

## Meeting the National Interest through Asia-literacy – An overview of the major stages and debates.

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" ... Australia requires an export culture which is "Asia literate" i.e. ... one which possesses the range of linguistic and cultural competencies required by Australians to operate effectively at different levels in their various dealings with the region - as individuals, organisations and as a nation." Rudd 1994: 2.

### Introduction

This paper traces the evolution of ideas on the question of how Australians might become Asia-literate. It examines the main phases in those government and non-government reports on Asian languages and studies that called for a national strategy for Asia literacy. As well, it explores the major debates about the place of the study of Asia and its languages in Australian education. It contends that the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commission and acceptance in 1994 of *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future*, known as the Rudd Report (Rudd 1994), was the culmination of more than three decades of debate and lobbying. Also, it argues that the Rudd Report's ambitious long term plan, aimed at producing an Asia-literate generation to boost Australia's international and regional economic performance, was unprecedented.

First, an overview of the significance of the Rudd Report is established. Second, the main stages in those reports and documents that advocated the study of Asia and its languages are identified. Third, the core debates surrounding such phases are traversed in order to establish the contested nature of the context for the study of Asian languages and cultures in Australia, prior to the 1992 COAG brief which commissioned the Rudd Report.

### The significance of the Rudd Report

For more than three decades, Australian scholars of Asia lobbied to prioritise Asian languages and studies in the education system for the potential to broaden Australia's conceptual framework about the region. Concomitantly, policy advice from prominent Australian Asianists stressed the value of broad intellectual and cultural understandings

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about Asia and noted the utilitarian benefits which might accompany such knowledge. Yet government interest in prioritising Asian languages and studies only gathered momentum from 1989 and heightened in 1991 when the assumption, that a utilitarian form of knowledge would produce economic outcomes, was accepted by policy elites. I argue that the decision by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to establish a high level working group to develop a strategic framework for the implementation of a comprehensive Asian languages and cultures program in Australian schools in December 1992 marked a turning point in the push for Asian languages and studies in schools.

COAG's acceptance of the Working Group's report, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future*, referred to as the Rudd Report after the Chair, on 25 February 1994, was significant. Its policy prescription for an "export culture" that was "Asia literate" (Rudd 1994, 2) was without rival in previous policy struggles about how studies of Asia and its languages might be placed in the education system. The Rudd Report emphasised that a national Asian languages and cultures strategy should be developed in the context of second language provision. Its 15 year plan, aimed at producing an Asia-literate generation to boost Australia's international and regional economic performance, received bipartisan agreement across all levels of state and federal government. It could be argued that this report was a political, and ultimately practical solution to the Commonwealth government's inertia on developing a national strategy for Asia.

The Rudd Report recommended that four priority Asian languages, Japanese, Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian (Bhasa) and Korean, selected for their perceived economic significance to Australia, be studied through a school-based program. It endorsed the Commonwealth's 1991 White Paper (DEET 1991) targets that 25% of Year 12 students should study a second language, however, it recommended that the target date be extended from 2000 to 2006. Significantly, the Report recommended that 15% of Year 12 students study one of the four priority Asian languages while the remaining 10% study other languages by this date. Further, it recommended that 60% of Year 10 students study a priority Asian language by 2006.

Although the Report acknowledged that "a parallel investment in Asian studies" (Rudd 1994: 55) was required, it did not afford Asian studies equal emphasis. Rather, the Report's central assumption, that its policy prescription should be set in the context of overall second language provision, drove the allocation of resources. Critics of the Report noted the Keating government's prioritisation of utilitarian knowledge about

Asia as the most recent extension of its economic rationalist ideology on the education system and resented the trend to elite, and increasingly centralised, policy making. Moreover, it was hardly surprising that Australian Asianists debated such policy moves when, as will be seen, so much earlier advice emphasised a broader rationale for the study of Asian languages and studies.

The implementation of the Report, overseen by the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Taskforce, commenced in 1995 after much debate about the funding model. It was finally agreed that the Commonwealth would provide 50% of the quantum required and that this would be matched by States and Territories on the condition that they set their own deadlines to achieve the NALSAS targets stipulated in the Rudd Report (Henderson 1999). During its first quadrennium, the study of Asian languages increased by more than 50% (NALSAS 1998). The January 2002 evaluation of the NALSAS Strategy, commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), indicated that by 2000 more than 23% of all Australian students were studying a NALSAS language at some level, and that enrolments for Japanese and Indonesian had doubled over the past six years (Erebus Consulting Partners 2002a: x). However, given the low enrolments in Korean, the evaluation report recommended that resources in the future could be better allocated to three priority languages (Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian). It also recommended that the original COAG targets that by 2006, 60% of Year 10 and 15 % of Year 12 students should be studying a NALSAS priority language, be modified to reflect more realistic targets (ibid: xiii). The *Review of Studies of Asia in Australian Schools* (Erebus Consulting Partners 2002b), also commissioned by DEST, recommended that the studies of Asia remain a national priority within the NALSAS strategy and noted the crucial role of the Asia Education Foundation in supporting this strategy. Hence it seemed that the Rudd Report's long term strategy was taking effect with 73.5% of Australian schools teaching an Asian language.

Yet in May 2002, the Federal Education Minister, Brendon Nelson, indicated that Commonwealth funding for the NALSAS program, scheduled to run until 2006, would cease at the end of 2002. Dr Nelson provided no explanation for axing funds other than to claim in an Australian Broadcasting Commission 7.30 Report interview, telecast on 9 May, that the Howard government gave notice of this funding cutback in the 1999 Budget. Rudd, now Opposition Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, responded that the cessation of Commonwealth funding would mean that \$240 million invested so far would be wasted and that "this radically increased effort in the teaching of Asian languages in our schools will be largely destroyed through the Minister Nelson's

decision to axe the program for the next four years" (Rudd 2002). At the time of writing, the future of Asian languages and studies now seems uncertain as it is doubtful the States and Territories will continue to provide their quantum for NALSAS now that the Commonwealth has reneged on its share of the funding model. As will be seen, Louie's observation that "the premature dismantling of NALSAS is not only a waste of resources already invested, but it undermines Australia's future" (Louie 2002: 10) reiterates the longstanding argument that the study of Asia and its languages is in Australia's national interest.

### **The stages and debates**

Since 1970, the prevailing concern evident in those documents and policies that focused on the need to teach Asian languages and studies in Australia was that knowledge about Asia was essential for the national interest<sup>1</sup>. At specific times, such documents have intersected with other government policies on languages, and with policies and reports on education reform, business, trade and economic matters. However, what is striking about the policy arguments for Asian studies is that they have independently pursued the placement of Asian studies on the education agenda in terms of Australia's national interest. Five identifiable stages have emphasised differing aspects of this concern. In manifold ways, each stage indicated that the lack of attention to Asian language skills and cultural knowledge in Australia had intellectual, philosophical, educational, economic, trade, strategic and political consequences for the nation.

