

EDUCATION AND THE COLONIAL CONSTRUCTION OF WHITENESS

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Abstract

European imperialism spawned settlements of invasive white communities throughout Asia and Africa. Stoler and Cooper (1997: 27) argue these evolving colonial societies became subject to what amounts to an extended bourgeois project such that “we can ... not understand the construction of whiteness without exploring its class dimensions”. If, in terms of that project, nineteenth-century metropolitan society was deemed vulnerable to the ravages of a brutish and unruly working class, these white colonial outposts, whether constituted as settler colonies or colonies of exploitation, were even more vulnerable to the more insidious danger of miscegenation. Racial intermingling became simultaneously an issue of class and race. Imperialism therefore added a further dimension to the on-going definition of “bourgeois-ness”: the discourse of whiteness transforming a national discourse into a discourse on civilisation.

In focusing on education as the colonial authorities' response to what they perceived of as the danger of mixed parentage, this article develops a comparative framework that links colonial settlements in Asia and Australia. It examines the discourse surrounding miscegenation, education and the “rising generation” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Dutch East Indies British India, French Indo China and (British) Australia. In so doing, I demonstrate the

universality of a linked discourse of whiteness and class across Imperial Asia.

Introduction

In the cultural outposts of western societies – whether they be “settler colonies” or “colonies of exploitation” – whiteness, as a physical and cultural category, was seen to be particularly vulnerable. Far from the cultural heartland and the institutional sources of cultural values, for metropolitans white settlers were often the subject of derision (eg., Twopeny 1976 [1883]; Daum 1888). Of more immediate concern, however, was the state of European culture they embodied and the influence upon persons and culture of the proximity of the cultural “other” (N. Cooper 2005; Vann 2005; White 1981). Where in metropolitan Europe, the unruly and ill-disciplined working class masses appeared to threaten established class arrangements and the economic practices upon which these were based, in the colonies control of the reproduction of bourgeois values was seen to be directly threatened by race.

Stoler and Cooper (1997) have defined European colonialism as an extended European bourgeois project and suggest that the conceptualisation of whiteness was inseparable from this class-based dynamic in both metropolitan and colonial settings. While the colonial context made more evident and urgent broader civilisational and biological issues, such concerns were also evident in delineations of urban underclasses in a metropolitan class-based agenda (Platt 2005; Mayne 1993;

Kidd et al. 1985). In both contexts anxiety was particularly predicated on the future behaviour of the offspring of the “unruly classes” and solutions suggested in terms of discourses and policies centred on education. But here it was particularly the locally-born children of the settler classes in colonial settlements who represented the most vulnerable element, given the biological and cultural “dangers” inherent in a colonial context. This ensured that schooling became a key cultural institution in safeguarding the isolated islands of whiteness in the vast stretches of empire – as indeed it was in safeguarding “civil society” in the “wastelands” of industrialised metropolitan Europe.

In colonial societies, whether settler colonies or “colonies of exploitation”, great anxiety surrounded the definition of “the boundaries of identity” (Stoler 2002a; Caplan 2001: 6-10). They were “not made up of easily identifiable and discrete biological and social entit[ies]” (Stoler 2002b: 42), even within what counted as European society. Increasingly sharp distinction was made between “settlers” or “*blijvers*” in the Dutch East Indies, “*colons*” in French Indo-China, “domiciled” in India, or “Australians” in the British Australian colonies on the one hand, and “newcomers”, “*totoks*”, “French”, “non-domiciled” or “English” on the other. In this contrast, settlers were already culturally and biologically defined in “shades of grey” against metropolitan, culturally white, citizens. Governor General of French Indo-China, Paul Doumer, for instance, referred to local French colonial officials as “France’s flotsam and jetsam on the Indochinese shores” (quoted in Bang 1971: 33), while a post-colonial account described a “colon” as “a barbarian. He is a non-civilised person, a ‘new man’ ... he ... appears as a savage” (Dupuy 1955,

quoted in Stoler 2002b: 66). Similar derogatory remarks were made about Australians by some British visitors (White 1981: 52-61).ⁱ

