Australia and Europe

Australia and Asia Pacific: Cultural Narratives and "Asian Values"

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ANY CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION of values, governance, and international relations in the Asia Pacific region inevitably involves the concept of culture, especially in view of its centrality to the ongoing debate about "Asian values," which in turn has important implications for political relations not only among countries of the region but well beyond the region, as well. Culture is very often taken to be the primary source of values—if not the only source. But the idea of culture is itself highly problematic. As soon as we start asking more specific questions about what culture is, how it influences or forms people's value systems, and what role it plays in politics and governance, we are likely to find ourselves in a maze of confusion and contradictions. A thorough exploration of these issues is certainly beyond the scope of the present discussion, but it is necessary at least to be critically aware that such concepts as culture, which we refer to so often in talking about values, cannot be taken as simple self-explanatory concepts.

This can be illustrated by reference to the enormous body of literature dealing with the concept of culture that has emerged in the discipline of anthropology over the last hundred years. During this time, anthropologists, as well as other social scientists, have attempted to distill the meaning of culture in order to gain a better conceptual grasp of what it is that they are dealing with. In the process, however, meanings have proliferated, and there is still no agreed upon understanding of what culture is and how it gives rise to a coherent framework of values for any human community. Nonetheless, it is often confidently

asserted not only that culture is a tangible analytical category but also that we can identify actual cultures and give them names.

In politics and international relations, these named cultures have moved well beyond the early anthropological conceptions that focused on small-scale communities, and have become largely equated with nation-states. So we speak not only of, say, Malaysia or Singapore or Australia (as states) but also of Malaysian culture, Singaporean culture, Australian culture, and so on. Beyond these categories, proponents of the concept of Asian culture have posited an even larger and more diverse entity, "Asia," as the contextual framework for Asian values. My view is that such categories bear very little analytical weight or substance when scrutinized even in the most superficial way for coherent cultural properties. Such problems, however, have rarely prevented the generation of gross stereotypes. And they have certainly never prevented state elites from deploying these categories to considerable advantage, as has been only too evident in much of the political rhetoric that has accompanied the Asian values debate.

Another notable feature of this debate is the extent to which "Asia" is seen as a contrast to "the West" (and vice versa). Indeed, the construction of "Asia" as a tangible entity is very much dependent on the existence of "the West" as a category against which Asia can be defined. This is important for considering Australia's place in Asia Pacific, since Australia is usually described in cultural (as well as economic) terms as a "European outpost" in a decidedly non-Western region, and is therefore usually placed well outside the sphere of "Asianness." This is often seen as one of Australia's main obstacles to achieving integration in the region, politically if not economically.

Historically, Australia's exclusion from this sphere was very much self-imposed. Until the late 1960s, successive governments sought to preserve virtually all aspects of Australia's cultural (and racial) distinctiveness through such measures as the now infamous White Australia policy, which essentially restricted immigration to people of Caucasian background. Over the last thirty years, however, far-reaching changes have taken place. Due to the implementation of a nondiscriminatory immigration policy, Australia is now regarded as one of the most multicultural countries in the world, with its population drawn from virtually every corner of the globe. The largest proportion of recent immigrants from non-English-speaking or non-European countries, though, has come from the East Asian region.[1] In addition, successive governments have worked hard to ensure that Australia is seen as an

integral part of, and has a secure future in, what is widely perceived as the world's most economically dynamic region, financial crises notwithstanding.

Australia's "enmeshment with Asia"—the phrase most often used to describe the aim of government policy—obviously involves more than just economic issues, since it also brings into focus all those problems and questions concerning social or cultural values mentioned above. Despite the increasingly multicultural makeup of the population, Australia is still regarded—by the majority of its own inhabitants as well as by other countries—as essentially Western. With respect to politics and governance, it would certainly be foolish to attempt to argue that the Australian system is anything but an adaptation of the British system of responsible government, overlaid with aspects of American-style federalism, and that it belongs to the broad category of "Western democracies."

But this by itself does not distinguish Australia from its regional neighbors. After all, most countries in the region have adopted forms of government which, at least in terms of institutional structures if not always in practice, are adaptations of one or another of the major Western democratic models. Many would therefore argue that what really differentiates Australia from its neighbors and, together with New Zealand, gives it a unique place in Asia Pacific is the framework of social and political values that are supplied by "culture." And this, in turn, is often seen as decisive for the way in which Australian political institutions operate in the domestic sphere, as well as for how Australian governments have interacted with their regional counterparts on a range of issues.

While acknowledging that cultural differences among human groups certainly do exist and that these play a part in shaping social, political, and economic perspectives and values, I contend, nonetheless, that the culture concept has been strategically deployed in much of the contemporary Asian values debate as a rhetorical weapon which has a great deal less to do with actual values than with realpolitik. As suggested above, this debate obviously has special significance for Australia because to the extent that "Asian values" have been defined largely in contrast with "Western values," at least by protagonists in the debate, Australia is clearly excluded from their ambit. Some political leaders in the region, most notably Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia, have frequently emphasized this point, claiming that Australia can never be a genuine part of Asia because of the irredeemably

Western nature of its value base and predominant cultural outlook.

To place the question of culture and its implications for values and governance in Australia as well as Australia's relations with the region into perspective, we first look briefly at the history of Australia's social, economic, and political development. Here I am especially concerned with certain myths and images that seem to predominate in stereotypes about Australia and Australians. The subsequent sections deal with aspects of Australia's system of politics and government, certain economic issues, immigration policy, some social and political aspects of multiculturalism in contemporary Australia, and Australia's relations with the region over such matters as human rights. Special attention is of course paid to the relevance of these for the broader issues of values, governance, and international relations.

