 1974, 31).

A hypothetical embassy

It is clear that the Nationalists, like their supporters amongst the Australian ‘Taiwan lobby’, saw the issue of diplomatic representation as highly important on the grounds of prestige. An embassy in Taipei would be symbolically significant, insofar as it would reconfirm the Nationalists’ relationship with a ‘respectable’—if politically negligible—Western country. And it is some indication of the weight that the Nationalist government placed on the issue that it was brought up directly by Chiang Kai-shek with Kent Hughes when the latter visited Taiwan in early 1955.⁵ Yet for most of the 1950s, such calls were ignored. There were several reasons for this, but above all, it came down

⁴ *Australia Free China Association, Annual Report 1961/1962*. AH: Waijiaobu; 172-8; 1055, Aozhou Ziyou Zhongguo Xiehui, August 1957–May 1964.

⁵ *Typescript of Asian Tour, Jan–Mar 1955*, p. 155. NLA: Papers of W.S. Kent Hughes, Box 14, Series 3, Folder 9.

to the fact that the anti-communist stance adopted by the Menzies government did not translate into sympathy for the Nationalists. On the contrary, a general distrust of Chiang Kai-shek, as well as the pro-KMT 'China lobby' in the United States, pervaded the Australian government and public service for many years.

Nonetheless, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the idea of opening an embassy did become an issue of open debate in Australia. The arguments put forward by Goddard, and later by Kent Hughes and others in parliament, had both moral and practical dimensions. On the one hand, it was argued that Australia was ethically obliged to establish an embassy in Taipei because Nationalist China was a Cold-War ally; the sense was that the Nationalists had *earned* an Australian embassy. In later years, it was also argued that an embassy in Taipei would help bolster Australia's image in the region as a counterweight to American influence (e.g., Goddard 1966, 212). In addition, it was believed that a mission on Taiwan would offer Australia a number of practical advantages, including access to Taiwanese intelligence.

For their part, the Nationalists stressed strategy over duty when trying to convince Australian policy-makers. They argued that Australia needed an embassy on Taiwan because the island was a well-sited 'listening post', providing intelligence on developments on the mainland; in the 1960s, they hinted at how useful Taiwan could be as a destination for Australian soldiers on leave from the war in Vietnam.⁶ Interestingly, the Nationalists' obsession with the form that such representation would take highlighted their belief in the importance of an embassy on purely symbolic grounds—Nationalist bureaucrats had little time for suggestions such as that of a trade mission in Taipei or dual accreditation for Australian ambassadors in the Philippines and elsewhere, for instance.⁷

⁶ Albinski (1965, 422) notes that the Americans had also tried to persuade the Australian government to open an embassy on Taiwan at different times.

⁷ Details of the Nationalist position in regards an Australian embassy can be found MOFAA: Waijiaobu;

The embassy question was first seriously studied by the Australian government in 1957, with External Affairs being tasked with preparing a position paper on the matter (Albinski 1965, 426). Rumours to this effect reached Taiwan the following year, prompting the Nationalist Foreign Minister to write directly to Kent Hughes, asking: ‘If you know anything of this [i.e., the opening of an embassy], whether to substantiate or disprove it, I wish you would be good enough to let me know’.⁸ In the end, however, the decision was taken not to act, as it was feared that an overt display of support for Chiang Kai-shek would reflect badly on Australia in post-Bandung Asia. Just as importantly, the increasingly vocal efforts of Australia’s Taiwan lobby played a part in hardening Menzies’ stance. It has been suggested, for instance, that Menzies was ‘...scornful of those who, like Wilfrid Kent Hughes, were constantly pressing the government to open an embassy in Taipei’ (Booker 1976, 100). As one Australian official later confided to the Nationalists themselves, Menzies was loathe to be seen as having acquiesced to such people.⁹

It was only towards the end of Menzies’ career that the issue began to be taken seriously again. In 1965, for example, the first assistant secretary Malcolm Booker visited Taiwan, reporting favourably to External Affairs on social and economic conditions there (Klintworth 1993, 41). Such sentiments coalesced with the general foreign policy pursued by the new prime minister, Harold Holt, upon Menzies’ retirement. Holt’s approach focused far more on Australia’s alliance with the United States in the immediate region—particularly in the context of Vietnam—and ‘...identified [communist] China as the key villain...’ in Asia (Rodan 1979, 313). In hindsight, it is hardly surprising that Holt’s approach of building relationships with anti-communist regimes in East and Southeast Asia should lead to a reconsideration of the official position vis-à-vis

Aozhou huifu zai Tai zhu Hua shiguan; October 1957–November 1966.