These stages also reflect different phases in the campaign to mainstream Asian studies by Australian scholars of Asia, and, by State and national government education and economic policies. The first stage, evident from 1970, focused on awarding Asian studies parity of status with the study of European languages and studies in the Australian education system. The next stage developed during the period of declining foreign language enrolments and was evident from 1982. It emphasised the need for a second language learning culture in Australia along with calls for a national policy on languages. From 1986, the third stage centred on the need for government intervention to promote Asian languages and studies for intellectual, cultural and utilitarian reasons. That is, the study of languages and cultures would provide the stimulus for Australians to think beyond the constraints of their cultural mores and historical context, and prepare them for engagement with the region in various capacities. It was prompted by prominent Australian Asianists, some of whom were members of the Asian Studies Council, such as Viviani and FitzGerald.

The fourth stage overlapped the third and it could be argued that its discourse, although considerably narrower, ran parallel from 1988. This stage coincided with government policies to harness education in its program of economic restructuring, and emphasised how Asian languages and studies had utilitarian purposes in the push for Asian engagement. The fifth stage intensified the rhetoric of the previous phases and elevated Asian languages above the study of Asian cultures. From 1991, this stage set the scene for the commissioning of the Rudd Report as its focus was on the economic benefits of Asia literacy for domestic employment and for trade in the East Asian region during a period of recession and record unemployment in Australia.

With few exceptions, the intellectual and philosophical emphases for the study of Asian languages and cultures in the education system were gradually overshadowed by the broader utilitarian and economic policy priorities of the national government in the late 1980s and early 1990s<sup>2</sup>. The following more detailed examination of this journey includes an analysis of the core debates which accompanied the increasing emphasis on mainstreaming Asian languages and studies.

### **The need for parity of status**

The first expression of a national interest rationale for the study of Asia in the Australian education system emerged from the work of an advisory committee established in 1969 by the Gorton Government in response to an initiative from the Minister for Education, Malcolm Fraser. The 1970 Auchmuty Report identified the need for Asian studies to be accorded "parity of esteem" (Auchmuty 1970, 90) with the study of European languages and cultures in the Australian education system. This rationale emphasised the "practical arguments" (ibid, 20) for Asian studies because of the "steady growth in the economic, cultural, political and military links between Australia and Asia during the last two decades" (ibid, 7). As well, it harnessed the argument that it was in Australia's national interest to challenge the prevailing Anglocentric traditions that dominated Australian intellectual and cultural life. The report's emphasis on the need to lift the profile of Asian languages in the school curriculum to the same level as European languages was really about establishing a notion of balance in language offerings.

The Auchmuty Committee acknowledged that if "parity of esteem" was to occur, the "reappraisal of Australia's traditional attitudes towards Asia" (ibid, 11) would have to commence in Australia's classrooms. This entailed resources and teacher training. Policy documents, following Auchmuty's lead, would continue to note the role of

government in facilitating the human and material resources necessary for Asian studies in the Australian education system. As the Rudd Report observed, the Auchmuty Report "was among the first to recommend the expansion of Asian language teaching in schools and universities" (Rudd 1994, 6).

This first manifestation of "the national interest" was sustained by the efforts of Australian Asian scholars throughout the 1970s and 1980s. With a sense of urgency, academics and key individuals called for a national strategy to promote the study of Asian languages and cultures (Fitzgerald 1978). Other policy documents and reports produced during this period reiterated Auchmuty's call for "parity of esteem". The Basham Report (ASAA 1978) and most notably, the FitzGerald Report (ASAA 1980) acknowledged the utilitarian aspects of the national interest in terms of the need to mainstream Asian studies for Australia's long term benefit.

The FitzGerald Report was the first major non-government report on this issue and it raised the notion that the multicultural stimulus for teaching languages and cultures in Australia during the 1970s was not sufficient to sustain the needs of the nation as it faced the 1980s<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the thematic emphasis in the report challenged the legacy of Eurocentrism and argued that Asian languages and cultures studies were required to broaden the education curriculum. In this way, the call for "parity of esteem" encompassed the intellectual, philosophical and utilitarian rationales in the national interest.

The FitzGerald Report argued strongly that the focus on the nature of Australian society in curriculum offerings had to be balanced with an emphasis on

education for international understanding, on the development of global as well as national perspectives and on the study of other civilizations and peoples for the greater understanding that this brings of the nature of human beings (ASAA 1980, 50).

Of course, FitzGerald's point in raising this argument was to insert the study of Asia into the curriculum at a time when the taken-for-granted assumption was that Eurocentrism was the referential norm in education. Australian Asianists also debated whether Asian languages or Asian studies should be prioritised in their efforts to provide a rationale for challenging the status quo. This remained a longstanding debate.

Yet the argument that Asian languages and studies might provide some balance in the school curriculum would be constantly turned against Australian Asianists. As will

become clear, some members of ethnic and multicultural lobby groups feared that community and European languages would be placed at risk if Asian languages were given "parity of esteem" in the education system. Such anxiety heightened with the government's increasing awareness that languages were a national resource that could serve particular purposes. Those who lobbied for the mainstreaming Asian languages and studies, such as the Asian Studies Association, were accused of pursuing a " 'hard-nosed' advocacy which was more acceptable to government" (Lo Bianco 1990, 56).

### **The need to establish a culture of foreign language learning**

The second stage, evident from 1982, focused broadly on the need to establish a culture of foreign language learning in Australia. It was prompted by concern about the decline in second language enrolments in Australia<sup>4</sup> that followed the removal of university language entrance requirements. As Djité (1994) observed

nationally, between 1967 and 1976 ... enrolments in matriculation programs for the study of foreign languages dropped from 40 per cent of the total number of matriculation students to just 16 per cent (p.11).

During this period language professionals were concerned that "unless strong policy measures were adopted Australia would soon be unable to meet its internal and external language needs" (Ozolins 1991, 186). However, this push for second language learning became politicised when it was couched in terms of the need for a national policy on languages in Australia. The debates surrounding the issue of which languages should be prioritised by the government, served to prolong and hamstring policy development. This was due to the fact that migrant groups lobbied for the promotion of their languages, while professional language associations exerted influence to promote their own interests.

### **Debate about which languages should be taught**

The debate about which languages should be prioritised in the Australian education system remains longstanding and highly charged because of the vested interests involved. Critics of Asian languages employed two main arguments. Advocates of the multicultural position cast their assumptions about second language acquisition with reference to the social rights of migrants to speak their mother tongue. They argued that advocacy of Asian languages in the national interest perpetuated a false assumption for language requirements and ignored the multicultural nature of Australian society.

