Multiculturalism as a Strategy for National Competitiveness:

The Case for Canada and Australia

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Like many other industrialized countries, Canada and Australia are experiencing low birth rates and an aging workforce (Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2008, 2011; Burke & Ng, 2006). As a result of these changing demographics, a sustained period of growth and low unemployment rates, both nations now face a shortage of skilled workers (KPMG, 2010; McDonald & Kippen, 2001). The Canadian and Australian governments have sought to address this issue by strategically increasing the immigration of skilled workers into their countries (CBC, 2012; Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIC], 2012). Historically, immigrants to Canada have come from Europe, but Asia and the Pacific Region have surpassed Europe as the principal source of immigrants over the past 30 years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010a). Similarly, Asian countries have changed from being completely absent to making up five of the top eight sources of immigrants to Australia (ABS, 2007). The result is an increasingly ethnocultural diversity in both Canadian and Australian populations.

In 1971, Canada became the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy (the Multiculturalism Act was later passed in 1988), and Australia followed suit in 1973, as a way to forge national identities (Mann, 2012; Stratton & Ang, 1994). Despite decades of popular support for multiculturalism in both nations, there is some backlash against immigrants and threat to multiculturalism in Canada (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; Dei, 2011) and in Australia (e.g., Klocker, 2004; Singh, 2011). This backlash is also evident in many other nations around the world, specifically prompting German Chancellor Angela Merkel to famously declare that multiculturalism has “utterly failed” in Germany (Bloemraad, 2011a). Literature on multiculturalism as a political philosophy and as a public policy has focused on issues such as individual socioeconomic mobility (Chong & Kim, 2006; Min 1999; Reitz, Zhang, & Hawkins, 2011), attitudes and backlash (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; Berry, 2006), nationalism and identity (Cameron & Berry, 2008; Citrin, Johnston, & Wright, 2012), and integration and assimilation (Bloemraad, 2007). However, little attention has been paid to how multiculturalism can be a strategy for national competitiveness. The purpose of the present article is to articulate how multiculturalism as a public policy can be an effective strategy for national competitiveness, in an era characterized by globalization, immigration, and changing demographics.

We first provide a brief historical account of how multiculturalism came about in both Canada and Australia. We then articulate how multiculturalism and strategic tolerance of differences can promote socioeconomic mobility for individuals, and act as the “glue” that binds immigrants and host country nationals together. We also demonstrate how multiculturalism can attract skilled talents necessary for nation building. Immigrants who retain their ties with their countries of origin (home countries) can serve as natural trade links for their countries of residence (host country), and contribute to a reverse “brain flow” rather than a brain gain/drain for the countries of origin/residence. We conclude by explicating that immigrants can be a source of competitive advantage for countries when a multiculturalism policy is in place.

Historical Context

Canada

Multiculturalism first came into being in Canada as a policy response to bilingualism and to the increasing number of immigrants. According to Mann (2012), the adoption of multiculturalism occurred earlier in Canada than in Australia for three reasons. First, an English-French tension persisted and the country needed a policy to move beyond the “new nationalism” that was distinctly British. Second, Canada abandoned its “White Canada” policy, which accepted migrants only from Britain, the US, and northern Europe (see Suyama, 1995). This dramatic policy change was in line with changing international circumstances, where former Western colonies in Asia and Africa petitioned the United Nations to remove racially discriminatory immigration policies. Third, Canada opened its doors to immigrants from non-European countries in large numbers about fifty years before Australia, and thus adopted immigration policies considerably earlier. An immigration policy was seen as essential to Canada’s long-term population sustainability and economic viability (Dib, 2006).

According to the 2011 census, immigrants make up two-thirds of Canada’s roughly two million population growth between 2006 and 2011, which is largely responsible for Canada’s economic growth (National Post, 2012). Historically, immigrants to Canada have come from Europe, but Asia and the Pacific region have replaced Europe as the principal source of immigrants over the past 30 years. Today, seven in 10 immigrants come from Asia and the Middle East (see Table 1), and it is estimated that one in three workers will be foreign born by the year 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2011a). The majority of immigrants (80 percent) reported a mother tongue other than English or French, with Chinese, Punjabi, Spanish, Arabic, and Tagalog making up the majority of languages spoken at home (Statistics Canada, 2011b).

