

**AUSTRALIAN IMMIGRATION POLICY AND  
THE MIGRANTS FROM  
THE SOUTH PACIFIC REGION**

Kiyotaka Aoyagi

This report aims to examine how the Australian immigration policies have affected the status of migrants from the South Pacific region. The data which I will present here were collected during my stay in Sydney from July 16, 1983 to August 28, 1983.

The report will consist of the following three sections:

- I. Migrants from the South Pacific Region
- II. On the New Immigration Policy
- III. Adaptation to Australian Society

**I Migrants from the South Pacific Region**

Australia's political and economic experience with the South Pacific region has offered a wide variety of research opportunities. Especially, the dynamic relations between Australia and New Zealand have caught the attention of many scholars in both countries. The ever changing population flow across the Tasman in both directions illustrates such dynamic relations. In this connection, M. McCaskill's recent article on "The Tasman Connection: aspects of Australian-New Zealand relations"<sup>(1)</sup> is a very good example.

As regards the other parts of the Region one of the precise studies is perhaps on Kanaka labour. However, this work belongs to classical studies, and it is hoped that similar and systematic studies will be made in the area of population movement. The import of Kanaka labour under indenture may be mentioned here briefly since it serves as the base line of Australia's attitude toward the people of the South Pacific region

against which her present position can be measured.

The life of this labour system spanned more than half a century. Its beginning goes back to 1842, and its abolition was officially stated in 1901. Through reading the work by M. Willard it can be pointed out that there was a similar pattern between the Kanaka labour system and the Asian Coolie labour system. A particular colony adopted and advocated its use, but the system was soon questioned and became a controversy, which was followed by a complete abolition of the labour system in question.<sup>(2)</sup> In any event, Australia shares the experience of the exploit of non-white cheap labour with Canada (particularly, British Columbia) and with the United States of America (California in particular).

In the case of Australia the causes for its abolition, besides racial prejudice, seem to be explained by the colonists' fear of attack from the Kanaka and by international censure against the practice of exploiting the Kanaka in some of the South Pacific Islands (the worst incident was reported in New Guinea during German control). In the U.S., on the other hand, growing protest by white workers, together with racial prejudice exerted decisive pressure against the continuation of Asian Coolie labour.

M. Willard points out in his "History of White Australia Policy to 1920" that the first task of the Commonwealth Parliament established in 1901 was the deliberation of immigration restrictions based on the White Australia Policy.<sup>(3)</sup> A cursory review of immigration policies since then indicates that the White Australia Policy was constantly being eroded, and finally replaced by the non-discriminatory policy. An egalitarian idea pervades the new immigration policy established in the 1970's.

Pressures against immigration policy based on the White Australia Policy came both from within and without Australia. A few examples are drawn from the South Pacific region and discussed below.

The Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement which became effective in 1920 guaranteed reciprocal free flow of people between New Zealand and Australia for residence or for temporary stay without passports or previous travel authority (visas). However, Maoris were excluded from this privilege. In the late 1940's, the New Zealand government and a

large number of New Zealanders voiced their protest against the Australian government's differential treatment of the Maori. As a result, the Australian government hastily withdrew their exclusion.<sup>(4)</sup>

But in New Zealand there are also about 18,000 resident Chinese, and over 88,000 resident Pacific islanders who are not Maoris but Cook, Niue, Tongan, Tokelau and other islanders.<sup>(5)</sup> They were only allowed to migrate to or visit Australia if they satisfied the same conditions as non-Europeans coming from elsewhere.

*The Sydney Morning Herald* in the June 20, 1972 edition reported that: "The New Zealand Prime Minister Mr. Marshall said New Zealand was prepared to receive any Australian citizen without question. But Australia's policy was not to permit New Zealanders from the islands or from a non-European race without permit," and he added that "this was one small area of conflict in the movement of people between the two countries."

Since then, the situation has been improved, so that prior authority to enter is not required for direct travel between Australia and New Zealand by citizens of other (British) Commonwealth countries who have been granted permission to reside indefinitely without restriction in either country. New Zealand passport holders, wherever they come from, can enter Australia without prior authority. Visas are required for aliens resident in New Zealand, but if any non-European aliens entitled to live in New Zealand seek to enter Australia, temporarily or permanently, their applications will be treated in the same manner as those of European aliens with a similar entitlement.

