CHAPTER 2
DIPLOMAT AND SCHOLAR: FREDERIC EGGLESTON IN CHUNGKING AND CANBERRA, 1941–1946

Frederic Eggleston was a widower of sixty-seven when he arrived in Chungking on 21 October 1941. After a day’s flying from Rangoon, Burma, with a stopover in Kunming, he glimpsed the dim lights of China’s wartime capital as his aeroplane approached, circled in descent and touched down at 8:00 in the evening at the city’s main aerodrome, a facility built on a tiny islet in the middle of the Yangtze River. The scholar turned diplomat, who suffered from gout that periodically left him immobile, eased himself into a wicker chair that had been arranged for him in the middle of the dusty tarmac, where, he wrote, ‘photographers blazed at me and at our group for about a quarter of an hour.’ He made a short speech to the gathered members of the Chinese and foreign press before embarking on a launch for the city. There, he was helped into a sedan chair, which he self-deprecatingly took to calling his ‘perambulator’:

This was an extraordinary contrivance — not at all my idea of what a chair should be. It was a basketware chair between two long bamboo poles but it was fixed — there was no play for the chair and when we went uphill I was leaning back almost parallel to the ground.79

Perched on a steeply hilled peninsula where the Yangzte and Chialing rivers meet, Chungking presented constant challenges for the Australian Minister. By the time of Eggleston’s arrival, refugees from east China had swelled the city’s population from a pre-war level of 475,000 to more than 700,000, many of whom lived in densely-packed, riverside hovels rife with disease and malnutrition. ‘Wartime accounts of journeys into Chungking typically describe a sense of despair and horror provoked by the visitor’s initial view of the working-class districts along the shore’, writes Lee McIsaac in his study of modern Chungking, reactions which ‘sharply contrast with the delight and relief experienced as the traveler reached the modern district at the top of the hill’. One refugee from Shanghai described the Upper City as being ‘as different from the riverfront as heaven is from earth’.80

Eggleston certainly shared such sentiments. When he first saw the city’s downtown districts, he declared Chungking to be ‘outside of civilization as we know it’.81 Upon reaching what was known as the Upper City, the more salubrious areas of town in its west, where the Australian

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81 Osmond, Frederic Eggleston, p.209.
Legation was located, he wrote in his diary: ‘At last we got down on to the motor road — quite a fair stone road — and after going a fair way began to climb out of it into a part with some nice houses and gardens. The houses were quite big of Chinese dark grey bricks. It seemed like a kind of Toorak’.82

Although the invading Japanese army never reached Chungking, its air force had bombed the city relentlessly since the Nationalist government’s retreat from Nanking in 1938. The Australasian magazine published a double-page illustrated feature on the city with photos depicting an anti-aircraft warning system, civilians huddling in caves fitted out as air-raid shelters and panoramas of a smouldering waterfront. ‘Sir Frederic’, the paper commented, ‘goes to what even Londoners would admit is a real wartime capital’.83 But, by the time Eggleston arrived in the Republic of China, the Japanese were concentrating their forces on driving further into Southeast Asia, and would very soon be engaged more widely across the Pacific. Keith Waller, the Australian Legation’s First Secretary, recalled that now ‘the bombing attacks, which had been such a feature of life in Chungking and had made physical conditions so unbearable … virtually ceased’. The Australians experienced only ‘four or five’ small raids between late 1941 and March 1944, when they returned home — the first did not come until August 1943, and it marked ‘the first time’, Eggleston wrote in his diary, that ‘I have seen a shot fired in anger’.84

LEFT IN THE KITCHEN PIANO

On 7 December 1941, less that two months after Eggleston arrived in Chungking, Japan’s sudden attack on US naval forces at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii drew the Allied powers overnight into China’s now four-year war of resistance. Still, the new alliance was tenuous.

In Two Kinds of Time, a memoir about his work for the US Ministry of Information during the war, Graham Peck recalled the mistrust and cynicism in China that followed Pearl Harbor. While ‘the rest of the Allied world looked toward [China] with respectful admiration’ and praised Chiang Kai-shek as being the noble equal of Roosevelt and Churchill, a ‘strange snarling gaiety’ swept over Chungking itself as the Chinese people reacted to America’s entry into the war: ‘A most dreaded event had taken place — China was now encircled from Siberia to India — but the worst had happened to somebody else’.85

Chiang Kai-shek, who had converted to Methodism in 1927 so as to marry Soong May-ling 宋美齡, celebrated Pearl Harbor by listening to ‘Ave Maria’ on his gramophone out of sheer joy. In Washington, President Roosevelt advised Hu Shih, China’s Ambassador to the United States, to tell his countrymen to refrain from ‘noisy’ celebration and show more tactful

82 ‘Diary of Sir FW Eggleston, 21 Oct 41–30 Oct 41’, p.59. Toorak, in Melbourne, was in Eggleston’s time, and remains today, one of Australia’s most affluent suburbs.


sympathy for American losses. Such disharmony between China and its Western allies — and between the British and Americans themselves — hampered the war effort against Japan. It was the dominant theme of the almost two hundred diplomatic despatches that Frederic Eggleston sent back to Canberra.

