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# Riding on the waves of transformation in the Asia-Pacific: Chinese migration to Australia since the late 1980s

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**ABSTRACT**
Australia's ethnic Chinese population has increased from around 200,000 in the mid-1980s to about 1.2 million according to Australia's 2016 census. Their settlement has contributed to the fact that China has become Australia's largest trading partner and that Australia has been recession-free for almost 30 years. At the same time, this rapidly growing population has also become hyperdiverse, well-educated, hyperconnective, highly transnational, and hypermobile. However, over the past three or so years, Australia has been embroiled in a campaign against alleged Chinese influence in Australian politics and public life, and the Chinese-invasion narrative has not only been reinvented, but also been sanctioned by some political leaders and xenophobic critics. Before waiting until the history of Chinese migration to Australia is reconstructed and rewritten, there is an urgent need to look at what has caused new waves of Chinese migration to Australia, and offer an update about it at the intersection of two major socio-economic transformations taking place in the Asia-Pacific, which are China's reform and opening-up and Australia's shift towards Asia. Through examining their interplays, this article is to address misconceptions in Australia's current debate over Chinese influence.

**KEYWORD**
Chinese migration; Australia; shift towards Asia; Sinophobia; merit-based migration system

A relatively clear picture of the role of international migration and multiculturalism in the socio-economic development of developed countries has recently become blurred worldwide over the past few years. In Australia, the picture has been heavily distorted by a strong Sinophobia, which has also partly been sanctioned by some politicians, a few government agencies, and xenophobic critics. In August 2016, the Turnbull-led government commissioned an inquiry to assess China's interference in Australia. The inquiry may have been prompted by shock over protests by some Chinese community organisations after the Hague-based tribunal ruling on South China Sea in July 2016. However, the inquiry concluded that China has attempted to compromise Australia's political system for a long time and that there has been infiltration of every layer of Australia's political landscape, including governments, professional bodies, education institutions, and businesses (Borys 2018). This is the most disturbing aspect of the debate, by which the integration of many Chinese migrants has been linked to China's suspected infiltration, or silent invasion as portrayed in a provocative book (Hamilton 2018). New espionage and foreign interference laws were enacted in June 2018. The debate has implicitly sent two damaging messages: that whatever Chinese migrants say must have been influenced by China, and that whatever they do always constitutes interference on behalf of China.

What has been ignored by Australia's debate over Chinese influence is that, unlike some earlier groups, new cohorts of Chinese migrants have largely been attracted to Australia by a series of new migration polices in order to maximise its benefits from China's rapidly growing economy. That is, this is the connection and influence that

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Australia's political and economic elites would like to nurture and utilise, which has also been a vital part of the country's development strategy that has been developed since the late 1970s. Australia officially abandoned its decades-long White Australia policy in 1973, and adopted multiculturalism in the same period, which was endorsed by the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. As a result, a large number of refugees from Indochina was accepted after 1976 (Viviani 1996; Jupp 1995). All these have laid the foundation for a social and political transformations of Australia in the 1980s. When Australia opened its door in the late 1970s to many non-European migrants, China's door was still largely closed to the outside world. Australia received few immigrants from the Chinese mainland before the mid-1980s, except a few thousand people from China's Xinjiang region (Woodard 1985). Many immigrants of Chinese descent who came to Australia before the late 1980s were from Indochina and Southeast Asia. The ethnic Chinese population, fewer than 10,000 in the late 1940s, grew little by little to about 50,000 in 1976 and 200,000 in 1986.

The resumption of direct immigration from the Chinese mainland to Australia took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when 45,000 or so Chinese nationals were all allowed to stay permanently in Australia as a consequence of the political turmoil in China in the late 1980s (Birrell 1994; Gao 2013a). Their settlement and the subsequent chain of immigration flows from China have resulted in a rapid increase in the ethnic Chinese population. The 1996 census recorded 343,523 Australians claiming to be Chinese speakers, and in 2001 the number identifying themselves as ethnic Chinese increased to approximately 555,500. According to the 2011 census, there were about 866,200 Australian residents claiming Chinese ancestry, and as high as 74 per cent of them were first-generation. After another five years, the 2016 census found the total increased to more than 1.2 million, and among them, 41 per cent were born in China (ABS 2018).

This article seeks to examine the dynamic nature of recent Chinese migration to Australia at the intersection of two major socio-economic transformations that have occurred in the Asia-Pacific region, namely China's post-1978 reform and opening-up and Australia's shift towards Asia. Through analysing what has caused new waves of Chinese migration to Australia in this increasingly transnational world, this article is to bring to light not only the actual historical process, but also a set of characteristics, namely hyperdiversity, hyperconnectivity and hypermobility, that are outlined by Guo (2021) in his Introduction to this special issue, with an aim to address misconceptions in Australia's recent debate over Chinese influence. Following this brief introduction, the article will review the literature on Chinese migration to Australia. This is followed by a section that looks at how China's opening-up and Australia's strategic shift towards Asia had interacted with each other in encouraging migration flows in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and another that analyses how Australia's merit-based new migration tetralogy has since the late 1990s been developed in response to China's economic boom. The article is also to analyse the impact of Australia's economic dependence on China on Chinese migrants, before offering concluding remarks on how their transnational life can be considered in future research.