⁸ Letter from Shen Chang-huan to Kent Hughes, 16 August 1958. NLA: Papers of W. S. Kent Hughes, Box 53, Series 14, Folder 4.

⁹ MOFAA: Waijiaobu; Aozhou huifu zai Tai zhu Hua shiguan; October 1957–November 1966.

representation in Taipei. Yet, as the Australian media of the day recognised, the decision was also a clear victory for the ‘Taiwan lobby’, and suggested that the ideas that this group had been promoting for over a decade were finally influencing policy, just as they had done in the United States a decade earlier.¹⁰

In a report prepared by External Affairs in May 1966, reasons for and against the establishment of an embassy were set out. Reasons for the mission included many of the same arguments that had been championed by Kent Hughes and others; arguments against mainly concerned appearances—it would seem odd and untimely to suddenly open an embassy, especially to ‘Afro-Asian countries’, it was argued. A revised version of this report elaborated on the issue of how others (including Beijing) would view the opening, but also included a clue as to how the government was considering evading such difficulties. Any embassy, it declared, would merely represent ‘a reactivation of the Mission we maintained in Nanking until 1949’.¹¹ As in so much relating to Taiwan, semantics counted for a good deal—Australia was *re-activating* an embassy which had been made moribund by political events, not *opening* a new one.¹² So important was this distinction that it was expressly mentioned in the 12 June 1966 joint communiqué through which the decision was finally announced: ‘...the reappointment of an Australian ambassador... [will]...resume the representation of Australia in China which had been interrupted with the movement of the Chinese capital from the Mainland’.¹³ In

¹⁰ Future research may go some way further in exploring the specific processes by which this group influenced policy under Holt. As Chao (1999, 39) has noted for the American China lobby: ‘Little is still known about the inner workings of the China lobby and its actual impact on specific decisions’. The picture is similarly unclear for Australia’s ‘Taiwan lobby’.

¹¹ NAA: External Affairs; A1838, Correspondence files, multiple number series; 1500/2/62/1, Australian diplomatic representatives abroad — Taiwan — opening of mission; 1966–1966.

¹² As well as helping to quell speculation about the move and make it appear the natural next, if belated, step in a long-running relationship, this focus on the act of ‘re-opening’ or ‘re-activating’ a latent institution (rather than opening a new one) also had practical reasons. In terms of protocol, the establishment of an entirely new mission would have required formal approval from Australia’s head of state—i.e., the Queen—and hence would almost certainly have been scrutinised if not rejected outright by the British Foreign Office. ‘Re-activation’ required no such approval.

¹³ In NAA: Cabinet Office; A4940, Menzies and Holt Ministries - Cabinet files ‘C’ single number series; C4370, Australia/Taiwan relations — Creation of post of Australian Ambassador; 1966–1966.

the process of one verb being replaced by another, the dreams of Australia's 'Taiwan lobby' had finally come true.

Representing Australia on Taiwan

Leaving aside the distinction between 'establishment' and 're-activation', the hiatus of almost two decades in Australian diplomatic representation on Nationalist Chinese soil had ramifications for the ways in which the embassy began operations. Those Australian diplomats who had served in the 1940s in Chungking and Nanking had all either retired, passed away or moved on to different areas by the mid-1960s; and while Australian diplomats had visited the island, no Australian official had ever served in Taipei before.¹⁴ Finding one's way around Taiwan—physically, culturally and diplomatically—was something that Australian diplomats would have to learn 'from scratch'.

This can be seen in the difficulties that staff of the new embassy faced as soon as they arrived in Taipei. Though aided to some extent by the American embassy in establishing a presence in the city,¹⁵ Australian diplomats found themselves at a loss as to where their mission would even be located. Wally Handmer, who had been made interim *chargé d'affaires* (in lieu of an ambassador), and who was tasked with finding premises for the mission, apparently examined some sixteen different sites in the weeks following his arrival in Taipei in September 1966, without finding anything suitable. From his room at the Ambassador Hotel, Handmer wrote to External Affairs in Canberra informing them of the situation, prompting one bureaucrat to suggest that he '...remind [the] Chinese of their promises when [the] question of opening a mission was under consideration'.¹⁶ In

¹⁴ Interestingly, the MOFAA files suggest that Malcolm Booker (who had served on the Chinese mainland as a young diplomat), confided to Chen Chi-mai in 1965 that he hoped that any future ambassadorship to Taipei would be his. Why Booker was, in the end, not chosen for the position is not known.

¹⁵ Former employee (A) of the Australian Embassy in Taipei, e-mail message to author, 30 October 2006.

