Beyond White Australia
Australian Education and the Engagement of Asia after the Second World War
Wayne Reynolds, University of Newcastle, Australia

Abstract: The paper traces the engagement of Asia after 1945 with reference to the role of education. Initially it was an elite process with the Department of External Affairs leading the way. The rapid expansion of embassies in the region gave considerable scope for cultural attaches to disseminate material and information about Australia. Percy Spender, the Foreign Affairs Minister in 1950, added considerably to this process with the successful launch of the Colombo Plan - a hugely successful initiative that invited many Asian students to Australia where they were to do much to break down the walls of White Australia. His successor, R.G. Casey, launched the journal 'Hemisphere', a major attempt to engage favourable academic debate on Australia and Asia. The survey will then include an assessment of the Asian Social studies movement after the 1970s and the associated attempts to expand facilities in the universities, the media (ABC, SBS) and in bilateral and multilateral diplomatic initiatives. The paper will draw on recently released archival material in Australia, official DFAT records and scholarly material.

Keywords: -

THIS PAPER PROVIDES a survey of Australian engagement of Asia with reference to broad education policy issues. The focus is on the period since the end of the Second World War, one which saw the rapid decolonisation to Australia’s north and was to see the emergence of a number of regional initiatives from Canberra. The Colombo Plan was the most well known initiative and it marks the beginning of the analysis. But it was steeped in the Cold War and based on Australian attempts to link Asia to the West. It did, however, contribute to the end of the White Australia, the second part of this paper. By the seventies there was a sustained debate about Asian immigration and Australian identity, but it was soon to be overtaken by the economic imperatives of the eighties and beyond, the final section of this paper. From the vantage point of 2006 Asia has assumed many of the characteristics of the immediate post-war period a dangerous neighbourhood with the potential for great profits. It is a narrow view that education policy has yet failed to counter.

Regional Engagement and the Origins of the Colombo Plan

For most of the history of White Australia Asian engagement has been about trade. The settlers of 1788 came as part of European mercantilist expansion. British Eastern policy was dictated by the imperatives of trade and bases. Beyond that most of Asia was dismembered by European Empires. To Australian colonists calls for a “British Monroe Doctrine” until the First World War were about excluding rival European Empires. Not surprisingly academic study confined Asia to “Oriental Studies” – and that in only one University, Sydney in 1918. Only one Asian country, the rapidly industrialising Japan, warranted scholarly attention. Japanese language instruction had been introduced in Sydney and Melbourne Universities in 1919 but it was within the Prime Ministers’ Department that a more thorough analysis of Japan was undertaken. Former intelligence officer and director of the Pacific Division Major E.L. Piesse reckoned that Japan posed a future risk to Australian security. It had defeated the Russian Navy in 1905 and in the recent conflict had been rewarded for supporting the British with island possessions north of the equator. Piesse presciently predicted that the White Australia would give unnecessary offence and therefore should be abandoned. In 1919, however, he had no hope of realising such a development. Australia had not emerged from the war with a sense of region but rather with a sense that its sacrifice of 60000 on behalf of Empire was worth it. The popular curriculum would continue to study the “Capes and Bays” of the Empire and academics would complete to publish in the foremost humanities journal of the day, The Round Table – a study of the affairs of the Dominions and Empire. This picture was to change little before the Second World War.

The period after 1939 saw the first serious attempts to understand the region – Menzies called it the “Near North”. German victories had weakened European empires, the Japanese reaped the benefits
and set in train processes that would see the end of colonisation in Asia. Against this background the Australian Government moved to influence regional attitudes. In 1941 Radio Australia, which had been established as a vehicle of propaganda two years before, reacted to the Japanese invasion by focussing its transmissions on Asian audiences. After the war, apart from the languages of the metropolitan powers in the region, the transmissions were made in Japanese, Mandarin, Malay and Thai. In 1950 External Affairs Minister Percy Spender sought to control the material of the broadcaster, now placed under the ABC, but ran into opposition from ABC Chairman Sir Richard Boyer. The Chairman prevailed, so Spender had to be satisfied with the appointment of a liaison officer from the Department of External Affairs to collaborate on material to be broadcast.¹

