

Residency without citizenship: Korean immigration and settlement in Australia

David Hundt 

Deakin University

Asian and Pacific Migration Journal

2019, Vol. 28(1) 28–52

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DOI: 10.1177/0117196819832772

journals.sagepub.com/home/amj



Abstract

This article focuses on the changing quality of citizenship in Australia, which is the idealized end-point of the process of immigration, by drawing on the experience of Korean immigrants. In the formal (*political*) dimension of citizenship, the article shows that Koreans fare comparatively poorly. They are less likely to be citizens than most other groups of immigrants, due to factors such as the lateness of Korean immigration. The article also analyzes the *social* dimension of citizenship among Koreans in Australia, and their disappointing socio-economic outcomes. Korean immigrants, I argue, enjoy residency without citizenship, and their experience illustrates how the promise of Australian citizenship has eroded. This is a significant finding, given the prominent role that immigration has played in shaping all aspects of contemporary Australia.

Keywords

Korean immigrants, Australia, citizenship, immigration

Introduction

There are two main interpretations of citizenship and immigration in contemporary Australia. The first emphasizes the continuing and “fundamental” (Parkin and Hardcastle, 2009: 330) significance of immigration to Australia’s sense of identity and place in the world since Federation in 1901, when the national parliament restricted immigration by non-Europeans. Australia

Corresponding author:

David Hundt, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, Melbourne Burwood campus, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, Victoria 3125, Australia.

Email: david.hundt@deakin.edu.au

consciously defined itself as a predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon nation that was distinct from its Asian neighbors. In this interpretation, Australia again reimagined its identity and worldview—and views of immigration—in the 1970s. Since that time, Australia has generally embraced ethnic diversity and celebrated its connections with Asia, so much so that a form of “banal multiculturalism” has taken root and acceptance of difference is commonplace (Ho and Jakubowicz, 2013: 11). There is an appreciation that imported labor—and thus new citizens—have contributed to Australia’s continued prosperity (Jakubowicz, 2013: 27). At a time when the overseas-born (OSB) population equates to 28 percent of the entire populace (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2018: 342–343), the government has emphasized the economic benefits of immigration (Treasury and Department of Home Affairs, 2018), and the public supports the notion that multiculturalism is “good for Australia” (Markus, 2018).

A second interpretation emphasizes the decline of the spirit of openness and inclusiveness that typified immigration policy from the 1970s. Proponents of this view point to heightened sensitivity about the levels of the immigrant intake (Oliver, 2018: 14–15), and a tightening of conditions for citizenship in Australia. In place of the “social justice” agenda of the initial phase of multicultural policy, which was designed to enable them to make a smooth transition to life in Australia as citizens, workers and neighbors, the focus of policy has shifted to “social cohesion” in the 2000s. The onus has been on immigrants to demonstrate their commitment to Australia (Ho, 2013), and the loyalty of some immigrants—most especially those from Islamic societies—has been called into question (Hollifield, 2010). Immigration policy has been “securitized,” in that Australia has abrogated its commitments to assist people fleeing conflict and upheaval, and asylum-seekers have been demonized and treated as security threats (McDonald, 2005: 298). Young men of Lebanese and Sudanese backgrounds, for instance, have been depicted as violent, anti-social and thus undeserving of Australian citizenship. A “citizenship test” was introduced in 2007 (Levey, 2014), supposedly with the goal of denying citizenship to immigrants who do not live up to “Australian values.”

Both of these interpretations offer useful but limited perspectives on the contemporary politics of immigration and citizenship in Australia. The first interpretation remains relevant given that immigration continues to be such a prominent feature of Australian life. Proponents of this view can point to the inherently generous spirit of the immigration program, which has progressed remarkably from the “White Australia” era. The policy regime, however, has changed in recent decades too, most notably in the breakdown of the implicit pathway to citizenship in the past. Fewer immigrants are being given the opportunity to become citizens, and those who do qualify for citizenship are not enjoying the same quality of life as their Australia-born counterparts. The second interpretation, meanwhile, highlights how the immigration

regime—and the Australian public—distinguish between groups of immigrants. It also reflects the pessimism and fears that have pervaded Western societies since the 11 September attacks of 2001, and the subsequent demonization of Muslim minorities. This interpretation, however, overstates the degree to which these newly-held fears have affected Australia's immigration program. There has been little support for reducing the program, and most Australians continue to see the benefits of immigration. The share of the immigrant intake from majority-Muslim societies is low, with most immigrants and would-be citizens instead coming from Asian societies that do not have substantial Muslim populations.

This article provides a new interpretation of the politics of immigration in Australia. It focuses on the political and social dimensions of citizenship in order to assess how well Australia is meeting its commitments to ensuring a high quality of life to new citizens. The article focuses on South Koreans,¹ who are one of Australia's fastest growing immigrant communities (Hugo and Harris, 2011: 171), and the 13th-largest source of immigration in 2016 (Treasury and Department of Home Affairs, 2018: 17). More than 2,000 Koreans were granted citizenship between July 2017 and June 2018, making them the seventh-largest cohort of new citizens in Australia (Department of Home Affairs, 2018). At the same time, Koreans have a low rate of citizenship acquisition (Han and Han, 2010: 32). Some Koreans have struggled to adapt to life in Australia (Yang, 2010: 132), and have reported cultural shock, stress, isolation and exclusion (Kang, 2012: 10–11), as well as problems in securing employment and adequate income (Han, 2017).

This article proceeds as follows. It first reviews the transformation of the notion of citizenship in Australia, and recounts the emergence of Korean immigration and settlement at a time when the definition of the Australian nation has been changing and also as globalization has altered some of the assumptions that underpin the idea of citizenship itself. Second, the article analyzes patterns of political (legal) citizenship for Koreans in Australia. It traces the emergence of Korean immigration and settlement, and the acquisition of citizenship, in a comparative context, by analyzing the Korean experience in Australia alongside that of other immigrant communities. Third, the article analyzes the social dimensions of citizenship for Koreans in Australia, and focuses on aspects such as education, income and employment. The article concludes by considering what the Korean experience can tell us about citizenship in contemporary Australia.

In analyzing Korean immigration and settlement in Australia, the main source of data used in this article is the 2016 Australian census. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducts a census every five years

¹Hereafter, "Korea." In 2017, Australia's Estimated Residential Population included 114,560 people born in South Korea (Republic of Korea) and 250 people born in North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea).

and produces a credible and detailed set of real-world observations about the population as a whole, and specific segments thereof. Descriptive statistics provide “a powerful and economical way of measuring, analyzing and presenting political phenomena,” such as immigration and citizenship, but “their simplicity means that much of the richness of political phenomena is necessarily excluded” (Burnham et al., 2008: 138, 139–40). The census data, therefore, offers insights into broad trends about the collective behavior of particular segments of the Australian population, but not necessarily that of individuals within those segments. Census data have limited value in analyzing diversity within the Korea-born population in Australia, for instance in terms of age, gender, class and income. As the author of this article, I am cautious in interpreting the findings gleaned from the census data, and am cognizant of the fact that the data have been collected by a national agency (the ABS) with the priorities of a national government in mind. As the discussion of “measurement problems” later in the article notes, the priorities of governments are not always fully aligned with those of specific segments of society. I am conscious, therefore, of the inherent limits to any inferences that can be drawn from census data in the absence of corroborating evidence from other sources, especially testimony from Korean immigrants themselves.