Pearl Harbor was soon followed by the fall of Hong Kong and Singapore to the advancing Japanese. Eggleston wrote that the loss of these colonies was a ‘severe shock to Chinese faith in British invincibility’ and resulted in a ‘brisk recrudescence of the Anglophobia which has always characterised certain sections of the [Chinese] community’. He predicted that such Anglophobia could, in the midst of constant Japanese appeals to broker a truce with the Nationalist government, lead ‘to China deserting the Allies’.

The Australian Minister understood why so many Chinese people he encountered were suspicious of Westerners, especially the British. It had been a century since the end of the Opium War fought between Great Britain and the Ch’ing dynasty, yet the pernicious ‘extraterritoriality’ laws initiated with the signing of the 1842 Treaty of Nanking were still in place. Eggleston wrote that repealing extraterritoriality had been the most ‘outstanding diplomatic question’ during his time in Chungking. Even though a series of abrogation treaties were concluded in 1943, many Chinese remained wary of Western intentions. Their suspicions were exacerbated by a feeling (one with which Eggleston sympathised) that China’s allies viewed their war against Japan with much less gravity than that of Britain and America’s against Germany.

Britain and the United States dominated allied war strategy, and their approach was to ‘beat Hitler first’: to concentrate on winning the war in Europe while fighting a defensive war in the Pacific. It was a strategy with which Eggleston fundamentally disagreed. Writing to Stanley Bruce and Owen Dixon, Australia’s representatives in London and Washington respectively, he said despairingly that: ‘we in this part of the world are continually beset by the deepest anxiety that the apparent preoccupation in London with European affairs has led to the Pacific and the Far East generally being neglected.’ He urged Bruce and Dixon to represent more forcefully what he called a ‘Pacific view’ of the war in the allied capitals, adding that ‘Churchill is to blame’ for what he perceived to be a pervading lack of attention to the region.

Eggleston had loathed the British prime minister for nearly three decades. In 1914, he had accused Churchill, who was then the First Lord of the Admiralty, of being ‘fallacious and self-serving’ when he ordered the British navy to withdraw from the Pacific to confront Germany (and called on Australia to contribute its own ships as well). ‘A policy which disregards the Pacific, or leaves it to Japan’, he then argued, ‘cannot be regarded as a truly Imperial policy’. Now, he found Churchill’s disregard of the Pacific War to be extremely detrimental to Chinese morale. In

87 Despatch no.18, ‘Surrender of Singapore’, 3 March 1942, pp.1 and 3, NAA A4231, 1941/1942/NANKING.
88 Despatch no.8, ‘General Work of Post’, 8 February 1944, p.1, NAA A4231, 1944/ NANKING.
89 Letter, Eggleston to Bruce, 7 July 1942, NAA A4144, 608/1943. Eggleston included a copy of a letter date 4 July to Owen Dixon in this correspondence.
Top: Eggleston presenting his diplomatic credentials to Lin Sen, President of the Republic of China, and Foreign Minister Kuo Tai-chi, Chungking, 30 October 1941 (Central News Agency, Taipei); bottom: letter from Stanley Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner in London, enclosing Eggleston’s full powers to sign the Extraterritoriality Treaty with China, 25 November 1942. (Courtesy National Archives Australia)
early 1943, after Churchill spoke in a radio broadcast of the need for the ‘partial demobilisation [of British forces] following the defeat of Hitler’, Eggleston wrote furiously to Canberra:

It must be rare for any one speech by a public man to have in it so many things which would give offence to an ally. ... We have been striving to build up the belief that Britain and the British countries are interested in China and sympathetic with her difficulties and a speech of this kind undoes, in a few moments, the work of months. 91

The corollary of ‘beating Hitler first’ was ‘keeping China in the war’, something to be achieved by supplying as much military aid and technical expertise to the Nationalist government as possible. Eggleston believed this to be essential, and that the recapture of British Burma, followed by a land offensive launched from Burma reaching across China was the best course of action for the Allies to take against Japan.

A belief in this strategy informed his admiration for Joseph (‘Vinegar Joe’) Stilwell, the American general in charge of US operations in the China-Burma-India theatre. When the British colony of Burma fell to the Japanese in 1942, Stilwell had led an allied retreat through the Burmese jungle to India, marching at a pace known as the ‘Stilwell stride’ — 105 paces per minute. 92 Among the allied leaders in China, Stillwell was the main advocate for recapturing Burma. While Eggleston found that some US diplomats were prone to ‘flattering China in public while forming the worst opinions of [the country] behind the scenes’, Joseph Stilwell was, by contrast, a man of ‘rough talk and no side’. 93 Eggleston held a generally higher opinion of Americans whom he thought of as being ‘Pacific-minded’ — men like Stilwell and John Fairbank, the first teacher of Chinese history at Harvard University — than the British, a fact reflected in a diary entry in early 1943:

We are getting quite friendly with a lot of Americans. General Stillwell [sic] I like very much. We are going to dinner there tomorrow night. Also a man named Fairbank, a Harvard man. They all strike me as exceedingly competent; their education seems to me to fit them much better for public affairs ... and they are more constantly on the job.

