

AUSTRALIA'S STRUGGLE FOR INFLUENCE IN THE ASIA PACIFIC
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Australia has actively employed public diplomacy methods for as long as it has pursued an independent foreign policy, but the style, content and focus of Australia's public diplomacy has changed dramatically over the years.

This study analyses the nature of Australian public diplomacy, what has influenced its development, how it has changed, what it has achieved, and how it is perceived. To place Australian public diplomacy in context, it briefly summarises the history of Australian public diplomacy, and explain the government structures that were set up to implement it. In identifying the formative influences over public diplomacy, this study examines both internal and external factors, with particular focus on the objectives and aims of Australian public diplomacy. In doing this, it identifies some key turning points in Australian public diplomacy and endeavours to pin-point some successes and failures of public diplomacy and its overall relationship to Australian foreign policy. The study considers government responses to all these elements, its attempts to improve the functioning of Australia's public diplomacy institutions, and provides some evidence as to whether these have been worthwhile or are mere window dressing.¹

Early Days of Australia's Public Diplomacy: Lack of Focus but Debates about Control

From the earliest days of Australian diplomacy, information and cultural relations programs played a specific but modest supporting role in Australian governments' pursuit of Australia's overseas interests. An identifiable foreign policy mechanism for information dissemination existed from the 1950s, for cultural relations from the mid-1960s, growing into a single Information and Cultural Relations Branch from 1966, and two separate branches from 1975. Of course, Australian governments were conscious of what other "Western" governments did in the way of information and cultural programs in those days, but it was not a question of deliberately modeling ourselves on what others were doing; our needs were always specific, our capacities always somewhat limited, and the context in which our policies were carried out was always quite distinctive. The term "public diplomacy" started to be more commonly used from around 1990 but it was not until 2000 that the name of the relevant division changed to Public Diplomacy Division.

Through the 1960s and into 1970s, it could never be said that "information and cultural relations" enjoyed a high priority in terms of skills, or resources, or integration

¹ This study concentrates on the Department of Foreign Affairs, but also considers briefly the role of Australia's international public broadcasting. I am indebted to Bill Bannear for his research assistance.

into the policy mainstream.² Indeed, it was openly described as the “Cinderella” area of the Department by the then Secretary, Alan Renouf, as late as 1975 when a Division for Cultural Relations was set up (Manton, 2003). Within the Department, any requirement for an information or cultural relations perspective on the handling of issues was mostly an after-thought, with officers working in the area often complaining of being shut out of internal consideration of issues.

Complicating Australia’s handing of its overseas projection of itself in these early days was the fact many agencies did not come under the Australia foreign ministry but were separate agencies. The very number of these agencies made coordination of Australia’s efforts a major focus of activity for much of the time.³ In this respect, Australia is very different from some of the main countries with overseas public diplomacy programs, such as the United States, the UK, or even Japan, who had a strong central agency handling their international outreach.

A notable attempt to review the handling of Australia’s overseas promotional roles occurred in 1969 when an Inter-Departmental Committee produced a report containing major recommendations for upgrading Australia’s overseas programs, but the report was never adopted by the Australian Cabinet and indeed the very document disappeared from Departmental files for some years.⁴ This was a time of weak conservative governments in Canberra and the report was swamped by the new political agenda swept in by the reformist Labor Government under Gough Whitlam in 1972. Had the report been adopted, it would arguably have meant a transformation of Australia’s international profile years ahead of when this finally happened. Instead, the government in 1972 ruled out any idea of a single over-riding external Australian agency like the British Council, but did decide to establish the Australia Council of the Arts to coordinate all arts funding, domestic and external.

The idea of a single cultural promotion body like the British Council was considered at different times, but was never able to secure political support.⁵ While the advantages of a single organisation could be appreciated, the disadvantages for all the relevant agencies of giving up existing programs and funding in favour of creating a new body carried more immediate weight for them. There was also no strong advocate for such a body, probably for a variety of reasons. The absence of a visionary argument for a single body seemed to reflect lack of confidence in Australian culture at a time when Australian culture was relatively under-developed, and was one reason why the idea

² An interesting practitioner’s account of Australian public diplomacy in its infancy is contained in Neil Manton’s *Cultural Relations: The Other Side of the Diplomatic Coin*, Homosapiens Books, Canberra, 2003. Manton worked for more than 30 years in the Department, often working on cultural relations

³ Departments included the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Interior, Treasury, Education and Science; agencies included the Australia Council for the Arts, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (Radio Australia), the Australian News and Information Bureau, as well as non-government bodies such as Musica Viva, and later Asialink at Melbourne University.

⁴ Recounted by Manton who only recovered a copy of the report in obscure government archives in Sydney in 1999 after a two-year search. Manton’s assessment of the significance of the report is persuasive.

⁵ Manton quotes the Minister for External Affairs as indicating he did not support the idea in 1972 (page 56).

never gained supporters. Institutional rivalry and suspicion also played a part, with neither Foreign Affairs nor the agency responsible for the arts ever having enough influence to win over the rest of the stakeholders; Foreign Affairs was not considered sufficiently “arts-wise”, while the Australia Council was not seen as sufficiently reflecting broad Australian policy interests.⁶

Was this a loss for Australia? Quite possibly a single body at a time when Australian culture was growing and being more recognised would have ensured a lasting high-profile presence for Australian cultural promotion. But Australians are generally skeptical about organisations with broad generalised objectives, preferring specialised focused bodies. However, it is far from clear that overseas models such as the Alliance Francaise were for Australia, where after the 1970s there would be considerable distaste for over-arching broad promotional bodies.⁷ Moreover, instances of such organisations not working are almost as common.⁸

Yet from relatively early on, public support for international Australian cultural and information programs was consistently in evidence. Parliamentary committees, for example, from as early as an inquiry into ASEAN in 1980, would endorse Australian overseas promotional programs and recommend increased funding for them. Media commentary tended to be positive rather than negative or questioning about such programs. Perhaps it was because they struck a chord of nationalism that they tended to retain backing from most quarters.

Early Rationales for Public Diplomacy and the Start of Australia’s “Soft power”

Historically, Australia was rather modest and unassuming in claiming and wielding “soft power” resources of its own. Initially there was uncertainty about what form of Australian culture could be promoted, but eventually it was found that Australian art and music had sufficiently distinctive features to attract overseas interest. It was also found, with strong support from the Australia academic community, that “Australian Studies” at academic institutions helped meet considerable demand for information about Australia. The “discovery” of Aboriginal art in the 2980s and 1990s was in many ways a godsend for Australian international cultural promotion.

Opinion polls showed that Australian to be generally well liked and popular and visitors to Australia reacted positively to Australian informality, egalitarianism, and down-to-earth qualities. Australia’s healthy outdoors “lifestyle” was widely used to promote immigration and tourism to Australia. From relatively early days these characteristics were quietly promoted as part of Australia’s information programs, before

⁶ But it is noteworthy that the boards of the various country-specific foundations set up under DFAT included representatives from the arts community. See Manton page 63

⁷ Former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans arguably reflected this thinking when he insisted that public diplomacy is not about creating “front organisations” (Evans and Grant, 1991:72).

⁸ The loss of confidence in the Australian News and Information Bureau in the 1980s and the US Information Agency in the 1990s are perhaps the most obvious example. ANIB was incorporated in the DFAT in 1987 and the USIA was abolished as an independent agency in 1995.

the term “Australian values” was adopted in 2003 apparently in response to earlier regional attempts to promote “Asian Values”.⁹

One of the most important of Australia’s soft power “resources” is now widely considered to be Australia’s scholarship programs under the Colombo Plan which from 1951-80 saw many Asian who were to become opinion leaders in their own countries undertake undergraduate studies in Australia and form mostly positive views of Australia. These have long been recognised as an accumulation of ‘regional interactions’ with Asia ‘soft power’. Through mechanisms such as these, Australia was perceived to have an underlying store of long-term goodwill. In recent years, the active expansion of alumni schemes by Australian universities seek to capitalise on precisely this residual attitude.¹⁰ By opening up Australian universities to fee-paying international students from the mid-1980s, the Australian Government enormously increased the number of potentially pro-Australian foreigners exposed to Australia at a young age. The Australian Government provides an increased number of 19,500 scholarships a year but these numbers are now much smaller than the more than 200,000 private students in Australia in 2006.¹¹ At the same time, since 2001 the Australian Government has relaxed the requirement for international students to return home and made it easier for them to stay in employment in Australia. So self-interest is a motivating factor for receiving international students much more than it ever was before.

From early days Australia government policies were a potential source of negative sentiments in the Asia Pacific region. Sensitive issues such as the White Australia program, and controversial actions such as Australia’s participation in the Vietnam War were recognised as powerful reasons early on for a more sophisticated Australian information program. More importantly, they were implicitly recognised as detracting from any Australian ‘soft power’.¹² Winning greater respect and recognition for Australia’s achievements in science and the arts, and later sports, was acknowledged as important in strengthening Australian influence amongst friends and neighbours alike.¹³

⁹ Interview with retired Australian Information Officer, 27 November 2006. Contrast this with the almost strident references to Australian values in the 2003 Foreign Policy White Paper “Advancing the National Interest”.

¹⁰ One session of a conference on Australia’s engagement with Asia at the Australian National University in 2005 was devoted to ‘soft power issues’ and as the main presenter ANU Vice Chancellor Chubb singled out the Colombo Plan as the main example of Australia’s soft power.

