‘They May Come Here to Study But Not To Stay’¹: Print Media Coverage of International Student Migration in the Era of the White Australia Policy

Dr. Rachel Burke  
The University of Newcastle

The Australian International Student Program was founded in 1950 as a cornerstone of the government’s humanitarian efforts in post-war Asia.² In the era of the White Australia Policy, the establishment of a program to enable Asian student migration, albeit on a temporary basis, attracted strong print media attention. Whilst government policy designated that international students were to return home on the completion of their studies in order to assist with economic development in Asia, analysis of Australian newspaper texts during the 1950-1973 period reveals that—at least within the confines of the media—this requirement was the source of some debate.³ Support for the policy co-exists within the media alongside calls for international students to have the opportunity to remain in the country following graduation both as expatriates undergoing workplace training and as potential ‘Australians’. As such, I argue that media discussion of the requirement for students to return home after graduation not only provided a forum for the contestation of the broader issue of Australian immigration policy, but also facilitated the articulation of beliefs regarding Australian ‘national identity’.

The Origins of the International Student Program in Australia: Reconciling Domestic Anxieties with International Commitments

The Australian International Student Program has its origins in the turbulent post-war era, when much of the Asian region experienced poverty and civil unrest in the wake of WWII and decolonisation.⁴ Motivated by humanitarianism and a desire to alleviate defence concerns raised by instability in the region, Commonwealth countries met in Colombo, Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), in January 1950 to implement measures to raise Asian living standards.⁵ Economic assistance and

---

² Whilst official records indicate that students from Asia have undertaken tertiary education at Australian institutions since 1904, the formal International Student Program is considered to have its origins in the 1950 Colombo Plan. See: M. Radford, D.J. Ongkili & M. Toyoizumi, Overseas Students in South Australia, Adelaide, International Students Association, 1984; K. Koh, Chinese Overseas Students in Brisbane, Brisbane, Division of Asian and International Studies, Griffith University, 1989.
³ The timeframe for the investigation was chosen to reflect the commencement of the formal International Student Program in 1950, through to what many consider the official abolition of the so-called ‘White Australia Policy’ in 1973. This date for the final dismantling of the White Australia Policy is contested, with others regarding modifications to immigration practices in 1966 as representing the official abolition. See: D. Pope & P. Shergold, ASEAN: Australian Immigration and the Demise of the ‘White Australia’ Policy, Canberra, ASEAN-Australia Joint Research Project, 1985.
⁴ Koh, Chinese Overseas Students.
cooperation via bilateral agreements was identified as the most effective course of action and the resultant Colombo Plan would be organised into two main initiatives—the Capital Development Program, involving investment in agriculture, infrastructure, and communications, and the Technical Co-operation Scheme which would provide equipment, expertise, and the training of students in sponsor countries. The formalised International Student Program in Australia was therefore established in order to facilitate the enrolment of students at tertiary institutions throughout the country.

In 1951, these so-called Colombo Plan students began arriving in Australia, representing one of the first groups of non-European entrants to be officially endorsed by the government since the inception of the White Australia Policy. Along with students sponsored under the Colombo Plan and other scholarship programs were private students, who received an education subsidy but financed their own entry, departure, and living expenses. During a time in which immigration practices were based on the idea of a ‘White Australia’, the establishment of a program to enable Asian student migration, albeit on a temporary basis, attracted strong print media attention.

Various scholars have identified the tension between Australia’s promise to assist with education in the Asian region and the maintenance of the White Australia Policy. As Waldron advises, students who entered Australia for educational reasons prior to the Colombo Plan did so through the ‘alien clause’ and their acceptance was dependent on the nomination and guarantee of an Australian resident. This clause could not be the foundation for the increased intake of students arriving in association with the Colombo Plan, so new administrative measures were implemented to facilitate student entry. The early International Student Program objectives are summarised by Jones as:

The fostering of international understanding through student mobility [and] the stimulation of social and economic development through training in Australia for Asian students...ensuring that students temporarily admitted to Australia returned home promptly on the completion of their studies.

---

8 The term ‘Asian student’ or ‘Asian international student’ is employed to distinguish international students originating in countries located within the Asian region from the rest of the international student population and from Asian Australian students. These terms are not intended to belie the diversity of the nations, cultures, and populations of this region. Likewise, it is acknowledged that the terms ‘European’ and ‘Australian’ are equally problematic.
10 Waldron, *Overseas Student Policy*.
Given the stated intentions of the Colombo Plan and other scholarship programs to assist with economic development in Asia, it is perhaps surprising to find that reference to Australian immigration policy is a marked feature of media coverage of International Student Program affairs throughout the 1950-1973 period. However, as will be shown here, newspaper coverage of the time indicates that the presence of the international student population in Australia provided a tangible reminder of the nation’s restrictive immigration policy. As one of the first officially endorsed non-European migrant groups since the commencement of the White Australia Policy, international students represented the first contact with Asia for many Australians. Their inclusion in newspaper coverage through articles concerning student activities and presence in Australia was frequently accompanied by reference to the broader debate concerning Australian immigration practices.

This print media association between the International Student Program and Australia’s immigration policy was also generated by reports of students wishing to remain in the country following the completion of their studies. Whilst government policy clearly designated that international students were to return home in order to fulfil the Program’s aim of assisting with economic development in Asia, analysis of Australian newspaper texts from the 1950s-1970s reveals that—at least within the confines of the media—this policy was the source of some debate. Even from the earliest years of Colombo Plan intake, the question of participants remaining in Australia following the completion of their studies was a key theme of media coverage, with a range of opinions expressed in articles, editorials, and letters to the editor.

Media treatment of individual students seeking to remain in Australia and the often-emotive nature of reporting suggests that such cases personalised the debate surrounding the nation’s immigration policy, providing a relatable, ‘real-life’ human embodiment of the arguments concerning non-European entry and citizenship. As will be discussed here, student desire to settle in Australia was often treated sympathetically within newspaper texts, with students constructed as valuable ‘potential citizens’ with professional expertise to contribute to the Australian labour force and community. Relationships between students and Australians were frequently documented in the media in emotive terms, particularly in cases of student deportation, with expressions of support for the broadening of immigration policy to enable former students to return to Australia and couples and families to remain together.

At other times, the idea of international students settling permanently in Australia was presented within the media as counter-productive to the intentions of the Colombo Plan and other scholarship programs aimed at assisting with Asian economic development. In addition, the acceptance of students as residents was frequently constructed as problematic for Australia’s cultural composition, with

---

12 Jupp, ‘Part of Asia’.
expressions of concern within the media regarding the sustainability of an increasingly multi-ethnic society. As such, media discussion of the requirement for international students to return home following their studies provided a point of convergence for the contestation of immigration practices and broader issues regarding the cultural fabric of Australian society, definitions of ‘Australian-ness’, and notions of ‘national identity’.

