

The Karma of Culture

by

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Dedicated to:

All the babies
who wiggle their
toes at us

“It is wisdom to live in the world
In the way the world lives”
-Tiruvalluvar (*Kural 426*)
(*South Indian Weaver Sage, Circa 200BC*)

“Two birds of beautiful plumage, comrades
Inseparable, live on the self same tree.
One bird eats the fruit of pleasure and pain;
The other looks on without eating.”
Shvetashvatara Upanishad (4.6)

Preface

Culture is ubiquitous. Culture is all-pervasive. Many (mainly Asian) immigrants take into white host nations strongly divergent, and historically durable, cultural stances and practices. In the migrant-receiving countries of the Western world, the core issue of a conflict between a sustained attempt by such immigrants to retain their cultures and the osmotic force of equal opportunity offering an earlier and smoother integration into the values and mores of the host people bobs up and down in the seas of social policy. Cultural diversity can therefore be destabilising to a hitherto cohesive society. The national identity which had evolved through the merging of culturally compatible tribes and peoples can now be seen to be threatened. Whilst this book is about Australia, the issues raised have relevance for all immigrant-receiving nations.

One's culture provides the template for dealing with life. Its base is laid in childhood, through the values imposed by family and community. The cultural practices of one's tribe reinforce these values and associated perceptions. The impacts of nurture (experience) upon nature (inheritance), as one passes through life, are filtered through this network of cultural values. A conditioned belief among some in the West that a human zygote equates to a human being, contrasting with an older Asian belief that the human soul enters the body of a baby at (or after) birth, is reflective of divergent cultural values.

The need for an immigrant to reconcile inherited cultural values and associated practices with the predominant values and practices of an adopted nation-state can create stresses on both cultures. The issues which arise from this cross-cultural impact are those of : equal opportunity; whether a unified people can arise from widely divergent tribes; whether the individual or the family unit has priority in terms of rights and responsibilities; the definition of family, and its role in society; cultural and political sovereignty in a globalising nation-state; the place of the Creator in modern life; and whether Australia's "fair-go" ethos needs an infusion of Asian values.

Assessment

“This book provides a thoughtful and fearless approach to some important and highly topical questions. What constitutes Australia’s nationhood? What is her role in Asia and in the world? How can, and should, the burgeoning economies of Asia contribute to the development of Australia, not just as foreign investors and trading partners, but in terms of cultural and spiritual values? What is the nature of democracy, and how can democratic ideals be realized in Australia and in its Asian neighbours? What is the meaning of multiculturalism in the Australian context? These questions are raised in an intelligent and thought-provoking way.”

“You give us valuable insights into your own experiences as an ‘outsider’ in a predominantly white ‘Western’ environment, who has been able to become part of that environment without losing your deepest links with your own culture. And you demonstrate that the influence of Eastern philosophers – to which Australia is uniquely exposed among Western countries – has the potential to counteract the West’s slide into materialism and the spiritual impoverishment that provides fertile soil for cultism and fundamentalism in all their forms.”

“This is a hard-hitting, insightful book that will appeal to academics, public servants, students, and many members of the general public.....”

Endorsements

“Writing from the perspective of an Asian Australian, Arasa addresses some of the fundamental questions confronting human kind at the present time. The clash of collectivism and individualism is seen as an East/West issue. Here is available, perhaps for the first time, an insightful ‘take’ on Australian society written by an ‘insider’ who, paradoxically, is an ‘outsider’ as well. ... enormously interesting and not uncontroversial ...”.

- John Western, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, University of Queensland, Qld.

“Ratnam’s book is a wake-up call for a more independent national policy on immigration and multicultural policy. Coming from a well-informed former migrant, who has embraced this country as his own, his message has particular value. ... Impressed with the depth of (his) analysis”.

- Professor Bob Birrell, Director, Centre for Population & Urban Research, Monash University, Vic.

“This is a book that every Australian should read. It provides a unique insight into the society and culture of contemporary Australia from someone who has been both an insider and an outsider in Australia. It has a refreshing honesty in an age in which ‘spin’ and euphemism too often combine to hide the true nature of things. You may not always agree with what the book says but you will be compelled to sit up and think more deeply about our contemporary world. I think that the book has that element of honesty and insight that much of what is currently published does not. I hope that it will be read widely.”

- Associate Professor Greg Melleuish, Head, School of History and Politics, Wollongong University, NSW.

Introduction

The Trauma of Transplantation

He thought he saw an Elephant
That practised on a fife:
He looked again, and found it was
A letter from his wife.
“At length I realize”; he said,
“The bitterness of life!”
—*Lewis Carroll*

Near the end of my life, I feel compelled to make sense of the totality of my experiences. This, I believe, is not unusual for those of us who have sought meaning in the events and outcomes of daily existence. We ask if there is an identifiable pattern for each of us in the tides of Life, Destiny or Karma; or in God’s Will.

Indeed, it is imperative for a Hindu to know if he has assiduously availed himself of the opportunities for learning presented to him in his present sojourn on Earth. More crucially, as said in the Upanishads (the conveyor of the core metaphysics of Hinduism), it is that same deep driving desire directing the way each of us lives that determines what our next life is to be. With possibly thousands of human lives yet to go, and knowing that life on Earth can require some very painful lessons, one does indeed have to be reasonably circumspect about those desires.

After contributing to a very fast-changing Australia for the span of nearly two generations, I am satisfied that I have adapted successfully to Australia’s institutions and to its behavioural mores and practices. Yet, I am deeply and sadly aware that many of the cultural values which formed me in Asia are not quite congruent with prevailing Australian cultural values.

At that most crucial point of impact between East and West, where white skin is seemingly affronted by coloured skin, my life is better than it was when I arrived in 1948. Since the Hanson phenomenon in the mid-Nineties, and the Government’s stance that personal abuse by a white against a coloured person is only an expression of free speech, some of the prejudice has returned. The underlying reality is that the “old” Aussie’s sacred sites, the seats of power, remain securely in his hands.

And I marvel at the continuing sensitivity to skin colour and the derivative disparagement of coloured people by many an ‘old’ Aussie. For how long will such people continue to remain unaware that 85% of mankind is indeed coloured, and that skin colour is not relevant in most human relations? I do, however, acknowledge that it is extremely difficult to discard the residues of ignorance resulting from a culturally conditioned but out-dated superiority complex. This complex was borne of a few centuries of dominance, by white colonising Christians, of coloured people professing a plethora of religious beliefs, and with divergent cultural practices.

I can certainly attest, with deeply bruised feelings, to the display of prejudice and discrimination by some in powerful positions when I sought a job in the private sector as a graduate: and, later, when I sought my rightful place in a bureaucracy. In this effort, I was supported by my peer group. I also had an unchallenged track record. Lies, the shifting of

goalposts, backroom denigration, and the flexing of tribal muscles, whilst not commonplace, were most effective in ensuring that white superiority, and possibly the hegemony of the associated faith, prevailed. The message I received was that I was not one of them. Indeed, one most senior official told me that my “cultural background” would always be a bar to further career progress! How then did I achieve leadership positions in voluntary community organizations, and become a middle manager with the respected title of Director?

