

Hidden Footprints of Unity:

beyond tribalism and towards a new Australian identity

by

Raja Arasa Ratnam

Copyright © 2013 by Raja Arasa Ratnam

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without permission.

The contents of this work including, but not limited to, the accuracy of events, people, and places depicted; opinions expressed; permission to use previously published materials included; and any advice given or actions advocated are solely the responsibility of the author, who assumes all liability for said work and indemnifies the publisher against any claims stemming from publication of the work.

Raja Arasa Ratnam, a Hindu and Christian ex-Malaysian Australian, has lived in Australia for more than half a century. He has participated fully in Australian civil society, and at leadership level. His work and social life have taken him across almost all levels of the Australian people and a variety of industries and occupations. He has lunched with a governor general, and shared the head table with state governors and federal ministers — at different times of course. He has dealt officially with captains of industry and commerce, senior public officials and ethnic community leaders. In spite of this highly intensive interactive community life, he has not lost himself culturally.

His core values, formed in his youth in Malaysia, have remained with him. A bulwark in his early years in the slipstream of a weakening White Australia ethos, his ‘Asian values’ perspective has enabled him to chart the waves of the sociological changes engulfing his nation of adoption, without being drowned by the current. After living as a societally marginal person for more than half a century and near his meeting with his Maker, he has felt the urge to leave to posterity his vision of the inter-connectedness of humankind. A self-confessed workaholic, he continues to write; and to play tennis on a regular basis. His previous book *‘Destiny Will Out’* was reviewed favourably by academics, significant organisations such as the Centre for Independent Studies, and individuals in four countries. Two other books, *‘The Karma of Culture’* (about the ubiquity of culture in immigrant-receiving nations), and *‘The Slippery Slope’* (about the deterioration of the family in Australia) are in preparation.

ENDORCEMENTS

of *Hidden Footprints of Unity*

Chapter 4—Which Way to the Cosmos?

“I find the concepts in *Hidden Footprints of Unity* most appealing, coming as they do from an agile mind which has managed to embrace cultures usually seen as competitive, or even enemies. This book should prove a precious contribution to mutual understanding.”

—James Murray, SSC, recently retired Religious Affairs Editor, *The Australian*

Chapter 5—Peering into the Void

“As for your writing, it takes us out of our norms, our comfort zones, and reminds the reader that what we assume is objective historical reality is often mere permeable ideology, an arbitrary sense of order imposed upon the flux of life.”

—Paul Sheehan, Columnist, *Sydney Morning Herald* and renowned author.

Chapter 2—The power of pigmentation

“The value of Chapter 2 lies in its use of personal experience of living in Australia. One is struck by the author’s sincerity and, at times, magnanimity in recounting the lack of tolerance at the hands of colleagues and acquaintances.”

—Jerzy Zubrzycki, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, ANU

Chapter 6—The end of tribalism

“No question is more likely to provoke a quarrel between friends than some aspect of population policy. Are there too many Australians? Are the ones we have the right kind? Raja Ratnam is doubly privileged to reflect on such matters. He was a Malayan Hindu arrival when White Australia prevailed. By the 1980s, he was a senior public servant dealing with high policy.

His comments strike me as contrary and contradictory. He can be as anachronistic in his portrayal of Aussie customs as he is penetrating in his glimpses into how all Australians have managed the personal strains of living in a new place with even newer-comers. He is at his most perplexing when retelling his professional involvement with immigration policies. No one will read through this chapter without crying out “Too right” before having to stop themselves slamming the book shut with a shout of “What rot”.

Yet his retrospect and his prognosis are conveyed in a congenial voice, one that should contribute more to the sense of communal responsibility that he champions. Meanwhile, his neo-Liberalism seems set to demolish what Australia retains of these values.

—Humphrey McQueen, historian and renowned author

Dedicated to my grandchildren –
who know not the boundaries of culture or see any skin colour

“What would have happened to this life If I had not accepted you?
As the ups and downs carry me far from shore, You become my rudder and I swim across
fearlessly.
With you at the helm, I do not fear the waves.”