Of course, the concept of ‘national identity’ is highly contested, with theorists such as Cunningham and Turner using the term ‘national fiction’, Anderson coining the phrase ‘imagined community’, and Balibar and Wallerstein referring to an ‘identity of origins, culture and interests’ as ‘fictive ethnicity’.14 There is no intention here to evaluate the accuracy of the ‘fictive ethnicity’ constructed within media text, the validity of views or quotations presented, or the degree to which images of the International Student Program, social groups, or individuals reflect ‘reality’ or popular opinion. As Cunningham and Turner have commented, literary and visual representations ‘re-present’ a particular version of the world.15 Amongst a vast array of complex factors, concerns regarding newsworthiness, timing, and target audience play an integral role in determining the nature and scope of reporting.16 In the themes that are given prominence within media coverage, the researcher may glimpse the ideas, images, and beliefs that are considered newsworthy. Importantly, as Fowler has stated of his work:

News has not been singled out as a unique instance of deliberate or negligent partiality; it is analysed as a particularly important example of the power of all language in the social construction of reality.17

Existing research examines policy development associated with the administration of the International Student Program, including the requirement for students to return to their country of origin on completion of their studies.18 Further, various scholars such as Hodgkin, Rao, Auletta, Park, Oakman, and others have examined the socio-cultural aspect of student presence and desire to settle in Australia, utilising a range of sources including reports, government documents, media texts, memorandums, and personal correspondence.19 My discussion

15 Cunningham & Turner, Media in Australia, p. 233.
16 Herman & Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent.
18 G.L Rao, Overseas Students in Australia: Some Major Findings From a Nation-Wide Survey, Canberra, Education Research Unit, Australian National University, 1976; G.L. Rao, Brain Drain and Foreign Students: A Study of the Attitudes and Intentions of Foreign Students in Australia, the USA, Canada, and France, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1979; M.C. Hodgkin, Australian Training and Asian Living, Perth, University of Western Australia Press, 1966; M.C. Hodgkin, The Innovators, the Role of Overseas Trained Persons in Southeast Asia, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1972; Jones, International Relations in Education.
regarding newspaper coverage of the popular debate concerning the requirement for students to leave Australia following graduation or cessation of their studies is distinctive in the chosen timeframe for the investigation—1950-1973—and in its specific focus on the media as the forum for contestation of the issues.

Utilising newspapers as the textual corpus, this research offers a systematic yet necessarily interpretive analysis of media representations of the debate, identifying key implications for the broader issue of Australian immigration policy.\(^20\) In keeping with the notion of language as a social construct, I acknowledge that other interpretations of the textual corpus are not only possible but also desirable. I see the value of identifying and analysing media images of the International Student Program—not in the reflection of any ‘truth’ regarding the international student or Australian populations—but in bringing about greater awareness of the complex process in which popular discussion and representation of particular groups within society acts to externalise certain core beliefs regarding ‘national identity’.

**Fulfilling Program Objectives and/or Contesting Cultural Identities?**

Assertions within the print media regarding the importance of students leaving Australia following the culmination of their time at university were often based on the rationale that knowledge and skills gained through study should be used in assisting economic development in the students’ home countries. Such assertions were in keeping with the stated goals of the Program and reflected the government policy that, as Prime Minister Harold Holt explained in 1966:

> Australia would not be doing a favour to their countries if it allowed Asian students to stay here. The primary object of the students’ coming to Australia was to strengthen the economy and administration of their own countries.\(^21\)

Indeed, various politicians and scholars from the Asian region expressed support for the return of graduates to Asia following the completion of their studies in Australia. In 1964, within the context of a symposium debating Australian policy in Asia, Dr Usha Mahajani, visiting fellow of the Australian National University’s Department of International Relations, reportedly claimed that modifications to the country’s immigration laws would result in Asian nations losing highly skilled people to Australia.\(^22\)

---


\(^22\) ‘White Australia label denounced’, *The Canberra Times*, July 9, 1964, p. 3.
By the 1970s, fears of such a ‘brain drain’ were the topic of high-level diplomacy, with leaders in Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia expressing concern regarding changes to Australian immigration policy in 1973 that allowed for the settlement of private international students in Australia, provided they met the stated migration criteria.23 Following talks with Malaysian government officials, Al Grassby, Minister for Immigration within the Whitlam government, reported:

The Malaysian Government expressed its wish that there should be no departure from the long-established principle that on completion of their courses the students should return to their homeland so that Malaysia will receive the benefit of their training in Australia.24

Similar concerns were expressed by the Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, with a Canberra Times editorial relaying his criticism that ‘Australia is prepared to accept as migrants from Singapore university graduates, particularly those trained in Australia, but not the hewers of wood and the drawers of water’.25 In response, the Times editor stated that whilst most students did return to their home country, ‘it is understandable that the governments of their countries of origin should feel aggrieved at the loss of those who do not’.26

Mr Grassby was quoted in the media as having assured the Singaporean government that Australia would only accept private international students who ‘indicated they were coming to Australia to acquire skills to take back to Singapore’.27 In addition, the Minister reportedly advised that students who wished to remain in Australia, ‘would be closely counselled on the desire of their government that they return’.28 Whilst confirming that ‘the basic purpose of the scheme was understood and accepted’, Mr Grassby also reportedly maintained, ‘it was up to other countries, not Australia to regulate the exodus of their people’.29

However, prior to the 1973 changes in Australian immigration policy, media coverage indicates that support for students leaving Australia at the culmination of their studies in order to contribute to the economic development of their home countries was not the sole basis for opposition to student settlement in Australia. The textual corpus shows that from the commencement of the International Student Program in the 1950s, expressions of support for students returning home for the purposes of economic development were frequently accompanied in the media by references to issues related to the composition of Australia’s migrant intake and concerns regarding the feasibility of an increasingly multi-ethnic population. This is perhaps expected, given that fears regarding the impact of non-European migration

---

24 ‘Manila may be tough on Aust migration policy’, p. 8.
26 ‘Differences At Ottawa’, p. 2.
29 ‘Manila may be tough on Aust migration policy’, p. 8.
on the cultural fabric of society were among the major motivations for the institution of the White Australia Policy in 1901.\textsuperscript{30}