The British Secretary [who Eggleston

91 Despatch no.77, ‘Churchill’s Speech’, 31 March 1943, p.1, NAA A4231, 1943/NANKING PART 2. Churchill’s 21 March 1943 speech was titled ‘Postwar Planning’, see Robert Rhodes James, ed., Winston Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897–1963, London: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974, vol VII, pp.6755–6765. Later, when visiting India, Eggleston’s First Secretary, Keith Waller, reported a pervading belief in British diplomatic circles there ‘that it was not necessary or perhaps desirable to defeat Japan, because a relatively strong Japan was needed in the Pacific as a balance to China and Russia’ — in other words, this signalled a return to the strategy of appeasing the stronger power. This was ‘a most dangerous doctrine for Australia’, Eggleston reflected. ‘British people do not live in the Pacific area in great numbers and Britain may therefore be prepared to trust another power to play a part in maintaining the balance in the Far East. But Australians live in the Pacific and their destiny is to be decided there.’ See Despatch no.81, ‘British Attitude to China and Japan’, 21 April 1943, NAA A4231/1943/NANKING PART 2, pp.1-2.


described as ‘a fine-looking chattering ass of a First Secretary named BG who generally manages to say something completely tactless’] will spend his spare time reading Clarissa Harlowe, not thinking about peace time or the economy of Java.94

Unlike most other diplomats in wartime Chungking, Eggleston did spend a great deal of time pondering issues like the economy of Java and the Pacific after the war. His main duty was to report on developments in the Sino-Japanese conflict and on Chinese politics. But, from mid-1942, he wrote a number of despatches to Canberra in which he contemplated the necessity of a just, productive peace settlement and the likely shape of the post-war regional order. At ninety pages in length ‘The Outlines of a Constructive Peace in the Pacific’ (his Despatch no.66), which he submitted to the Department of External Affairs in February 1943, was the magnum opus of Eggleston’s Chungking despatches. It was a crystallisation of his thinking on international relations at a time of enormous change in the regional order.95

In his overview of the post-war order, he had the following to say about the potential and limitations of China:

Since the Kuomintang [Nationalists] became supreme, there has been greater stability than during the revolutionary period and than during the long period of decadent and corrupt rule under the Ch‘ing Dynasty. There was a definite possibility before the war that a period of political and economic reconstruction would develop and that China would begin to realise her potentialities and become, as she is designed by nature to be, the stabilising force in East Asia. This is why Japan found it necessary to act. But the stability of China was never very well-established and five years of war have weakened it substantially. ... The political and economic instability of China is one of the major problems of the peace and the important fact is that her weakness is self-created.96

Elsewhere in the despatch, Eggleston proposed the formation of a United Nations — an organisation which would need to solve ‘the question of its own authority’ in handling disputes, something that had been the main failing of the League of Nations. Because economic crisis had been the principle cause of the hostilities besetting the League, the Australian Minister offered a ‘scheme’ along the lines of a regional monetary fund to provide assistance to Pacific countries according to their needs. China, Siam, Malaya, the Philippines, Java and Sumatra, Eggleston reckoned, were countries ‘in a relatively early stage’ of development, and as such would ‘need capital to complete primary equipment even before they start the secondary stage’. Australia, which had reached the so-called secondary stage of development, ‘lives largely on exports of primary products’.

95 For discussion of Eggleston’s ‘Despatch no.66’, see Cotton, The Australian School of International Relations, pp.62-64; and, Osmond, Frederic Eggleston, pp.240-243.
Precisely because China was still weak, developing and in need of fiscal guidance, not in spite of this fact, it was the keystone or ‘stabilising force’ in Eggleston’s imagined post-war Pacific order. Australia, and the region more broadly, stood to benefit immeasurably from its rise:

[China] will be more definitely a beneficiary of the scheme than Japan because she needs primary and secondary equipment and has no capital. There is no doubt that the purchasing power of her 450 millions, if it could be organised, would be an enormous factor in world stability.97

Because Eggleston’s reports were so ‘fresh and unusual’, writes the historian EM Andrews, they were ‘read and laughed over in London by [Stanley] Bruce and the High Commissioners in the Dominions Office’; while in Canberra ‘it would have needed a staff of four to digest and master these despatches, and one wonders how far they were read by the ministers for External Affairs.’98 Eggleston despaired that Canberra failed to respond to his conscientious advice. On one frosty morning in January 1943 he confided to his diary that: ‘like children in the marketplace, I pipe unto you and you do not sing. Is it right for me to waste my sweetness on the desert air, in the vacant spaces of Australian minds?’99 He would later advise Douglas Copland, Australia’s second minister to China, that: ‘there is no doubt that you can do exceedingly valuable work for Australia in China … [but] you will always have to insist on attention being given to your reports and advice. Otherwise, they will be ignored, pigeonholed or left in the kitchen piano.100

Warren Osmond believes that Eggleston had a tendency to ‘exaggerate [Canberra’s] unresponsiveness’ to his advice. ‘The Outlines of a Constructive Peace in the Pacific’ certainly was read, and commented upon at length, by the government economist Lyndhurst Giblin, while Paul Hasluck, a member of the wartime Interdepartmental Committee on External Relations, noted that Eggleston brought ‘orderliness and method into the handling of international post-war questions and in clarifying thinking in the various departments on Australia’s interests in the world.’101 In March 1954, from his position as Australian High Commissioner in Canada, Douglas Copland would credit his predecessor with being the originator of the Colombo Plan, the most important initiative for education and economic development that the Pacific region had ever seen. Apparently, the bureaucrats in Canberra had been listening after all. As Copland remarked:

That Plan was initiated in Australia and came about in part because my distinguished predecessor in China, Sir Frederic Eggleston, used to write despatches. Of course, we all write despatches — we wonder if they are ever read! But Sir Frederic’s despatches were read. And one of his lines of

100 Letter, Eggleston to Copland, 9 November 1945, NLA MS423/1/241.
thought always was that an investment in technical training to the people of Southeast Asia in the new circumstances after the war would bring large returns [and place] relations between the East and the West on a new basis. And that was the essence of the Colombo Plan.  

