

Histories of Chinese and Japanese residents challenging the White Australia Policy, 1945–1960: making the ordinary extraordinary

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Histories of Chinese and Japanese residents challenging the White Australia Policy, 1945–1960: making the ordinary extraordinary

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ABSTRACT

Post-WWII histories about Japanese ‘war brides’, pearl shell divers, Chinese sailors and ‘Colombo Plan’ students frame these cohorts as early ‘challengers’ of the White Australia Policy. Because these histories are typically siloed from each other, bringing them together offers a fresh way to view how Japanese and Chinese residents shared a social space that linked Australia’s societal change and domestic concerns to international developments. Juxtaposition of these cohorts also compels considerations of less familiar cohorts of Chinese and Japanese residents in post-WWII Australia and of how historians might best use their craft to draw ‘extraordinary meaning’ through studies of these supposedly ‘ordinary lives’.

KEYWORDS

White Australia Policy;
Japanese Australians;
Chinese Australians;
Australian migration;
transnational history

Introduction

The anthropologist and historian, Keiko Tamura, has spent much of her career studying the Japanese women who moved to Australia after marrying servicemen deployed to the post-war occupation of Japan. Over a period of decades, she has met and interviewed many of the so-called ‘war brides’ and developed deep connections with this unique cohort in Australian history.¹ As Tamura intimates in her numerous works on the subject, the lives of these women are indeed remarkable. Yet she is struck by how these women saw and described their own lives as being quite ordinary. Tamura reconciles this by explaining that their ‘ordinariness’ in fact ‘transforms into extraordinariness when the trajectory of the women’s personal lives is laid over the historical and cultural transitions in Japan and Australia’.² Among the national and

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¹Keiko Tamura, ‘An Ordinary Life? Anthropologist Keiko Tamura Traces Her Interest in the Recollections of Japanese War Brides’, *Meanjin* 61, no. 1 (2002): 127.

²Keiko Tamura, *Michi’s Memories: The Story of a Japanese War Bride* (Acton, ACT: ANU Press, 2011), 92.

international dimensions that Tamura alludes to are the first challenges to the White Australia Policy in the years following the Second World War. Tamura's observation, however, bespeaks another truth that goes to the heart of what historians do: to turn the 'ordinary' into the 'extraordinary'. By laying the course of a life or a movement over the corresponding course of history, historians take what at first seems mundane and make it into something remarkable. Tamura's observation can thus lead us to deeper inquiries about the historiography of this period and Australian history in general. If we pull back the curtain on the historian's magic trick, what do we see working in the background? Which groups have been called to 'step on stage' for this special historical treatment and which are still waiting in the wings?

The historians who have investigated the first cracks in the White Australia Policy have sometimes done so through the experiences of specific migrant groups or minority communities. Naturally, alongside the Japanese 'war brides', there were other groups whose arrival or actions posed challenges to the policy in these formative years, too. Historians have posed the experiences and very existence of these groups in 1950s Australia as a direct challenge to the authority and legitimacy of the policies that sought to expel, assimilate or extinguish the presence of non-White peoples in society – be they Indigenous or migrant peoples. Post-war cohorts of Japanese and Chinese residents or migrants have provided some of the more familiar 'challengers' to the White Australia Policy. Of these, the histories of the Japanese war brides, international students (of whom many were ethnically Chinese), Japanese pearl divers and Chinese sailors are paramount. While studies of these groups routinely focussed on one cohort and its specific impact upon the White Australia Policy, a novel approach explored here seeks to juxtapose these cohorts and put them into the context of the changes occurring in Australia and beyond. Doing so also puts the role of historians – those finding extraordinary meaning in 'ordinary lives' – under the spotlight, allowing us to consider if championing some groups has overshadowed other Chinese and Japanese cohorts worthy of historians' attention. In the course of promoting the idea of a nexus of change that involved an interplay of Chinese, Japanese and Australian elements, an additional proposal emerges: it might be time for us to broaden our understanding of those noteworthy groups who challenged the White Australia Policy and to consider how we might include some more cohorts in this pantheon.

Chinese and Japanese residents in Australia

A focus on Japanese and Chinese in Australia in the post-war period begs an obvious, fundamental question: how many were there? Considering the tumult of the Second World War and the effects of decades of racialised migration and naturalisation policy, the answer is: maybe more than one would expect. A comparison of the Japan and China-born residents who appeared in successive Australian censuses reveals the symmetries these two cohorts shared and reflect different Australian and international influences at play.

Despite a difference in numerical scale between the China and Japan-born residents, their numbers share a strikingly similar trajectory (Figures 1 and 2). In the opening decades of the twentieth century, both populations were overwhelmingly masculine, reflecting the waves of young men who had for decades been leaving

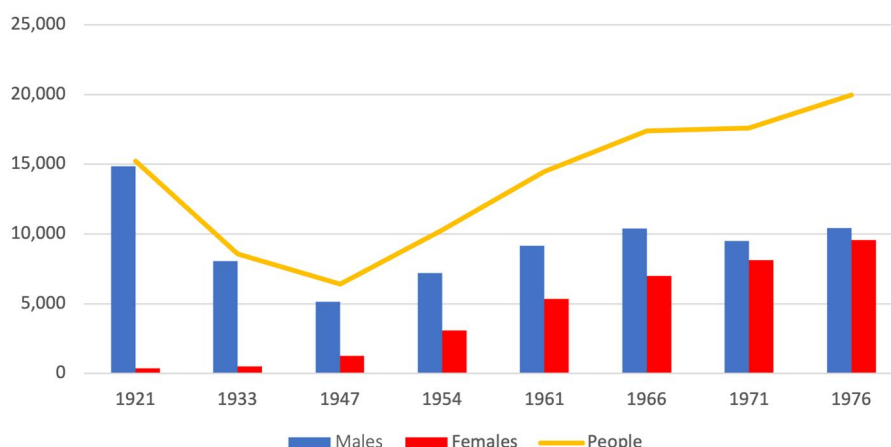


Figure 1. China-born residents of Australia.

Source: Data compiled from the Australian Commonwealth Censuses 1921, 1933, 1947, 1954, 1961, 1966, 1971 and 1976.³

China and Japan to make a livelihood in Australia. Both populations also atrophied due to the immigration and residency restrictions Australia imposed at Federation. Policies of internment and the deportation of ‘enemy aliens’ during and after the Second World War caused a severe drop in the number of Japan-born residents. The White Australia Policy notwithstanding, the decrease in the number of China-born residents is less pronounced – likely explained by some Chinese refugees finding their way to allied Australia. And again, despite the White Australia Policy, both populations display a prominent ‘uptick’ in China and Japan-born residents in the years after the war. This is quite remarkable because both populations could be associated with Australia’s recent and emerging enemies in the context of the Second World War and the Cold War respectively. Though the White Australia Policy was still decades away from being completely repealed, its gradual dismantling corresponds with the steady rise in Japan and China-born residents. The similarities between Japan and China-born residents in Australia might seem like an interesting quirk at first. However, if it is laid over the trajectories of Australia’s (and Japan and China’s entangled) history this alignment can be traced to similar factors in both cases, namely, developments that compelled people to leave their homelands, and the changes of Australian policy that allowed them in.