IMAGES OF AUSTRALIA

A common image of Australia is that of a "young country" with a relatively shallow history, effectively reaching back a mere two hundred years or so. Certainly there are no ancient pyramids, cathedrals, temples, great walls, or other spectacular physical structures to give the observer the same "sense of history" that one may feel when gazing upon such marvels in other parts of the world. But Australia is scarcely young in any sense of the word. Geologically speaking, it is the oldest landmass in the world. Moreover, it has been inhabited for at least forty thousand years by Aboriginal peoples.[2] Australian history and culture, however, are usually seen as beginning with the arrival of the first permanent colonial settlers from Britain. In terms of prevailing notions of international law, the British viewed the Australian continent as *territoria nullius* and therefore available for the unimpeded application of British sovereignty and everything that went with it in the way of legal, social, political, and economic institutions and customs.[3]

Since the first colony was established in what is now the city of Sydney in 1788, the presence of Aboriginal people as a percentage of the total population has declined to the extent that they now make up only about 1.6 percent. This has come about not only because of continuous immigration from other parts of the world but also as a result of policies and practices, both official and unofficial, that saw their numbers decimated in parts of the country and, in the case of Tasmania, almost completely wiped out. A recent inquiry into the official policy

of assimilation that operated for five decades, until the 1960s, and that involved the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their own families to be brought up either in white families or in institutions, has described this policy as genocide, since it was quite deliberately aimed at destroying Aboriginal existence in terms of culture, language, and identity. In the end, the policy did not succeed, and Aboriginal cultures and societies have survived in one form or another.

The first settlement in Sydney, and others like it around Australia's shores,[4] began as a dumping ground for unwanted convicts, and many of the social concerns of Australia's white settlers and their descendants are said to have been significantly influenced by the tawdry nature of these beginnings. In a well-known historical account of the early period of convict settlement, it is argued that there is "an unstated bias rooted deep in Australian life." It involves a wish that Australia's "real" history had a more respectable beginning, starting "with the flood of money from gold and wool, the opening of the continent [and] the creation of an Australian middle class" rather than with the clanking fetters of some 160,000 transported convicts (Hughes 1987, xi).

> What the convict system bequeathed to later Australian generations was . . . an intense concern with social and political respectability. The idea of the "convict stain," a moral blot soaked into our fabric, dominated all argument about Australian selfhood by the 1840s and was the main rhetorical figure used in the movement to abolish transportation. Its leaders called for abolition, not in the name of an independent Australia, but as Britons who felt their decency impugned by the survival of convictry . . . [A]nd for decades to come, the official voices of Australia would continue to stake their claim to respectability on their Britishness. (xi–xii)[5]

This assessment is somewhat at odds with other popular myths about Australian identity or "character" which predominated at least up until the 1960s and emanated largely from a certain self-image of white, male Australians. The historian Russel Ward has argued that the characteristics embedded in the predominant myth are derived largely from stereotypes of nineteenth-century pastoral workers, many of whom were, or had been, convicts, rather than from the great majority of Australians, who have always dwelt in urban clusters around Australia's shoreline. Moreover, Ward argues that this identity emanates from the common people rather than from the "more respected

or cultivated sections of society." According to the myth, the "typical Australian," apart from being male, is practical, rough and ready in manners, and disliking affectation in others; a great improviser and capable of working hard—but not without good cause; taciturn rather than talkative; skeptical about religion as well as of intellectual and "higher" cultural pursuits; deeply committed to the egalitarian idea that the laborer is as good as the master (if not better); highly critical of eminent people unless their eminence has been achieved through sport or some other feat of physical prowess; and a fiercely independent person who loathes officiousness and authority and would never betray a "mate" (1966, 1–2).

Although, as Ward points out, this legendary image never really characterized more than a relative handful of Australians and, like many other depictions of "national character," may be "absurdly romanticized and exaggerated," elements of the legend have certainly underscored various versions of self-imposed stereotypes about Australians, their attitudes, and their habits of thought (Ward 1966, 1). In a more recent commentary, John Dryzek states: "Popular accounts of the political dispositions of the Australian are replete with ideas such as a general belief in a 'fair go,' resentment of 'tall poppies' [and] anti-intellectualism" (1994, 234). This clearly accords with certain key aspects of Ward's account, although it remains "mythical" in the sense that it undoubtedly applies to only some sectors of the population.

Those who are accustomed to hearing that Australian values, like those of other countries with a largely European heritage, are infused with a high degree of individualism—in contrast to the alleged collectivism of Asian societies—may be surprised to learn that Ward's "legend" also incorporated a strong element of collectivism. Since this legend was based on a stereotype of a working man, however, it must be understood to apply to lower socioeconomic classes rather than, say, business elites. Another point to note is that this type of collectivism did not incorporate a general disposition toward acceptance of government authority, as the Asian version is said to. According to Ward, it was manifest in quite opposite attitudes (1966, 245). Nor did it reflect some great conception of the national interest overriding individual aspirations. Rather, it gave rise to a relatively strong labor movement concerned with protecting the interests of workers vis-à-vis the more prosperous and politically powerful classes.

But again, this is only one version of Australian "values," "identity," or "character." Another study, which is at odds with at least some

aspects of the "egalitarian collectivist" element described by Ward, finds that Australians are more likely to be conservative, are not especially egalitarian, and hold quite authoritarian attitudes, including strong beliefs about obedience to the law as well as respect for authority (Bean 1993, cited in Dryzek 1994, 234). While on the subject of these particular values, let us also consider a remark offered by a contemporary commentator on Asian values: "We [Asians] have a respect for authority and a yearning for stability and strong government which most in the West cannot understand" (Sopiee 1995, 190). Clearly, at least some in the West, possibly a significant proportion, subscribe to precisely the same values. But as Dryzek notes, analyses which aggregate attitudes in order to posit a singular version of "political culture" are not all that helpful. It makes much more sense to try to identify a range of discourses which exist within a community but which cannot be combined to create a single narrative (1994, 234).

