

Cultural Homogeneity in Australia and Japan

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Abstract

At the start of the 20th century both the Japanese and Australian nations were organised around an ideology of cultural homogeneity. At the start of the 21st century, Japan is still committed to monoculturalism while Australia has instead shifted to an ideology of multiculturalism, or cultural heterogeneity. We investigate how two nations with similar ideologies initially have moved in such different directions. We focus on the reasons behind migration, in particular the need for labour, to help us understand the different directions the two nations took. We argue that Japan's negative experience with its unskilled foreign worker intake from Korea around WWII, which caused assimilation problems and threatened Japanese cultural homogeneity, is the main reason why the Japanese government is still reluctant to open its doors to foreign countries. We further argue that Australia's relatively positive experience with its post-war migrants, coupled with international pressure on Australia to drop the White Australia policy, led it to become a multicultural nation.

Keywords: homogeneity, multiculturalism, migration, Japan, Australia

Introduction

In the first half of the 20th century both the Japanese and Australian societies were organised around ideologies of cultural and racial homogeneity. In Australia this was characterised by the White Australia Policy, which made it very difficult for non-Whites to immigrate. In Japan valuing cultural homogeneity meant that only very few migrants could enter. Both nations expected migrants to assimilate to the dominant ethnic and racial norms: only those who were thought to be capable of integrating were allowed entry. By the start of the 21st century, however, Australia and Japan have moved in opposite directions. Australia is now a self-avowed multicultural nation (HREOC 2007), while Japan has maintained its identity as a mostly monocultural nation (Lu et al. 2005). Australia has one of the largest proportion of

migrants of any developed nation in the world (Walsh 2008), whereas Japan has one of the lowest proportions of migrants (Bartram 2000). Given the initial commitment to monoculturalism in both nations, how and why have the two nations ended up in such different positions?

In this paper we explore this question. We argue that a key potential driver of migration in both nations post World War II was a shortage of labour. Both nations sought to alleviate labour shortages through increased migration, but only with migrants who were considered by dominant political actors as a potential cultural fit: British and European migrants in Australia and Korean migrants in Japan. In Australia the integration of these migrants was a success (Jones 2003), whereas in Japan it was a failure (Cornelius 1994). We argue that the successful integration of the European migrants, coupled with international pressure from its trading partners and other states, led Australia to abandon the White Australia Policy and to look towards multiculturalism. The lack of success in assimilating Korean migrants in Japan led to an increased and lasting commitment to monoculturalism.

In the following sections we define racial and monoculturalism and multiculturalism and we review sociological approaches to understanding migration as a solution for labour shortages. We note that migration is a common response to labour shortages, and this approach was adopted by both Japan and Australia in the middle of the 20th century. We then discuss migration to Japan and Australia, comparing and contrasting the use of migration as a response to labour shortages in the post-war period.

Monoculturalism and multiculturalism

Cultural homogeneity or monoculturalism is both a *description* of a society with one overwhelmingly dominant culture and an *ideology* that asserts that it is important for a society to have one dominant culture. A monocultural society will seek to maintain its cultural homogeneity and it will expect that those who reside within its bounds will assimilate to the dominant cultural norms and values. This may mean adopting new cultural values and practices, for example taking a new, culturally appropriate name. Because of this, monocultural societies police their boundaries vigorously, only permitting those deemed capable of assimilating entry. A culturally homogeneous society does not necessarily need to be racially homogeneous, although in practice it often is.

Multiculturalism is also both a descriptive and an ideological term (HREOC 2007). It describes a culturally heterogeneous society where there are people of many different cultures living side-by-side. Ideologically, multiculturalism asserts that it is important to value different cultural heritages and that all cultural heritages are important and people should be free to practice their culture (HREOC 2007). In terms of migration, a multicultural society will, at least in theory, accept people regardless of their cultural background because the goal is not for them to assimilate, but to integrate and acculturate, because as part of the whole, they have a responsibility to contribute to society.