The second argument was concerned with proficiency. Advocates of this position claimed that Australian students would not be able to reach the required levels of proficiency in Asian languages. This argument made claim to an internationalist perspective, but it was really about preserving slices of European culture in Australian society. As Ingleson (1991, 215-16) observed

(w)e should not underestimate the strength of opposition in Australia to the concept that our future lies in Asia. For example, the Australian government's commendable efforts to promote Asian language learning in schools and Universities have met with strong opposition from significant quarters. When stripped of the power play, these people are asserting the Europeaness of Australian culture and their determination to keep it that way.

Despite such opposition, awareness that Asian studies was in the national interest increased. For example, the Commonwealth Department of Education acceded to some of the issues raised in the FitzGerald Report (ASAA 1980) in its 1982 document *Towards a National Language Policy*. This document demonstrated a paradigm shift in government direction on policy prescription for languages, as it raised concerns that there was no coordinated language policy that acknowledged Australia's developing multiculturalism along with the increasing trade focus with Asia. *Towards a National Language Policy* influenced Asian languages and cultures policy for it saw language as a "resource", as well as a "need" and a "right". It was argued that policy prescription needed to "take cognizance of Australia's total communication needs at local, national and international levels" (Department of Education 1982, 2).

By 1984, the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts would note in its report, *A National Language Policy* that

Australia's interests required that many Australians especially in business and in government should be proficient in languages other than English (Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts 1984, 120).

The recommendations of this committee prompted further analysis into the creation of a national policy on languages, and the Lo Bianco Report of 1987 took up this issue. This report, *National Policy on Languages* (Department of Education 1987), emphasised that "(a)n explicit statement of the choices made and the principles underlying them" (p. 3) was necessary to give "order and coherence to the broad and otherwise unconnected issues of language in Australia" (ibid). Although the Lo Bianco Report recognised



Asian languages as particularly important to Australia, its overriding emphasis was generalist and it acknowledged that all language study was important. Hence, Lo Bianco's argument for a coordinated policy "in the national interest" did not place the priority on Asian languages. Rather, Lo Bianco's rationale for second language provision was based upon four social goals which encompassed the notion that all languages spoken in Australia were "resources". This frustrated the Asian language lobby and reinforced the hiatus in the move to prioritise Asian languages and cultures. Moreover, as demonstrated with reference to the debates on this issue, "the national interest" rationale became fractured by the constant debates amongst different language groups as each sought to promote particular languages.

### **Asian languages and studies in the national interest**

The third stage presented a national interest argument for Asian languages and studies in terms of a new vision for Australia in a changing global and regional environment. Commencing in 1986, key policy documents in this phase, such as the Scully Report (Scully 1986), the *National Strategy* (Asian Studies Council 1988) and the Ingleson Report (Asian Studies Council 1989), drew together the themes of the previous stages and set them in a wider national, economic and strategic setting. The need for a national strategy to promote the study of Asia in the education system for a range of economic, trade, foreign policy, cultural and educational reasons was established. The strength of this thematic emphasis was that such policy documents acknowledged the ways in which intellectual, philosophical and utilitarian features of learning Asian languages and cultures intersected with, and qualified, each other.

*The Asian Studies Council - Report of the Working Party*, known as the Scully Report (1986), after its convener who was chairperson of the ASEAN-Australian Business Council at the time of his appointment, was presented to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Education and Trade. The Scully Report's formation was a direct result of the lobbying of a small group of Asianists, together with efforts by the Asian Studies Association, led by FitzGerald, Mackie, Wang and Low. Scully was a former head of the Department of Trade and an influential figure in Canberra at this time, and it could be argued that his chairing of this committee was important for its outcome. As will be seen, similar observations were made of *Australia and the Northeast Asian Ascendancy* (Garnaut 1989), and Garnaut's connections with the Hawke government. Given that it was characteristic of Australian policy-making for commissioned reports to stimulate public debate, it was most notable that reports on the teaching of Asian languages

and/or studies played a powerful role in driving the debate about the place of Asia in the Australian education system.

The Scully Report was significant for two reasons. First, it reiterated the call for government support to establish a national coordinating body to campaign for Asian studies, first made in the FitzGerald Report, so that "some familiarity with Asia-related subjects should be part of the normal educational background of all Australians" (Scully 1986: 5). The Commonwealth Government's endorsement of the Scully Report resulted in the establishment of the Asian Studies Council (ASC). This provided a much needed stimulus to Asian studies, for it helped to break the hiatus which had developed over Asian languages and cultures that was reinforced by the generalist approach of the Lo Bianco Report. Many of the Asian Studies Council's initiatives received the support of the Hawke government. And herein lay the second reason for the Scully Report's significance, for I argue that the endorsement of this report set the momentum for the political will required for an Asian languages and cultures strategy to be realised.

The Asian Studies Council's seminal report, the *National Strategy* (1988), served to focus the core elements of the rationale for Asian studies in the national interest, and it put the argument cogently. It noted that there was no certainty that students at any level in the education system would have opportunities to study systematically any subject matter relating to Asia and that fewer than one in one hundred studied an Asian language at school. Of those students presenting for tertiary entrance, only 2.2% studied an Asian language. The *National Strategy* asserted that "the proper study of Asia and its languages is about national survival in an intensely competitive world" (p. 2) and that a "revolution in our education" (ibid) was necessary so that Australians could require "Asia-related skills" (p. 3). It also emphasised that "Asia" was used as a "shorthand term" (frontpiece), and that

such shorthand is in itself one of the problems Australia has in understanding a region which is more diverse culturally, religiously and linguistically than Europe. (ibid).

Amongst its recommendations, the *National Strategy* set targets for the number of primary, secondary, TAFE, college and university populations studying an Asian language by 2000, it and recommended that Asian content be an element in all appropriate subjects in all years of education from the commencement of primary school to the end of tertiary education, by 1995.

Djité (1994) argued that the *National Strategy* set the agenda for the debates about Asia literacy in Australia with its claim that Asia was central to Australia's "trade, our foreign relations and our future" (Asian Studies Council 1988, 2) and with its *caveat* that the necessary transformation required by Australia to deal with such change would not be achieved "without Asia-related skills" (ibid, 3). It was contended that subsequent reports took up the *National Strategy's* focus on Asian language skills "and concluded that critical to business success is the ability to understand and negotiate with foreign customers and partners" (Djité 1994, 73).

Of course, those opposed to the *National Strategy's* message worked against it. Persistent lobbying from ethnic communities prompted Prime Minister Hawke to address the issue of policy priority during his speech to the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils Congress:

(S)econd language learning will remain a balanced programme as long as this government is in office. There will be no artificial distinction made between economic and community languages or between Asian and non-Asian languages (Hawke cited in Federation of Ethnic Communities 1988, *Proceedings* : 18).