The idea of a single, national narrative, however, is one of the most common themes in modern politics. Moreover, it is a rare political leader who does not attempt, either implicitly or explicitly, to develop such a narrative to suit his or her own broad agenda. In an analysis of former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating's attempts to shape a suitable narrative about Australian society, Carol Johnson has argued that the project was quite clearly aimed at configuring Australian cultural and social identities to suit his government's wider economic agenda. Part of this exercise involved the question of Australia's becoming a republic, as well as the vigorous promotion of multiculturalism. Underlying these issues was another, much more pragmatic concern to develop economic links with the rapidly growing economies of Australia's neighbors to the north. In this respect, Johnson suggests that Keating envisioned multiculturalism "as a resource for developing export links" (1996b, 13) and that his republican agenda was explicitly connected with "the need to orientate the Australian economy towards Asia" (1996a, 26).

Whether or not Keating's approach to issues of social values, cultural identity, and the national narrative had a distinct instrumental dimension, there is no evidence to suggest that he lacked commitment to the principles underscoring republicanism and multiculturalism and to an immigration program that welcomed newcomers regardless of place of origin, as well as to broader social and political aspects of engagement with the region. This is not to say that his judgment about how to deal with regional leaders such as Mahathir was always faultless.

However, the present prime minister, John Howard, has displayed a quite different set of attitudes and approaches to a number of these issues. This has become especially evident in the debate which has erupted in Australia since the general election of March 1996, and which has revolved very largely around an outspoken, independent member of the Federal Parliament, Pauline Hanson. But before moving on to discuss the issues raised by the "Hanson phenomenon," we shall look at some basic features of Australian government as it has developed since federation in 1901.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

When Australia achieved independence on January 1, 1901, it did so with a written constitution that kept the British monarch as formal head of state, provided for a popularly elected bicameral legislature and an independent judiciary, and established a federal system of government in which the former colonies became states, retaining their own constitutions and legislatures. Both the national and the state systems have undergone changes over the years, but the essential features of the constitutional system as it existed at the beginning of the century are largely intact. Arguably, this reflects a certain degree of flexibility in the formal system itself, to the extent that it can accommodate significant political and social change over a long period of time. This is partly assisted by the High Court's ability to interpret, and reinterpret, provisions of the Constitution (including those affecting legislative powers and responsibilities) in the light of contemporary developments, problems, and needs. In recent years, for example, the High Court has ruled on a number of issues crucial to Aboriginal land claims and has effectively restored some Aboriginal rights after two centuries of almost unmitigated dispossession.[6]

Over the years, political, social, and economic links with Britain have been transformed, as well. In the earlier part of this century, Australia's foreign policy was virtually dictated by Westminster. World War II was the most significant historical factor which changed this, along with some other key aspects of Australian policy. Ties were progressively weakened on the economic front, as well, especially when Britain joined the Common Market and Australian goods could no longer gain ready access to British markets. Other political and legal links became further attenuated over time as well, although it was not until 1986 that the Australia Act was passed by Parliament, which

formally terminated the last remaining vestiges of colonial rule (Galligan 1993, 61–63). Nonetheless, Australia retains the British monarch as head of state to this day, and although it makes no difference to Australia's legal and international status as a sovereign nation, it has been the subject of much debate in recent years.

The prominence of the current debate is due largely to a strong, proactive republican movement that since the late 1980s has attracted significant support from the population at large as well as prominent politicians. And while Labor Party politicians have been the most outspoken, a number from the more conservative Coalition parties have added their voices to calls for the formalization of an Australian republic. Proponents of an Australian republic argue that it is unfitting, if not ridiculous, for Australia to retain the British monarch as head of state. A 1986 Constitutional Commission proposed that the time had come for all Australia's institutions, symbols, and conditions of citizenship to reflect properly "Australia's status as an independent nation and a Federal Parliamentary democracy" (Warhurst 1993, 100). While the issue does not really affect Australia's relations with its neighbors, there is no doubt that the inevitable portrait of the queen of England which adorns the walls of Australian embassies around the region has been the subject of some puzzlement on the part of local visitors. Australian republicans also argue that the ever-diminishing British character of Australia and the increasingly multicultural makeup of the population (which of course includes many migrants from Asia Pacific) make the retention of the British monarch even more inappropriate.

Another important feature of government and politics in Australia which has developed since the time of federation, and which is often seen to be anathema to certain "Asian values," is an adversarial party system. While political parties are now a ubiquitous feature of virtually every political system in the world, from the most authoritarian to the most liberal, it is frequently argued that a competitive party system incorporating a distinct, legally protected opposition which is capable of replacing the government via a popular election is the sine qua non of modern representative democracy. One writer has defined democracy as "the toleration of opposition," arguing that insofar as alternative governments are permitted to take office, as well as merely to exist, then democracy exists. He goes on to say that insofar as opposition "is persecuted, rendered illegal, or stamped out of existence, democracy is not present, and either never has existed or is in the

process of being destroyed" (Durban 1962, 558). In further explaining the nature of constitutional political opposition and its role within the framework of a democratic, constitutional system of representative government, Graham Maddox writes: "Democratic opposition implies a toleration of different points of view. It works within the system and does not 'contest' a legitimate government's right to govern, nor does it try to overthrow the system within which the political conflict takes place. It is 'institutionalised' because the system itself is so constructed as to recognise that different views need to be expressed, and that governments need to be criticised and controlled" (1996, 256).