**Table 1 – Canadian immigrants by top 10 source countries, ten-year period (2001-2010)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Country | Continent | No. of Immigrants | % of Total |
| China | Asia | 337,317 | 13.7% |
| India | Asia | 277,759 | 11.3% |
| Philippines | Asia | 191,121 | 7.7% |
| Pakistan | Asia | 109,369 | 4.4% |
| United States | North America | 85,560 | 3.5% |
| United Kingdom | Europe | 70,185 | 2.8% |
| Korea | Asia | 65,880 | 2.7% |
| Iran | Middle East | 63,478 | 2.6% |
| France | Europe | 54,032 | 2.2% |
| United Arab Emirates | Middle East | 44,298 | 1.8% |

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2010a)

In light of this ethnocultural diversity, the Canadian government in 1971, became the first country in the world to adopt a multicultural policy. The multicultural policy was created to encourage immigrants to retain their cultural heritage rather than to assimilate. The Multiculturalism Act, passed in 1988, aimed to help people overcome barriers related to race, ethnicity, and cultural or religious background. The Act was also a policy of inclusion and a means by which the Canadian government reaffirmed multiculturalism as a fundamental value of Canadian society and of the Government of Canada. All federal institutions must take multiculturalism into account in all their activities from hiring and promoting employees of all backgrounds to serving a diverse public. Therefore, the Canadian government is accountable for ensuring that they “carry on their activities in a manner that is sensitive and responsive to the multicultural reality of Canada” (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988: p.4).

Australia

Australia is a “settler” society because it is largely populated by people whose ancestors traveled to Australia from elsewhere during and after the colonial period (Stratton & Ang, 1994). In a similar vein to Canada, Australia had a White Australia policy (introduced by the Immigration Restriction Bill of 1901), which excluded coloured and non-European migrants. Given Australia’s imperial connection to Britain and, later, the post-war manufacturing and construction boom, this policy was driven by the need to construct a new cultural identity and build the nation (Stratton & Ang, 1994: p.127). As a result, the multicultural or non-English speaking background (NESB) section of the population during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, was primarily working class and of European descent (Colic-Peisker, 2011).

In the early 1970s, Australia followed the Canadian example of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism became the centrepiece of official government policy “… to improve the inclusion of ethnic minorities within national Australian culture” and to again create a distinctive national identity from Britain (Stratton & Ang, 1994: p.127). Further, the Australian Government replaced the White Australian policy with one more suited to its new economy. Specifically, the new Australian immigration policy was driven by an emerging and gradual need for skilled immigrants to sustain its economic growth and its burgeoning service economy. At about the same time, the demand for non-skilled immigrants decreased with the outsourcing of its manufacturing to countries with lower labor costs. The government introduced the “points test” system in 1979, thus firmly reneging on discriminatory immigration policies and reaffirming its strategic focus on skilled immigrants regardless of their ethnic or national origin. Multiculturalism was thus established “as ideology and policy in Australia” in the 1970s (Colic-Peisker, 2011, p.637).