Uncovering who the people represented in this ‘uptick’ were is illuminating. For a long time scholars of this period in Australian history have shown more interest in dissecting the ‘what’ – the White Australia Policy – rather than the ‘who’. Australian historians have

³J.P. O’Neill, comp., ‘1966 Census – Volume 1 Population – Single Characteristics – Part 3 Birthplace’, *Census of Population and Housing, 30 June 1966* (Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1970), 9–13, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2106.01966?OpenDocument>; J.P. O’Neill, comp., ‘Bulletin 1. Summary of Population – Part 9. Australia’, *Census of Population and Housing, 30 June 1971* (Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1972), 2, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2105.01971?OpenDocument>; R.J. Cameron, comp., ‘Population and Dwellings: Summary Tables – Australia’, *Census of Population and Housing, 30 June 1976* (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1979), 2, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2104.01976?OpenDocument>.

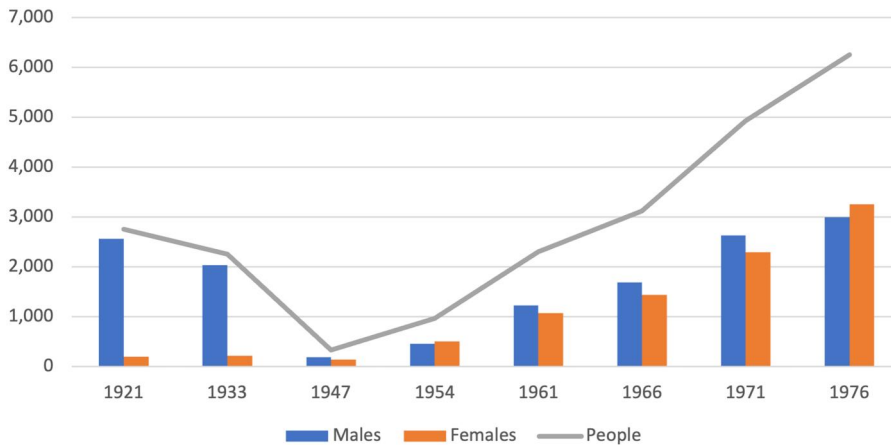


Figure 2. Japan-born residents of Australia.

Source: Data compiled from the Australian Commonwealth Censuses 1921, 1933, 1947, 1954, 1961, 1966, 1971 and 1976.⁴

put forward several complementary arguments that combine domestic and international reasons for the policy's undoing. These have included: Australia's moral need to expunge its racist image internationally; its responsibility as a member of the United Nations and signatory to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; its desire to improve political and economic relations with its Asian neighbours; and the necessity to admit non-White migrants to meet the labour demands of Australia's post-war industry. In the views of Laksiri Jayasuriya and Pookong Kee, Australia's main motivation to begin dismantling the legislative architecture of 'White Australia' came from looking toward its international interests – especially in Asia.⁵ James Jupp describes Australia's changes to immigration and naturalisation policies as reactive and practical; largely being responses to domestic labour needs and demographic realities.⁶ Gwenda Tavan argues it was the interplay of the country's international and domestic political interests (combined with the will of politically influential individuals) that undermined the foundations of White Australia and led to its gradual demise.⁷ Each viewpoint offers a useful explanation for the end of the White Australia Policy and each add, as Sean Brawley suggested in the 1991, a 'small candle with which to illuminate the great cavern' of this expansive topic.⁸

Brawley himself used the personal papers of the likes of Arthur Calwell, Peter Heydon and Kenneth Rivett to shed light on the abolition of the White Australia Policy, but he also turned attention to the opinions of Australia's Asian

⁴O'Neill, '1966 Census – Volume 1 Population – Single Characteristics – Part 3 Birthplace', 9–13; O'Neill, 'Bulletin 1. Summary of Population – Part 9. Australia', 2; Cameron, 'Population and Dwellings: Summary Tables – Australia', 2.

⁵Laksiri Jayasuriya and Pookong Kee, *The Asianisation of Australia?: Some Facts about the Myths* (Melbourne University Press, 1999), 13.

⁶James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 217–19.

⁷Gwenda Tavan, 'Creating Multicultural Australia: Local, Global and Trans-National Contexts for the Creation of a Universal Admissions Scheme, 1945–1983', in *Wanted and Welcome? Policies for Highly Skilled Immigrants in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos (New York: Springer, 2013), 41.

⁸Sean Brawley, 'Slaying the White Australia Dragon: Some Factors in the Abolition of the White Australia Policy', in *The Abolition of the White Australia Policy: The Immigration Reform Movement Revisited*, ed. Nancy Viviani, Australia–Asia Papers, No. 65 (Brisbane, Qld: Griffith University, School of Modern Asian Studies, Centre for the Study of Australian–Asian Relations, 1992), 1.

neighbours. In *The White Peril*, he showed how Australia's abysmal reputation in Asia put pressure on the country's diplomats and delegations, who in turn put pressure on their government, to amend or abrogate the country's discriminatory immigration laws.⁹ The work to throw the most light on the White Australia Policy in the last three decades is undoubtedly Tavan's *The Long Slow Death of White Australia*. Much of the heft of Tavan's argument – that the Commonwealth's dismantling of the White Australia Policy was largely in step with public opinion – comes from the sustained attention she paid to the popular interests, local pressure groups and influential individuals in Australian society. Importantly, Tavan discusses the place of Japanese war brides, Chinese sailors, and Colombo students in the history of the White Australia Policy and public opinion.¹⁰ Perhaps necessarily, however, we can only glimpse these groups before Tavan guides us further along the over-arching national history.

On their mission to explain the origins and implications of the White Australia Policy, these works brought attention to the people who were directly impacted. To reveal the human impact of this policy though, other works have flipped the historical focus. In *Big White Lie*, John Fitzgerald wrote about Chinese Australian history as Australian history and reframed early 'Chinese in Australia' as early Chinese Australians.¹¹ His social and political history was of a large and diverse ethnic group responding to the White Australia Policy and the racist attitudes that underpinned it. The flipped focus thus shows what the White Australia Policy was by examining what it was like to be affected by it. In *The Pearl Frontier*, Julia Martínez and Adrian Vickers take the approach further by examining the inter-ethnic and intersectional experiences of life in White Australia – the connections of Indonesian, Malay and Australian Indigenous (and other) peoples through the pearl shelling trade, family ties and everyday life across northern Australia. By making the individual life stories of these people central to the work, Martínez and Vickers reveal how ethnic groups that have often been studied in isolation are in fact impossibly entangled – and their encounters with the White Australia Policy just as much so.¹² This gives us not just a richer understanding of the policy itself, but also the country and the peoples in it. This discussion remains critical to contemporary discourse. As recent events and public demonstrations show, Australia is still grappling with its own historical tensions, how to listen to those who have not been listened to, and reconciling the complex relations of the peoples who call this country home.