¹¹ Data from **Australian Scholarships Factsheet** on the Australian Agency for International Development website (accessed 21 Feb 07). Scholarships are now provided by the Department of Education, Science and Training as well as AusAID.

¹² Much later the respected journalist Paul Kelly would comment: ‘However under the Howard Government Australia has largely failed to construct an effective soft power strategy, a legacy of Hansonism, refugee policy and bitter cultural divisions at home that are transmitted abroad.’ Retired Australian diplomat Richard Woolcott would make a similar case in his ‘A Land of Fading Promise’, *The Age*, 21 January 2006.

¹³ Owen Harries in his 1979 Report on ‘Australia’s Relations with the Third World’ in would argue: ‘While supporting the value of current (cultural exchanges, people-to-people contacts and information) programs, the Committee considers that a long-ways term objective of the Government’s cultural and information policies should be to encourage in practical ways Australia’s gradual emergence as a recognized regions and our neighbours as a centre of intellectual exchange on Asian affairs.’

Simply seeking attention for Australian thinking and policies would eventually also become an important reason for raising Australia's international profile.

In the 1960s and 1970s, more than would ever occur again in the history of Australia public diplomacy, Australia's activities were largely altruistic, aimed at generic enhancement of Australia's standing regardless of short-term political or policy imperatives. Even though arguments were waged about "to what extent should our cultural relations programs seek to promote Australian culture, and to what extent should they be serving broader 'national interest' purposes", promotion of Australian culture was pursued at that time without attempts to gain political or commercial advantage.¹⁴ But perhaps precisely because of this 'purist' approach, the overall Australian effort was low key, low budget, low priority, and it would eventually seem, low impact.

Australia's comparative 'neglect' of public diplomacy as a practical tool in its foreign policy armoury was noted by then Foreign Minister Gareth Evans in his treatise on Australia's foreign relations (Evans and Grant, 1991:69). A number of reasons was cited to explain why this was so, ranging from the lack of a need to expunge adverse memories of historical actions, to absence of a *mission civilisatrice*, to skepticism about the measurable returns from public diplomacy. Yet Evans and his co-author acknowledged that 'Australia continues to have something of an image problem in Asia', deriving (they suggest) from negative perceptions of Australia's poor economic performance and rigid industrial relations system, and Australia's 'immigration policy tainted with racism'. They nevertheless argued that Australia must employ public diplomacy more actively because of evidence that many people in other countries know little about Australia, on the assumption that 'familiarity does not breed contempt'.

The Middle Ages: Lasting Institutional Changes, Having Some Impact

Significant and distinctively Australian changes to Australia's overseas programs occurred from the 1980s into the 1990s. The main development in this period was the establishment of Australia's cultural promotion foundations starting with the Australia-Japan Foundation in 1974, to be followed over several years by the Australia-China Council, the Australia-Indonesia Institute and others.¹⁵ Each of these bodies enjoyed reasonable funding and a good measure of coordination over bilateral cultural programs, conditions that did not always govern Australia's projection of itself overseas. No other comparable country has bilateral bodies such as these; none of the bodies is reciprocal but rather all are unilateral; and no other country has established such bodies for ostensibly altruistic objectives, purportedly independent of foreign policy considerations.

¹⁴ For example, 'The promotion of art for art's sake was argued as being diametrically opposed to the promotion of art for the Department's political and economic imperatives in many officials' minds' (Manton).

¹⁵ Eventually nine bodies would be set up: Australia-Japan Foundation, Australia China Council, Australia Indonesia Institute, Australia-Korea Foundation, Australia-India Institute, Australia-New Zealand Foundation, Australia-Thailand Institute (2004), Australia-Malaysia Institute (2005), and the Australian Council for Latin American Relations.

Essentially, these initiatives enjoyed bipartisan support: some of the bodies were set up under conservative governments, others were set up under Labor Governments.

It is no accident, of course, that the foundations, councils and institutes have been set up with Australia's major trading partners. This reflects the gradual turning way from a generic international promotional body and the increasing emphasis over the years on using public diplomacy more overtly but discreetly for political purposes, namely to enhance specific bilateral relationships, judged to be important enough to warrant tailor-made programs. This was taken even further under the Howard Government which set up several more country-specific foundations, but openly linked commercial returns with many large promotional events.¹⁶ Influencing this approach was a general skepticism in government departments about 'independent' bureaucratic organisations with what were seen as idealistic goals.

Stronger coordinating mechanisms were also set up during the 1980s and 1990s inside and outside Foreign Affairs under successive Australian Governments which by most measures resulted in more effective promotional efforts.¹⁷ Although the quality and quantity of Australian promotional activities lifted noticeably during these years, these new bodies still suffered from the weaknesses that all coordinating mechanisms have of not being able to exercise the necessary authority to lead public diplomacy in new directions. On the other hand, the specialist non-government bodies were able under these looser arrangements to develop professional programs with reasonable funding (from government and non-government sources).¹⁸

Tools for Australian Public Diplomacy

Australia has always used a wide range of tools to influence its neighbours and others to adopt more positive attitudes towards Australia and to increase their visits, study, trade and investment into Australia. In each of these areas specialised marketing strategies were adopted by specialist bodies, but they were always underpinned by generic and strategic (long-term) promotional activity. In most of these areas, Australia's programs became increasingly sophisticated, but were still only funded on a scale that dwarfed that of Australia's 'competitors'. Former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans set out one of the most coherent statements about the importance of public diplomacy and the various means of achieving Australia's interests through public diplomacy in a speech he gave to the Australia-Asia Association in 1990 (Evans 1990).

¹⁶ In 2006, in a scarcely noticed shift towards even imposing even greater political and commercial influence over its program activities, the Howard Government placed the Australia-Japan Foundation under direct administrative control of DFAT, thereby bringing it into line with all the other foundations.

¹⁷ The Australia Council was set up as a separate agency under the Department of the Arts in 1978, the Australia Abroad Council was set up inside DFAT in 1989, and its *de facto* successor the Australian International Cultural Council in 1998.

¹⁸ These include Musica Viva (established in 1939) in the field of musical performances and Asialink at the University of Melbourne (established in 1990) in the field of visual arts. By the 1990s both had regular contractual relationships with DFAT to provide international programs in their fields. Asialink also became a significant 'second track' organisation promoting intellectual exchange through conferences.

A. Public Broadcasting and Public Diplomacy: Australian 'soft power' at Work?

Australia has long used public broadcasting as one arm of its public diplomacy in Asia and the South Pacific, establishing Radio Australia as a short-wave radio service in 1937. However, Radio Australia is distinctive in that, other than during the period of World War II, it has always been independent of the Australian Government. Thus Radio Australia functions more like the BBC World Service than Voice of America or Radio Free Asia, which are explicitly controlled by the US Government. But the significance of Radio Australia for Australia's international relationships was always clearly understood, and conversely it was generally accepted that in presenting an Australian perspective on events Radio Australia needed to be mindful of a range of Australian interests. This inevitably meant tussles between the then Australian Broadcasting Commission, which operated Radio Australia after World War II, and the Department of External (later Foreign) Affairs. These tussles were particularly fierce during the period 1950-1970 and are the subject of a fascinating account by Errol Hodge entitled *Radio Wars*.¹⁹

During the Cold War, Radio Australia was openly regarded by the Liberal Government as 'an instrument of foreign policy', and indeed Australia was party to a formal agreement undertaking that it would seek to further the interests of the West through propaganda broadcasts on Radio Australia. This generated an ongoing contest between the government and the Department of External Affairs on one side and the ABC on the other over what sort of restrictions should govern Radio Australia. When Labor Governments were in power during 1972-75 and 1983-96, they tended to be less set on exercising complete control over Radio Australia, and tended to take the view that Radio Australia enjoyed more credibility in the Asia Pacific region if it was seen as being 'independent' of the government. But at many times, mainly but not only under conservative governments, tension between Radio Australia journalists and senior foreign policy officers erupted into competing claims and counter-claims.²⁰

At issue was the fact that this journalistic independence and determination to tell the facts as they saw them (both in Australia and in the Asia Pacific region), not surprisingly occasionally brought Radio Australia into conflict with regional governments, especially in Southeast Asia.²¹ These conflicts inevitably had consequences for the Australian Government and for Australian foreign policy, no matter how hard the Government argued that it did not control Radio Australia. The most serious episode occurred after the Indonesian Government took exception to Radio Australia broadcasts in 1980, and banned Radio Australia and ABC from posting a correspondent to Jakarta

¹⁹ Hodge, a former ABC journalist and former Head of Radio Australia, published his overtly partisan account, *Radio Wars*, Cambridge University Press, 1995

²⁰ These are well reflected in the Senate Committee report into Radio Australia conducted in 1997 (Senate, 1997).

²¹ According to long-time ABC correspondent Michael Maher, certain Southeast Asian and South Pacific leaders 'found it difficult to or at times inconvenient to distinguish between Radio Australia's reporting and the official policies of the Australian government' in "The media and foreign policy" in *The National Interest in a Global Era: Australia in World Affairs 1996-2000*.

for eleven years.²² During a Senate inquiry into Radio Australia and ATV conducted at the same time as the Howard Government was making its cuts, Radio Australia was presented by several retired DFAT officers as a trouble-maker with little positive impact (Senate, 1997), even though Howard Government Ministers went on the record to defend Radio Australia's role (although not necessarily its funding).²³

Nevertheless, in practice there was a long history of operational coordination between Radio Australia and External Affairs, which had a special mechanism to oversee the content of Radio Australia's news broadcasts in particular.²⁴ For many years, moreover, Radio Australia was regularly provided with special briefing material by External Affairs, a practice which continued into the 1970s.²⁵ But these arrangements did not amount to anything like editorial control over Radio Australia's current affairs programs, which was still the jealously guarded preserve of the ABC journalists. The synergies between international broadcasting and government foreign policy objectives are probably impossible to avoid. It may be no accident that in a country where non-career appointments to senior positions are still relatively rare, two former Australian diplomats without any particular broadcasting expertise have been appointed to head Radio Australia and ATV.²⁶ (There are no suggestions, however, that either allowed their diplomatic background to influence their professional performance.)