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Shortly before he left China, Eggleston reported that apart from the issue of extraterritoriality and desultory discussions with the Chinese about a possible trade agreement and an agricultural mission, there had been practically no ‘outstanding diplomatic questions’ to deal with during his posting. He said that in reality it was China’s community of scholars that had informed his ‘line of approach’ to understanding the country. ‘I believed in this approach’, he wrote, ‘because I have observed that

though scholarship may not apparently take a leading place in a community, the scholars are always more articulate than other sections of the community and their views have considerable currency.\textsuperscript{103}

In 1948, when interviewed by the editors of Near North, a collection of essays on Australian foreign policy and engagement with Asia, Eggleston reprised the nature of his mission in similar terms: ‘scholars are generally more articulate than other sections of the community, and I learned much about China and her ways from them.’ Given the state of the war effort, and with Australia playing a minor role in the conflict compared to Britain and America, Eggleston reiterated that during his time in China he ‘did nothing’ of diplomatic significance.\textsuperscript{104}

What he did do, however, was foster friendships with a number of prominent scholars and educationalists with the aim, as he himself said, of ‘[putting] Australia on China’s map.’ ‘To be called a “scholar and a diplomat”’, he wrote, ‘means something to China.’\textsuperscript{105} Robert Payne, who taught English literature at National Southwestern Associated University in Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan, describes the atmosphere at the Australian Legation:

Of the Ministers in China, Sir Frederic is the most popular. He lives quietly in his great house, rarely going out, surrounded by Chinese paintings, quietly performing those acts of friendship and understanding which are more important in China than diplomacy. You will find professors and merchants sitting at his table; an official of the Kuomintang [Nationalist Party] will be discussing the paintings of the Wei dynasty with a little schoolmistress; and when the wine is served on a silver platter, and the Minister is beaming at the young soldier who is arguing about the iniquities of the Burma campaign, you have a feeling that the civilization of our forefathers has been restored. He sits in a great chair, one gouty foot stretched forward, and behind him, like a curtain, all the yellow smoke and dust of Chungking rise in the air.\textsuperscript{106}

The guests at such soirées at the Australian Legation included Wen Yuan-ning, a translator of English literature and former editor of the Shanghai literary journal T’ien Hsia Monthly 天下月刊. Yuan Tung-li 袁同禮, the librarian of Peking University, and Mei Yi-chi 梅貽琦, President of Tsinghua University, were invited to peruse Eggleston’s library at the Legation, which included such classics as Keith Hancock’s Australia and WD Forsyth’s The Myth of Open Spaces. ‘Yuan says he has read all my books, even Swinburne, but I suppose he means that he catalogued them’, Eggleston noted in his diary. ‘He is a very nice man and so is Dr. Mei. They want to translate some Australian books into Chinese and want recommendations.’\textsuperscript{107} Eggleston proposed library exchanges between China and Australia, but then was ‘outraged’
Top: Eggleston with Kuo Tai-chi, October 1941 (Central News Agency, Taipei); bottom: Eggleston with Joseph Needham (left) and Kuo Yu-shou 郭有守, Minister for Education, Szechuan province, Chengtu, May 1943. (Courtesy Needham Research Institute, Cambridge UK)
by the lack of interest from Canberra.\textsuperscript{108}

By the end of his first year, Eggleston had visited over fifteen universities in Chungking, nearby Chengtu and Kunming [see Maps, pp.ii-iii]. Some were local universities, but many, like National Central University (originally in Nanking) and Fudan University (originally in Shanghai), had relocated to western China in advance of the Japanese invasion. The problems facing these institutions, Eggleston noted, included ‘malnutrition, poor housing and inadequate medical attention, resulting in a heavy increase in disease among staff and students’; ‘inadequate salaries paid to staff’; and, a ‘complete lack of recent foreign books, periodicals and the latest equipment.’\textsuperscript{109} Since the Japanese had disrupted contact between China and the outside world, all such materials and equipment had to be transported via ‘The Hump’, the dangerous air route from India over the Himalayas.