*The Sydney Morning Herald* (July 21, 1982 edition) carried an article about a Western Samoan woman who applied for New Zealand citizenship. The grounds for her request were that she was a British citizen in the period when Western Samoa was under New Zealand control, and therefore she was not an illegal immigrant in New Zealand. As we will see in the following, her request resulted in involving not only New Zealand as her defendant but also Australia's concern and a binational agreement with New Zealand and Western Samoa. This whole process illustrates the delicate relationships among New Zealand, Aus-

tralia and the South Pacific islands.

In response to the woman's appeal, New Zealand sought the opinion of the Privy Council in London which was still recognized as her highest court.<sup>(6)</sup> The Privy Council ruled that she be entitled to New Zealand citizenship. Immediately after this ruling New Zealand successfully made an agreement with Western Samoa. Through this agreement New Zealand could strip about 100,000 Samoans living in Western Samoa of automatic New Zealand citizenship. In return the New Zealand government agreed to grant citizenship to Samoans now living in New Zealand including those there illegally.

The ruling of the Privy Council caused a special concern for Australia, because "if the Western Samoans affected by this decision are issued with New Zealand passports, they will be entitled to greater privileges in regard to Australian access and residency than British citizens, according to Mr. Hodge's (spokesman for the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs) office." (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 21, 1982)

Australia does not want to grant residency to many unskilled islanders entering Australia via New Zealand or directly from the island. On the other hand, population pressure has been creating serious socio-economic problems in the South Pacific islands. Realizing the serious population pressure on Fiji, Tonga, Gilbert and Ellice, the Australian Council of churches recently approached the Australian Government with the request of admitting a certain number of migrants from these islands.<sup>(7)</sup>

Papuans were legally Australians before gaining independence in 1975. Admission to Australia, however, was closely restricted by the Dept. of Immigration. In March, 1966, a major change occurred in the immigration policy. This change for the first time testified to Australia's willingness to admit selected non-Europeans capable of becoming Australians and joining in her national development. From this time on Papuans and New Guineans became eligible for entry into Australia under the same condition as other non-Europeans, provided that they were close relatives of Australians or possessed high level skills. Eligibility for entry of part Europeans was more liberal than that governing the

entry of non-Europeans.<sup>(8)</sup>

In the case of Asian residents who were in Papua and New Guinea without any immigration restriction, the Australian government decided in 1959 that they could be granted the right to settle in Australia; but they were required to wait fifteen years before they became eligible for Australian citizenship. However, as of December, 1973 when the Citizenship Act became effective, irrespective of race or country of origin, immigrants to Papua New Guinea, like migrants to the Australian mainland, need wait only three years before becoming Australian citizens. This, of course, applies to the Asians just mentioned.

## II On the New Immigration Policy

By the new non-discriminatory immigration on policy the Australian government expects, as often noted, to meet the demands for labour supply and national defense, to establish closer economic ties with Asian countries, and to enhance the international image of Australia.

The new policy, then, when implemented, should contribute to a powerful, more egalitarian and international Australia.

The Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs followed the review of immigration policies in his statement in Parliament on June 7, 1978. The elements and principles of the immigration policy are briefly summarized in the Parliamentary Paper.<sup>(9)</sup> My comments are based on this summary.

The most important salient feature is the priority given to the cases of refugees and family reunion, which reflects a humanistic approach to the immigration policy. Active concern about admittance of refugees is compatible with growing Australian leadership in the world. The new policy is applied without discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, descent, ethnic origin or sex. The majority of refugees admitted so far are non-European and non-White such as the Vietnamese and Cambodians. This fact is actual proof of the abandonment of the longstanding White Australia Policy and its practices.

The second salient feature seems to be that the new policy is very clearly aimed at increasing the labour population in Australia. Natural-

ly, Australia has been concerned with the population growth rate and quality and quantity of intake as well. It is also a reality that intake is always offset by an outflow of emigrants from Australia. In addition, competition comes from Western European countries which have achieved a relatively high rate of economic growth and have been active in implementing new immigration policies favourable to the welfare of a foreign labour force. Australia can not overlook these facts if she wishes to attract foreign skilled labour.