The tension inherent in the government funding an international public broadcasting arm yet claiming it was desirable that it should be independent surfaced again when Australia Television was set up as an international TV broadcasting service in 1993. This initiative of the Keating Labor Government was initially operated by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which recognised that television represented a far more powerful medium for projecting Australian influence. Yet the concern within the Australian Government about potential for such broadcasting to inflict short-term damage on Australia's relationships in Asia was such that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provided a special 'briefing' to ATV executives in Darwin before transmission commenced.²⁷ The key purpose of the initial DFAT meeting with ATV executives seemed to be DFAT's objective to dissuade ATV from giving coverage of East Timor

²² Hodge, *op cit*, provides detailed account of this episode and the various attempts by the ABC and the Australian Government to have the ban lifted.

²³ DFAT was soon afterwards to transfer some of its funds to Radio Australia in recognition of its 'contribution' to Australian foreign policy interests. Thus the "trouble-maker" evidence although given much play in the Committee report, does not seem to have persuaded the government to strip the ABC of the Radio Australia responsibility.

²⁴ The 'Radio Australia Liaison Officer' was originally stationed in Melbourne, where Radio Australia was located, but later was a Canberra-based officer who regularly travelled to Melbourne for planned meetings with Radio Australia staff.

²⁵ Author's personal recollections as an Australian foreign service officer from 1967-2003

²⁶ In 1989 Richard Broinowski, previously Ambassador to Vietnam and to South Korea, was appointed to head Radio Australia, the first time a non-journalist was appointed to the position. In 1994, Michael Mann, previously Ambassador to Laos, was appointed to head Asia Television. Both were appointed under a Labor Government, although their appointments were made by the respective boards not by the government.

²⁷ Errol Hodge has a fascinating "inside" account of this episode in the second part of his *Radio Wars* (Hodge, 1996:272-4)

issues at a time when this was highly sensitive in Jakarta. Moreover, when the Howard Government revived Australia's international television broadcasting in 2001, DFAT was given the task of managing the initiative as a foreign policy task.²⁸

Despite having almost as many critics as supporters, Radio Australia on the whole seems to have been an effective vehicle for raising Australia's profile in the Asia Pacific. The problems of accurate measurement of the impact of Radio Australia were plainly acknowledged in the 1997 Senate Committee report, but at the same time the Committee gave Radio Australia high marks for cost effectiveness and reach (number of languages, hours of programming, content of programs) (Senate, 1997). Today, Radio Australia has moved to using a variety of media, not only short-wave radio but rebroadcasting through local FM stations, to disseminate its programs, and continued to have a significant impact.

B. Australian Studies: A Long-term Strategy

Australian studies programs have been used as effective tools for improving knowledge and understanding of Australia, sometimes from a low starting point, and most programs have received some funding from the Australian Government (either DFAT or the Department of Education). They have been especially successful in China and remain a major tool of the Australia-China Council. Experts acknowledge that 'Australia can point to a remarkable achievement in the form of Australian studies centres and conferences, translations, courses and graduate students, all on the basis of modest financial support.'²⁹ Carter goes on to describe Australian studies as a 'massively under-utilised resource' noting that they are accompanied by a lack of research, lack of credibility, spread too thinly, and with too little funding. Many other countries use similar tools, whether they have a widely recognised traditional culture or a newly developed one.

In China, Australian studies were commonly seen as having an important, albeit unspoken objective of assisting reform in China (Feng, 1992). Since it was not easy to reach the public in China, this was an important special agenda. In Japan, they were a small part of Japan's 'internationalisation'. Setting up Australian studies centre in any country involved considerable collaboration academics from other countries, in effect enlisting them as allies in the task of transforming knowledge and perceptions of Australia. Two-way exchanges of personnel were often a basic component of the programs, and presumably one reason for their success. Above all a positive long-term view of Australia was required, and achieved with Australian Government funding in academic centres across North East and South East Asia as well as in the United States and the UK.

²⁸ ABC Asia Pacific was operated by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation using the Indonesian-owned PAS satellite.

²⁹ Carter, David, 2004. 'Asian Australian Studies in Asia' in *Double Vision* ed. by Alison Broinowski, Pandanus Books, Canberra

Various assessments testify to the achievements of these Australian studies initiatives in countries such as China and Korea.³⁰ But how much did Australian studies projects contribute to improving Australia's influence and standing? This is much harder to assess, but there is little doubt that Australian studies programs were effective in extending the reach of Australia's profile enhancement.

C. Exhibitions, Performances and Major Promotions

From the early days of Australian cultural programs around the world, DFAT has supported exhibitions of Australian art overseas, and supplemented this by bringing small numbers of overseas artists to Australia to broaden both sides' perspectives. With Performances of major Australian performing groups, as well as prominent Australian musicians, were also supported from time to time.³¹ From 1997 DFAT began a regular "road-show" of Australian films for holding film festivals of well-known and modern Australian films. Such events were well publicised and high-level foreign opinion leaders invited to attend in order to promote goodwill. Over the years, DFAT reports indicate general satisfaction with these programs, although the methods for assessing the activities were not necessarily rigorous, or the measures for results very high, and the outcomes were mostly measured in quantitative terms rather than qualitative terms.³²

After the 1990s, DFAT and Austrade frequently joined together in what might be called 'integrated promotions' which were considerably expanded versions of any previous events and drew on resources and funding from a wide range of government and non-government sources. Reflecting what has been described as a 'utilitarian' instead of a 'visionary' approach (Goldsworthy, 2001), these promotions often measured their success in terms of contracts signed as well as numbers of attendees.³³ High-level visits by Australian Ministers were often arranged to coincide with these promotions in an all-out attempt to gain maximum leverage from the events. Although outcomes from the promotions were generally gauged in quantitative terms, few examples of assessments of any change in Australia's standing as a result have been made public.³⁴ It is hard to imagine these major exercises not having some substantive gains for Australia in terms of a positive profile, but it is nevertheless difficult to judge whether these large-scale events represent value for money for the limited public diplomacy budget. Some describe them as "glorified trade fairs" rather than normal public diplomacy.

³⁰ David Carter says 'We must be thankful for DFAT or rather for the bilateral bodies that manage the Australian studies programs: the Australia -China Council, the Australia-Japan Foundation and their counterparts for India, Indonesia, and Korea.'

³¹ These included the regional symphony orchestras, the Australian Ballet, the Australian Opera, Bell Shakespeare Company as some of the groups performing.

³² DFAT Annual Reports over the years include a good deal of factual information about these activities.

³³ Examples of major Australian promotions and evaluations during the 1990s were: 1994, 'Australia Today Indonesia, Jakarta (\$187m in direct sales, \$952m in gross revenue); 1995 'Celebrate Australia', Tokyo; 'Experience Australia', ten German cities; 1996 'New Horizons', six Indian cities (\$3m in business concluded, another \$44m projected); 1997 'All the Best -from Australia', Manila; 1998, 'New Images', London. Sources: DFAT Annual Reports 1995-96, 1996-97, 1997-98.

³⁴ An opinion poll taken after the promotion in Manila in 1997 showed "significant fall in the percentage of writers and commentators who perceived Australia as a racist country: currently 36 per cent, down from 66 per cent."(DFAT Annual Report, 1998-99).

D. Visits and Exchanges

Like most countries with active public diplomacy programs, Australia has used visits by targeted opinion leaders to Australia as a way of building a ‘pro-Australian’ constituency in countries around the world, but especially from the Asia Pacific. Only rarely did Australia fund visits overseas by prominent Australians, perhaps because relatively few Australians could be expected to be sufficiently well-known to have public impact. DFAT’s Special Overseas Visitors Fund was the main vehicle for bringing carefully targeted visitors to Australia and over many years was used intelligently to inform already and potentially influential opinion leaders about Australia. In Japan, for example, by seeking to target future leaders of the governing Liberal Democratic Party many politicians who were later to become Prime Ministers visited Australia as guests only because of this program. Anecdotally, goodwill towards Australia on the part of such political visitors was not only enhanced, but tended to be sustained through careful cultivation by Australian diplomatic missions overseas.³⁵ There is much evidence of key opinion leaders around the Asia Pacific having visited Australia as guests under such program and being positively influenced by this.³⁶

Australia also sees visits by Australian leaders as an element of its public diplomacy, but not surprisingly these are not regarded as the seminal, opinion-changing occasions that they are for the United States. Public events routinely feature as a component of such visits, but usually in the form of media interviews, and no other public exposure normally occurs during visits to Asian countries by Australian political leaders. Yet in non-English speaking cultures, the wider public impact of such public activities by Australian leaders can be quite limited. Japanese media, for example, paid little attention to Prime Minister Howard’s 2005 visit to Japan (Walton 2006). In recent years, Australian Ministers have frequently participated in overall promotions organised by DFAT and/or Austrade as part of their itineraries, but it is not clear whether it is their visit or the promotional event that is having the main benefit in terms of public diplomacy.

