



Australian Population Association

13th Biennial Conference

Population Policy and Australia's Destiny

5-8 December 2006 - University of Adelaide

Changing demographic profile of Asian migrants in Australia in recent decades

Melinda Hammann

Macquarie University, Bachelor of Science, Human Geography, (melrieck@yahoo.com)

Australia's composition has evolved since the nation's birth. Built on immigration, migrants have been instrumental in developing the economy, culture and society of today's Australia. Asian-born settlers, as the focus of this paper, have been part of Australia since the mid 19th century where they featured, and were largely opposed, during the Gold Rush period. Subsequent legislation, returning of displaced Asian-born settlers to birth nations and restricted entry occurred for almost three-quarters of the 1900's. Implementation of policy changes in the late 1960's and early 1970's saw Australia 'welcome' Asian immigrants. Diversity has increased, so much so that in 2000 one quarter of immigrants to Australia were Asian-born settlers. Representing 6% of the population, Asian-born settlers increased significantly between 1981 and 2000 from 276,000 to over one million, and proportionally Australia has the largest number of Asian-born settlers than any other nation. Asian migration, past and present, has influenced the composition of today's Australia. Demographically, country/region of origin; age/gender structure; educational background; occupation; employment status; language and geographic distribution are investigated to demonstrate the intensity of influence and highlight changing patterns over recent decades, between 1940 and today. In part this involves looking at the arguments that feed the Asian migration debate and discovering that much of the evidence is fuelled, both positively and negatively, by emotion rather than statistical evidence. As background, when defining Asia, it is categorised as Southeast, Northeast and Southern Asia. More specifically, this paper refers to Vietnamese and Chinese born settlers and subsequent generations.