Australian notions of citizenships and Korean immigration

Australia’s relations with Asia has influenced its national identity since the time that the White Australia policy was introduced to prevent immigration from the region (Tavan, 2004; Jupp, 2007). By the 1980s, however, “close to 40 percent of the immigration intake was from Asian countries” (Markus, 2018: 56). Asia’s share of Australia’s OSB population was 24 percent in 2001, and increased to 40 percent by 2016 (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2017c). Overall, however, “[t]he contribution of Asian peoples, including Koreans, to the culture and economic development of Australia is largely not mentioned in Australian history and social studies textbooks” (Yang, 2010: 130).

Citizenship is often defined in terms of either political and civic values, or ethnicity and bloodlines. It results from negotiation between citizens and would-be citizens about what it means to be a member of the body politic (Choo, 2016) or the *nation*. If the idea of the nation changes, then so too must the definition of citizenship. Australian notions of citizenship, as noted above, underwent a significant transformation in the second half of the 20th century. From a strictly race-based definition of citizenship largely akin to the communitarian tradition (Brubaker, 1998; Seol and Skrentny, 2009), Australia recast citizenship much more along liberal lines (Levey, 2014; Parkin and Hardcastle, 2009). An important caveat, and potentially significant contradiction here, is that the majority white (Anglo-Saxon) culture remains firmly at the center of national identity, and there is an expectation that “newcomers” will assimilate

to the majority culture. That is, the liberal citizenship regime seeks to create a single, cohesive national identity but also allow for a significant degree of cultural diversity (Parkin and Hardcastle, 2009: 337). Alastair Davidson (1997: 6) argues that “newcomers share a present. If they stay a long time, they may share a future. But they almost *never* share a past. . . different pasts [must] somehow be united in a collectivity or a community.” The ongoing challenge for Australian multiculturalism, since the historic changes of the 1970s, has been to reconcile its growing cultural diversity with a shared sense of national identity.

Citizenship can be divided into its civil, political and social dimensions (Marshall, 1992), each of which connotes a certain set of rights and obligations. The civil dimension refers to the rights that people have to live in a society that is governed by laws, and to have recourse to the legal system to protect themselves, if necessary. Closely related to the civil dimension is the political one, which refers to the ability to hold legal citizenship and to enjoy, for instance, the right to vote and thus, have a voice in electing political leaders. The social dimension of citizenship, meanwhile, refers to the right of individuals to live a life broadly comparable to most other people in society, often by holding a job that allows them to enjoy a reasonable degree of material comfort, and sometimes through access to social welfare (Marshall, 1992).

Some dimensions of citizenship, however, have been “hollowed out” by globalization and securitization (Deckard and Heslin, 2016). Social citizenship, especially in Western societies such as Australia, has given way to “market citizenship” in an era of globalization, precarity and deindustrialization. The admission of migrants for work may enable them to qualify for legal (political) citizenship. That is, “work provides legitimacy for inclusion” (Mundlak, 2007: 720), but it does not address the decline in social citizenship, at least in the short term. As traditional notions of social citizenship are hollowed out, the promise that all citizens will enjoy a broadly similar quality of life has been debased. As a result, “partial” and “dual” modes of citizenship are emerging (Kemp, 2007: 666–668), and some individuals do not enjoy equal and full access to all the rights associated with being a citizen.

In 1994, more than one million people, or 6.2 percent of the population, were permanent residents (Davidson, 1997: 151). By 2016, the number of immigrants who were considered residents, for the purpose of the census, without holding citizenship had increased to about 2.4 million people, or roughly 10 percent of the total population. This was equivalent to 39 percent of Australia’s OSB population (ABS, 2017c).

A distinguishing feature of the Korean experience in Australia is that, compared to other groups of immigrants, they are more likely to arrive on skilled-migrant visas. Relatively few Korean students have benefited from the “two-step” path from temporary to permanent residence, a mechanism that offers international students a pathway to permanent residence as skilled

immigrants, and possibly citizenship (Chiou, 2017). The main reason seems to be that most Korean students do not consider Australia to be a premier destination for tertiary education, preferring instead to study in the US or Europe. Given that it is easier to acquire a visa as a student rather than as a skilled worker, Australia's lack of attractiveness as a study destination necessarily reduces the potential pool of Korean permanent residents, and thus citizens.

Another feature of Korean immigration to Australia is that this influx has coincided with changes to the social and political dimensions of citizenship, and the rise of non-white immigration. Koreans began to arrive in Australia on a small scale in the late 1960s, and there was a significant influx after the Vietnam War in the 1970s. About 500 former Korean soldiers and civilians arrived in Australia on tourist visas and stayed on illegally (Han, 2001: 547). A second wave of Koreans seeking greater economic opportunity emerged in the 1980s. Skilled immigrants, especially nurses and computer technicians, became a substantial part of the immigrant intake from Korea. A third wave of immigration occurred after the Asian financial crisis of the 1990s and the global financial crisis in 2008. Unlike Koreans who migrated in earlier decades, this most recent influx of arrivals in Australia included people seeking to stay not just permanently but temporarily, such as working holiday-makers (OECD, 2018) and international students (Gomes, 2015). As this brief review indicates, there has been no clear pattern of Korean immigration to Australia. The article next analyzes the attainment of Australian citizenship by Koreans and the reasons for its comparatively low rate, before proceeding to examine the social dimensions of their citizenship.

Residency without citizenship

Data from the most recent census indicate that a comparatively low proportion of Korean immigrants have attained Australian citizenship. Against an overall average for the OSB population of just under 60 percent, the rate of citizenship attainment for Koreans was just 38.7 percent (see Figure 1). Koreans had taken out Australian citizenship at only about half the rate of people from Vietnam, England, Hong Kong and Italy, and well below the levels of comparable societies, such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia and India. This comparatively low level of citizenship is a long-standing trend. Of the generation that arrived in the 1970s and 1980s, Koreans were less likely than other immigrants to hold Australian citizenship (McNamara and Coughlan, 1997: 306).