## Analytical deficiencies of commonly used perspectives

Australia's current Sinophobic sentiment mentioned above has in some way exposed a series of theoretical problems and shortcomings that have long existed in the study of

Chinese migration to Australia and their settlement in the country. It is right that the Chinese Australian community and the experiences of new cohorts of migrants from China have been considered from a number of perspectives, resulting in quite a large number of publications. However, a large proportion of them are analysed based on a few frequently used perspectives that are normally restricted within the boundaries of individual nation-states and their cultures. The lack of sufficient studies and analyses from a dynamic transnational perspective appears to give rise to some ether-or views about Chinese Australians, and may be theoretically blameable for the resurgence of Sinophobia in Australia.

Many traditional studies have focused on recording and examining how Chinese in Australia were mistreated before multiculturalism was introduced, especially in the nineteenth century. According to Tung (2005), such a decades-long research attention has been paid to specific geographical places and trades, smaller localities including Chinatowns, family networks and settlements, and trade activities and occupations of earlier groups of Chinese (Atkinson 1995; Couchman 1995; Lydon 1999; Fitzgerald 2001; McGowan 2004). Based on accounts of the early Chinese experience in various genres and socio-economic contexts (Cronin 1982; Ryan 2003; Fitzgerald 2007), the profiles of the early Chinese migrants as poor and illiterate labourers have long been defined. These findings are true reflections of the life of early Chinese migrants, but they have also unfortunately led numerous none-specialists to consider new migrants according to such interpretations, making many non-Chinese Australians confused over new Chinese migrants.

A great deal of research attention has also, since the late 1980s, been given to the settlement of Chinese migrants and related integration issues, many studies of which, however, are analytically host-country-centric. For example, there are many studies about the pre-migration experiences of new Chinese migrants and the factors behind their decision to come to Australia (Kee and Skeldon 1994; Ho and Coughlan 1997; Gao 2006a, 2009, 2011). Since the late 1990s, researchers have devoted attention to post-arrival experiences of Chinese migrants to focus on settlement issues (Kee 1995; Khoo and Mak 2003). These studies include changing perceptions of Australia and China (Fung and Chen 1996; Ip et al. 1998); family life (Chiang 2004); identity and transnationality (Ip et al. 1997; Ang 2000; Lee 2006; Tan 2006); media consumption and cultural life (Sun 2005; Gao 2006b); and social mobility (Wu et al. 1998). Also explored are gender (Hibbins 2006; Ho 2006); and education and intergenerational issues (Dooley 2003), and health and ageing (Lo and Russell 2007). The Australia-centric focus of these studies, however, has not only isolated Chinese migrants from their home country, practically repudiating the transnational nature of them, but also regarded the home country connections as counter-integration forces, reinforcing the assimilationist assumption of being either integrated or segregated.

Lately, more research attention has been focused on issues explicitly related to the occupational adjustment of Chinese migrants (Wu et al. 1998; Hugo 2008), and their business activities (Yu 2001; Collins 2002). These studies focus on a vital aspect of post-migration life, which is the means of livelihood of new migrants. In more recent years, due to Chinese economic expansion, the topic of migrant entrepreneurship has attracted more attention than it was. A growing number of studies have analysed the causes and consequences of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship and related conceptual issues (Zhou 2004; Li 2007). As part of this global trend, researchers have sought to analyse Chinese immigrant entrepreneurship in Australia, paying attention to topics,

such as related social and human capital (Lund et al. 2006; Collins and Low 2010); local integration experiences of Chinese entrepreneurs (Liu 2011); intergenerational succession (Ye et al. 2010); the role of Chinese entrepreneurs in trade and business (Tung and Chung 2010) and transnational dynamism (Gao 2006b, 2015; Hsu 2009; Selvarajah et al. 2012). Despite all these efforts, the depth and scope of the research findings still lag far behind the expansion of the new Chinese migrant community in Australia. Research outcomes are insufficient to not only change many Australians' dated perceptions about poor and illiterate Chinese, but also to explain the migrants' connections with Chinese establishments and individuals, leaving clueless people in Australia to speculate on the links between many Chinese migrants with the Chinese state and its geopolitical arrangements.