At National Central University, Eggleston met the painter Ju Peon (Hsu Pei-hung 徐悲鴻), whose classes, he observed, suffered badly from a paucity of art supplies. He told Keith Murdoch, Chairman of Trustees at Melbourne’s National Art Gallery, that ‘an opportunity exists for an exchange of modern Chinese pictures with Australian ones.’ There were art schools ‘at nearly all the Chinese universities and some quite good artists’, Eggleston noted, yet for them ‘materials are almost unprocurable’ — these, too, had to be ferried over ‘The Hump. With regard to the proposed artistic exchange, Eggleston suggested to Murdoch that:

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Something about £50 would be sufficient; small for ease of transport. The picture should be rather good technically but decorative. … I am prepared to pay for my share of the picture — say £10. I would do it all myself only I have spent a good deal on the materials in India and the inflation here is so bad that for the last few months I have been living beyond my income.\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}

At the time, nothing came of the suggestion, although Eggleston did not give up: in late 1945, he would write to the man who would succeed him in China, Douglas Copland, that ‘the Chinese are very anxious to send an exhibition of Modern Chinese Art to Australia and I think some reciprocal arrangement of this kind should be made.’\textsuperscript{111}

It was a trip to Chengtu, however, that gave practical substance to Eggleston’s plans for academic engagement with China. In August 1942, Stanley Smith, an Australian attaché at the British Ministry of Information in Chungking, suggested that Eggleston visit Chengtu to meet Frank Dickinson, Professor of Agriculture at West China Union University 华西协合大学. Smith described Dickinson as:

\begin{quote}
a very great booster in a practical sort of way for the British Empire. He urged me to discuss with you certain ideas for the transfer of Chinese students to Australia when they had completed their courses in China. He feels, and I agree with him,
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\textsuperscript{108} Osmond, Frederic Eggleston, p.288.
\textsuperscript{109} Despatch no.54, ‘Universities in China’, 30 November 1942, p.15, NAA A4231, 1941/1942/NANKING.
\textsuperscript{110} Letter, Eggleston to Murdoch, 30 March 1943, NAA A4144, 608/1943. The sum of £50 at that time is equal to approximately $3,400 today.
\textsuperscript{111} Letter, Eggleston to Copland, 9 November 1945, NLA MS423/1/243.
that Australia has a very good chance of doing considerable business with China after the war, and that the more Chinese people we get down to our country the better. The general consensus of opinion is that American people get along better with the Chinese than the British because so many Chinese students go to America. Personally, I think there is more to it than that, but Australia should commence to lay down some sort of programme for the development of trade and their relations with China after the war.112

Dickinson was involved in a British government mission to provide aid to Chinese universities during the war. The mission had its origins in the late 1930s. As news of the Rape of Nanking reached the British public, Lo Chung-shu 羅忠恕, a young lecturer in philosophy at the University of Oxford, appealed to a number of prominent Oxbridge professors — who in turn put pressure on Whitehall — to declare that something had to be done to support China’s universities as they fled the Japanese onslaught. Now back in China and teaching at West China Union University himself, Lo, in October 1942, invited Eggleston to address the university’s three thousand students. A series of lectures by the Australian Minister — ‘The Clash of Ideas in the 20th Century’, ‘The Social Sciences in Search of a Philosophy’, ‘The Scientific Approach to Politics’ and ‘Some Post-war Problems’ — had previously been published in the university’s student magazine.113

Work commitments obliged Eggleston to postpone the trip. But when, in April 1943, he finally did go to Chengtu, he travelled with Joseph Needham, a biochemist from Cambridge who had just arrived in China. Needham was Director of the Sino-British Science Co-operation Office 中英科學合作館 established under the auspices of the British mission to aid China. Needham said his work was ‘part of the Allied attempt to break the Japanese intellectual and technical blockade round China … to bring help to the Chinese scientists and technologists isolated even in the biggest cities of “Free China”’.114 Together with his lifelong companion, Lu Gwei-djen 魯桂珍, the daughter of a Nanking pharmacist, Needham would go on to write and edit the monumental Science and Civilisation in China, the first volume of which appeared in 1954.

Although the trip from Chungking to Chengtu was less than two hours by plane, Needham wanted to visit a power alcohol factory in the town of Neichiang en route; Eggleston was also keen to see more of the countryside, so the pair decided to travel by road. They got more than they had bargained for when their jeep broke down on a narrow country road some forty miles out of Chengtu, stranding them for twenty-four hours. Eggleston later described the scene:

112 Letter, Smith to Eggleston, 7 August 1942, NAA A4144, 608/1943.
Top: Two men standing in front of the British Embassy car taking Needham and Eggleston to Chengtu, April 1943; bottom: Needham (fourth from the left), Manager Chang Chi-hsi and Eggleston with workers outside the National Resources Commission Power Alcohol Works, Neichiang, Szechuan, April 1943. (Courtesy Needham Research Institute, Cambridge UK)
The peasants were at work from five in the morning until six o’clock at night. There was a charming view of flat land with graded terraces; a man with a water buffalo was ploughing a field nearly down to his knees in water and mud all day long. The children left for school at six o’clock in the morning, returned for an hour between eleven and twelve and finished for the day at three o’clock. They then amused themselves watching the car till it became dark and their parents called them home. They seemed a jolly lot quite free from care and many of them, if dressed as Australian children with the appropriate ties would have made typical public schoolboys. 115

Eggleston, charmed by the surrounding countryside, also loved the city of Chengtu. The despatch he wrote about the visit included a lengthy description of the Tukiangyan 都江堰 hydraulic and irrigation network at Pi-hsien county near the city, complete with a two-page chronology of its development from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) up until 1941. At a time when, as Warren Osmond notes, Eggleston’s ‘somewhat condescending scepticism gave way to a more informed awareness that [China’s] complex cultural heritage would persist’ and would give a ‘distinctive tone to China’s industrialisation and modernisation’, the city of Chengtu, and the scholarly atmosphere he encountered there, were certainly formative. 116 The warm reception he received at West China Union University he found positively flattering: ‘The Chinese have enormous respect for a scholar especially if he is old and stout. If he is difficult he is probably the more profound. The professors were very

cultivated charming people and I made many good friends. When interviewed for the book *Near North* in 1948, Eggleston referred to this defining episode:

> If I was successful [as Minister to China] ... then it was only because the Chinese like old men; they like fat men; and they like scholars. ... I made genuine friends with a lot of University people because scholars are generally more articulate than other sections of the community, and I learned much about China and her ways from them.

