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### Asians: The new metics of Australia

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## Asians: The new metics of Australia

### Abstract

The Asian immigration debate has become one of the most contentious topics of debate in Australia. Little about the debate is new and most of the arguments, both in favour and against, begin with demographic considerations, then move on to the economic consequences of immigration and the social and cultural ramifications. Delving deeper into the debate, one will realize that there is an underlying assumption of the economic theory of *laissez-faire*, which is the driving force of the debate. The new realities of global electronic commerce with *laissez-faire* economic theory have been transposed onto Australia's immigration policy. The government welcomes the "elite" of the knowledge workers because they are the real generators of wealth. However, the government is also aware that maximizing its benefit out of these immigrants, it must minimize the costs associated with them, such as maintenance cost of their sponsored parents. The analysis, while dispelling the myth of increasing immigration costs, confirmed the urgent need to shift the focus of societal pluralism from an economic one that is rooted in competition and self-interest individualism, to pluralism that is rooted in social organization. This is where society is seen as cooperative units rather than of competing units, that is Asians and non-Asians contributing to Australia as a cooperative group of people. The government promotion of division in society with its archaic politics to instill the '*metic*' status for new immigrants may prove detrimental to its effort to attract elite wealth generator migrants.

### Keywords

australia, metics, asians

### Disciplines

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## ASIANS: THE NEW METICS OF AUSTRALIA

### SUMMARY

The Asian immigration debate has become one of the most contentious topics of debate in Australia. Little about the debate is new and most of the arguments, both in favour and against, begin with demographic considerations, then move on to the economic consequences of immigration and the social and cultural ramifications. Delving deeper into the debate, one will realize that there is an underlying assumption of the economic theory of *laissez-faire*, which is the driving force of the debate. The new realities of global electronic commerce with *laissez-faire* economic theory have been transposed onto Australia's immigration policy. The government welcomes the "elite" of the knowledge workers because they are the real generators of wealth. However, the government is also aware that maximizing its benefit out of these immigrants, it must minimize the costs associated with them, such as maintenance cost of their sponsored parents. The analysis, while dispelling the myth of increasing immigration costs, confirmed the urgent need to shift the focus of societal pluralism from an economic one that is rooted in competition and self-interest individualism, to pluralism that is rooted in social organization. This is where society is seen as cooperative units rather than of competing units, that is Asians and non-Asians contributing to Australia as a cooperative group of people. The government promotion of division in society with its archaic politics to instill the 'metic' status for new immigrants may prove detrimental to its effort to attract elite wealth generator migrants.

KEY WORDS: Australia, Asians, knowledge workers, immigration policy

### Introduction

The Government official position that was reported in the Australian newspaper *Sydney Morning Herald* article of March 19<sup>th</sup>, "Welfare ban on parents of migrants" was of no surprise. Developed nations of the world are in a state of stagnant

political flux. Poverty, unemployment, pollution, overpopulation, mass migration, and global genocide are some of the new realities confronting these Nations, where the very natures of work, of institutions, of society, and even of capitalism itself, are 'mutating'.

These mutations are confronting each other in the vacuum created by the increasing impotence of liberal democracy and the utopian promises of science and technology. The masses will not win in the natural selection for dominance of an increasingly elitist world. Naturally politicians, such as Pauline Hanson or Le Pen in France don't like it, but nevertheless would exploit the values of the weak to take them over as devices of domination. The politicians may engage in their rhetorical promises, but now the markets decide.

*Table 1: Summary of the Australian Population*

Population of Australia	18,492,000.00	100.00%
Employed persons	8,534,600.00	46.15%
Unemployed Persons	752,100.00	8.10%
Other	9,205,300.00	49.78%
Aging Population	5,353,180.00	28.95%
Under 15 Years of Age	3,852,120.00	20.83%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Australia today faces a challenging reality where 46.15% of the population sustains the whole 18,492,000 with an ever increasingly aging population of 28.95% that is matched by a 20.83% of the under 15 years of age population. Coupled with a stagnant unemployment level of 8% and nation-states mutate into corporation-states in the new 'information age' order.

The role of each corporation-state is to either *produce* or *import* the right people, with the right knowledge and expertise who the raw material for the global companies that profit from the Information Age. The government role is to service these companies and to provide them with an efficient infrastructure, a minimally regulated market, a secure and stable environment. Governments, like all other organizations, will have to survive economically on the efforts of the *few* in a time when NO nation-state has an automatic right to exist.