The rapid expansion of the Chinese community in Australia has also given rise to new waves of community activism. In 2007, China became Australia's largest trading partner, and in the same year, a higher-than-usual proportion of ethnic Chinese voters helped vote the then Prime Minister John Howard out of the seat of Bennelong in the north of Sydney after he held it for 33 years (Gao 2013b). The long-debated issue of becoming part of mainstream society, or participation in Australian politics, has been raised by increasingly confident Chinese community activists after the 2007 election, promoting local participations as a vital means of becoming integrated into the host country. Some studies have been conducted on the role of community media outlets, religious activities, and community reorganisations in the process (Sun 2016; Jiang 2017; Pan 2018). Certain parts of such new socio-economic activism of the Chinese community have then been found to be a challenge to Australia's way of life, and the country's public discourse is inundated with what is called the neo-securitisation of Chinese migrants and Chinese-Australians (Fitzgerald 2016; He 2019). The public allegation of Chinese infiltration of every layer of Australia's political landscape have not only exposed the racial fault lines in Australia, or racial politics as analysed by Yu (2021) in his paper in this issue, but also revealed the shortcomings of many studies.

Obviously, the Australia-centric point of view adopted by several generations of researchers is the major analytical problem. According to this view, China as a poor country in the past was ignored in the study of earlier immigrant groups, and in many recent studies, researchers tend to stick to this traditional thinking without taking into account that Australia has been shifting towards Asia and China's growing economy has provide many Chinese migrants, as well as Australia as a whole, with chances to prosper. As noted, this analysis considers the recent Chinese migration to Australia at the intersection of Australia's strategic shift towards Asia and China's decades-long reform. Methodologically, this study adopts an approach combining a transnational point of view with political-economic analysis of the Chinese migration to Australia. Through such analyses, this article is to address misconceptions in the current debate over Chinese influence.in Australia.

## China's opening-up and Australia's shift towards Asia

In the Asia-Pacific region, Australia and China were all famous for their closed-door policies. Australia resumed sizable immigration directly from mainland China in the late 1980s and early 1990s in a rather peculiar fashion. Tens of thousands of Chinese students came to Australia under its English language intensive course scheme in the mid-1980s, and almost all of them, totalling up to about 45,000, were allowed to stay

under a four-year temporary residency permit after China's political turmoil in 1989. Before the end of the four-year temporary residency period, they were all allowed to stay permanently as a result of the Keating Labor government's '1 November [1993] decisions'. On the surface, the decisions were made by the Keating-led government (1991-96) to honour an assurance made by his predecessor, Bob Hawke, that none of the Chinese nationals living in Australia in 1989 and 1990 would be forced to leave against their will. However, from a socio-economic transformation point of view, the 1993 decisions were not made without consideration of Australia's national interests, including numerous immediate economic benefits. While Bob Hawke's words were largely humanitarian, the Keating government's decisions were clearly a response to what Paul Keating believed to be the major seismic shifts in the world, and the most important shift relevant to Australia has been China's strong determination to reform and rejoin the world market.

Although Australia was not known to the Chinese who were looking for a foreign country to study in the early 1980s, China's post-1978 national strategy of sending thousands of Chinese to study out of the country started making inroads into Australia in the mid-1980s. International education in Australia has its origin in the early 1950s, when the Colombo Plan brought in thousands of Asian students from a few Southeast Asian countries, but it only became an economic sector of importance in the mid and late 1980s, when Australia introduced an English language scheme for international students in order to earn foreign currency. At the time, the United States was the most favoured destination among Chinese for studying abroad, but it insisted on only taking graduate and research students, whereas a few competing countries, such as Canada, Germany, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, identified a unique market segment for themselves, which is the vocational and training sector, or precisely running intensive language course for foreign students. Once Australia's English language scheme was put into action in 1986, several hundreds of Chinese students came to Australia soon afterwards.

In the beginning, Chinese students did not dominate the foreign student market in Australia in the mid-1980s. However, the new and strong interest of many Chinese in studying overseas, along with Australia's efforts to attract more students from Asian countries to support its vocational and training sector, resulted in a steady inflow of young Chinese to Australia. Chinese families in the mid-1980s were rather poor, but China as potentially the biggest market in the world became a target for Australia's language export industry. Supported by the government that was unable to introduce new industries and jobs after economic restructuring in the 1970s and early 1980s, many Australian English language colleges actively promoted their courses in major Chinese cities. The attention of a large number of Chinese who were not qualified to study in their most favoured destinations turned to Australia from 1987. A so-called 'Australia fever' emerged in China.

Australia was fortunate to have a fast-changing China in its region, as the demand generated by China's reform policy for international education and foreign language skills provided a boost to its new education export sector. In 1988, Chinese students recruited by English language colleges flocked to Australia. It was estimated that no less than 100,000 Chinese students came to Australia and studied there from 1986 to 1989 (Fung and Chen 1996). It was also because of the presence of so many Chinese students in Australia in the late 1980s that two countries became more interconnected than ever before. Such new relations, however, were soon challenged by the turmoil

occurred in China in the late 1980s, which became a crucial moment to test Australia after the Indochinese refugee crisis.