Other Vehicles

Curiously, Australia has used sport relatively little to foster better relationships and deeper understanding with the Asia Pacific region.³⁷ Only with South Pacific countries has Australia pursued a sustained program to develop mutually beneficial sporting contacts and relationships.

³⁵ Author’s recollections based on three postings at the Australian Embassy, Tokyo 1968-71, 1980-83, and 1996-2000.

³⁶ Interview with Radio Australia’s Foreign and Defence correspondent, Graeme Dobell, 21 February 2007.

³⁷ As the Senate Report into relations with ASEAN commented drily in its 1998 report: ‘It would appear to be obvious that a country like Australia which has such avid sporting interests should see sport as one of its basic linkages with its neighbours. This has not been so.’ (Senate 1998).

Problems with Australia's Image in Asia: Public Diplomacy More Important?

However, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a noticeable deterioration in Australia's standing in Asia as Asian countries own status and reputation improved. As early as 1989, the 'Garnaut Report'³⁸ identified the need to strengthen Australia's cultural and information programs in China, Japan and Korea as in integral element of furthering Australia's political and economic interests in those countries. Among other things, it recommended the establishment of a Council for Australia Abroad in order to achieve greater coordination of Australia's approach, a recommendation that was immediately implemented by the Labor Government of the day. This was indeed something of a turning point for Australia's relations with Asia, as what Garnaut found in relation to northeast Asia was to apply also to Australia's wider relationships in Asia. Moreover, there was a strong sense of bipartisan support for such an approach.

Some of the evidence of negative Asian attitudes to Australia was already evident at a conference in Perth in 1991³⁹, when numerous Asian speakers (journalists, writers, academics) described Australia as arrogant, rude, loud, unfriendly, untrustworthy (Grant and Seale, 1994).⁴⁰ There was little disposition among participants at this conference to challenge or questions these highly negative assessments. During the early 1990s and again during the early 2000s a teams of Australian researchers analysed issues such as how Australia was positioned in Asia and how wrongly Australian had perceived their own image in Asia. The perceptions they identified were similar to those raised in the Perth Conference in 1991.⁴¹

One conclusion that could be drawn was that these image problems represented a failure of Australian public diplomacy. However, perhaps surprisingly, the general consensus did not suggest a need for major changes to Australian public diplomacy. Rather, the assessment was that these were periods of adjustments for Australia and Asia relations (Cotton and Ravenhill, 1997), and changes in Australian attitudes towards Asia. Probably no amount of public diplomacy would have been to any avail: this decade was, after all, a period of intense public diplomacy activity by Australia. Moreover, while the 'worst' period was under the Howard Government, the decline in Australia's standing had begun under the Hawke and Keating Governments. Yet the negative attitudes

³⁸ This report was commissioned by the Australian Government to recommend ways to enhance Australia's interests in North Asia. Entitled *Australia and the Northeast Asian Ascendancy*, it was carried out by Ross Garnaut, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra 1989

³⁹ The conference papers were published as *Australia in the World* ed by Don Grant and Graham Seal, Black Swan Press Perth 1994, and still represent one of the biggest collections of Asian views of Australia.

⁴⁰ In his presentation at the conference Ross Garnaut described the perception of Australia in Asia "as the international busy-body, specialising in gratuitous insult to other societies and polities, maintaining a raucous critique of other countries' political cultures and social systems". (Garnaut, 'The New Gold Mountain and the Young Tree Green' in Grant and Seale, *ibid*:224-32.

⁴¹ The results of the 1991-95 Australians in Asia project were published as *Australia in Asia: Communities of Thought* (Anthony Milner and Mary Quilty eds, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996. The results of a subsequent survey in the early 2000s were published as *About Face*, (Alison Broinowski, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2003), which made no attempt to assess the effectiveness of Australian public diplomacy or to identify positive perceptions.

towards Australia apparent in all these ways could not be ignored and obviously posed a challenge for Australia's image-makers, as well as its policy-makers. The result, however, was a different style of more focused Australian public diplomacy. But the other result was the certainty that Australia had to give higher priority to public diplomacy and try to approach it more strategically. Did this also mean that more funds and more professionalism would be directed towards public diplomacy?

During 1996-97, the instant and widespread reaction to Pauline Hanson across Asia was a major setback for the Howard Government's policies towards Asia.⁴² Frantic efforts were undertaken by DFAT to provide briefing for Australian missions around the world and to put out a positive message, but essentially these failed. In a revealing response DFAT reorganised its public diplomacy efforts under the title of Images of Australia. Funds were redeployed onto a damage limitation exercise, but there was little that could be done to convince Asians who wanted to believe that Australia was still racist, that Hanson and the hesitant but numerically strong Howard Government were representative of Australian public opinion. It confirmed longstanding impression in Asia that Australia was a racist country. In time, Australia's friends in Asia started putting the case for Australia, and that was the beginning of the end of Pauline Hanson as an issue.

Australia's Public Diplomacy Resources under Pressure: 'Doing More with Less'?

One of the common themes of any writing about Australian public diplomacy is the small amount of public funds that have always been actually spent on the various programs that make up Australia's public diplomacy. The amounts are well below what is spent in other developed countries. For 2006-07, the DFAT budget earmarked for public diplomacy is \$4.6 million, compared to Canada's public diplomacy budget of C\$8 million (approximately A\$ million). A former head of Australia's public diplomacy programs describes it as working on 'the smell of an oily rag' (DFAT Interview, August 2006).

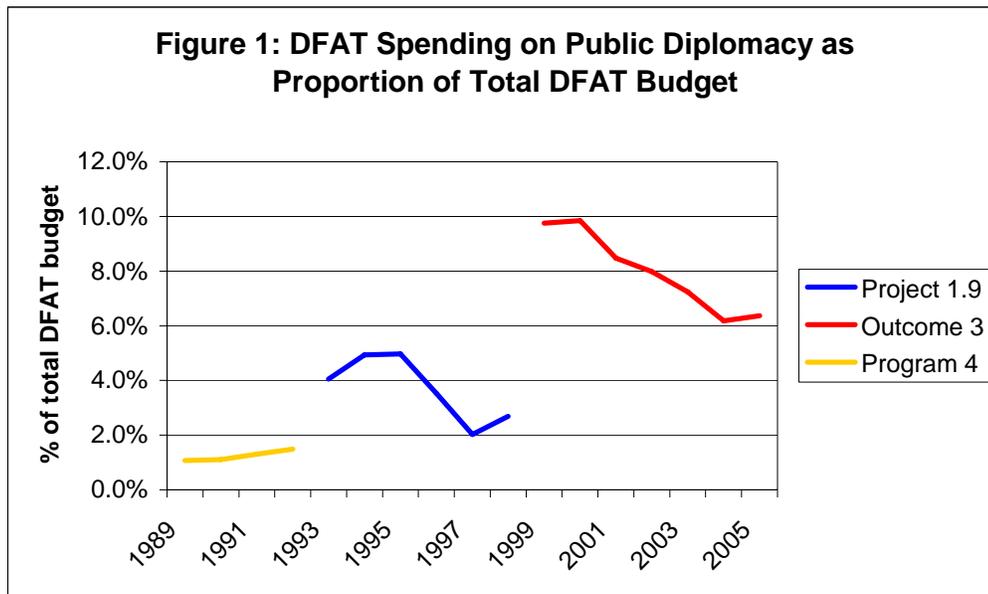
Although it was increasingly apparent by the early 1990s that Australia needed to work harder on its image in Asia in particular, in an apparently contradictory development, in 1995 DFAT moved to abolish professional journalist positions both because of budgetary constraints and because of doubts about the effectiveness of the presentation of Australian information abroad. Although the official line might have been that this was a tidying up of administrative numbers⁴³, in fact there was a strong conviction (rightly or wrongly) within DFAT that these journalists were generally not up to the complex challenge of 'selling' of Australian policies in a more sensitive overseas environment. Transferring these tasks in the main to professional diplomats was

⁴² See Graeme Dobell, *Australia Finds Home*, who says 'In Asia, Australia's politicians, diplomats, and business people were asked questions they had not heard for decades' about White Australia policy in immigration.

⁴³ Reported in Graeme Dobell's account of Australian foreign policy evolution in the 1980s and 1990s *Australia Finds Home: The choices and chances of an Asia Pacific journey*, ABC Books, Sydney 2001: pp 280-281.

considered to be much more effective.⁴⁴ Less value was attached by DFAT to the professionalism that this task demanded, this is not necessarily the case.

When the Howard Government assumed government in 1996 it not only drastically cut the overall DFAT budget, it cut public diplomacy programs disproportionately as a percentage of departmental outlays. Figures 1 and 2 show the steady decline in public diplomacy expenditure since 1985, and the sharp cutbacks that occurred in 1996.



Note: The break in lines reflects changes in DFAT's program budgeting arrangements such as bringing consular activities into the PD program in 1999.