The early 'challengers' of the White Australia Policy

Overwhelmingly, the historians who have studied the postwar increase of Chinese and Japanese residents have focused on four Chinese or Japanese cohorts: Japanese war brides, international students (many of whom were ethnically Chinese but not

⁹Sean Brawley, *The White Peril: Foreign Relations and Asian Immigration to Australasia and North America 1919–1978*, Modern History Series 20 (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1995), 243–46.

¹⁰Gwenda Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2005), 68, 71–73, 84–85, 97–98.

¹¹John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007).

¹²Julia Martínez, *The Pearl Frontier: Indonesian Labor and Indigenous Encounters in Australia's Northern Trading Network* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 148–63, 164–67.

strictly China-born, as discussed below), Chinese seamen and Japanese pearl shell divers. As these cohorts are the most salient and recurrent research subjects, they are a logical place to begin explaining the ‘uptick’.

The Japanese wives of Australian servicemen are perhaps one of the earliest and most well-known cohorts to have challenged the foundations of the White Australia Policy in the postwar period. As part of the Allied military occupation, Australian servicemen were stationed in the city of Kure, an important naval and shipbuilding city 20 kilometres from Hiroshima. Australian military authorities officially frowned upon personnel fraternising with local women, however the close contact between the local and occupying populations seemed inevitable – led in part by the necessity for many young Japanese women to work to support their families after the war. They found ample work within the military bases themselves, or the hospitality and commercial sectors that catered to the occupying forces.¹³ Rumours of soldiers marrying women and fathering children soon began filtering back home and turned the prospect of Japanese women entering Australia into a hot topic for the country’s politicians and public.

Arthur Calwell, minister for immigration during the Chifley government, openly abhorred the idea that Japanese might ‘pollute’ Australia and pointed to letters he received from those who had lost loved ones during the war as proof his opinion was widely shared.¹⁴ For a time, it seemed that Calwell was right; it took over half a decade of sustained petitioning by the husbands and their families (and certain media outlets and community leaders drawing greater public support) before the government allowed Japanese wives of Australian servicemen to come to Australia in 1952.¹⁵ This was followed by further concessions. In 1956, the government afforded permanent resident status to non-Europeans who had fled to Australia during the Second World War and had been in the country continuously for 15 years. In the same year non-European spouses of Australian citizens were permitted to apply for naturalisation and the admissions of persons of mixed-descent (for instance, children) were clarified and eased. The following year, any non-European was permitted to apply for citizenship after 15 years of residence. In 1958 the Menzies government finally abolished the dictation test and in 1959 any non-European spouses and non-married children of an Australian citizen were immediately eligible for Australian citizenship, too.

The first war bride, Cherry Parker (nee Nobuko Sakuramoto), touched down in July 1952. Knowing little English and wishing to ingratiate herself with her in-laws (and perhaps an ambivalent public), Parker related that the first phrase she learnt was ‘I like Australia’. She told the press one of her favourite Australian things was ‘your meat pie with tomato sauce’.¹⁶ Scholars have estimated that 600–650 Japanese

¹³Tamura, *Michi’s Memories*, 9–11.

¹⁴The Mercury Special Service, ‘Mr Calwell Will Not Allow Japs “To Pollute Australia”’, *Mercury*, 10 March 1948, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article26451752>; Jerzy Zubrzycki, ‘Arthur Calwell and the Origin of Post-War Immigration’, in *Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research* (Canberra: Making Multicultural Australia, 1994), 10, <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/document/id/93.Arthur-Calwell-and-the-Origin-of-Post-War-Immigration>.

¹⁵Prime Minister’s Department, ‘Japanese Wives of Servicemen and Ex-Servicemen – Admission to Australia – Policy’, Cabinet Secretariat file, 1953–1952, National Archives of Australia (NAA), A4940, C639 <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/AutoSearch.asp?O=I&Number=1337688>; Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, 74–76, 97–98.

¹⁶Tamura, *Michi’s Memories*, 12; ‘Japanese War Bride Likes Australia’, *Northern Miner*, 19 July 1952, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article81560283>.

women followed Parker between 1952 and 1957.¹⁷ Gradually, public and media sympathies grew to see these women as model wives for Australian war heroes and today discussions of the 'war brides' still regularly appear in public forums, heavy with sentiments of love conquering war and prejudice.¹⁸

Most of the historical literature about the Japanese war brides explores their journeys to Australia and becoming Australian at the cost of losing facets of their Japanese identity – such as connections to their old home, or the opportunity to pass on their language and customs to their children.¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, studies present the women as being torn between 'Japan and Australia and past and present'.²⁰ Historians like Tamura and Julie Easton believe oral history approaches and extended relations with the war bride community were essential to tell these innately private stories. It is perhaps also due to these close connections that historians are keen to show the brides as ultimately triumphing over the diversities they faced.²¹ As such, historians hold up the admittance of the Japanese wives into Australia as one of the first significant dents in the White Australia Policy. In 1972, the doyen of Japanese Australian history, David Sissons, heralded the view that would be followed for years to come:

The contrast between the long and disheartening struggle fought by the husbands and their well-wishers ... and the ready acceptance of the brides by the Australian community may perhaps cause future historians, with some justification, to see this as a watershed ... The success that the very large majority of these women earned in their roles as wives, mothers and citizens in a new country was no doubt one of the factors that made it relatively easy for the Australian government in 1956 to lift the ban on the naturalisation of Asians.²²

Sissons here hints at how the benefits won by one cohort could affect another and the Asian students that came to Australian universities are a cohort that benefitted immensely from the changes to naturalisation policy.

Although coming under various schemes, either through scholarships or self-funded positions, the 1950 Colombo Plan has become the most well-known and is now synonymous with the cohort of international students arriving in the 1950s and 1960s. The Colombo Plan's fame is also partly due its use as a soft-power tool during the Cold War.²³ The Australian government hoped that the Asian students' presence

¹⁷Tamura, *Michi's Memories*, 60; David Sissons, 'Immigration in Australian–Japanese Relations, 1871–1971', in *Japan and Australia in the Seventies*, ed. J.A.A. Stockwin (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972), 205.