The Asian’s cultural traits can also be deemed to be un-Australian. The most ridiculous manifestation of such prejudice relates to attitudes to study displayed by Asian children. They are accused of studying inordinately hard, and not developing a rounded personality through participation in sport. I concede that a driving will to succeed is indeed an Asia-wide trait, and enforced by parents. The close family cohesion, and social and other obligations within families, and within ethnic communities, from all parts of Asia - from the Mediterranean to the Sea of Japan - are clearly held to be incompatible with the emphasis on individual freedom in the West. It is little wonder that Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysia’s Dr Mahathir upset the leaders of the West with their claims about the inherent superiority of Asian values, even in a democratic capitalist milieu. Perhaps it is evolutionary superiority, as time will no doubt tell.

At that important interface between citizens and rulers in an officially secular Australia, the socio-political values of a religious minority have an undue influence. Some social policies in Australia have been allowed to be dominated by the challengeable values of this minority. What is surely required in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation-state is religious tolerance. How else could Australia aspire to be the ideal of a free and responsible society guided by liberal values?

However, the sectarian chasm transplanted from the British Isles has recently been papered over publicly. The hands of descendants of immigrants from the Western border of Europe are now firmly in control of much of the administrative machinery of government. This really does little harm, except that tribal machinations should have no place in an open society. The tectonic movements of the strangely competitive Christian sects indeed bode ill for the full acceptance and integration of peoples of other faiths. In this context, is it not strange also that the majority of Asian immigrants define themselves in the Census as Christian? This influx of Christians occurred in spite of the formal non-discriminatory immigration policy which applied from the Sixties!

Further, the recent official antagonism against fundamentalist Islamic nations (which seem to have lost the moral messages of Mohammed, its founder) have led (through the “war on terrorism” and an implicit “clash of cultures”) to the denigration of Muslims in Australia by many ordinary Australians. People brought up in an authoritarian environment in their formative years are unfortunately likely to counter any display of prejudice by retaliation. The arrogant and challenging behaviour in public spaces by Australian-born male youths of Middle Eastern descent might be a reflection of this tendency. What is strange is that ordinary Australians, many of whom are church-going, have expressed views in my company indicating an antipathy to Islam, and a dislike of Muslims. Who is guilty of propagating such prejudice?

But, then, this unwanted and unwarranted tension between Muslims and Christians may be the price my adopted country has to pay for the aim of our military protector to have oil-rich lands under the control of people linked to the major oil interests in the West, and (perhaps) to have the Jewish people residing in the West to be induced to move into their own territory (God-given of course) in the Middle East. This would also give the West (at last) a permanent foot-

hold in the Middle East, having lost that bit of Syria named Lebanon which the French had expropriated. The oil and gas fields are getting closer.

My government is, of course, in no position to reject demands placed upon it by its military mentor and much sought after saviour, and by those whose continuing capital injections are vital for my nation-state to survive. We have never been independent financially and ideationally. Militarily, we act freely, but on a wink and a nod. Our relations with other nations are, in essence, effectively determined by the USA. Our Middle East policy is an example. Our enemies are defined for us too. So, we are at risk of being involved in yet another clash of cultures, but a more dangerous one now. In the meanwhile, we hunt suspected terrorists. We do this without respect for those human rights which we normally attempt to shove down the necks of Asian nations. How sanctimonious some of our leaders sound at times. They do not realise that their feet of clay, in relation to the way the Aussie indigene continues to be treated, are so clearly visible to the world at large.

The “white man’s burden” of yore is still infused into much of our official and private attitudes, utterances and actions towards our neighbours. Yet, many of these are kindly and intended to assist. The pre-colonial industrial and trading successes of the major cultures and tribes in the Asian region, their valuable and durable religious faiths, and their superb capacity for artistic expression over the millennia are over-shadowed by the retinal after-images of the white colonisers of the relatively recent past. Many “old” Aussies do not seem to realise that that most effective combination of gun and “good book”, inflicted over peaceful, settled, and civilised people all over the world for a few centuries, has now been deracinated. Without an adequate appreciation of the great history and viable cultures of near neighbours, can white Aussies be able to relate, with mutual respect, to coloured neighbours?

White Aussies have yet to realise too that the claimed innate superiority of white people was illusory. The “white” man is a mythical artefact, given the deeply buried genes of the Tartars (Mongols) and the Turkic peoples (of Central Asia) in the Anglo-Celt forebears of the Anglo-Celt Aussies. They have yet to learn too that the desert faith of Christianity is no better, metaphysically or spiritually, than the forest faiths of Asia. Increasing numbers of Australians are giving away authoritarian religions for the joys of spirituality. In any event, “whites” will soon represent only 10% (a fall from the current 15%) of the total global population. The hegemony of “white” nations is well on the way out.

When it comes to political freedom (which we have), in spite of a transparent and efficient electoral system, we are powerless in relation to the tweedledum and tweedledee political parties which take turns to rule us. Our elected representatives are not answerable to us. Our leaders often behave in the manner of oriental despots. Yet, they present themselves as ever so humble, and always claim to consult us. I note that “my government” has given way to “I”. Our leaders also live very well. Behind the scenes there is the stench of some corruption, but antiquated and undemocratic laws of defamation offer a veil of purity. At worst, however, official corruption in Australia is akin only to petty theft, compared to the grand larceny reported in some Asian and other nations.

It is in these above areas that I have major concerns about the underlying cultural values in our nation.

In other areas, Australia is way ahead of the nation-states of Asia. It is a beacon for the dispossessed, the disadvantaged, and those who seek opportunity for economic success and greater freedom, as well as free money (as welfare). So, all is not black in this still white nation-state. Relations with and between Australia’s ethnic communities are good, but the communities

may be somewhat mutually exclusive, as in many Asian countries. We are a tolerant people, as long as the new arrival does not flaunt his difference. As some do so exultantly, it is little surprising that other ethnic tribes display a little irritation. The security of public space, the desire for social harmony through a unity in forms of public behaviour, and just good conduct are threatened by some overt assertion (perhaps counter-assertion) of some ethnic cultural right. Those responsible are, however, only a handful of immigrants and their descendants. These clearly see themselves as insistently different from the rest of us.

Multiculturalism is, as expected, already on its way out - except as a description of the cultural diversity we have accumulated. The policy of "managing multiculturalism", code for official attempts to ensure effective equal opportunity, was doomed to failure, because it was a top-down policy. Education, a bottom-up osmotic and all-pervasive influence, is the only effective means of enhancing fair treatment of all - *by all* - and not only by the Anglo-Celts. Some leaders of our ethnic communities have tended to behave as if it is only the Anglo-Celt who has to display tolerance and cultural acceptance.