Source: Compiled from DFAT Annual Reports

Although Radio Australia had always been acknowledged as important in achieving Australian foreign policy objectives as public diplomacy, and while the potential for an Australia television service into Asia and the South Pacific was also recognised, successive Australian Governments failed to commit the necessary funding to both of these superficially high-cost activities.⁴⁵ In earlier times, government-commissioned reports had actually called for the enhancement of Radio Australia as a key to extending Australia's influence in the third world (Harries, 1979). Numerous parliamentary reports acknowledged the value of Radio Australia, but their calls for

⁴⁴ Author's personal recollection as Senior Advisor to Foreign Minister Evans in 1995-1996. A few journalists were retained where the pure media liaison workload was high, but dedicated media officers were retained in only a small number of large overseas posts. Media skills were deemed to be an essential requirement for all diplomats, but eventually DFAT was to decide in 2007 to recruit a small cohort of journalists (Interview with retired Information Officer, 27 November 2006).

⁴⁵ Graeme Dobell provides an insider's commentary on these mis-steps in his *Australia Finds Home*, pp283.

adequate funding for it were also ignored when Departments decided their budget priorities, which were almost always under great pressure.⁴⁶

A review of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, commissioned by the Howard Government as soon as it came into office in 1996, recommended major cuts in the ABC and the sale of Radio Australia's crucial transmitting station near Darwin. By any measure, this was a major assault on Radio Australia, on the grounds that it was not a 'core' ABC role, that it used outdated technology, and that it was 'expendable'. Little effort was made to mount a serious case against Radio Australia in this review which did not involve any public hearings, was not based on any thorough cost/benefit analysis, and whose recommendations were subsequently reversed, but not until some years later.⁴⁷ The cuts to Australia's international broadcasting were very deliberate government decisions targeted at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Radio Australia itself rather than public diplomacy.⁴⁸ These attacks on the ABC have subsequently been widely regarded not only as attempts to achieve false economies, but also as major errors in judgement.⁴⁹

Parliamentary inquiries into Australia's relations with a number of countries during the 1990s and subsequently, based on numerous public submissions, have identified a shortage of funds for public diplomacy-type activities and have called, in vain, for additional funding. In significant areas, there have been cuts to services and to support.⁵⁰ Australian Government responses to these reports, however, did not acknowledge any shortcomings in funding, nor have there been any noticeable changes in the financial fortunes of the various DFAT bodies. Since funding cuts began to bite, especially after 1996, DFAT has looked increasingly to sharing costs of many of its international promotions with other government and non-government organizations, and Australian missions overseas have been encouraged to seek out local corporate funding to match Australian Government support. One effect of such an approach is to reduce the "public" side of such activities, but it also inevitably means a greater focus on potential commercial benefits..

The Drive to Get Better Outcomes from Australia's Public Diplomacy

⁴⁶ The 1997 Senate Report on Radio Australia and Australia Television concluded that both were 'particularly cost effective in projecting and promoting Australia, as well as our many national interests' (Senate 1997).

⁴⁷ A fairly critical assessment of the Mansfield Report can be found in Allan Brown's 'Australian Public Broadcasting Under Review: The Mansfield Report on the ABC', *Canadian Journal of Communications*, 26(1).

⁴⁸ The Keating Government would also only provide seed funding for the ABC to set up Australia TV in 1995; one of the Howard Government's early decisions after it assumed power was to sell Australia TV to a private broadcaster, who within a few years closed the ATV operation down when it lost money.

⁴⁹ The 1998 Senate Report on ASEAN castigated the decision non Radio Australia and Australia Television, pointing out the extent of regional support for their retention (Senate 1998). The Report on Relations with Indonesia urged more funds for various public diplomacy in 1998. The Report on Relations with Korea in 2005 did the same.

⁵⁰ The Senate Report on ASEAN in 1998 noted that 'in significant areas, there have been cuts to services and to support' for program to improve understanding with Asia (Chapter 9).

Targeting of Australian Public Diplomacy

North and Southeast Asia have always been prime targets for Australian public diplomacy, reflecting strong Australian commercial and other interests there. Australian has pursued a very active public diplomacy strategy towards Japan for more than forty years, reflecting the importance and priority that Australia has long attached to its relations with Japan. Australia was helped by the relative openness of the Japanese information environment and by Japan's general receptiveness although it was not a problem-free experience.⁵¹ As well as constantly undertaking a wide range of promotional activity throughout Japan, Australia had a substantial pavilion at each of the international exposition that Japan has hosted, in Osaka in 1970, Tsukuba in 1985, and Aichi in 2005 and each of these was certainly a significant opportunity for outreach to large numbers of ordinary Japanese. Many Japanese-speaking Australian diplomats posted to Tokyo over the years also gave speeches to innumerable Japanese organisations and interest groups, and from the mid-1980s the Australian Tourism Commission regularly engaged in significant media publicity to attract Japanese tourists to Australia.

A major target for Australian public diplomacy has always been Southeast Asia, and in particular Indonesia. Obvious differences between Australia and Indonesia have always made public diplomacy there a particular challenge. Storms over issues such as East Timor, human rights in Indonesia, and West Papua have flared up frequently over the years, and required a good deal of 'massaging' by Australia Government, relations have in recent years been marked by their resilience as these efforts paid off (Viviani, 1997). The Australia-Indonesia Institute has received the most funding of all the bilateral institutes, but its funding has been substantially reduced in recent years. Indonesia is the target of much of Australia's public diplomacy effort, ranging from information dissemination, to cultural programs, to two-ways visits, and activities focused on non-government group. Although Australia's relations with Indonesia since 2001 have been assessed as being surprisingly good, arms-length assessments do not suggest that Australian Government efforts have eliminated residual ill-will against Australia (Wesley 2006).⁵² Indeed, when interviewed on ABC radio in December 2004, the middle of the road Indonesian political scientist, Dewi Fortuna Anwar, describe why Indonesians generally had come to regard Australia as Indonesia's primary threat (ABC Radio National 2004). South East Asia generally remains a tricky area for Australian public diplomacy. Michael Wesley concludes that 'The story of Australian foreign policy towards South East Asia during the first half decade of the twenty-first century was one of careful management of a new set of challenges in a changed regional environment' (Wesley 2006).

⁵¹ Australia stationed an information attaché in the Tokyo Embassy from 1965 and a separate Cultural Attache from 1966. The Australia-Japan Foundation was established in 1974 and immediately set up a Tokyo office and its own reference library in its own premises before moving back to the main Embassy in the mid-1990s. An Australian Education Office was established in the mid-1990s, and engaged in considerable promotion of Australian tertiary education in Japan.

⁵² Michael Wesley notes in his overview of Australia-Indonesia relations from 2001-05 'Despite the pragmatism and goodwill gestures, Australia's relations with Indonesia and other Southeast Asian states continued to be dogged by events that aroused old animosities and created new ones'

China was always a key target for Australian public diplomacy, but with some unique characteristics because of the differences in political outlooks of the Australian and Chinese Governments. One unstated aim of Australia's approach to China almost as soon as diplomatic relations were established in 1972 was to reach beyond the Chinese officialdom and discreetly encourage positive Chinese attitudes towards Australia's brand of Western values. As Jocelyn Chey points out, this was well understood by the Chinese authorities who themselves practised a very focused form of public diplomacy to serve Communist Party purposes (Chey 2004).

Even though Australia has a strong and effective alliance with the United States, and even though this is quite widely recognised in the United States, Australia has always been vigorous in pursuing public diplomacy in the United States. One manifestation of this is the relatively large number of consulates-general that Australia operates in the United States for the specific purpose of cultivating US opinion leaders.⁵³ Much of the Australian effort in the United States is devoted to catching the interest of the American public in a highly competitive 'market' for attention. The use that Australia has made in its US promotions of celebrities such as Paul Hogan is well known, but Australian Government also 'trades off' its positive reputation as a dependable ally of the United States. There is little doubt that Australian public diplomacy in the United States has achieved considerable success. Australian journalist, Greg Sheridan in his recent book on Australia's alliance relationship with the United States made the comment that Australia enjoys both soft power and hard power in the United States (Sheridan, 2006).

Public Diplomacy Takes on a Political Agenda

A shift to emphasise national interests to a greater extent in Australia's public diplomacy was first publicly apparent in the Howard Government's 1997 Foreign Policy White Paper. Even though the new government cut foreign affairs spending fairly drastically, rhetorically it nevertheless recognised the importance of public diplomacy. Image was seen as important for Australia because it aimed to build reputation, which had direct bearing on national interest. It suited the government politically at the time to acknowledge the problems of Australia's standing in Asia in particular. It noted that Australia's image was 'generally positive', but in some respects 'indistinct and dated'. It also noted that foreign attitudes to Australia contained some stereotypes that needed to be broken down (Australian Government, 1997). Aside from the more hard-headed approach to undertaking only activities that were deemed to be 'in the national interest', there was considerable continuity in public diplomacy 'on the ground'. Major promotions continued for example, and Howard Government Ministers frequently participated themselves.

⁵³ Although the numbers change as offices are occasionally open and closed, Australia generally has six Consulates-General in the United States (New York, Chicago, Atlanta, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Honolulu) more than in any other country.