In the post-war era, the White Australia Policy, which had been implemented at Federation as the result of anxiety regarding the perceived threat posed by non-European migration to the nation’s security, economy, and cultural identity, attracted greater criticism as restrictive immigration practices became increasingly out of step with the general acceptance of principles of equality.\textsuperscript{31} While the primary aspects of the so-called White Australia Policy were to remain in official government policy for another twenty years or so, the election of the Menzies government in 1949 introduced a more liberal attitude towards immigration.\textsuperscript{32} A number of policy modifications were instituted, many of which did not require formal legislative amendments.\textsuperscript{33}

In 1950, Minister for Immigration Harold Holt’s declaration that there would be ‘no departure from the principles underlying the immigration policy which every government had followed since 1901’ was reported in the media.\textsuperscript{34} However, increased flexibility in the application of the White Australia Policy was evident, with Mr Holt advocating ‘a reasonable discretion to meet particular circumstances’ such as post-war refugee intake, declaring he was ‘confident that the great majority of the Australian people supported that view’.\textsuperscript{35} Among alterations to the nation’s immigration practices during the 1950s was the annual allowance of 250 individuals from the Asian region to be given residence, the 1956 extension of temporary entry permits for an indefinite period to ‘distinguished and highly qualified Asian professionals’, and the relaxation of legislation regarding non-European naturalisation and citizenship.\textsuperscript{36}

Post-war modifications to Australian immigration practices were closely debated within the media, with the implications for ‘national identity’ a central feature of the discussion. A range of positions regarding the White Australia Policy were evident, including expressions of support for its continuation, calls for its complete abolition, and suggestions that a quota for non-European migration be adopted.\textsuperscript{37} The presence of international students at Australian schools and tertiary institutions contributed to the visibility of the immigration issue within the media. Newspaper coverage of student arrivals, their enrolment at Australian institutions, and their activities in the broader community frequently incorporated references to the debate regarding immigration policy.

\textsuperscript{30} Jupp, ‘Part of Asia’.
\textsuperscript{31} N. Viviani, \textit{The Abolition of the White Australia Policy: The Immigration Reform Movement Revisited}, Brisbane, Australia-Asia Papers, No. 65, Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Griffith University, 1992.
\textsuperscript{32} Auletta, ‘Colombo Plan’.
\textsuperscript{33} Pope & Shergold, \textit{ASEAN: Australian Immigration}.
\textsuperscript{34} ‘No Change In Principle’, \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald}, January 11, 1950, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{35} ‘No Change In Principle’, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{36} J. Jupp, \textit{The Australian People}, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1988, p. 217.
In 1954, *The Sydney Morning Herald* relayed statements from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition Mr Arthur Calwell, who reportedly addressed university students at a meeting arranged by the Australian Labor Party Club at which, the reader is informed, ‘about ten Asian students were among the 200 present’. The Deputy Opposition Leader is quoted in the *Herald* article as having explained the Australian policy to prevent non-European migration was intended to, ‘avoid the stresses and strains that a mixed race [sic] always brought’, stating that the formation of enclaves and the exploitation of cheap labour would be among the problems encountered ‘if great numbers of Asians came’. According to the article, the Minister also stated that he was only too happy to help all Asian students here’, assuring his audience that ‘Australia harboured no racial [sic] prejudice against Asians...even though they felt it would be dangerous to assimilate them.

Indeed, media coverage suggests that concerns regarding the possible impact of non-European migration on Australian cultural composition and social harmony fuelled support for the maintenance of what one 1954 *Courier-Mail* editorial described as:

An immigration policy which has spared this country problems that now appear almost insoluble to other countries that have tried to blend peoples who are racially [sic] and culturally exclusive when they become sufficiently numerous to build up their own communities.

In 1958, a letter to the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald* from the President and Secretary of the Melbourne University Students’ Representative Council claimed that a referendum regarding the White Australia Policy revealed 77% of those students who voted–estimated to be two-thirds of the full-time student population–were in favour of allowing permanent Asian migration to Australia. Yet, another *Herald* correspondent responded by asking:

It would be interesting to know how many of the 2,824 students who voted have a first-hand and intimate knowledge of Asia and Asians; and...appreciate the problems which would arise if a quota were granted in respect of Asian migrants.

However, alongside such expressions of support for the continuation of the White Australia Policy were recommendations that the nation’s immigration

---

39 ‘No Prejudice, Says Calwell’, p. 4.
40 ‘No Prejudice, Says Calwell’, p. 4.
practices be modified to allow students from Asia to settle permanently in the country following the completion of their studies. Such support for student migration was often based on personal interactions. This theme was evident in a 1954 letter to the editor of The Argus that stated:

It has been our privilege to give part-board to three Asians who are studying here under the auspices of the Colombo Plan...As a result of this contact, my family and I feel strongly that if any such Asians did wish to settle permanently in Australia, this country in its refusal to admit even a quota of Asian migration is doing itself a real disservice.45

Claims of a fundamental contradiction between the nation’s participation in the Colombo Plan and other diplomatic endeavours and its adherence to the White Australia Policy continued to be voiced in the media. A 1959 letter to the editor of The Sydney Morning Herald recommended the Australian government ‘drastically revise its immigration policy with regard to Asian students’, suggesting that, ‘the present policy is gradually destroying ties with all our Asian neighbours’, 46 Referring to ‘quite a few’ students who were given only two weeks notice to leave Australia after failing a year of their studies and continuing in part-time mode, the letter continued by arguing:

Asian graduates leaving this country, practically at the end of a boot, although having a favourable impression of the people with whom they have come into contact, have a very bitter feeling toward our democratic way, as exemplified by the Immigration Department...If a student is married he [sic] is not allowed to bring his wife out here. The few who have managed to be united with their wives are hounded by the department to send them home again...Not a congenial atmosphere in which to gain a favourable impression of a country...47

Tensions resulting from the enforcement of regulations regarding the presence of international students’ family members served to illustrate the conflicting interests at play in the nation’s participation in the Colombo Plan and its concurrent adherence to the White Australia Policy. Whilst the policy for students’ families to be excluded from the country was often discussed in terms of International Student Program intent and the desire to ensure students returned home to assist with economic development in Asia, media coverage of such cases frequently involved broader debate regarding Australian immigration policy and diplomacy.

44 This theme has also been identified in research by: Hodgkin, Australian Training and Asian Living; Rao, Overseas Students; Oakman, ‘Young Asians in Our Homes’.
A typical case occurred in 1961, when it was reported that ‘a brilliant Malayan honours student has given up his studies at the University of Western Australia because his fiancée has been barred from Australia’.48 Having first met his fiancée when the two were studying at the University of Western Australia, Mr Teng Ching Kiat, described as the President of the Malayan Students’ Association of Western Australia and ‘the recognised leader of the Asian students’, was reportedly returning home ‘sick and tired of Australia’s immigration policies’. The Sydney Morning Herald reported: ‘Mr Kiat49 said today he believed the visa was refused only because Miss Tan [his fiancé] was a single Asian girl [sic]’.