The Asian Studies Council also commissioned the Ingleson Report (ASC 1989) which stressed that Asian studies was

the obverse side of the coin to Australian Studies. It is vital that in teaching about Asia and its languages we constantly seek ways of relating this to our own society (Vol. 1, 13).

While the Ingleson Report endorsed the *National Strategy's* concept that the key to Asia-literacy lay in the schools, it focused on the teaching of Asian languages and studies in universities<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, the Ingleson Report built on the premise, established by the Asian Studies Council, that Australian tertiary institutions needed to allocate their own resources to Asian studies and languages to complement the shifting priority in government funding, begun when Asia was specified as a priority area under the National Language Policy. The Ingleson Report also shared the *National Strategy's* uneasiness with the capacity of the term "Asia" to represent the great diversity of the region. Rather than create another term to conceptualise academic work and research in this field, the Report used the term "Asian studies" (Vol. 1, 61) to refer to the scope of intellectual work about the region.

The need to promote and support an understanding of Asia in the education system, and to broaden public awareness of Australia's place in the region, was also targeted by Asialink. Following deliberations between the Myer Foundation, the Commission for the Future and the Asian Studies Council, Asialink was established in 1990. Its work would involve various strategies to heighten public awareness and understanding of the cultures and societies of Asian countries through education, community awareness, the arts and business, and to promote Australia's role in the region. One of Asialink's first education projects involved identifying needs and producing resources for primary and secondary schools.

The report of the Asian Studies Council Asian Studies and Languages Working Group, *Studies of Asia and Asian Languages in Australian Schools* (ASC 1991) continued the emphasis on promoting Asian languages and studies in schools in the national interest. Meanwhile, the Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education (AACLAME) commissioned a review into the state of modern language teaching in higher education. This review's findings, *Widening our Horizons: Report of the Review of the Teaching of Modern Languages in Higher Education*, known as the Leal Report (Leal, Bettoni, and Malcolm, 1991) was promoted by the European language lobby as complementing the work of the Ingleson Report for it reiterated the necessity to teach second languages in the national interest. It must be noted that, at this stage, a decline in European foreign language enrolments was apparent, and the advance of Asian languages in policy prescription, notably because of the work of the Asian Studies Council from 1986, was causing concern that Asian languages might "overtake" other languages at the university level.

It was claimed that the Leal Report focused "on all languages in higher education" (Djité 1994, 21). However, a closer reading suggests that this report was also concerned with reasserting the teaching of European languages<sup>6</sup> in response to the prioritising of Asian languages and studies. Indeed, the Leal Report's emphasis indicated how politicised the issue of second language development in the national interest had become. For a deep rift had developed between the European, and ethnic lobby backed AACLAME, and the Asian Studies Council, that was supported by some powerful Labor politicians. This rift extended into the bureaucracy and political debate, and it continued after both councils were disbanded.

### **The utilitarian value of Asian languages and studies**

As noted earlier, the fourth stage overlapped the third and its discourse emphasised the utilitarian outcomes of Asian studies in terms of its purported benefits to the national economy. This discourse developed in two ways. First, under the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins, the Labor government's utilitarian view of knowledge informed a range of national education and language policy documents from 1988 onwards, some of which merged with the push for Asian languages and studies. This was evident in the Higher Education White Paper (Dawkins 1988)<sup>7</sup>, and the Hobart Declaration that set Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia (AEC 1989). For some Australian Asianists it was ironical that the continuous lobbying to mainstream Asian studies in the education system coincided with a period of government restructuring and reform designed to better equip students with workforce skills. Second, the publication of the Garnaut Report in 1989 lifted the debates about prioritising Asian languages and cultures onto the mainstream political agenda. Although Asian studies was finally given high priority in education policy, the view that it was for purely instrumental reasons, was evident in the debates which accompanied Dawkins' reforms and Garnaut's report.

### **Debates about government utilitarianism**

In terms of national education policy, debate ranged from how education systems might meet those challenges prompted by globalisation, to resistance to those broad policy changes prompted by what Evans (1989) identified as the inevitable impact of the core interlocking trends of rapid economic growth, regional interdependence and strategic fluidity for Australia<sup>8</sup>. Hence, while Kennedy (1990) acknowledged those new areas for the policy context in education as the "economic, strategic and social issues that tie Australia to Asia in a significant way" (p. 48-49), others critiqued government policy direction for the study of Asia as a blatant politicisation of the education system by the Labor government<sup>9</sup>.

Of course, the move by governments to formulate education policy at the national level, rather than within education departments, was part of a wider trend in some Western nations. Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry (1997) have argued that by the mid-1980s, economic imperatives were framing Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) deliberations, notably with respect to the contribution of education to economic performance. This trend was, in part, a response to the challenge of dealing with global recession and to the increasing emphasis upon intellectual capital.

The tension between the government's agenda to control and shape Asian studies in its national policy objectives and the broader intellectual debates about the purposes of knowledge was evident in the debates about prioritising Asian languages and studies. Some academics defended Asian studies in "terms that echo the defence of the humanities" (Dutton and Jeffreys 1993: 4). This humanist defence valued Asian studies for its intrinsic intellectual worth, its potential for cultural enrichment, and deplored government efforts to control knowledge by emphasising the utilitarian assumptions about the calculable outcomes of scholarship (Healy 1990). Some argued that the government's emphasis on Asian studies was "blinkered by Eurocentrism" (Dutton and Jeffreys 1993: 3) and that it sat "cosily with the empiricist and positivist assumptions that dominate the field" (ibid, 4). The rationale that Asian studies should be targeted as a necessary component of Australian intellectual inquiry was criticised by other scholars as the basis of poor institutional arrangements and as flawed intellectual practice. For example Davies (1993) argued that the release of the White Paper and the Ingleson Report meant that

Asian studies has had the problem of constructing its institutional identity and thus its relevance in the contradictory terms dictated by humanities' claims to intellectual autonomy on the one hand and the utilitarian demands of government on the other (p.12).

Other scholars argued for pragmatism and welcomed the emphasis of documents such as the White Paper (1988), the *National Strategy* (1988) and the Ingleson Report (1989) as timely. For example, Marr (1989) emphasised the potential of the Ingleson Report in terms which reiterated his much earlier response to debates about the purpose of Asian studies and the role of the Asian Studies Association in this matter: "We ought not sneer at such opportunities, but be prepared to take advantage of them, to convince a few participants that it is worth going deeper ... " (Marr 1977: 3). Similarly Copland (1991, 140) saw the instrumentalism of the White Paper as something which Asian scholars could overcome.