The first problem at that juncture was that there were no Australian journalists on the ground in Asia. That was to change. Writing in 1967 in the journal *Hemisphere*, (itself a creation of Casey’s Cold War planning in 1957 which was designed to influence Asian student opinion²), Mungo McCallum reported that at that time the ABC was broadcasting fifty bulletins a day in seven Asian languages and was in receipt of 500,000 letters from Asian listeners a year. It had offices in Singapore, Djakarta, Kuala Lumpur, New Delhi and Tokyo. It also had correspondents in South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and throughout the Pacific. Furthermore it patched into BBC programs and those of the mainstream American news services.³ By the Seventies and early Eighties the process was continued with new technology. Messages could be beamed from space in the Asian footprint covered by geosynchronous Aussat satellites – ironically launched by Chinese “Long March” rockets.

The second problem was that there were no organisational links to Asia after the war. Spender’s Colombo Plan was designed to overcome this problem. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is about to release published documents on Australia’s longest-running aid program, the centrepiece of which was the education initiative to engage the students of Asia.⁴ The plan, however, had its origins in a much broader strategy of Asian engagement. The great impetus to engage Asia came in the second global conflict. But it did not come simply because the Japanese had defeated the European colonists with relative ease in their sweep south from December 1941 to February 1942. The challenge came from left field – from the Mont Tremblant Conference in 1942. The occasion was a meeting of the Institute of Pacific Relations and it was clear at the gathering that the Americans were to launch a major campaign against the retention of post-war empires. From this point onwards the idea of “trusteeship” dominated debate. If Australia was to entertain its ambitions for controlling strategic islands to its North, such as New Guinea and Timor, then it could not do so by simple annexation. It was to counter charges of its colonial credentials that Herbert Vere Evatt, Labor’s irascible foreign minister, launched Australia’s first bilateral treaty in 1944. The centrepiece of the Australia-New Zealand Agreement, or ANZAC Pact, was the claim of the two Southern Dominions to being fit trustee powers. It was their willingness to engage in the welfare of native peoples that would differentiate their role from that of the former colonial powers. Evatt accordingly linked Australian proposals to trusteeship to the Atlantic Charter.⁵

By the end of the conflict the idea had taken root that regional commissions⁶ would oversee colonial development and that the participating trustee states would account for their actions to the new United Nations Trusteeship Committee, and where relevant, other associate bodies such as the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Council (later UNESCO). Australia had successfully defended its restrictive immigration policy in 1945 from UN scrutiny under the so-called domestic jurisdiction clause of the Charter, but could not deflect similar scrutiny of its colonial record. It would not be long before UNESCO would ask for explanations of the depiction of race in text books and curriculum. In similar vein Foreign Affairs officials were asking for guidance on Australian national policies on aborigines over ten years before the 1967 referendum made the indigenous population a national responsibility.

Yet these calculations were absent in 1945 as Chifley launched into a sustained campaign to establish Australian credentials as a leading regional power. To that end the new Australian National

---

⁴ David Lee, DFAT, Colombo Plan Workshop, Deakin University, 16 November 2005.
⁵ The relevant files are in DO35/1895 and CAB66/47, Public Record Office London (PRO). The Atlantic Charter of August 1941 declared independence of people to be a war aim. Churchill had not seen this as applying to colonies.
University was to focus advanced research on the region in the School of Pacific Studies. Australia’s first ambassador to China, Sir Frederick Eggleston, was instrumental in setting up the Research School of Social Sciences. Patrick Fitzgerald was wooed away from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and asked to take charge of the Department of Far Eastern History, which was better than “Oriental Studies” but still located Asia to Britain’s east, not Australia’s north.  

Sydney University too offered “Oriental Studies.” It was funded by the Department of the Army until 1948 after which the University engaged in a lengthy correspondence with the Pacific Division of External Affairs via the Minister. The close interest of the Department of External Affairs was based on the rapid expansion of the Diplomatic Corps after the war. Herein the immediate need was to identify those universities that could provide trainees language instruction in Chinese, Japanese and Malay.