Labour migration in Japan and Australia

Labour shortage, the situation where a nation does not have enough workers, has been an important social issue for most developed nations. Labour shortage has resulted from various social factors including economic growth, low fertility and population ageing. Labour shortage is interwoven with migration and workers' mobility, and has

been a pull factor attracting migrants to new countries for work. In the following section, we examine the specific experiences of Japan and Australia.

After WWII, Japan undertook rapid economic reconstruction and reindustrialisation, creating an additional ten million jobs (Cornelius 1994). This labour demand was much higher than anywhere else since the economy expanded much faster than the other economies (Bartram 2000). With continuous economic expansion through 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, many small and medium-sized businesses in Japan (mainly in unskilled and semiskilled fields) suffered from chronic labour shortages. And Japan is now facing labour shortages caused by a rapidly ageing population and an unprecedented low fertility rate (Robertson 2007). Nevertheless, unlike European countries and Australia, labour shortage has not led to a mass foreign labour intake in Japan (Bartram 2000).

Japan is well known as a culturally and racially homogeneous society (Lu et al. 2005). Throughout its history the maintenance of cultural homogeneity has had a significant influence on the Japanese Government's immigration and foreign labour policies that deal with the labour shortage (Bartram 2000; Cornelius 1994). Weiner argues that:

Labor shortages do not automatically result in labor migration: instead, "the contrasts in national approaches are due to differences in conceptions of national identity- specifically, whether or not a nation is built on the nation of cultural homogeneity or cultural diversity and notion of pluralism extends from the political to the cultural realm" (cited in Bartram 2000: 22).

Supporting this analysis, in Japan, labour shortages have not led to foreign labour intake. Reflecting a commitment to maintaining homogeneity, to resolve post-WWII labour shortages Japanese policy encouraged surplus Japanese rural workers (who usually took agricultural work) to move into the urban industrial sectors when they were needed or when agricultural work was not active for seasonal reasons (Bartram

2000). So, rather than looking overseas, internal migration was seen as a possible solution for labour shortages. Even when internal migration did not solve the labour shortage problem, the Japanese Government adhered to its anti-foreign labour intake policy irrespective of the pleas to import foreign labour by the Japanese companies which suffered from chronic labour shortages in the late 1970s to 1980s (Higuchi and Tanno 2003) because it feared that increased migration would negatively impact on its cultural homogeneity. This expectation was based, at least in part, on Japan's past experiences of migration, in particular the integration of Korean workers in the World War II period. Korean workers were brought in to fill positions with undesirable working conditions such as those in the manufacturing and mining industries (Lu et al. 2005).

In 1945 there were more than two million Korean workers in Japan (Kim 2006). At that time Korea was a Japanese colony and those Koreans were afforded equal rights to Japanese nationals. When the San Francisco Peace Treaty was sanctioned in 1952, Japan was forced to give up its colonial rights to Korea and its other territories. As a result, all rights previously given to Koreans residing in Japan were removed and they became 'complete aliens' residing in Japan (Kim 2006: 57). The Government's decision to was to give them two choices, 'either return to Korea or to become naturalised Japanese citizens' (Tai 2004: 359). As a condition of naturalisation, the Government required complete assimilation for the Koreans, including the compulsory adoption of Japanese names and speaking of Japanese (Lu et al. 2005; Tai 2004).

While the majority of the Koreans returned to Korea, over 500,000 people could not return due to the political conflicts between South Korea and North Korea (Kim 2006). The assimilation policy elicited a negative response from the Koreans and their

reluctance to give up their ethnic practices and customs was reflected in the low naturalisation rate among the Koreans: of 535,065 Koreans, only 232 became naturalised Japanese citizens in 1952 (Tai 2004). The resistance of the Koreans to assimilate into Japanese culture was perceived as problematic because they were seen as a potential threat to Japanese cultural homogeneity. Therefore, their social status was marginalised in Japanese society, for instance, they did not have any citizenship rights (including welfare benefits and suffrage) and types of jobs they could take were also restricted (Kim 2006).

Despite the fact that the labour shortage had been prevalent through 1970s and 1980s, the immigration and foreign labour policy implemented in 1990 was heavily influenced by Japan's experience with its Korean residents. Cornelius (1994: 381-2) noted that:

Some officials argue that, after more than fifty years, the Korean assimilation problem has not yet been solved, and until it has been solved it is pointless to consider importing large numbers of foreigners of other nationalities, at least as permanent resident aliens.