The influx of foreign peoples has been great. In my view, far too great. The variety of imported cultures is also far too great. So say the older Aussies, whether of British, European or Asian descent. Too much change within a single lifetime is terribly threatening. It is a very human reaction. I sympathise with those so affected. But, in this arena of policy, we are ruled by a shopkeeper mentality. And, in truth, we grow economically only through the demands generated by population growth. This is achieved mainly through immigration. The necessary funding is provided by overseas interests, who thereby come to control significant sectors of the economy.

However, the fabric of society is fraying rapidly, as in the other economies of the Ultra-West. This is because of the undue emphasis placed upon the rights of individuals. There is also a rising white under-class. This class is under-educated, under-skilled, under-motivated, and under-employed, but full of rights. It is fed and housed mainly by the middle class, because the wealthy have legal means to pay little tax. (Why so?) Young people can even matriculate without being able to deal proficiently with words and numbers. What are we to do with this class? Will the members of this class afford to form families? As they already do, and up to three generations can be supported by welfare, what sort of society will result? A few offspring of the hard-working white post war immigrants can, surprisingly, be found in this under-achieving under-class. What can members of this under-class contribute to society? What role models are available to the children born into welfare?

The definition of family is currently as varied as are the rights asserted for each concept. Evolutionary logic, like history, is now irrelevant. An army of children suffers from asserted freedoms, with no one officially seemingly concerned about the future of society, or its nature. Instant gratification is all, except for the poor bloody kids. Many of these can expect only an hour of "quality time" per work day from career parents. Many others will go to bed in a home without a father, and without any paternal guidance in life. And, is there any evidence that women accept head-of-household responsibilities within marriage or cohabitation?

Where do the old people fit into the new paradigms? In old people's homes, or on their own. It is their right, OK? It is clear that each generation is increasingly disavowing mutual responsibility. The State can provide. Who funds this largesse? And for how long into the future? What happened to the self-reliance and self-sufficiency which built this and other immigrant nations? And the more one relies on the State, the weaker the bonds of family. And one's

community is restricted to the workplace or the club. Reliance on the State also leads to a culture of control by shiny-bottomed bureaucrats.

Further, with a newfound wisdom of some members of the judiciary, not only are the law enforcers' responsibilities thwarted, but all manner of rights, and rewards for irresponsible to criminal conduct, are proliferating. Curiouser and curiouser! Because equal opportunity was always available, it is not surprising that working class values can now permeate academic theories, the educational approaches inflicted on school children, and the preferred policies of welfare deliverers. Yet, I am in wonderment at the development of judicial thinking. Whilst apparently upholding the law, judges find new rights, but fewer responsibilities. Does this not say a lot about the durability of cultural values?

It is against this perspective that I present my overview of the Australian nation-state and its institutions and peoples. In the half-century span of this overview, my core Hindu Asian values remain supreme. These values are based upon freedom, but with responsibility; with mutual obligation to the collective and to one's Creator over-riding satisfaction of self.

Chapter 1

Be True To Thine Self

There is a tide in the affairs of men
which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
—Shakespeare

I am an integral part of a nation founded in fear. It lives in fear. While it struts the world stage – for example, as a “wannabe” mediator between two nations with nuclear warheads, or as an effusive preacher on human rights to any Asian or Pacific nation which might listen - it continues to be a little fearful.

At a suburban level, I am told “The Indonesian will attack us one day”. What about the bloody Martians, I wonder. Anyway, will the Indonesians ever be able to walk over the intervening seas? The republicans want us to ditch our English monarch immediately. What about our military overlord, I wonder. Were we to become a republic, say the republicans, as they whistle against the wind, we would gain the respect of our Asian neighbours. What a novel ambition! The shopkeepers and their political allies want us to fill up the empty interior of this vast land with foreigners to avoid a military threat from Asia. What about the already extensive ownership of Australian land, farms, and other enterprises by the Japanese and the peripatetic Chinese, I wonder. The Aussies living in the country towns and hamlets (what is left of these after the successes of globalisation, privatisation, de-industrialisation, and such like), however, fear that foreigners might colour their terrain (having previously ensured that it was not blackened) - unless the new arrival is a doctor.

The rising middle class disdains the studiousness and some academic prowess of Asian Aussie students, on the grounds that their indefatigable focus on high marks surely could not develop the rounded personalities so typical of Australia. It seems to fear that the “near enough is good enough” ethos of the Anglo-Celt’s forebears will be forever “rooned”, ie ruined (in archaic bush Australian lingo). Social researchers tell us that, increasing uncertainty of a kind never experienced before in their lifetime, weighs heavily over the Australian people. This uncertainty might explain the following behaviour - which is surely akin to the instinct of ants to gather food supplies if rain is expected: those at the top end of town causing immense economic and social destruction by seeking to raise shareholder values in their enterprises to yet higher levels; double-income families burying themselves in huge mortgages over palatial homes built not for prestige but for security; single income families lacking security seeking welfare supplements - essentially to offset their heavy tax burden; and the others joining the aged in demanding increasing welfare to compensate for their lack of earned income.

What caused this fear and uncertainty? At the initial occupation of Australia, the harsh sun and land; the strange environment; the isolation, loneliness, and distance from home; the proximity to aliens (some actually within the land); an assumed threat of invasion (a very natural fear for an invader); the inability to shake off the illnesses and debilitation caused by an alleged debauched lifestyle, lack of hygiene and immoral social practices; and possibly some subconscious guilt at the treatment of the indigene, would have had some part to play. Later, the

White Australia policy ethos would have coloured the perception by the Anglo-Celts of their new neighbours, especially after their treatment of the Chinese and the Kanakas. The fear of the “yellow hordes” was strong when I arrived in 1948, when the government did its best to find reds (ie communists) under every bed. Incidentally, my white Aussie father-in-law told me that the communist leaders of the trade unions had done more than the socialist ones to protect the Australian worker from the kind of exploitation which seems now to be seeping back into the economy. Said father-in-law was a political conservative.

Underlying these fears was that fatuous colonial attitude. This seemed to have stained the moral fibre of the whole nation. Every white Aussie, irrespective of educational level, saw himself as a cut above a non-white. I remember, in 1949, a fellow student saying to me “I don’t mind you, but I wouldn’t like many more like you in the country”. Did the Aborigines say something similar to Captain Cook? In the mid-Eighties, a fellow Director in the Department of Immigration complained that there were “too many really black people coming in - no, no, not like you”. Even now, I have elderly Aussies tell me about the odd old friend who “was a truly white man”! In this situation I can only assume that I am seen as an honorary white. But I am not affronted. I have often wondered, though, whether the white population, (even those with the “stain” of Aboriginal blood in them) realise that coloured people like me could, through a little miscegenation, lead the nation to become free of that terrible risk of sunburn.

Both racial superiority and its sibling, cultural superiority, were basic ingredients to the white man’s burden. Cultural superiority subsumes religious prejudice. Only relatively recently, the Pope forgot his manners when he talked (whilst a guest in India) about converting Indians to his religion - presumably for their salvation. In Australia, having the country flooded by people who are denying themselves salvation could be a somewhat fearsome experience - and perhaps to be avoided. However, as I recently asked a woman in my district, when she openly displayed a terrible prejudice against the Muslim peoples (yes, the ordinary peoples, not any bully-boy government): “One of these days you are going to have a shock. When you reach the Celestial Abode of the Heavenly Father, you will have to shake hands with all kinds of people - Hindus, Muslims, Caluthumpians, and so on. What will you do then?”