## Today's Realities of Australian Immigration

The Australian government is not stupid. To exist, it must function like a corporation-state whereby maximizing its benefit out of its immigration operations. On one hand, migrants submit to the 'violence' of the State in return for citizenship and protection. On the other hand, the State collects taxes for its services and protection.

Immigration is profitable when the State collects tax revenue from migrants that is far higher than its service expenditure. However, if the government breaks-even, then it is at fault in bringing-in migrants that may cause demographic, economic, political and cultural shifts. Thus, the government will be able to maximize its profit out of the immigration program, *if and only if* it reduces the overall cost of immigration. However, comments made by the Honorable Minister for Immigration, as it was quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* about reducing the cost of immigration, were ingeniously bizarre.

"It is simply a fact that some classes of migrants are more beneficial to Australia than others. Those with skills have a huge benefit, the parent scheme is not as economically beneficial. We are seeking to ensure the broader community does not bear excessive costs."

The broader community of the unemployed, the aged and the ones below 15 years of age represent the excessive cost, *not* the migrants and their parents.

A major immigrant group to Australia in recent years has been the Asians. The results of a recent study (Cheng, 1997) at the University of Wollongong, of Asians' contribution dispelled some of the myths associated with immigration in general and Asians in particular.

Asians, like any other citizen in Australia, contribute income tax among other forms of contribution. They represent a highly energetic and efficient workforce (97.60%) with quite a high average weekly taxable income of A\$ 657 compared to the average Australian taxable income of A\$ 270. This suggests that the government collect far more tax revenue from Asians per capita compared to non-Asians.

*Table 2: Asians Earning Patterns Per Week*

	Australia	Asians
Population	17,892,433	286,413
Percentage of the Population	100.00%	1.60%
Overall Weekly Income	\$4,833,791,040	\$188,210,683
Average per Population	\$270.16	\$657.13%
Workforce	46.32%	97.60%
Average Wage	\$583	\$673
Knowledge Workers	28.39%	55.30%
Average Wage	\$673	\$831
Service Workers	17.93%	42.29%
Average Wage	\$439	\$468
Not in Workforce	53.68%	2.40%

Source: Cheng, 1997

## Who is an Asian?

The main objective of the study was to 'account for' the Asians contribution to Australia in terms of their 'taxable income' given the anti-Asian debate and government assertions about the cost of immigration. This was soon shattered by the fact, that the ABS 1996 census publications were not yet available or were not sufficient (the ABS do not associate a person's racial background to their income levels) for the research. This was further complicated by the difficulty in identifying who is an Asian, especially second and third generation Asians. This was due to the way the census questionnaire was designed. It did not allow the person to specify their own racial background - it only asked the person about: (a) their country of birth, (b) their parents country of birth, and (c) languages spoken at home. This meant that there was a need for hypothesizing which characteristics present in the census questionnaire may serve to identify (a) who is an Asian, (b) who belongs to the first generation of Asians, (c) who belongs to second or third generation of Asians, (d) who is in the work-force and who is not, (e) which jobs do they hold, (f) whether the person's job belongs to knowledge or service workers categories, and (g) what were their income levels.

The first hurdle was to identify who really qualifies for being an Asian. If we consider the national census questionnaire, it is the principal source for the data re-

quired. The questionnaire addressed the country of birth for both the person and their parents and the languages spoken at home. For persons born in Asia, or who have Asian parents this was not a problem. However, this was further complicated when one considers the different combinations that may be present: What if the person was not born in Asia but have one Asian parent and one Australian parent, would they be considered Asian or Australian? What if the person and their parents were not born in Asia but the language spoken at home is Asian? What if the person was born in Asia but have no Asian parents and the language spoken at home is not Asian? The question is who or what should define a person as an Asian?

These questions prompted the consideration of a way that would account for all the possible combinations that may exist so as to help define who is an Asian. The possible combinations were the result of the combinational relationships between (a) country of birth, (b) parents country of birth and (c) language spoken at home.

*Table 3: 'Rules of Thumb' to Identify an Asian*

1996 CENSUS CHARACTERISTICS (RULES OF THUMB)			EXPLANATION	
PERSON COUNTRY OF BIRTH IS IN ASIA	EITHER PARENT COUNTRY OF BIRTH IS IN ASIA	LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME IS ASIAN	IS THE PERSON ASIAN?	ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS
YES	YES	YES	YES	
YES	YES	NO	YES	Asian or Australian expatriates?
YES	NO	YES	YES	Asian or Australian expatriates?
YES	NO	NO	YES	Asian or Australian expatriates?
NO	YES	YES	YES	Asian second generation?
NO	YES	NO	YES	Inter-racial? Which racial group should they belong to?
NO	NO	YES	YES	Asian third generation?
NO	NO	NO	NO	Is there a remote possibility that they are of an Asian origin?