Another motive was to support Australia’s regional diplomacy. In 1948 Australia launched at last the South Pacific Commission which had been promised in the ANZAC Agreement. It was to coordinate welfare and education policies in a general but yet to be determined area to Australia’s north and east. Australian also sought an active role in the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, which saw involvement in many reconstruction projects to the north.

Yet it would be wrong to construe this activism as an active attempt to engage Asia. There was a paternalism reflected in the sense that the Far East or Orient was very distant to the immediate Pacific area. The South Pacific Commission was seen as covering a strategic area of British Commonwealth responsibility. In this area, which also covered the Christian-dominated eastern portions of Indonesia, Australia would promote, under the guise of trusteeship arrangements, the teaching of English and Western culture. This would prove a valuable tool in any future vote of self-determination by the peoples of the Moluccas, Ambon, Timor or Netherlands New Guinea.

One problem lay in the fact that a key member of the Empire, India, achieved independence in 1947. It was in the interests of Australian regional security and the survival of the British Empire East of Suez that attempts be undertaken to retain India as loyal Dominion. Top that end John Burton, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs and one of its most sympathetic advocates of Asian engagement, was despatched to the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in March that year. Burton could report that the conference re-affirmed the right of nations to control immigration, but that “with a view to eliminating resentment” a “token quota system for Prospective Asian migrants” would be established. The criterion that mattered was that such migrants would be “thoroughly educated and westernised Indians.”

India was not wedded to post-war regional defence plans sponsored by the Commonwealth, but it was susceptible to co-operation on other fronts. In 1950 at the Commonwealth Conference in Ceylon, the Colombo Plan was launched mainly as a result of Australian initiative. The context is important. The US had launched the Marshall Plan two years earlier in Europe. The great attempt to construct a non-Communist Europe lay at the heart of the plan. The problem was that the Truman Administration had no such plan for Asia – apart from the bilateral and widely distrusted bilateral treaty with Japan. Yet the region faced similar Cold War threats. A Communist insurrection – the British called in an “Emergency” – broke out in Malaya in 1948. Mao had taken over mainland China in 1949 and in June 1950 Communist North Korea mounted an invasion of the South.

Nehru in India was ready for some form of regional association but had not received support from other Asian states. It was therefore left to incoming Foreign Affairs Minister Percy Spender, who replaced Evatt after the December 1949 elections, to set Australian foreign policy on a new course. Whereas the Chifley period had seen an attempt to build regional security on the work of the UN, Spender sought bilateral help from the war-time Allies. Given US neglect, he pressed the Commonwealth to take the initiative. The hope would be that the US with its much superior resources would come on board.

In this he was mistaken. While the US welcomed the participation of Australia, New Zealand and India in the promotion of regional welfare, the British Commonwealth was not its chosen instrument for this. To Washington the whole plan smacked of a British attempt to revitalise the Empire as a force in Asian affairs – but without the finances to do so. Consequently Spender’s grandiose plans for a capital

---

7 S.G. Foster and Margaret M. Varghese, *The Making of the Australian National University* (St Leonards: Allan & Unwin, 1996), 106. The “School of Oriental Studies” term crept back in and was elevated from School to Faculty status in 1961, Item 553/2/50, A1838/273, NAA. The External Affairs agency that had oversight of these issues in the 1950s was called the Advisory Committee on “Oriental Affairs”, Item 353/2/50, A1838/273, NAA.

8 Correspondence in item 553/2/12, A1838/266, NAA.

9 Burton to Heyes, 1 March 1948, 169/10/8/3, i, “White Australia Policy”, A1838, NAA.

aid program and technical assistance scheme went nowhere. Britain could not afford the commitments, Canada saw the whole thing as an unnecessary duplication of ECAFE and the US would only accept the plan one year later on the proviso that it remained low key and informal.\textsuperscript{11} In reality Washington marginalised the scheme.