¹⁶ Canberra to Australian mission to United Nations (NY), 6 October 1966. NAA: External Affairs; A1838, Correspondence files, multiple number series; 1500/2/62/1, Australian diplomatic representatives abroad — Taiwan — opening of mission; 1966-1966. What these promises were is unknown.

any case, when Ambassador Frank Cooper finally began representing Australia in Taipei on 3 October 1966, he did so out of a suite at the Grand Hotel.¹⁷

The embassy was staffed by both external affairs and trade officials from Canberra: Ambassadors Frank Cooper and (later) Hugh Dunn were assisted by first and second secretaries; a commercial counsellor; a commercial attaché; a consular attaché; and a staff of other 'Canberra-based' administrators. Locally-employed staff, both administrative and domestic, made up a much larger group, and included everything from accountants to 'wash amahs'.¹⁸ In the absence of Australian bureaucrats with any experience of Taiwan (and few with Chinese language skills), the choice in the early years was for career diplomats.¹⁹ Ambassador Frank Cooper, for instance, was a career diplomat whose only other posting in Asia had been a brief period at the Australian High Commission in Singapore. Cooper was representative of a generation of Australian officials who had come through the ranks under the long primeministership of Robert Menzies, and who shared with the Menzies government a general distrust of the Nationalists, as well as the Australian 'Taiwan lobby'. Cooper was not a firm believer in the embassy's longevity, and this informed the ways in which the embassy began operations under his command. Indeed, even as early as April 1967, Cooper had seen enough of Taiwan to believe that it was a '...police state in which the trappings of democracy are observed, but in which there is no real freedom of speech, movement or association' (quoted in Doran and Lee 2002, 271).

The challenge of 'learning Taiwan' was made all the more difficult by the timing of the mission's opening. Although, as Hugh Dunn later noted (1988, 33), the status

¹⁷ More permanent premises were eventually found in the Arcadia Building on Tun Hua South Road, while a chancery was established on Yangmingshan.

¹⁸ NAA: External Affairs; A1838, Correspondence files, multiple number series; 519/1/9 PART1, Formosa - General - Political situation - Monthly reports from Australian Embassy; 1967-1972.

¹⁹ This changed in later years. Dunn himself had trained in Chinese studies at Oxford, and he was assisted by a number of Chinese-speaking Canberra-based staff.

granted to Australia in Taipei was far more important than her position in world affairs merited,²⁰ the Australians arrived on the island just as the Taipei diplomatic corps was beginning to contract. Only two years into the life of the embassy, for example, there was talk in London about the closure of the British Consulate in Tamsui (Hoare 2004, 14).²¹

The quotidian workings of the embassy involved monitoring trade between the two countries; reporting back to Canberra on political and economic developments; and assuaging Nationalist fears about Australia's long-term intentions in regards to the People's Republic. This was carried out in the context of an increasing number of visits to Taipei by the very people who had been so vocal about an embassy in the first place—the 'Taiwan lobby'. In 1968 alone, embassy staff oversaw visits by Wilfrid Kent Hughes, Kenneth Gee and Douglas Darby.²² W. G. Goddard may also have been a visitor to the embassy (though no records or recollections of this remain).²³

The limited number of Australians resident in Taiwan did not necessarily restrict the amount of consular work required either. With the establishment of embassy-level relations, Taiwan had indeed become an alternative to Hong Kong for Australian servicemen on furlough from Vietnam (just as the Nationalists has suggested it would prior to the embassy being established), and the consular affairs that inevitably arose out of a large number of soldiers on leave took up much of the embassy's energy.²⁴ Another recurring, though minor, consular irritant was that of Taiwanese fishing boats operating in the waters of Papua and New Guinea—administered, at the time, by

²⁰ Something that would be further strengthened following Australia's assumption of responsibility for 'residual British interests' after the closure of the British consulate in early 1972.

²¹ Although contact with the British consulate was not, in any case, as frequent as with the US embassy and the missions of other East Asian countries. Former employee (B) of the Australian Embassy in Taipei, e-mail message to author, 26 March 2007.

²² A New South Welsh parliamentarian who later acted as a *de facto* honorary consul for the Nationalists.

²³ An institute established by Goddard at the newly-formed China Academy was certainly mentioned in reports compiled by embassy staff.

²⁴ Former employee (A) of the Australian Embassy in Taipei, e-mail message to author, 30 October 2006.