In more recent times, a new kind of fear has been aroused - of being over-run by richer, better educated, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan Asians. There is now no reference to unspeakable habits. This was an excuse used to defend ethnic cleansing by settlers. Of concern now is the way very old mansions in upper class Sydney are being knocked down by wealthy upper-class Asians representing “old money”, who then put up a bigger mansion straddling two building blocks. The boongs and blackfellows aside, the wops, wogs, eyeties and dagoes have disappeared. Unwanted or not fully acceptable at first, they proved themselves hardworking. Their offspring are actually doing better, in economic terms (but not in taking up many sacred seats of power) than those of the Anglo-Celt Aussies (and the Brits, their cousins). This is surely not surprising, since the initially despised Irish are now an integral part of the mainstream - hence the term Anglo-Celt, where initially it was Anglo-Saxon.. Even the Mediterranean and West Asian people later followed the same path of acceptance and integration. However, a few academics and ethnic community leaders did whinge for a while about being forced to assimilate, and presumably having to off-load all their essential ethnic or tribal cultural characteristics.

However, I have not yet found an Irishman or any immigrant from Europe who had to give up his core cultural values in those allegedly assimilationist days. These values are: to whom, how, and where he prays; how one brings up family; what language one speaks at home and

within the ethnic community; how one dresses, sits, sleeps and eats at home. Yes, in the early days, immigrants had to speak English in public; else, they were most likely to be told, most rudely, "Why don't you speak English, you". How quaint! The "old" Anglo-Celt Aussies, by then secure in their new home (although surrounded by a smorgasbord of foreign and somewhat disconcerting cultures, religions, languages, customs, habits and so on), felt threatened because they could not understand what some foreigners were saying to others of their kind on an Aussie street. This is little different from the more recent practice of ripping off a head scarf from a Muslim woman, saying "You can't dress like that in my country". It's all a matter of protecting white Anglo-Celt Aussie public space. Who gave this white guardian the right to defend public space?

If the fear of being over-run, often expressed as anger, is as pervasive as I feel it is, why do Australian governments continue to feed it by accepting large numbers of hitherto unacceptable foreigners? We now know that the British do not have any substantive reason to migrate. Those who fear the blackening and browning of British cities by the descendants of the people from the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent are an exception. The Europeans would be foolish to emigrate to Australia, given the substantial economic development at home. So, who wants to migrate to Australia? Mainly, only the coloureds – essentially, the unviable, the hopeful, the opportunists, and the criminals amongst them. I say this partly because none of my middle class relatives or their friends are attracted by Australia. Their lifestyle in three Asian countries is far superior to anything they can expect in Australia - unless they are doctors or medical specialists..

Australia's massive post war immigration program began because the country needed able-bodied men - to build all manner of things. And this is what the nation got - the able bodied. The Brits were supplemented by the "reffos" (ie refugees) from Europe. These included some very cultured, educated and skilled displaced people, who were sent, on contract, to work with their bodies. The acceptance by the Australian population of the initial batch of reffos was enhanced by officialdom describing them as beautiful Balts. Many of the women were certainly that. I speak from personal contact with a few. The Balts had to be blonde and blue eyed. So, all manner of Europeans came in as Balts. These included (reportedly) some Nazis, and others of like temperament and occupation.

Since these initially unacceptable European foreigners had made such a contribution to the development of Australia's infrastructure (such as the tramways) and manufacturing industry, it seemed reasonable that, when the supply from Europe started to dry out, to look for near-whites from the Middle East. I remember a certain discomfort in those immigration officers I helped to interview in the mid-Sixties with this shift in policy. Although these intakes did not add much to the able bodied work-force, Australia learnt that foreign clerks and administrators were employable; and that there can never be too many shopkeepers and traders. All this adds to that consumer and housing demand which now so fascinates the policy wallahs.

We do not, however, have a population policy or a policy for economic and social development. The government denied relatively recently that a population policy is necessary as a template. Without such a policy, there can be no development policy. A fabulous piece of research on population policy by some think tank reached, I understand, the profound conclusion that a population policy should be investigated!

What are our political parties afraid of? In the event, it is easy to continue with immigration and economic development policies which, in any clear thinking and environmentally sensitive nation, would be out of date. The reasons for this inertia are complex.

A major influence is the fear of empty spaces. One must fill up the land as quickly as possible, with people like oneself. Hence the emphasis on whites and those of an appropriate faith. So, Asian entrants initially tended to be East Asian, and predominantly Christian. Refugee, humanitarian and asylum policies also helped to reverse the ratio between the “prods” and the “micks” in the population. It took me a long time to appreciate the political and policy impacts of these terms.

Another significant factor in policy inertia is growth for the sake of growth. Modern nations are stuck on this treadmill. We do not know how to survive without a rising GDP (gross domestic product), which requires buyers. Because we have never been able to find continuing overseas buyers, at stable prices, for most of what we have to export, we need a growing consumer demand within the country. Since our women are not keen to confuse sexual activity with procreation, we need to import the buyers. Indeed, the attraction of the en-suite, and all the other accoutrements of modern housing, did defeat the priests of old and the modern politician. Their admonishments sound suspiciously like “root for Australia”, a platform once suggested by a senior official to his Minister..

A key factor in policy lethargy is our relationship with the foreigners who invest heavily in Australia. The national government is also beholden to the USA for military protection - and thereby has to permit American multinational corporations free play in the Australian economy. The economy has always lacked the savings necessary for development; so the foreigner obliges. He exacts a heavy price; he can therefore buy anything he likes in Australia. He does as he pleases, and we will accede to anything he asks. That mechanism for screening foreign takeovers and other foreign investment was ever a smokescreen. I spent eight years in that business. The bottom line in economic policy is that market forces must prevail.

However, modern market ideology can lead to all manner of destruction. For example, the rural sector is devastated societally by big agribusinesses replacing small farms. Where do the small farmers then go? The destruction of centralised marketing of rural products (such as milk) leads to the exposure of small producers to organised buyers. This can also result in higher prices to the consumer. Where is the benefit to the economy? Claimed economic efficiency over-rides consideration of community and humanity. This is why the French Government quarantines its rural sector from the socially destructive impacts of economic efficiency at any cost. Privatisation of public infrastructure also offers questionable benefits, because of a myopic focus by the private sector on short-term profits, matched by governments avoiding the raising of loans to fund necessary expenditure on infrastructure. De-unionisation and de-industrialisation exposes employees to exploiters, and the nation becomes a huge laundromat, with everyone taking in everyone else’s washing.