The third salient feature lies in one of the principles which is stated as follows: "Policies governing entry and settlement should be based on the premise that immigrants should integrate into Australian society. Migrants will be given every opportunity, consistent with this premise, to preserve and disseminate their ethnic heritage." The premise clearly negates the Anglo Conformist or "melting pot" views. Al Glassby, an appointee to the Minister of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs in 1972 expressed his idea about Australia as "The Family of the Nation" which should be created through dynamic interaction between all of the component parts. He hopes that Australians of all backgrounds will be proud to say in whatever accents "I am an Australian." He claims that "The family of the Nation" should be based on equality and justice for all and on not only a recognition but a cherishing of all the languages and cultures represented in Australia.<sup>00</sup>

One aspect of the premise, the emphasis on integration of immigrants into Australian society, is reflected in one of the principles: while admitting that migrants will have the same right as other Australian residents to choose their place of residence, enclave settlement is not encouraged. Integration is also explicit in another principle which reads: the size and composition of migrant intakes should not jeopardise social cohesiveness and harmony within the Australian Community.

However, it is difficult to speculate on how integration will acutally be achieved. The Dept. of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs is undoubtedly the official organization which upholds the policy. The Australia Ethnic Affairs Council, established on January 31, 1977 as the Department's advisory council, is concerned with progress to be made in i)

settlement programs, ii) multi-cultural education, iii) community coordination and iv) ethnic media, to all of which we should direct our attention in order to see what relevance these programs will have to the realization of integration.

The idea of integration is not new. But its implication has changed since the 1970's, when the new immigration policy was formulated. Formerly it was claimed that "integration" could be achieved only through demographic homogeneity. For instance, the following explanation is given by the Dept. of Immigration on May 1, 1965: "It is fundamental to the policy that those people coming to Australia for residence should be capable, both economically and socially, of ready integration into the community. Consequently, preference is given to persons of European origin. Australia is not alone in seeking, as a matter of prudence, general homogeneity as a basis of economic, social and cultural integration."<sup>00</sup>

However, one year later Mr. Opperman, Minister of Immigration, in his statement to Parliament on March 9, 1966 referred to the change in the policy as follows:

"Every country has not only a right to its own immigration policy . . . . Our primary aim in immigration is a generally integrated and predominantly homogeneous population. A positive element in the latest changes is that which will admit selected non-Europeans capable of becoming Australians and joining in our national development."<sup>02</sup>

This statement indicates that the way was being prepared in the latter part of the 1960's for the new immigration policy.

As a conclusion to this section, I would like to restate three points which can profitably be discussed in the near future.

- (a) The nature of integration is not necessarily clear, as it is not fully discussed in the policy.
- (b) One of the policies states that it does not encourage enclave community. One can guess that the rationale behind his statement is a belief that enclave communities block the path toward integration. But one may also argue the strategic importance of the enclave community in its role of preserving or creating ethnic culture.

- (c) As pointed out, there is, in one of the policies, a reference to the maintenance of social cohesiveness and harmony within Australian Community. What is meant by maintaining social cohesion, and what is meant by harmony?

Authors like Mackie or Yarwood and Knowing<sup>19</sup> refer to the possible influence the immigration policy exerted upon the policy towards Aborigines. In both policies we see that the ideas of assimilation and integration have been adopted.

Sequence and timing of the changes in each policy can be roughly compared as follows:

White Australia Policy	1901 – 1948	Protection	– 1951
Assimilation	– 1970's	Assimilation	– 1970's
Integration	– present	Integration	– present

When the idea of assimilation was applied to the immigration policy, the intake was restricted to 'Europeans' who were more or less homogeneous with current Australian population. Assimilation of Aborigines meant that they were to surrender their cultural integrity and social autonomy. Thus, the implication of the assimilation policy seems quite similar in both cases.

When integration replaced assimilation, it did not imply the same for Aborigines and immigrants. As dealt with earlier, immigrants are expected to integrate into Australian Society, while Aborigines are allowed self determination. How self determination will be pursued by Aborigines, or how it will shape itself within Australian society, remains to be seen, but it should surely be a serious concern to many.

### III Adaptation to Australian Society

It is not long since the Maoris and the islanders from the South Pacific region have settled in Australia. They are, relatively speaking, newer arrivals, particularly when they are compared, for example, with Australians of Chinese descent. In South Coogee, where I stayed during my field work, I came to know Chinese residents who are already third generation, with relatives who are recent immigrants from Singapore and Hong Kong. One of the couples I knew, who are middle aged, used to

own a couple of Chinese restaurants in Singapore. With the money saved from disposing of these restaurants they came to Australia. They said that they were admitted to Australia on the condition that they would invest their money on running a restaurant business in Australia. But I doubt that there is any substantial number of such business migrants among the Maoris and South Pacific islanders. No such evidence or information was available from those Maoris, Tongans, and Fijians whom I interviewed.