Australia.²⁵

On paper, the embassy's opening did appear to presage a 'honeymoon period' of greater interaction between the governments of the two countries. This was demonstrated through what was perhaps the most significant diplomatic event in the embassy's short history—the three-day visit to Taiwan of Harold Holt in April 1967.²⁶ Yet it is also in the nature of Holt's visit that a clearer picture of Taiwan's limited significance to Australia (and the embassy) emerges: Indochina dominated discussions during a meeting between Holt and Chiang Kai-shek, for example, while the joint communiqué that was issued at the conclusion of the visit added little other than a vague pledge to '...strengthen... cooperation in the common effort to maintain peace and security...' in the face of communism's advance in Indochina.²⁷ On the other hand, for the Nationalists, the very fact that Holt had decided to visit at all was considered to be of the utmost importance. After years of being ignored by Menzies, the Nationalists read a great deal of significance into the visit. Such optimism continued even after Holt's death in December 1967; the senator who took over as prime minister in early 1968—John Gorton—had impeccable 'Taiwan lobby' credentials, having first visited the island in 1960, and having been one of the founding members of the Australia-Free China Association. In Nationalist eyes, the prospects for bilateral relations had never looked so good.

Even more crucially, while Holt's visit and Gorton's accession to the primeministership had given rise to optimism about the relationship, events 'on the ground' in Taipei were being seen in a quite different light. Indeed, as embassy staff

²⁵ NAA: External Affairs; A1838, Correspondence files, multiple number series; 519/3/1/7, Formosa—Guidance Notes for Embassy—Taipei; 1966–1975.

²⁶ To date, this is the only occasion on which a serving Australian prime minister has visited Taiwan; yet it was only part of a wider 13-day trip made by Holt through Asia.

²⁷ *Joint Communiqué issued by the Republic of China and the Commonwealth of Australia on April 6, 1967*. MOFAA: Waijiaobu; *Ao zongli Hete jiang Hua* [Visit of Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt to China]; 3 February 1967–4 April 1967.

continued to acquire first-hand knowledge of Taiwan—learning from the frustrations that arose in the course of the mission’s early operations—this led them to develop, even further, a pessimistic view of the Nationalists. Indeed, Cooper began to explicitly point out that the opening of the embassy had *not* given rise to a closer relationship between Taipei and Canberra, but had in fact led to a marked deterioration. He explained this as the result of major differences of priority and opinion between the two countries’ governments—the Nationalists viewed events such as Australia’s recognition of Mongolia, the withdrawal of an Australian company from a steel project in Taiwan and Australia’s relaxed attitude towards ‘meaningless gestures’, such as congratulatory cables on Double Tenth Day, with the utmost seriousness (Doran and Lee 2002, 277). In July 1969, Cooper also complained about the noticeable difference of opinion that was developing between the embassy and Canberra. He argued that ‘...the Department [of External Affairs] entertains some serious misconceptions about Taiwan...’, and that these were born of a lack of the ‘first-hand knowledge and experience’ such as that which embassy staff had acquired since being in Taipei. There were ‘political and social facts’ about the island which may have been lost to observers in Canberra, yet which Cooper insisted were, ‘to anyone who has lived in Taiwan for any length of time...self evident’ (Doran and Lee 2002, 302). Only a year later, the new ambassador Hugh Dunn was expressing similar sentiments, though in slightly more veiled terms. When Dunn (1970, i-ii), writing in Taipei about third-century China, spoke of ‘factionalism at court [which] mitigated against sound government; [and] local officials [who] were ...more concerned with staying in favour than with carrying out their allotted tasks...’, the parallels he was drawing were clear.

At one level, such language reflected a personal lack of enthusiasm about the longevity of the embassy on the part of both Cooper and Dunn; yet at another, it pointed to the substantial gap that had developed between this group of increasingly

sceptical, yet ‘Taiwan-literate’, Australians in Taipei and their peers on the ‘China desk’ back in Australia *since* the embassy’s opening. In Canberra, foreign affairs officers were trying their best to follow a policy which was defined by Holt, Gorton and other politicians with a ‘Taiwan lobby’-inspired view of the region; for Australian diplomats in Taipei, the ‘wild stuff’ (Dunn 1988, 36) of Nationalist propaganda was beginning to wear thin.

A slow closure

The Australian embassy was formally withdrawn from Taipei in December 1972, following the Australian Labor Party’s victory in federal elections that year, and only six years after its (re)establishment.²⁸ Yet this development was far from unexpected—closure of the mission had been discussed by Australian diplomats and policy-makers ever since 1966, and plans for this eventuality were drawn up more than a year prior to the official announcement, as political trends in Canberra, and around the world, suggested imminent change.²⁹ It was in November 1971, for instance (i.e., less than a month after the UN General Assembly had voted to allow PRC admission to the United Nations), that a protocol for closure was drafted by embassy staff.³⁰

None of this was hidden from the Nationalists. Far from denying their plans, Australian diplomats felt that they ‘had an important role...to ensure the Taiwan authorities...understood that an Australian election was due ...and that ALP policy was

²⁸ Labor had campaigned on the need to recognise Beijing, and had made it clear that the embassy in Taipei would be closed as soon possible after victory

²⁹ NAA: External Affairs; A1838, Correspondence files, multiple number series; 519/1/9 PART1, Formosa - General - Political situation - Monthly reports from Australian Embassy; 1967–1972.