Aligned with this viewpoint, the Government sought to solve the labour shortage by recruiting Japanese descendents whose ancestors emigrated to Latin America, mainly Brazil, as unskilled foreign workers. This policy reflects the expectation that Japanese descendents would more easily assimilate to Japanese culture than others (Cornelius 1994). In fact, Japanese Brazilians were appreciated by employers because they expected that they would be less likely to cause xenophobic reactions among the Japanese people (Higuchi and Tanno 2003). Currently, over 300,000 Brazilian-Japanese workers reside in Japan (Ministry of Justice 2008; Reyes-Ruis 2005).

In addition to accepting Japanese Brazilian descendants in the unskilled labour force, in 1993 the Government set up a Practical Trainee Program that accepts unskilled foreign workers from developing countries in manufacturing, construction, engineering and metalworking fields for the purpose of transferring skills and knowledge (Ministry of Justice 2007b). Although trainees are allowed to stay for only a maximum of three years, the trainee program attracts many foreign workers and the number of trainees has been increasing year by year, reaching over 70,000 by 2006 (Ministry of Justice 2008). Because these workers have to leave after three years, they do not threaten Japanese cultural homogeneity.

Although Japan does not accept unskilled migrants, it does accept skilled foreign workers from a variety of cultural backgrounds (Ministry of Justice 2007a). It could be suggested that the recent intake of skilled migrants may lead to a softening of the Japanese government's commitment to cultural homogeneity. However, irrespective of the Government's apparent willingness to accept skilled workers, the number of skilled workers has not dramatically increased and rather rate change has been gradual: 144,809 in 2005 and 157,719 in 2006 (Ministry of Justice 2008). Moreover, as foreign residents account for such a small percentage (1.6 %) of the total Japanese population (127.8 million people) these foreigners are not likely to threaten Japanese cultural homogeneity. Indeed, the ideology of cultural homogeneity has been explicitly incorporated into the skilled migration policy, especially in the health care sector where more labour intake is expected in the future due to the acute labour shortage. For instance, for foreign health care workers, Japanese language acquisition is compulsory and moreover, they are required to sit a

national examination set by the Government to obtain the Japanese qualification to be officially recognised as carers (Kajimoto 2005).

Australia

Like Japan, Australia was also committed to cultural homogeneity for the first half of the 20th century. Unlike Japan, which has been a nation with essentially closed borders for hundreds of years, Australia only became a nation in at Federation in 1901 when its colonies joined together to become the Commonwealth of Australia. One of the first acts of the new Commonwealth was to pass the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, the basis for White Australia policy. The goal of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* was to create and maintain Australia as a White, British nation (Jones 2003; Teicher et al. 2000). Migration restrictions were tied up with both labour market needs (Teicher et al. 2000) and cultural values from the beginning of the Australian nation, including its colonisation and subjugation of Indigenous peoples.

The belief that non-Whites were inferior was an important part of Australian nationalism at the time of Federation (Jones 2003; Markus 2003). During the first half of the 20th century the Australian population rapidly increased and ‘... became progressively "whiter", with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population a steadily declining proportion of the total’ (Jones 2003: 112). According to Jones, by 1933, 97% of the Australian population was of British descent (Jones 2003: 113). In that context, Australia was imagined as a white nation and, in dominant representations, Indigenous people were written out of the national story (Moreton-Robinson 2004).

Unlike Japan, however, since the arrival of European settlers in 1788, Australia had been a settler nation. Australia is a young country and without migrants there would be no Australia. At the same time, the history of migration in Australia has involved a series of critical debates around acceptable countries of origin for migrants. During World War II and in the post-war period, for example, Australia feared invasion from Asia, particularly after Japan's successful bombing of Pearl Harbor and its invasion of Malaysia and Singapore, and this led to a campaign for increased British immigration (Jones 2003). In addition, economic growth in the post-war period called for additional workers (Teicher et al. 2000; Walsh 2008).