What went forward the following year was hardly a plan at all – the Canadian academic William Harrison said the “whole enterprise…was something of a misnomer”.\textsuperscript{12} Spender, however, had by now achieved a measure of Australia’s security objectives with the successful negotiation of ANZUS that year (although this too was well short of the attempt to rehabilitate the Empire – Britain was excluded from ANZUS at American insistence). As far as the Colombo Plan was concerned he now turned to the role of education in winning the mind of Asia in the Cold War. Archbishop Howard Mowll called it a “spiritual Colombo Plan”. Colombo Plan activities came under the direct influence of the Overseas Planning Committee (OPC), a body made up of representatives of the Prime Minister’s Department, the Australian Secret Intelligence Service, Defence and the ABC.\textsuperscript{13} The “basic principles,” as Oakman calls them, were to expose Asians to Australian views on social and economic development. Australia was to be projected as modern, industrial, educated and above all, non-Communist.\textsuperscript{14}

The Colombo Plan developed in the context of shaping Asian opinion in the early Cold War. In 1951 the Department of Foreign Affairs embarked on a major campaign to establish a firm Australian presence in the region. Spender’s replacement, R.G. Casey, had already established Australia’s first overseas spy agency (the Australian Secret Intelligence Service – ASIS) to report on the region. The same year the Colombo Plan scholarships were launched, taking a massive seventy percent of the technical aid budget. The scheme was to be supported by the expanding network of Australian legations that Casey opened in the region. It was also bolstered by Casey’s scheme of subsidising Australian books to be distributed in Asia. A particular target in all of this was Asian leaders – journalists, public servants and teachers. Cultural exchange to Casey was about ensuring that Asian students could exchange views at Australian universities “at an impressionable stage of their lives”. In August 1954 Casey would confide to Menzies that the Colombo Plan was a “good shoe-horn for Australian interests” which would help secure “reliable buffer states between ourselves and the Communist drive to the south”. It was part of the armoury – one that ranged from educational contacts through to “less respectable activities”.\textsuperscript{15}

To that end Colombo aid planning in 1955 was brought under Casey’s Overseas Planning Committee which in effect ran the Cold War activities in Asia. The Committee worked to promote Western development strategies to Asian students. Not surprisingly it was not long before Colombo Plan funds were extended to training security forces. The initiative for this had come from ASIO chief Spry who sought training of Thai police in anti-subversive techniques.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite the origins of the scheme with its focus on the Cold War, its legacy was a triumph for Australian education and its role in engaging Asia. In period 1951-1965 Australia took in 5,500 students under the scheme, a number dwarfed by the influx of over one million European immigrants, mostly British. Nevertheless the relative importance of education in the scheme was increased over time. Initially the focus had been on technical aid and development projects but by the mid Sixties the proportion devoted to education had doubled, to 46 per cent.\textsuperscript{17} There had been no great economic gains but Australia the Colombo Plan had helped cement ties with non-Communist Asia and exposure to Asian students had prepared the way for the end of White Australia.

The End of White Australia

Engaging Asia had begun as a weapon of Cold War but by the early Sixties it had become a matter of national survival. The original paradigm, the Colombo Plan, had been fashioned as a Commonwealth initiative targeted on India, but increasingly embracing most of the region as the Cold War intensified. By 1956, however, the forces propelling Australia towards Asia strengthened. The Suez affair that year dealt a telling blow to British imperial ambition East of Suez, although the final announcement would be delayed another ten years. But it heralded the end of Empire, which had been strangely delayed after the initial declarations of independence on the subcontinent in 1947-48. In 1957 the independence of Ghana and Malaya was followed by rapid decolonisation in Asia and the

\textsuperscript{12} Oakman, Facing Asia, 67.
\textsuperscript{13} “Cold War Planning: Counter Propaganda Material for Use in Australia”, 23 February 1961, Item 563/6/4 Part 2, A1838/2, NAA.
\textsuperscript{14} Oakman, Facing Asia, 135. External Affairs noted that countering Communism was the primary purpose with “amicable political relations” as secondary objective. “The Colombo Plan: An Appraisal”, Item 145/1, A4311 (The Cumpston Collection), NAA.
\textsuperscript{15} Oakman, Facing Asia, 127.
\textsuperscript{16} Material in 383/1/1/1, “Meeting of the Cold War Planning Committee”, 6 April 1955, A1838, NAA; Oakman, Facing Asia, 141.
\textsuperscript{17} Oakman, Facing Asia, 210.
Pacific. Within three years the composition of the Commonwealth was changed to such an extent that Apartheid South Africa would be forced out. Menzies decried the summary treatment of so valued a member of the “Old Commonwealth”. The days of capes and bays were numbered.