An adversarial system of government and opposition has certainly characterized Australian politics at both state and federal levels since the early decades of this century. Arguably, it is the strength of the alternating system of party government, and the extent to which government in Australia has changed hands peacefully and with reasonable regularity over a long period of time, that distinguishes Australia from many of its neighbors in the region—especially those whose ruling elites hold to the idea that criticism and dissent are not only tantamount to disloyalty to the state but also represent the expression of "unauthentic" political values in an Asian context. However, these views have come to characterize fewer and fewer states in the region since succession of government has become a more common feature of other Asia Pacific nations.

Underscoring the adversarial two-party system of government and opposition, therefore, are a number of important assumptions that are often linked to such concepts as political culture and values. And it is these assumptions that are held to stand in contradistinction to those that have been identified as making up the distinctive cluster of so-called Asian values. Put briefly, proponents of the Asian values school claim that their values (and therefore a certain distinctive style of Asian politics) are based on such ideals as consensus, harmony, unity, and community. These are generally contrasted with a very different set of values said to characterize the West, namely, dissensus, conflict, disunity, and individualism.[7] The adversarial system of government and opposition is assumed to be a product of the latter set of values, reflecting the inherent individualism of Western societies in contrast with the essential collectivism of Asian societies. In summary, because the values associated with the operation of free political opposition seem so incompatible with the kind of Asian values described above, it has often been argued that adversarial politics, and therefore

a legitimate political opposition, are politically, socially, and culturally undesirable.

Debate surrounding the issue of political opposition, including a competitive party system and the possibility of succession of government, also involves questions of human rights, and here we encounter the now familiar conceptual division of civil and political rights on the one hand and social, cultural, and economic rights on the other. The former rights encompass freedom of speech (and therefore of the press) and freedom of association (and therefore of people to organize themselves for political purposes), and are therefore clearly essential for the operation of political opposition. These same rights, however, are frequently construed as "individual rights" and are held up as essentially incompatible with the notions of collective rights said to characterize "Asian approaches."

There is not the space to provide an extensive analysis of all these issues here, so just several points will have to suffice. Proponents of Asian values generally assume that "Asian" and "Western" societies embody certain essential (and largely unchanging) characteristics that are encapsulated in the terms "collectivist" and "individualistic," respectively. These characteristics are further construed as essentially incommensurable in that they constitute absolute opposites. The possibility that societies may contain elements of both, and that both may interact in a milieu of creative tension, is not considered. Moreover, the simplistic characterizations deployed in respect of "Asia" and "the West" ignore the extent to which collectivist values have permeated many aspects of political ideology in the latter (especially via socialism) and, with regard to the former, often conflate a model of close family relationships with some kind of collectivist loyalty to the state per se.

In practical policy terms, Australia's relations with some of its neighbors in the Asia Pacific region have suffered some strains over human rights issues. And there has been some debate within Australia, too, over just how human rights issues should be treated. One writer notes that whereas the Australian government (at least before Howard) considered itself very vigorous and consistent about upholding human rights principles, human rights groups in Australia think the government approach is too soft, while business people consider the behavior of both the government and nongovernmental organizations as "way over the top" (Sheridan 1995, 132). The same writer suggests that as Australia continues to integrate with the countries of the region, not only economically but on a personal and cultural level as

well, the main problems are likely to involve questions of human rights and democracy. In analyzing the potential problems, he distinguishes two very different perspectives or approaches. The first is the "cultural convergence" perspective, which reflects Francis Fukuyama's vision of the end of history in the sense that there are no longer any real ideological obstacles to the spread of liberal democracy and capitalism. Keating's approach to the region is said to have reflected a crude version of this type of liberal triumphalism. The other perspective is a "culturalist" one and is most (in)famously represented in the recent writings of Samuel Huntington on the "clash of civilizations." According to this view, Australia has much to fear by virtue of its significantly different cultural base vis-à-vis its large and powerful neighbors (Sheridan 1995, 132–133).

The culturalist view, which is based on a static and highly deterministic conception of culture, gives prime explanatory value to a form of organic communitarianism. These notions also accord with the idea of incommensurable value systems—especially as between "the West" and "the rest"—and it is this idea of essential incommensurability that underscores the normative elements of the Asian values debate, especially in relation to human rights and democracy. As mentioned previously, two of the most simplistic cultural values which have been used to characterize the differences between Asian and Western societies are collectivism and individualism. And while the most vocal proponents of Asian values have been political elites from parts of Southeast Asia, some prominent commentators in Australia have also endorsed such views, as is evident in the following extract:

> The cultural differences between Asian societies are of course also great. But one characteristic which they almost all have in common and which distinguishes them from Australian and other English-speaking Western countries is that they are what social scientists describe as collectivist whereas we are individualistic.
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> There are many complexities to this distinction (there are also exceptions to it), but the critical difference is the way in which personal relationships and groups have an almost organic function in a collectivist society and are the dominant motivation in almost every human encounter. Research on collectivist societies concludes, for example, that people in such societies are born into family and other ingroups which protect them in

exchange for loyalty; identity is based in the social network to which one belongs; harmony is important and direct confrontation is avoided. (Fitzgerald 1997, 171–172)

Other Australian writers argue in similar terms: "Even in Asian states that have been heavily influenced by European constitutional and political ideas, it is the communitarian rather than the individualistic dimension of citizenship that predominates. In Australia there tends to be a far greater emphasis on the rights of individual citizens and less on their duties to the community" (Milner and Quilty 1996, 8).

