



‘LOOKING AT THE WORLD WITH OPEN EYES’:
EARLY CHINESE WRITING ABOUT ABORIGINAL
AUSTRALIANS, 1842–1891

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THE CHINESE IN AUSTRALIA

- ▶ Over 3,000 Chinese indentured labourers arrived in Sydney between 1848 and 1853. The subsequent number of Chinese arrivals surged because the gold rush in Victoria during the 1850s-60s.^[1]
- ▶ More than 60,000 Chinese are estimated to have arrived on Australian shores between 1851 and 1875.^[2]
- ▶ The nineteenth-century Chinese population in Australia peaked in 1881 with a total of 38,533 persons, dropping slightly to 35,821 in 1891.^[3]

ZHIFANG WAJI

One of the earliest introductions of Australia to Chinese people was through a geographical work, *Zhifang Waiji* (職方外紀 *Chronicle of Foreign Lands*), completed in 1623 by the Italian Jesuit Giulio Aleni, a missionary working in China during the Ming Dynasty.

職方外紀墨瓦蠟尼加卷五

西海艾儒略增譯 東海楊廷筠彙記

天下第五大州曰墨瓦蠟泥加先是閣龍諸人既已覓得兩亞墨利加矣西土以西把尼亞之君復念地爲圓體徂西自可達東向至亞墨利加而海道遂阻必有西行人海之處於是沿海船選舟師裹餼糧裝金寶繕甲兵命一強有力之臣名墨瓦蘭者載而往訪墨瓦蘭既承國命沿亞墨利加之東偏紆迴數萬里展轉經年歲亦茫然未識津涯

職方外紀 卷之五

一 墨瓦蠟尼加

人情厭數輒思返國墨瓦蘭懼功用弗成無以復命拔劍下令舟中曰有言歸國者斬於是舟人震懼賈勇而前已盡亞墨利加之界忽得海峽亘千餘里海南大地又復恍一乾坤墨瓦蘭率衆巡行間關前進祇見平原漭蕩杳無涯際入夜則燐火星流瀾漫山谷而已因命爲火地而他方或以鸚鵡名州者以其所產有鸚鵡亦此大地之一隅也其後追厥所自謂墨瓦蘭實開此區因以其名命之曰墨瓦蠟尼加云墨瓦蘭既踰此峽還入太平

大海自西復東業知大地已過其半竟直抵亞細亞馬路古界度小西洋越利未亞大浪山而北折遵海以還報本國遍遶大地一週四過赤道之下歷地三十萬餘里從古航海之績未有若斯盛者因名其舟爲勝舶言戰勝風濤之險而奏巡方偉功也其人物風俗山川畜產與夫鳥獸蟲魚俱無傳說卽南極度數道里遠近幾何皆推步未周不漫述後或有詳之者

SINOCENTRISM

- Over centuries the Chinese ruling elites believed that *Tianxia* (all under heaven) was subordinated to *Tianzi* (Son of Heaven) and as the *Shijing* says, the entire world under heaven was the realm of the king.
- Sinocentrism firmly situated the Middle Kingdom as the centre of the world and the embodiment of civilisation. Underlining China-centric ideology was entrenched prejudice against outsiders.

THE FIRST OPIUM WAR (1839–42)

- ▶ Lin Zexu was recognised as the first person ‘looking at the world with open eyes’ in the history of the Qing dynasty.
- ▶ *Haiguo Tuzhi* (海國圖志 *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*) published by scholar-official Wei Yuan in 1843, was the most influential multi-volume geographical work at that time. It was one of the earliest Chinese works that introduced Australia and its Aboriginal inhabitants, which will be elaborated later.
- ▶ *Haiguo Tuzhi* was completed on the basis of Lin’s unpublished translation of Hugh Murray’s *Cyclopaedia of Geography* (1834) under the Chinese title *Sizhou Zhi* (四洲志 *A Gazetteer of Four Continents*).

HAIGUO TUZHI (BY WEI YUAN)

- ▶ The first edition of *Haiguo Tuzhi*, containing 50 scrolls (juan), was released in 1843. A second expanded edition was published in 1847–48 with 60 scrolls, and a third, expanded again to 100 scrolls, in 1852.
- ▶ Together with other geographical works such as *Yinhuan Zhilue* (瀛環志略 *A Brief Survey of the Maritime Circuit*) published by the governor of Fujian, Xu Jiyu, in 1849, *Haiguo Tuzhi* significantly challenged the Sinocentric views by demonstrating that the Middle Kingdom was not the centre of the world nor the only civilised country.
- ▶ Wei Yuan proposed the idea of ‘learning foreign technologies to subdue foreigners’ (師夷長技以制夷). In this slogan, foreigners are referred to as ‘夷’, a pejorative term originally designating the ethnic groups in the east during ancient times.