In response to criticism of the department’s decision to deny Mr Teng’s fiancée a three-month tourist visa, Minister for Immigration Mr Alexander Downer reportedly ‘promised to give “very special consideration” to the fact that Mr Teng had only three more months to finish his course’, reiterating the purpose of the Colombo Plan as a means of promoting economic development in Asia and stating that ‘wives and relations of students were normally barred from Australia because they might want to settle here’.50 The Sydney Morning Herald reported that Mr Teng then cancelled his travel plans and stated:

There is a danger that Australia’s immigration policy could be misunderstood through this one unfortunate incident. Whatever I have said in the past about the policy was said in a moment of anger and disgust at the refusal of my fiancée’s visa. Since then I have had time to think.51

In the end, newspapers reported that the government granted Mr Teng’s fiancée a visa on the proviso that she would leave with her fiancée when he completed his studies.52

The ‘Human Face’ of the Immigration Debate: Student Stories

Within the context of popular debate concerning Australian immigration practices, the print media closely followed the fortunes of individual students seeking to remain in the country despite completing or terminating their studies. One such case occurred in 1954 when the Department of Immigration requested Mr Thambu Paramanathan,53 a private international student from Ceylon (present-day

48 ‘Asian student resents fiancée bar’, The Sydney Morning Herald, August 13, 1961, p. 25. Interestingly, in contrast to The Herald article that stated the student had given up his studies, The Canberra Times reported the student ‘had threatened to discontinue his studies’. See: ‘Govt May Relax Ban For Malayan Student’, The Canberra Times, August 16, 1961, p. 15.
49 Some media texts refer to Mr Teng Ching Kiat as Mr Teng Chin Kiat and Mr Teng Chen Kiat. See ‘Govt May Relax Ban For Malayan Student’, p. 15; ‘Visa Granted to Malayan Girl’, The Canberra Times, August 18, 1961, p. 1. In other reports, the student is referred to as ‘Mr Kiat’ despite the usual practice of the family name being placed first. See: ‘Asian student resents fiancée bar’, p. 25.
53 Newspaper coverage varies in citing the student’s surname as ‘Thambu’ or ‘Paramanathan’.
Sri Lanka), leave Australia. Media reports contained conflicting information as to whether Mr Paramanathan had decided to terminate his studies or had requested to transfer to part-time enrolment to allow for casual employment. In either case, newspapers reported that Mr Paramanathan desired to remain in Australia despite the Department of Immigration’s instructions that he leave and the case made headlines in both national and international publications, with the student’s marriage to an Australian intensifying interest.

Indeed, Australian newspaper headlines emphasised Mr Paramanathan’s relationship, with The Sydney Morning Herald publishing an article entitled ‘Asian Student Wed Australian Despite Warning’, claiming an ‘Asian student had married an Australian girl [sic] against her parents’ wishes after he had been given a month in which to leave the Commonwealth’. According to the report, Mr Paramanathan had undertaken studies and then transferred to another degree, later failing the course and requesting to switch to part-time enrolment to enable him to take on casual employment. The Sydney Morning Herald quoted Immigration Minister Harold Holt as explaining, ‘Thambu was told that he would have to leave the Commonwealth if he was unable to continue full-time study. This was the normal provision for Asian students’. The suggestion that the student was attempting to use his marriage and/or the International Student Program as a means of remaining in the country was communicated in the article with the allegation that he told her [his new wife’s] mother that Asian students who had married Australian women were allowed to remain in Australia and expressed his confidence that he also would be permitted to remain.

The same claims were made in other publications including The Argus in an article entitled ‘Thambu wed Jean to stay here, says Holt’. However, according to newspaper coverage, the Immigration Department warned both Mr Paramanathan and his new wife prior to the wedding that marriage did not enable students to remain in the country and that special consideration could not be extended in this case.

Yet, Mr Paramanathan’s marriage retained centrality within newspaper coverage of his bid to remain in Australia. The West Australian published its version of the story under the headline ‘Marriage Crowned Thambu’s Failures’—echoing many of the same claims made in the Herald article including the statement that the student married the Australian woman ‘against her parents’ wishes after he had been

54 ‘Asian Student Wed Australian Despite Warning’, p. 5.
57 ‘Asian Student Wed Australian Despite Warning’, p. 5.
given a month in which to leave the country’. Likewise, *The Courier-Mail* headlined its report ‘To deport Asian. Has Aust. Wife’, whilst the story was personalised somewhat for *Argus* readers with a photograph of the couple appearing above the description ‘Newly wed Asian student, Thambu Paramanathan, shown above with his Australian wife, has been ordered to leave Australia’.

Indeed, *The Argus* ran an article several days after the initial story had broken in the media in which further details regarding Mr Paramanathan’s relationship were provided, as told from his wife’s perspective. Entitled ‘Asian student’s wife: “We’ll never part. Where my husband goes, I go too”’, this report upheld the legitimacy of the marriage and in contrast to earlier coverage, engaged directly with Mr Paramanathan’s wife. Described as an ‘attractive and talented 26-year old artist’, Mrs Jean Paramanathan reportedly provided information on how the couple had met and details of their common interests in art and music, claiming:

> The suggestion that I was beguiled into marrying Thambu to provide him with an excuse for staying here is simply not true. The fact is I only decided to marry him after he himself had made up his mind to leave here for England and had obtained the necessary visa.

In addition to Jean Paramanathan’s assurances concerning the legitimacy of her marriage, *The Argus* included her statements regarding the strength of the couple’s determination to remain together:

> I was under no starry eyed illusion about the difficulties that would face us when we married...We know they would try to tear us apart again. But whatever happens they will not separate me from my husband. If he goes I go too, no matter where it is...The Immigration Department will never part me from my husband. We want to tell Mr Holt, immigration minister, the full story. I know that if we had been parted before we were married it would have been very difficult for us to meet again...

The inclusion of Jean Paramanathan’s declarations regarding the relationship framed the story in emotive, human terms, whilst contradicting claims that the marriage was a means of allowing her husband to remain in the country.