Other data sources corroborate these findings. Of the 180,000 Koreans living in Australia in 2016, less than 28 percent (49,534) held Australian citizenship (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), 2017: 121). This low rate of take-up dates back to at least the 1990s: "Data from the 1996 census indicate that 63.1 percent of Australia's eligible Korean-born had been naturalized, a relatively low figure, particularly compared to other groups of Asian-born

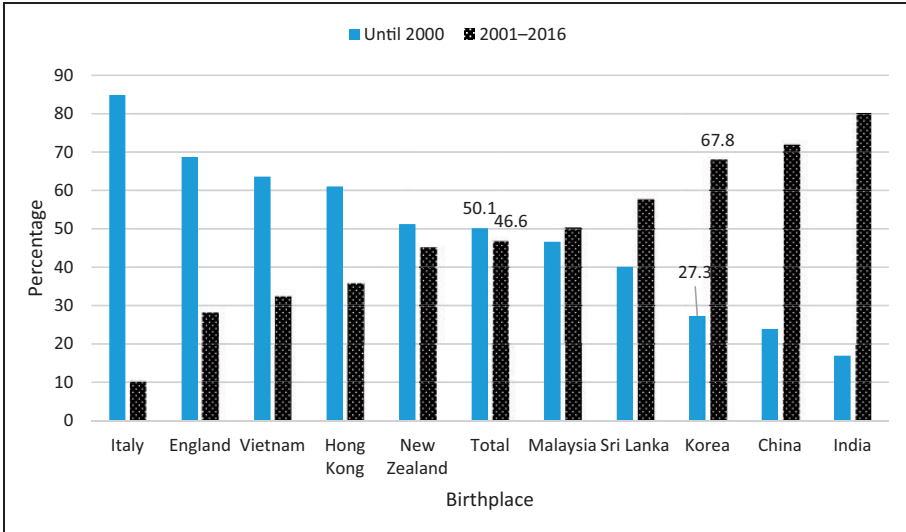


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of selected immigrant groups in Australia by birthplace and time of arrival.

Notes: Totals do not amount to 100 because responses for “not stated” are omitted; “China” excludes Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

Source: ABS (2017a).

migrants” (Han and Han, 2010: 32). We now offer some explanations for this trend of low acquisition of citizenship by Koreans in Australia.

The impact of late arrival

Compared to other immigrant groups, Koreans have arrived in Australia quite late in historical time. As Figure 1 shows, Koreans are more likely than most other immigrant groups to have arrived in the first decade of the 21st century. According to the 2016 Census, half of the OSB population began living in Australia before 2001 (50.1 percent), and slightly less than half did so after. Immigrants from Sri Lanka, Malaysia and New Zealand were closest to the overall average. People from Italy, England, Vietnam and Hong Kong were more likely than the overall OSB population to have arrived before 2001, and Koreans—along with immigrants from India and China, were more likely to have arrived after the turn of the millennium.

One explanation for the low attainment of citizenship by Koreans in Australia is simply time. That is, the longer the immigrants live in Australia, the more likely they are to want to (or feel the need to) attain citizenship. As was shown in Figure 1, the segments of the OSB population that have the highest rates of arrival prior to 2001 (e.g., immigrants from Italy,

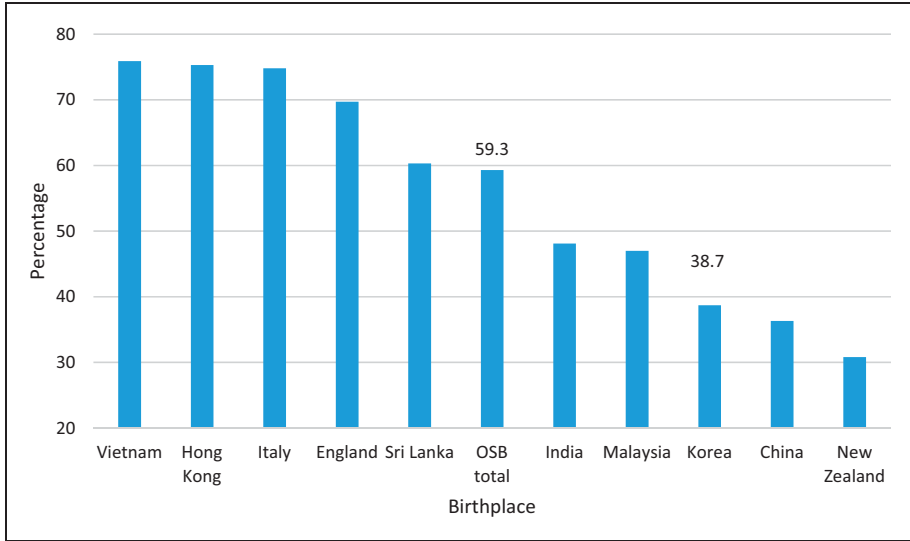


Figure 2. Percentage distribution of selected immigrants attaining Australian citizenship by birthplace, 2016.
Source: ABS (2017a).

England, Vietnam and Hong Kong) also have the highest rates of citizenship acquisition. Figure 2, meanwhile, shows that people born in these four societies have comparatively high rates of citizenship acquisition: almost 70 percent of these immigrants are Australian citizens, as opposed to an overall average for the OSB population of 59.3 percent. Conversely, those immigrants who have spent a comparatively short time in Australia—such as Koreans—are less likely to have attained citizenship than other segments of the OSB population. Figure 1 showed that people born in Korea, India and China were among the most recent arrivals in Australia. They were much more likely than the OSB population as a whole to have arrived after 2001. As Figure 2 makes clear, these three cohorts of late-arriving immigrants have comparatively low levels of citizenship (see also the section below on “hard choices”). Koreans and Chinese immigrants, for instance, are more than 20 percentage points less likely than the OSB population as a whole to hold Australian citizenship, while Indians (and Malaysians) were also far less likely to be citizens.²

²Those from New Zealand are somewhat outliers. They have comparatively low rates of citizenship (see Figure 2), despite more than half living in Australia since 2001 (see Figure 1). This can largely be explained by the conditions of the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement, introduced in 1973, whereby “Australian and New Zealand citizens are able to enter each other’s country to visit, live and work indefinitely, without the need to apply for prior authority” (Spinks and Klapdor, 2016: 1).

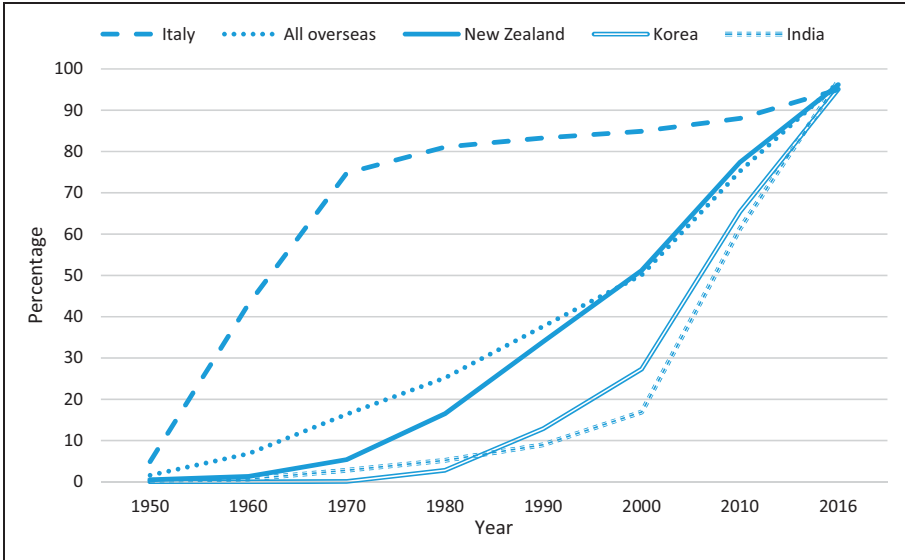


Figure 3. Percentage share of selected immigrant populations to the Australian population, 1950–2016.

Note: Responses for “not stated” were omitted, so totals do not amount to 100.

Source: ABS (2017a).