### **The significance of the Garnaut Report**

The significance of the Garnaut Report (1989) was twofold. First, Garnaut "mainstreamed" Asian studies because he lifted the policy initiatives of Australian Asianists onto the main political agenda. Asian studies was now part of the cut and thrust of national political debate. Put simply, the Report was written by an individual

who had significant political connections with the government. Moreover, the Report was timely. Its call for trade liberalisation was made

when the need for greater export competitiveness has never been more urgent ... if this combination of extensive contacts and good timing cannot do the trick, then very little else would (Lim 1990, 53).

It might be argued that this was one of the reasons why the Garnaut Report received the political clout to prioritise Asian studies that previous reports, such as the *National Strategy*, had been unable to achieve.

Second, Garnaut presented a comprehensive case that fitted the range of government strategies at that time. The Report's analysis and its recommendations assumed that education was part of the process of Australian micro-economic reform and it linked the study of Asian languages and cultures with the other broad strands of its analysis to provide a powerful argument for Asian studies. In this sense, as with the other emphases in the Report, Garnaut's work supported the government's policy agenda (Tisdell 1990) and connected the need for Australia to become more internationally competitive through micro-economic and macro-economic reforms with the imperatives of the potential economic opportunities in Northeast Asia. Garnaut's case was that Australians must be empowered through the education system to act upon this strategic coalescence of circumstances in the national interest. An update of some of the economic and political factors of Garnaut's analysis was presented in the 1992 report *Australia and North-East Asia in the 1990s: Accelerating Change* (East Asia Analytical Unit 1992).

Of course Garnaut's interpretation of the national interest as a rationale for Asian studies was debated amongst Australian Asianists in academic journals. Much of this debate reiterated the polemic about Dawkins' reforms. Stivens (1992) claimed that Garnaut's work was based on a policy rationale that fitted "the growing emphasis on Asian languages as a path to trade success, frequently at the expense of other areas of Asian studies" (p. 75). According to Garnaut's rationale, Australians must learn to acknowledge Northeast Asia as a region in terms of its economic, political and strategic relationships and in terms of Australia's links to the region through migration and education. The Report identified certain weaknesses in what it termed Australia's assets, for example: "(o)ur use of English encourages complacency about Asian languages" (Garnaut 1989: 319) and the Report endorsed the educational policy prescriptions of the *National Strategy* and the Ingleson Report for emphasising Asian language proficiency.

Despite this support for preceding policy, the rationale underlying Garnaut's advocacy of Asia-literacy was underdeveloped in its cultural context.

Lim (1990) contended that the Garnaut Report could be criticised for "raising the role of cultural factors in economic development but never going very far with the discussion" (p.52). Similarly, Grant (1990) noted the cultural weakness in the Report's rationale. The "cultural theme" (Grant 1990, 5) of the Garnaut Report misjudged "the temper of the times in its assumption that the case for Asia, if its argument may be described in that simple way, is self-evident" (p. 7).

Critics of Garnaut's rationale for Asian languages and studies stressed the need for a more rounded treatment of intellectual skills, in contrast to the utilitarian approach he advocated for the Australian education system. Healy (1990) for example, described intellectual endeavour in Asian studies as the "challenging of accepted practices and interpretations, the stimulation of critical thinking, scholarship, the promotion of greater social awareness and sensitivity" (p. 74). Similar criticisms would be levelled at the Rudd Report.

### **The views of business and industry**

During this period, a series of papers from business and industry also served to reinforce the utilitarian outcomes of Asian languages and studies. In sum, these reports presented language as an economic resource that should be developed in the national interest. Djité's (1994) claim that language was "good business" (p. 74) was developed in the Valverde Report, *Language for Export* (1990)<sup>10</sup> and the Stanley Report, *The Relationship between International Trade and Linguistic Competence* (1990)<sup>11</sup>.

The Valverde Report (1990) stressed the importance of long-term second language planning as part of the broader framework of training for overseas trade. This report concluded that

(o)ur own language attitudes have created self imposing limitations on our relationship with the rest of the world. Australian companies will not be able to respond rapidly to the pressing demands of the global economy if they do not incorporate in their export departments staff who are linguistically capable of breaking into new markets or retaining old ones (Valverde 1990, 49).



Similarly, the Stanley Report (Stanley *et al.* 1990) argued, in terms that anticipated the thrust of the Rudd Report, that a core feature of the lack of export growth in Australia had been the failure to develop an export culture in the education system.

It is this need to establish an "export culture" and the ways in which this might be achieved within an educational frame of reference and with particular attention to the role of foreign languages which provides the main substance of this report (Stanley *et al.* 1990, 29).

The Stanley Report advocated specific intervention in the education system so that language education would meet the needs of business, and it called for changes to content, methodology and to institutional frameworks. Moreover, the report supported the increased commitment to language teaching made in the Ingleson and Garnaut reports.

Although the geo-political realities of Australia's Asian future had been clearly documented in scholarly reports to government, and in policy prescription from 1988, business and industry leaders expressed alarm at the gap between policy rhetoric and the reality of business and trade practice (Balderstone 1992).

Such arguments from business and industry were essentially a call for government intervention in the national interest. From this perspective, governments had the mandate to act in the national interest and should exercise the power to do so. Indeed, by the early 1990s the government indicated that education policy was a significant component of Labor's micro-economic reform agenda by endorsing documents such as the Finn (AEC 1991) and Mayer Reports (Mayer 1992), which emphasised work related skills and outcomes in the education system. However, these views from business and industry, together with the government's emphasis on education reform, were seen at the broadest level by some educators as a direct attack on the autonomy of intellectual practice and, specifically, as ill-conceived attempts to control the policy process for Asia literacy.

### **Debates about economic rationalism**

Such contested views about the nature and purpose of Asian languages and studies were derivative of the general concerns of many educators at the overarching impact of economic rationalism on government policy making. In particular, Pusey's (1991) contested claim that the educational function of the Department of Employment,

Education and Training (DEET), the key government agency for policy on Asian languages and studies, had been “colonised by the central agency economic rationalists and their ministers” (p. 148), prompted further concerns about who was in charge of policy prescription. Whilst some acknowledged that “the economic rationalists may have brought some positive things for Asian studies” (Reeves 1992, 66) by giving it priority, the collective fear was that economic rationalism would continue to narrow the focus of policy for Asian studies at the top level of government. As Reeves (1992) put it, the perception was that only those parts of Asia “measured by trade or investment criteria, or which can be seen to be a source for quick economic gain for Australia” (ibid) would find their way into policy.