Almost immediately after China's turmoil of June 1989, the Australian government published figures showing that 15,405 Chinese nationals lived in Australia on 4 June 1989 (Birrell 1994; Jupp 1991). The then Hawke-led Labor government opted to join several Western countries to offer short-term residency for Chinese students living in Australia (Gao 2013a). However, the number increased significantly, as none of the English language colleges wanted to refund the tuition fees that thousands of Chinese students had already paid, though they had not yet arrived in Australia on June 1989. Keeping the tuition fees and earning more became far more important to recession-stricken Australia in the late 1980s and early 1990s than any serious political event in the region. To help its vocational colleges keep the money and the jobs, the Australian government made some changes to the visa application procedure, and then allowed more than 25,000 Chinese students to come to Australia from late 1989. These late arrivals joined earlier arrivals in Australia in staging a multi-year campaign to seek opportunity to stay permanently.

China's turmoil in the late 1980s and early 1990s changed the nature of the 'tide of going abroad' and turned the great majority of Chinese students studying overseas at that time into a new generation of Chinese migrants. In the course of dealing with the so-called Chinese-student issue at the time, the Hawke-led Labor government was in power, and it had three immigration ministers. Gerry Hand replaced Robert Ray who handled the student issue in the immediate aftermath of China's 1989 chaos, but as a person from the left faction of the Labor Party, Gerry Hand disagreed with what was then called a blanket approach to the student residency issue. His disagreement was based on both the large number of the students and their low qualification levels. His argument was statistically correct by predicting that if the spouses and children of the 45,000 students were taken into account, together with the effects of chain migration, the total intake of Chinese migrants would be increased to 300,000 by the turn of the century. However, Gerry Hand's argument was politically hazardous for the Labor's ethnic support. As a result, after publicising his short-sighted calculation, Gerry Hand was dumped from the position in March 1993 by the Labor's new big-picture leader, Paul Keating, the then newly elected prime minister.

Gerry Hand's successor, Nick Bolkus, had done his own check without following long passed-down hearsay and stereotypes about Chinese migrants. His department carefully went through the profile of the students, and realised that 'we had within our shores some of the crème of young China' (Bourke 2009). Unlike the worry stated by Gerry Hand, Nick Bolkus publicly praised the Chinese students as 'an enormously highly talented group of people' based on the new analysis (Banham 2003). This is a very interesting case as the same group of Chinese were seen so differently, and there seems to be at least two factors at play. First, it is true that Australia was less able to understand present-day China and its people in the early 1990s. Second, the then new Labor Prime Minister, Paul Keating, had his own strategic vision about China and its migrants in Australia (Kelly 2009).

The 1993 decisions were made by the Keating government after Deng Xiaoping's famous inspection tour in early 1992 and the Chinese economy regained momentum. With a strategic vision to entrench Australia in the rising Asia-Pacific, Paul Keating visited China in June 1993, within three months after his election win, when China's economic growth was once again accelerating. Pual Keating's realisation of China's

economic potential clearly helped him consider the student issue differently from his predecessor. In fact, Australia had seen greater trade potential in China than in other countries before 1993. The volume of trade between two countries already exceeded US$1.27 billion in 1980, and Australia was then China's fifth biggest trading partner. More importantly, Australia has always had a big trade surplus with China. In 1980, Australia had a trade surplus of more than AU$650 million with China, much higher than its surpluses with Taiwan and Hong Kong (Fung and Mackerras 1985), and the yearly growth rate averaged 24.5 per cent, twice Australia's total export growth rate (Woodard 1997). By the mid-1980s, Australia had already integrated itself into the Asia-Pacific economy, and over 60 per cent of its trade was conducted in the region (Humphreys 1985).

In 1993, China became Australia's seventh largest trading partner, rising from the tenth position in 1991 (Andrew 2009). Therefore, the 1993 decisions by the Keating government to allow Chinese students to stay were in fact part of Australia's historic shift towards Asia. The latter was initiated by both the Whitlam Labor government (1972-75), and the Fraser Liberal government (1975-83), and then strongly advocated by the next two Labor governments of Bob Hawke (1983-91) and Paul Keating (1991-96). This strategic shift continued and reached its full-swing under the Howard Liberal government (1996 to 2007), despite Howard's past speech against Asian immigration.

What is more significant historically than the acceptance of 45,000 or so Chinese students to settle in Australia is that their settlement has not only resulted in the huge increase in Chinese migrants, through which Australia has become closely connected with China's economy, but also driven Australia's political and policy elites to think about how to make use of migration policies for sustaining economy (DIMA 2001). Therefore, the 1993 decisions to allow Chinese students to stay were also the start of Australia's new merit-based migration system, the second pivotal turning-point in its post-war migration history since the Colombo Plan.