By 2011/12, the Australian Census revealed that Asian countries represented six of the top eight countries as sources of skilled immigrants and sources of international students (ABS, 2012; Australian Government, 2012). Although the influx of migrants from Asian countries continued, multiculturalism as ideology and policy in Australia was under siege from the late 1990s onwards. Specifically, the change from Labour to Liberal Federal government in 1996 marks the start of what many regard as a post-multiculturalism period in Australia. In addition to change in Federal politics, events such as the 9/11 attacks to the Twin Towers in New York fuelled anti-Muslim sentiments and public antipathy for boat asylum seekers from Asia (Klocker & Dunn, 2003). Some Australian politicians have also shown a preference for denying rather than combating racism (Dunn & Nelson, 2011), evidenced in unequal employment outcomes for workers of NESB compared to their ESB counterparts (Colic-Peisker, 2011) and sporadic attacks on Indian students and youths of middle-Eastern appearance (Singh, 2011). Yet, there is widespread public recognition that racial prejudice exists in Australia (Dunn & Nelson, 2011). Analysts advise that this disconnect between political and public recognition of racism needs to be addressed, so that multiculturalism as ideology and public policy can again flourish in Australia. Yet, despite the Australian Labour Party (ALP) regaining power in 2006, it was not until February 2011 that the current ALP Government re-proclaimed multiculturalism as official policy (DIC, 2011). This new policy aimed to specifically combat racism (ABC News, 2011).

Multiculturalism and Strategic Tolerance

Multiculturalism is a political philosophy that is related to immigrant assimilation, integration, and adaptation (Berry, 1997). Drawing upon social psychology, Berry (1997, 1998) developed a typology on the acculturation process between members of the dominant group and members of the minority group along two dimensions: cultural preservation and cultural attractiveness (see Figure 1). The typology demonstrates the acculturation mode between members of minority groups (i.e., immigrants) and members of the dominant group (host country nationals). Under the assimilation approach, members of the minority group abandon their culture and adopt the culture of the host country. This approach entails immigrants giving up their (cultural) identities in favour of the culture of the host country. The naturalization process of becoming “an American” and the “melting pot” metaphor is an example of the assimilation process. Under the separation approach, minority group members seek to preserve their own cultures and reject the adoption of the host country culture. Interaction between immigrants and host country nationals is limited and the existence of ethnic enclaves (e.g., Chinatowns, Little India) is a result of this mode of interaction. Under the marginalization approach, minority group members have little interest in preserving their cultures or adopting the culture of the host country. As a result, individuals lose their own cultural identities and are also rejected by host country nationals. Finally, under the integration approach, both dominant and minority group members adopt and adapt to each other’s cultures. In other words, the positive aspects of both cultures are preserved, combined, or expanded to create a new culture (Tung, 1993). This approach typifies the multiculturalism approaches in contemporary Canada and Australia (Reitz & Sklar, 1997).

**Figure 1: Berry’s (1997, 1998) Modes of Acculturation**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Cultural Preservation | |
| Yes | No |
| Cultural Attractiveness | Yes | Integration | Assimilation |
| No | Separation | Marginalization |

In the US, the most common approach for immigrants to gain access to economic opportunities is through assimilation (Alba & Nee, 1997). Accordingly, becoming similar to the dominant group can bring about upward socio and economic mobility (Daneshvary Herzog, Hofler, & Schlottman, 1992; Rumbaut, 1997), while maintaining strong attachments to one’s native culture and language will negatively affect the assimilation process (cf. Ng & Sears, 2010). In other words, those who are not willing to assimilate will be left behind socioeconomically. In contrast, the integration approach allows immigrants to freely preserve their own cultures while also adopting elements of the host country culture. This approach also requires host country nationals to be open and tolerant. That is, mutual accommodation is required by both the dominant and minority groups. As a result, this approach is seen as the most inclusive and as promoting social and economic mobility for everyone. Suffice to say, the integration/multiculturalism approach appears to “lift all boats,” although not all ethnic groups integrate similarly and successfully (Reitz et al., 2011).

The contrasting approaches between “assimilation” and “integration” can be seen in the outcomes among immigrants to the US (assimilation), with those in Canada and Australia (multiculturalism) (Bloemraad, 2011b). In the US, second-generation Latinos (Mexican-Americans and other Latin Americans) have lower educational attainment and economic success than their Asian-American counterparts (Reitz et al., 2011), likely because Latinos are less willing to assimilate (Huntington, 2004; Yancey, 2003), a requirement for socioeconomic mobility in the US. In another study on comparing the acculturation outcomes between Canada and France, immigrant youths in Canada reported higher self-esteem and lower discrimination than their counterparts in France, because success in French society also requires assimilation, while Canada is more tolerant and accepting of ethnocultural differences (Berry & Sabatier, 2010). Another example is the different stances on multiculturalism between Australia and US. Multiculturalism is generally viewed as a threat to social unity and national identity in the US, but accepted as “integral to the Australian national culture and identity” (Stratton & Ang, 1994: p.126).