In a series of discussions with Needham, Lo Chung-shu and others about post-war academic exchange, Eggleston proposed that 'we had to realise that the essential need of China was for reconstruction' and that this involved not only the sciences, as advocated by Needham, but also the social sciences 'such as law, economics, political science and engineering', as well as 'Finance, Statistics, Taxation (Welfare Management)'. Fired up by the conversation, soon after returning to Chungking Eggleston wrote a despatch to Canberra in which he suggested that a school of Oriental Studies, one based principally on the exchange of Chinese and Australian students, should be established in the Australian capital. He would frequently refer to this despatch over the coming years.

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120 I have been unable to locate the text of this despatch. Eggleston wrote of his journey to Chengtu in his Despatch no.99, dated 16 April 1943; of the remaining despatches he wrote during that year, nos. 102, 115 and 119 are missing, and one or more of them may well have contained the material Eggleston mentions.
In March 1944, Eggleston returned to Australia for a six-month furlough in Canberra and Melbourne, where he sought treatment for ‘gout and osteoarthritis, fatigue, and eyesight threatened by cataracts’. He never returned to China. In October that year, Owen Dixon resigned as Australian Minister to Washington and the Minister for External Affairs, HV Evatt — who had been impressed by Eggleston’s work — appointed him as Dixon’s replacement. 121

Despite ill health, during the six months he spent in Australia between postings, Eggleston delivered over sixty public lectures in which he continued his advocacy for library, artistic and student exchanges with the Republic of China. He told the Constitutional Club in Melbourne, for example, that China was ‘on the eve of a great renaissance, and was destined to play a prominent and more active part in the reconstruction of the Pacific. ... Australia must try to understand China, and work out adequate methods of co-operation to ensure order in the Pacific’. In particular, he said: ‘More attention should be given by Australian universities to these affairs’. 122

Melbourne’s Argus newspaper reported Eggleston as saying: ‘It is incredible how little we knew about our part of the world until the Japanese began to set fire to the Pacific horizons. ... I would have imagined that when Japan struck, once we had got over the first shock, we would have got to work at once to make provision for a complete study of that part of Asia, that lies nearest to us.’ Seemingly unaware of the existence of the University of Sydney’s Department of Oriental Studies or perhaps aware of the extent to which Arthur Sadler’s department had declined through neglect — the reporter who had interviewed Eggleston for the article in Argus said:

I have not, however, noticed the establishment anywhere in Australia of a new school of Oriental studies since December 1941, and in fact it was noticeable that nobody in Australia was making any stir about such matters until Sir Frederic Eggleston recently put the question of Oriental studies on the map. 123

PARENT OF PACIFIC STUDIES

The idea of establishing a national university had been in circulation from even before Federation. As early as the 1870s, the educator Edward Morris proposed that the three colonial universities in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide should be amalgamated, or at least they should form a federation for the purpose of shared standards for examinations and the conferring of degrees.

After Federation, educators turned their thoughts towards the idea of creating a university to serve the nation, and the Griffin plan for the national capital of Canberra, as we have seen, included a site for an institute of higher learning at a ‘situation of gentle undulation’ at the foot

121 Osmond, Frederic Eggleston, p.236.
of Black Mountain. What kind of institute of higher learning it would be was far from clear. Would there be a ‘Canberra University’ for teaching and a ‘Commonwealth University’ for national examinations, as John Butters and Mungo MacCallum, two early planners involved with the development of the capital, proposed in the 1920s? Would a Canberra University be an extension of Canberra University College, established with Commonwealth support in 1930 under the auspices of the University of Melbourne to provide tertiary training for public servants and their families? As we have noted in the above, in the early 1930s, Colin MacKenzie even thought that the Institute of Anatomy might become the ‘first unit of the National University of Australia’.

What eventually became The Australian National University (ANU) emerged during the war from discussions amongst and committee meetings of public servants, scientists and military men engaged in planning what was known as ‘Post-war Reconstruction’. The economist ‘Nugget’ Coombs, who became Director-General of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction from 1943 to 1948, was one of many thinkers involved in the creation of ANU. Like many of his colleagues, Coombs had been deeply affected by the Great Depression in the 1930s and was a strong believer in state planning, economic management and Commonwealth involvement in education. He later wrote:

The concept of the National University was an expression of the optimism of the time. We accepted in good faith the assurances of political leaders that they were committed to a richer, more secure way of life after the war; we believed that the war itself had demonstrated that resources could be directed towards chosen purposes; and we were convinced that the social sciences provided the intellectual framework which would enable those purposes to be wisely chosen and the resources to be creatively directed. The Keynesian foundation for the economic management of the war had been sufficiently effective to justify this conviction. 125

In October 1943, an Interdepartmental Committee on Commonwealth Educational Activities was established to promote federal involvement in education. Its members included Coombs, RC Mills, Chairman of the Universities Commission, David Rivett, Chief Executive Officer of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR, now CSIRO), Charles Daley and Robert Garran, two public servants who had been strong proponents of the arts and education in Canberra since its earliest days as federal capital. Chaired by the economist Ronald Walker, Deputy Director-General of the Department of War Organisation and Industry, it was known as the Walker Committee.