¹⁸'Japanese War Bride Likes Australia'; 'Second Japanese War Bride Here', *Age*, 8 August 1952, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article206218423>; 'Japanese War Bride's Son Christened', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 June 1954, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18430194>; Paul Jones and Vera Mackie, 'Introduction', in *Relationships: Japan and Australia, 1870s–1950s*, ed. Paul Jones and Vera Mackie (Parkville, VIC: University of Melbourne, Department of History, 2001), 61; Louise Maher, 'War Brides, Marriage and Immigration at the National Museum', *ABC News*, 20 March 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-20/japanese-war-bride-wedding-dress-on-display-at-national-museum/9544582>; Sharon Verghis, 'Cherry Parker: The War Bride Who Created a Shift in the White Australia Policy', *SBS Voices*, 26 March 2019, <https://www.sbs.com.au/voices/article/cherry-parker-the-war-bride-who-created-a-shift-in-the-white-australia-policy/g96m5jtg>.

¹⁹Julie Easton, 'Japanese War Brides in Western Australia: Immigration and Assimilation in the Nineteen Fifties', *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. 16 (1995): 31.

²⁰Keiko Tamura, 'How to Become an Ordinary Australian: Japanese War Brides' Reflections on Their Migrant Experience', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* 24 (2002): 63.

²¹Brawley, *The White Peril*, 248; Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, 97–98.

²²Sissons, 'Immigration in Australian–Japanese Relations, 1871–1971', 205–6.

²³Brawley, *The White Peril*, 252–55.

would foster cultural exchange and person-to-person connections. ‘All this is to the good’, explained the minister for external affairs, Ron Casey. ‘The presence of so many Asian students in our midst’ would help broaden Australian attitudes, shift international interest to nations closer to home and (with luck) mend relations with the neighbours. This last effort was more directly signalled by Australia’s growing diplomatic presence in Asia at the time.²⁴ To be more precise than Casey, the presence of Asian students was strongly felt in Australia’s universities. Kate Darian-Smith and James Waghorne point out that throughout the 1950s, Australian universities were ‘among the most cosmopolitan places in Australia’; they enrolled 3000–4000 Asian students annually, representing almost half the amount of Asians living in Australia on certificates of exemption.²⁵ The university context is important because the Australian government saw the Colombo Plan and other schemes as an opportunity to educate a generation of people who would go back and become Australia-friendly leaders in their home countries.²⁶ Other Cold War events, however, would ensure that a large proportion of the students would end up staying in Australia.

Among the students, the ethnically Chinese – who came predominately from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Hong Kong – formed a sizable cohort.²⁷ The historical literature portrays these international students, especially the Chinese students, as a restless and ambitious cohort, both socially and politically. During their university years, these students created their own social clubs or joined existing political clubs. Jen Tsen Kwok puts forward the example of *Asiana*, a magazine created in 1956 by the Asian Students Council of NSW and the National Union of Australian University Students that intended to ‘make some contribution towards a deeper understanding between a relatively homogeneous western Australia and a kaleidoscopic rising Asia’.²⁸ As these students matured into the young professionals of the 1960s and 1970s they continued down this path; their education, professional class status and relative wealth enabling them to become leaders of Chinese Australian communities and climb Australia’s social and even political ladders.²⁹ One-time students have attributed their ambitions and interests to their upbringings. Many of them had experienced racial prejudice or political suppression growing up in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore or Hong Kong and the steady liberalisation of Australia offered a future their old homes could not. In 1989, president of the Australian Chinese Forum (ACF), James Lee, delivered a speech at a fundraising event the Forum held for the Liberal Party of Australia. In it, he reflected on the

²⁴Richard Casey, ‘Buddhist Art Exhibition: Statement by the Minister for External Affairs, the Rt. Hon. R.G. Casey, 8th June 1956’, *Current Notes on International Affairs, Department of External Affairs* 27, no. 6 (June 1956): 370, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1231449601>.

²⁵Kate Darian-Smith and James Waghorne, ‘Australian–Asian Sociability, Student Activism, and the University Challenge to White Australia in the 1950s’, *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 62, no. 2 (2016): 205.

²⁶Jen Tsen Kwok, ‘An Etymology of “Asian Australian” Through Associational Histories Connecting Australia to Asia’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2017): 356, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2017.1346696>; Rachel Burke, ‘International Student Accommodation and Changing Foreign Policy Alignments in 1950s Australia’, *History Australia* 14, no. 4 (2017): 628, 641–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2017.1389229>.

²⁷Pookong Kee, *Chinese Immigrants in Australia: Construction of a Socio-Economic Profile*, IAESR Working Paper, no. 13/1988 (Parkville, VIC: Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research, 1988), 44.

²⁸Kwok, ‘An Etymology of “Asian Australian” Through Associational Histories Connecting Australia to Asia’, 356.

²⁹Nathan Daniel Gardner, ‘All As One to One For All: Comparing Chinese Australian Responses to Racism During the “Hanson Debate” and COVID-19’, *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 18, no. 1 (March 18, 2022): 16–18; James Lee, ‘President’s Speech’, *Australian Chinese Forum Newsletter* (November 1989): 5.

effect of the Colombo Plan and other international student schemes had on lives like his own, but also on Chinese Australian communities and Australia at large:

Upon the liberalisation of [Australia's] immigration policy which coincided with the rise of racism and nationalism in Asia, many students, who are mainly ethnic Chinese, decided [...] to stay on after completion of their courses ... The composition of the Chinese community has been irreversibly changed. It is no longer a community of restaurant owners, laundrymen or vegetable gardeners ... We are [now] recognised to be amongst the fastest upward mobile [sic] people in this country... Having had personal experience of the consequences of political apathy of our forebears, [we] are therefore determined that our children will not have cause to regret that we have not upheld their legitimate rights and interests as free and equal citizens of this country. The Chinese Australian community has come of age.³⁰

The 'liberalisation' of Australia was somewhat a self-fulfilling prophecy; like the Japanese brides, it was the arrival of these students and their integration as young professionals into Australia's postwar society that caused immigration rules to relax, and public attitudes to change. Indeed, it was patently difficult for Australia to promote its international student programs to Asian neighbours while at the same time defend its commitment to the White Australia Policy to Asian critics. Moreover, Australia was interested in retaining some the students' economically valuable skills and their connections to Asian markets; the government's 1956 changes to visa and naturalisation laws neatly accommodated them.³¹ By Lee's measure, the students successfully integrated themselves into Australian society while resisting wholesale assimilation, building up communities and holding on to their Chinese identities. It was a path in direct contravention to the ethos of the White Australia Policy and pointed to the multicultural road Australia would later follow.