It may be just recently that the second generation of migrants from the South Pacific is taking the place of their parents, the first generation in Australia. Accordingly, it is premature to make any serious attempt at generational analysis in relation to adaptation. Future analysis of generational adaptation, if it is to be made, needs to follow Australian immigration policy in its nature and change over a long period.

The present policy puts severe restriction upon unskilled migrants and has seemingly succeeded in halting the wave of unskilled migrants from the South Pacific. In spite of this restrictive measure, Australia is burdened with illegal residents, the majority of whom, I suspect, may be unskilled. Illegal residents are logically the ones who do not leave Australia and hide after expiration of their temporary visa.

Again, in spite of Australia's restrictive measure in screening immigrants, she does not harshly deport all illegal residents indiscriminately. Australia has taken a generous measure called "Regularization of Status Program" (ROSP). The purpose is to give illegal residents an opportunity to apply for permanent resident status. It is generally known as "Amnesty" among the migrants. So far, ROSP was announced in 1973, 1976, and 1980.<sup>60</sup>

There were 11,042 ROSP applications covering about 14,000 people in 1980. Those who were from Oceania occupied 7.5% of the total applicants. According to "Major sources of settlers, 1980-1981"<sup>61</sup> 20,730 came from New Zealand and 1,595 from other parts of Oceania. Since the majority of those who came from New Zealand are legal entrants into Australia by the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement, the 7.5% share of total applicants for ROSP may well represent those who

came from the rest of Oceania.

In 1973, about 400 applicants and in 1976, about 9,000 applicants were given permanent resident status.<sup>99</sup> In the case of the 1980 Amnesty, 7,292 of the applications representing nearly 10,000 people had been approved by June 30, 1981. (3,383 were still being processed.)<sup>100</sup>

Since it was stated that the 1980 ROSP was final, there will be no more opportunity for illegal residents to apply for permanent resident status. But, it is unlikely that illegal residents will disappear. One factor in the continuing existence of illegal residents is the domestic demand for cheap labour in Australia. One of my informants indicated that they did not believe the Government's final word. They still cling to the hope of another "Amnesty" in future. He himself thinks that politicians will be tempted to make "Amnesty" one of their political issues.

The 1958 Migrant Act's definition of an "immigrant" includes a person who enters Australia for a temporary stay only. By this definition, Maori migrants are immigrants. However, because of their special status from the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement, they may differ in the nature of their adaptation to Australian society from the Pacific islanders coming to Australia. As M. Aoyagi's report on "Social Groupings of the Maori and South Pacific Islanders living in Sydney" indicates, Maori immigrants are not necessarily going to stay permanently in Australia. I was often told during my stay in Sydney that Maori youths come to Sydney looking for a job and that Bondi is full of those Maoris. In actuality, however, Maoris who come to Australia are not necessarily young. To put it differently, a Maori of any age rank can come practically whenever he feels attracted by Australia and may return home if he becomes dissatisfied or weary of it.

Economic opportunity might be the major pull for those who wish to migrate to Australia, but it is not the only one. Perhaps what may be termed 'amenity for living' may be important for them; they weigh both countries in terms of this amenity which cannot be defined solely by economic factors. Components of 'amenity for living' should be further examined.

For the above reasons, one might hesitate to categorize Maori

migrants either as permanent settlers or as migrants who ultimately intend to return home with the money they would earn in a foreign land.

Maori migrants in Australia may resemble those Japanese or Chinese migrants who went to work in North America or Brazil in the nineteenth century, but one major difference is that Maori migrants unlike the latter do not have a strong sense of returning home loaded with honors or a custom of remittance to kin folk. Yet their identity may not be shaped by the value of assimilation into Australia. Instead of saying "I am Australian" first, a Maori migrant is likely to claim that "I am a Maori."

New Zealand Pakeha and Maori living in Australia are not differently tabulated in the Australian Census, which makes it difficult to pinpoint geographical areas of Maori concentration. Although I was unable to locate a so-called Maori enclave community in Sydney, I came to know a few groupings of Maoris. Such groupings as listed below will give us clues for a future analysis of Maori life in its adaptation to Australian society.

- (a) a limited number of specific denominational churches attract many Maoris,
- (b) a sizable number of Maoris have participated in fund raising for construction of a *Marae* in Sydney, and
- (c) many Maoris have been trying to revitalize their traditional Maori culture, particularly dancing and singing through organization of Maori culture groups.