Another group of scholars interpreted Pusey's account of the primacy of economism for policy prescription as an extension of what was already established in the rationales of earlier policies and reports. For example, Macknight (1992) claimed that key reports from the "Asian studies industry" (p. 57) such as the *National Strategy* and the Ingleson Report, were examples of "the instrumental voice" (ibid: 58) which contained "cloying links with institutions of education" (ibid). Similarly, Dutton and Jeffreys (1993) argued that the Ingleson Report offered "a blueprint for the reform of Asian studies in the Dawkins and post-Dawkins era" (p. 6) for it acknowledged the functional role of Asian studies in meeting the long term demands of the Australian economy. Yet, in terms similar to Hunter's (1991) argument, Stivens (1992) acknowledged that, at another level, the utilitarianism of a Dawkins-headed DEET was really an extension of what had happened under past governments. That is, government agencies and universities have always operated as "rational, instrumental apparatuses aimed at training, disciplining and developing vocational specialists" (Stivens 1992: 75)<sup>12</sup>. And, governments have always exercised their political power to set the broad agenda for these processes across education systems.

Of course, one significant aspect in the debate about control of policy development was the empirical question of whether Asian languages and cultures studies actually increased exports. Healy (1990) rebutted the Labor government's assumption that there was a straightforward relationship between knowledge about Asia and Australia's national economic success, by claiming that it was impossible to qualify. Yet, despite such challenges to the logic of the government's assumption, the notion that Asian languages and cultures study would contribute to increased national outputs persisted and, as will be seen, ultimately framed the context for COAG's commission of the Rudd Report.

## Debates from language protagonists

Because the utilitarian view of second language acquisition was so dominant during this period, it continued to be used by some language groups to reinforce the claims for European and community languages, against the prioritisation of Asian languages and studies. This was essentially a multicultural push for control over language policy. Clyne (1991b) claimed that during this period of utilitarianism, language education

was increasingly seen in terms of short-term economic and training goals, and there was some political pressure for the languages of our Asian trading partners to be taught to the exclusion of other languages (p. 15).

Moreover, it was argued that Asian language protagonists wanted to "overthrow" (Cryle *et al.* 1993) existing foreign languages and substitute Asian languages for those such as French or German, and thus reduce the range of languages offered for study in Australia. The conflicting interests of "two key groups" at the core of the tension at this stage in the debate about second language policy direction were labelled the "Anglo-Asianists", and the "Community Language-Multiculturalism Advocates" (Lo Bianco 1990: 72). It was claimed that Asianists gained ascendancy because they controlled "the language of the debate" (ibid: 73). This meant that the term "community languages", which in the early 1970s was used in contradistinction to modern and foreign languages to "connote greater immediacy and relevance" (ibid) became characterised as

parochial, limited and domestic. Asian languages (really only Chinese and Japanese with Indonesian a long way behind) were labelled originally by their supporters 'key' languages, and then relabelled 'national interest' languages (ibid).

According to Lo Bianco (1990) the debates about which languages were in the national interest further intensified when Australian Asianists use the term "strategic" languages to boost their arguments. Other critics inferred that government advocacy of Asian languages subverted the National Policy on Languages (Clyne 1991b). For example, Ozolins (1993) argued that Dawkins'

single-minded pursuit of Asian languages on any occasions in which he mentioned language policy and the continuing bureaucratic shifting of program responsibilities, signalled a battle of considerable proportions over the direction of language policy. With a clear orientation by some politicians to see Asian languages as *the* languages in education, tensions on this front grew ... (p. 251-252).

## **Debates about multiculturalism and Asian studies**

Continual opposition to Asian languages and studies from some sections of the community could be interpreted as an attempt to preserve multiculturalism's policy identity from the early 1980s in the face of changing social, economic and political realities of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Mackerras 1980). Indeed, it might be argued that the multicultural argument had lost its significance and warranted revision. Two divergent views were evident in the debates about multiculturalism and Asian studies. One view was that multiculturalism could accommodate Asian studies in the curriculum as long as its own interests were preserved. The second view was that a multiculturalist emphasis would marginalise Asian studies in the curriculum. Lo Bianco (1995a; 1995b; 1996) advocated the first position, while FitzGerald (1995) was highly critical of it and advocated the second position.

The multicultural push against the prioritisation of Asian languages and studies remained persistent. For example, the response to Minister Dawkins' release of a policy discussion "Green Paper" on the development of a more focused language and literacy program for Australia - *The Language of Australia* (DEET 1990) indicated the political leverage of ethnic communities at this stage (Clyne 1992a, 1992b). They argued strongly that the government should not set priority languages in response to economic and geo-political concerns, and lobbied that domestic community languages were of equal, if not more significance, to the development of Australian society than languages of strategic, economic and trade concerns. The ensuing White Paper *Australia's Language - The Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (DEET 1991), continued the emphasis that second languages were a national resource, but set as its goal the provision of LOTES so as to include Asian, community and Aboriginal languages. The outcome of this period of utilitarian policy prescription and divisive lobbying from various interest groups was that the White Paper effectively handed the implementation of language policy back to the states.

## **The dominance of economism**

By the early 1990s the incremental creep, or as some saw it, 'tidal wave' of economic rationalism, characterised the fifth stage in the shifting agenda for Asian languages cultures. From 1991, theme of economism, which characterised this stage, also reflected the degree to which Asia had gained policy priority in the national government's agenda. Prime Minister Hawke had set the foundations for the orientation to Asia by the late 1980s. From 1991, Keating accelerated the pace of reform and responded to the

global trends confronting Australia by shifting the focus to Asia across a range of policy objectives.

The dominance of economism that characterised this fifth stage was evident in those policy documents which advocated the study of "trade" languages and the study of Asian societies for "business reasons". Other aspects of Labor Party policy such the continuing emphasis on economic restructuring and Senator Evans' objectives for regional engagement, reinforced the notion that teaching Asian languages and cultures were critical in securing Australia's long term economic and strategic interests in Asia. As Yeatman (1990) argued, economic restructuring took on meta-policy status, and economism now framed and constrained the discourse on Asian languages and cultures.

It might be argued that the prospect of the 1993 federal election intensified the predominance of this economism. In effect, it tightened the confluence of the national interest, engagement with Asia and the need for a culture of Asian language learning in Australia for Labor Party policy initiatives. This was partly because of record unemployment. The Labor Party response to the issue of unemployment was a sharp focus on the link between an export-led recovery for Australia in the Asian region and on the creation of new employment opportunities which transcended traditional commodity trades and focused instead on high value-added, elaborately transformed, manufactures and human service industries. Labor strategists envisaged high quality education and vocational training as the linchpin for these new employment opportunities. In the words of (then) Prime Minister Keating

(i)t will be important to our future success in Asia to devote even more effort to increasing the number of Australians with Asian language skills, familiarity with Asian cultures, market knowledge and awareness of how to do business in Asia (Keating 1993, 2).