*The Examiner* and *The Advocate* also took a personalised and impassioned approach to reporting the case. The *Examiner* headline ‘Asian Must Quit, But Has Not The Money To Take Wife With Him’ was accompanied by the subheading

---

62 ‘Marriage Crowned Thambu’s Failures’, p. 10.
65 ‘Asian student’s wife: “We’ll never part”’, p. 3.
66 ‘Asian student’s wife: “We’ll never part”’, p. 3.
67 ‘Asian student’s wife: “We’ll never part”’, p. 3.
A Red Cliffs girl [sic] who married an Asian student is watching helplessly in Melbourne as the Immigration Department completes its plans to deport him. She will probably have to stay in Australia because the student has no money to take her with him.\(^{69}\)

Both articles incorporated a rare quote from Mr Paramanathan indicating that he:

Told reporters yesterday afternoon: “We both knew there was trouble ahead, but we wanted to marry and were prepared to face it. My parish priest had a long talk with us about the problems we would face”.\(^{70}\)

*The Advocate* also referred to Mr Paramanathan’s religion, stating that he ‘became a Catholic two years ago, and met his wife, an attractive brunette, six months later’.\(^{71}\)

References to the student’s financial struggles and family sacrifices to enable his study in Australia were also featured in media coverage,\(^{72}\) with *The Advocate* stating the ‘handsome’ student had been able to pursue studies in Australia in 1948 due to the fact that ‘his Hindu mother in Malaya had scraped up enough [funds] to send him’.\(^{73}\) After passing first-year medicine, Mr Paramanathan reportedly began other courses only to find that he could not afford to study full-time. This personalised reporting of Mr Paramanathan’s case and the financial and personal implications for his family may have provided a ‘real life’ embodiment of the issues raised by the immigration debate. Whilst the policy for students to return home on the cessation of their studies was informed by International Student Program intent, media coverage of this case encompassed a broader discussion of Australian immigration policy and diplomatic relations in the Asian region. A letter to the editor of *The Argus* suggested that given Australia’s efforts to enhance its reputation in Asia ‘it seems a greater pity that an Asian student married to an Australian girl [sic], should be forced to leave Australia immediately as he has contravened some regulations’.\(^{74}\)

This connection between Mr Paramanathan’s situation and broader questions concerning migrant entry and settlement in Australia was also evident in *The Advertiser*’s coverage. In an article entitled ‘Asian Student Ordered Out’, *The Advertiser* discussed Mr Paramanathan’s potential as a valuable Australian citizen.\(^{75}\) The report firstly relayed Immigration Minister Holt’s statement that ‘Australia has welcomed thousands of Asian students over recent years, but it must be made clear that they are required to abide by the conditions of their entry’.\(^{76}\) However, the article

---

\(^{69}\) ‘Asian Must Quit’, p. 9
\(^{70}\) ‘Asian Must Quit’, p. 9; ‘Asian to be deported while wife looks on’, p. 2.
\(^{71}\) ‘Asian to be deported while wife looks on’, p. 2.
\(^{73}\) ‘Asian to be deported while wife looks on’, p. 2.
\(^{74}\) ‘Stand By Our Words’, *The Argus*, October 30, 1954, p. 4.
\(^{75}\) ‘Asian Student Ordered Out’, *The Advertiser*, October 28, 1954, p. 1
\(^{76}\) ‘Asian Student Ordered Out’, p. 1
also included a follow up report regarding Mr Paramanathan’s success in earning an income and setting up a life in Australia.\textsuperscript{77} The reader is advised:

Thambu and his wife of six weeks are living comfortably in fashionable Queen’s road, Melbourne. He said today that he had made £20 last week as a freelance commercial artist and had more work on hand. He had given up his university medical course because his interest had turned to art, and because he could not afford to remain a full-time student.\textsuperscript{78}

The article further claims that Mr Paramanathan ‘produced good records from employers for whom he has worked on a casual basis’.\textsuperscript{79} Dr A.E. Floyd, described as a ‘leading Melbourne musician and broadcaster’, is also quoted as referring to Mr Paramanathan as ‘a man of cultivated taste and good judgment who could be depended on to be a useful citizen of any country that welcomed him’, suggesting, ‘if with our big land and small population, we don’t want citizens of this type, we had better think again’.\textsuperscript{80}

The sympathetic treatment of Mr Paramanathan’s situation and recommendations regarding his value as a potential citizen were relayed in the media alongside discussion of the importance of fulfilling the humanitarian intentions of the International Student Program. An \textit{Advertiser} editorial announced:

Dr A.E. Floyd, of Melbourne, may be justified in his opinion that Thambu Paramanathan, an Asian student whom the Commonwealth proposes to deport is a man of cultivated taste who could be depended on to be a useful citizen.\textsuperscript{81}

However the editorial also asserted:

Thambu is one of thousands of Asian students brought to Australia to take university courses here. The purpose of these Colombo plan studies is not merely to advance individual interests, but to train and equip the visitors so that they can provide the professional and technical skills which their countries need so urgently to raise their standards of living and development...It may be understandable if some find themselves unequal to the demands of long courses, as Thambu seems to have done. But to allow those who abandon their studies to remain here would create a situation which could undermine the success of the whole Asian student plan.\textsuperscript{82}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{77} ‘Asian Student Ordered Out’, p. 1
\item \textsuperscript{78} ‘Asian Student Ordered Out’, p. 1
\item \textsuperscript{79} ‘Asian Student Ordered Out’, p. 1
\item \textsuperscript{80} ‘Asian Student Ordered Out’, p. 1
\item \textsuperscript{81} ‘Deportation’, \textit{The Advertiser}, October 29, 1954, p. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{82} ‘Deportation’, p. 2.
\end{itemize}
The contrasting views expressed in newspaper coverage of the student’s application to remain in Australia suggest diversity of opinion—at least within the confines of the media—regarding the purpose of international student entry to the country. Again, this may be indicative of uncertainty as to whether student applications to remain in Australia were to be treated as a Program issue or under the broader auspices of the immigration policy.

The intense interest surrounding Mr Paramanathan’s marriage and the personal implications of the Department of Immigration’s requirement that he leave the country was indicative of a broader trend in media coverage of international students in Australia. Stories centred on students’ relationships in Australia were a common theme within the textual corpus. Families were also the focus of such reports, with the length of time students spent in Australia and the familial bonds established whilst there, complicating the principle of students temporarily entering the country and leaving immediately once their studies were finalised.

This was especially the case where children were born to students whilst in Australia. The question of ‘Australian-ness’ became centrally contested within the media discussion of students’ rights to remain in the country with their families or their responsibility to return ‘home’. On occasion, former students explicitly defined themselves as ‘Australian’ within media reports, as was evident in The Canberra Times’ coverage of the case of Mr Andrew Yeo, a former Colombo Plan student from Malaysia who had married a Singaporean Colombo Plan student and ‘began to raise two children’ in Australia. The Times reported ‘The Immigration Department says the Yeo family has until next Tuesday to get out of the country. But the Yeos would like to stay’. Whilst no further information was provided regarding the details of the department’s notification that the family would be required to leave Australia, The Canberra Times quoted Mr Yeo as announcing that after ten years in the country firstly studying for an associate diploma in civil engineering and then working with the Country Roads Board, ‘I feel as Aussie as anyone’. He was further quoted as stating, ‘The Immigration Department has written...asking when we were going to leave. But I have letters saying there will be no job for me back in Sarawak’. The caption accompanying a photograph of the family suggests a sympathetic stance regarding their circumstances with the use of the word ‘home’: ‘Mrs Jenny Yeo, wife of Mr Andrew Yeo, with her two children Timothy, 3, and Jacinta, 16 months, who will have to leave their Melbourne home soon.’