The effects of the Sputnik launch the year after Suez saw a dramatic change in US scientific collaboration with its Allies, one which was to have major implications for Australian education. The immediate effect, however, was to put an effective end to the Sterling Bloc, which had dated to 1932. With the final triumph of the US plans for regional organisation after these two landmark events, the Australian signature of the Trade Treaty with Japan seemed a mere formality. The future of Australian trade and security lay in the Asia-Pacific region – even though the culture was still wedded to the past. Within ten years that would change.

The immediate effect of the shift was found in education. Following US reactions to Sputnik, in Australia there would be a vast increase in Commonwealth involvement in education. Sir Keith Murray delivered the necessary critique in his landmark report in 1957 – more universities would have to be built. The focus of the education effort was on science and on increasing school retention rates, but in the process attitudes towards Asia changed. During the following decade courses in Asian studies proliferated in Australian universities. The Research School of Pacific Studies at the ANU was one of the most prolific in research output but new players emerged – and with them new areas of regional interest. Since its stormy path to independence Indonesia had commanded great attention. This was reflected by Commonwealth financial support for Indonesia departments in the ANU, Melbourne and Sydney. The University of Queensland took the running on Japanese studies while Monash became the centre for South East Asian Studies. All universities had some offer of an Asian language and Asian studies were incorporated in some form or other in social science and humanities offerings. The veteran observer of Australian foreign relations, Gordon Greenwood concluded that the Sixties were characterised by the “remarkable growth of attention within so short a time to teaching and research about Asia”.

This shift was clearly demonstrated in the number of major publications devoted to the changes in international affairs and their impact for Australia. A series of volumes appeared from the Australian Institute of International Affairs with five yearly assessments, much focussed on the region. Key members of the Department of External Affairs also chided in with public criticism of the restrictive immigration policy. William Macmahon Ball, who had conducted shuttle diplomacy throughout the region since 1946, wrote a major piece for the Australian Institute of Political Science in 1961 warning that the good work of the Colombo Plan was being undermined by “racial discrimination”.19 Alan Watt, a career diplomat since the war, used the occasion of the Royal Milne lecture in 1964 to remind the Australian audience that the immigration policy was “what separated Australia from South-East Asia, to which it now belongs”.20

Many journals in the Sixties also took up the various issues in the region. As Australia moved to fight in Vietnam Hemisphere was challenged by a raft of the competitors. Australian Outlook appeared in 1965 and was to become the leading journal dedicated to international affairs. The University of Queensland put out the World Review and the Australian Journal of Politics and History, the University of Sydney published the Current Affairs Bulletin and the University of Melbourne produced the Journal of the Orientalists Society of Australia. In addition the journals Quadrant, Meanjin, Bulletin and the Australian Quarterly also appeared – all of which carried significant Asian material.

Particular attention was paid to relations with Japan, which rapidly emerged as Australia’s leading trade partner. During the Sixties a raft of exchanges were promoted. In 1966, as the White Australia was quietly being dismantled22 by Minister for Immigration, Hubert Opperman– with the support of his opposite number, Labor’s Fred Daly – 327 Japanese worked in Australian branches of their companies. Forty five worked in universities or the ABC. Organised visits by Japanese students had started three years before and starting in 1964 the National Union of Australian University students began annual pilgrimages to Japan. Australian film festivals started to screen Japanese masterpieces and inevitably the star-knife wielding Shintaro made it onto Australian black and white television sets. Not only was there an increasing interest in the study of Japanese at university level, schools showed signs of offering Japanese language study in Western