Figure 3 illustrates these divergent patterns of arrival in a different way. Immigrants from Italy and India serve as the biggest outliers to the overall OSB population. Almost three-quarters of Italians had arrived in Australia by 1970, compared to just 16.9 percent of all OSB people. About 80 percent of Indians, by contrast, arrived after 2001, as opposed to just under half of the overall OSB population. The Korean experience more closely resembles that of India, in that immigrants from these societies are comparatively late arrivals in Australia. As noted above, immigrants from New Zealand closely resemble the overall OSB population, especially after 2001.

Figure 4 extends the analysis of Korean immigration, by situating it amid the broader influx of Asian immigrants from the 1970s. When it is placed in comparative perspective, the lateness of Korean immigration and settlement becomes apparent. For instance, whereas about one-quarter of Sri Lankan immigrants and nearly half of those born in Vietnam (and 37.7 percent of the overall OSB population) had arrived in Australia by 1990, those from Korea, China and India had only a relatively small presence until the turn of the millennium. Only 12.9 percent of Koreans had arrived by 1990, but the proportion more than doubled—to 27.3 percent—by 2000. In the 21st century, this pattern of divergence between comparatively early- and late-arriving cohorts of Asian immigrants has continued. Immigration from Sri Lanka and Vietnam has

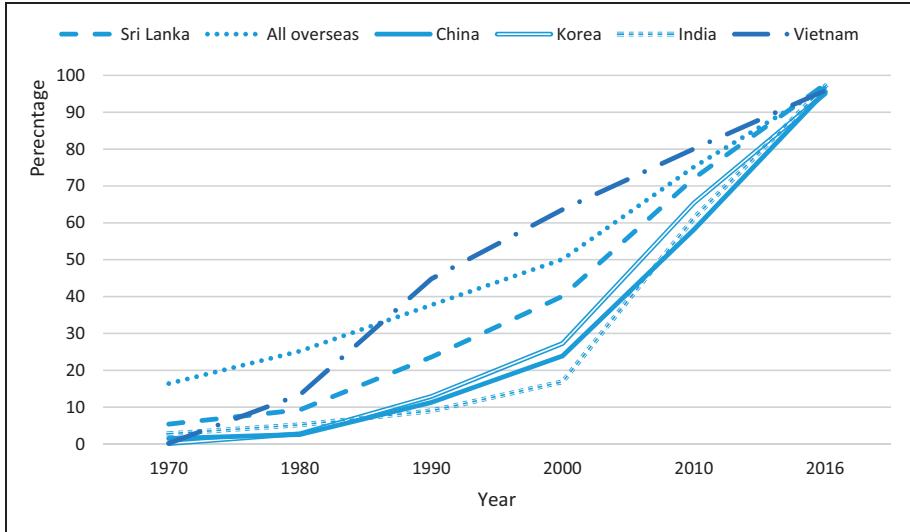


Figure 4. Percentage share of selected immigrant populations to the Australian population, 1950–2016.

Note: Responses for “not stated” were omitted, so totals do not amount to 100.

Source: ABS (2017a).

generally tracked the rate of the overall OSB population, in that about three-quarters of people born in these two societies (72.1 percent and 80.1 percent, respectively) were living in Australia in 2010, against an overall OSB average of 75.2 percent. By contrast, migrants from Korea, China and India (65.4 percent, 58.2 percent and 61.3 percent, respectively) were well below the OSB average in 2010. Once again, Koreans are evidently one of the comparatively late-arriving segments of the migrant population in Australia.

Migration from Asia, as a whole, has increased sharply since 2001, with Korea, China and India registering the highest rates of growth. Almost two-thirds of Koreans (65.4 percent) had arrived by 2010, along with 58.2 percent and 61.3 percent of migrants from China and India, respectively. Conversely, about one-third of migrants from these three societies arrived in Australia between 2010 and 2016.

Measurement problems

A second explanation for the low reported rates of citizenship stems from different methods of estimating populations, and the “slippage” that can occur between categories of residents. Both the Korean and Australian governments produce estimates of the Korean population in Australia, and in doing so, they focus on concepts such as ethnicity and residence, which

inherently reflect the interests and perspectives of states rather than individuals. In estimating the Korean population in Australia, the Consulate for Overseas Koreans (MOFA, 2017) focuses on *ethnicity*. The Consulate is responsible for accounting for “overseas Koreans,” who include Korean citizens living and visiting abroad, and also “Korean compatriots,” or citizens of other societies who are of Korean descent. According to Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the number of Koreans in Australia increased by about 40 percent between 2011 and 2016, from 132,000 to just over 180,000 (MOFA, 2017: 17). These consisted of Korean citizens who are residing in Australia temporarily as students, tourists or for other purposes (28.2 percent), Korean citizens who have been granted permanent residence in Australia and may later qualify for citizenship (44.3 percent), and people of Korean descent but who are not Korean citizens (27.5 percent) (MOFA, 2017: 121). In other words, MOFA estimates that there were about 50,000 Korean citizens in Australia, along with just under 80,000 Korean citizens who have been granted permanent residence in Australia, and slightly less than 50,000 ethnic Koreans who are citizens of Australia or another society.

For the ABS, the most important concept in estimating a given population is *residency*. In calculating the “estimated resident population” (ERP), “a person is regarded as a usual resident if they have been (or expected to be) residing in Australia for a period of 12 months or more.” The ERP includes “all people, regardless of nationality or citizenship, who usually live in Australia, with the exception of foreign diplomatic personnel and their families” (ABS, 2009). MOFA, as noted, instead focuses on ethnicity and seeks to count the number of Koreans who simply “live in or visit a foreign country” (MOFA, 2017: 3). The 2011 census counted almost 75,000 Koreans, and the Korean population in Australia increased by almost one-third by the time of the 2016 census, bringing the total to 98,775 (ABS, 2017b). According to the 2016 census, just 38.7 percent of people born in Korea were Australian citizens (ABS, 2017b), which equated to just over 38,000 people.

MOFA and the ABS differ in their estimates, for a variety of reasons. First, by counting only people who are “usually resident” in Australia, the ABS would appear to set aside most if not all the 50,000 Korean students, tourists and working-holidaymakers who are included in MOFA’s estimate. That methodological difference alone could account for a significant portion of the divergent estimates of the total population (180,004 versus 98,775). Second, MOFA’s estimate of the number of ethnic Koreans in Australia who are not Korean citizens does not imply that all these Koreans hold Australian citizenship. It is likely that a majority of them do, but some may be citizens of other societies, which could explain the discrepancy in the estimates (49,534 versus 38,226).

Third, MOFA and the ABS also differ in their estimates of the number of Koreans who live permanently in Australia. Once again, MOFA’s estimate

(79,770) is somewhat higher than that of the ABS (59,561). One possible explanation for the difference is that some Koreans who have been granted permanent residence in Australia may spend too much time outside of Australia to meet the residency requirement for inclusion in the census. From the perspective of MOFA, these Koreans would be permanent residents of Australia, but they might not be counted in the ERP for a given census. Another explanation comes from the Australian government itself, and stems from the "slippage" between the categories of permanent residence and citizenship. According to a report prepared by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the "information on citizenship rates" provided by the census and commonly used in government "is a crude measure that does not take into account" factors such as "the two years it took . . . for a person to be 'residentially eligible'" for citizenship, as well as "the number of temporary entrants who, because they are in Australia for 12 months or more, are counted in the Census population" (Smith et al., 2010: 23). When an immigrant cohort is "made up of a large proportion of recent arrivals and large numbers of long-term temporary entrants (most notably international students)," the nominal naturalization rate is much lower. In the case of Korea, the naturalization rate of 39 percent in the 2006 census, for instance, was "readjusted" to 88 percent (Smith et al., 2010: 24).