Within the settler element of colonial societies in Asia, however, the more vitriolic comments were directed at settlers of mixed parentage. In the case of British India, distinction was made between “half-breed, Chichi, East Indian, Eurasian, Indo-Britons, and ... Anglo-Indian’ (Ferro 1997: 116-7). In the Dutch East Indies terms such as “*halfbloed*”, “*Indo*”, “*kleurling*”, and “Eurasian” were employed while in French Indo-China the terms “*métis*” was universally applied to such people (Stoler 2002c). In British Australia, where demographic ratios were quite different, and attempts were made to keep people of mixed parentage strictly outside the perimeters of white society, the term “half-caste” (and other “fractions” of Europeanness!) was universally employed (Reynolds 2005).ⁱⁱ

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, keeping European settlers white provided a powerful bond linking metropolitan and colonial elites. Increasingly, efforts by cultural “gatekeepers” across Europe’s Asian periphery to “whiten” (culturally and biologically) what counted as European were characterized by racial anxiety. This was so whether we examine small white colonial enclave communities in Asia proper or those on the margins of the larger settler colonial society of the British colonies on the Australian continent. While different demographic ratios of European and “native” populations undoubtedly impacted on such anxieties,ⁱⁱⁱ these gatekeepers had to look two ways: outwards towards the unEuropean cultural environment that threatened these European enclaves, and inwards, into the heart of settler society itself, to try to bolster it against

the spread of cultural and biological contamination (Anderson 2003; Vann 2005). "Colonial control" argues Stoler, "was predicated on identifying who was 'white', who was 'native', and which children could become citizens rather than subjects, on which were legitimate progeny and which were not". (Stoler 2002b: 43). But whiteness was not merely a matter of cultural anxiety: it also had direct political and economical registers and, of no less significance, also become a question of defence.

Saving whiteness: separation by law

In Asia's European colonies, and in marginal communities in British Australia, the class and racial boundaries were constantly being undermined. Indeed, miscegenation and economic disadvantage were typically seen to correlate and the cultural outcome manifested in the culture of families and children (Bosma and Raben 2004; Hawes 1996). Generalised across colonial society, miscegenation was seen to threaten what Robert Young called a "raceless chaos" (quoted in Caplan 2001: 5), or the possibility of white imperialists being "elbowed out and hustled and even thrust aside" in the world, as Charles Pearson said in 1896 (cited in Tregenza 1974). In British India, Robert Knox (1850) believed that "separation [between the races] and purity [of race] were the sole alternative to extinction" (quoted in Caplan 2001: 4), while in the Netherlands Bas Veth (1900) wrote that products of colonial miscegenation had even begun to seep into metropolitan cities back home, and that the Netherlands' own future could only be secured by the continuing dominance there of a race of blue-eyed, blond farmers in the country's north (Coté 2005). Located discursively between these two political categories, in Australia it was predicted that "the problem" had been largely contained.

Alfred Deakin, one of the architects of the new settler federation, confidently declared that "in another century the probability is that Australia will be a White Continent with not a black or even dark skin amongst its inhabitants." This was supposedly because "[t]he Aboriginal race has died out in the South and is dying fast in the North and West [while] ... [o]ther races are to be excluded by legislation if they are tinted to any degree" (quoted in Anderson 2002: 90).^{iv}

In all four imperial settlements under discussion attempts were made to contain the problem of "contamination" by creating laws to distinguish and establish barriers between races. Where the "racial other" formed an indispensable element of European daily life, however, achieving such separation was difficult. Colonial legislative efforts therefore largely focussed on the enactment of marriage and paternity laws intended to separate the adult "half caste" and mixed race offspring from their native roots (Stoler 2002b). Dutch colonial law distinguished three ethnic categories, Europeans, "Inlanders" and "Foreign Orientals" (Fasseur 1994), and, as in French Indo-China, defined specific legal entitlements of the differing racial communities in separate legal codes. This meant that legal category could (and did) override race (and skin colour), and no separate legal distinction was made between "pure white" and "not-so-white" and "brown" once legally defined as belonging to the category European (Stoler 2002a).^v In British India, however, further legal distinction was made between "pure white" and "half white" elements of the European population and, unlike in the Dutch East Indies, Anglo-Indians were separately indicated in censuses (Caplan 2001).