Tension between adherence to the policy that students leave the country following their studies and the practical realities of families being formed in Australia was also exemplified in the 1965 case of a Chinese international student, Mr Cheung Cheuk-To, and his daughter. Mr Cheung had reportedly entered the country in 1958, marrying an international student and childhood acquaintance in 1962. On May 1st 1965, The Canberra Times reported:

---

83 I examine this element of newspaper coverage of the International Student Program elsewhere.
85 Untitled photograph, p. 7.
86 Newspaper coverage of this case presents varied spelling of the student’s name including ‘Cheuk-to’ and ‘Chek-to’.
87 ‘Court wrangle clouds little girl’s future’, The Canberra Times, May 1, 1965, p. 3.
A three-year-old Australian-born girl has become the butt of a marriage and immigration mix-up involving her Chinese parents. The girl, Jenny, is boarded out in Sydney. Her mother is in Hong Kong and wants to remarry. Her father is in a Commonwealth prison in Melbourne, about to be deported. What will become of Jenny nobody yet knows.\(^88\)

In the months following initial reports of the case, the media covered developments comprehensively, including the legal ramifications of Mr Cheung’s arrest for deportation, his remand in custody, and the implications of the case for the Australian family with whom Mr Cheung’s daughter had been living for approximately three years. According to *The Canberra Times*, Mr Cheung’s wife had relocated to Sydney for personal reasons and then returned to Hong Kong, leaving her daughter with the Perry family.\(^89\) Mr Cheung’s efforts to find his daughter and his financial contributions to her foster care were described in reports, with Mr Cheung said to have encountered ‘financial difficulties’ that ‘forced him from time to time to give up certain studies for work sometimes as a cook, sometimes as a turner and fitter, and more recently as a tool-setter’.\(^90\)

In describing the case to contest the deportation order, *The Sydney Morning Herald* relayed claims issued by Mr Cheung’s legal counsel that by requiring the former student to leave Australia, ‘the Commonwealth was wrongfully attempting to get Jenny out of the country’, adding, ‘Jenny was an Australian citizen and entitled to stay’.\(^91\) Yet Jenny’s status as a citizen and her right to remain in the country was reportedly reinforced in statements by the Immigration Department.\(^92\) When the High Court dismissed Mr Cheung’s application to stay in Australia, he was quoted as claiming:

> I cannot offer any decent kind of future for Jenny in Hong Kong. As she was born in Australia she can stay here. But this means I must never see her again.\(^93\)

On May 28\(^{th}\) 1965, a large picture of the infant was published in *The Canberra Times* with the caption ‘Three-year-old Jenny Cheung may soon be without her father’.\(^94\) Likewise, *The Sydney Morning Herald* described the Cheung family’s situation in sympathetic terms stating Mr Cheung, a ‘young Chinese under order of deportation’ was confronted with ‘the dilemma of parting with his three-year-old Australian-born daughter, or taking her to Hong Kong to face a strange life and language’.\(^95\) Mr Cheung eventually chose to take his daughter with him when he returned to Hong Kong, explaining that his mother would not forgive him if he left

---

88 ‘Court wrangle’, p. 3.
89 ‘Court wrangle’, p. 3.
90 ‘Court wrangle’, p. 3.
95 ‘Chinese Will Contest Deportation’, p. 10.
Jenny in Australia. However, the media also relayed Mr Cheung’s desire that his daughter return to Australia to commence schooling when she was five years old.

*The Sydney Morning Herald* described the Cheung family’s exit from Australia in detail, with Jenny’s foster parents reportedly being ushered into a room away from the public when they arrived at the airport terminal. According to the report, Mrs Perry had been advised that as an Australian citizen, Jenny could return to the country whenever she wished but her father ‘could not come back unless the immigration laws were changed’. The emotive nature of the Perry’s parting with their foster child was described in the article and reinforced by the inclusion of Mrs Perry’s comment:

I’m afraid her father is in for a trying time tomorrow when Jenny wakes up and finds herself a stranger in a strange land with a strange man for her father, who she has only met briefly three times during the last 12 months.

The article advised that an Immigration spokesperson emphasised that:

> No pressure had been put on Mr Cheung by the department to take Jenny with him to Hong Kong. But the department had agreed to pay the child’s air passage to Hong Kong if the father decided that she should go with him.

The ramifications of the Cheung family’s situation for Australian diplomatic relations in Asia were discussed in an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that addressed coverage of the case in the Hong Kong newspaper, *The Star*. Referring to *The Star* as an ‘Australian-edited’ publication, *The Herald* relayed the ‘charge’ reportedly made in *The Star* that, ‘Chinese student Cheung Chek-to, deported from Australia on Friday, was described today as the latest victim of the “White Australia” policy’. Commenting on the impact of the deportation on Australia’s image and trade with Asia, *The Star* reportedly advised that whilst most Asian people did not wish to live in Australia, ‘they were irritated and perplexed when they read of yet another Asian—in compassionate circumstances—being deported from Down Under’.

The significance of the case for the media discussion of Australian immigration practices and for defining ‘Australian-ness’ was also evident. The diversity in the terms of reference applied to Jenny Cheung within newspaper coverage was one key point of interest. Described as ‘Australian’, ‘an Australian
citizen’,\textsuperscript{105} ‘Australian-born’,\textsuperscript{106} ‘a Chinese girl from Sydney’,\textsuperscript{107} and ‘a Chinese girl’.\textsuperscript{108} Jenny Cheung’s situation reflected the growing reality of Australians with multi-ethnic origins born to international students. References to Hong Kong culture as ‘strange’ to the child reinforced this sense of struggle to define where she belonged.\textsuperscript{109}

Following his return to Hong Kong, Mr Cheung informed journalists that his sister was caring for Jenny and expressed his hope that the child’s aunt could ‘help her to adjust to her new life’.\textsuperscript{110} A further quote from Mr Cheung, relayed in \textit{The Herald’s} discussion of \textit{The Star’s} coverage of the case, reiterated the unfamiliarity of the culture for his daughter: ‘Jenny has been so scared since her arrival that she cries whenever anyone speaks to her in Chinese which she doesn’t understand’.\textsuperscript{111} Adding another dimension to the media discussion of the Cheung family’s situation, the article referred to an offer from an Australian woman to adopt Jenny; to which Mr Cheung is quoted as having responded, ‘I don’t want to be separated from my daughter’.\textsuperscript{112}