## Australia's new migration tetralogy in response to China's economic boom

In addition to bringing in better educated migrants from Asia after the Colombo Plan, Australia also joined a few other industrial countries in the 1970s to introduce a race-neutral points-based immigration selection policy as a response to the changes in the 1960s and early 1970s. However, Australia's policy of recruiting trained and skilled migrants was interrupted by the Indochinese refugee crisis, which happened in 1975 after the fall of Saigon. In the eyes of other critics, Australia's merit-based policy was put on hold twice by both the Indochinese refugee crisis and by the Chinese student issue of the late 1980s. While the first case was less debatable, the Chinese case was more complex and significant than the Indochinese case, because the former had not only helped many elites in Australia learn and realise its next main sending region of migrants, but also enabled the modification of the focus of its migration policy. At the time, Australia's history of looking for migrant supplies was at a running point. It had gone through the stages of recruiting people from the United Kingdom and European continent, and it had also tried in Southeast Asia. Since the late 1980s, because of the student issue, China has come to the attention of Australia's migration policy makers. China was also the country where an increasingly high proportion of Australia's trade was conducted in the 1990s, when China already displayed its great trade potential. In the light of this historical context, new Chinese migrants have become a vital factor in

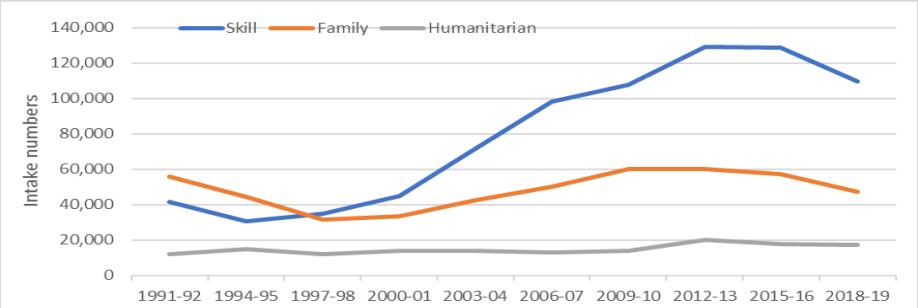
the post-1996 reforms of Australia's migration strategy since the start of this round of policy fine-tuning.

In March 1996, the John Howard-led Liberal-National Coalition was elected after more than 13 years of Labor government, and Philip Ruddock, the new immigration minister lobbied the Cabinet effectively for the acceptance of the remaining onshore residency claimants who were not covered by the 1993 decisions. This decision made the new government free from any historical baggage left by the Labor governments, and ready for resetting immigration policy in line with its economic philosophy. The policy reset was launched in 1996, turning policy attention away in part from family reunion and humanitarian programs, and restoring the points system that was tried in the 1970s. Australia's migration policies and programs have since the mid-1990s evolved as a key strategy to compensate for its powerlessness to restructure its economy as anticipated by generations of reform-minded Australians.

Over the past decades, Australia's migration policy focus has expanded to include qualifications, skills, business experiences, and financial capabilities to invest for selecting new migrants. In this analysis, this set of gradually developed policies is defined as a new immigration selection tetralogy, which is very similar to the hyper-selectivity perspective discussed by Zhou and Yang (2021) in this special issue. As a result of such polices, hundreds of thousands of Chinese who become more qualified than others attacked to Australia.

Recently released the Cabinet documents by Australia's National Archives reveal that in 1996, about 70 per cent of migrants arrived in Australia under family reunion programs partly due to the flow-on effect of the Indochinese refugee crisis, and only around 35 per cent were skilled-based (Bagshaw 2019). After the 1996 election, the Howard government started changing what it inherited as it believed family-reunion-focused programs to be out of touch with the needs of present-day Australia. Figure 1 shows what has taken place to the migration intakes afterwards.

**Figure 1 Australia's migrant intakes by category, 1991-2019**




*Source:* Based on data from Phillips and Simon-Davies (2017), DHA (2019a, 2019b).

A new policy focus was first placed on educated immigrants, with an expectation to closely aligned migration intakes with the needs of the Australian labour market. In practice, however, educational qualifications have no direct connection with the right skills needed by industries and changing economic structures. The idea to list skilled occupations was formed and tried. Despite the above two new migration requirements, it was soon found to be difficult to achieve the objectives of these policy ideas. In the case of educated and skilled migrants from China, their English language skills were obviously weak. The level of education also has no guarantee of local knowledge of new transcultural migrants to be accustomed to the economic conditions in their host

country. As a result, the above practical issues have given rise to a new policy option, which is to link international education programs to skilled migration intake schemes. This strategy was also a starting point for making the distinction between permanent and temporary migrations less distinct, similar to what is discussed by Park (2021) in her paper in this issue.

The strategy to partially combine skilled migration and international education was formed in the late 1990s. A two-step approach was undertaken. First, the government started with the reduction of migrant intake under the family reunion stream. That is, before forming a clear idea and applicable tactics about how to recruit more educated and skilled migration, the government started altering the policy from the other end of implementation, which was to reduce the family reunion migrant intake to ensure that no new migrants are a burden on society. At the same time, the new government was also making efforts on finding out where and how to recruit skilled immigrants. This was the effort made on the supply side. At the time, global migration was becoming a competition as advanced economies started using migration as a strategy to address their problems. Among the approaches used by Australia, its policy to retain foreign full-fee paying students as skilled migrants, or a two-step migration, was considered rather innovative, at least generating a great deal of enthusiasm among middle-class Chinese families.