In the Australian colonies, on the peripheries of colonial settlement, where an interdependent *ménage* of European, Indigenous and Asian settlers evolved a pioneer economy (Reynolds, 2003), "half-castes" were classed within the indigenous population. In such relatively isolated areas demographic conditions comparable to those elsewhere in imperial Asia existed (Coté 2001) and according to one observer, gave rise to the emergence of "a race of nearly white people living like aborigines" (Reynolds 2005: 124). Here statistical reports prepared by the "Aboriginal Protection" authorities distinguished between "full-bloods" and "half castes" (and other percentages of "Aboriginalness", Reynolds 2005) as a basis for further legislative action. Between 1886 and 1920 a series of parallel laws were enacted across the colonies (later states and territories of the later Federated states of Australia), and such laws became more systematic as "outback" Australian society progressed into the 20th century.^{vi} Their intention, if motivated by welfare concerns for the children involved, was to separate white men and their offspring from Indigenous and mixed race partners, and from "full-blood" Indigenous communities, by both specifically targeting an existing and evolving mestizo community and proscribing further interracial relations, to "wash out" indigeneity in mainstream Anglo-Saxon society (Reynolds 2005: 115-30; Haebich 1988: 134-37).^{vii}

Underlying such enactments was the apparent assumption on the part of colonial observers that the social and cultural pre-conditions that had initially encouraged cross-racial relations would be persevered in subsequent domestic environments and thus further the spread of "racial degeneracy" (Stoler 2002b: 67). This assumed also that the negative moral attributes of class were

fused with those of race in the biological inheritance of settlers' children. The prospective manifestation of such attributes were seen as directly endangering the fragile nature not just of authority in the colony but, more generally, the representation of the white race and civilisation abroad, and even of undermining the imperial centre.

Saving Whiteness: separation through education

If these legal delineations went some way to define the issues and set out a basic framework for the future, they did little to resolve the immediate problem of the "rising generations". The colonial-born increasingly seemed to be slipping away from some ideal concept of civilisation that frames the discourse on whiteness in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In practice, those within the European domain with money (and thus social status) were generally able to maintain their European credentials via regular "furloughs" home. More significantly, to maintain their longer-term position, they sent their children to Europe to be educated, or educated them privately with imported governess and tutors. This renewed injection of metropolitan values contributed to maintaining the distinction between European metropolitan and colonial cultural attributes. The majority of children of poorer European families – and this category in Asia was dominated by people of mixed parentage classified European – largely remained "trapped" in the colony by their lower earning capacity. Failure to improve their own and their children's educational (and cultural) qualifications, and thus future earning capacity and status within a colonial hierarchy, increasingly also left them open to competition from

(western) educated indigenous graduates.^{viii}

Education therefore evidently held the key to gaining the cultural capital in terms of which whiteness could be safeguarded and advanced. Any resolution to the problem of maintaining “whiteness” within the colonial settler society thus eventually focused on “the rising generation” – as was also contemporaneously the case for those concerned with the reproduction of dominant bourgeois values in the industrialized and rural regions of the metropole (Reeder 1985). But if local schooling for poorer settler children offered a potential pathway to a better future this also required the separation of European – and particularly poorer Eurasian – from indigenous children.