HAIGUO TUZHI (1852)

- ▶ The 1852 edition of *Haiguo Tuzhi* presents Aboriginal Australians as inferior Others by extracting references from a list of geographical works written in Chinese by western missionaries and sinologists living in China and from Xu's *Yinhuan Zhilue* (1849).
- ▶ The former cluster of works includes:
 - *Waiguo Dili Beikao* (外國地理備考 *Geography of Foreign Countries*) published in 1847–48 by Martinho José Marques, a Macau-born Portuguese sinologist;
 - *Waiguo Shilue* (外國史略 *A Brief History of Foreign Countries*) co-authored by Robert Morrison, a Protestant missionary, and his two sons, John Robert Morrison and Martin C. Morrison;
 - *Wanguo Dili Quanji* (萬國地理全集 *World Geography Gazetteer*) published in 1844, for which Karl Gützlaff, the first Lutheran missionary to China, was the editor and translator.

- Marques's *Waiguo Dili Beikao* describes Aboriginal Australians as 'imbecile' and 'nomads'.
- The quote from Morrison's *Waiguo Shilue* regards Aboriginal Australians as 'native barbarians' (土蠻 *tuman*). As it goes, Aboriginal people are black-skinned, 'extremely mean and foolish', have 'no clothes or houses, wandering in the bush' as they 'seek alcohol and food only from westerners and fall asleep whenever they get drunk'.
- The quotes from Gützlaff's *Wanguo Dili Quanji*, concur with Marques's and Morrison's narratives, portraying Aboriginal people as being animalistic and bestial. Marques's description of Aboriginal people 'living miserably under no shelter' is elaborated upon by Gützlaff to 'sheltering under the branches and leaves'; Morrison's portrayal of 'drunken natives' is expanded by Gützlaff into 'Aborigines lying in the mud like boars after getting drunk'.
- As for Xu's *Yinhuan Zhilue* quoted in *Haiguo Tuzhi*, it summarises the relevant contents in the above three geographical works, and mentioned *Zhifang Waiji*, confirming that Australia was the fifth continent.

CHINESE TRAVEL WRITING AND THE EMERGENCE OF CHINESE-LANGUAGE

PRESS IN HONG KONG

- ▶ In 1842 Hong Kong became a British colony and by the mid-1850s it had grown into one of the most significant ports for Chinese emigration. According to the Hong Kong custom records, in 1853 alone 10,467 Chinese, most of whom originated from southern China, left Hong Kong for Australia, and this number climbed to 17,722 in 1857.
- ▶ The first Chinese-language newspaper *Chinese Serial* (遐邇貫珍) in Hong Kong: From August 1853 to May 1856, *Chinese Serial* was published every month, with successive editors including the English Congregationalist missionary, Walter Henry Medhurst, the Chief Magistrate of Hong Kong Charles Batten Hillier, and the English sinologist James Legge.

A SURVEY OF MELBOURNE GOLD MOUNTAIN REGION (砵非立金山輿地志)

- ▶ In 1856, *Chinese Serial* published an article 'A Survey of Melbourne Gold Mountain Region' (砵非立金山輿地志), which is the earliest known Chinese migrant writing in Australia.
- ▶ The author described the appearance of Aboriginal people in detail: 'Their body looks black and naked. The colour of their hair is quasi-black (青) and their eyes are dark vermilion (赤)'.

A SURVEY OF MELBOURNE GOLD MOUNTAIN REGION (砵非立金山輿地志)

► The article then gives an account of Aboriginal life:

They all raise dingos to help hunt animals. In the summer they dwell under the canopy of trees to enjoy the coolness. In the winter they use fire 'as clothes' to keep themselves warm; the method is that a dozen people sit in a circle near the tree, and everyone could be warmed by the fire. They know how to drill wood to make fire, and follow the rules to kill animals for food. Yet they are of mild temperament. Benevolence, generosity, and morality seem to have prevailed in the community.

A SURVEY OF MELBOURNE GOLD MOUNTAIN REGION (砵非立金山輿地志)

Recently they often use sheep skin as clothes or cover their body with tops and trousers that they could find. Whenever they meet someone, they always lower their head to beg for food, but whatever they get will be shared with their people. Hence it is said that they seem to be the populace of Emperor Getianshi. However, the Europeans have occupied their lands and imposed rather draconian legislation upon them. They had to move to further inland.