Such statements have become so common that they are accepted as basic fact. Moreover, they ignore the degree of collectivism that has been a part of Australian political and social life for a very long period, as reflected in a distinct strand of democratic socialism. While the contemporary period has seen this aspect of Australian social life under attack, especially from the present government, it is nonetheless an important part of Australia's social and political history. At the same time, such views ignore the increasingly significant elements of individualism in industrialized (and industrializing) Asia. There is obviously insufficient space here to assess critically the assumptions behind such views or to address all the political implications. But let us keep in mind the problem of the extent to which these or other assumed cultural values translate into political behavior, especially in the realm of normative issues. One of the most astute observations about the dangers of narrow culturalist approaches to normative aspects of governance comes from Malaysia's former deputy prime minister:

It is altogether shameful . . . to cite Asian values as an excuse for autocratic practices and denial of basic rights and liberties. To say that freedom is Western or unAsian is to offend our own traditions. . . . It is true that Asians lay great emphasis on order and societal stability. But it is certainly wrong to regard society as a kind of deity upon whose altar the individual must constantly be sacrificed. No Asian tradition can be cited to support the proposition that in Asia, the individual must melt into a faceless community. (Anwar 1996, 28)

To return briefly to the matter of strains in the relations between Australia and regional neighbors over human rights issues, the above discussion suggests that assumptions about the extent to which these

strains are caused by differences in values must be treated with caution. Take, for example, the question of torture and arbitrary killing of civilians by a state's security forces. There is no set of cultural values that has been put forward as legitimizing such actions (yet such actions have unquestionably occurred in parts of the region and have been sanctioned by state authorities either formally or informally). Countries like Australia may well protest when such incidents come to light, and usually do. Other countries in the region may say nothing. But this is not necessarily because they endorse such actions. They are more likely driven by a strong and overriding concern about interference in the internal affairs of another state. Certainly, states where such actions occur are quick to invoke the doctrine of state sovereignty as a barrier to external criticism, as well as equally convenient doctrines associated with "domestic security," to repress internal criticism and protest. The one value that is at issue here, at least with respect to the former, is that of noninterference in the internal affairs of a state in terms of either action or criticism. And this value, far from being essentially Asian, is based on the indisputably Western doctrine of state sovereignty.

There is a great deal more that could be said on this and related subjects, but we must return now to some issues involving immigration into Australia, especially from neighboring countries, and the policy of multiculturalism.

IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

Australia is a very different place in the 1990s from what it was even thirty or forty years earlier. One of the most important changes to have occurred is linked directly to shifting demographic patterns, initially brought about by the nature of post–World War II immigration. Whereas most prewar immigrants were largely from the British Isles, from the late 1940s onward a much higher proportion was to come from non-English-speaking European countries. This resulted in a shift, slow at first, from a largely monocultural Anglo-Celtic society to a more multicultural (albeit still mostly European) one. Social changes reflecting demographic transformation were slow partly because migrant numbers were obviously small at first, but also because the prevailing social and political atmosphere strongly encouraged assimilation.

From the late 1960s onward, however, even more profound changes

occurred. First, the official White Australia policy was abandoned. This policy, which unashamedly restricted immigration into Australia on racial grounds, had prevailed since the Australian colonies federated in 1901 to establish a national, independent government and enacted the Immigration Restriction Act and, two years later, the Nationality and Citizenship Act, which prohibited the naturalization of non-Europeans. Some may like to sanitize the historical origins of the policy by arguing that the prospect of abundant cheap labor from the region pouring across Australia's shores prompted genuine concerns for the living standards of Australian workers at the time and that the policy was not motivated simply by racism. While there are certainly elements of truth in concerns about labor at the time, there is no escaping the conclusion that the policy was also driven very strongly by racialist assumptions embedded in a derivative British-Australian nationalism. An early analyst of the policy contends that toward the end of the nineteenth century justifications for the policy were expressed in terms of a fear that the "British character of the community" might be destroyed, along with the political and social institutions that the community valued (Willard 1923, 189). Some of the arguments of that time also identified the apparent reluctance of certain immigrants to "assimilate" as good reason for a restrictive policy.

> To preserve the unity of their national life, a people can admit emigrants from alien races only if within a reasonable time they show a willingness and a capacity to amalgamate ideally as well as racially with them. Australians have formed their restrictive policy because . . . they believe that at present non-Europeans of the labouring classes have neither this willingness nor this capacity. The Chinese in Australia, for instance, tended to congregate into communities of their own, living their own life uninfluenced by the ideas and customs of the people amongst whom they had settled. In other words, they remained aliens. As a matter of experience and of fact, . . . there was no desire on the part either of "whites" or of "coloured races" to merge in a common citizenship. (Willard 1923, 190)[8]

As we shall see shortly, similar arguments and perspectives have been voiced by Hanson, an Australian politician who achieved more notoriety in the space of a year in Parliament than many do in a lifetime.

The abandonment of White Australia, the subsequent change in

immigration patterns, and strong bipartisan political support for an official policy of multiculturalism (rather than assimilation) therefore represented significant changes—changes which had very obvious implications for Australia's relations with the Asia Pacific region. This was certainly so in terms of Australia's economic future. It has been noted that by the early 1990s more than half of Australia's exports were directed to the region, while almost the same proportion of imports were sourced there. Of Australia's ten largest markets, seven were located in the region. In addition, about a quarter of the total foreign investment in Australia came from the region, while almost one-fifth of Australia's overseas investments were also located there (Evans and Grant 1991, 12). Neville Meaney writes that "the Federation's ideal of 'White Australia' and its perception of Asia as the alien other have in the last two decades come to be discarded and replaced by the notion of the 'multicultural' society and Australia as integrally part of Asia and prospectively a 'Eurasian' nation. . . . [T]his change represents the transformation of what for three generations had been the absolute orthodoxy of national existence" (1995, 171).