More and more emphasis is being placed on ‘damage control’, euphemistically called ‘issues management’ in the DFAT public diplomacy handbook. By its very nature, such damage control in recent years has been almost entirely prompted by the requirement to clarify Australia Government policy itself or Australian Government negative reactions to actions by Australian individuals overseas. This has occurred particularly when Australian policies were seen as being inconsistent with international or regional norms (such as the requirements of the UN Convention of Refugees, or the ASIAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation). According to a former head of DFAT’s Images of Australia Branch, these campaigns were mostly organised at the specific direction of the Minister and would often involve the Minister directly in writing an ‘opinion piece’ for a prominent overseas newspaper or journal.⁵⁴ Examples are the dealing with the Pauline Hanson phenomenon in the 1990s and Australian drug traffickers in Southeast Asia in more recent times, to responding to criticism of Australian immigration and refugee policy, or changing policy on the death penalty. This trend has been witnessed by Australian journalists particularly on the ground in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.⁵⁵ It is hardly surprising that giving ‘issues management’ such high priority results in greater political involvement in day-to-day public diplomacy. At its best, this is not much more than practised ‘spin’; at its worst, it might involve selective use of facts.⁵⁶

A greater emphasis on ‘issues management’ could have a number of potentially negative consequences for Australia’s public diplomacy. It is far more likely to put Australia’s public stance directly at odds with the positions adopted by foreign governments, and therefore tends to heighten the risk of confrontation. Its approach of appealing directly to the public in other countries, effectively over the heads of the foreign government concerned, sharpens any latent sensitivities on the part of other governments, whether political or cultural in nature. Foreign Minister Downer’s recent letter to newspapers in the Solomon Islands is a good example of the risks involved. Although DFAT claims that in recent years its public diplomacy activities have generally not become the object of complaints from foreign governments (DFAT Interview, 2006a), there are instances where public statements from Asian governments have signaled their unhappiness with the thrust of Australian Government statements.⁵⁷

Shifting Public Diplomacy to Assert Australian Interests

⁵⁴ Interview with DFAT officer August 2006.

⁵⁵ Commenting on this period, Michael Maher notes: ‘Acutely sensitive to media criticism, the government also puts a lot of effort into controlling any damage which may be caused by unfavorable reporting.’ See his ‘The media and foreign policy’ in *The National Interest in a Global Era: Australia in World Affairs 1996-2000*.

⁵⁶ Jocelyn Chey goes as far as to compare the present political control over Australia’s public diplomacy with China to that of the Chinese Communist Party in the first decades of the People’s Republic of China. See Chey ‘Cultural Relations and Public Diplomacy’ in Thomas (ed.) 2004.

⁵⁷ DFAT described one occasion where a public speaking program for Australia women educators visiting Iran had to be dropped because the Iranian Government did not want the program to proceed (DFAT Interview, 2006a).

One of the main themes of current Australian public diplomacy is that it should be aimed more explicitly at promoting Australian interests and values. The Howard Government's philosophy was outlined most forcibly in the second foreign policy White Paper it published in 2003, where promoting so-called 'Australian values' were explicitly brought to the forefront of Australian foreign and trade policy.⁵⁸ Current DFAT guidelines for carrying out public diplomacy underline the emphasis now placed on pursuit of hard national interests first. In his foreword to the public diplomacy instructions to his overseas staff, DFAT Secretary Michael L'Estrange hammered home the point that for Australia, public diplomacy 'should seek to do more than just promote bilateral interests or Australia's broader 'image'...'. Australia also needed to 'enter the marketplaces of ideas actively', he wrote (DFAT 2005).

The high priority that is now attached to 'issues management' for Australian public diplomacy is evident in the instructions that DFAT subsequently prepared for Australian overseas missions in 2005. Putting his own name to the instructions, the Secretary of DFAT enjoined his staff to 'be rigorous about managing or rebutting negative or inaccurate public perceptions about Australia'. The reason for this high priority are also clearly spelled out: 'We want people in other parts of the world to understand and take into account how their policies and actions can impact on us, particularly in areas such as security, counter-terrorism and trade'. Underlining the point, the handbook explains that 'There is considerable evidence that inaccurate or negative perceptions have a direct impact on all areas that involve either a 'mass' movement of people or capital, including tourism, education, trade and foreign investment'. In practice much of the issues management tends to be instigated by the Minister or undertaken to defend Ministers against negative criticism overseas (DFAT Interview, 2006a).

But when transferred to public diplomacy such an assertive approach represented a sharp change from earlier more sensitive, conventional, and even courteous approaches. In the parliamentary response to this White Paper, chaired by the Labor Party contained the following plea: 'it is probably only sustained person-to-person engagements, cultural exchanges, travel abroad and so on that will eventually wear down such prejudices. However, it is imperative that official relationships take care not to give any credence to, nor reinforce, these popular stereotypes' (of Australians as loud, rude racist, lazy, moralising).⁵⁹ As John Fitzgerald has argued, the government's increasing emphasis on values suggests that the Australian Government is not intrinsically disposed to be sensitive to its views being in conflict with those of countries that might think differently.⁶⁰

⁵⁸'*Advancing The National Interests: Australia's Foreign And Trade Policy White Paper*' makes the case in these terms: 'Australians value tolerance, perseverance and mateship. These values form the spirit as a nation. ... Political and economic freedom, ... We believe that the freedoms produce a more stable and prosperous Australia. And that they also produce a more stable and prosperous international community... In this new climate of international terrorism, Australians have become targets because of the values we represent.'

⁵⁹Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, 2003, Response to *Advancing the National Interest: 'The (Not Quite) White Paper'*.

⁶⁰ See his 'Who Cares What They Think? John Winston Howard, William Morris Hughes and the Pragmatic Vision of Australian National Sovereignty' in Broinowski (ed.) 2004:15-40

Reaching out to the public in other countries is inherently delicate at the best of times, and normally it would stop at articulating and explaining Australia policies and would strictly avoid overt criticism of another government or intruding into sensitive political issues. This is why Foreign Minister Downer's February 2007 letter to newspapers in the Solomon Islands was not only highly unusual but contravened normal conventions. More importantly, it seems to have backfired, predictably, by aggravating already serious bilateral relations. Mr Downer went further in a television interview on Australian Network broadcast throughout the South Pacific. It is not yet clear what public reaction in the Solomon Islands will be, but this would seem to be an instance where the impact of Australian public diplomacy has been almost entirely negative. It might even signify a wider failure of Australian policy.⁶¹ A similar negative response to Australian Government statements occurred after the UN intervention in East Timor in 1999, when many Southeast Asian countries accused Australia of 'triumphalism' and insensitivity to local feelings.

Making Public Diplomacy 'Core Business': The Quest for Immediate Returns

One of the main themes of current Australian public diplomacy is that it should be aimed at clearly identifiable outcomes, applying in some senses criteria applicable to other more concrete areas of government activity. At least in form, public diplomacy is no longer regarded as an ancillary activity. The instructions talk about 'mainstreaming' public diplomacy and integrating it with pursuit of Australian interests. Public diplomacy is to be regarded as 'core business' and Australian all diplomatic staff are expected to play a part. DFAT's plea to posts that 'it is critical that posts ensure that their public diplomacy and advocacy activities are closely aligned with key global, regional and bilateral policy objectives' demonstrates concern that public diplomacy opportunities might be ignored. Posts are enjoined to make public diplomacy part of their 'core activities', to 'achieves specific results in support of Australia's international interests'. Illustrating how far Australia has moved from generic, image enhancement DFAT posts are directed that 'events should not be held in isolation' but should be 'an integrated component of posts' overall public diplomacy strategies'. Tactics are often defined in commercial or military terms. They are urged to 'know their markets' in order to have the rights strategies for 'combating short or long-term misconceptions about Australia', for 'anticipating negative media or public reactions to issues an working out in advance, ways of combating them'. A whole chapter on effective contact with the Media reflects increased importance attached to this. Posts are expected to 'know their {media} market'. Indeed the role of foreign media is ever present for Australian diplomats. They are expected to be 'a buffer between the media and the mission' 'creating breathing space'.

Posts are instructed to 'add value to all public diplomacy events'. 'They should be seen as pegs or platforms rather than as ends in themselves. And there are few events

⁶¹ See editorial in *Canberra Times* February 2007.

to which you cannot attach a message'. 'DFAT communicates positive messages about Australia by showcasing artistic and cultural assets in support of Australia's foreign and trade policy interests'. 'Our culture defines our identity. The understanding of our culture influences the views of Australia and its standing in the world. The promotion of a distinctive contemporary image of Australian culture is an important element of our public diplomacy agenda'. Posts are urged to 'ensure that all cultural and other public diplomacy events are an integral of your overall public diplomacy strategy and that they are used to disseminate broader messages. All events should be seen as potential platforms and pegs for: attracting influential business/media people who might otherwise be inaccessible; getting selected messages across to such people; disseminating broader messages about Australia about Australia as a culturally and socially sophisticated country; promoting Australia's broader cultural exports potential.' Even if all these statements are hyperbole and exaggerate the way in which Australian public diplomacy is now played out, they illustrate graphically how directly public diplomacy is intended to support government objectives of the day, rather than serve vaguer long-term objectives.

The targets of Australian public diplomacy are not only the public of other countries. Without mincing words, the DFAT handbook emphasises that 'Views about Australia held by ministers and officials in foreign countries are often informed and tempered by information and views presented in the electronic and print media'(DFAT 2005). Yet DFAT officials acknowledge the tension between advocacy and generic image promotion 'which do not always fit well together' (DFAT Interview 2006a).

The conscious thrust in Australia's public diplomacy for specific outcomes from public diplomacy can also be seen in the growing tendency since the mid-1990s to measure results of major promotions by commercial contracts. While this started under Labor Governments, it has become more pronounced under the Howard Government, with current DFAT guidelines abjuring against organising public diplomacy events purely for the sake of image promotion. This emphasis on commercial spin-off has also been criticised in Parliamentary reports.