An examination of the discourse around education then, reveals much of the colonial anxiety surrounding whiteness and locates education policies as a key instrument for protecting whiteness. As in metropolitan Europe, it was in the urban centres of the colonies that the risk of “class contamination” was seen to be most concentrated, and with which discourses of degeneration were typically associated. This was, in the first place, because cities in imperial Asia represented the most significant concentrations of Europeans. But Asian cities were also the locations where inter-racial contact was historically more widespread and intimate, and the formation of extended mestizo communities an established phenomenon, even before European colonialism (Bosma and Raben 2004). (By contrast, in the Australian colonies, where anti-Indigenous and anti-Chinese policies had driven “the problem” to the peripheries of white settlement, it was only there that very similar communities evolved.) At the same time, cities were also social contexts where “the

modern”, the manifestation of European “civilisation”, could most strikingly contrast with various forms of Indigenous and settler tradition, and where consequently “degeneration” was most readily observed.

By the 1860s, in the European Asian and Australian colonies, parallel concerns were being expressed about colonially-born youth, particularly children of mixed racial parentage. In the Dutch East Indies, from the earliest days of a school inspectorate, inspector reports commented on the “reluctant, irregular and incomplete” attendance of colonial children but blamed this on the fact that pupils typically experienced “little encouragement” and came from an environment characterized by “damaging association with slaves and servants” which included the use of “unsavoury and bastardized language” (Inspector’s Report 1823 cited in *Algemeen Verslag* 1850: 9). The condition of teachers in the first half of the nineteenth century was not considered to be much better: many “demonstrated a lacklustre interest in the vocation to which they have bound themselves” (*Algemeen Verslag* 1850: 9). But it was specifically the poor intellectual and moral condition of colonial youth, the majority of whom lived in urban areas, that concerned educational authorities:

the limited receptiveness, the extremely low intellectual and mental capacity, the lack of attentiveness, the complete dispirited nature of the children born here and then [usually] of mixed race; weaknesses and limitations which in part, no doubt, find their origins in nature but to which nevertheless bad upbringing, especially in the early years of childhood contributed to significantly (*Algemeen Verslag* 1850: 10).

In British India, where belated initiatives to found a school system for European settlers emerged after the assumption of Imperial rule in 1860, very similar arguments were being aired. As in the Dutch East Indies, a significant percentage of settler children were not attending school – in 1879 this amounted to an estimated forty per cent of European and Eurasian children of school age (between 11,000 and 12,000, Caplan 2001: 37). As in the Dutch colony, it was primarily children from relatively poorer families and mainly “Anglo-Indians” – those who might be considered the aspiring sections of the European poor – who attended, leaving a majority still unschooled. Such sentiments reflect the prominence of class concerns and sensitivity to the social divide within both the European community and the wider racial context of the discourse.

Securing lower class European and Eurasian children for a white future implied, as already indicated above, the need to separate these most vulnerable elements from indigenous claimants to access to Western education. The question of co-education – that is, of indigenous children in European schools – became more urgent towards the close of the nineteenth century, and crucial in the twentieth. In British India authorities had early expressed concern at “the spectacle of a generation of natives highly educated ... side by side with an increasing population of ignorant and degraded Europeans”. Such a situation, Bishop Cotton believed, “would be subversive of ‘our Indian Empire’” (quoted in Caplan 2001: 55). In the Dutch East Indies, where children of Indigenous elites had traditionally been permitted to attend European elementary schools, their presence towards the end of the century came to be seen as further undermining the

European environment of those “vulnerable” settler children who were already the focus of concern because of the influence of the Indonesian womenfolk who dominated their home environments.^{ix} In a move presented as progressive but primarily motivated by a desire to remove the pressure of Indonesian parents to gain entry to European schools, the colonial government introduced a dual (separate races) elementary school system in 1892.^x This provided a form of western education in Malay language, and later, a further sub-elementary village school system using a local language medium into which Indonesian aspirations for access to European culture were diverted (Ricklefs 2001: 199-203).

