Frederic Eggleston: The Empire and the Pacific

Frederic Eggleston (1875–1954) is the most important figure considered in this book. In the area of IR alone his role, writings and influence were of primary importance. In the AIIA (and its predecessor organizations), and especially as the key figure in the IPR, Eggleston worked consistently to encourage Australian scholarship on and public engagement in international affairs. As Australia’s first minister to China, then minister in Washington, and subsequently adviser to the Department of External Affairs, Eggleston bridged the worlds of commentary and policy. His membership of the Australian delegations at Paris in 1919 and in San Francisco in 1945 points to his unique role. However, Eggleston’s career spanned many fields. Quite apart from his personal role in the government of Victoria (as attorney-general and minister for Railways, 1924–27) and subsequently in the federal administration (as chairman of the Commonwealth Grants Commission, 1933–41), Eggleston’s original and inquiring intellect also produced one of the most insightful works on the practice of government in Australia, *George Swinburne* (Sugden and Eggleston 1931), the most searching critique of the state’s role in the Australian economy, *State Socialism in Victoria* (1932), as well as numerous essays on a wide variety of social and political subjects.

The subject of a very fine and comprehensive biography (Osmond 1985) as well as of studies devoted to his international thinking (Akami 2001; Meaney 2005), the development of Eggleston’s ideas as well as his international influence has already received a good deal of attention. While dealing in part with these topics, this chapter will concentrate on the approach and methodological character of his international thought since these aspects of his work merit further exposition. Eggleston was the author of an ambitious and penetrating volume—unique in the Australian intellectual landscape of the time—on the methodology of the social sciences including IR (Eggleston
1941a); his last published work was a book of essays on Australian foreign policy (Eggleston 1957). His particular concern was the likely impact of developments in the “Pacific”—what would now be determined the Asia Pacific region—on the future direction of Australia, a concern reflected in his insistence, as one of the founding fathers of the institution, that the new Australian National University should house a faculty specifically devoted to this subject. Eggleston’s undoubted liberal sentiments and his abhorrence of excessive state control, in the context of his closeness to H. V. Evatt and bearing in mind the many tasks he discharged for External Affairs during the Chifley government, are the strongest indication of his practical view that foreign policy could and should be pursued according to bipartisan national objectives.

**Australia and Empire Assumptions**

Frederic Eggleston manifestly shared the racial and cultural assumptions of his social milieu and time. From 1910, Eggleston was the leading figure in Victoria of the Round Table group, a movement dedicated to constructing imperial federation (Kendle 1975: 94–8). Work for the movement and the writing of articles, published anonymously, for its journal, provided Eggleston with his initial schooling in international affairs. At that time, he had no doubt that the Empire was “the main factor in the world’s progress towards democratic ideals”; the British Empire was unlike any previous imperial system in that it was “bound together by the mere power of association and not by organised force” (Eggleston 1915: 30, 33). Australia’s membership of the Empire constituted the guarantee of the young nation’s security and identity. As Eggleston remarked in 1912, “Australia is a lonely outpost of European civilization in a region which is profoundly alien” (Eggleston 1912: 721), consequently, the “White Australia” policy was required to maintain that civilization and only the protection of the British fleet permitted its free practice. Yet, even in these earlier writings, Eggleston’s powers of independent thought were manifest in his dissatisfaction with the prevailing naval doctrine, which, he held, left Australian security to the hazard of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. From his first works on international issues, Eggleston exhibited a keen appreciation of Australia’s distinct national interests as well as apprehension regarding Japan and possible Japanese designs upon Australia.

In a contribution to the *Round Table*, produced immediately prior to the outbreak of the Great War, Eggleston (1914) discussed the full regional implications of the “overwhelming preponderance of Japan” and the fact that, as Japan was not a satisfied power, she would either acquire a dominant position in China, or frustrated there, would seek to expand elsewhere. Eggleston sought to refute the argument, advanced by Winston Churchill, that all the heavy naval units of the Empire should be concentrated in the British theater in order to counter the only fleet that posed a strategic challenge. It was clear that the Anglo-Japanese Naval Treaty of 1902 was designed to facilitate that concentration. Yet, Eggleston was not reassured by this arrangement since, as he held, “a treaty is merely a contractual obligation…secured by no independent guarantee, but only by the