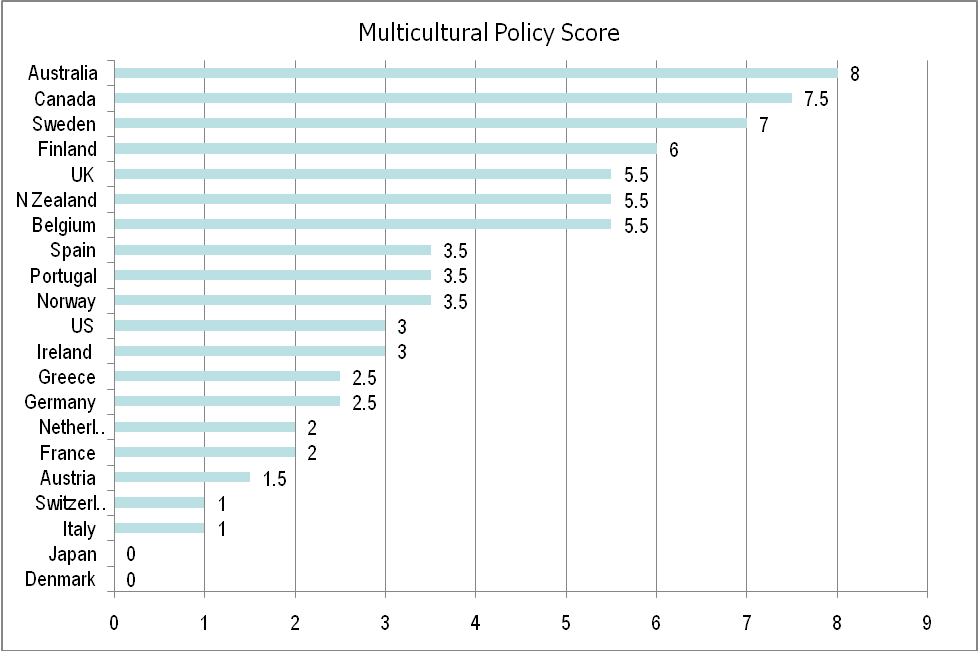
The level of inter-group tolerance of differences appears to be a key ingredient to successful integration. For example, Amy Chua (2007) in her book, *Day of Empire,* demonstrated that tolerance of cultural and religious differences promotes the rise of empires, while intolerance ultimately led to their decline. Human talent is distributed among diverse groups of people, and nations that are able to attract and utilize the best and the brightest without regard to ethnicity or religion will rise in power. In this regard, Chua chronicles the rise of empires from Persia and Rome, to the Mughals and Tang dynasties, and to the Dutch and British empires, and in each, she documents how strategic tolerance plays a role in the rise to dominance. Chua argues that while tolerance is key to attract the best talents from around the world, a nation will also require some form of social or political “glue” to unify and bind diverse people to a common purpose and identity. For example, the Romans extended citizenship to defeated enemies to assimilate them into the Roman empire. The lack of political “glue” will lead to intra-group conflicts and intolerance of each other and ultimately result in the demise of empires and superpowers. It should be noted that the Romans deemed the Hellenic and Germanic people incapable of adapting and, thus, Rome never achieved complete tolerance.

In line with Chua’s rationale, we contend that multiculturalism, as a public policy that fosters national identities, may be the political glue that holds people from different ethnicity and religion together. Our contention is supported by the fact that many Canadians and Australians see multiculturalism (unlike assimilation, which requires citizens to give up their cultural heritage) as a positive characteristic of their countries (Cameron & Berry, 2008; Satzewich, 2007; Stratton & Ang, 1994). It is also supported by views that acts of intolerance and racism, even if perpetrated by a small proportion of the dominant population, are detrimental to Canada’s and Australia’s national interests (e.g., Singh, 2011; Satzewich, 2007). Therefore it should not come as a surprise that 84 percent of Canadians held favourable views of multiculturalism and continued support for immigration (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010b).