It is in this light, however, that Lee's remarks aimed at the 'restaurant owners, laundrymen [and] vegetable gardeners' seem somewhat harsh. Though the 1956 changes benefitted other types of Asian migrants too, it is clear a certain type of migrant was more desirable than others. Lee's words suggest the previous class of Chinese migrant had apparently failed to contribute meaningfully to Australia's liberalisation and it was due to their inaction or apathy that the Chinese Australian community had not 'come of age' under their watch. Of course, this is not the whole picture. As the students ingratiated themselves to Australian society as highly desirable 'skilled migrants', other migrants and residents, like Japanese pearl shell divers and Chinese seamen, had to defend the necessity of their skills and long legacies in their respective industries. Though less upwardly mobile than Lee's cohort of international students, they nonetheless were influential in dismantling the White Australia Policy through their admittance and settlement. In fact, these cohorts represented direct appeals to the government and mounted legal challenges that undoubtedly influenced the changes to immigration law in the fifteen years following the war.

³⁰Lee, 'President's Speech', 5.

³¹Darian-Smith and Waghorne, 'Australian-Asian Sociability, Student Activism, and the University Challenge to White Australia in the 1950s', 206.

The history of Japanese pearl shell divers in Australia stretches back to the nineteenth century and they, along with other Japanese settlers, had been a vital part of the early local and international economies of Australia's north, especially in Broome, Darwin and Thursday Island.³² During the Second World War, many of these Japanese (mostly men but also women and children) were interred in camps. After the war, some of the Australian-born Japanese were permitted to return to their old homes, but the vast majority of Japanese Australian residents – the divers among them – were deported.³³ Many of them came from the Okinawan Islands. This became an important distinction from mainland Japanese after the war. As the islands came under the direct control of the US military, these divers were able to return to Australia as 'Okinawans'. The entry for 'Japanese' remained closed.³⁴

Because the Japanese shellers had been integral to the Australian pearling industry, Australian operators began imploring the government to allow the expert divers to return to the country soon after the war. The imperative was couched in economic necessity. In 1948 Queensland pearling operators stressed that Australia was losing an 'enormous [export] dollar-earning' industry due to a lack of skilled divers and, in 1952, the Broome Pearler's Association warned the pearling industry faced 'extinction unless Japanese were introduced'. But resistance from the Australian government, unions, returned services leagues and local populations was great – especially as Japan had attacked Broome, Darwin and Torres Strait Islands during the war.³⁵ It was only after persistent negotiations that, under strict conditions, the first Japanese divers returned to Broome in 1953, Darwin in 1955 and Thursday Island in 1958.³⁶ Many of the men who came were in fact returning to their old places of work and residence. While the operators sought beneficial concessions from the White Australia Policy, they also used it to their advantage. The strict deportation laws and still fresh sensitivities about the Japanese were a useful pretext to impose miserable conditions on the indentured Japanese workers. Lorna Kaino has interviewed many of the old Japanese divers who were still living in Broome in the 2000s. They described to her 12-hour working days on luggers that stayed at sea for four to eight weeks at a time. They were ever 'mindful that they could be jailed or repatriated ... for breach of condition or insubordination' and that 'their countrymen had been

³²David Sissons, 'The Japanese in the Australian Pearling Industry', *Queensland Heritage* 3, no. 10 (1979): 9–27; Yuriko Nagata and Jun Nagatomo, *Japanese Queenslanders: A History* (Bookpal, 2007); Tomoko Horikawa, 'Australia's Minor Concessions to Japanese Citizens under the White Australia Policy', *New Voices in Japanese Studies* 12 (2020): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.21159/nvjs.12.01>.

³³Commonwealth of Australia, 'Japanese Internees (a) Release in Australia (b) Deportation – Part 1', Department of Immigration file, 1945–1947, NAA, A437, 1946/6/72 <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/AutoSearch.asp?O=I&Number=74937>.

³⁴Anna Shnukal, 'The Return of Japanese and Okinawan Indentured Labour to Darwin, 1955–1958', *Northern Territory Historical Studies*, no. 29 (January 1, 2018): 29, <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.697368973316114>.

³⁵Anna Shnukal, 'A Failed Experiment: Okinawan Indents and the Postwar Torres Strait Pearlshelling Industry, 1958–1963', *International Labor and Working-Class History* 99 (2021): 126, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547920000307>; Shnukal, 'The Return of Japanese and Okinawan Indentured Labour to Darwin, 1955–1958', 24–25.

³⁶Shnukal, 'The Return of Japanese and Okinawan Indentured Labour to Darwin, 1955–1958', 25, 30; Shnukal, 'A Failed Experiment', 130.

interred during the war'.³⁷ This is a far cry from the strikes organised by Japanese pearl shell divers before the war.³⁸ Nevertheless, local acceptance of the divers – indicated, for example, by their long-term residence in Broome, that town's early re-embrace of its Japanese identity and the pride with which local residents describe their mixed heritage – suggests they still had a tempering effect on local Australian communities comparable to the Japanese war brides.³⁹

In contrast, the Chinese sailors and waterside workers had the capacity to be very politically active. As Chinese ports fell under Japanese control, many Chinese sailors had found sanctuary in Australia, with most of them staying in Sydney. They quickly integrated themselves into that city's local Chinese Australian community, helping local organisations like the communist-aligned Chinese Youth League (CYL) and the Australasian branch of the Kuomintang to raise funds for China's war effort against Japan. Ultimately, they gravitated to the CYL.⁴⁰ In fact, the Australian branch of the Chinese Seamen's Union (CSU) was founded in 1942 in the CYL clubrooms, with the CYL later helping to form the Chinese Sailor's Welfare Association to assist those who wished to stay in Australia after the war.⁴¹ Though the CSU was not a union recognised by Australian industrial law, it had close relations with the Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA).⁴² Both of the unions were Maoist aligned and supported each other in industrial actions and actions opposing racial discrimination – for example jointly refusing to work on or with Dutch ships during the Indonesian War of Independence. The intercultural and international exposure clearly had an impact on the CSU. When Calwell began deporting Chinese sailors after the war, Arthur Locke, a leader of both the CYL and the CSU, described their opposition as keeping with 'the Australian trade union tradition': the CSU successfully secured three months' severance pay for deported seamen. Other sailors prevented their deportations by going to court. They successfully argued that the dictation test – which would have surely secured their deportation – could only be used within five years of a person's residence in Australia. By 1948, many of the defendants had resided in Australia longer than that; some men even had Australian wives and children.⁴³

³⁷Lorna Kaino, 'Re-Mooring the Tradition of Broome's Shinju Matsuri', *Rural Society* 15, no. 2 (2005): 168, <https://doi.org/10.5172/rsj.351.15.2.165>; Lorna Kaino, "'Broome Culture' and Its Historical Links to the Japanese in the Pearling Industry", *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 25, no. 4 (2011): 484, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2011.575214>.

³⁸Tianna Killoran, 'The Near North and the Far North: Japanese Migrants in North Queensland before 1941', Paper presented at History Australia Workshop, 'Japan, China, Australia: Rethinking Histories and Futures', University of Sydney, 26–27 July 2023.