Evaluating Australia's Public Diplomacy

No comprehensive, independent evaluation of Australia's public diplomacy has ever been conducted.⁶² While it has quite often been included in parliamentary reports of Australia's relations with individual countries, this year's inquiry by the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee will be the first attempts of its kind ever in Australia. Various academic writings have examined certain aspects of Australia's public diplomacy, with valuable insights from some first-hand such as Australian diplomats and journalists. But almost none have examined Australia's performance overall, and most other appraisals of Australia's foreign policy as a whole do not even mention public diplomacy. Not only does this make it difficult to assess its effectiveness, it complicates

⁶² This is in sharp contrast to the programs of, say, the United States and Canada which have been subjected to thorough scrutiny. In the case of Canada this was undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade by an outside commercial body in 2005 (DFAIT 2005).

the task of objectively considering its impact. While carefully constructed public opinion surveys could be a reliable guide to public diplomacy outcomes, unfortunately Australian diplomatic missions are generally not funded for such surveys.⁶³

From the mid-1990s and beyond, internal public evaluations of Australia's major public diplomacy promotions were explicitly cast in terms of commercial benefits, and well as straight quantitative terms such as numbers of visitors.⁶⁴ This has been noticed in the most recent parliamentary report on Australia's bilateral relations⁶⁵, but the Committee stopped short of criticising this approach. One wonders, however, how opinion leaders in the countries where major promotions are mounted feel seeing the results measured in such crude mercantilist terms.

Publicly, Australia's public diplomacy efforts since 1996 have generally been judged fairly harshly. Referring to Nye's notion of 'soft power', Paul Kelly in 2004 described his ideal of 'a tolerant unified multicultural and multiracial democracy', the idea of 'unity in diversity' as 'the Australian vision' which he believed could become a model for others. But Kelly said that under the Howard Government 'Australia has largely failed to construct an effective soft power strategy' (Kelly 2004). However, Kelly's fellow journalist Greg Sheridan believes that Australia now exercises soft power as well as 'hard power' in the United States (Sheridan 2006a, b). Other appraisals of Australia's public diplomacy have been made by US organisations monitoring public diplomacy developments which have, perhaps superficially, give Australia high marks for outperforming the United States.

But how should the effectiveness of Australia's major public diplomacy efforts be assessed? Unfortunately, there is no clear-cut answer to this question. Japan is, however, one of the few countries where Australia has commissioned public opinion polls on Japanese attitudes toward Australia over more than two decades, and these provide a good indication of the trends in Japanese sentiment towards Australia.⁶⁶ While they consistently show extraordinarily positive Japanese attitudes towards Australia throughout the period of the polling, with Australia either the second or third most popular country/desirable country to visit. But they also show clearly that Japanese stereotypes of Australia were reduced from the mid-1980s, that Australia was 'trusted' to an increasing degree, and that Australia's importance to Japan was not only increasingly

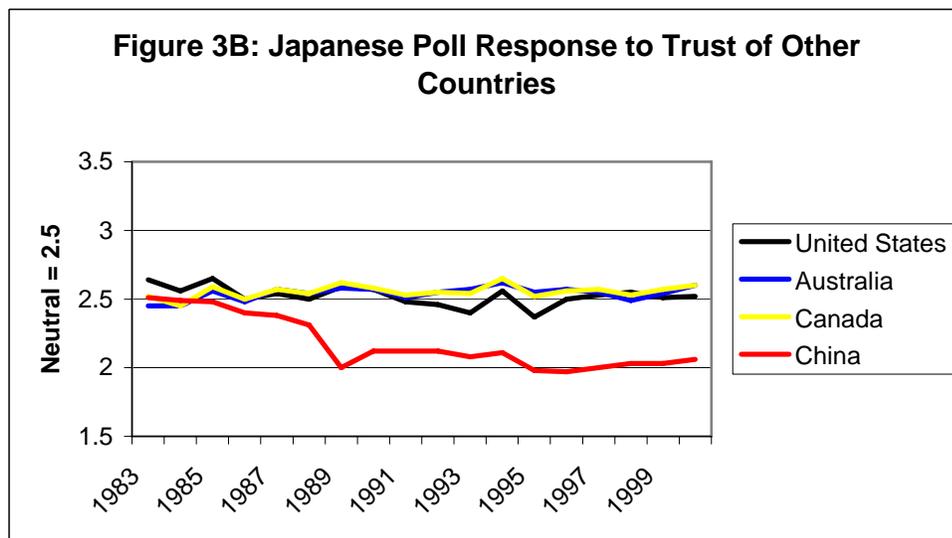
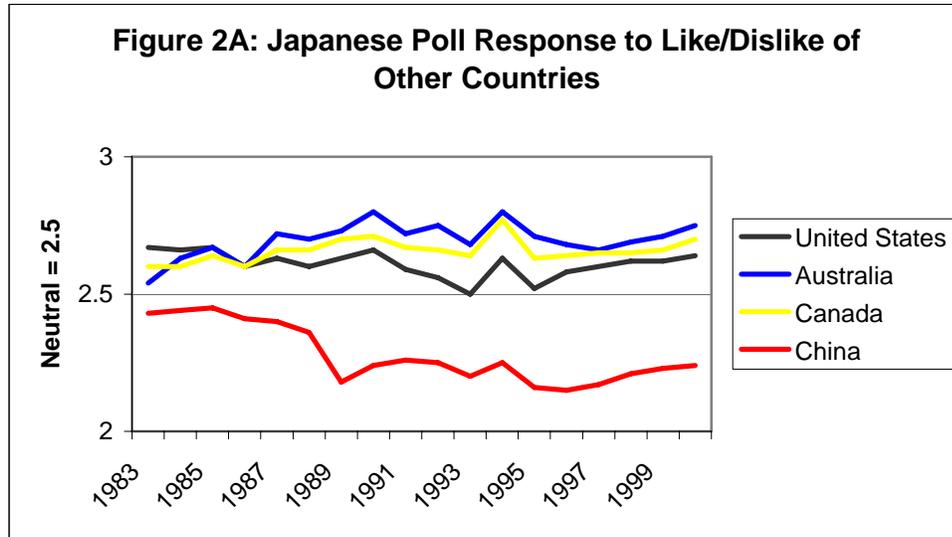
⁶³ Posts are mildly discouraged from carrying out opinion surveys on the grounds of their expense, plus the argument that 'the information (may be) available through other means such as the Internet, research organisations, universities or media outlets'. (DFAT, 2005). The Australian Embassy Tokyo's surveys quoted in this study were discontinued after 2000.

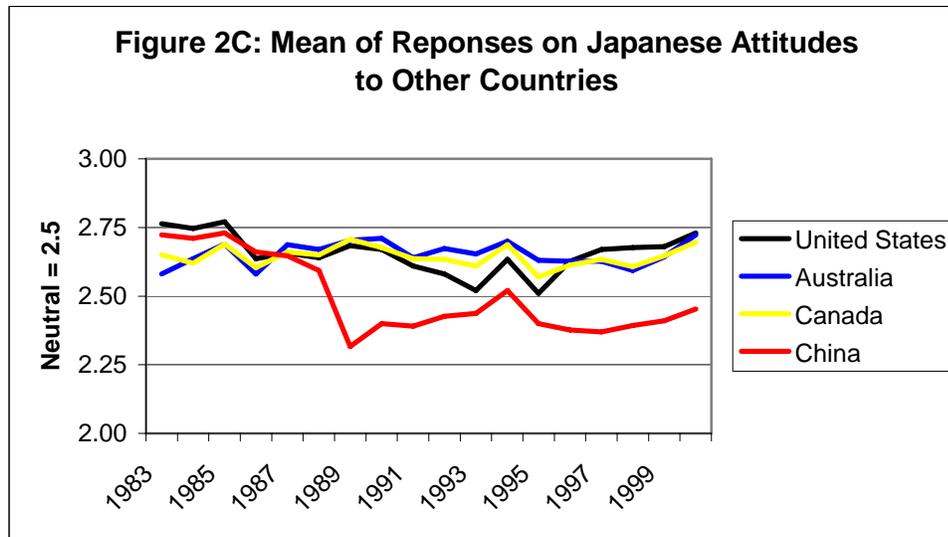
⁶⁴ The list of promotions and evaluations is as follows: 1994, 'Australia Today Indonesia, Jakarta (\$187m in direct sales, \$952m in gross revenue); 1995 'Celebrate Australia', Tokyo; 'Experience Australia', ten German cities; 1996 'New Horizons', six Indian cities (\$3m in business concluded, another \$44m projected); 1998, 'New Images', London. Sources: DFAT Annual Reports 1995-96, 1996-97, 1997-98.

⁶⁵ Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee Inquiry in Australia's Relationship with China, 2005.

⁶⁶ The polls were conducted by the Japanese public opinion and market research organisation, Nippon Research Centre. They were not published although they were sometimes mentioned in public statements by Australian Embassy spokespersons. The polls posed the same questions over many years, but added more sophisticated questions as the relationship developed.

recognised but also Japan's 'dependence' on Australia was regarded with less caution by the mid-1990s (see tables below). These were certainly the sort of priority goals for Australia's public diplomacy in Japan for many years, and these results would have been most pleasing for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.





Source: Nippon Research Center Poll on Japanese attitudes to Australia and Other Countries 1985-2000

One challenging testing ground for Australian public diplomacy is whether any improvement has been observed in Indonesian attitudes to Australia. It is difficult, however, to determine the extent to which Australian Government efforts with Indonesia have paid off. Australia-Indonesia Institute reports are cautiously positive, recording good progress in some of their innovative inter-faith programs and an ‘encouraging’ response to a new arts program in 2004-05, while noting that ‘security concerns’ are still affecting some AII activities. The AII also claims some success in interesting ‘inter-faith’ programs targeting Muslim opinion leaders in Indonesia, but there is no publicly available material assessing the impact of such programs.