\textit{‘If They are Fit to Study Here They Should be Fit to Settle Here’}\textsuperscript{113}

In the same year that the Cheung family’s situation received widespread media coverage, a report in \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald}’s ‘Living with Asia’ series featured a photograph of students in academic dress with the caption, ‘Asian students graduate at the University of Sydney…they may come here to study but not to stay’.\textsuperscript{114} Craig McGregor, the \textit{Herald} journalist and author of the report, further declared, ‘there is a desperate irony about the White Australia Policy these days’, claiming that whilst each major political party distanced itself from the policy, only 700 non-European people were granted residence each year, with these individuals selected for their ‘distinguished qualifications’ or the humanitarian basis of their application.\textsuperscript{115} Further, the article claimed:

\begin{quote}
It is estimated that at any one time, around 12,400 Asian and African students are in the country, however they must return home for five years post graduation and will only be accepted back into Australia if their qualifications are needed.\textsuperscript{116}
\end{quote}

Indeed, the true basis of Australian immigration practices was increasingly scrutinised in the media, with the implications for international students a key component of the debate. Whilst some expressed the view that the White Australia

\begin{footnotes}
\item 106 ‘Chinese Will Contest Deportation’, p. 10.
\item 107 ‘Chinese Girl: Aid Offered’, p. 7.
\item 108 ‘Chinese Girl: Aid Offered’, p. 7.
\item 109 ‘Send Girl Back’, p. 18.
\item 110 ‘Hong Kong Cramped, Says Chinese’, \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald}, May 31, 1965, p. 3.
\item 111 ‘Deportee “Victim of White Policy”’, p. 3.
\item 112 ‘Deportee “Victim of White Policy”’, p. 3.
\item 115 McGregor, ‘Is there a White Australia Policy?’, p. 2.
\item 116 McGregor, ‘Is there a White Australia Policy?’, p. 2.
\end{footnotes}
Policy was essentially economic in nature, others questioned the rationale for the contrasting entry standards applied to European and non-European migrant applicants. As one reader of The Canberra Times stated:

During several conversations with officials of the Immigration Department, I have been informed that applications of Asians for residence visas are not considered under the terms of a White Australia policy, but on the basis of their qualifications...European applicants, on the other hand, do not have to possess any qualifications, either educational or social, in order to be considered as potentially suitable and worthy migrants.117

In 1966, the media reported on the Deputy Leader of the Federal Opposition Mr Gough Whitlam’s call for Australia to abolish discriminatory immigration practices, relaying his claim:

We solicit students from Asia. The very persons we train are the persons we require to leave. If they are fit to study here they should be fit to settle here.118

These statements received support within the media, with a representative of Australian Alumni in Singapore, Mr L. Mah, agreeing that ‘skilled Asian technicians should be allowed to settle in Australia on the same terms as skilled European technicians’.119 Also supporting Mr Whitlam’s criticism of the view that ‘hordes of Asian people would want to go to Australia’120 if the immigration policy was modified, Mr Mah argued:

We are firmly of the view that most of us who had the benefit of higher education and training in Australia would wish to return home and use our skills and knowledge to assist the difficult task of nation building. We are however, equally convinced that those of us who, for personal reasons, might wish to settle in Australia, should not be prevented from doing so because of race [sic] or creed. We feel certain that only a minority of Asian graduates would wish to live permanently in Australia.121

In 1966, in a move that many consider to signal the abolition of the White Australia Policy, the Holt government enacted modifications to the immigration policy to relax citizenship legislation and allow for increased intake of migrants from Asia.122 The waiting period for citizenship for non-Europeans was lowered from

118 ‘Settlers “need language help”’, p. 8.
122 ‘5,000 Asians eligible as citizens’, The Canberra Times, March 10, 1966, p. 3; Pope & Shergold, ASEAN: Australian Immigration.
fifteen years to five years, with media reports estimating that some 5,000 Asian individuals residing in Australia would be eligible to apply for citizenship. According to the Minister for Immigration Mr Hubert Opperman, these changes would remedy a situation ‘often criticized for its effects on individuals and families’.123

Whilst an annual quota for non-European immigration was not implemented, the Immigration Minister was quoted as advising that given the policy modifications ‘more Asians than previously will be admitted’.124

Further, individuals with particular qualifications and those with the support of Australian authorities or institutions would be ‘more freely admitted’.125 However, the media also relayed statements from Mr Opperman that:

This does not of course mean that everyone admitted to Australia for limited temporary residence is entitled to stay here indefinitely….Every country makes separate provision for temporary entry as distinct from the entry of settlers…it would be quite wrong and most unfair to the development of countries from whence they came to allow the 12,000 Asian students in Australia the right to settle here after five years’ study.126

Mr Opperman is also reported to have advised that ‘the Government’s primary aim in immigration was a generally integrated and predominantly homogeneous population.’

Two years later, at the official opening of the Overseas Students’ Service Conference at Queensland University in 1968, the Gorton government’s Minister for External Territories, Mr Charles Barnes, reportedly reiterated this concern with Australia’s cultural composition.127 The Canberra Times relayed the Minister’s statements alongside the inclusion that ‘Most of the students attending the conference are from Asian, Pacific and African countries’.128 In response to a student question regarding the White Australia Policy, the Minister is quoted as having stated, ‘Australia’s present immigration policy would remain virtually unchanged’, arguing, ‘racial [sic] problems like those in other countries were not wanted in Australia’.129 Reportedly advising that ‘the Government was anxious to preserve a homogeneous population and did not want a situation similar to that in America’, Mr Barnes was also quoted as emphasizing that ‘immigration laws in Australia were based on economics and not on colour [sic]’.130

This dual concern with the philanthropic essence of international student intake and the cultural composition of Australian society was also evident in letters to the editor, such as a 1970 correspondence to The Sydney Morning Herald entitled

---

123 ‘5,000 Asians eligible as citizens’, p. 3
124 ‘5,000 Asians eligible as citizens’, p. 3
125 ‘5,000 Asians eligible as citizens’, p. 3
126 ‘5,000 Asians eligible as citizens’, p. 3
‘Admission of Asians’ that argued ‘Australia’s greatest contribution to Asia...is its adherence to this [international education] scheme, rather than bring in great numbers and create problems which might not be solved in 100 years’. The author further stated:

It is natural that those who come here and enjoy the high standard of living do not want to return home, where conditions are shocking in many respects. However they come here on the understanding that they will return to help their own people. If after their training they remain here the scheme becomes useless and they have themselves broken their promise.