Playing in the dot.com, share trading, and paper shuffling enterprises does not provide the nation with the sort of solid industrial and employment base that small European nations like Sweden have. With limited land, a small population, and no natural resources, Singapore does not compete with Third World countries, as Australia does by relying on its rural and mining industries. Singapore is up there with the high-tech nations, modifying long-term development plans continually. This is why Singapore’s per capita income is higher than Australia’s. We have no idea how to do this. We are also hamstrung by an unholy reverence by officials for the indescribable beauty of market forces. This faith relieves them of the need to formulate proactive policies to take the nation into the future.

One might expect that, seeing the destruction of industries and country towns, with the pool of unemployed and under-employed somewhat excessive, and a growing and immobile under-

class living on welfare, that there would be a reduction in immigration. Instead of adding to the stocks of surplus workers and welfare dependents, one might educate, train and re-train those in the country. Instead, we focus on a soul-destroying process - for process is all it is. The job seekers are required to look for jobs which do not exist. Those who are not seriously seeking work are not required to move (even with official assistance) to where the jobs are. I and other taxpayers have so many unwanted dependants in our areas of residence.

The major drive behind our immigration policy, is therefore a simplistic reliance on the economic demand generated by the new arrivals. Unfortunately, if they are not employable, because of a lack of English, or needed skills, or motivation, the welfare cost will be very high. If they are employable, but have large families to feed and, through family re-union immigration entry policy, are allowed to bring more unemployable into Australia's welfare system, the net gain to the nation is negative.

Many a taxpayer like myself has argued that the nation should accept only those who will put in more than they will take from the country. The imperatives of immigration policy are clear. Even in a country with little intelligent debate about major policy issues, many ordinary Australians are clearly aware of the limited environmental carrying capacity of the land. Then there is the problem of inadequate infrastructure, such as sewage, roads and railways. There is relative over-crowding in those capital cities which draw the immigrant. Housing estates are planted instead of food crops, thereby wasting productive land. The enveloping air pollution is worsening. Frightening levels of drug taking and associated crime prevail. And so on, and so on. Yet, the odd political leader who looks far into the future (eg. Gorton, Hewson or Keating) soon has no future himself. So, we are like a fellow on an exercise bicycle in a gym going nowhere very fast. But we are busy, looking good, feeling good. Whether all that activity and the associated smug self-satisfaction is damaging to the body politic is something only time will tell. By then, however, all those politicians who should have led the nation to a better future would be enjoying their fat parliamentary pensions, and quite a few on-going perks.

It is fair to acknowledge that the immediate post war immigration policy was relatively sound. The country needed that intake. But, the manufacturing sector that absorbed the influx was, by both definition and in reality, uneconomic and inefficient. High cost production under tariff protection was necessarily limited to the Australian market. It was doomed to failure in an open competitive market. The residues of that industry policy still bedevil the nation. Having worked in the Tariff Board of the Sixties (and accused of being a "free trader"), I wondered at the contribution made by its successors to the developmental direction taken by Australian manufacturing industry. I can only hope that Fate will continue to be kind to us all. I suppose that economic growth of one to two percent per year in *real* terms (ie after allowing for inflation) is about the best that we can hope to achieve.

When, strangely, yet sensibly, a Labor government started to open up the economy to the real world, did we need all those able-bodied people still coming in? Fortunately, with the shift to immigrants from west and east Asia, we began to receive more educated, more skilled, more business oriented, and more enterprising immigrants. Overall, they were more cosmopolitan than the southern Europeans. Their English was better than that of most the earlier arrivals. The new immigrants may not have been needed as factory fodder and the like, but they were employable.

We got used to people coming in who were even more different than before; to the economy continuing to grow; to all sorts of tongues being heard in public places; and to a growing emphasis on how the nation could begin to help the immigrant settle in. Ethnic vote hunting by the major political parties coincided with ethnic (not necessarily immigrant) academics and

community group leaders highlighting the plight of the immigrant. This was the thin edge of the wedge to ethnic empowerment, leading to some ethnic proportionalism and ethnic preference in parts of the public sector. I recall a public service department with four young Greek Australians in a section of five, with the Greek officer in charge not getting along well with his fellow ethnics.

This was a useful lesson for the Anglo-Celts. An “ethnic” does not necessarily favour other ethnics, even his own kind. I also recall a Jewish fellow undermining a highly respected German in ethnic radio, simply because the latter was a German. My then Jewish colleague said that it was to be expected, although both oppressor and oppressed were pre-war immigrants! The Minister would not intervene; neither would the department. It was no different when I was treated badly, through a manifestation of tribal cohesion; no one at the helm was prepared to act.

In this context I can report that in two departments, I seemed to have all the junior ethnics allocated to my Section. My impression was that they were not wanted by my peer group. Why? They were good officers. And I am proud to claim that I guided a Vietnamese, a Pakistani, a Greek, a Hungarian, an Italian, a Latvian, amongst others, to find appropriate career paths. Only the first two were immigrants; yet they were all viewed by my hierarchy as foreigners. Indeed, one CEO (with three degrees) used to refer to an Australian born German Australian as a Hun. He would also not release the Hungarian to a preferred career path. In a similar vein, some school principals were known to have placed Australian children of immigrant parents with immigrant children to whom English was a new language. This was done in order to qualify for additional staff to offer “remedial” education.

By the late Sixties, sensitive to the burgeoning influence of the new nations arising from the colonial territories of Asia, the government wisely eased up on the White Australia policy. Then came the open door policy, which had two curious early results. The majority of Asians came from East Asia. Lighter coloured Asians were obviously preferred. This outcome was achieved simply by having more migrant selection officers in the preferred countries. The majority of Asians selected for entry also claimed to be Christian. I am certain that this helped their selection. Choosing Christian immigrants is quite a good idea. They would be more subject to social control than the others.

Many of the Christian entrants would, of course, have been of mixed ancestry, the distant forebear having blessed his descendants with his European name. Others would have been colonial whites not returning to Britain and other parts of Europe to a relatively bleak life. I have met a few of these. That is, some of the arrivals from Asia were either whites, or those who saw themselves as near-white, and therefore unwilling to be ruled by the fully coloured in their new garb as independent peoples. This is understandable, as the mixed bloods in some of the colonies had enjoyed a privileged position in the administration. However, I found those from India in this category not impressive at all. Indeed, the few ex-colonial all-white officers I came to know through work or socialisation were not that bright either - except for one very brilliant and civilised man (a deputy governor in a British colony and, after retirement, the deputy chancellor of an Australian university).

The immigration open door now seems to be genuinely open. The Asian immigrants are clearly integrated, the Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists with their own houses of prayer. The opposition by some local government authorities to the building of mosques and temples, and the strange claim by a member of the judiciary that a mosque is not a church, are minor hiccups. Yet, they reflect the anxiety of many in the mainstream populace forced to come to terms with an abrupt, and a little disconcerting, invasion of foreign cultures.