---

19 W. Macmahon Ball, “Australia’s Political Relations with Asia”, Australia and Asia, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1961, 75.
21 Greenwood, Approaches to Asia, 411.
22 Although Sean Brawley argues that technically the policy had not ended, even though ministerial discretion allowed the number of Asian immigrants to grow from this point. The White Peril: Foreign Relations and Asian Immigration to Australasia and North America 1919-78 (Kensington: UNSW Press, 1995), 312.
Australia, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland.23

Beyond White Australia

Education assumed great importance in the first half of the Seventies as Australian governments moved to bury the restrictive immigration policy and introduce a policy of multiculturalism. Education was also greatly influenced by the rapidly expanding secondary school retention rates which brought in its wake a debate about curriculum. Asian languages had been taught in universities but now attention turned to their role in the School curriculum. In 1970 Newcastle University Vice Chancellor, James Auchmuty studied the matter and reported that Asian languages were taught in only 108 secondary schools (and only six taught more than one language), and these focussed on three – Indonesian-Malay, Japanese and Chinese. His report was followed within two years by a large injection of Federal funds into this area as part of the Whiteman Government’s reform program. Here the emphasis was to be on a coordinated national approach to education generally and to curriculum development specifically.

There was more to studying Asia, however, than understanding languages. Australia had been very slow in developing school-level courses in Asian social studies. UNESCO had been requesting Australian initiative here since 1955 but little was done. Indeed a Western Australia study in 1956 found that Asian study in history and geography would “be likely to emphasise differences of colour and culture in an undesirable manner.”24 The Department of Foreign Affairs pressed the matter and in 1959 the Commonwealth Office of Education developed a curriculum for Asian history, geography and social studies25 but there was little done by the States before the Auchmuty Report.26

One result of the Auchmuty Report was the establishment of a coordinating committee for Asian Studies which would develop teaching materials for primary and secondary schools.27 Established in 1972 the Asian Studies Coordinating Committee was established to look into ways by which Asian course could be accorded “parity of esteem” with the dominant Western studies. The Commonwealth also provided travel grants for teachers to study in Asia and supported national action through the establishment of the Asian Studies Association of Australia. This body took the lead in arguing the need for a standing Asian Studies Council which in turn could chart the implementation of Asian languages and societies in all States. The leading light in this push was Australia’s first ambassador to the People’s Republic of China, Stephen Fitzgerald. To Fitzgerald the national approach to curriculum, that had been the hallmark of the Whitlam years, should be used in the promotion of Asian Studies.28

The work survived the Whitlam Government. Malcolm Fraser came to office in December 1975 with a determination to extend regional contact. He has been known more for his role as Minister for the Army during the Vietnam War, but he had a very different view of Asian engagements when he took on the Education and Science portfolio in the McMahon Administration. Fraser sent Cabinet a submission in June 1972 stressing the need to expand not only the teaching of Asian languages but also philosophy, culture and outlook. Reflecting on the strategic trends since the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, which had forecast a process of US engagement from Vietnam but also one of increased Allied engagement in the region, Fraser said

In view of the increasing need for independent Australian action in relations with her Asian neighbours, and bearing in mind Australia’s geographical position, it is essential that Australia should have a more thorough knowledge of the peoples and countries to their north…29

To support this broad thrust Fraser established in 1977 a committee to review migrant services (which produced the Galbally Report).30 The most public legacy of this work was the launching of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) which was dedicated to
screening shows and current affairs programs from a variety of non-English speaking backgrounds. SBS, along with the ABC’s Open Learning Programs, were given a boost when the Aussat company beamed its programs into the Asian region from satellites. Engaging Asia, in short, was a two way flow of information, into Asia and into Australian living rooms.