Source: Cheng, 1997

However, the above table highlights very clearly the difficulty in asserting with confidence who is and who isn't an Asian given the number of possible explanations for the fore-mentioned combinations. Despite the fact that the census information seem to compound the problem of identifying who belongs to which racial group, it is puzzling how the Ministry for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs asserts that Asians represent 5% in Australia. If the government possesses information about who is an Asian, then perhaps the government should publish how much these Asians and other immigrants contribute and cost Australia rather than fueling the race debate by making assertions about immigration costs only?

## Asians in Australia

The data provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics divided Asians into three major regions: (a) South East Asia, (b) North East Asia, and (c) South Asia. Much of the Asian debate surrounds the Vietnamese refugees, which prompted the request of a separate data set for persons from Vietnam and excluding them from the South East Asian region. The intention was to identify how do the Vietnamese compare to the other Asians given the critical debate surrounding their experience in Australia.

*Table 4: Asians Earning Patterns Per Week*

Income levels	ASIANS		
	Total number of Asians	%	KW, SW & not in work
Negative income	787	0.29%	
Nil income	2,042	0.75%	1.04%
\$1 - \$119	12,118	4.47%	
\$120 - \$299	39,790	14.68%	19.15%
\$300 - \$499	90,142	33.26%	
\$500 - \$699	59,620	22.00%	
\$700 - \$799	17,503	6.46%	61.72%
\$800 - \$999	20,408	7.53%	
\$1,000 - \$1,499	16,842	6.21%	
\$1,500 or more	8,163	3.01%	16.76%
Not stated	3,606	1.33%	
TOTALS	271,021	100.00%	

Source: 1996 population census



It is apparent that Asians are quite competitive compared to the average Australian. Asians in the workforce represented 97.60% of the total number of Asians in Australia, while 2.4% were not in the workforce. Out of the 97.60% in the workforce, an estimated 56.67% held 'knowledge' related occupations. More than 78% received a weekly wage of A\$ 300 and above. Of which, 17% received a weekly wage above A\$800. There was 1.04% with a negative or Nil income.

## The Vietnamese

They represented 14.52% of the total number of Asians and 0.22% of the total population of Australia. Contrary to the common belief, 97.52% of the total number of the Vietnamese is earning income and thus may be considered in the work-force while 2.48% were not in the work-force.

*Table 5: Vietnamese Earning Patterns Per Week*

Income levels	VIETNAM				
	Total number	% of Vietnam	% KW, SW, not in work	% of total	% of total KW, SW, not in work
Negative income	114	0.29%		14.49%	
Nil income	287	0.73%	1.02%	14.05%	0.15%
\$1 - \$119	1,337	3.40%		11.03%	
\$120 - \$299	6,573	16.71%	20.11%	16.52%	2.92%
\$300 - \$499	17,919	45.55%		19.88%	
\$500 - \$699	7,670	19.50%		12.86%	
\$700 - \$799	1,811	4.60%	69.65%	10.35%	10.11%
\$800 - \$999	1,656	4.21%		8.11%	
\$1,000 - \$1,499	1,052	2.67%		6.25%	
\$1,500 or more	349	0.89%	7.77%	4.28%	1.13%
Not stated	573	1.46%		15.89%	
TOTALS	39,341	100.00%		14.52%	

Source: 1996 population census

Out of the 97.52% in the workforce, an estimated 57.12% held 'knowledge' related occupations. This figure is slightly higher than the Asian average. More than

77% received a weekly wage of A\$ 300 and above. Of which, 7.77% received a weekly wage above A\$ 800. There was 1.02% with a negative or Nil income. Surprisingly, these figures are comparable to the average Asian figures.

## The South East Asians

They represented 38.52% of the total number of Asians and 0.58% of the total population of Australia. South East Asians in the work-force represented 97.65% of the total number of the South East Asians, while 2.35% were not in the workforce.