In this context, it is a little too easy for some to criticise the receiving populace (with its infusion of earlier generations of ethnics) for not being more accepting of very significant change. For, some of our ethnics are much more racist than the Anglo-Celt. Of course, the professional Muslim who insists on his daily prayer right at his work station, whether a desk or a machine, muddies the waters of acceptance by his arrogance. The recent arrivals from China and Hong Kong stridently asserting their rights, eg saying on tv that “We Chinese will not tolerate (such and such) from the Australian government”, or whingeing about discrimination when they themselves will not employ non-Chinese are not clearly sensitive enough to ethnic community relations, or to the imperatives of a liberal society.

However, it was the following two major changes in entry policy which rocked the boats of entry, tolerance and acceptance, and led to questioning by many about the rationale for immigration policy, viz. refugee and humanitarian (R&H) entry, and family reunion.

The most significant refugee policy was the Indo-Chinese policy. There were a few other policies floating around when that came in, but they were of no great consequence. The White Russian policy, introduced to save those fleeing Russia when that country became communist, had somehow hung around. The latest entrant under that policy came after a long and profitable residence in China. The Middle Eastern policy was intended to protect whites in brown Muslim nations. Some of the entrants under that policy were Jews.

Then there was the East Timorese program. Australia took in, apart from those who needed succour, East Timorese living in Portugal, their country of nationality. This was a clear case of corrupting a sound policy. My experience in administering this policy showed sponsors in Australia “shopping” for soft entry at a number of Immigration offices. There were also attempts to bring in unaccompanied minors. These were to become “anchors”. An anchor is a young person whose emotional needs for family call for immigration entry to parents, siblings and other close relatives. Although the entrants were coloured, they were safely Catholic.

The Soviet Jew policy enabled entry to Australia of those allowed by the USSR to join close family in Israel, but who wished instead to settle elsewhere. When the Prime Minister of Israel complained about the leakage of up to eighty five per cent of the exodus from the USSR (to mainly the USA), Australia tightened its scrutiny – much to the annoyance of the Australian Jewish community. However, somewhere along the line, we took in Soviet Jews who had entered Israel, did not like it, and left - and then claimed opportunistically to be refugees. Who were these? Mixed couples - a Soviet Jew female married to a non-Jewish male. I was able to help one of these women commence a career in Australia. Personal testimony showed that such couples were not treated by the Israeli government as equal to white both-Jewish couples. Further testimony suggests that coloured Jews in Israel are not equal to white Jews in treatment, with non-Jewish Israelis at the bottom of the pile. This policy stratification was confirmed by a very reliable and close Jewish Australian friend, as well as by that female Soviet Jew colleague I took under my wing. That is, whilst those Soviet Jews who had left Israel were clearly outside our R&H policy, we did take them in. Both the East Timorese and Soviet Jew policies demonstrated the power of the respective lobbies in Australia. Acceptance of the entrants by mainstream Anglo-Celts was obviously not an issue.

An entry policy of short duration covered the Tamils of Sri Lanka. Its scope was reduced by that shortage of Australian staff in those South Asian countries with a brown population. The two migrant selection officers (members of my team) who protested to the head of department about this discriminatory policy were not placed overseas again – and thereafter resigned. Again,

preference may have been given to Christians, who are only a small fraction of the Tamil population.

The Middle Eastern policy gave way to a global humanitarian policy (which I re-wrote). This policy was initially focused on the Middle East. The people of interest over there were the Baha'is of Iran. These were the only people in the region known to be subject to *official persecution*. Yet, eighty percent of the initial entrants were Iranian Muslims from Pakistan. Some migrant selection officials at overseas posts would seem to have had a little difficulty in reading policy circulars. The global humanitarian policy was later expanded to cover individuals facing *discrimination within* their country of nationality, applying mainly to Poland. Before this change, R&H policies required the applicant to be *outside* his country of nationality, the refugee to be fearful of persecution, the humanitarian entrant to be fearful of discrimination (by the State).

The Indo-China policy was necessary to relieve the countries of first asylum in South East Asia. It would not have been necessary if the US government had accepted that the Vietnamese only wanted independence. In spite of the highly favoured "domino" theory, even by academia, there was no evidence of a substantive threat of communism to the rest of South East Asia. None of my relatives gave any credit to the "domino" theory. But the West has this lingering colonial policy of attempting to install its kind of government all over the world. It certainly beats globalisation practices and trade wars. The East European policy arose when certain key Liberals reportedly wanted a change in right-wing refugees - white ones. Later, when a powerful key player in the Labor Party reportedly sought, for a change, some left-wing refugees, the Latin American policy was introduced. All these policies would have taken in a large number of economic refugees. A goodly proportion of the Indo- Chinese entrants and almost the whole of the entrants under the other two policies would have been nominally Catholic. Of all the R&H entrants, the Chileans were the most interesting. Cohesive and ultra-nationalistic, they exuded a great and terrible hunger for freedom and fair play.

When I, as Head of R&H entry policy (in the early Eighties), challenged some of our policies, I was asked to close down only the White Russian and East Timorese policies. The lobbies backing the other policies were too powerful.

Refugee policy is an exceedingly complex matter. Illegal entrants are a world-wide phenomenon. Few nations have the luxury of the USA - of being able to use the cheap labour thus available. On a head of host population basis, the US intake is apparently less than that of Australia.

Should a country be required to take in someone knocking on the backdoor asking for (or demanding) asylum, simply because he claims to be a refugee? Through Australia's open immigration door already come people who are not going to make a net contribution to the nation for a long time - having regard for employability and family reunion consequences. We already have generous refugee policies. They are necessarily selective and political, their mainspring being (chiefly) pressure from within the nation.

UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) has piggy-backed upon this process. Its theology is a comfortable one for its highly paid officials; it imposes a "one size suits all tastes" requirement on signatory nations, somewhat like the Eurocrats' definition of a sausage (member nations *must* conform). No allowance is made for cultural differences, which reflect both history and geography or, more importantly, inter-ethnic community cohesion and power balances.

Its policy on *non-refoulement* is quite weird, implying that every claim is based on truth. That is how Australia finished up with all those economic refugees, thugs and gangsters from

Vietnam, whilst providing succour to those needing it. Yet, in Africa, Pakistan, and sundry other places, the displaced are returned to their territories once the disruption has settled. Should Australia have done this with the Lebanese? I was told by a Lebanese priest that many a known killer had found safety in Australia through our generous overstay policy for visitors, during one of those Lebanese political storms.

The precedent set by the boat people from Vietnam, including that dastardly trick of throwing children, not into the water, but onto unsafe boats, has been copied by illegal entrants from a variety of Asian countries, particularly the Middle East. The children, unaccompanied by their parents, were (and are) intended to act as “anchors”; to force the Australian government to accept their parents, whether or not they could adapt to Australia. The capacity to so adapt is an essential ingredient in immigrant and refugee selection. Such practices by illegal arrivals are causing a turbulence which defeats common sense. But, not everyone in favour of an open door asylum policy is at arm’s length in this business. Public posturing and crocodile tear-shedding are mixed with a rent-a-demonstrator mob, hopeful or conniving Aussie relatives of the illegal arrivals (some of whom have themselves come through the refugee door), and some heart-on-sleeves caring people.