All these developments seemed to indicate that Australians, instead of struggling "against the reality of their geography," had for the most part finally accepted that their future lies in this region (Meaney 1995, 187). Or so many believed until the emergence in 1996 of a "phenomenon" associated with the election to Parliament of an outspoken opponent of affirmative action for Aboriginal peoples, the policy of multiculturalism, and further immigration from the Asian region. From the moment Hanson, an independent member of Parliament elected in the seat of Oxley, Queensland, delivered her first speech in the House of Representatives in September 1996, there has been an intense and often vitriolic public debate about the whole range of issues associated with the impact of immigration on Australian society and the economy, as well as the issue of Aboriginal rights and the redress of injustices against past and present generations. Because Hanson has received so much media attention both within Australia and around the region, it is important to look at her rise to prominence and the issues that this has raised for the broader themes of values, governance, and international relations.

Hanson was elected to Parliament in the general election of March 1996, which also saw the return to power of the relatively conservative Coalition government of the Liberal and National Parties under Howard's leadership. Hanson had originally run as a member of the

Liberal Party for the seat of Oxley in southeastern Queensland but had been disendorsed by the party during the election campaign after making racist remarks about Aborigines. Since this occurred so late in the campaign, the Liberals did not have time to endorse another candidate and she was elected at least partly by default. Nonetheless, she achieved one of the biggest electoral swings against the outgoing Labor government, which had previously held the seat of Oxley, thereby lending some credence to the idea that a significant proportion of the electorate supported her views.

Although she achieved a certain notoriety at that time, it was Hanson's first speech to Parliament that focused the attention of the Australian media and observers in the region on her ideas. A considerable part of this speech concerned Aboriginal issues and the longstanding bipartisan policies supporting various affirmative-action programs. She then went on to call for a radical review of Australia's immigration policy as well as abolition of the policy of multiculturalism, arguing that a "truly multicultural country can never be united and strong" and alleging that the demise of multiculturalism would not only save billions of dollars but also "allow those from ethnic backgrounds to join mainstream Australia." The most inflammatory remarks concerning immigration and multiculturalism, however, were directed to migrants from the Asian region and echoed the sentiments expressed in support of the White Australia policy: "I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians. . . . They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate." The last part of Hanson's speech consisted largely of a warning of future dangers to the interests of Australians from foreign interests:

> We must look after our own before lining the pockets of overseas countries and investors at the expense of our living standards and future.
>
> Time is running out. We may have only 10 to 15 years left to turn things around. Because of our resources and our position in the world, we will not have a say because neighbouring countries . . . are well aware of our resources and potential. Wake up, Australia, before it is too late. (Australia 1996, 3860–3863)

The reaction in the press was very critical but at the same time expressed concern that Hanson was echoing the views, if not of the "mainstream" of the Australian community, then at least of an important minority. One writer suggested that she "represents an undercurrent

which is running strong and becoming more visible. . . . [She is] a warn-
ing to the main parties of something quite nasty happening out there
in the electorate." He went on to attempt to locate this in the context
of contemporary social and economic change and what it has meant
for some Australians:

> She is the embodiment of a strong and widespread sense in the
> community of alienation from, and disillusionment with, the po-
> litical system and government. She is a protest.
>
> The views she expresses are a collection of the grievances from
> mainly working-class, white Anglo-Saxons . . . battling to pay
> mortgages and worried about their jobs, their security and their
> children's futures, who feel that no-one is listening to them and
> no-one cares. (Kitney 1996)

An editorial column published in a leading Australian newspaper
at much the same time suggested that the significance of her election
to Parliament was being overstated and that it was dangerous to draw
the conclusion that she had succeeded in tapping "a rich vein of racism
and xenophobia." But it also said that while there was no evidence that
Hanson's views were supported by anything near a majority of people,
or that they even represented a growing body of opinion, it would none-
theless be wrong for both the government and the opposition simply to
ignore her. The Coalition, according to the editorial, had a particular
responsibility to reject her "extremist views" ("Ms Hanson" 1996). This
was similar to an editorial published earlier in another prominent
newspaper that pointed out that one "fundamental demand of politics
in a democracy is moral leadership," especially when it comes to such
issues as racism, and that it was especially important to challenge Han-
son's views at the highest level ("Leaders and Followers" 1996).

But the government under Howard's leadership appeared to be ex-
tremely weak on the issue. Not only did Howard refuse to repudiate
Hanson's views as soon as they were voiced, he chose instead to high-
light the right to free speech. In an implicit reference to Hanson's criti-
cism of Aborigines and migrants, Howard said that it was time once
again to support freedom of speech in the Australian community. He
actually claimed that "in a sense, the pall of censorship on certain is-
sues has been lifted. I think we were facing the possibility of becoming
a more narrow and restrictive society and that free speech could not be
so easily taken for granted" (Green 1996).

It was not until the second week of October that Howard finally

broke his silence on Hanson's first speech and reaffirmed the commitment of his government to racial tolerance and the nondiscriminatory immigration policy. This was accompanied by increasing anxiety over reactions to the "Hanson phenomenon" in the wider region. Early reports focused on concerns over trade and business links (Brough 1996a; Brough 1996b). Another more general commentary suggested that Howard was facing a "fierce backlash" over his failure to take an early tough stand against Hanson's views and that he was perceived to have displayed weak leadership over the apparent spread of racism in Australian society (Baker 1996).