— Paramahansa Satyananda Saraswati

Preface

After living as a societally marginal person, for more than half a century, in a country in which I had not chosen to live, and near my meeting with my Maker, I feel the urge to leave to posterity my vision of the inter-connectedness of humankind. My vision is reflective of both my adult life in Australia and that acculturating period of two decades in multicultural Malaya (now Malaysia and Singapore). Naturally, my perceptions were conditioned by my life as a demeaned colonial subject, yet uplifted by the metaphysics of Hinduism, and leavened by the subtle impacts of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural communities learning to live with one another.

Deposited by Destiny in a strange mono-cultural, mono-lingual, mono-chromatic nation which displayed contradictory attitudes towards fellow humans (derived from a misguided perception of the significance of skin colour), I have observed and analysed my fellow Australians whilst adapting, in a substantially contributory fashion, to my new home. This record focuses on the realities of life in the two principal areas of human significance: inter-community (especially black/white) relations, and the universal search for the Creator. Commencing with a look at that strange sensitivity to skin colour by most adult whites I have encountered, my record moves initially onto that rather weird competitive urge displayed by mere mortals in their search for the Divine, and then onto that understandable desire by one and all to peer into the Void of the future. Finally, it touches upon the issues of a divisive tribalism, and the imperatives of an evolving new Australian national identity.

I naturally write as one whose predecessors sought to be free, both politically and culturally. The values which formed me in Asia obviously filter my perceptions and comments. As can be expected, my exposure to Australia's institutions, social mores and values has imposed yet another filter. I have participated fully in civil society — and continue to do so. I have worked for governments and in the private sector. I have had substantial exposure to many leaders in the latter sector, through my work in the public sector. Both as a private citizen and as a public official, I have dealt with a very wide range of immigrants and their leaders. I have lunched with a governor-general (as a guest in Government House), and been an invited guest and speaker in the company of state governors and federal ministers. As a public official, I had dealt with federal ministers and state public officials at the highest level.

How did this happen? I was simply fortunate. Or, was it the hand of Destiny? Who am I to know? What matters to me is that we, the Australian people, in all our diversity, are collaborating together to produce a deserved wonderful future. We should soon be colour blind. We should also be proudly presenting an integrated Australian culture.

Introduction

The East transits the West

“Australia is a huge rest home where no welcome news is ever wafted on to the pages of the worst newspapers in the world” — Germaine Greer

I was formed as a Hindu in a traditional Asian environment, where the extended family, the clan, and the tribe form the lacunae into which the individual is placed. My people were also migrants, seeking a materially improved life. Tribally, we are part of yet another diaspora. This was influenced in part by European colonisers and the political actions of an un-Buddha-like tribal priesthood. The former, with hoity-toity mein, pretended to be civilising us, and teaching us how to govern ourselves, whilst simply exploiting us and our resources. The latter continue to represent the worst aspect of tribalism, especially when deeply imbued with institutional religion.

Living in another Asian environment was not a very great strain for us Asian migrants, apart from the initial difficulties of communication. We all prayed to the same Creator, with the same objectives. The manner of praying was varied, but the priesthood on all sides was not fussed by the differences. We ate the same foods, with some small exceptions reflecting cultural taboos or prejudices; but the culinary styles did remain divergent for about a generation. We had comparable values about life and death, and the way we related to fellow humans and to our Creator. As cultural assimilation was not required of us, social traditions were retained. We believed in our priests, the tribal elders and other wise people, or those who displayed the marks of having been touched by God.

We naturally waited for the day the unloved or hated alien oppressor would leave us to recover our freedom and rights, as well as our dignity and self-respect. We would govern ourselves as we saw fit, without being coerced into political and other institutional structures which suited more the retreating ex-colonial. My people are still endeavouring to do this, even in the politically independent nations of Asia, because of the new form of white man colonialism, viz. eco-colonialism. To be governed badly or ineffectively in freedom is surely better than being ruled in subjugation!