³⁹Kaino, 'Re-Mooring the Tradition of Broome's Shinju Matsuri'; Kaino, "'Broome Culture' and Its Historical Links to the Japanese in the Pearling Industry'; Martínez, *The Pearl Frontier*, 164–65.

⁴⁰Shirley Fitzgerald, *Red Tape, Gold Scissors: The Story of Sydney's Chinese* (Sydney: State Library of New South Wales Press, 1997).

⁴¹Drew Cottle, 'Forgotten Foreign Militants: The Chinese Seaman's Union in Australia, 1942–1946', in *A Few Rough Reds: Stories of Rank and File Organizing*, ed. Hal Alexander and Phil Griffiths (Canberra: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra Region Branch, 2003), 138; Drew Cottle and Angela Keys, 'Red-hunting in Sydney's Chinatown', *Journal of Australian Studies* 31, no. 91 (2007): 25–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443050709388125>.

⁴²Seamen's Union of Australia, 'File of Correspondences with Chinese Youth League', Seamen's Union of Australia, Sydney Branch Deposits, Other Organisations, 1971–1973 (n.d.), Australian National University (ANU) Archives, Z91, Box 90, <https://archivescollection.anu.edu.au/index.php/seamens-union-of-australia-sydney-branch-deposit>.

⁴³Arthur Gar Lock Chang and Ann Turner, *Arthur Lock Chang Interviewed by Ann Turner*, sound recording, 1991, National Library of Australia.

The history of the sailors contains an interesting case of symmetry with the influential Annie O'Keefe case. O'Keefe was a Malay wartime refugee who married an Australian and whose fight to stay in Australia became a cause célèbre.⁴⁴ Locke believed it was the CSU's successful legal cases that compelled Calwell to create the 1948 Alien Deportation Act.⁴⁵ After O'Keefe bested the 1948 act, Calwell 'closed the loophole' with the 1949 Wartime Refugee Removal Act. In turn, 48 sailors tested the validity of the 1949 act in the High Court, much like O'Keefe. Though the court found their deportation was legal under the act, by then the government had changed. The minister for immigration, Harold Holt, chose to use his powers as immigration minister to dismiss the seamen's cases and let 800 non-European refugees stay as a 'war time legacy' with the Chinese seamen among them.⁴⁶ Annie O'Keefe's case is popularly remembered as 'signalling the end' of the White Australia Policy, but the cases of the Chinese sailors put O'Keefe into a broader context of contemporaneous legal and social challenges against the policy.⁴⁷ O'Keefe herself was trying to prevent repatriation to the Dutch East Indies, a colonial regime that the CSU and SUA had campaigned against. By 1947, Australia was supporting Indonesian independence at the United Nations, despite continuing its own colonial and racial project, exemplified by the attempted deportation of O'Keefe and the Chinese sailors. Like Martínez and Vickers' examination of Indonesian and Indigenous peoples in northern Australia, such interrelations point to a complex entanglement of individual lives with domestic politics and international developments.⁴⁸

The histories reconsidered

Three observations emerge from a comparative analysis of these four cohorts of Japan and China-born residents and the histories written about them. The first is that much of the best research into these cohorts of Japan and China-born residents and migrants drew on non-English language materials, oral history interviews and direct relationships with the communities being researched – and often in combination. While such methodologies are not new in other fields or disciplines, their combined application to the field of Australian history produces works of refreshing vision and novel ambition which challenge the dominance of Anglo-Australian accounts. Oral histories and non-English materials go especially far in making 'visible historical storytelling strategies and larger architectures of knowledge' that, Samia Khatun argues, challenge the 'suffocating monolingualism' of Australian history.⁴⁹ Tamura's research, which resulted from her close relationship to the war bride community, oral histories and use of Japanese language sources, is exemplary in this regard. Lorna

⁴⁴Brawley, *The White Peril*, 248–50; Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, 59–64.

⁴⁵Chang and Turner, *Arthur Lock Chang Interviewed by Ann Turner*.

⁴⁶'Refugees' Removal Act Declared Valid by Court', *Warwick Daily News*, 22 December 1949, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article187185247>; Commonwealth of Australia, 'Deportation Cases of and Appeals by 38 Chinese at Sydney 1949 – Validity of the War Time Refugees Removal Act 1949', Attorney-General's Department file, 1949–1950, NAA, A432, 1949/1003 <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/AutoSearch.asp?O=I&Number=12012256>.

⁴⁷Paul Power, 'How One Refugee Signalled the End of the White Australia Policy', *The Guardian*, 18 March 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/18/annie-white-australia-policy>.

⁴⁸Martínez, *The Pearl Frontier*, 150–58.

⁴⁹Samia Khatun, *Australiana: The South Asian Odyssey in Australia* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2019), 4.

Kaino and Drew Cottle also provide noteworthy works created from oral history and community connections to Japanese divers and Chinese seamen respectively. What many of these histories do then, is not just put the voices of those affected by the White Australia Policy on centre stage; they also voice perspectives that expand beyond the white, English-language accounts of this part of Australian history.

The second observation is related to the way these cohorts were posed as ‘challengers’ to the White Australia Policy. This was often done regarding the cohorts’ own social and legal activism, such as in the case of the Chinese sailors or the international students, or the activism and petitioning that was done on behalf of others, like with the Japanese brides and divers. Scholars (myself included) tend to frame the presence of these cohorts in White Australian society as a challenge to the legitimacy and the authority of the White Australia Policy in itself. Though true and valuable perspectives, many do not shed much light on the forces and decisions that took these cohorts out of their old homelands and into a new one. This is somewhat startling if we remember how much the White Australia Policy made Australia an unattractive option for residency or migration in the first place. A theme of Australian exceptionalism can sometimes be sensed in the histories of Chinese or Japanese *Australians* triumphing over prejudice, doing their bit to dismantle racially discriminatory immigration, becoming Australian and making Australia a better place in the process. Consequently, there is a risk that we curate the histories of these cohorts into a teleological framework for dismantling the White Australia Policy. If we look beyond Australia’s borders, we see that people faced situations in their homelands that were so precarious and their reasons for leaving were so practical or straightforward, that a special ‘pull to Australia’ was only one (and maybe a minor) factor for someone’s decision to move. Though their presence did challenge the norms of White Australia, these cohorts did not come to Australia to do so, so it can feel odd to define them by this challenge.

