

GOING NATIVE: THE PASSIONS OF PHILIP
JACKS, ROHAN PRICE (AUSTRALIAN
SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING, 2016)

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To some minds, ‘going native’ was a nasty, racist phrase constructing a superior, civilised European world laughing at members of it who fell from grace into a licentious subterranean of foreign tongues and odd habits. Rohan Price’s new book *Going Native: The Passions of Philip Jacks* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2016) is an admirable and, for the most part, convincing antidote to the accepted narrative. Price’s very lively account of the sexual politics of interwar Hong Kong centres on the life of local Land Officer Mr. Philip Jacks. In Hong Kong he had a British family, and a Eurasian one. He baptised his Eurasian daughter, Audrey, in the heart of the Hong Kong establishment, St John’s Cathedral. He conceived and executed a plan to assist 23 war orphan Eurasian girls to foster families in Australia at the height of the White Australia Policy. Rather than depict Jacks as a White Saviour of Asia, or a sojourner with a taste for ribaldry, *Going Native* plumbs deeply into the questions posed by living between races, the racist friction to conform, and the frankly unsatisfactory aspects of living a life as a Mr In-between. Price also offers a balanced assessment of Hong Kong’s middling historiography on Eurasianism, and while he’s about it, gives the Asian mistress figure a plinth of her own alongside all the dead white men.

In reimagining what it was to go native, Price examines the influences at play on Philip Jacks, among them evangelical Christianity, the Tory wild boy archetypes, the licenses to hedonism provided by Gilbert and Sullivan, and its censures among those in Hong Kong’s vituperative gossip culture. Most satisfying about Price’s narrative is that he holds out the palate but lets the reader do the painting. Certainly, Price has firm views about the political use of history. Yet the Jacks I discern was indeed heroic; he had an uncommon impulse to do the decent thing, even if his enmeshment was not without controversy in its time, or indeed

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now. Price's reading of going native, however, stresses quietly made humanitarian responses to problems of Jack's making, and not.

Rather than simply brazen out his community's disdain at an open relationship with a Eurasian woman, Jacks orchestrated a plan for the evacuation of war orphaned Eurasian children who would otherwise fall into lives of prostitution and domestic drudgery known locally as *mui tsai*. Price puts forward a view of Jacks as an unassuming man, who received no recognition for his efforts and nor did he seek it. This was the civilisation occasionally permitted by British colonial administrations – the opportunity of the non self-aggrandising among their number to do some charity.

Two points by way of criticism: First, Price strands much of the material on Jacks as a Land Officer and administrative trailblazer at the back of the book. It would have been better to splice it throughout his narrative. Second, although the sources Price consulted were prodigious in volume, the lack of a personal diary or correspondence in his research armoury results in a text that contextualised a life, rather relate it in pure biography. In a sense, however, this quality makes *Going Native* a marvellous read. It gives a sense of swimming in the cool and warm currents of the Edwardian Far East; the profane and the upright; the social deception and the mezzanines of sensual delight. Price does not rationalise the contradictions to find an ideal; he juxtaposes them for the reader's judgment.

Is *Going Native* a tour de force? It comes close. Its publication is definitely the beginning of a promising career in historical biography should Dr. Rohan Price wish to pursue it.