Hard choices about citizenship

Another explanation for the low acquisition of citizenship by Koreans relates to the policies that governments adopt on dual citizenship. There are three main approaches that governments may adopt. The first, and least common, approach is for states to forbid their citizens from acquiring citizenship of another society without the explicit permission of the government. In these cases, even formal renunciation of citizenship by an individual does not, in the eyes of the state, extinguish legal citizenship. This approach is practiced in about 9 percent of the world's societies (Vink et al., 2015).

Increasingly, however, it is possible for people to acquire dual citizenship. The second, and most common, approach is that the "voluntary acquisition of another citizenship does not lead to the loss of the citizenship of the country of origin, *but* citizens have the possibility to voluntarily renounce their citizenship of origin" (Vink et al., 2015, emphasis in original). About 60 percent of the world's societies (Vink et al., 2015), including Australia (since 2003), adopt this approach, meaning that it is possible for immigrants to become citizens of another society without affecting one's original citizenship.

A third approach is for governments to force emigrants who want to become citizens of another society to give up their original citizenship. About 30 percent of the world's societies, including Korea, India, Sri Lanka and China, adopt this approach to citizenship. In these societies, "the

voluntary acquisition of another citizenship leads to the loss of the citizenship of the country of origin” (Vink et al., 2015). Some societies, however, have shifted away from such a strict approach to citizenship. For instance, Italy and Vietnam, in 1993 and 1989, respectively, legislated to allow for dual citizenship. Hong Kong, meanwhile, adopted the British interpretation of dual citizenship until 1997, when the territory reverted to Chinese rule and a stricter interpretation came into force (Vink et al., 2015). Immigrants from these societies can apply to become Australian citizens, but only at the cost of their original citizenship. Or they may qualify for the less secure status of permanent residency while maintaining their original citizenship. Alternatively, they may only have temporary residence, without the possibility of converting that to either citizenship or permanent residence.

Due to the mismatch between the more permissive approach adopted in Australia and the more restrictive one in societies such as Korea, some immigrants—including Koreans—have become less likely to acquire Australian citizenship. As was noted in the discussion above about the impact of late arrival, and as Figure 5 indicates, there is a reasonably strong correlation between the length of time immigrants have resided in Australia and their likelihood of attaining citizenship. People who have immigrated from societies such as Vietnam, England and Italy are more likely than

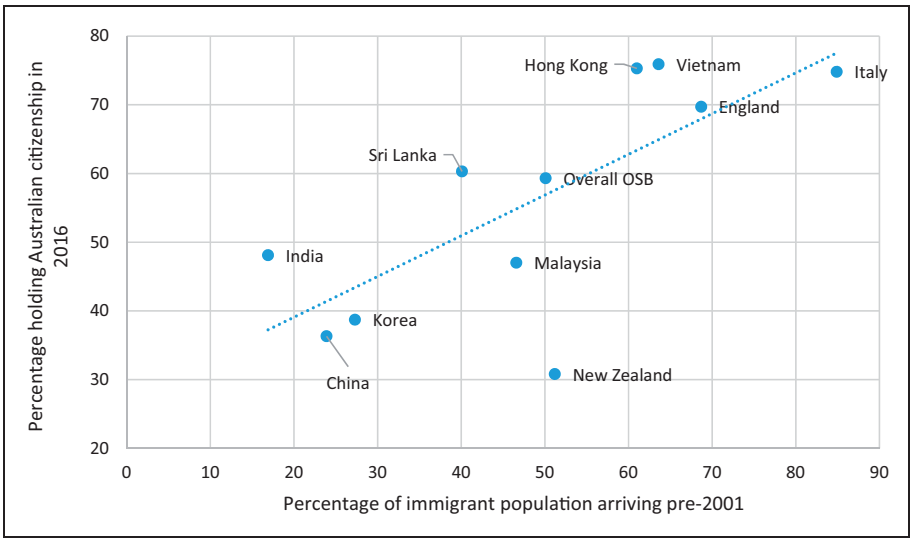


Figure 5. Percentage of selected immigrants arriving before 2001 holding Australian citizenship in 2016.
Source: ABS (2017a).

most of the OSB population to have lived in Australia since before 2001, and more likely to hold Australian citizenship. Immigrants from Korea, Sri Lanka, India and China, conversely, have low rates of Australian citizenship compared to the overall OSB population, and are also more recent arrivals than most immigrants. Of the late-arriving segments of the OSB population, Koreans and Chinese are the least likely to cede their original citizenship.

This analysis suggests that a substantial portion of Korean immigrants have chosen to retain their original citizenship, have yet to qualify for Australian citizenship, or are unable to apply to become permanent residents or citizens. Many Koreans may not have a choice to become citizens, or the choice can only be made at the cost of a permanent break with their homeland. It is also possible that some Australian-based Koreans have “recovered” their Korean citizenship, which became a possibility with the passage of the *Overseas Korean Act* in 2009 (Law Viewer, 2017). To reverse what it sees as a decades-long “brain drain,” and to combat a declining population, the Korean government has made it easier for ethnic Koreans with foreign passports to “recover” their citizenship. About 20,000 ethnic Koreans have attained Korean citizenship in this way, with almost 60 percent of returnees being Koreans based in the US (KIS Statistics, 2018: 58–59). There is, however, no data on Australia-based Koreans who have recovered their Korean citizenship.

The social dimension of citizenship for Koreans in Australia

Koreans fare poorly in terms of socio-economic outcomes compared to other migrant communities and the Australia-born population. As far back as the 1990s, Koreans have been comparatively less proficient in English, and they have earned substantially lower incomes than other Asians in Australia (Coughlan, 1997: 190). Despite being of working age and being well credentialed, Koreans have struggled to achieve the levels of income that would allow them to enjoy a standard of living comparable to most people in Australian society. Korean immigration to Australia, we illustrate in this section of the article, has coincided with a hollowing out of the social dimensions of citizenship.

