

# Chapter 73

## “We Still Don’t Like You but We Want Your Money”: The Case of Chinese Migration to Australia

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### ABSTRACT

*The history of Chinese migration goes back nearly as long as colonial settlement. The first major wave, which brought a noticeable number of Chinese to Australia, was the gold rush. Although the Chinese were the first non-British migrants they were heavily discriminated and looked down upon. Under the ‘White Australia Policy’, it was guaranteed that the Chinese would not become in any real way, part of the Australian population. Yet despite all these difficulties, by 2010-2011 Chinese migrants became the largest migrant group in Australia. This change is significant as it was a turning point in Australia’s demographic makeup (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016). This paper examines the phenomenon of Chinese migration into Australia and how it evolved from the early years of discrimination to more recent years when the Chinese are seen in more economic opportunist forms. The true motivations of the Australian authorities for opening up to the Chinese are indeed questionable which can aptly be summarised as “we may still not like you but we want your money”.*

### INTRODUCTION

Australia from its outset was country of migration be it colonial or otherwise. The historic waves of migration have been in line with the formation and development of this country. Much of the early migration to Australia involved British colonial people movement both in the form of British, free settlers as well as convicts and petty criminals (Migration Heritage Centre 2017). Non-British settlement and migration on the other hand has however generally been a source of curiosity and even controversy.

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Chinese settlement in Australia has evolved from being tightly controlled migration in the early times (enshrined through the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901), popularly known as the White Australian Policy, which effectively banned Asian migration for the next fifty years, through to more modern times whereby Chinese migration is amongst the top sources of migration to Australia. Highlighted by the last decade of strong economic engagement between China and Australia, the very relationship between these two nations have almost turned full circle. As Collins noted: “For most of its history Australia attempted to exclude Asians from Australian life, in the last decade Asia and Asians have played a greater role in Australian society than at any time in its history” (Collins, 1995, pp. 378). Today China is Australia’s largest trading partner, has a strategic Free Trade Agreement and challenges the US for Asian regional security leadership. The purpose of this paper is to ascertain the changes in Australia’s approach towards the Chinese and how these changes have gone from initially being discriminatory to a business approach towards migration. In addition, this paper will seek to highlight the manner in which, different from the past, Chinese migrants have sought out Australia as a new destination and home from the 1990s until today.

## **A Short Overview of Chinese Migration to Australia**

Chinese migration to Australia is one of the oldest outside of British migration. Chinese migration to Australia goes back to two specific periods of Australia’s short history. The first period included the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century associated with the news of gold discoveries especially in Victoria and New South Wales. The second phase of this Chinese migration is in a more contemporary period, which emerged towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the new millennium.

The gold rush brought large numbers of Chinese to Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A large proportion of them settled around the goldfields in Victoria and New South Wales. For instance between 1851 and 1861 42,000 migrants came from China which was the third top from the list after British and Irish and continental Europe (Migration Heritage Centre 2017). In 1861, the Chinese population in Victoria made up 7 per cent of the total (Museum Victoria 2017) and reached 3.3 per cent of the total Australian population.

This large presence of Chinese would even out by the time of Federation in 1901 with Chinese making up a 1 per cent of the total population (Inglis, 2006). While the Chinese were one of the first non-British migrants to make a mark on Australian demography, the 1901 Immigration Restriction Policy, known as White Australia, ensured that Chinese would not be welcomed to this new nation. Collins observed that White Australia was “the bedrock of the new Australian nation at federation in 1901, blocking entry for Asian and other ‘coloured’ people to Australia until the 1960s” (Collins, 1995, pp. 376). Moreover, White Australia also guaranteed that the Chinese would not figure in any real way in the Australian population (as can be seen from Table 1) until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the White Australia Policy died and buried.

The next wave of arrivals were ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia during the 1970s when the White Australia came to an end under the Whitlam government (1972-1975) and to further the point in January 1973, Australia recognised the existence of the People’s Republic of China which until then had been a no-go area diplomatically. Australian diplomat and China observer FitzGerald noted: “The great post-war of Australia’s attitude to Asia was its joining hands with America in the policy of non-recognition and containment of China” (Fitzgerald, 1997, pp. 3). Equally important, under the proceeding government of Malcolm Fraser, it was “decided for the first time in Australia’s history to accept large numbers of Asian immigrants for permanent settlers” (Sheridan, 1995, pp. 7). These were ground

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