*Table 6: South Asians Earning Patterns Per Week*

Income levels	SOUTH EAST ASIA (EXCLUDING VIETNAM)				
	Total number	% of South East Asia	% KW, SW, not in work	% of total	% of total KW, SW, not in work
Negative income	269	0.26%		34.18%	
Nil income	723	0.69%	0.95%	35.41%	0.37%
\$1 - \$119	5,021	4.81%		41.43%	
\$120 - \$299	14,212	13.61%	18.42%	35.72%	7.10%
\$300 - \$499	34,282	32.84%		38.03%	
\$500 - \$699	24,368	23.34%		40.87%	
\$700 - \$799	7,061	6.76%	62.95%	40.34%	24.25%
\$800 - \$999	7,961	7.63%		39.01%	
\$1,000 - \$1,499	6,141	5.88%		36.46%	
\$1,500 or more	2,894	2.77%	16.28%	35.45%	6.27%
Not stated	1,460	1.40%		40.49%	
TOTALS	104,392	100.00%		38.52%	

Source: 1996 population census

Out of the 97.65% in the workforce, an estimated 49.18% held 'knowledge' related occupations. This figure is lower than the Asian average. More than 79.23% received a weekly wage of A\$ 300 and above. Of which, 16.28% received a weekly wage above A\$ 800. There was 0.95% with a negative or Nil income.

## The North East Asians

They represented 29.27% of the total number of Asians and 0.44% of the total population of Australia. North East Asians in the work-force represented 98.62% of the total number of the North East Asians, while 1.38% were not in the workforce.

*Table 7: North East Asians Earning Patterns Per Week*

Income levels	SOUTH EAST ASIA (EXCLUDING VIETNAM)				
	Total number	% of South East Asia	% KW, SW, not in work	% of total	% of total KW, SW, not in work
Negative income	269	0.26%		34.18%	
Nil income	723	0.69%	0.95%	35.41%	0.37%
\$1 - \$119	5,021	4.81%		41.43%	
\$120 - \$299	14,212	13.61%	18.42%	35.72%	7.10%
\$300 - \$499	34,282	32.84%		38.03%	
\$500 - \$699	24,368	23.34%		40.87%	
\$700 - \$799	7,061	6.76%	62.95%	40.34%	24.25%
\$800 - \$999	7,961	7.63%		39.01%	
\$1,000 - \$1,499	6,141	5.88%		36.46%	
\$1,500 or more	2,894	2.77%	16.28%	35.45%	6.27%
Not stated	1,460	1.40%		40.49%	
TOTALS	104,392	100.00%		38.52%	

Source: 1996 population census

Out of the 98.62% in the workforce, an estimated 56.18% held 'knowledge' related occupations. More than 75.40% received a weekly wage of A\$ 300 and above. Of which, 16.14% received a weekly wage above A\$ 800. There was 1.38% with a negative or Nil income.

## The South Asians

They represented 17.69% of the total number of Asians and 0.27% of the total population of Australia. South Asians in the workforce represented 97.61% of the total number of the South Asians, while 2.39% were not in the workforce.

*Table 8: South Asians Earning Patterns Per Week*

Income levels	SOUTH ASIA				
	Total number	% of South East Asia	% KW, SW, not in work	% of total	% of total KW, SW, not in work
Negative income	112	0.23%		14.23%	
Nil income	230	0.48%	0.71%	11.26%	0.13%
\$1 - \$119	1,657	3.46%		13.67%	
\$120 - \$299	5,699	11.82%	15.28%	14.25%	2.70%
\$300 - \$499	11,641	24.28%		12.91%	
\$500 - \$699	11,587	24.16%		19.43%	
\$700 - \$799	3,908	8.15%	56.59%	22.33%	10.01%
\$800 - \$999	5,350	11.16%		26.22%	
\$1,000 - \$1,499	4,945	10.31%		29.36%	
\$1,500 or more	2,263	4.72%	26.19%	27.72%	4.63%
Not stated	589	1.23%		16.33%	
TOTALS	47,951	100.00%		17.69%	

Source: 1996 population census

Out of the 97.61% in the workforce, an estimated 76.74% held 'knowledge' related occupations. More than 82.78% received a weekly wage of A\$ 300 and above. Of which, 26.19% received a weekly wage above A\$ 800. There was 0.71% with a negative or Nil income.

The analysis have clearly shown that all regions, including Vietnam share: (a) high levels of participation in the work-force, (b) very low levels of unemployment compared to the overall levels of unemployment, (c) high average weekly earnings, and (d) a very high representation (45-77%) in the Knowledge Workers occupations. These findings strongly suggest that Asian immigrants are highly skilled, employ-

able, and efficient generators of wealth. This conforms to government policies in attracting a highly skilled immigrant workforce with a low maintenance cost.