Living in the West is a totally different matter. White people are not as receptive of coloured immigrants. This is because of their recent history of colonisation. That sense of superiority of skin colour, religion, mode of living, and technology, derived from a few centuries of armaments-based domination, continues. This is not to deny that, as individuals, many, many, Asians have been accepted in white nations, with considerable social equality and opportunities for material progress — but, often subject to some unspoken upper limits. The success of such integration depends upon one's worth, skills, accent, codes of conduct, and modes of dress. Upholding divergent cultural *practices* can, however, delay acceptance.

Experiencing colour sensitivity and cultural disdain at the hands of the common people was surprising to me when I arrived in Australia at the age of nineteen. I had grown up in a tolerant multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multicultural nation-in-the-making, then under the control of the British. The earlier generations clearly co-existed, in the main. Yet we co-operated and communicated as best we could. The latter generations are now one nationality, almost one people — no matter what certain Australian media people might say. Limited by their own

colonial heritage and their cultural preference for an individualism devoid of any tribal affinities, these media people may have some difficulty in accepting the Asian people's preference for their ancient tribal values. I also do believe that there is more tolerance in my countries of origin — Malaysia and Singapore (then Malaya) — to differences in faith and associated cultural values than I discern in Australia. Since tolerance can be little more than indifference, true tolerance exists when two or more large ethnic or cultural communities relate to one another with mutual respect and, preferably, as equals.

After more than half a century of a highly participatory community life in Australia, I feel that it might be useful for any keen observer of mankind to know what it was like for a coloured immigrant to enter Australia during the dark age of White Australia; and thence to cope with the lingering but slowly fading effects of the colonial heritage of Anglo-Celt Australians. A combination of a smug superiority based on skin colour and religious affiliation, and a fear of foreigners reflecting the isolation from the world of whites, does not provide a sound foundation for dealing with, initially, a vast increase of white immigrants with strange languages and cultures and, latterly, an influx of an even wider range of skin colours, cultures, and religious beliefs. This observer might also be interested to know how such an Asian 'outsider' sees the significant tidal changes which have since occurred in inter-community relations, and in the search by fellow Australians for psychic stability and spiritual peace; and how national identity may have been impacted.

In this narration of my experiences and observations, I therefore focus on two principal areas of significant human interest and experience; I also offer some commentary and a few tentative conclusions about the future of the human condition in my country of adoption. Commencing with the issue of skin colour (which covers the plight of the Australian indigene), I move on to religion and the search for spirituality; changing inter-community relations (both Anglo-Celt/migrant and ethnic/ethnic); and the evolving national identity. Naturally, my perceptions are filtered through the cultural values which formed me. They also reflect my ideology. I believe in a free but mutually-responsible people, with liberal but communitarian values, living in a secular and tolerant multicultural society, in an independent sovereign nation-state. Could one ask for less, even if the universe in which we exist is said to be illusory, that is, a reflection of Maya?

Unlike some Australian-born expatriates, I respect my fellow Australians. A goodly number of us remain engaged in working for the common good, primarily, for the communities in which we live.

Chapter 1

Black Looks in Oz

“...the assumption that Australia not only has a history worth bothering about, but that all the history worth bothering about happened in Australia.” — Clive James

“Be careful! Raj will give you a black look, if you don’t play well today.” When I first heard these words, I was mystified. There had been no reference to my colour for decades, certainly never in a stable social situation. Why now, in the mid 1990s? Anyway, it came to my notice that these strange words were being uttered somewhat frequently by Willy, a chatty old Aussie, in my presence. Yet, he never referred to any of the others — all white — as ever giving black looks. Willy, typically self-confident, in spite of being relatively unlettered, and I were members of a group of elderly men (known as the ‘vets’) who played tennis three times a week. Our ages ranged from a little under 60 to about 80. Most, like Willy, were ordinary folk, with no pretensions.

Significantly, this strange reference to my black looks was actually spoken with some warmth! Willy was thus indicating, very clearly indeed, that he rather liked me, in spite of my being a ‘black’, ie a coloured person. At least, this is how I saw my associate’s behaviour. I was therefore not offended. I had, of course, learned such tolerance through similarly disconcerting experiences with Anglo-Celt Australians in my earliest years in the country. Significantly, European migrants did not seem to be sensitive to skin colour. Indeed, unlike the Anglo-Celts, they appeared to view my cultural heritage with some respect.