The problem, however, was that the Fraser Government also heralded an era when the great national structures were to be dismantled. Any strategic thrust into Asia was thwarted by the post-Whitlam rationalisation of education. The move for a national curriculum received a setback with the abolition of the Curriculum Development Centre under Fraser and the Federal Schools Commission under Hawke. Paralleling the dismantling of the Federal structures that might have given a lead to the setting of national priorities was the steady push to privatise education, which in the Australian context effectively meant a strengthening of Christian schools. At the level of higher education the call was to integrate education and the economy. In 1987 the Higher Education Green Paper broadly set the scene for the future: federal funding would be scaled back and tertiary institutions were expected to diversify their funding sources. A casualty was the Federal Professional Development Program in Multicultural Education.

In the straightened Eighties and early Nineties the talk may have been about Keating’s “big picture” in Asia, but everywhere education decision making was being devolved. Fitzgerald himself saw something of the effects of this trend in 1991 when the government refused, in a White paper on language teaching, to indicate which languages would have priority. With the States firmly in control of curriculum the push to Asia was lost in the competing claims that dominate curriculum debate. In 1989 NSW, which had pioneered Asian studies in the 1960s, listed six mandatory areas in its so-called Human Society and Its Environment Curriculum (HSIE) but Asia was not one of them. Asians Studies, wrote the Sydney Morning Herald, was “pushed aside” by a spread of offerings such as legal studies, business studies, Aboriginal studies and women’s studies. Similarly the attempt to replace World War I as the “core” in the NSW Modern History Syllabus with the Pacific War was met with solid resistance by politicians and most teachers. What was perhaps more alarming was that NSW had a centralised process of developing curriculum, unlike States like Queensland where local resistance to unpopular Asian courses would be even more strident.

At a national level the Asian engagement debate was centred in 1989 on a report produced by another former ambassador to China, Ross Garnaut. Garnaut understood that the prosperity that came from Asian trade could not come unless there was also a shift in education. His landmark report could survey the march of Australia from the protected imperial order, which had dominated in the first seven decades of nationhood, to the onset of the new global since Britain had joined the European Union. To Garnaut Australia needed to engage Asia with two ends in mind. First there was a need to ensure that teacher education give much more emphasis to Asian studies. Beyond that there was a need to provide a substantial boost to Australia’s “analytic capacity” of Asia. Garnaut also stressed that there was a need to improve knowledge of Australia throughout the region by promoting “Australian Education Centres” in cities such as Beijing, Seoul, Hong Kong and Taipei. The initiative bore fruit in 1996 with the launch of a number of strategic Australian Studies Centres in Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan, China, India, Thailand and Vietnam.

But there was now a clear break with the philosophy of the Colombo Plan era. The emphasis was no longer on shaping Asian attitudes in ways of Western development. That war had been won. The emphasis in the post-Cold War World would be on attracting fee-paying students. The full fee program was introduced in 1986 and was based largely on the enrolment in the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS). It did not get off to a smooth start with thousands of Chinese students seeking entry with a view to obtaining permanent residence. The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee called it an “education fiasco”. By the mid Nineties things had settled down with the Australian Government tightening entry requirements and starting a process of reviewing the standards of educational service provided to foreign students – the process of establishing clear protocols in service provision,

36 Weekend Australian, 28-29 September 1996.
37 Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, Australia - China Relations (Canberra: Senate Printing Unit, June 1996), 147.
however, would continue to the present. Nevertheless by 1996 the international student market was bringing in over $1.5 billion annually. By 2002 Australia had topped the OECD with one in five university students coming from abroad – double that of the nearest countries Britain, France and Germany. The Chinese made up 78 per cent of international students that year – 68,857–and they brought in one sixth of Australia’s $5.9 billion education services industry.38 Not surprisingly Australia’s aim was to bring China into the new World Trade Organisation and later to engage in Free Trade discussions. Education was an important part of this process.39