³⁰ Kenneth Gee was apparently assured by Gough Whitlam that a Labor government would allow the Nationalists to retain a trade office in Australia even after the ending of diplomatic relations. This may have provided some cause for hope about a similar arrangement being made for the transformation of the embassy in Taipei into a trade commission. However, the Nationalists were expelled from Canberra following the Labor victory in December 1972, and plans for a trade office in Taipei were similarly disposed of. Interview with Kenneth Gee, QC, Sydney, 4 January 2006.

to recognise the PRC'.³¹ Indeed, late in his tenure, Dunn apparently openly joked with Sampson Shen—the Nationalist ambassador to Australia at the time—that his 'bags were already half packed' lest there be a sudden change of policy (Shen 2000, 597). When the Australians finally did leave, there appears to have been a sense on both sides that the decision was inevitable.

It is important to note that the decision to end Australian representation on Taiwan did not fall on the Australian embassy itself; and it might well be argued that, had there been no change of government in Australia in late 1972, the embassy's fate may have been quite different. Yet the ways in which the embassy was managed, and the role it played in providing information about Taiwan to Canberra, did play a relevant part in the embassy's decline insofar as it provided few reasons for the embassy *not* to be closed.

With the exception of facilitating existing trade between the two countries, the embassy had proven itself to have no *raison d'être* beyond symbolism. Once the long debate over the embassy's establishment had been won back in 1966, there was very little left for those who favoured closer relations between the two governments to do. In this regard, while the establishment of the embassy had represented a victory for Canberra's 'Taiwan lobby', it is telling that the years of the embassy's existence also marked the beginning of a rapid decline for the lobby in terms of voice and influence in Australian politics. Many of the benefits that the 'Taiwan lobby' had argued would arise from the embassy's establishment—such as access to reliable intelligence—failed to materialise, and Australian diplomats found themselves in Taipei doing little other than administering consular affairs, entertaining visiting members of the lobby and, ironically, discussing the embassy's futility, despite a very real but short-lived rapprochement between Taipei and Canberra under Holt and Gorton. The withdrawal of Australian troops from Vietnam from 1970 onwards also spelt an end to one of the few long-term projects in which the

³¹ Former employee (B) of the Australian Embassy in Taipei, e-mail message to author, 26 March 2007

embassy had become involved. As Dunn (1988, 38) himself suggested some years later, 'we could neither exert influence nor be influenced by the existence of an embassy in Taipei'.

Furthermore, it is clear that the knowledge gained by Australian diplomats through actually serving in Taipei did nothing to alleviate a deep lack of confidence in the Nationalists that had long been harboured by many members of the Australian foreign service. Ironically, the more Australian diplomats learnt about Taiwan the more the bilateral relationship appears to have worsened. The embassy saw little evidence of the occasionally-discussed hope for political reform on the island; and Nationalist obsessions with what Australians generally saw as 'meaningless gestures' and protocol did little to alleviate a longstanding image of a regime which put more emphasis on style than substance, and which had lost touch with the general diplomatic mood in East Asia.

Thus, when the embassy's future became a topic of public debate again in 1971, there was little that anyone (beyond an increasingly marginalised 'Taiwan lobby') could say in favour of its continued existence, and few tangible achievements that could be raised in its defence. Indeed, it may well be argued that the views developed by embassy staff actually harmed bilateral relations in the long term, precisely because they created a group of Australian policy-makers who saw little merit in maintaining close relations with Taiwan. One could wonder, for instance, about the extent to which Hugh Dunn's views of Nationalist rule on Taiwan influenced the decisions he later made when serving as Australian ambassador to the People's Republic during the 1980s, or when teaching in Asian Studies at Griffith University.

The significance of Australian diplomatic representation in Taipei from 1966 to 1972 thus lay not in what it actually achieved, but in what this long-held aim of the 'Taiwan lobby' did *not* achieve in the course of its existence. As an end in itself, the embassy's end was certain from its very beginning.

Archival Abbreviations

AH	Academia Historica
MOFAA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (Taipei)
NLA	National Library of Australia
NAA	National Archives of Australia

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