## The Asian Crisis

Despite the demonstrated success of the Asian migration experience in Australia, *does it matter* that this proposal coincides with the Asian crisis and the rising numbers of the extreme right? Is it possible that the government, like any other business is exploiting the Asian crisis to nurture its opportunities of having skilled professional and business migrants with the least cost possible - given that Asians maintain a strong culture of family reunion.

Migrants will not cost the wider community more with their parents. The Honorable Minister with his comments that "parents - long recognized as the most costly part of family reunion" implied that almost every parent coming to Australia is, either *diseased, handicapped or disabled* which would attract a costly health bill that would be footed by the government. Immigrants cover their parents cost with their tax contributions, given their high earnings and the extremely low rate of their population that is not in the workforce. However, the government would like to channel these migrants' contribution to the currently aged, unemployed and below 15 years of age population of Australia. Thus, the parent scheme is an obvious net loss to the government.

## Conclusion

The Asian debate has occurred because we are living in a society economically driven by the theory of *laissez-faire*, which promotes competition by encouraging individuals in the uninhibited pursuits of self-interest. Therefore, since all individuals have the basic instinct of self-interest in some way or another, competing debates arise as with the Asian immigration debate.

The economic theory, however, does not hold in reality for several reasons. But essentially, the main fallacy of the economic theory is that it does not reconcile with reality. This is the case because it excludes reflexivity (Soros, 1995). Reflexivity deals with the interactions of participants rather than supposes that all participants have the same knowledge and assumptions. From the perspective of the debate, the economic theory does not reconcile with reality because the debate would not have risen if we all shared the same knowledge and assumptions. However, each individual holds their subjective views about the world.

Maintaining the position of *laissez-faire*, the researchers have demonstrated through their empirical analysis that Asians do contribute to Australia in terms of: (a) their skills through the professions that they occupy, and (b) taxes through the income that they earn. If we adopt an alternative perspective of viewing the data and consider Australia as a whole without the differentiation of Asians or any other ethnicity, the overall data looks better. This is because we consider all people residing in Australian as one cooperating contributing whole, we then need an ontological shift from the way society is 'economically' organized to a 'social' organization.

The social perspective is an ideological position, which maintains that we should cooperate as a society and not compete as groups of individuals divided by race, colour or religion. This need for an ontological shift is urgent, because excessive individualism will result in the self-mutation and self-destruction of our society.

Finally, the central question for the Australian government is obviously *not* whether reinventing the ancient Greek status of the *metic* for aliens with limited rights who are neither citizens nor slaves is *moral*. But, whether doing so would still *attract* those elite mobile and independent immigrant groups knowing that they are welcome in any other society that values their skill and fulfil their needs.

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**Lissa Cheng, George Mickhail**

## **AZIJC I: NOVI METEKI AUSTRALIJE**

### **SAŽETAK**

Rasprava o azijskoj imigraciji postala je jednom od najspornijih tema prepiranja u Australiji. Te rasprave nisu nove i većina argumenata, i za i protiv, započinje demografskim razmatranjima, nastavlja se posljedicama imigracija te prelazi na društvene i kulturne probleme. Zagrebe li se dublje u raspravu, može se doći do spoznaje da se ispod površine nalazi pretpostavka ekonomske teorije *laissez-faire* koja je pokretačka snaga rasprave. Nove realnosti općeg elektronskog općenja s *laissez-faire* ekonomskom teorijom prebačene su na australsku useljeničku politiku. Vlada srdačno dočekuje "elitu" stručnjaka jer su oni istinski proizvođači bogatstva. Istovremeno, vlada je svjesna da se povećavanjem koristi od tih useljenika smanjuju troškovi vezani uz njih kao što je, primjerice, izdržavanje njihovih sponzoriranih roditelja. Raspršivši mit o povećanju troškova za useljenike, analiza je potvrdila hitnu potrebu premještanja žarišta općedruštvenog pluralizma od ekonomskoga, ukorijenjenog u natjecanju i sebičnom individualizmu, do pluralizma duboko ukorijenjenog u društvenoj organizaciji. Tu se na društvo prije može gledati kao na jedinice koje međusobno surađuju nego na one koje se natječu među sobom, odnosno Azijci i ne-Azijci daju svoj doprinos Australiji kao kooperativna skupina ljudi. Vladino potpomaganje podjele u društvu njenom arhaičnom politikom usađivanja statusa *meteka* novim useljenicima može se pokazati štetnim za njene napore da privuče elitne migrante, tvorce blagostanja.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** Australija, Azijci, stručnjaci, useljenička politika