The fundamentals for work

Koreans in Australia are comparatively young, and thus of an economically productive age. For most of the period from 1992 until 2016, Koreans were younger than other immigrant cohorts in Australia and the Australian-born population. Only since about 2010 has the average age of Koreans converged with other segments of the population (see Figure 6). The median age of Koreans in 2016 was 33.8 years, which is identical to that of people born in

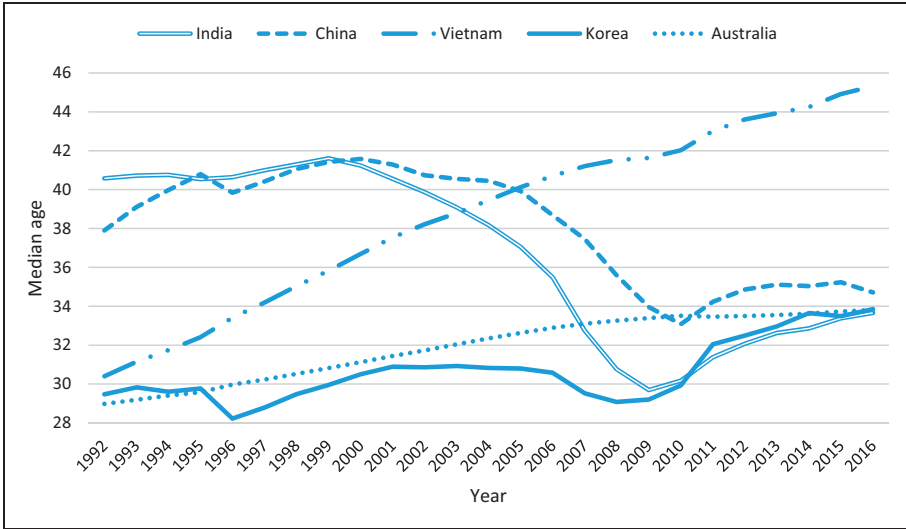


Figure 6. Median age of selected populations by birthplace, 1992–2016.

Source: ABS (2017e).

Australia. Koreans were significantly younger than the overall OSB population (44 years), and slightly younger than the Asian-born population (35 years) (ABS, 2017c). Koreans remain, on average, younger than their China-born counterparts, but the gap has narrowed significantly. By contrast, the average age of Vietnam-born immigrants has been rising steadily, and represents an outlier in the data (ABS, 2017d).

According to the 2011 census, Koreans had comparatively high levels of education. Just over 38 percent of people born in Korea reported having a Bachelor's degree or above. This was substantially higher than the Australian-born population (17.2 percent). Koreans were also far less likely to report having less than 12 years of schooling (8.1 percent), compared to one-third of the Australia-born population. The level of education for Koreans was similar to those of immigrants from Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and China, but lower than those of immigrants from India and Malaysia (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014: 63–66).

The comparatively strong position of Koreans in terms of education was again evident in data collected in the 2016 census. The share with a Bachelor's degree was 39.3 percent (see Figure 7). Koreans' attainment of Bachelor's degrees was substantially higher than the overall OSB population, the total population of Australia, and people born in Australia (31.6 percent, 22.0 percent and 19.6 percent, respectively). Koreans, however, had attained Bachelor's degrees at lower rates than comparable segments of the OSB population such as people born in India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, China and

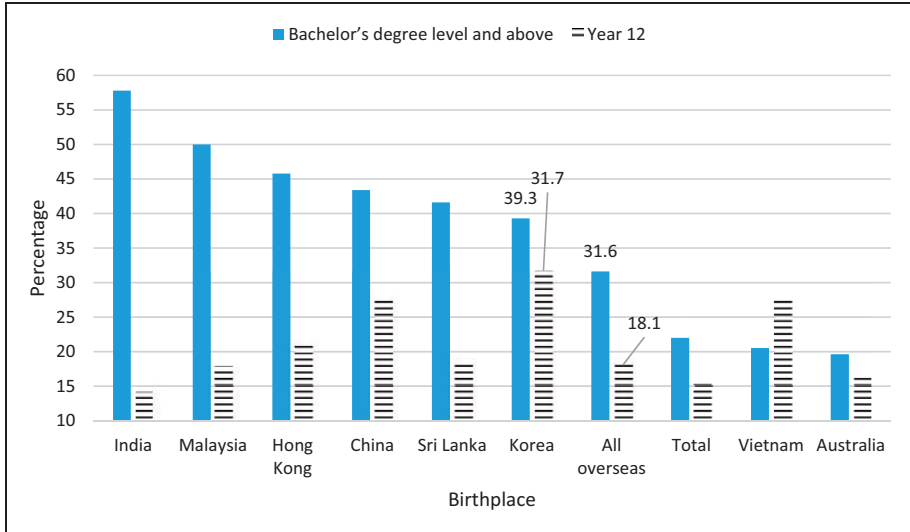


Figure 7. Percentage distribution of selected populations by educational attainment and birthplace, 2016.

Notes: Percentage of population aged 15 years and over; highest level of education achieved.
Source: ABS (2017a).

Hong Kong. The exception to this trend was observed among Vietnamese immigrants, who held Bachelor’s degrees at about the same rate as the total population and people born in Australia, but well below the average for the overall OSB population. Compared to other segments of the immigrant population, Koreans were more likely to report that Year 12 was their highest level of education. Almost one-third of Koreans (31.6 percent) reported that this was their highest level of education, a rate much higher than people born in India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. It was almost double the comparable levels for the total population, Australian-born people and the overall OSB population.

Levels of labor market participation

Despite their high levels of education and relative youth, Koreans have struggled in the Australian labor market. The 2011 census found that Koreans had a comparatively high rate of unemployment (9.1 percent), which was almost four percentage points higher than the average for the Australia-born population (5.2 percent). Koreans also had low rates of economic participation. At 59.0 percent, the share of Korea-born immigrants in the workforce was 8 percentage points below that of people born in Australia. Immigrants from Korea, China and Vietnam were more likely than other segments of the OSB population to endure high levels of unemployment

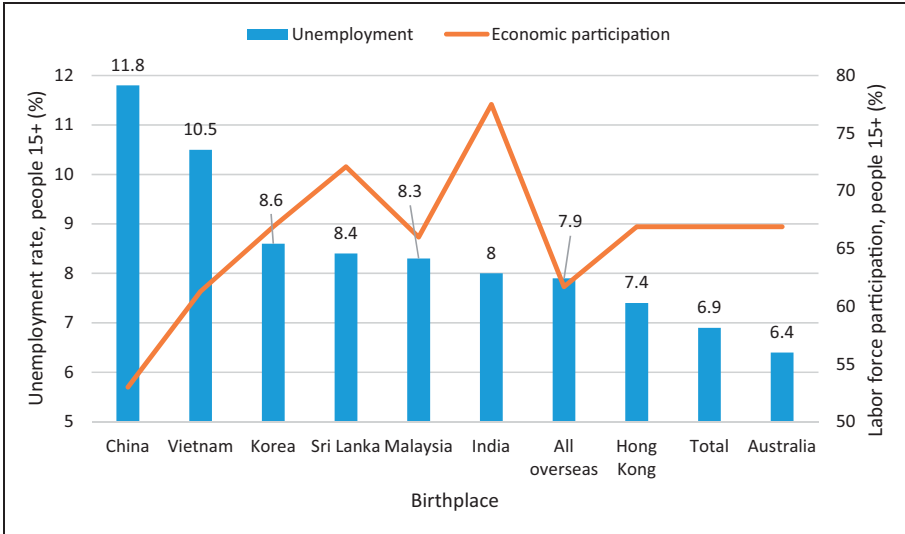


Figure 8. Unemployment rate and percentage of labor force participation rate of selected populations by birthplace, 2016.

Source: ABS (2017d).

and low participation rates. People born in India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Hong Kong, meanwhile, compared reasonably well with the Australia-born population (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014: 63–66).