I do, however, accept this strange behaviour by Willy as symptomatic of the mindset of those Australians who see skin colour first, and whose behaviour thereafter reflects that overriding perception. Why do most Anglo-Celts seemingly see skin colour as the primary defining characteristic of fellow humans? A few centuries of domination of coloured people everywhere by European colonisers led to claims about the innate superiority of those lacking a suntan. The politico-social construct of ‘white’ people, linked to two generations of Australians bathed gloriously by the White Australia policy, with its cultural underlay of superiority, unavoidably results in coloured people being viewed askance. I know though that, if and when Anglo-Celts eventually accept me as an equal, I am treated as well as anyone else. That is, in that casual Australian way of a refreshingly open informality, but without any risk of intimacy (which I claim is essentially a Protestant tradition).

This tennis group’s quiet sensitivity to skin colour is reflected not only through their private comments on the nation’s indigenes; but also on the brown chaps in neighbourhood countries. Coloured women, not surprisingly, are clearly OK! After all, what could be more enticing than big boobs on a slim, feminine female? But I find it engrossingly intriguing to have terrible displays of colour prejudice uttered in my company. It would seem that, in such circumstances, I have the status of an honorary white. Am I supposed to be flattered?

A deeper explanation of the Anglo-Celt’s colour prejudice may come from that Jungian collective unconscious. Overcoming coloured people everywhere led, as mentioned above, to white adventurers and marauding pilferers believing that they had a right to exercise control in these relationships. Then came the newly coined concept of race. This was implicit in the nation

building taking place in Europe, based as it was, on cultural or tribal homogeneity. A wilful misunderstanding of Darwin's theory of evolution then led to claims that the technologically superior whites were higher up the evolutionary scale. An unthinking misinterpretation of what Christ is alleged to have said about the pathway to God to his fellow Semites (viz "only through me shall ye know God") conveniently ignored Christ's predecessors in India, especially the Buddha. The Europeans' collective unconscious juggled these components together to produce a comforting rationale for the despoliation and destruction of infidel societies and their cultures. The modern untutored Aussie wears this rationale as a cloak of comfort which (like modern water-repellent fabrics) enables him to shed all unwanted foreign influences with indifference.

Then, at the end of World War Two, after nearly a century of living in an atmosphere of communal stability, the old Aussies' somewhat somnolescent and superior psyche had suddenly become a little convulsed. A nation created by white Christians, for white Christians, had hitherto successfully marginalised the indigene, and kept out other coloured people (recognising that not all dams are leak proof). This left plenty of scope for the Christian sects to out-gun one another. The cultural peace and quiet ethnic satisfaction enjoyed by those who looked back with pride upon the times of white colonial supremacy, both at home and elsewhere, was now being ruined by a massive immigration program. Initially, the entrants were white, although a goodly proportion had foreign features and behaviour; latterly, the entrants displayed a range of colours and cultures. The despised and quiescent Aborigines, instead of dying out or bred out as expected, also began to multiply, or re-discover their previously denied Aboriginality. They also claimed their proper place in Australian society. Worse still, they started to ask for apologies and compensation for past injustices. Indeed, they even seek self-betterment through self-management!

Many of the people I talk to are now unhappy about the high crime rates for the newer Asian communities. They are also uncomfortable about the vast increase in East Asian faces on the streets. These were the 'yellow hordes' of yesteryear, some now referred to as 'slopes'. Many observers have also become bitterly aware of the legislative and policy structures intended to 'favour' both the foreigner and the indigene. These cover racial discrimination, racial vilification, equal opportunity, and similar practices, with their unfavourable implication about (mainly) mainstream Anglo attitudes and practices.