Few offer solutions which recognise that assessing asylum claims (using the term asylum to cover R&H entry) is extremely difficult. This is so especially when the applicant has carefully destroyed all identity and travel documents, and chooses an identity and history to suit the claim. I had been told about some of those who had torn up their papers on arrival in Australia. For example, there was a young man wandering around Sydney Airport who, when accosted, asked which country he was in. He had clearly got off a plane, using necessary documents. Then he made a big mistake. He rang his mother to say that he had arrived safely. “Boat people”, carrying false documentation, or with no papers, are far more difficult to assess. Should such behaviour be treated as criminal? Anyone who cannot qualify for entry through the very flexible immigration door will pull every trick in the book to get through the asylum backdoor. It must also be recognised that UN obligations upon countries whose borders are being breached are as binding as are the Ten Commandments - unless these are reflected in legislation. Yet, UNHCR *definitions* need to be adhered to in making decisions about R&H admission.

Our procedures and processes are also extremely generous. Rejected asylum applicants have more access to the courts, at no cost to them, than the ordinary citizen of Australia. The cost of assessing, and then defending the assessment, is quite horrendous. Very few taxpayers consider that the cost to them is warranted. What I hear from everyone is “Get back into the queue”. And there are so many Australians patiently waiting for due process to apply with their refugee sponsorships of eligible relatives overseas.

To the supporters of asylum applicants it is all about rights, and yet more rights. What about the nation’s rights? It is, of course, quite possible that the striving and cunning asylum seeker is the kind of thrusting future citizen that the nation now needs. However, with jobs for those speaking little or no English not exactly waiting for them, how will these people live? The high public profile proponents of easy asylum entry surely have an obligation to tell us all about the policy and budgetary consequences of their plaint. They might even invite us to a public debate about relevant issues and costs, as well as mutual obligation. Letting asylum applicants loose in the community whilst their claims are being assessed would certainly represent easy permanent entry. Anyway, does Australia need any more welfare recipients? And should not the question of morality be turned back onto the illegal entrants and their Aussie sponsors and supporters?

Even an immigrant-seeking nation should not be forced to accept any applicant for asylum who cannot ultimately make a net contribution to the nation. One who does not speak English, or clearly has no capacity to learn English because of age or non-literacy in his own language, is not going to be readily employed. He will be a permanent burden upon the nation. Are we, as a nation, supposed to feel good about this? What about the applicant's self-esteem when he eventually learns that he is economically unviable? More counselling, with welfare?

Is there a better or fairer alternative? Returning an illegal entrant to the country of nationality or origin, or relocated in a culturally compatible country, would be appropriate. This would be a suitable role for UNHCR, instead of attempting to force Australia to accept the unqualified, the unsuitable, and the bully-boys.

After all, what is fear of persecution or discrimination? From my own experience, I suggest that it is too easy to make such a claim. It has also to be recognised that persecution and discrimination refer to acts by the State - not, as recently decided by a member of the Australian judiciary, by one's relatives. Does a lack of equal opportunity in economic terms; or living under rulers of a foreign faith; or a relative imbalance in the power relationships between one's tribal community and other tribal communities within one's environs; or experiencing a life of hardship normally experienced by millions; or the inability to express freely one's ideology (whether political, theological, social or whatever) – would this constitute persecution or discrimination, or the fear of either? In the event, we are all refugees. From what? From life itself.

What if an asylum applicant had fled from ethnic strife? Would that represent a fear of persecution or discrimination by authority? Or an understandable wish for safety and security? If the applicant's family and relatives continue to reside within the country of nationality whilst the applicant claims a well founded fear of return to his own people? Should also Australia give preferential entry to those who can afford to pay for their travel to Australia, disregarding those in refugee camps, in neighbouring countries, or in another part of the country of origin? Is asylum entry becoming another form of family reunion, especially through a skilful use of media-attracting tactics by those already in Australia?

In reality, how does one reject a claim of a well-founded fear of persecution or discrimination? By and large, an asylum applicant will get the benefit of the doubt, consistent with past flexible and sympathetic decisions. In this context, it would be interesting to ask how many of those given refugee, humanitarian or asylum entry to Australia have returned to their country of origin to live the life they prefer? I have heard that quite a few Vietnamese, Polish, Lebanese, and others who had attracted Australia's sympathy (thereby achieving R&H entry) and largesse had done so.

Due process is the mainstay of good open administration. A nation where whingeing is becoming an art form, especially for the more recent arrivals, has yet to learn this. The government's insistence on due process certainly has the support of all the people I know. I would expect that a substantial majority of the nation's population is on the same wavelength. The issuance of temporary visas has considerable merit.

Cynically, I wonder if the pressure for asylum would abate, were welfare to be denied for the duration of the temporary visa - to be followed by return to the country of *departure* to Australia (ie not necessarily the country of nationality). The denial of welfare to skilled immigrants in the first two years of residence in Australia is clearly not enough. This policy should apply, in particular, to family reunion entrants. After all, it is their family in Australia

who want them here. Their psychic satisfaction should lead them to look after the new arrivals, as they presumably would have back home.

Family reunion entry was sought for years by the Greeks and Italians. A sudden sensitivity by the government to claimed needs by ethnic community leaders led to this new policy. Ethnic community leaders (commonly second or even third generation Aussies - the first generation being the immigrant) need to strengthen their leadership claims by having runs on the board. Government money for the community, advisory positions, policy changes - all are grist to the mill. The government, in turn, hopes to swing votes, *en bloc*. Such a marriage, made in ethno-politic heaven, led to terrible wastes of taxpayer money, a lot of strutting on small stages, and (fortunately) to some assistance to new arrivals. After all, the bigger the ethnic community, the more capable it should be to look after its own. The Jewish community does a beautiful job in this regard.

Initially, in that divide between the professional Australian ethnic and the chauvinistic mainstream Aussie is the issue of terminology covering the Australian-born offspring of immigrants. The term mainstream Aussie includes those immigrants and their descendants who see themselves as an integral part of the nation. Many of those who refer to themselves as ethnics, and a sector of the Australian media, tend to refer to these descendants as second and third generation *immigrants*. This reflects false pride on the part of these ethnics and an unthinking stance by that sector of the media. It is also quite insulting to an Aussie-born to be described as an immigrant. If you are born in Australia, you are an Aussie, except for those whose heart is elsewhere. They can describe themselves as they see fit. New settlers are immigrants. There are no subsequent generations of immigrants springing from the loins of the settlers. Thus, the immigrant is the first generation Aussie. His Australian born children are then second generation Aussies. I notice that more academics are now using this terminology. Perhaps they were influenced by my public protests that referring to my children as immigrants is chauvinistic and patronising.