In 2016, the unemployment rate for Koreans remained high, at 8.6 percent, but was somewhat lower than the 9.1 percent recorded in the 2011 census. This reduction occurred at a time when unemployment had increased for most other segments of the OSB population. Unemployment among all migrants was 7.9 percent in 2016, or slightly below the rate for Koreans (see Figure 8). In the same period, the proportion of Australia-born people out of work increased slightly (from 5.2 percent to 6.4 percent). The difference in unemployment rates between Korea-born and Australia-born people therefore declined from 3.9 in 2011 to 2.4 percentage points in 2016. Just as employment for Koreans registered a modest improvement between 2011 and 2016, so did their participation in economic activity. As Figure 8 illustrates, labor force participation for Koreans rose sharply and reached the same level as that of the Australia-born population (66.9 percent), as well as the overall population. This was 5 percentage points higher than the rate for the OSB population as a whole (61.7 percent), and lower only than the level of participation for Indian and Sri Lankan immigrants.

Despite their higher level of participation in the labor market, Koreans were less likely than most other segments of the OSB population to be employed

full-time (see Figure 9). At 49.4 percent, the proportion of Koreans in full-time work was about 8 percentage points lower than the overall OSB population, people born in Australia and the overall population of Australia. Koreans were also much more likely to work part-time. More than one-third were employed part time (37.7 percent), as opposed to about 30 percent for people born in Australia, the OSB population and Australian society as a whole. In other words, there were 1.3 full-time positions for Koreans for every part-time position. For most other segments of society, there were about two full-time positions for every part-time job. Koreans, it would appear, worked in increasing numbers, but not as much as they would prefer, and not in positions where they could best use their skills and education. Koreans were most commonly employed in sectors such as “cafes and restaurants” (12.6 percent) and “building and other industrial cleaning services” (6.7 percent) (ABS, 2017d).

The quality of employment and levels of income

Korean immigrants have increased their participation in the labor market, but English-language ability appears to inhibit their willingness to work and

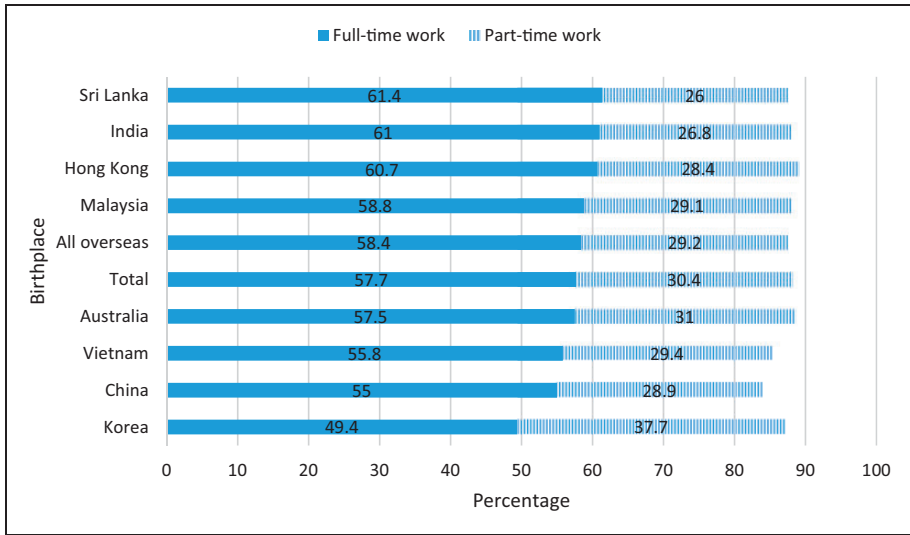


Figure 9. Percentage share of full- and part-time employment of selected populations by birthplace, 2016.

Notes: People aged 15 years and older actively seeking work; excludes responses for “unemployed” and “away from work.”

Source: ABS (2017d).

quality of employment. Immigrants born in Korea, Vietnam and China reported comparatively low levels of ability to speak English (see Figure 10). About one-third of immigrants born in these societies reported that they spoke English “not well” or “not at all” (ABS, 2017a). Of these groups, however, Koreans fared the best in labor force participation. Koreans were 5 and 13 percentage points more likely than migrants from Vietnam and China, respectively, to be in the workforce. Immigrants from these societies fared much worse in their English-language abilities than the total population and people born in Australia. They also reported lower levels of English-language ability than people from the other Asian societies (India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Hong Kong). The rate of labor market participation for Koreans, however, was 5 percentage points higher than the overall OSB population (66.9 percent versus 61.7 percent), despite Koreans having comparatively low levels of English-language ability.

The 2016 census revealed some distinctive patterns in the occupation of Korean immigrants (see Figure 11). Koreans nominated the professions as their most common occupation (21.2 percent) and, in this respect, they were quite similar to people born in Australia (21.0 percent). They were slightly less likely to work in the professions than the overall population and the immigrant population as a whole (22.2 percent and 25.2 percent, respectively).

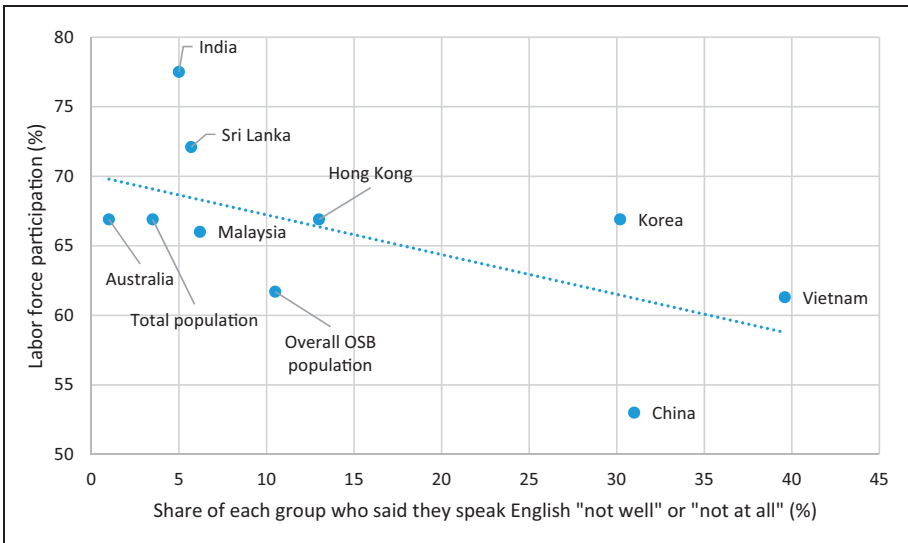


Figure 10. Percentage share of perceived English-language abilities and percentage of labor force participation of selected populations by birthplace, 2016.

Source: ABS (2017d).