Then came the overt political challenge (in the mid 1990s) by that significant minority of whites attracted to Pauline Hanson, MP, because of her views on Asian immigration and the Aborigines. I noticed that this was followed immediately by a rise in public expression of racial and cultural prejudice. The defenders of such aggressively rude behaviour claimed a right to free speech, a right endorsed by the government in its efforts to wean this disaffected minority from Hanson. There was also a rise in street abuse of people who looked coloured, whether or not they were Asians. Whilst Asian governments expressed concern about the security of their people in Australia, my government did little that was effective in protecting coloured people like me in public spaces. There were reports of brown-coloured children (most probably Australian-born) being vocally abused on public transport, without anyone intervening. Muslim women had their headgear torn off in busy streets. Wealthy Chinese in expensive suburbs were spat at on railway platforms. To further fuel the fires of over-rapid and threatening social changes, came the land rights claims by Aboriginal communities. The irrationally pathetic and prejudiced response by some Australian politicians, and their pastoral and mineral constituencies, to these claims did little to enlighten a population generally kept in the dark on such an important issue.

The rise in racial abuse led to me, the only visible Asian in a small country town, being confronted, for no overt reason, with very personal abuse, in a public place, on a few occasions in the late 1990s. This was after a long period of peace of about thirty-five years (albeit in conservative and protected Canberra), in a total residence of nearly fifty years in Australia. In that period, I had had a relatively high profile in various community organisations, and been accepted in leadership roles (eg as national president of a respected organization). I was abused simply because I obviously *look* like a ‘bloody foreigner’; and it was now acceptable to express one’s xenophobic feelings. It took me back to my early days in Australia.

A foreigner coming into Australia in those early days was not only very easily noticed, but also commented on (eg “Look at that blackfellow”), or rudely addressed (eg “Hey, Rastus”, or “Listen, Jacko”). Why should this have been so? “Why don’t you go back where you came from, you black (or effing) bastard?” was quite common then. The first time it happened to me, I was stunned. How could a well dressed woman, in a Collins Street arcade (in a fashionable part of Melbourne), shout at me in that way? Why? What had I done to her or to her people? What sort of humans were such Aussies? By what right could she claim to protect public space initially stolen from black people? I had no answers then.

Looking back is, however, not an easy task. As said by Qin Shi Huangdi (said to be the first emperor of China), “Those who make use of antiquity to belittle modern times shall be put to death with their relations”. This fierce forward-looking self-aggrandising view was seemingly supported more recently by a philosopher from the far side of the globe — Nietzsche. He said: “The historian looks backward; in the end, he also believes backward”. The utterances in Australia by some academics, politicians, and media pundits in recent decades lend some confirmation to this caustic perspective. Yet, I (a representative of a further culture), know that looking back can be useful. This is so, even if (as said a hundred years ago by that famous British politician Gladstone) one cannot fight the future. In looking back, I realised that I would echo Lord Byron. He said: “I stood among them, but not of them; in a shroud of thoughts which were not their thoughts”. And this might be a perspicacious approach for me.

A slight digression. I can now look back, with some amusement, at an extraordinary event more than half a century ago. Four young men, naïve about that strange combination of ignorance and arrogance of the white Aussies of that period, went to have supper with a middle-aged lady, her university student son, and her best friend, Gladys. Soon after we arrived, she went up to Ari, took one of his hands, and said, “Gladys, see how his palm is not as dark as the back of his hand”. So, Gladys stood up to have a good look. Then our hostess asked Ari to show his tongue, and said, “Gladys, see how pink it is”. Gladys agreed. Then, much to our consternation, she peeled back Ari’s lip (whilst he sat, presumably stupefied) and commented on the colour of his gums and the inside of his cheek.

The rest of us looked at one another in disgust. I did wonder whether she would proceed to have him peel back his foreskin to see what colour was concealed (we are normally untrimmed). I also wondered whether she had been a slave trader in an earlier incarnation. Suddenly, the three of us remembered an earlier appointment (at 9 pm?), and left Ari to his fate. It was sad foregoing all those lovely cakes; but not the horrible tea that we expected to be served.

