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Realizing Australia's Diaspora Advantage

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Migration

Migration has always been a feature of the complexities of Australian society ever since the beginning of colonial settlement, even as many policy makers and analysts have tried to simplify its role.

The complexities of migration are due partly to its dynamic nature, constantly shifting in line with changing national and global conditions.

These changes have defined the challenges and opportunities associated with migration, both for the immigrants and the nation.

Migration is not what it used to be

In the context of globalization, migration

- No longer involves an expectation of permanent detachment.
- Dual and even multiple citizenships now widely available.
- Decision to migrate is much better informed than ever before.
- Increasingly it is not the individuals but ethnic networks that move.
- Ability to remain connected with friends and family at home and elsewhere through technology and ease of travel.
- Mobility, cross-border flows and circulation occur in all directions.
- Annual intake of skilled migrants is now greater than that of the unskilled.

The **figure of the migrant** assumes the perspective of *stasis* (migrant is assumed to be a secondary or derivative figure with respect to place-bound social membership; and of *statist* (migrant is assumed to a figure who is abandoning membership of one state to embrace another)

(Thomas Nail, The Figure of the Migrant (Stanford UP 2015)

Three Different Perspectives

- Ethnicity highlights issues of cultural identity and backgrounds.
- Migration highlights issues of relocation and settlement.
- Diaspora highlights issues of dispersal and transnational connectivity.

These perspectives are not distinct but suggest new questions about the nature of ethnic formations, identification and migrant experiences.

ACOLA Project 11 (2015-16) Australia's Diaspora Advantage

- *What **contribution** do **Asian-Australians** make to the Australian economy, and how?*
- *What opportunities do they have and what challenges do they face?*
- *How might Australia and its major institutions address these challenges to realize the potential?*

Limitations

- **Conceptual and practical challenges of existing data sets and qualitative research.**
- **Risks of a celebratory discourse, eschewing criticality.**
- **Limitations of existing categories of analysis and literature.**

Diaspora Perspective

Diaspora perspective views groups of people as *dispersed, yet remain transnationally connected* with each other and can easily activate these connections as and when needed, and

They have an emotional attachment and hold a *claim* to a country of family origin regardless of time past, are *recognised and accepted within their communities* as being diaspora members.

Diversity Council Australia estimates that approximately 17 per cent of people living and working in Australia identify as being of Asian origin.

Diaspora advantage

As can be expected, Asian-Australians relate to their experiences of mobility, dispersal and transnational connectivities in a wide variety of different ways.

However, those within the diaspora communities engaged in some form of business activity in Australia view these experiences and its commercial possibilities, in very positive terms – as their **diaspora advantage**.

They consider the emerging **transnational economic space** --a dynamic and flexible space (both virtual and physical) where transnational circulation of ideas, knowledge, people and capital can drive trade, investment and collaboration -- in terms of limitless business opportunities.

In this space, they feel they are able to use their **language skills, cultural understanding and global networks** to unleash their entrepreneurial energy, to take risks, create new business products for both local and transnational cultural markets.

Examples

- Ruchir Punjabi and Langoor (IT)
- Lei He and Heavy Vehicles Australia (transport manufacturing and importing)
- International students in under- and post-graduate wine business programs at The University of Adelaide (wine export)
- Natasha Malani and Access India (business consulting)
- James Tong and Agribaba (produce exports)
- DD Saxena and Riverina Oil and BioEnergy (agriculture manufacturing)
- Melbourne Cricket Ground advertising and broadcasting rights during Indian cricket tours (sports marketing)
- Anupam Sharma and Films and Casting TEMPLE (creative industries)
- Brad Chan and Banna Property Group (property)

Learning from other countries

- Interest in capturing financial and social remittances
- **Chinese and Indian governments** are exploring ways to ‘invite back’:
 - More flexible forms of citizenship.
 - Knowledge and talent circulation for research collaboration and commercialisation.
 - Connecting with diaspora youth.
 - Maintaining cultural connections and engagement.
- **United States and Canada** similar diaspora experiences to Australia, being well educated working in highly-skilled mostly STEM-related industries.
- **Silicon Valley** and the ‘new Argonauts’
- **Germany and Singapore’s** focus on attracting skilled STEM workers.
- **Ireland’s** *Global Irish* diaspora policy and Minister of State for Diaspora Affairs.

Challenges and Dilemmas

- Attitudes, perceptions and the role of Australian and ethnic media
 - Recognition, representation and the bamboo ceiling
 - Accessing government support and funding
 - Managing Australia's legal and regulatory regimes, risks and compliance
 - The tensions within connections and local diaspora communities
 - Connecting the business, research and cultural diasporas
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- Given the competing national interests, diaspora space is always uncertain, complicated and difficult to negotiate.
 - Refusal of governments to see diaspora communities to a 'third space'
 - Attempts by some governments to control the narratives diasporas are allowed to speak.
 - Questions of loyalty, rights and responsibilities always ambiguous

Policy Ideas

In policy terms, our interviewees suggest the need to recognise that:

- Australia's Asian communities – and the advantages they possess – are a potent economic force with rich potential and growing, yet under-utilised.
- To tap economic potential, A better map and model is needed beyond the narratives of migration and around the possibilities of diaspora business networks.
- Australia's Asian business diasporas have much to contribute but are often unrecognized and underrepresented on decision-making bodies.
- Bilateral councils and business associations have an important role to play as conduits for culture, commerce and connections.
- Entrepreneurialism and business skills, Asian languages, historical and cultural studies are critical elements of Asia capability.
- A co-ordinated national approach to diaspora policy and engagement is needed.