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Politely Adversarial: Perceptions of Japan in
New Zealand Print Media, 1895-1942.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on how New Zealanders viewed Japan from the turn of the twentieth century to the outbreak of war in the Pacific Theatre in 1941. The research is based primarily on newspaper articles, editorials and letters to the editor. The goals of this research are to ascertain the self-perceptions of New Zealanders based upon how they viewed a significant foreign power in the Pacific, replete with the general vernacular used to describe the Japanese and the racial and political attitudes that such vernacular represented. Existing scholarship tends to focus on New Zealand’s official diplomacy with Japan, and this thesis aims to add to this by providing a social history of New Zealand’s racial attitudes narrated by civilian New Zealanders in their own voices.

The three focus questions of the thesis are: How far did New Zealanders’ attitudes to Japan vary from region to region? How far did racial ideologies impact New Zealanders’ views of Japan? And how closely were New Zealand’s perceptions of Japan in line with those of New Zealand’s First and Second World War allies, as expressed in print media? While New Zealanders’ written perspectives on Japan may have also been influenced by genders of those who wrote them, a focused consideration of the influence of gender on such perspectives is beyond the scope of this thesis due to the often anonymous nature of contributions to newspaper letters to the editor.

The main body of the thesis consists of a prologue and five chapters which progress in chronological sequence. The first chapter covers the turn of the twentieth century. The second chapter focuses on New Zealand’s reaction to the Russo-Japanese War and the Annexation of Korea to 1910. The third chapter focuses on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in effect to 1921. The fourth chapter covers the ending of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the cooling of relations to 1931. The fifth chapter covers New Zealand’s reaction to deepening Japanese
militarism in China. The sixth and final chapter focuses on the attitudes of New Zealanders toward Japan at the outset of the Second World War.
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