By the end of October, it was clear that Australian politicians had to be seen to be doing more to repudiate the Hanson line. While Labor politicians had done so immediately following her first parliamentary speech, Howard's refusal to engage directly in the debate had indeed sent all the wrong signals both to the Australian community and to the wider region. In a highly unusual move, the Coalition parties and the Labor Party sponsored a joint motion in the House of Representatives on October 30, 1996, which read as follows:

That this House

Reaffirms its commitment to the right of all Australians to enjoy equal rights and be treated with equal respect regardless of race, colour, creed or origin;

Reaffirms its commitment to maintaining an immigration policy wholly non-discriminatory on grounds of race, colour, creed or origin;

Reaffirms its commitment to the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the context of redressing their profound social and economic disadvantage;

Reaffirms its commitment to maintaining Australia as a culturally diverse, tolerant and open society, united by an over-riding commitment to our nation, and its democratic institutions and values; and

Denounces racial intolerance in any form as incompatible with the kind of society we are and want to be. ("Joint Statement" 1996)

Reports from around the region, at least until mid-1997, continued to warn of the dangers to Australian trade, business, and tourism. This

was despite figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that showed an overall increase in tourism from the Asian region—up by 10.2 percent in the year ending December 31, 1996. Individual countries showed some significant increases: visitors from South Korea were up by 58.3 percent, Indonesia 30 percent, Singapore 25.8 percent, Malaysia 22.6 percent, and Thailand 4.5 percent. Some falls, however, were also recorded, with visitors from Hong Kong and Taiwan declining by 10.3 and 8.3 percent, respectively (although other factors, such as uncertainties caused by the changeover in Hong Kong and a tourism price war with the United States for the Taiwanese tourist trade were said to be responsible for these decreases). More recent figures also showed an overall increase of visitors from the region of 6.7 percent in the period March 1996 to March 1997 (Das 1997).⁹

A poll of Asian business leaders, however, suggested that there was still a backlash to fear. Conducted by a polling firm on behalf of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the poll's results indicated that almost half the respondents had become more negative about Australia since the emergence of the "Hanson factor," while 16 percent said that they were less likely to do business with Australia because of it. What is even more surprising, according to the paper's own editorial commentary, is the fact that Hanson had a high personal profile in the region. For example, she had a "recognition quotient" of 76 percent among Malaysians. On the other hand, the recognition in Asia generally of the Australian minister for foreign affairs, Alexander Downer, and the deputy prime minister, Tim Fischer, was extremely low ("Hanson Factor" 1997). Another report on attitudes in the region suggested that the Australian government's failure to counter Hanson's opinions had provoked the most concern (cited in Jinman 1997).

Even with evidence of growing, rather than diminishing, attention on Hanson's activities, in mid-1997 Howard was still maintaining that she was relatively insignificant and that he preferred to reserve his critical energies for more important things:

> I take gloves off to real opponents. I think in the long run people will see Pauline Hanson as one of those transitory phenomena. They come along with glib criticism, they don't offer any solutions, they look appealing for a while, because when a nation is going through a lot of change . . . it is always easy to sort of draw on discontent, but when people see that the people drawing on

the discontent don't have any real answers, they lose interest.
(Howard 1997)

But Howard has been no less guilty of drawing on discontent than Hanson. In an analysis of how Howard has approached issues of identity in Australia, Carol Johnson points to his own, admittedly more subtle, manipulation of racial and ethnic issues as well as his admission that he and Hanson have in fact drawn on similar resentments in an attempt to win the support of "mainstream" Australians (Johnson 1997, 12–13).

Downer made some effort to counter the Hanson phenomenon, especially in remarks concerning Australia's relations with the region. In a speech delivered just one day after Howard's comments reported above, and which made explicit reference to the phenomenon, Downer told the audience present at the launch of Asialine:

> There is no more important issue facing Australia's foreign policy than our engagement with Asia. Australia's future lies in Asia. This Government is committed to that future. That is why we have made closer engagement with Asia our highest foreign policy priority. . . .
>
> An important measure of Australia's foreign policy is the extent to which Australian values such as tolerance and respect for cultural diversity are successfully projected into the region.
>
> These values are important because a humane and principled approach to the region's challenges is one of the key pillars of our foreign policy and humanity begins at home. . . .
>
> There are dissonant voices in our society . . . which do not see Australia's future in Asia. . . . These are not the views of the Australian Government . . . [or] the views of the Australian people.
>
> Rather, they . . . portray a false view of this country and of the true values which constitute our society. . . .
>
> In Australia, people have a right to speak freely. But with that right comes a responsibility and the implicit racism of the anti-ethnic agenda is shamefully irresponsible. . . .
>
> In the end, [Hanson's] ideas have already lost. They have lost because Australia *is* already engaged with its region. Australia *is* already an open and tolerant country. And Australia *is* already a wonderfully diverse country. (1997)

Downer's remarks must be seen in the category of continuing "damage control." Howard's initial judgment about the impact of the Hanson phenomenon was clearly very poor. Certainly, his early decision to ignore her was a mistake, and his leadership image was tarnished both at home and abroad. This was not helped by the government's decision in May 1997 to cut the annual quota of immigrants by six thousand. Although Howard denied that the cut had anything to do with Hanson, and pointed out that it did not discriminate against any particular ethnic group, this was not how it was perceived in the region (Millett 1997). Another report on expressions of concern in the region over the more general issues highlighted the comments of a senior Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, who was quoted as saying that his country's support for Australian participation in the Asia-Europe Meeting, a forum for economic dialogue between Europe and Asia, "is conditional on Australia showing it wants to be a part of Asia." The reporter also said that until now Japan had been Australia's most consistent supporter of the latter's drive for a greater political role in Asia but that the Hanson debate had had a negative impact on this support (Bond 1997).[10]

Hanson's One Nation Party enjoyed significant electoral success in the Queensland state election of June 1998, when her party won close to 25 percent of the vote. If sustained, this level of support would certainly translate into national Senate seats and perhaps at least one seat in the House of Representatives. The question of the extent to which Hanson has actually gained genuine electoral support in the broader national sphere of Australian politics will obviously not be known until the next general election.[11] One poll showed a maximum of around 13 percent potential support, while most had it at about 10 percent, but this later dropped to about 8 percent.[12] One commentator has said that the positive thing about the figures at that time is that the "forces of ignorance and bigotry" amounted at best to only 10 percent of the population and that this was "an extraordinary advance on the situation a century ago when all major parties were overtly racist" and that, in Aboriginal policy, "informal extermination was well advanced" (Macklin 1997).