Conclusion

Australian policy makers have always been ambivalent about Asia. It has long promised a prosperous trading opportunity but it has also been kept at distance by the certainty of imperial protection. The situation changed markedly in 1941. The response to an emerging Asia thereafter was to a very large extent fashioned by education. Radio Australia broadcasts, the Colombo Plan and the attempt to elevate Asian studies in the curriculum were all part of a systematic attempt to revolutionise the mutual understanding of Australians and Asian elites. That at least was the broad thrust of policy until the last two decades of the Twentieth Century. Globalisation had somehow made the region less relevant and in any case had underlined the primacy of economic relations. In any event the era was one in which governments did less and the private sector set much of the debate.40 Fee-paying students from the region would constitute a life-line for cash-starved universities. The 1997 Asian economic crisis served to deflate the reputation of the Tigers for economic strength while the emergence of China was increasingly cast not as an opportunity for engagement but rather as a potential hegemonic threat to the region. The drawn-out tragedy of Timor was finally brought to a bloody conclusion in 1999 but left in its wake much uncertainty about what engaging our near neighbour meant. If Australia had a role in the region it would be determined by its security credentials – reflected in a defence budget that is more than South East combined.41 If Samuel Huntington is right, the post Cold War is one characterised by a clash of civilisations. Australia at the end of the day is a product of its past, not of its geography.42

About the Author

Assoc Prof Wayne Reynolds

---

38 “We top OECD for foreign students”, Australian Higher Education Supplement, 14 September 2005. In 2005 there were 50,000 Chinese students studying in Australia. Each year seven million Chinese students qualify for university study but there are only four million tertiary places in China itself. Chris Manner interview with Madame Fu Ying, China’s Ambassador to Australia, The Diplomat (6, February-March 2005), 10.


THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEARNING

Editors
Mary Kalantzis, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.
Bill Cope, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.

Editorial Advisory Board
Michael Apple, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.
David Barton, Lancaster University, UK.
Mario Bello, University of Science, Technology and Environment, Cuba.
Pascal Brown, Unitec New Zealand, New Zealand.
Robert Devillard, Kennesaw State University, USA.
Melinda Doody, Universitat Autònoma De Barcelona, Spain.
Manuela du Bois-Reymond, Universiteit Leiden, Netherlands.
Ruth Finnegan, Open University, UK.
James Paul Gee, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.
Kris Gutierrez, University of California, Los Angeles, USA.
Roz Ivanic, Lancaster University, UK.
Paul James, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.
Carey Jewitt, Institute of Education, University of London, UK.
Andreas Kazamias, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA
Peter Kell, University of Wollongong, Australia.
Michele Knobel, Montclair State University, New Jersey, USA.
Gunther Kress, Institute of Education, University of London.
Colin Lankshear, James Cook University, Australia.
Daniel Madrid Fernandez, University of Granada, Spain.
Milagros Mateu, NASA, USA.
Sarah Michaels, Clark University, Massachusetts, USA.
Denise Newfield, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa.
José-Luis Ortega, University of Granada, Spain.
Francisco Fernandez Palomares, University of Granada, Spain.
Ambigapathy Pandian, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.
Miguel A. Pereyra, University of Granada, Spain.
Scott Poynting, University of Western Sydney, Australia.
Angela Samuels, Montego Bay Community College, Montego Bay, Jamaica.
Juana M. Sancho Gil, University of Barcelona, Spain.
Michel Singh, University of Western Sydney, Australia.
Richard Sohmer, Clark University, Massachusetts, USA.
Pippa Stein, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa.
Brian Street, King’s College, University of London, UK.
Giorgos Tsiakalos, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.
Gella Varnava-Skoura, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece.
Cecile Walden, Sam Sharpe Teachers College, Montego Bay, Jamaica.
Nicola Yelland, RMIT University, Australia.
Wang Yingjie, School of Education, Beijing Normal University, China.
Zhou Zuoyu, School of Education, Beijing Normal University, China.

Please visit the Journal website at http://www.Learning-Journal.com for further information:
- ABOUT the Journal including Scope and Concerns, Editors, Advisory Board, Associate Editors and Journal Profile
- FOR AUTHORS including Publishing Policy, Submission Guidelines, Peer Review Process and Publishing Agreement

Subscriptions
The Journal offers individual and institutional subscriptions. For further information please visit http://ijl.cgpublisher.com/subscriptions.html. Inquiries can be directed to subscriptions@commongroundpublishing.com

Inquiries
Email: cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com