It is a historical fact that, since the time of its initial occupation, Australia had been progressively racially cleansed — to remove coloured people from any usable land. This had been achieved by all manner of means — all immoral. There is nothing new to be said about all this. The abominable ethnic history of this nation is now well known. Indeed, an academic recently accused both the historical and the modern Australian of genocide (using the UN

definition), under three (possibly four) counts. However, I am delighted that today's generation of Aussies, mostly young (and many not so young), are encouragingly endeavouring to acknowledge and compensate (but without any sense of guilt) for the misdemeanours of previous generations. Not all of the latter were their genealogical ancestors, or involved in the ethnic cleansing. As that famous Roman Seneca said: "Injustice never rules forever".

The most effective means of achieving a uniformly white populace was by assiduously attracting British migrants of all ages, irrespective of skill, education or funds (and, as I note, not necessarily speaking understandable English). In relatively recent times, young British children were also treacherously bundled off to the antipodes with this objective. Many of these were then subject to physical (including sexual) and moral violence. I find it surprising that members of the priesthood were among the perpetrators. The brutality of such Christian priests might be explained only in part by that celibate life imposed upon some of them, and their authoritarian system of rule. It was only near the end of their lives that some of these involuntary Aussies learnt that they were not orphans. Indeed, they came to realise, almost too late, that they had kin 'back home'; and some very joyous reunions with their families then brought them that solace which they had needed in their lives. Perhaps the Law of Karma can offer compensation within the one life.

In this early environment of attempted uniformity, the relatively few *white* non-British residents of Australia wisely kept a low profile. Exogamous marriage would also have helped their acceptance, but only in the long term. Anyway, there were not enough of them about to cause serious umbrage to the xenophobic Aussie; although the record shows acts of violence against them by some ignorant Anglo-Celts. The treatment of the Chinese, Kanakas and other *coloured* people is, of course, a quite different story.

But, as one might ask, were most Australians xenophobic in those early years of my arrival? The answer can be found, in part, in the media of that period. Did they give objective coverage to events occurring outside the country; whether the national government radio station looked at events overseas without prejudice or paranoia; whether, once an Australian sporting team or sportsman was eliminated from an international competition, the Australian public was permitted to know how the competition was progressing; and whether there were prominent politicians and editorialists preaching or propagating prejudice against foreigners, especially the coloured ones to the north of the island continent. Perhaps, as a famous Australian editor allegedly asserted at that time, the typical newspaper reader in Australia had a mental age of only twelve. This reminds me of an adage: that one cannot fly like an eagle with the wings of a sparrow. Yet, progressive changes were about to be set in train.

It is worthy of great commendation that in the years immediately following the much-wanted end of the Second World War, Australia opened its arms to Asia by initially offering scholarships to young Malaysians to study nursing. Later, the Colombo Plan provided university places to government-sponsored students. We Malaysians had also already formed an attachment to Australia and its people. We were grateful for the troops sent to protect us. Members of my extended family had fraternised with some of the officers. At about the same time, perhaps by a process akin to that by which birds throughout the world suddenly learnt to remove foil caps from milk bottles, private students from a number of countries in Asia began to choose Australia for their tertiary qualifications in the late 1940s. Widely separated by seas and time, just like the milk-loving birds, the students (and parents) took a liking to the hitherto unknown Australian universities and schools. Perhaps, as the English poet Longfellow put it, "All things must change to something new, to something strange".

Asians generally tend to claim that a yearning for knowledge reflects their cultural traditions. Yet, the search for formal qualifications (especially technical ones), enabling the acquisition of a high income (and all that comfort and freedom that goes with it), can easily override the cultural imperative. Francis Bacon's "I would live to study, not study to live", whilst seemingly Asian in perspective, might (in the post-colonial era) find limited support in that continent. European men had taught the subjugated modern Asians the value of advanced technology. Join them or beat them at their own game (as did the Japanese), became a clear ambition. Unlike the dog, for whom happiness always lies on the other side of the door, these Asian people knew what they wanted to take from the West without losing themselves. But I doubt whether many would have taken note of the exhortation by the great Greek philosophers that "the unexamined life is not worth living".