Two Australian Labor Party (ALP) documents, released in 1993, explored aspects of this policy thrust. Although these documents were not about language policy *per se*, they indicated that Labor's overarching policy agenda had combined education, economic and national goals to specifically target Asian languages and studies. *Australia in Asia: Economies Growing Together* (ALP 1993a), addressed factors influencing Australia's success as a trading nation in Asia and emphasised potential employment outcomes. *Growth Plus Equals The Employment Challenge* (ALP 1993b), set forth an agenda for change in preparation for the Green and White papers on Employment and Unemployment. One of the core assumptions which informed Labor's proposed set of initiatives to resolve long-term unemployment, was that Australia's

economic prospects depended largely on the potential of trade with Asia. As Hooper (1995, 72) put it

(s)ince 1990 - and particularly over the past two years or so - Asian Studies has achieved added momentum with Asia becoming, not just a national priority, but probably the national priority as Australia has been attempting to redefine its geographical and social identity for the twenty-first century ... we now hear politicians telling us that a knowledge of Asian societies and cultures is vital for Australia's future in the Asian region, even if their underlying motivation is still fundamentally economic.

As noted earlier, the Keating government's increasing emphasis on prioritising Asian languages for their assumed economic benefit was vigorously debated. The issue of language proficiency was prominent in these debates, along with the question of whether Asian languages or Asian studies should be prioritised. Indeed, since the late 1970s, Australian Asianists had argued over which approach was appropriate in the national interest<sup>13</sup>.

### **The debate about language proficiency**

One argument consistently employed against the prioritisation of Asian languages was that Australians were poor students of second languages because the education system did not contain an established culture of foreign language learning (Sussex 1991). Yet, this was precisely what the recommendations of *National Strategy* (1988) and the Ingleson Report (1989) were designed to achieve. Arguments about proficiency first levelled against the *National Strategy* and the Ingleson Report (McCormack 1989; Goodman 1989; Brown 1989) persisted into the 1990s. Polemic ranged from the Sussex's (1991) *caveat* to be realistic about what could be achieved in terms of language proficiency, to the position which argued that Asian language proficiency goals, outlined first in policies such as the *National Strategy* and the Ingleson Report, were extravagant and impossible to attain (McCormack 1989; Goodman 1989; Goot 1990). The claim that community attitudes were "scanty and problematic" (Goot 1990: 119) with regard to foreign language learning in Australia was also used against Garnaut's (1989) argument for prioritising Asian languages.

Critics of Asian languages claimed they were more difficult to learn and took longer than other languages to master to an adequate level of proficiency. Others pointed to the major structural readjustments universities and schools would have to make in order to facilitate the increased emphasis on Asian languages and studies (McCormack 1989;

Goodman 1989). McCormack (1989) contended that claims about Asia literacy and Asian language competence contained ambiguities, and, that the structure of the university system could not facilitate the contact hours the *National Strategy* and the Ingleson Report required for proficiency.

Does literacy mean something other than language competence, and if so, what? ... And exactly what is competence anyway? ... The present output of graduates in Japanese those completing their 504 classroom hours, have little more than a smattering of the language (McCormack 1989, 11).

However, as a respondent to McCormack noted, at worst, "even those who only acquire a smattering of the [Asian] language may achieve some worthwhile progress in breaking their monocultural vision" (Orton 1989: 33) and that despite the "formidable challenge" (ibid: 35) the study of an Asian language was a "worthy intellectual task" (ibid 35-36).

One consistent critic of Australia's engagement with Asia, Slaterry (1992) asserted in the popular press that

(i)t seems not to matter that character-based languages such as Japanese, according to linguists, take at least three times longer for English-speakers to learn than languages of Latin derivation. Combined with the difficulties of training Australian teachers to teach the language well, this means that most students of Japanese are unlikely to develop an expertise in the tongue. In effect, scarce education resources are being wasted for little gain (p. 11).

It must be noted that Ingleson Report (1989) went to considerable lengths to deal with the question of language proficiency in university courses. Stoddart (1989) supported Ingleson's targets and argued that it was up to the Australian government to "show by its actions that it intends to tackle this problem with resources sufficient for the task" (p. 39).

A related argument used against the prioritisation of Asian languages was that English had become the international language of business and trade in Asia (ALLC 1994). According to this perspective, it followed that expenditure on Asian language programs required to achieve proficiency levels was therefore unnecessary. FitzGerald (1994) suggested that while such views indicated that there was "no 'culture' of foreign language learning in Australia" (p.5), they also demonstrated that the rationale for learning foreign languages was misunderstood.

FitzGerald's (1994) view, that language learning was intellectually rigorous and the window to cultural understanding, was also made by the Ingleson Report with specific reference to the debate about proficiency. However, these arguments persisted throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, and re-emerged and in the responses to the Rudd Report when it was released in February 1994. The most strident critics of the move for Asian languages aired their views in the press (Slattery 1992, 1995) and in reports such as *Speaking of Business – The Needs of Business and Industry for Language Skills* (ALLC 1994) and *Language Teachers: The Pivot of Policy* (ALLC 1996).

### **The languages or studies debate**

The question of whether Australian students should learn about Asia through its languages or through discipline-based and area studies was also part of this last debate about controlling the policy context for Asia-literacy. Language advocates, such as the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Association (AFMLTA), claimed that second language learning facilitated both communication and cultural understanding. The push for Asian studies rehearsed some of the arguments used to discredit Asian language proficiency in order to claim that more students would learn about Asia if the less complicated option of inserting "Asia" across discipline subjects in the curriculum occurred. The latter was frequently termed the "infusion" approach.

Moreover, because the economic rationalist argument for Asia literacy prioritised language study over Asian cultures study, some Asianists and educators turned this argument against their fellow scholars and key industry leaders to discredit language advocacy (Healy 1990; White 1991). The arguments for Asian studies were broadly based upon the claims that cultural understanding could be attained through discipline-based inquiry, that it was less disruptive to the school routine and that it was much cheaper to implement than a languages program.

The debate about policy priority ran parallel with the push to lift the profile of Asian studies in Australia, and for this reason it had political implications for the peak lobby group, the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA). It commenced when the Auchmuty Report (1970) was released and continued with the FitzGerald Report (1980), while the publication of the *National Strategy* (1988) continued to prompt divisions within the ASAA. Although there were signs of unity, such as the ASAA's positive response to the Ingleson Report, the debate about the importance of languages versus studies remained contested.



Notwithstanding their different emphases, both arguments centred upon what Ingleson (1991: 212) termed "micro-cultural reform". As Ingleson demonstrated in his report (ASC 1989) the interdependency of languages and cultures study about Asia was envisaged as the core long-term strategy for Asia-literacy in Australia. However, as argued earlier, Ingleson's efforts to establish micro-cultural reform in the education system from the first formal years of schooling through the study of both Asian languages and cultures, and the previous recommendations of the *National Strategy*, were criticised because of their language proficiency targets. This indicated the depth of opposition amongst some quarters to the language approach. Similarly, criticism was made of the emphasis on Asian language acquisition in the Garnaut Report (Healy 1990). By 1990, the President of the ASAA, McKay, claimed that

major attention is still being given to languages and not to studies in other disciplines. Yet we know studies, and not languages, will always reach a larger number of students. Second, teacher education is only now being addressed and again Asian languages have received all the attention. Asian studies has barely touched the surface of activities in schools (McKay 1990,169).