Multiculturalism and Talent Attraction

In a research project that examines multiculturalism policies in 21 Western countries, Australia and Canada rank at the very top for having an inclusive approach to immigrant integration (see Figure 2). Both Canada and Australia were cited for having an official affirmation of multiculturalism, adoption of multiculturalism in school curriculum, inclusion of ethnic representation/sensitivity in the media, exemptions from dress codes, acceptance of dual citizenship, funding of ethnic groups and activities, funding of bilingual/mother-tongue education, and affirmative action for immigrants. In contrast, countries that espouse an assimilation approach to immigrant integration were ranked much lower (e.g., the US #11, France #16 respectively). In other words, Canada and Australia were recognized as having the broadest range of multicultural policies.

**Figure 2: Multiculturalism Policy Index Scores (2010)**



Source: Multiculturalism Policy Index (2010).

Canada and Australia both foster a climate of tolerance, whereby everyone who is ethnically and culturally different is welcomed. Promoting multiculturalism as a national identity (and implementing immigration policies that focus on skilled labor, as has been the case in Canada and Australia; e.g., see Dib, 2006; Hawthorne, 2005) has been hugely beneficial for both countries. For example, Canada has been able to attract a large number of human talents and financial capital, resulting in being placed among the most competitive of the G-8 nations (Businessweek, 2010; Uberoi, 2009). In turn, Australia has been able to attract international students (more than 60% come from Asian countries), who contributed AUD $16.3 billion to the Australian economy in 2010-11 (AEI, 2011) and labor to thousands of jobs (Singh, 2011). This strategy of inclusion is consistent with Florida’s (2002) hypothesis that tolerance results in “low barriers to entry.” In Florida’s (2002) formulation, tolerance is composed of the “melting pot” index (i.e., the proportion of foreign born people), the gay index, the bohemian index (e.g., the concentration of artists, writers, musicians, and other artistic professionals), and the racial integration index (i.e., levels of segregation between ethnic and racial groups). Thus, the more tolerant a place is to new people, the more talent and skills it will attract. In turn, human capital is related to economic development such that attracting talented individuals will attract “new economy” jobs. The influx of skilled and entrepreneur immigrants has thus far provided valuable economic and social contributions to Canada and Australia, and raised the standard of living in these two countries (Collins, 2003; Reitz, 2007). The net result has been a brain gain for Canada and Australia.

In light of this climate of tolerance, it is no coincidence that both Canada and Australia are highly ranked in their immigration integration efforts (Multicultural Policy Index, 2010). In addition, it is not surprising that their immigration policies, which strategically focus on skills and job readiness, have attracted a large number of skilled and investor immigrants. For example, in 2010, two-thirds of immigrants to Canada (186,913) were skilled and business/investor immigrants, 22 percent (60,220) were family reunifications, 9 percent (24,696) were refugees, and 2 percent (8,845) belonged to the “other” categories (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010b). Similarly, migration has transformed Australia’s cultural and linguistic diversity over the decades. As at 30 June 2011, 27% of the population was born overseas (6.0 million people) (ABS, 2012). Further, Australia's population increased by 359,600 to reach 22.7 million for the year ending June, 2012. Net overseas migration accounted for 58 per cent of this growth, with the remaining 42 per cent due to natural increase (births minus deaths) (ABS, 2012). Of the 211,458 temporary visas granted in 2009-2010, approximately 12 percent (26,225) were in the Business category, 51 percent (107,243) in the Student / Higher education / Vocational education and training categories, and the remaining 37 percent (26,225) were in the Visitor / Working holiday / Other categories. Further, of the 84,014 permanent visas granted in 2009-2010, 47 percent (39,564) were in the Skill category, 41 percent (34,592) in the Family category and approximately 12% (9,858) in the Special Eligibility / Humanitarian category (ABS, 2012). Further, in a recent Gallup poll (2010) involving 347,713 residents from 148 countries, Canada was selected as the number one destination of choice among would be immigrants with a college degree (although the US remains as the number one choice for respondents without a college education). Additionally, only 46 percent of immigrants to the US took up American citizenship, in contrast to 79 percent for immigrants to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011c), suggesting that the assimilation approach may not be as effective as the multicultural approach in cultivating committed and engaging citizens as originally thought. It is important for immigrants to become naturalized citizens because they have higher employment rates, are more likely to be in higher-status occupations, and have higher earnings than non-citizen immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2011c).