The same approach was employed in French Indo-China where similarly separate indigenous schools were established for Vietnamese. Initially, as in the Dutch East Indies, schools established on the metropolitan model for French and Eurasian settler children also accommodated children of Vietnamese fathers employed in the administration or who were of significant rank, “when space permitted”. This practice, however, was increasingly viewed with “alarm”. French authorities and *colon* representatives expressed concern about the disadvantages experienced by settler children compared to metropolitan children that resulted from overcrowded classes – by implications because of the numbers of Vietnamese children included – and about “the level of instruction [that] had fallen because of both [the resulting] large class sizes and ill-prepared Vietnamese students” (Kelly 2000: 81). Here too, a systemic separation was introduced into the school system (although not until 1917) which offered Vietnamese a dual system consisting of a watered-down Western education in

urban areas and a “reformed” traditional education for the rest.^{xi} Secondary schools remained, as in the Netherlands East Indies, open to French speaking, economically able, Vietnamese, since at higher social levels, mixed schooling could be risked and had the potential advantage of promoting the assimilation of an indigenous elite with colonial interests (Ferro 1997: 136).

In a somewhat reversed but comparable process, in the peripheral regions of colonized British Australia the growing “half-caste community” was also being represented as constituting – and no doubt did in fact constitute – a pauper class. Concern about numbers, and attempts to use education to “civilize” these remnants of whiteness reflected similar sentiments in the Asian colonies. But here policies were carried out with much greater discursive and physical violence since they concerned parents legally classified as “native”. In Queensland from 1865, authorities automatically deemed all children of Aboriginal and “half caste” mothers up to the age of 21 as “neglected children” and claimed the right to remove and institutionalize them. These “Stolen generations” were collected in separate Industrial Schools and care institutions to be trained to undertake domestic (girls) and technical (boys) occupations in European society (Haebich 2000: 149-50). In the Northern Territory in 1930, where this separate class was estimated to be 852 and rising (compared to a declining European population of less than 3000) it was predicted that “[i]f the existing trend continued, the half-castes would become the predominant part of the local population in fifteen or twenty years” (Reynolds 2005: 16).^{xii} In the meantime, a 1930 report argued, children of mixed race needed to be removed from or limited in numbers in European schools since ‘any increase in

the number of half-castes among the student body would inevitably result in a lowering of the general standard of education for all children in attendance’ (Cecil Cook, quoted in Reynolds 2005: 162).

Underlying such concerns was also the more tangible issue of security. In British India, according to one commentator, Eurasians presented “a source of present mischief and future danger to the tranquillity of the Colony” which “should they be well led and politically organized, could pose a risk to British security” (cited in Caplan 2001: 26). In the Dutch East Indies, as in the Philippines, Eurasians did indeed form cohesive and energetic political organizations that went on to claim autonomy. In the Indies, after several transmigrations, a short-lived Eurasian-lead independence movement under the Eurasian leader Douwes Dekker in 1912 declared its goal to lead a combined settler and indigenous movement for autonomy. In a slightly later and more hysterical version, an Australian investigator pointed to the political implications of permitting the further development of:

an immoral, degenerate coloured population which under the influence of communist agitators, is becoming indolent, embittered and revolutionary. The existence of the coloured community along such lines strikes at the very basis of the White Australia policy already gravely threatened here by the prolific fertility of Australian-born Chinese (Cook 1932 cited in Reynolds 2005: 166).

Saving whiteness: Commissions of inquiry

The effects of the 1880s depression, the possible threat of imperial competitors, the rise of Japan, together with growing signs of indigenous as well as settler

nationalism, all contributed to heightened concerns about the quality of these European enclaves. In this context, the moral fibre of the colonial community, and ultimately its physical and military capacity to protect and expand European civilization, became paramount considerations for imperialists and their colonial counterparts. At the end of the nineteenth century one finds an increasing number of official enquiries taking place, as more sophisticated colonial bureaucracies established more systematic investigations into the condition of the poorer classes of the European colonial communities. Like similar inquiries at the time into the condition of the urban working classes in metropolitan Europe, these official colonial investigations represented the more pronounced urgency in the desire for social reform, often bringing together the interests of political, class-conscious conservatives with more progressive, social reformers.