The strategy of allowing foreign students to seek residency after graduating from Australia's educational institutions was seen by some as a typical tactic of hitting two birds with one stone. From a critical perspective, this measure is not much different from the act of swiping one's credit card twice, or double-dipping of a different kind. However, it is fair to say that this approach achieved what it intended to accomplish. The Australian government insisted that international students could thus be trained locally, making them ready for local jobs with improved language skills. This not only resulted in a surge in the number of Chinese students coming to Australia, but also became part of Australia's policy experiment to run two parallel systems of permanent and temporary migration. In 1994, the number of Chinese students accounted for only 6.5 per cent of the total number of international students in Australia, and in 2000, the ratio grew to about 10 per cent (ABS 2002). Since 2001, their enrolments have grown more than twelve-fold (Norton 2016). Table 1 shows what has happened afterwards.

**Table 1 Chinese students in Australian universities' total foreign student enrolment, 2002-19**

| Year | Total foreign students in Australian universities | Percentage that are Chinese (%) | The second largest country, India (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2002 | 124 922 | 13.9 | 7.2 |
| 2003 | 146 428 | 17.1 | 8.5 |
| 2004 | 164 451 | 21.1 | 11.0 |
| 2005 | 178 284 | 25.7 | 12.7 |
| 2006 | 185 899 | 28.0 | 13.7 |
| 2007 | 192 547 | 29.1 | 14.0 |
| 2008 | 202 598 | 30.9 | 14.0 |
| 2009 | 226 115 | 33.7 | 12.3 |
| 2010 | 242 490 | 36.9 | 9.0 |
| 2011 | 241 440 | 38.7 | 6.3 |
| 2012 | 230 351 | 38.5 | 5.4 |
| 2013 | 230 715 | 37.2 | 7.2 |
| 2014 | 249 362 | 35.7 | 10.5 |
| 2015 | 271 656 | 35.6 | 12.9 |
| 2016 | 305 322 | 36.8 | 14.5 |
| 2017 | 349 120 | 38.3 | 15.5 |
| 2018 | 398 140 | 38.3 | 18.0 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2019 | 442 219 | 27.3 | 20.5 |

*Sources:* Based on Austrade (2020).

After the above policy changes, including the formation of study-migration pathway approach, qualifications and skills have been well reintroduced into Australia's merit-based migration system, resulting in the new migration intake pattern demonstrated in Figure 1, which is characterised by an increasing number of Chinese migrants. This is because that there are not only more Asians who are able to meet the new migration selection criteria, but also many Chinese who have become better educated and skilled than earlier generations. However, the above policies were soon found unable to solve Australia's long-term economic problems. The reality has then turned the attention of decision-makers to more utilitarian use of some migration schemes than before, which is to include business experiences and financial capacities to invest into its migration selection. Once again, these policy focuses attracted more Chinese who have not only obtained a variety of business experiences from China's decades-long economic boom, but have also accumulated needed capital to invest in a country they would like to live. As a result, while more Chinese have become able to meet all these two new criteria, they are even better represented in the investment category.

According to Australia's Office of Parliamentary Counsel, the federal government had made 282 legislative efforts from 1994 to 2016 to adjust the country's migration policies and schemes in order to fully use migration to not only supplement its labour force, but also attract more businesses and investments to the country. Among all ten visa categories, totalling up to 95 types of visa, ranging from subclass 010 to subclass 995, many of them were introduced as a result of policy-making efforts (OPC 2017). Subclass 163 was a typical business skills scheme that was not only flexible, but also business-oriented as it had no qualification requirement and open to anyone younger than 55 years of age. Its aims were to pick brains, business skills, and connections of commercially active people from overseas, but mostly from China. This subclass was replaced in 2012 by what is called the golden ticket visas, or officially the significant investor visas, including Subclasses 132, 188 and 888, indicating investment ranging from AU$1.5 to AU$15 million respectively. For years, applicants from China have never accounted for lower than 80 per cent of successful applications (Doherty 2018).

## Chinese in an economically China-dependent Australia

Since the strategy of shifting towards Asia was clearly put forward by Paul Keating, Australia has already become an Asian country economically, and it is now the most China-dependent economy in the developed world. As analysed, this is not only the result of the Labor Party's push, but also better practiced by the conservative Liberal-National Coalition until recently. Australia's second-longest serving prime minister John Howard has not been regarded as an Asian-friendly politician since his earlier stance on restricting Asian immigration in the 1980s, but he was among the first few influential Australians who not only publicly praise the constructive role of Chinese migrants in Australia's nation-building, but also uphold that it is the responsibility of any Australian government, Liberal or Labor, to advance relations with China in the country's national interest. Subsequently, while Australia has benefited significantly from China's economic development, the ethnic Chinese population in Australia has changed drastically as a result of the new migration selection tetralogy.