The third observation is that the histories written about these cohorts are almost always siloed off from each other. Juxtaposing the contemporaneous histories of these cohorts, as done here, shows that Chinese and Japanese residents and migrants were occupying a common discursive, legislative and social space in Australia. But this is also seen if we go beyond the frame of historiographical analysis. The historical record shows that Chinese and Japanese elements were, for example, occupying a common space in Australian social and political discourses. In 1949, syndicated advertisements appeared in newspapers around Australia under the heading ‘Talk about Inconsistency’. They encapsulated issues of Asian immigration with international politics in a uniquely postwar, White Australian way:

The Federal Government is deporting those wretched Chinese sailors with tactless enthusiasm. At the same time it’s bringing in Asiatics for free education at our Universities and paying them an allowance three times higher than the Rehab to ex-servicemen.⁵⁰

⁵⁰See for example: C. Donnelly, ‘Bush Telegraph’, *Northern Star*, 9 September 1949, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article99064957>; Max Bryant, ‘The Gen!’, *Daily Advertiser*, 2 September 1949, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article145548370>; Max Bryant, ‘On Side!’, *Lithgow Mercury*, 8 September 1949, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article220843745>; E. Sykes, ‘SSSHHH!’, *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 3 September 1949, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article131361124>.

Conflations and comparisons of Chinese and Japanese appeared to be common and frequently connected to events abroad. In response to a concern that the USA was not doing enough to dissuade mass emigration from Japan, Mr. A.H. Priest, a Commonwealth Immigration Officer, assured the public that ‘the regulations relating to the entry of Japanese into Australia were stricter than those governing the admittance of Chinese’.⁵¹ In another example, Arthur Calwell (from the opposition bench now) promised that no Chinese wives would be brought into Australia by any future Labour government and tangentially declared that the admittance of Japanese war brides by the Menzies government had been a ‘violation of migration laws’; this was, of course, not the case and instead was rather in keeping with Australia’s commitment to the international peace accord in 1952.⁵² Another alarmed headline read: ‘Japanese and Chinese in Australia; over 200 admitted in three months’. It continued with a breakdown that spoke to Australia’s social mores, its most important national product and its international aspirations: ‘most of the new Japanese arrivals were war brides and their children. A few were also wool classers and even diplomats. Most of the Chinese were students admitted under the Colombo and UNESCO plans’.⁵³

Vignettes like these are indications of ways the histories of Japanese and Chinese cohorts in Australia were neither siloed from each other, nor the history of Australia siloed off from the world. If we look at these cohorts from new vantage points, we can see how historians can draw together these points to reveal larger constellations of change underway in Australia and abroad. But if these are the points that historians have so far trained their focus upon to understand the disintegration of White Australia, what others are out there waiting to be noticed? Many are groups that are discernibly close to those discussed above, yet have so far eluded much, if any, historical attention.

Other ‘extraordinary’ lives?

It is surprising that for all the attention paid to Japanese war brides, there has been little corresponding attention paid to the Japanese ‘war children’ who came to Australia with their parents. It is even more striking because they were a similarly sized cohort. Looking at the census data for 1954, 1961 and 1966, we can see an anomalous ‘bubble’ appearing in the columns representing the number of Japanese-born women aged 25–35 residing in Australia, that likely represents the 600–650 war brides who moved to the country. As could be expected, there is also a large bubble moving through the columns of people 0–14 that correspond to the children born in Japan of Australian and Japanese parents (Table 1).

So far, scholars have only turned serious attention to the children of Australian servicemen and Japanese women still in Japan, though ‘war children’ have appeared indirectly in Joy Damousi’s study of humanitarian initiatives to settle children in

⁵¹‘NO JAP. MAY MIGRATE HERE’, *Argus*, 6 February 1951, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article23048935>.

⁵²‘Labor Would Ban Chinese “Lend-Lease” Brides’, *News*, 19 August 1953, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article134206954>.

⁵³‘Japanese and Chinese in Australia’, *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 3 June 1954, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article256855207>.

Table 1. Japanese-born residents in Australia.

	1954	0-4	5-9	10-4	15-9	20-4	25-9	30-4	35-9	40-4	45-9	50-4	55-9	60-4	65+
F		72	67	5	8	72	136	56	23	9	11	2	13	12	22
M		87	53	7	24	48	49	38	33	23	24	14	11	4	43
	1961	0-4	5-9	10-4	15-9	20-4	25-9	30-4	35-9	40-4	45-9	50-4	55-9	60-4	65+
F		30	115	118	9	31	174	315	146	46	26	17	10	10	29
M		30	110	124	48	125	208	165	136	77	74	54	28	26	25
	1966	0-4	5-9	10-4	15-9	20-4	25-9	30-4	35-9	40-4	45-9	50-4	55-9	60-4	65+
F		58	61	124	139	40	119	250	360	147	59	22	13	11	35
M		58	63	114	204	147	236	256	243	148	80	50	49	14	24

Source: Data taken from the 1954, 1961 and 1966 censuses.⁵⁴

Australia and Catriona Elder's study of Australian anxieties about them.⁵⁵ As the Japanese brides are often treated as a seminal part of Australia's postwar Japanese community, it is worth investigating how these children might have also contributed to its establishment. We might also further consider how they too have played a part in challenging the White Australia Policy – as Elder and Damousi suggest they symbolically did – and what their lives were like growing up in its shadow. As these children are now elderly, it might be time to capture their stories orally before they are lost.

Another history to escape sustained scholarly attention is that of Chinese Australian restauranteurs. The widespread public interest in Chinese cuisine and familiarity of Chinese restaurants in Australia makes this omission curious. It is perhaps due to their familiarity that they have not received due attention, as Barbara Nichol has described the topic as 'not taken seriously' by 'established historians'.⁵⁶ In her doctoral thesis, Nichol noted that the histories of Chinese restaurants and restauranteurs never seem to reach beyond postgraduate studies and otherwise seem to be a topic treated fleetingly if at all by historians of food or Chinese Australian history.⁵⁷ Nichol critiques the oversight plainly:

Until the post-World War II years the city's Chinese restaurant sector was small by comparison with Chinese market gardens, cabinet makers and other high profile Chinese enterprises, but the sector was unique in that it experienced almost continuous

⁵⁴S.R. Carver, comp., 'Volume VIII. – Australia Part I. – Cross-Classification of the Characteristics of the Population', *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30th June, 1954* (Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1954), 26–27, 30–31, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2108.01954?OpenDocument>; K.M. Archer, 'Volume VIII. – Australia Part I. – Cross-Classification of the Characteristics of the Population', *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30th June, 1961* (Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1961), 30–31, 34–35, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2107.01961?OpenDocument>; J.P. O'Neill, comp., 'Volume 2. Population: Related Characteristics Part 3. Overseas-Born Population', *Census of Population and Housing, 30 June 1966* (Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, December 1970), 18–23, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2106.01966?OpenDocument>.

⁵⁵Walter Hamilton, 'Children of the Occupation: Japan's Untold Story', 1 January 2012; Kathleen Cusack, 'Beyond Silence: Giving Voice To Kure Mothers of Japanese-Australian Children', *New Voices* 2 (2008): 103–27, <https://doi.org/10.21159/nv.02.06>; Catriona Elder, "'Diggers' Waifs": Desire, Anxiety and Immigration in Post-1945 Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 38, no. 130 (2007): 261–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10314610708601246>; Joy Damousi, 'The Campaign for Japanese-Australian Children to Enter Australia, 1957–1968: A History of Post-War Humanitarianism', *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 64, no. 2 (2018): 211–26, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajph.12461>.