Among the other Pacific islanders in Sydney, there are religious or other cultural groupings. That they are more inclined to settle permanently in Australia seems a principal difference from Maori migrants.

The West Samoan minister of the Uniting Church who serves Pacific Islanders in Sydney referred to the recent change of attitude among the West Samoan migrants: the majority of the migrants in the past intended to return to West Samoa, but the young Samoan migrants who arrived within recent years intend to stay permanently in Australia, as job opportunities in West Samoa are very tight.<sup>69</sup> Young Samoans have also been looking for job opportunities in Hawaii and New Zealand. There are about 25,000 West Samoans in Australia, most of whom are located

in Sydney. The majority of them seem to have come to Australia via New Zealand, and only a few directly from West Samoa. But the flow of West Samoans to Australia via New Zealand is now blocked by the bi-national agreement (West Samoa and New Zealand in 1982).

The minister mentioned above tries to keep close contact with the Dept. of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to assist the Islanders in housing, medical care and legal matters. His role is beyond mere preaching in the church. He sees his role as something which is in common with the role of *Matai* in West Samoa. He enjoys maintaining the Samoan way of life in his church, but at the same time he admits that it has to be compatible with the Australian way of life since West Samoan migrants live in Australian society.

It is noted in connection with social or cultural groupings that there has been a coalition of multiple ethnic groups among the South Pacific islanders since 1975. It is called the Pacific Islanders Council, which was organized by the voluntary members of West Samoans, Fijians, Tongans and Rotumans. The council is primarily based on a religious body and its leadership is taken by the religious leaders. The Council deals with the religious or other problems of individuals. It also tries to meet the demand of cultural entertainment requested by the community people and civic clubs like Rotary club. It organizes and sends forth Tongan and Samoan dancing, singing or feast teams. The minister just mentioned is one of the Council leaders. The Council meets monthly usually at his residence. Whether this type of coalition will gain political strength or not is yet to be seen.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Peter Lawrence, Chairman of the Anthropology Department, the University of Sydney for his arrangement for my use of the University research facilities. To Prof. William B. Newell I owe my scholastic impetus. Without his encouragement I could not have come to Sydney. My special thanks go to Mr. & Mrs. Henere Sutherland, Mr. & Mrs. Bill Ngawaka, Mr. & Mrs. John Puriri, Mr. & Mrs. Edward Wineera and their families for their under-

standing and generosity in many ways. I can not forget Ratana Leaders who visited Sydney, several ministers of the Anglican Church and other denomination in Sydney, and Mr. J. Durlak at the Department of Ethnic and Immigration affairs. They were all very helpful and made my visit to Sydney meaningful.

(January 25, 1985)

### Notes

- (1) Murray McCaskill, "The Tasman Connecton: aspects of Australian-New Zealand relations," *Australian Geographical Studies*, 20-1: 3-23.
- (2) Myra Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920, Reprinted* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1978), Sections II & IV.
- (3) *Ditto*, p. 120.
- (4) H.L. London, *Non-White Immigration and the "White Australia" Policy* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1970), p. 201.
- (5) New Zealand Official Year Book.
- (6) Australia stopped recognizing the Privy Council as the Highest Court since January, 1973.
- (7) Rivett, p. 277.
- (8) Rivett, pp. 74-75.
- (9) *Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Annual Report 1977-78* (Parliamentary Paper No. 358, 1978), pp. 12-14.
- (10) Al Grassby, *The Morning After* (Canberra: Judicator Publication, 1979), p. 67.
- (11) Extract from an Explanation of Australian Immigration Policy prepared by the Department of Immigration, May, 1965. In A.C. Palfreeman, *The Administration of the White Australia Policy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967), p. 174.
- (12) Extract from a Statement to Parliament by Mr. Opperman, Minister for Immigration, March 9, 1966, *ditto*, p. 175.
- (13) A.T. Yarwood & M.J. Knowling, *Race Relations in Australia* (Sydney: Methuen Australia Pty Ltd., 1982), pp. 286-287.
- (14) J. Mackie, "Asian Migration and Australian Racial Attitudes," *Ethnic Studies*, 1-2: 7.
- (14) *Parliamentary Paper*, No. 58, 1982, p. 56.

- (15) *Ditto*, p. 40.
- (16) Data from an interview with Mr. J. Durlak, Department of Ethnic and Immigration Affairs, Sydney Office.
- (17) *Parliamentary Paper*, No. 58, 1982, p. 56.
- (18) Data from an interview with Rev. Fa'atoese Auva'a.