Demographically, this is a comparatively young community with over 1.2 million people claiming Chinese origin, and the its median age is only 33 years (ABS 2018). This median age is two years younger than they were in 2011, and five years younger than that of the total Australian population (DHA 2018). Among them, 41 per cent of them were born in China, larger than the second and third subgroups: Australian-born (25 per cent) and Malaysian-born (8 per cent), and over 46 per cent of them claimed to be Mandarin speakers. Nationally, the ethnic Chinese accounted for 4.5 per cent of the Australian population in 2011, but rose to 5.6 per cent in 2016. This increasing ratio is believed to be a reason behind a growing Sinophobic sentiment in Australia.

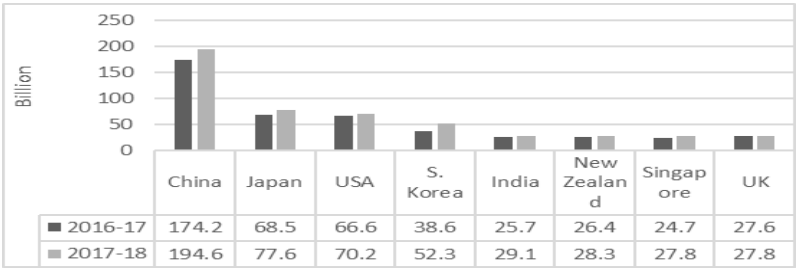
In terms of qualifications, partly due to Australia's study-migration pathway policy, more Chinese migrants have now become better educated in comparison to the rest of the Australian population. In the 1980s, when the average proportion of Australians with tertiary qualifications rose to about 5.4 per cent, the level of the ethnic Chinese population was already two times higher than the national average: 13 per cent by the first generation, 16.4 per cent by the second generation, and 10 per cent by the third generation. Since then, the Chinese community has changed significantly. The 2011 census recorded that there were around 38 per cent of the Chinese Australians with tertiary qualifications, while the national average was around 14 per cent. Five years later, the 2016 census revealed that the national average rose to 16.1 per cent, but the average of the ethnic Chinese population climbed up to above 43 per cent, becoming one of highly educated communities in Australia (ABS 2018).

Their employments in Australia have also changed noticeably, although many of them are engaged in various China-related businesses. In general, their high level of qualification has already been reflected in their employment in Australia. Nowadays, more China-born Australians are holding white-collar jobs, only about one quarter of employed community members work as sales workers, machine operators and drivers, and labourers (ABS 2018). Because of China's growing economy and their networks within China, there are many Chinese Australians owning and operating a variety of their own businesses, small or medium, exporting or importing goods and services, as well as facilitating people-to-people interactions.

Since the mid-1990s when the first cohort of new Chinese migrants helped Australia earn more profits from the Chinese market, Australia's immigration policy has become even more central to Australia's nation-building and economic-growth strategies than it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In addition to what was noted above, Australia has also paid special attention to recruiting entrepreneurial Chinese through business migration schemes. By the late 1990s, about 80 per cent of business migrants were of Chinese origin (Jordens 2001). This trend has continued in the past twenty years, and for example, around 84 per cent of sponsored business migrants in Victoria in the mid-2000s were from China (Murphy 2006). After the 2008 financial crisis, more business skills visas were granted to Chinese businesspeople with a hope that Australia could be more closely linked to China's economy.

Economically, China has, over the course of the past three decades, rapidly moved up from being Australia's tenth largest trading partner in 1991 to its largest one in 2007. Now, as showed in Figure 2, Australia's two-way trade with China is valued at around $194.6 billion, as it sells 30.6 per cent of its exports to China, worth over $123 billion, eclipsing the combined sales to Japan, the United States, South Korea, and India.

**Figure 2 Australia's top two-way trading partners, 2016-18**




*Source*: Based on Chau (2019).

The above figures are noteworthy economically and politically. First, they are a good indicator of how advantageous Australia's economic conditions have been to Chinese Australians. Apart from many China-related jobs created by government systems and businesses, only a small fraction of which are offered to people of Chinese origin, the continuing development and enormous scale of trade and people-to-people exchange between two countries have provided many ethnic Chinese with more employment or business opportunities than non-Chinese Australians have. When Chinese migrants started doing import or export business in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, they could only import products that the purchasing managers of big businesses did not do. After invisible competitions for market share for many years, Chinese have slowly taken a larger market share than ever. They have in particular played a vital role in activating people-to-people exchanges between two countries, offing them additional channels to earn a better living.

Australia's international education and tourism sectors have expanded at a rather rapid pace since it opened its door to Asian markets in the 1990s, making these two sectors the country's second and third foreign-currency earners. Without its Chinese community, Australia would almost undoubtedly never attract so many students and tourists from China, nor would it be possible to convince middle-class consumers in China to buy Australian goods and services. In the process of opening up and running the international student and tourism businesses, the Chinese operators, big and small, have worked at both ends of the markets, in Australia and China. They have provided different forms of service to Chinese students and travellers, and Chinese Australians have therefore taken up a larger share of some markets than non-Chinese Australians, and a big share of the income from the sectors has also been earned by the providers. Onshore services alone, such as accommodation, food, as well as travel and shopping, have brought hundreds of millions of dollars a year into the Chinese community. The latter as a whole has therefore become rather prosperous.