Characteristically, these inquiries focused on the future, investigating the likely prospects of the up-coming generation. And, as in metropolitan Europe also, the "battlefront" in the colonies by the end of the nineteenth century was gradually shifting from prevention and suppression to re-education and the introduction of welfare provisions to ameliorate economic conditions. But once again, in the colonies the issue was seen as being more urgent than in the metropole, the consequences of inaction more dramatic, and the often-unexpressed motivation was racial as much as it had overtones of class sentiment. The civilisation of whiteness was increasingly being defined in public enquiries in terms of the characteristics of the inner moral stamina of individuals, which came to be seen as the ultimate defence against "Asia". This meant

"whitening" the colonial settlers of the future.

A 1902 Inquiry into the condition of European urban pauperism in the Dutch East Indies emphasized that this class of people posed a threat to the existing order "given the place which it is deemed desirable for the European element of the population here to occupy in the midst of the native population" (*Rapport der Pauerisme-Commissie* 1903: 5). In other words, it threatened the racial hierarchy upon which colonialism, and European imperialism, was founded. While manifesting itself in unemployment and poverty, the root cause of their economic condition was seen as a matter of morality: the lack of *innerlijke kracht*, of moral strength, of this community. Despite a recognition that the solution to poverty in the end had to be an economic one, the report insisted the solution "in the first place will have to be found in] those factors innate in the persons themselves" (12). Implicitly, therefore, pauperism was the legacy of the negative character traits inherited directly from the Indigenous parent, or indirectly from the Indigenous environment in which the child was raised.

A similar Inquiry in British India in 1891 found an estimated 7.9 per cent of Europeans and 22.3 per cent of Eurasians (who constituted almost half the European population of 21,000) in Calcutta were paupers (*Report of the Pauperism Commission* 1892). As in the Dutch report, this pauper class "lived in huts like natives and slept on the ground" (*Report of the Pauperism Commission* 1892: xiv) and, as the Dutch report concluded, they similarly lacked "moral fibre". The Reverend Charles Walter Jackson told the Commission:

There are many reasons for the poor condition of these people:

the chief are drunkenness, pride, promptness to resign ... There is a great want of perseverance and absolute recklessness as to consequences. The class is utterly improvident (*Report of the Pauperism Commission* 1892: xvii).

In Australia, both in the separate colonies before federation and as a nation after 1900, a spate of similar inquiries into (primarily) urban social conditions expressed direct or indirect reference to class cultures, implicitly and explicitly in connection to the European community's proximity to its Asian and Indigenous environment. Here too, the solutions advocated were predicated on the "education" of the rising generation. In the European-dominated south, it could be argued, concerns were expressed in terms more comparable to those of metropolitan Europe. There, the physical and moral condition of the urban working classes more clearly reflected the class basis of white anxiety. However, unlike similar concerns expressed about the urban working classes in Europe, these were voiced against the background of an awareness of the isolation of the minority European community within an Asian hemisphere. Thus, as in the Asian colonies, here too commissioners and witnesses linked concerns about adult poverty, perceived moral decline, and race. Often duplicated across the legislatures of the semi-independent Australian states,^{xiii} such investigations came to similar conclusions to those of leaders of European enclaves to the north. While the commissioners on the Melbourne Board of Inquiry on Unemployment (1902), for instance, similarly noted the "demoralizing effect" of unemployment giving rise to "the existence of [a] listless, helpless and idle class" (cited in McCallman 1982: 94-5), in fact it was the existence of such a

"listless, helpless and idle class" on the southeastern edge of a continent located in Asia, far from the heartland of Europe, that underpinned the urgency of urban reform in Australia. Like the existence of the Eurasian poor in Calcutta or Batavia, it represented more than an economic problem: it simultaneously represented a potential threat to the robustness and prestige of the white race in Asia. In the words of one witness to the Royal Commission into the Declining Birthrate in Sydney: "on the welfare of the [Anglo-Saxon] race essentially depends the standards of a right living and right-thinking community" (cited in Hicks 1978: 25), while the Birthrate Commissioners themselves, reflecting the mood of national anxiety, concluded:

The problem of the fall in the birthrate is ... a national one of overwhelming importance to the Australian people, perhaps more than to any other people, and on a satisfactory solution will depend whether this country is ever to take its place among the great nations of the world (cited in Hicks 1978: 146).