A dichotomy in Indonesian attitudes towards Australia was also noticeable in the first authoritative public opinion poll take on Indonesian attitudes to Australia by the Lowy Institute in 2006. The results showed that Indonesians had very mixed attitudes to Australia despite many years of Australian investment in a variety of public diplomacy programs in Indonesia.

Respondents were suspicious of Australia’s involvement in Indonesian affairs. They agreed that Indonesia was right to worry that Australia was seeking to separate the province of West Papua from Indonesia, that Australia had a tendency to try to interfere too much in Indonesia’s affairs and that Australian policy towards Indonesia and the region was shaped too heavily by its alliance with the United States...

Still, they agreed narrowly that Australia had shown itself to be a reliable long term friend of Indonesia, that Indonesia benefited from having Australia as a stable and prosperous neighbour, and that it was very important that Australia and Indonesia work together to develop a close relationship. (Cook 2006)

While the Lowy assessment was that Indonesian attitudes were not as negative as might have been expected, it is striking that Indonesians placed Australia among the lowest countries towards which they felt any warmth.⁶⁷

However, another more narrowly focused study of Indonesian media attitudes towards Australia was much less encouraging. It concluded that 'Enduring images of Australians as racist, disrespectful, arrogant and interfering and regarding Indonesians as a threat, corrupt, impoverished, with inferior political and social systems were never far below the surface. The ease with which negative reporting arose in each nation was evidence that old wounds had not fully healed. Or even if they had healed to an extent, past issues continued to be used as ammunition in defence of national pride' (Mahoney 2006).

Comparing negative recurrent images of Australia in Indonesia before and after 2000, it would seem that although Australian public diplomacy had achieved considerable progress, but had yet to find a way to expunge deep-seated Indonesian media negativism. This assessment is confirmed by the observations of one-time Australian diplomat David Reeve, who recently reported on residual Indonesian suspicions of Australia also to be found in letters published in the Indonesian media and maintained that the Australian Government had not been effective in rebutting Indonesian criticisms of its 1999 role in East Timor.⁶⁸ As his solution, Reeve calls for a more vigorous public diplomacy effort in Indonesia by the Australian Government.

Australia's efforts in China seem to have had more success, despite having to overcome the hurdle of operating in a highly restrictive society. Australia's first Cultural Attache in China, Jocelyn Chey, points out that initially few Chinese knew anything about Australia because of China's period of isolation after 1949, but reports that Chinese cultural exponents and people alike responded extraordinarily warmly to some of Australia's public diplomacy activities (Chey 2004).⁶⁹ Moreover, the steadily increasing number of Chinese students in Australian universities suggests that Australia's standing in China remains high even if Australian Government policies were not always in harmony with Chinese policies.⁷⁰ But the achievements of Australia's efforts in China have not always fully met their objectives. As late as 1996, the then head of the Australia-China Council, Stuart Harris, told a Senate inquiry into Australia's relations

⁶⁷ While the Lowy analysis concluded that 'The views ... of Indonesian respondents about Australia, were less hostile than many commentators might have imagined' it went on to report that Indonesians 'felt neither warm nor cold towards South Korea, Iran, Australia, North Korea and Iraq'.

⁶⁸ Reeve notes that 'A complex web of suspicion surrounds Australia's actions in East Timor in 1999. No detailed explanation of these actions has been mounted in Indonesia. Probably Australian officials were relieved enough when the first waves of anger died down after October 1999'. He also quote Indonesia's Ambassador to Australia saying that 95% of Indonesian applicants for the Indonesian foreign ministry in 2003 'held anti-Australian attitudes'.(Reeve 2006)

⁶⁹ It would be difficult to match the size of some of the Chinese response that Chey mentions: Over 100,000 visitors to an exhibition of Australian landscape paintings in 1977; Radio Australia received over eight million letters after Chinese listeners were allowed to listen to short-wave radio in the 1980s.the

⁷⁰ Holenbergh provides data on the numbers of Chinese students in Australian universities in Thomas (ed.) 2004.

with China, that Chinese written accounts still presented Australia inaccurately and simplistically (Chey 2006).

It is hard to relate these assessments to some by US public diplomacy organizations which have given Australia surprisingly high marks for establishing Australia as a popular 'brand' (Anholt Nation Brand Index 2005), or who praise Australia's success in winning foreign students 'away from' US universities. Leaving aside issues of methodology, it would not be surprising if Australian public diplomacy in the United States were more successful than elsewhere. For a start, it would not have had the same negative attitudes to overcome, and in recent years under the Howard Government Australian policies would have been seen in some quarters in the United States as extremely helpful

Conclusions

Australia's public diplomacy has been quite successful over the years in building a positive image for Australia or preventing perceptions of Australia from deteriorating and adversely affecting Australian interests. In particular, for the amount of public funds 'invested', Australia has almost certainly got value for money from this investment when compared with the expenditure of Australia's larger 'competitors'. Australia's cultural diplomacy efforts have also improved substantially in terms of their content, diversity and techniques. But it is not yet clear that evaluating Australia's public diplomacy by mainly commercial returns is valid or that 'targets' of Australia's public diplomacy will be responsive to such an approach. Moreover, there is a wide consensus in Australia that Australia could do better in terms of lifting its image overseas and that the Australian Government should increase the amount of public diplomacy spending.

Australia's public diplomacy is showing signs of becoming more politicised as Ministers become increasingly involved in all aspects of Australia's public diplomacy and as Australia's 'issues management' becomes more time, effort and funds consuming. Yet, as Australian Government policies become more at variance with, and less sympathetic to, those of Australia's immediate regions, Australia's public diplomacy will inevitably be required to devote more attention to damage control and 'fire quenching'. Since the overtly political character of such activities is very obvious, the prospects for success or lasting impact are almost certainly reduced; "spin" will be recognised for what it is, and is generally unable to change entrenched and deeply held views.

Australian public diplomacy also seems to be focused far more on short-term outcomes at the expense of long-term investment in 'better understanding'. While this probably parallels Australian Government approaches more widely, it tends to ignore the need for some altruistic programs, which can hardly be mounted by non-government bodies. It also means that while there is greater coordination and planning in Australian public diplomacy than previously, this is still only very loose coordination and has not produced a strong and cohesive strategy to guide all Australian public diplomacy. Even though some common messages are present in activities pursued by different government

agencies, their impact is probably reduced by recent domestic questioning of some of the underlying positive themes, such as multiculturalism.

Australian public diplomacy is also engaged in some activities that inherently generate tension rather than relieve it. This adds a new element of risk to Australian public diplomacy approaches which were not present in the past and which are not necessarily evident in the approaches of other countries (with the notable exception of the United States). These risks potentially arise where Australian policies or actions are perceived to have an adverse, negative effect on other countries, as they would whenever differences of opinion need to be managed. As regional countries themselves become more assertive and more articulate in expressing their own views when on the receiving end of unwelcome comments, recourse to public diplomacy by Australia may prove not to be a fruitful way out in future.

If Australian public diplomacy continues increasingly to follow domestic Australian attitudes, out of political considerations, rather than loftier goals, there is again a risk that it will find itself in conflict with other countries. Ignoring negative attitudes to Australia in the Asia Pacific implies that Australia places less value on goodwill, and therefore denies public diplomacy a chance to achieve outcomes. Even if Australian public diplomacy is being pursued through the most modern methods and technologies, the efforts devoted to long-term outcomes are fewer and so the chances of productive outcomes are not as high as they could be.

Based on the experience of Australia, public diplomacy probably has a greater chance of being successful if there are strong affinities between the culture of the sending and receiving countries. Australian public diplomacy was relatively successful in Japan and the United States, but much less so in the case of Indonesia, Malaysia, Melanesian countries, and to some extent China, where the political systems are very different. Australian public diplomacy was also less successful where Australian policies were not in accordance with mainstream international opinion.

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Australia, officially the Commonwealth of Australia, is a sovereign country comprising the mainland of the Australian continent, the island of Tasmania, and numerous smaller islands. It is the largest country in Oceania and the world's sixth-largest country by total area. The population of 26 million is highly urbanised and heavily concentrated on the eastern seaboard. Australia's capital is Canberra, and its largest city is Sydney. The country's other major metropolitan areas are Melbourne, Brisbane. This weekend's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit is a special occasion for Papua New Guinea (PNG), the organization's smallest and poorest nation. It is the first time the Pacific island country has hosted an APEC summit. China and Australia are covering the \$100-million (â,~87 million) cost for hosting the event.Â In November 2018, Australia set up an infrastructure bank worth 2 billion Australian dollars for projects in the Pacific region and said it will spend 1 billion more promoting exports and supporting Australian businesses in the Pacific. Chinese President Xi Jinping in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, on November 16. China has taken the lead in providing development aid in PNG and throughout the region. The Federal Government unveils several new development initiatives to reassert Australia's influence in South-East Asia as China continues to expand its presence across the region.Â Australia has become increasingly anxious about China's rapidly expanding footprint in the region, with some South-East Asian countries being pulled into Beijing's orbit through sheer force of economic gravity.Â Labor and foreign aid advocacy groups have accused the Coalition of neglecting South-East Asia because of its preoccupation with the Pacific Step-up, which is designed to reinvigorate Australia's influence in the immediate region.