Even if actual electoral support for One Nation were to fall to practically zero, however, the damage has been done. A 1993 Indonesian view of Australia summarized the contemporary political and social scene in positive and optimistic tones:

If the country of origin of the Australian people was once the basis of Australian identity, now its geographical location is increasingly taken into consideration. . . . Australians today, especially those who live in urban areas, have begun to display a cosmopolitan character that is slowly replacing their older xenophobic views. These cosmopolitan qualities include an understanding of other ways of life, an appreciation of other cultures and efforts to reach out to the Asian region, all of which have given rise to a tendency to move away from traditions that are conservative and shut in. . . . The change from earlier xenophobic tendencies to attitudes that are more open and relaxed will ultimately produce an Australia that is ambidextrous. . . . Australia will be capable of relating to both the western and the eastern worlds without any uncertainty. (Hardjono 1993, 222–223, 226)

It is doubtful whether anyone from the region could write in the same way in the late 1990s, even if the great majority of Australians do not endorse Hanson's views.

CONCLUSION

Australia has undoubtedly undergone enormous changes throughout the twentieth century, not least with respect to issues concerning immigration, multiculturalism, and relations with the wider Asia Pacific region. These changes clearly reflect a metamorphosis in the broad base of social values. Although this base has never been susceptible to simplistic accounts of essential "core values," as the earlier discussion of some of the myths about Australian identity and values shows, it did have sufficient coherence to support the predominant policies associated with monoculturalism and racism over a long period. That this changed so rapidly from the 1960s through the 1990s is testament, among other things, to the dynamism of social or cultural factors and should stand as a contradiction to rigid views of cultural determinism and static versions of human societies.

The debate generated by Hanson, and Howard's handling of it, however, has undoubtedly caused considerable damage to Australia's reputation in the region and raised doubts about whether Australians really are prepared to accept "the reality of their geography." One view from the region on the whole matter of Hanson and the government's weak

response to her, as well as on the government's foreign policy in the region more generally, was quite scathing. In addition to contrasting the Howard government's attitudes to regional countries quite unfavorably with the previous Labor government's, Zhou Jihua of the China Institute for International Strategic Studies has written that Hanson's remarks aroused the apprehension of Australia's neighbors with regard to the whole foreign policy direction of the Coalition government. Zhou has further suggested that the general trend of the present government is away from integration with Asia and toward strengthening ties with North America and Europe instead (Zhou 1997).

These issues aside, the debate has raised some interesting ironies that have generally gone unnoticed in much of the public discussion both in Australia and in the wider region. Hanson's approach to contemporary political issues is, in some respects at least, a strongly culturalist one, and accords closely with aspects of both the Asian values debate and the "clash of civilizations" thesis. When she says that Asians "have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate," she is endorsing precisely the views held by some participants in the Asian values debate who place great emphasis on cultural incommensurability and relativism—concepts which have been put forward by proponents of Asian values as a barrier to mutual understanding about democracy and human rights, and which are therefore a serious impediment to agreement on common approaches to these and other aspects of governance and international relations in the region.

NOTES

1. I am using "East Asia" here to include Southeast Asia, Indochina, and Northeast Asia (as distinct from South, Central, and West Asia).

2. Recent archaeological evidence suggests that human occupation could date back as far as 120,000 years.

3. The Latin term *territoria nullius* implies that the territory is completely vacant or unoccupied, but the legal doctrine it supported also incorporated the assumption that even where people were present, if they were not regarded as permanently united for political purposes and action, including the exercise of sovereignty over the land, then the land was effectively without an existing sovereign and was therefore available for settlement as if it were in fact unoccupied. See Keal (1995, 195).

4. Some of these later became the capital cities of Australian states.

5. It was probably not until the bicentenary in 1988 of the original convict settlement, which was celebrated with enormous fanfare all over the country, that many people who could identify a convict among their ancestors would openly admit it. Indeed, to have such an ancestor was for many a newfound cause for pride. Moreover, to have had an ancestor who was actually among the first colonists, who arrived in 1788, accorded one the highest status of all. What had been a cause for shame became a cause for celebration.

6. A recent High Court decision relating to Aboriginal claims actually prompted government complaints of "judicial activism."

7. I have critically discussed certain political aspects of the Asian values debate, especially as it relates to democratic theory and practice, in Lawson (1996).

8. The author attributes the last sentence to George Reid, speaking in the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales in 1896.

9. These and other figures quoted are likely to decline in future, but not because of Hanson. The financial crisis will obviously be the most significant factor.

10. The reporter also mentioned Australia's handling of Myanmar's entry into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as another negative factor.

11. This chapter was written before the October 1998 federal election. For the record, One Nation won around 8 percent of the national vote, which gave it no seats in the House of Representatives and only one in the Senate. Hanson lost her own seat.

12. However, some greatly exaggerated figures have also been reported in the regional media. See Chow (1997, 24), where it is alleged that one poll showed potential support to be as high as 51 percent.

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