The Walker Committee’s purpose was to explore the possibility of, and to act as an advocate for Commonwealth involvement in all aspects of education. This was a novel idea for the time, and Coombs even had to convince his boss, the future Prime Minister Ben Chifley, of its importance: ‘[RC Mills] and I tried to persuade him. “Education”, he said, “is a State matter under the Constitution. Besides it is all mixed up with religion

124 Foster and Varghese, The Making of the Australian National University, pp.3-7.
and causes all sorts of trouble in the Labor party.” Eventually, however, Chifley would come to champion the cause.

From the outset the Walker Committee envisaged that the national university would be located in Canberra — they called it the ‘University of Canberra’, or the ‘National University at Canberra’ in early meetings; the title ‘Australian National University’ was not fixed until early 1946. A June 1944 memorandum by Charles Daley, one that influenced the eventual scope of the university, suggested that there was a need for ‘post-graduate research into national problems connected with public administration, international relations, oriental affairs, economics, nutrition, forestry, Australian history and other special subjects’. Daley suggested that a national university should mirror the ideals of Canberra, a city which in spite of its small size was ‘a symbol of national aspirations, and dominated by a spirit of national service’.

Just as the nomenclature of the new university vexed the Walker Committee, so did the subject of the study of the Pacific, and of Asia more broadly. Indeed, what exactly was meant by ‘Asia’, or what Daley called ‘the Orient’? And what, precisely, was denoted by the ‘Pacific’, a vague geographical term that was eventually adopted in the title of the ANU Research School of Pacific Studies? In the early 1940s, these were points of constant confusion. It was hardly surprising, as these terms had long confounded the country’s educators. In his 1919 Sydney lecture Australia Must Prepare mentioned earlier, James Murdoch had noted that while ‘the Orient from [Australia’s] special standpoint is the wide-flung yeasty expanse of the Southern Pacific’, and its study might include ‘such themes as Maori origins, or the sociology of the Pitcairn islanders’ these were hardly the kinds of subjects that he was expected to pursue as the country’s first professor of Oriental Studies.

Similarly, in the Walker Committee’s deliberations the question of engagement with the Pacific often focussed on Australia’s responsibility to administer the colonial possessions of Papua and New Guinea, Nauru and other Pacific territories. Not surprisingly, it was argued that the new university should emphasise subjects like public administration, anthropology and even research in tropical medicine. With regard to what geopolitical territory ‘Asia’ covered, planners thought in terms of diplomatic studies, history and geography, subjects which could prepare Australia for closer engagement with the emerging nations in the region. Indeed, the lessons of war were not forgotten. When, in October 1944, the Committee’s definitive statement on the need for Commonwealth involvement in education, the Walker Report, was submitted to the federal cabinet, it cautioned that ‘this country will stand in a situation of peculiar danger vis-à-vis Japan. ... Our survival will depend on vigilance and preparedness.’

The Walker Report recommended the establishment of a Commonwealth Office of Education to oversee the development of the proposed university. This office was set up in early 1945 and, when RC

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126 Coombs, Trial Balance, p.194.
127 Charles Daley, ‘A National University’, 6 June 1944, NAA A2473/NN.
128 Murdoch, Australia Must Prepare, p.3.
Mills was appointed as its first Chairman, Eggleston wrote from Washington to congratulate him:

Educationalists in America are very much in favour of interchange of teachers and students and whenever I meet any of them they bring the subject up and seem rather surprised that I am not prepared with any ideas on the subject. The same thing occurred in China and after carefully considering the subject of Chinese education, I wrote a long dispatch on the subject. … I raised in my despatch … the establishment in Canberra of a School of Pacific Studies, that is to say, a high-class graduate school in which all subjects connected with Pacific countries should be studied. This would cover political geography of anthropology and linguistics of the area. … I think the Canberra educational effort should be in the form of a School of Graduate Studies, which is so marked a feature of the best American universities, such as, Harvard, Yale and Columbia. … My despatch from China may interest you and I think if you went to the Department of External Affairs you could get a copy of it. Nothing has been done about it. I fancy it rested in Evatt’s hands unread for a long period.\footnote{Letter, Eggleston to Mills, 10 September 1945, NLA MS423/1/228.} 

There is no evidence that Eggleston’s ideas guided discussions during the university’s initial planning phase, be it during the Walker Committee’s meetings in 1943 or in the final contents of the National University Act of August 1946, which named a Research School of Pacific Studies as one of the four foundational ANU research schools. Yet, on a number of occasions, the former diplomat repeated the claim that Pacific Studies at ANU owed its origins to his 1943 despatch from Chungking. For instance, he later wrote to Keith Hancock, the academic advisor to the Research School of Social Sciences, that: ‘I can claim to be the parent of the [School of Pacific Studies] because it was first mooted in a despatch I wrote from China in early 1943.\footnote{Letter, Eggleston to Hancock, 9 September 1946, NLA MS423/12/74.}’

