

Australian Migration Post-WWII

By Charles (Chas) Underwood

Australia has a rich history of migrants, ever since the First Fleet arrived in 1788. Dozens of different cultures have made the bold leap to Terra Incognita since then, but today I will be focusing on Post-World War Two migration. The migrants in these years were mainly from Europe or Asia. I will also provide a broader picture of Australian migration, the diversity, the skills, and the labour that migrants brought to Australia, even if they had nothing in their suitcase. Every migrant has an inspiring story to tell, from the Vietnamese who came Post-Vietnam War, battling the seas to survive, to my friend Melvin John, boldly tolerating bad food on his plane flight. Well, first things first, let's look at the migrants who came directly after the war; the Britons.

Before World War 2, Australia was already taking in the Britons, but the effect of the War meant that A LOT more decided to take the plunge. And who can blame them? Having your house destroyed by a German bomb really starts people off on these things. Australia was well aware that it would be a desirable country to migrate to, since the war had minimal effect on it. So it advertised furiously, and sure enough, people got on the boats. Of course, Australia made a profit from this, charging each family ten pounds. Because of this, the families became known as ten-pound Poms. (Pom being a nickname for Englishman. Still used today, particularly in cricket.) Naturally, it wasn't just the Poms coming in. Other Europeans, like Greeks, Italians and Czechs, must've read the advertisements as well. They came in the thousands, men, women and children. If you live in Australia today, you can see the effect they had on our country. You can't even walk a hundred metres without walking past a pizza parlour or café! If that's the payoff, I am absolutely fine with Italians coming to Australia. (Thanks for the gelato, guys!) As well as yummy food, they also brought skilled and unskilled labour to Australia. (Skilled = Cultural innovations, e.g. sewing, cooking. Unskilled labour = grunt work). In particular, the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electricity Scheme, which provided, as the name suggests, water and electricity via the Snowy Mountains for rural areas. Big name, big help. European migrants left their marks in more ways than one. And now, we move on to another culture big on tasty food, the Vietnamese.

In the 1960s, Europeans were still the main migrants to Australia, because our country had a 'White Australia' policy. Dislike of Asians stretches back to the goldfields, where Chinese miners, trying their luck at prospecting, were often shunned by European ones. But in the 1970s, Australia was more welcoming to possible Asian migrants. This came at exactly the right time, because Vietnam was in the grip of a major war. The Vietnam War. People fleeing their poverty-stricken country by any means possible, be it boat, plane or flying pig, came to the closest peaceful country they could find; Australia. Cuc Lam was one of these migrants pushed out by the war. With next to nothing in her possession, she made two trips, first to a refugee camp in Malaysia, then to Australia. A truly inspiring story, repeated thousands of times by other migrants. Vietnamese migration continued throughout the 1980s, and today the Vietnamese are a strong presence in Australia, and have settled into our society. Next up, their neighbours China!

The Chinese were one of the groups coming to Australia in the nineties. The political system in their country was unfair, and they wanted out. And they got out. They brought their delicious food with them, thank goodness. The other groups coming were our geographic neighbours, New Zealand, tempted by the promise of a stable economy and abundant jobs, and Middle Easterners, fleeing from war and religious discrimination. Middle Easterners are still coming today, for the same reasons sadly. It has been underlined

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by the media for quite some time now, and let's hope Mr Turnbull makes the right decisions on this topic. We are already going to accept an extra 12 000 this year. This underlines Australia's friendly culture, and hopefully we will take more in future years.

Today, the main migrants (as well as the Middle Easterners mentioned in the last paragraph) are Indians and Chinese. Much the same as previous decades, they have been tantalised by the promise of a safe country, good education, and job opportunities. A few of these opportunistic migrants are in my class, underlining the multicultural miracle that exists in Australia.

Well. That's that. Sixty-five years of migrants. Sixty-five years of desperation. Sixty-five years of inspiring tales. Sixty-five years of Australia. Migrants have brought so much to Australia's culture, from food to their unique skills. They all possess a determination, a resilience, a desperation, a hope. Australia fulfils this hope.