The letter then referenced the issue of cultural relations stating:

My own country, America, is now in a most serious state of oppressive fear in the streets by day and night due to racial [sic] sorrow, which will not be solved in 100 years...Do not–I repeat, do not–bring to your shores the horror of problems that my country and others have.

A 1971 letter to the editor of The Sydney Morning Herald reiterated the view that allowing Asian students to settle in Australia would be problematic. Echoing the official objectives of the Colombo Plan and other such scholarship programs, the reader claimed, ‘we must realise that our prime purpose in admitting Asian students is to educate them so they may return to, and raise the standard of living in, their homelands’. Whilst the reader upheld the importance of international students being permitted to undertake workplace experience as an adjunct to theoretical studies, this view was presented alongside the claim:

These students are intelligent enough to realise that a mixed colour [sic] population in any country creates certain unpleasant and unavoidable problems, and they are prepared to face the realities of leaving this country on termination of a specified period.

The twin justifications for rejecting student settlement in Australia—the desire to assist with regional development and a concern with maintaining an imagined Australian cultural homogeneity—were consistently voiced in media texts of this time.

However, competing views were also evident. In 1970, a Herald reader responded to claims that Asian migration to Australia would result in cultural

---

conflict labelling such assertions ‘absolute gibberish’. Identifying as a former Indian migrant to Australia, the author argued that social unrest in the United States had resulted from unequal employment opportunities and claimed such a problem did not exist for international students in Australia. Suggesting that students should be allowed to return to Australia after they had gone home and ‘applied through the proper channels’, the Herald reader announced:

Those of us who’ve done this are happy here; we feel we can contribute to the hybrid society of the new Australia. What counts are educational and intellectual standards, not the country of origin.

Support for this notion of a ‘hybrid society’ and the role of international students as contributors to the ‘new Australia’ was echoed in other correspondence to newspapers. In 1970, the Secretary of the N.S.W. Association for Immigration Reform argued, ‘Asian students who seek to remain here have enjoyed fair educational opportunity. There is not the slightest chance Asian students who come here will cause racial [sic] conflict’, with the proviso ‘that the number permitted to stay who have qualified to follow any particular profession is not so large as to damage the interests of Australian colleagues’. Further, the Association Secretary argued that the question of whether a student’s skills were better used in his/her home country or in Australia was best decided by the student themselves and their country of origin—not Australia.

Whilst fears regarding the potential for cultural disunity continued to be expressed in the media, by the 1970s, significant support for students remaining in Australia following graduation was also evident. Importantly, as Lopez argues, the civil rights movement had ushered in a period of significant ideological shift on a global scale:

Australia, from the 1960s experienced, with other Western democracies, the increasing influence of the model of political pluralism as the normative and analytical model of democratic government. This corresponded with the ‘melting pot’ model of migrant settlement…These cultural and political developments of the 1960s contributed significantly to establishing the ‘spirit of the times’ that carried into the 1970s.

138 Fernandes, ‘Asians have equal opportunities’, p. 2.
139 Fernandes, ‘Asians have equal opportunities’, p. 2.
141 Aside from the moral imperative, the media’s support for students remaining in Australia was also based on the rationale that they represented an important source of labour with the potential to contribute greatly to the Australian economy—an element of the debate I examine elsewhere.
The advent of the Whitlam government in 1972 marked a period of further modifications to the nation’s immigration policy.\textsuperscript{143} It was established that all potential candidates for immigration were to be treated equally in terms of eligibility for assisted passages, period of residence required for citizenship, the right to remain in Australia following the completion of courses at Australian universities and colleges, and eligibility for post-settlement assistance.\textsuperscript{144} Whilst total migration numbers were lower during this time, for many, these policy changes marked the official abolition of the White Australia Policy.\textsuperscript{145}

In 1973, Minister for Immigration Al Grassby announced the commencement of an investigation to identify the best procedure for the recognition of overseas qualifications.\textsuperscript{146} The main objective of this initiative was to enable the easier settlement of migrants within the Australian community. These changes signalled a burgeoning desire to engage Asia economically and culturally. Mr Grassby advised: ‘it is not possible to tell students where to go once they have finished their studies in Australia’, and identified a ‘need to promote understanding in the Australasian area—not to close the door to students’.\textsuperscript{147}

**Conclusion**

In the era of the so-called ‘White Australia Policy’, the establishment of a program to enable Asian student migration, albeit on a temporary basis, was novel indeed. The practical challenges created by Australia’s participation in the Colombo Plan and other scholarship schemes and its concurrent maintenance of immigration restrictions illustrated the tensions between the dual agendas of engaging Asian neighbours whilst retaining cultural insularity. The parameters of the media debate regarding the requirement for students to return home following the completion of their studies were clearly broader than a discussion of Australia’s humanitarian activities in Asia. Whilst arguments regarding the importance of student expertise to economic growth in Asia were in keeping with the stated objectives of the Colombo Plan and other such schemes, examination of the textual corpus reveals other agenda at play within media support for students returning to their country of origin.

A concern with the feasibility of an increasingly multi-ethnic Australia—a perceived result of accepting international students as permanent migrants—is a key theme within newspaper coverage. As such, within media discussion of the requirement for Asian students to return home upon completion of their studies, the struggle to define and conceptualise ‘Australian-ness’ is apparent. The notion that non-European migration would prove a source of disunity was juxtaposed with ideas of former international students as important contributors to a ‘new’, ‘hybrid’...
Australian society. Based on editorials and reader correspondence regarding media coverage of couples and families negotiating immigration policy amid the realities of daily life in Australia, such cases provided a ‘human face’ for the broader debate regarding non-European migration and sparked a diversity of opinion.

Although the question of media influence and/or reflection of societal values is beyond the scope of this paper, the range of media expressed responses regarding the requirement for students to return to their country of origin would seem in keeping with the turbulence of the 1950s-1970s; an era characterised by significant developments in immigration policy and Australian/Asian relations. From the 1960s, paradigm shifts in global attitudes to ethnicity, culture, and civil rights profoundly impacted national debate regarding Australian immigration practices. Media discussion regarding the presence of international students in Australia, their impact on society, and the desire of some students to remain in the country following the completion of their studies, provided a forum for contesting issues of equality, cultural identity, and the growing reality of a increasingly multi-ethnic population.

I wish to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewer who offered comprehensive feedback on this paper, my special thanks to former Limina submissions editor Dr Claire Cooke for her encouragement and kind assistance with the review process, and my deepest appreciation to my family—my constant support and inspiration.

---

148 Fernandes, ‘Asians have equal opportunities’, p. 2.