Ironically, in the first two years of family reunion policy, the majority of entrants were from the UK. The people of Europe were enjoying economic growth and a lifestyle which they wished to preserve, and were therefore reluctant to migrate. The families of the Asian refugees were, however, quick to take advantage of the new policy. But one mature Vietnamese woman preferred "to take a boat" to Thailand rather than wait for two years for processing under family reunion! What happened to all those pirates on the high seas? When she arrived at a country of "first asylum", she was predictably selected as a "refugee". She was then provided with free transport to Australia from the point of selection, and offered short-term accommodation and long-term welfare on arrival. The East Asian population thereby rose rapidly, upsetting all manner of Australians. Were these East Asians employable, any more than the East Timorese, the Chileans, and many of the East Europeans who were accepted as humanitarian entrants? It would be interesting to know, for policy purposes, how many asylum entrants are now on welfare, and the duration of their sojourn in welfare land (ie as my dependants).

The core question is - for whose benefit does a country accept immigrants? To be fair, the benefit has to be mutual. Hence, the entrant has to accept mutual responsibility. There does not seem to be as much of that about. Is this because of the rights - filled era we live in? Two Vietnamese women, in two separate incidents, said to government officials; "You Aussies f...ing stupid". When asked why, both said that the government gave money for nothing. So, they too believed in mutual obligation.

They would soon realise that it was the underpinning of the White Australia policy which allowed entry to those we were told were refugees fleeing persecution by an awful government. The aim of this policy was that Australia would be a nation in which no white person would disdain any kind of work; that equitable treatment by all, of all, would be available; and that the State would support and subsidise the indigent and others in need. Entry to Australia by those accepted as refugees result in their receiving free-flowing cash and generous settlement services, to enable them to create a new life in Australia.

Whilst, in their early years in Australia, some East Asians displayed criminal behaviour (mainly against their own people), in time, like all other new arrivals, these people generally settled down to a productive and peaceful life. However, Australian officials soon learnt that if there was a loophole to be exploited, and a new trick invented to get something for nothing, there would be an East Asian behind it. This was my personal experience too. I then learnt that a wide range of Asian individuals were becoming known for their criminal proclivities. It is the magnitude of criminality by Asian individuals, in terms of proportions of their communities, that should cause concern to us all.

Was our asylum policy responsible for the entry of these criminals? In a comparable vein, one could ask whether a country in communist East Europe had once used Australia's humanitarian policy to empty a couple of mental asylums, or whether a Latin American country had emptied a jail? Clearly, the criminals, whilst reportedly numerous, are not representative of their people. Strangely, however, even criminals can conform to the family and community values which form the core of what is referred to as Asian values.

Asian values are those formerly universal values which are currently upheld best by Asian societies. Regrettably, in Australia, Asian communities find that these values are under threat. Yet, adaptation to Australian modes of conduct, and integration into Australian institutions can leave the core of Asian values intact. But, that is difficult against the cultural onslaughts of American tv, and the upholding of individualism in what I refer to as the ultra-West. This a group of relatively new nations founded by massive immigration. The emphasis placed by school teachers and other educators on inalienable individual rights (exercisable even within families), and the creation of new rights by the judiciary (whose long-gone predecessors could not somehow uphold the rights of the Australian indigene), also exacerbate this difficulty. The visibly large number of Australian-born East Asian Aussie youth involved in the drug trade is indicative of this culture clash.

Asian values involve mutual *obligation* within the family, respect for one's parents and other elders, a system of hierarchical respect in relation to siblings and other members of the extended family, reciprocal obligation with other members of the broader clan - and also extended to members of the tribe. Mutual respect, obligation and protection also accept traditional roles and responsibilities. The latter have evolved both biologically and culturally (eg the taboo on incest), They are also premised on obvious biological facts, such as certain differences in gender (its the hen that lays the eggs). And children are not toys or playthings. They carry both family and society into the future.

Asian communities living in Western nations can maintain these values and related traditions. My relatives and their friends are living proof of this. Asian values also involve acceptance of (and respect for) authority, both within the family and within the clan and tribe, and extending to those in official authority.

At a historically universal level, there is nothing new in this. In a Western milieu, Catholic peoples and nations, and others whose religion upholds the importance of family, will share these

“Asian” values. The breakdown in the coherence of families is best exemplified in immigrant nations such as the USA and Australia. The US scholar Francis Fukuyama provides the necessary evidence in his book “The Great Disruption”, and identifies the causal paths for those who are not yet aware of what is happening around them or to them.

So, what happens to those of us who hold onto these “Asian” values? We cannot subscribe to a regime of unfettered rights. Who would want to see broken families everywhere, with a mountain of children in uncertainty and anguish? Who would deny children their natural father? Who would want to see a continuing stream of fathers suiciding because of alienating decisions by the Family Court? Authority is so denied that governments and politicians are despised, whilst teachers and police have difficulty doing their job. No one can do their job without a strong risk of being sued in the event of a mishap. Mishaps and accidents are perceived by litigants, aided by their lawyers and some members of the judiciary, as negligence. Children are free to their own “thing”, eg a child suing his parents. Peer group ignorance and pressure spread freely by psychic osmosis. Officialdom enables a child to leave home for its own reasons, with the parent unable to be told where the child is (because of alleged privacy principles), and so on.

This is not the Australia I came to more than half a century ago. Then, we Asians would have had no quibble on the issue of the place of family, and on relative rights and obligations. Today, Asian families, whether from West Asia or any other part of that large continent, are facing an on-going battle. In this battle, they are joined by many a community from Southern Europe. The media can then highlight the plight of young Aussies attempting vainly to follow the behaviour of their mainstream Anglo-Celt peer group, whilst their parents are passed as villains. Are they truly villains? Or are they in the wrong country?

Whose values will prevail in the long run? One can only guess. Water always goes to the lowest level, does it not?

In the meantime how are those Asian immigrants and their offspring holding to family values viewed by those in Australian authority? Bureaucrats make all manner of decisions which impinge upon the way we live, eg taxation, child care, health, social and child welfare, etc. They operate by rigid rules. They say, we obey. Their personal cultural values too will prevail. This is what I found out dealing with lowly local government clerks, council ordinance officers, and others with like responsibilities. If immigrants with Asian family values are employed in any bureaucracy, will not their value stances soon deem them as “not one of us”? What would their prospects then be for moving into positions of responsibility and authority? Does mutual obligation under immigration or asylum entry require these Asians to modify their core cultural values? If they do not modify these values to fit the prevailing Aussie ethos, could they be deemed, ever, to have integrated successfully into Australia?

If rejected or kept at arms length’s as not one of us, what will happen to their self-esteem? This is a criterion of concern to the feminists, gay people, drug users, and so on. Those groups want greater freedoms or rights, either to discover their inner selves, or to explore the boundaries of their personalities, and to achieve their economic and social potential. Can immigrants and their offspring take their rightful place in society, make a sufficient contribution to the nation, and reap the resulting rewards, if their self-esteem is diminished by a clash of cultures? I have in mind certain religious leaders who want all of us to live by cultural criteria cast in concrete by their churches.

Would it not be a reflection of an open and responsible society if those of us with our own core cultural values are free to live by the codes of conduct flowing from these values, and not

penalised for so doing? The “old” Anglo-Celt’s time-tested fair-go stance, if cherished as it should be, will then ensure an equal opportunity nation.