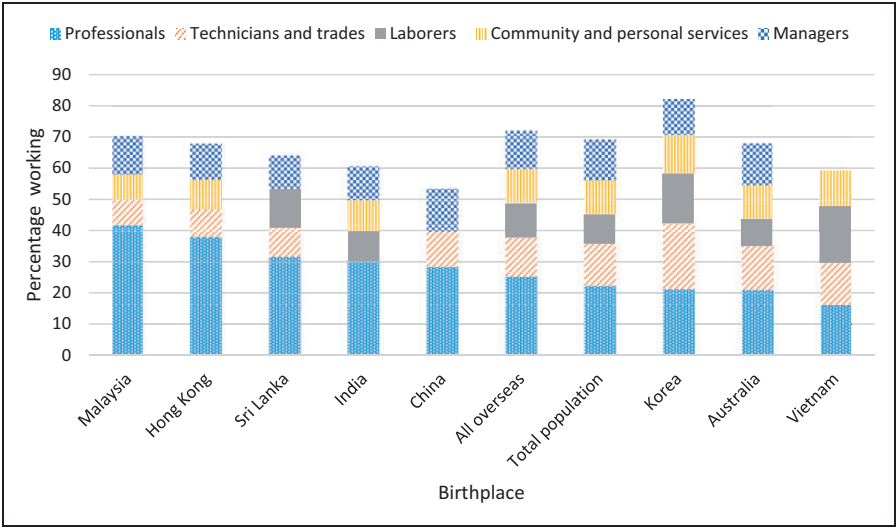


Figure 11. Percentage share of selected populations by type of occupation and birthplace, 2016.

Note: Totals do not add to 100 because not all categories are shown.

Source: ABS (2017d).

Koreans were also far less likely to work in the professions than migrants from other Asian societies.

The next most common occupation for Koreans was “technicians and trades,” with just over one in five nominating this category (21.1 percent). Seen in comparative perspective, this is unusual. Koreans were much more likely than people born in Australia, the overall population and the OSB population to nominate this category. They were nearly twice as likely to work in these fields as most other cohorts of other Asian migrants.

Koreans were also distinctive in that an unusually high proportion were laborers. About one in six people born in Korea nominated this category (16.0 percent), a share that was almost twice as high as that of the Australia-born population and the population as a whole. It was also substantially higher than the overall OSB population. Of the segments of OSB population considered in Figure 11, only people from Vietnam were more likely than Koreans to work as laborers. Similarly, Koreans had a comparatively high likelihood of working in “community and personal services.” About one in eight Koreans nominated this category.

Finally, Koreans were less likely than Australia-born people, the OSB population and the overall population to be in managerial roles. The share of Koreans in managerial positions (11.5 percent) was higher than that of

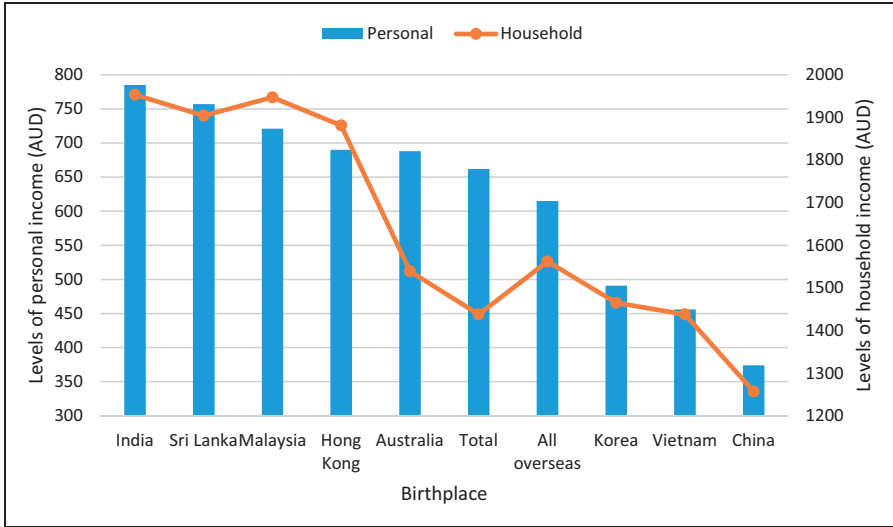


Figure 12. Median weekly personal and household incomes (in AUD) of selected populations by birthplace, 2016.

Note: people aged 15 years and older.

Source: ABS (2017d).

immigrants from Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and India, but lower than people born in Malaysia and China (ABS, 2017a).

Due to the mismatch between their levels of education, rates of employment and occupations, Koreans in Australia have comparatively low incomes. In 2011, slightly more than half of Koreans reported a weekly income of AUD 399 or less, compared to just over a third of the population for Australia-born people. Koreans were also far less likely to report weekly earnings of AUD 1,500 or above (the highest bracket). Just 6.1 percent of Koreans—less than half the share of Australia-born people—reported this level of income (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014: 63–66). The 2016 census suggested that Koreans continued to have comparatively low levels of personal and household income, but that there had been some modest improvement since 2011. By 2016, incomes for Koreans had increased and exceeded the levels of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants (see Figure 12). The personal and household incomes of Koreans, however, remained well below those of the OSB population as a whole, people born in Australia and the overall Australian population. Personal income for Koreans (AUD 491 per week), for instance, equated to just 71.4 percent of the Australia-born population (AUD 688), and 79.8 percent of all people born outside of Australia (AUD 615).

The high levels of education among Koreans have not translated into satisfactory outcomes in employment and labor market participation. Compared to some other segments of the OSB population and also the overall population of Australia, Koreans have struggled to secure full-time employment and earn income comparable to their qualifications. There was some improvement in their socio-economic outcomes between 2011 and 2016, but possibly not enough to assuage the disappointment felt by some Koreans.

Conclusions: Koreans amid Australia's eroding citizenship

Drawing on data derived from the Australian census, this article has analyzed the citizenship of Koreans in Australia in an age of large-scale immigration from Asia. It illustrated that Koreans have nominally low rates of formal, legal (political) citizenship, and suggested some possible explanations for this trend, such as that some Koreans fall outside of the neat categories of "permanent resident" and "citizen." The article's findings about the acquisition of Australian citizenship by Koreans invite further research. Statistical data, as noted earlier in the article, can provide only limited insights into political phenomena, and reflect the concerns of governments rather than both citizens and non-citizens (Burnham et al., 2008: 166). Through interviews and surveys, it might be possible to ascertain why some Koreans choose to give up their original citizenship and become Australian citizens, while others do not. Factors, such as education and age, might help to explain these choices. There is some evidence, for instance, that a first-generation of immigrants mostly retain Korean citizenship, while their children are citizens of Australia.

This article confirms that the social dimension of citizenship in Australia has eroded over time. The relatively difficult socio-economic position of Koreans in Australia could become a motivation for them to return to Korea. Among immigrant communities in Australia, Koreans may be uniquely open to the possibility of return to their society of origin, given that the standard of living in Korea is higher than in, say, China or India. If Koreans conclude that they cannot achieve a satisfactory quality of life in Australia, then the option of regaining or reactivating their Korean citizenship will become more attractive. The analysis conducted in this article confirms that the erosion of social citizenship has created conditions that might be conducive to return migration by Koreans in Australia. The data available from sources, such as the Australian census and the Consulate for Overseas Koreans, do not yet indicate a significant shift toward return migration, but the experience of Korean immigrants should serve as a cautionary tale to Australian policy-makers. Australia has long been a net beneficiary of large-scale immigration from Korea and other societies, but its attractiveness is at risk due to the erosion of the social dimension of citizenship.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this paper.

Funding

This work was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2016-SRK-1230006).

ORCID iD

David Hundt  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2019-1927>

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