But in metropolitan Australia, it was not just the number of white children but also the quality of their education that was of "overwhelming importance". This was not only because this befitted a "new nation", but also because this new nation represented Europeanness – and the only real representation of whiteness – in the Asian region. The Victorian Royal Commission into Technical Education, and the later parallel commission in New South Wales (as had similar Dutch and British colonial reports), advocated the provision of more practical and less academic education as the principal way to re-engage the children of the urban working classes. Each recommended varieties of agriculture, military, and technical vocational education to ensure the working class

children would not follow in the path of their nineteenth-century parents. Significantly, Australian educators could also emphasize patriotism and civic education, ideals which remained less clear to settlers in the Asian colonies. But above all, it was made clear that education – of the “inner man” as well as the “technical man” – was to protect race and the dominance of whiteness in the Asian hemisphere (at least in its British hue). In a patriotic address to school children in the state’s publicly-funded schools on Empire Day in 1907, the Victorian Director of Education declared:

So long as we share the undoubted benefits conferred by membership of the Empire, it is surely our duty to uphold it by developing at this end of the earth a sturdy, self-reliant race, able to work with brains and to use to advantage the best results of the world’s knowledge ... Each unit must make itself fit by education to bear its part in the world struggle. And here I would point out that although I may appear to overemphasize the industrial result of education, I do not undervalue as great forces in keeping our Empire together, wise and sane political ideal, clean social life, a high standard of justice as shown in our dealings of class with class, and of our own people with other people (Tate 1907).

It is of course not surprising that in the Australian context the discourse on whiteness was more obviously wrapped up in nationalist sentiment: the colonies had only just federated while elsewhere Asia European enclaves, although they protested the need for greater autonomy, existed in political limbo. At the same time, however, as with other outposts of Europe in Asia, imperial identity provided an essential insurance

as well as assurance of “quality”. To be French, Dutch or Anglo-Saxon, to be part of a greater French, Dutch or British Empire, was at once a symbol of their whiteness as much as it provided a sense of security that their society and its values would, despite adversity, and the overwhelming demographic disparities, triumph in the end.

Conclusion

In the colonial context, the metropolitan issue of class was exacerbated by the truncated nature of European society and by the imminence of race, both within the body of the European community and the broader cultural environment. Transferred to the colonies, imperial bourgeois discourses assisted to define the parameters of what was being defended as “civilisation”, and thus more directly coloured by “whiteness”. Colonial “white trash” represented a particular and acute problem in imperial Asia: it threatened the European entities imperialism had constructed. By linking the well-known Australian racial discourse more directly with that of other white colonial outposts in Asia, it becomes apparent, despite the evident different demographic and geographic characteristics, how much of this parallels the preoccupations, anxieties, and solutions elsewhere.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, action to safeguard whiteness in Asia increased apace, driven by the conjunction of three developments: the first stirrings of indigenous demands to participate in colonial modernity; the increasing penetration of colonialism into indigenous space; and increasing inter-imperial competition. In this context, European bourgeois anxieties developed a significant edge since these concerns directly equated with wider issues of racial domination, whether, as the Australian Charles

Pearson would have it, the continuation of the domination of the world by the “white race”, or, more chauvinistically, in terms of inter-national competition.

Traditionally, social separation and a culture of colonial “unmodernity” had protected better-off colonial families both from the “contamination” of pauper classes and from discourses of respectability. However, in the face of increasingly articulate Asian demands from without, the spread of democratic agitation from within, and a broader cultural anxiety within both metropolitan and colonial bourgeois establishments, the social isolation of poorer European and Eurasian families (and children) from “respectable society” could no longer be sustained. White settlers, wherever they were in Asia, felt themselves, in an immediate or indirect sense, to be in danger. From a metropolitan perspective, colonial settlers were already “not white enough”, but within their midst were those who were even less white. The problem of pauperism – or chronic economic unproductiveness – amongst a social category of Europeans in colonial Asia was represented as inappropriate in terms of their moral attributes as a social class but simultaneously as being dangerous when measured against a broader racialised canvas. The moral measure of class, then, gained its particular potency when manifested in a non-European context. Here the racial other was intimately close, and potentially overwhelming. In the optimism of the new century, protecting and advancing white supremacy meant believing in the possibility of re-whitening the immediate environment from which a new generation was emerging.