So, young Asians entered Australia in increasing numbers. Initially, we came mainly from the Indian sub-continent and other British-controlled territories, such as Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Malaya (now Malaysia and Singapore). A few came from Thailand. Strangely, there were also white students from overseas. I subsequently came to know well some students from Mexico, the USA, France and other parts of Europe. Those from Europe and the USA were probably immigrants. But we Asians were on strictly controlled student visas, because of the then White Australia policy. An interesting aspect of this attempted control was the use by the Department of Immigration of landlords and guest house owners to keep tabs on us. In one university, a particular senior academic was believed by us to report to the security agencies about our contacts and activities. In time, we coloured fellows became acceptable as residents; that is, if we asked to remain in Australia. Usually, this was because of marriage to white Aussie women who, then, did not wish to settle elsewhere. When allowed to stay, we were given only temporary residence rights, as were the Japanese wives of Australian servicemen. This happened even in the 1950s.

Why did we come to Australia instead of studying at home, when (except for Malaya, at that time) we had our own universities? In the main, we wished simply to acquire the white man's qualifications. To do that, we traditionally went to Britain; but Australia, whilst unknown, was closer.

In spite of our middle class presentation and conduct, we were not always seen by the Aussies as ambassadors for our people. Initially, we were not even tolerated by many. Our acceptance by such Aussies took a little time and effort, aided mainly by our adaptation to the behavioural mores of the man in the street, who was (in the main) our major contact. With the more educated Aussies, acceptance was easier. The willing support of barbecues, drinking lots of beer, and adopting blunt speech were useful vehicles for acceptance. Learning to drink beer in the Aussie style was difficult, I found, especially with the six o'clock closing of the pubs; but lots of practice helped. Learning to swear proficiently was relatively easy; a most useful skill in certain situations. As a result of my experiences, I recommend that middle class and professional migrants mix with the ordinary man in the street. This is the best way to come to know the Australian people, and to understand them. Diplomatic circuses, academic soirees, and professional conferences can then be the cream on top of a well-baked cake.

Fortunately, our relationships with the Aussies improved very substantially over the next quarter of a century. The Colombo Plan of the 1950s, by offering valuable scholarships to Asian students, opened the hearts and minds of some of the recalcitrant Aussies to simple socialisation, if not to miscegenation. Many ordinary Aussies now clearly felt good about assisting us to study in Australia. The inebriated, who invariably accosted us on public transport, made a point of

telling us how good they felt about their charity! They meant well. The mantle of even involuntary charity can be so warming!

In my early years in Australia, I was somehow enabled to enter homes at every economic level. The warmest were those of the working class. I have a soft spot for this breed of Aussie. Sipping (awful) tea in the kitchen or drinking beer until daybreak around a keg (generally containing about nine gallons of lovely amber fluid) reflected their hospitality. I did note that it was two years before my middle class Anglo-Celt Aussie student friends invited me to their homes. In that time, I had been invited to dinner by European and English migrant stock, on quite a number of occasions.

The liberalisation of immigration policy in the 1960s by a conservative government, mindful of Australia's place in a politically independent and economically burgeoning Asia, reflected the already open hearts and minds of many Aussies. The non-discriminatory immigration policy, wisely introduced in 1973, brought in Asian settlers whose paths of acceptance had been well greased by us. When the Indo-Chinese refugees arrived in Australia after 1975, no one would have guessed that the Australian nation had matured so wonderfully in such a short time. As someone said, "A bias recognised is a bias sterilised". When, as Chief Ethnic Affairs Officer based in Melbourne, I represented the Minister for Immigration (in the early 1980s) at a stage presentation of their culture by the Hmong community, and at a weekend-long Moon Festival organised by the Vietnamese community, I did wonder if these two communities were aware how my fellow students and I had prepared our Aussie hosts for their arrival.