But, to reiterate the sentiment with which we began this study, others had been there before. In March 1939, for example, writing for the Austral-Asiatic Bulletin (a journal which Eggleston edited) Robert Garran had spoken of the importance of establishing a ‘School of Oriental Studies’ in Canberra. Australia’s ‘great role’ in international relations, Garran said, was ‘that of interpreter of the East to the West, and of the West to the East’. Australia had a ‘duty of making a close study of the Orient’. Garran anticipated a school that would be substantially research-focused, based in the federal capital, with close links to the government and affiliated with other Commonwealth institutions such as the National Library. He also proposed that ‘a special and valuable feature, sooner or later, will be the exchange of professors and students with other countries.’\footnote{Robert Garran, ‘A School of Oriental Studies’, The Austral-Asiatic Bulletin, vol.2, no.6 (February-March 1939): 15.}

In their official history of the first fifty years of ANU, Stephen Foster and Margaret Varghese note that: ‘Pacific affairs in one form or another (linked sometimes with international relations or Oriental studies)
had been discussed as an appropriate research area for at least a decade before ANU was established. It had certainly been one of Robert Garran’s ‘favourite themes’ during the Walker Committee’s preliminary discussions, and Garran ‘probably saved it at the last moment when, after it had fallen off the proposal for Cabinet, he stressed how important it was as a way of proclaiming the national character of the university.’

ANU and its Research School of Pacific Studies were established, at least on paper, but the definition and scope of the school was far from clear. Indeed, in February and March 1946, as the contents of the parliamentary act proposing the new university were being discussed and formulated, it was agreed that it be called ‘The School of Pacific and Asiatic Studies’. This was later considered to be too verbose and was abandoned. In July, a last-minute amendment to the Act proposed the name ‘Research School of Pacific Studies’ instead of ‘Pacific Affairs and Diplomatic Studies’, as the latter ‘suggests under-graduate work or the training of public servants, and does somewhat detract from the full standing of the school’. ANU was to be, after all, a postgraduate research institution.

The public planners involved in establishing the university were clear on the question that Australia ‘needed’ postgraduate research in Asian and Pacific affairs. Yet how exactly Asia would fit under the rubric of Pacific Studies — and how aspects of Pacific, ‘Oriental’ or ‘Asiatic’ studies might overlap with the Research School of Social Sciences — were knotty issues tackled over a further four years of planning. To this day, however, they have never really been adequately resolved. But it was early days. As yet there was no university to speak of, let alone any students. Even as students began to arrive in 1950, ANU was nothing more than a ‘university

\[133\] Foster and Varghese, _The Making of the Australian National University_, p.16.
\[134\] ‘Agendum 882(c), _The Australian National University Bill 1946: Amendments and New Clauses_, 2 July 1946, NAA A571, 1945/1316 PART 1.
without buildings, with staff scattered all over the world’, noted The Sydney Morning Herald: ‘The National University is still a shed in a paddock.’\textsuperscript{135} Two main groups were in charge of planning the nascent university. The Interim Council, based in Canberra, was responsible for practical and administrative matters. The Academic Advisory Committee, which had offices in London and was made up of expatriate Australian scholars, offered advice on academic matters including staffing and recruitment. Eggleston was a member of the Interim Council from its first meeting on 13 September 1946. The other members present at that meeting included Coombs, Daley and Mills, the latter of whom was unanimously elected to the chair.\textsuperscript{136}

If Robert Garran ‘saved’ Pacific Studies during the wartime planning of ANU, Eggleston ensured that the idea was not dropped from the Interim Council’s planning agenda during the university’s first three critical years, when discussion focused more often on the schools of Medical Research and Physical Science. Eggleston may have exaggerated the novelty of his ideas, but he was certainly committed to them — particularly that of inviting Chinese scholars to lecture in Australia. On 2 September 1946, eleven days before the first meeting of the Council, he wrote to his old friend from Chengtu, Lo Chung-shu:

\begin{quote}
We are establishing a new Graduate University for Canberra and are having a meeting of the Provisional Council of which I am to be a member next week, but there is a lot of establishment work to be done and I do not know when we shall get to work. One of the schools will be a School of Pacific Studies and we are hoping to have exchange professors and courses of lectures by professors in Eastern countries. A course by you on Chinese Philosophy of, say, four to six lectures would be very good. \textsuperscript{137}
\end{quote}

It would be almost three years before Lo received this letter.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Lo Chung-shu in Chengtu, May 1943. (Courtesy Needham Research Institute, Cambridge UK)}
\caption{Lo Chung-shu in Chengtu, May 1943. (Courtesy Needham Research Institute, Cambridge UK)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{135} ‘Canberra University Has Its Staff Scattered Worldwide’, The Sydney Morning Herald, 28 March 1950, p.2; see also Foster and Varghese, The Making of the Australian National University, pp.64-66.
\textsuperscript{136} ANU Interim Council, Minutes of the First Meeting, 13 September 1946, p.1, ANUA 198, Box 2.
\textsuperscript{137} Letter, Eggleston to Lo, 2 September 1946, NLA MS423/12/72.