While Table 1 indirectly indicates how much money Australia could have earned from Chinese international students, it is worth considering that a large portion of the students' non-tuition expenditure has been shared by service providers of the Chinese community. By the end of 2016-2017 academic year, Australia earned around $28.6 billion from its international education industry, about 35 per cent of which were from Chinese international students, including those from Hong Kong (DET 2017). Australia has also benefited greatly from the enthusiasm of middle-class Chinese for international travel. Despite the facts of Australia's current Sinophobia and China's tardy economic growth, Australia received about 1.4 million Chinese tourists in the year ending 2018, realising an annual growth of 13.2 per cent and becoming Australia's largest inbound tourist market. As big spenders, Chinese tourists spent as high as over $11.3 billion in Australia (Ludlow 2018).

Second, politically, the reality of Australia being a China-dependent economy has socio-political implications that cannot be denied. Among the long-term consequences of shifting towards Asia, in terms of trade and migration, are the changes to the long-established patterns of the distribution of job opportunities, wealth, and influence in Australia. Tensions have built up between established communities and new arrivals. Before the current China debate, such strong resistance was represented by what has come to be called Hansonism. Pauline Hanson was a single parent and a fish-and-chip shop operator in rural Queensland before being elected as a member of Parliament in 1996. She warned that Australia was in danger of being swamped by Asians. These changes have since been intensified by the shift in migrant selection policies, giving more weight to qualifications, skills, business experiences and ability to invest. As a result, Chinese Australians have been better positioned than many others to prosper in changing economic conditions. Their increasingly active and conspicuous role in the Australian economy has intermittently aroused hostile responses from descendants of Anglo-Celtic settlers and critical commentary in the mainstream media. All these have resulted in the current China debate, giving some Australians a chance to voice their discontent with the country's shift towards Asia, but it has also eroded the country's standing as a successful immigrant nation.

## Conclusion

This article has examined the new Chinese migration to Australia from a combined perspective that takes account of two major transformations occurring in the Asia-Pacific region, which are China's reform and Australia's shift towards Asia. This perspective is utilised here to offer a dynamic view of the new Chinese migration, which is often considered from either a China-centric view or the position of a host country. This analysis has confirmed the new characteristics of contemporary Chines migration as outlined in several articles of this special issue (Guo 2021, Park 2021, Yu 2021, Zhou and Yang 2021). In the Australian case, its immigration policy and selection tetralogy has made the Chinese Australian population highly diversified in order to best serve Australia's economic needs. The hypermobility of the present-day Chinese Australian population is also found to have occurred both horizontally and vertically. The former is an outcome of both the close economic ties between two countries and the hyperconnectivity possessed by more Chinese Australians as a result of Australia's new immigration policies. The latter is mainly caused by the new immigrants' high level of qualifications and skills, which enable them to achieve relatively fast upward social mobility or realising it through wealth accumulation.

Theoretically, the following points may also be of some help to other researchers. First, no migrant community should be observed and analysed from one side of a migration process, especially in the case of migration between substantial counties in terms of population and economy. When discussing anything related to the Chinese migration to Australia, for example, China's reform has been so profound that one cannot simply consider the community from an Australia-centric perspective. This article has considered how Australia has taken positive steps to respond to chances created by China's expanding economy, which suggests that any studies of Chinese Australians need to consider these changes behind their transnational life.

Second, a political economic perspective is needed more than ever so that complex situations, such as Australia's current strong Sinophobia, could be better understood.

Australia has been considered to be a successful immigration country, and Australians of Chinese origin are also regarded as hard-working citizens and a national economic asset. However, in the words of Gareth Evans, former foreign minister, Australia has recently created a situation where Chinese Australians are coming under scrutiny and suspicion, to the extent even being though to be fifth-columnists (Evans 2018). In the words of an ethnic Chinese researcher, Australia is now pulled in a different direction from multiculturalism (He 2019). Theoretically, global migration either as a personal choice or a state policy has its political aspect or consequence, the issue of which has now become so prominent that more attention should be directed to it.

Finally, more practically, many Australians have been looking for solutions to the China debate as it runs a risk of alienating Chinese Australians. However, while two major political parties, Labor and Liberal, have done nothing constructive in resolving the current Sinophobic crisis, the voice of Chinese Australians is also largely absent from the debate. They seem to be at another crossroad in their transnational life, or seriously challenged by a new hurdle in their continuing ride on the waves of another round of socio-economic and -political transformation in the Asia-Pacific region or the world, which may somehow be indicative of new research topics and directions in the field.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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