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Notes

ⁱ White is of course anxious to point out that more positive self-assessments were generated in the Australian colonies just as in the Dutch East Indies. Local spokesmen, for instance, were defending colonial society and establishing metropolitan-equivalent cultural and learned institutions (Bosma and Raben 2004).

ⁱⁱ Indeterminate terms with changing meanings such as "Anglo-Indians" in British India and "Indisch" in the Dutch East Indies were often used generically to refer to long term settlers to distinguish them from temporary (European) residents.

ⁱⁱⁱ By the 1930 census, the Dutch East Indies European population was 300,000, of whom approximately two-thirds were of mixed descent, in a total population of around 60 million; in French Indo-China a population defined as European was approximately 80,000 in a total population of 20 million. On the Indian sub-continent, British India census reports did not provide ethnic breakdown, meaning the number of Europeans in a total population of almost 319 million is unknown.

In Australia in 1901 a mixed European population, largely of British origin, numbered approximately 2 million, an estimated indigenous population of about 95,000 and a Chinese population of almost 30,000, the latter two groups concentrated on the margins of European settlement (Vann 2005; Caplan 2001; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

^{iv} Anderson (2002) shows, however, how settlement (and possession) of northern Australia by white people nevertheless remained a rhetorical and scientific problem.

^v In the Dutch East Indies especially, significant numbers of non-Europeans, including children of Indonesian mothers legally acknowledged by their European fathers, were included in the census category 'European'.

^{vi} Major legislation in this context includes the Victorian Aborigines Protection Law Amendment of 1886, and similar acts in Queensland (1897), Western Australia (1905), Australian territories (1912-18), South Australia (1911-23) and NSW (1918).

^{vii} The Victorian legislation, known as the "Half-castes Act" (1886), was seen to promote "the process of merging" half-castes into the mainstream community to

ultimately remove evidence of the Indigenous presence (Reynolds 2005: 122).

^{viii} Class structure in colonial Asia becomes increasingly complex as a new indigenous western-educated class takes its place in the colonial structure. This largely twentieth-century phenomenon cannot be adequately addressed here. Suffice to say that the evidence suggests increased rather than decreasing racial delineations in the first half of the twentieth century on the one hand, and a greater complexity surrounding whiteness on the other, as increasing numbers of “non-white” persons demonstrate its attributes.

^{ix} Even where their mothers were not Indonesian, the universal practice in colonial homes was to maintain native “nannies” and a complement of native servants.

^x This legislation expanded existing native schools, separating these into First Class and Second Class Native schools. Post-elementary schooling remained racially “co-educational” and Indigenous aristocrats continued to demand and achieve access to European schools, including Dutch universities, for their children.

^{xi} As in the Dutch East Indies, government provision of schools for natives was also intended to discourage the establishment of “free schools”; that is, schools established by indigenous nationalists (Kelly 2000; M. Ricklefs 2001: 238-9).

^{xii} Reynolds appears to be possibly the first modern historian to have considered “the half-caste” as a demographic entity in the Australian context. He shows that, while statistics across the various states demonstrate the steady growth of a mestizo community, legislators effectively ignored this phenomenon.

^{xiii} Prominent commissions of inquiry include the Royal Commission on Unemployment (1900), Board of Inquiry into Unemployment (1902), the Royal Commission into Technical Education (1899-1901) and a series of investigations into the “living conditions of the poor” culminating in a Royal Commission in to the Housing of the Poor (1914) in Melbourne and the Royal Commission into the Declining Birthrate (1903) and Royal Commission into Public Education (1906) in Sydney.