Immediate post-war migration policy sought to increase the Australian population while maintaining its racial and cultural homogeneity (Vasta 2006; Walsh 2008). An emerging problem was that fewer British immigrants were electing to come to Australia. As Vasta notes:

The intention of Australia's post-war immigration policy was to create a culturally homogeneous and cohesive white society. However, as it became apparent that not enough British immigrants wanted to come, recruitment was broadened to other parts of Europe, including Italy, Greece and Spain. In its determination to maintain cultural homogeneity and to allay popular fears, the solution was found in assimilationism: the doctrine that immigrants could be culturally and socially absorbed, and rapidly become indistinguishable from the existing Anglo-Australian population. (Vasta 2006: 22)

These southern European migrants did not end up assimilating, however. The segmentation of the labour market meant that migrants were more likely to work with other migrants than with Anglo-Australians (Vasta 2006). This, coupled with the residential segregation experienced by many migrants enabled them to

maintain their ethnic identities (Vasta 2006). This was the beginning of the end of monoculturalism.

The White Australia policy officially ended in 1973 with the election of the Whitlam Australian Labor Party government. The policy was ultimately undermined both by the success of the European migration program in the post-war period and by external pressures placed on Australia. In particular, as Markus argues:

[I]t became clear [when?] that the need to place diplomatic and economic links with Asian countries on a sounder footing would fail while Australia maintained what was seen to be a policy of racial arrogance towards nationals of Asian countries. (Markus 2003: 180)

In the 1960s Australia sought to develop alliances with Asian nations, which meant not having an immigration policy that specifically excluded them. As London noted: 'Prime Minister Gorton, in his relatively short tenure as government leader, has been particularly sensitive to the apparent contradictions of a White Australia policy excluding Asians and a defense policy relying on Asian goodwill' (London 1970: 221). Interestingly, Japanese businessmen were some of the major critics of the White Australia policy (London 1970).

At the same time in the United States the Civil Rights Movement was re-shaping race relations (Chong 1991; Omi and Winant 1994), and other western nations were moving away from racial discrimination, putting further pressure on Australia (Markus 2003). Postcolonial states were also condemning racism, supported by the United Nations Assembly (London 1970).

Since the 1970s Australian governments have implemented various multicultural policies (see Vasta 2006 for an overview), and multiculturalism is

official government policy today (HREOC 2007). The shift from monoculturalism to multiculturalism in Australia, then, has been an official one.

Discussion

Successful integration of the European migrants, coupled with international pressure from its trading partners, and the election to federal office of a progressive political party in the early 1970s led Australia to abandon the White Australia Policy and move towards multiculturalism. Japan appears not to have been subject to similar external pressures to remove discriminatory ethnic/racial immigration policies as Australia. At least part of the explanation for this is that Japan had closed borders for close to 400 years and very few migrants were accepted. No particular group was excluded because everyone was excluded, including people of similar racial appearance. In contrast, Australia was a settler nation that welcomed and recruited migrants, but it discriminated against non-white/non-European migrants. This discrimination was perceived as being unfair and racist, and the international community condemned it.

Also key in enabling us to understand why Australia has become multicultural was the successful integration of the southern European migrants into Australia. Although they had been recruited because they were thought to be assimilable, they did not assimilate but they did peacefully integrate with Anglo-Australians. Their successful integration paved the way for migrants from other parts of the world, and led to Australia becoming multicultural.

In contrast, Japan's negative experience with its Korean residents increased its resolve to limit migration. Japan's policy changes forced the hand of the Koreans, and they resisted becoming Japanese. The European migrants in Australia were expected to

assimilate, but it was not forced. This is an important qualitative difference in the two nations and their approaches to monoculturalism.

The outcome of both countries' post-war experiences with migrants has been lasting. Australia has one of the largest proportions of migrants of any developed country, and Japan has one of the smallest. Australia has and continues to successfully recruit migrants to alleviate labour shortages, although politically charged issues continue to exist around which countries are 'acceptable' as countries of origin, while Japan has not and is experiencing ongoing labour shortages. While migration is a solution for labour shortages in Australia, as long as Japan is committed to monoculturalism, it cannot look to migration to solve its labour problems.

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