The new organisational environment which resulted from the White Paper and the completion of the Asian Studies Council's mandate on 30 June 1991 raised further concerns about the direction of Asian studies and languages (Ingleson 1991; Mackerras 1993). By 1992, the Asia Education Foundation (AEF), a joint initiative of the Curriculum Corporation and the University of Melbourne, managed through the latter's Asialink Centre, was set up as an independent body to promote the study of Asia across all levels of the curriculum in Australian schools. Funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, the AEF would receive a total of \$3.5 million during its first triennium. Despite the increasing emphasis on the study of Asia in government policy, some members of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) were concerned that the long term future of Asian studies was being subsumed in the government emphasis on economism.

However, others were critical of what they saw as the Asian Studies Council's over-emphasis on languages rather than cultures (Healy 1992). By this stage, the debate over policy priority indicated that, despite the claims of both camps to micro-cultural reform, deep philosophical issues of knowledge and cultural understanding continued the divide between language and studies protagonists.

By November 1992, the ASAA had established a Policy Working Group to consider these and other crucial issues for the Association. Mackerras (1993) observed in his account of the ASAA Policy Working Group's brief:

A fairly strong view has been put forward that too much money and effort has been allocated to language study, at the expense of other forms of study. It has been argued that the study of Asian languages should be more demand-driven than has been the case up to now and that far more money should be given to the study of Asian economies, histories and societies ... Is it really so impossible to understand Asia without language? Wouldn't it be more sensible and a better and more productive use of resources to spend more time and money on non-language? (Mackerras 1993, 169).

The Asian Studies Association Policy Working Party's discussion paper, *Policy: Issues and Options* (ASAA Working Party 1994), released before the Rudd Report was endorsed, noted the continued division on the issue of priority.

The ASAA places great emphasis both on language and non-language study of Asian countries, but there are differing views within the Association on precisely what should be the balance between the two ... Whether the teaching of Asian languages should be mass-based or merely confined to an elite is also an issue on which varying views can be found within the ASAA ... It is unlikely that ASAA can reach a consensus on the questions related to language (ASAA Working Party 1994, 118).

Thus, prior to the Rudd Report's release, the major professional association for the study of Asia in Australia, the ASAA, continued the debate over languages versus studies in policy priority.

## **Conclusion**

This overview of the five major stages and debates about policy prescription for the study of Asia in Australia, from the 1970 Gorton government commissioned Auchmuty Report to the release of the Rudd Report in 1994, presents the national interest rationale as the constant referent. Also, it argues that this rationale shifted in emphasis as national Labor governments began to view second languages as a national resource and acknowledge Asia as the regional key to solving Australia's immediate and long term economic problems. As successive national governments in the period from 1983 drew education into the process of micro-economic reform, the language of policy prescription and the language of policy debate about Asia-literacy, reflected an increasing preoccupation with economism. Collectively, these factors which emerged

from the policy context, forged the focus upon an "export culture" (Rudd 1994: ii) for Asia-literacy in the Rudd Report. Notwithstanding the Report's overly ambitious targets, the most recent evaluations suggest that its implementation is taking effect (Erebus Consulting Partners, 2002a, 2002b) and Asia-literacy is no longer "an elective" (ASC 1988: 2). However, Minister Nelson's May announcement indicates that this current effort to secure the study of Asia and its languages in the Australian education system is now at risk.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Of course, the national interest is a contested term and its significance varies according to the particular interest group or policy community which makes claim to it. Australian Asianists argued that Asian engagement and the development of Asia literacy was in the national interest because of the long term implications for Australia's cultural, social, economic, security and strategic interests.

<sup>2</sup> Put simply, the philosophical and intellectual rationales for the study of Asia emphasised that such knowledge was important for its capacity to prompt an understanding of cultural paradigms that were not Euro-bound. Moreover, such knowledge and understanding challenged the taken-for-granted assumptions Australians might have of their national and regional identity, and those of the various cultures and societies of the region. The utilitarian rationale assumed that specific skills useful for procuring economic or pragmatic outcomes could be acquired without a deeper contextual knowledge and understanding of the region.

<sup>3</sup> The Council of the Asian Studies Association of Australia established a Committee on Asian Studies at its General Meeting in 1978. Its brief was to inquire into the current state of Asian studies in Australia. The committee noted that "(t)he future of Asian studies in this country will largely depend on how successful we can be in establishing the view that it is of utilitarian as well as intellectual value" (FitzGerald Report Vol 1: 5).

<sup>4</sup>See Wykes 1966 and the *Report of the Australian Academy of Humanities* (1975).

<sup>5</sup>The Ingleson Report was commissioned by the Asian Studies Council in 1988 with a brief to "define what changes are necessary to emphasise functional and economic needs as well as higher education's role in creating an Asia-literate society" (Ingleson 1989 Vol. 1: 9).

<sup>6</sup> See Leal 1991 Vol.1, xxiv and xxxi.

<sup>7</sup>This document prompted a new analysis of institutional approaches to Asia because Asian studies was now identified as one of the four areas of national priority in higher education. The White Paper gave new impetus to those arguments which had been put forward over a long period of time to promote the significance of teaching Asian languages and studies, for the Commonwealth Government made explicit what it deemed to be their national priority in policy terms.

<sup>8</sup>Evans (1989) identified these trends as rapid economic growth, regional interdependence and strategic fluidity in the Ministerial Statement, Australia's Regional Security.

<sup>9</sup>See Lingard *et al.* (1993) for a comprehensive account of Labor initiatives in education policy.

<sup>10</sup>*Language for Export* was commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and its brief was to report on the need for language and language related skills for export.

<sup>11</sup>The Stanley Report was commissioned by AACLAME in 1989 as part of the implementation of the National Policy on Languages.

<sup>12</sup>Other scholars such as Dutton and Jeffreys (1993) and Davies (1993) employed Hunter's (1991) work in an attempt to critique the prioritisation of Asian studies in response to the White Paper and the Ingleson Report, and argued that the assumptions informing these documents were flawed. However, it could be argued that Ingleson's prescription for Asia literacy, like the *National Strategy* before it, operated on the assumption that legitimate exchange could take place between the intellectual, philosophical and utilitarian facets of a government-directed Asia literacy strategy. In Hunter's terms this was the position "between culture and utility" (1991, 11).

<sup>13</sup>See FitzGerald's (1978) speech to the Second National Conference of the ASAA and responses to the FitzGerald Report (1980) from Crawcour (1981), Osborne (1981) and Macknight (1980).

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