Yet, the well documented involvement of many Vietnamese and other East Asian youth in the drug trade, and in related crime, has soured the perception of Asian immigrants by many Australians (including me). A perceivable arrogance displayed by some of the newer arrivals is also not good for community relations. Many of us were also not very happy about the large numbers of rich East Asians (known as 'astronauts') who, having acquired resident status in Australia, left their children (described as 'parachute kids') in Australia. The children were to acquire academic qualifications, available relatively easily and cheaply in Australia, whilst the parents returned to their homeland work-pastures for the preferred high lifestyle. What sort of immigration was this? These 'astronauts' had obviously taken heed of what Confucius said to their forebears: "The Gods cannot help those who do not seize opportunities". However, when it became known that some of the offspring of wealthy absentee immigrant parents had applied for, and received, living allowances intended for disadvantaged Aussie students living away from home and were self-supporting, the Australian taxpayer was not amused. Even Confucius would not have been amused.

It is now clear (as expressed to me by a host of Anglo-Celt Aussies) that the pace of social change has been too great for many Australians, especially when accompanied by economic and employment uncertainty. I do sympathise with those who say this, as I did for the Malays into whose territory my ancestors moved three generations ago. Therefore, Australia's record of long-ingrained sensitivity (if not antipathy or prejudice) to people of other colours and cultures obviously requires careful handling. Successful community relations, especially relations with (and between) widely disparate tribes, do need time for people (especially the host people) to adjust. That is, to learn that the newer arrivals do not pose a threat to the nation's institutional mores, values and practices.

In fact, the cultural gulf between the Anglo-Celt Australian and the bulk of the 'old' New Australian (ie the European immigrant of the 1950s and 60s from a non-English speaking background) was deeper and wider than that between the Anglo-Celt Australian and the educated

English-speaking Asian immigrant of recent times. Since those Europeans had adapted successfully to Australia's institutions, surely these Asians can be expected to adapt equally well; and probably more speedily. The less educated and unskilled Asian refugee and humanitarian intake would continue, however, to pose the same problems as did many of the non-English speaking unskilled white migrants. Further, since the public's attitude to the Aboriginal people became politically linked to the rising intake of Asians, and since the urbanised white gene-infused indigene is not always readily discernible from the brown Asians (because of the influence of a common Caucasian heritage linking whites and these Asians?), the future comfort of coloured people in Australia may be at some risk. Public statements by some xenophobic politicians and academics seeking to be adored as pundits, propagandists and proponents of populism also warned against the Asian tide. But, as Kin Hubbard put it so well: "Nobuddy kin talk as interestin' as th' feller that's not hampered by facts or information".

Whilst recently arrived Asian immigrants and visitors testified publicly to the spitting, name-calling, and other forms of attack by Aussie yobbos, even in the wealthier suburbs, in private, the Anglo-Celts expressed discomfort, disdain and distrust about the heavy influx of coloured people. Examples of utterances made to me are: "There are too many black people coming into the country"; "I moved out when the 'slopes' began to move in"; "You Malaysians are taking up all our good jobs". The worst utterance of all: "You've got to blacken your face to get anywhere these days", links the indigene to the unwanted coloured immigrant. As a result, I fear that Australia's international reputation may be at risk. Indeed, it does not seem to be that good in Asia already.

It is against this background that, as an old Asian Aussie, I write about some of my experiences and observations. As the Japanese saying goes: "The outsider sees most of the game". However, as an old English proverb reminds us: "I can't be your friend and your flatterer too". Yet, I might be able to demonstrate that those of us with 'black looks' are no different in our human aspirations and conduct from the mainstream white Australian; indeed, that I can contribute to building a useful bridge between black and white. Hopefully, the reader might come to accept what a learned Arab had said: "All strangers are relations to each other".

Further, in a world increasingly seeking meaning in life, rather than only survival and security in a physical sense, many white Australians are being attracted to Asian philosophies. As another Japanese saying reminds us, "All religions start from Asia". Few enlightened people are thus likely to reject my claim that Asia continues to have a lot to offer Australia in this search. They might also concur with that Hindu proverb: "There is nothing noble about being superior to some other man. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self". There is hope for both Australia and Willy, the colour-sensitive tennis player, yet!