⁵⁶Barbara Nichol, Conversation with the author, 18 July 2023.

⁵⁷Barbara Nichol, 'The Breath of the Wok: Melbourne's Early Chinese Restaurants: Community, Culture and Entrepreneurialism in the City, Late Nineteenth Century to 1950s' (PhD thesis, Melbourne, University of Melbourne, 2012), 7–9, 15, 18.

growth from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth-century. This extraordinary growth is disproportionate to the size of the Chinese population in Victoria which, by Federation was already in serious decline.⁵⁸

From the 1930s, Chinese restaurant owners, according to the size of their businesses, were able to bring relatives into Australia under the special migration categories of 'cook' and 'café worker'. As a result, their businesses grew while other Chinese enterprises withered under the White Australia Policy.⁵⁹ Henry Chan has suggested that the history of Chinese restaurants remains under-researched because it is a 'closed underworld'. Due to their limited English and strong predilection for Cantonese usage in business and the community, as well as their lower-class status, their histories have been crowded out by those of the international students whose higher professional status, bicultural ability and wealth has made them more prominent.⁶⁰ Again, James Lee's speech at the ACF's Liberal Party fundraiser is an illustrative example of how one cohort's public presence eclipsed others. Yet the restaurateurs are still visible among the more prominent histories of Chinese Australian communities. The 1986 'National Conference of the Australian Chinese Community, for example, was feted by new and resurgent community organisations as the first great 'get together' of the collective Chinese Australian community. Yet of the 33 attending organisations, two explicitly represented the Chinese restaurateurs of Victoria and NSW respectively, and another, the Dixon Street Committee, was an amalgam of restaurant owners and other traders.⁶¹

The dearth of research into Chinese restaurateurs is even more pronounced if we return to the earlier graph of China-born residents: the postwar increase of China-born residents excludes those Chinese Australian residents born in Hong Kong, Taiwan or indeed Malaysia, Singapore or Indonesia whence the majority of Chinese international students came. Considering the consistent growth of Chinese in the hospitality sector, its likely a good proportion of those residents represented in the postwar population growth might have been working in Chinese restaurants. Nichol conservatively estimates that by 1960 there were 82 Chinese restaurants operating in Melbourne and its suburbs and by the 1970s one quarter of the restaurants in Melbourne were Chinese. But Chinese restaurants had already 'become an unremarkable presence throughout the nation's urban and regional centres' by the 1950s.⁶² Non-English records and materials created by these restaurateurs could turn this 'unremarkable' presence into a remarkable transnational working-class history – especially if further light could be shed on the ways Chinese restaurant owners and workers were able to circumvent the exclusionary powers of the White Australia Policy.

The historical treatment of Japanese pearl shellers and Chinese seamen makes the lack of historical treatment of Japanese seamen in the postwar period one final peculiarity to remark upon. In the 1954 census, there were 105 Japanese-born men recorded as working in the shipping industry. This is compared to 40 recorded as

⁵⁸Nichol, 'The Breath of the Wok', 2.

⁵⁹Ibid., 137–38.

⁶⁰Henry Min-Hsi Chan, 'The Chinese Communities in Australia: The Way Ahead in a Neglected Field of Research', *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 10, no. 1 (1989): 39–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.1989.9963346>.

⁶¹Nathan Gardner, 'United We Stood but Divided We Were: Chinese Australian Unity and the 1984 Immigration Debate', *History Australia* 19, no. 2 (2022): 324, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2022.2048038>.

⁶²Nichol, 'The Breath of the Wok', 2, 181–82.

working in the 'fishing, hunting, etc.' category – which corresponds to the numbers of Japanese, brought to Broome in 1953–4 to dive for pearl shell. Curiously, the 105 Japanese seamen overlaps almost perfectly with the 107 Japanese-born recorded in that census as 'migratory': that is, people 'who at midnight between 30th June and 1st July, 1954 were travelling on ships in Australian waters, or on long-distance trains or aircraft'.⁶³ Their presence likely reflects the reestablishment of trade relations with Japan in the 1950s as Australia was eager to take advantage of the country's need for raw materials after the war.⁶⁴ The increasing numbers of Japan-born men aged 20–45 in the table above further reflects the growing trade and investment ties between Australia and Japan and the presence of wool classers and diplomats in Australia (also mentioned above) points directly to this likelihood. In the 1961 census, the number of Japanese men working in the shipping industry more than doubled to 343, again neatly fitting within the number of 'migratory' Japanese-born in Australia (367).⁶⁵ As these snapshots only capture the number of Japanese sailors in Australian waters on particular nights in 1954 and 1961, respectively, it is interesting to consider how many more Japanese sailors might have cycled through Australian ports and cities over the years and if they had any discernible impact on local communities, as their seagoing Chinese counterparts did. What traces they left behind remain to be historically recorded.

Conclusion

Juxtaposing these Chinese and Japanese groups – especially with regard to the disintegration of the White Australia Policy – promises rich rewards for our understanding of Australian history, and the history of Australia's connections with China, Japan and the world. To this end, methodologies based in oral history, non-English language materials and community connections have much promise. Though this article did not draw heavily on oral or non-English sources, it offered something complementary to this approach: by putting these groups (and studies of them) side by side it offered a multifocal, intercultural and transnational history to complement Khatun's multilingual vision Australian history. Here, a comparison of several, seemingly disparate groups revealed how they were like tributaries flowing from various international and domestic sources into a greater, growing and sustained challenge to the White Australia Policy in the post-war years. In combination, the level of challenge rose to break through the various levees of racially discriminatory immigration policy, resulting in the gradual concessions made by the government in those years. But it is also clear that we have not yet mapped all the tributaries that combined into the breaking of the White Australia Policy, and how this history fits into a larger,

⁶³Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 'Volume VIII. – Australia Part I. – Cross-Classification of the Characteristics of the Population', *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia 30 June 1954* (Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1954), 4, 24, 126–27, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2108.01954?OpenDocument>.

⁶⁴Yuriko Nagata, "'Certain Types of Aliens': The Japanese in Australia, 1941–1952", in *Relationships: Japan and Australia, 1870s–1950s*, ed. Paul Jones and Vera Mackie (Parkville, VIC: University of Melbourne, Department of History, 2001), 232–33.

⁶⁵Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 'Volume VIII. – Australia Part I. – Cross-Classification of the Characteristics of the Population', 28, 208–9.

global system. To do this, it is time for us to consider what other ‘ordinary lives’ might offer up some ‘extraordinary histories’.

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The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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