In his updated book, *The Rise of the Creative Class,* Florida (2012) also pointed to the seemingly contradiction between talent attraction and income inequity. For example, cities such as San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara (Silicon Valley), New York-New Jersey-Long Island (financial centre), and Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana (entertainment hub) report among the highest wage inequities. Although these cities are world-class hubs and attract the best talents from around the world, the lack of government sponsored programs (e.g., social safety nets) when compared to Canada and Australia (Boychuk, 2004; Kangas & Palme, 2000) is likely to contribute to the high income inequities, a common issue for many first generation immigrants. Taken together, we conclude that the absence of a requirement to assimilate (i.e., melting pot policy), greater tolerance, lower socioeconomic disparity, and efforts to promote immigrants economic wellbeing all contribute to the high levels of attraction among prospective immigrants to Canada and Australia.

Multiculturalism and Natural Trade Links

Immigrants to Canada and Australia also form diasporas outside of their home countries or countries of origin, and they play vital roles in facilitating trade and investments between their countries of origin and their new countries of residence (host countries). Many recent immigrants to Canada (see Table 1) and Australia (ABS, 2012; Australian Government, 2012) come from emerging economies (e.g., China and India) and they become natural trade links between their countries of origin (COO) and countries of residence. According to Peter Hall, chief economist for Export Development Canada, “new Canadians have a natural advantage in their COO markets because they speak the language, they know the culture and they understand how business works in their home countries.” (The Globe and Mail, December 13, 2012). He projected that exports will grow at nearly 10 percent, versus the 1.5 percent Canada has been experiencing in the past, simply by matching exports to countries represented in the ethnic makeup of the Canadian population.

In addition, a phenomena is emerging in the flow of talent between countries. Using Canada as an example, what we have seen in the past is that immigrants contributed to the “brain gain” for the country of residence (host country) and “brain drain” for the country of origin (home country) (Tung, 2008). In recent years, however, many immigrants return to their countries of origin after acquiring a Western education (Tung, 2008; Tung & Lazarova, 2006). Tung further explained that since many immigrants value their Canadian citizenship and quality of life in Canada, they simply shuttle back and forth between their countries of origin and Canada. In this regard, the immigrants who go back and forth between two hubs (their countries of residence and their host countries) are referred to as “astronauts” and contribute to a reverse “brain flow” or “brain circulation.” This emerging mobility pattern is, therefore, an outcome of multiculturalism that can benefit all countries involved.

Nevertheless, critics of multiculturalism also raised concerns regarding unhealthy ties to immigrants’ countries of origins (Citrin et al., 2012). Such unhealthy ties are reflected, for example, in the stories of Croat-Canadians who returned to Croatia to fight in the civil war, or diasporic Italians who live outside of Italy but ran in Italian elections, or the number of Lebanese Canadians who needed evacuation during the war with Israel (see Satzewich, 2007).

Notwithstanding such disadvantages of multiculturalism, there are many advantages for both the COO and the host country as a result of the latter embracing a multiculturalism policy. For example, immigrants provide transnational social networks that facilitate trade and market opportunities for their countries of residence, introduce the culture of their home countries to their host countries, and generally improve the image of their countries of origin in their countries of residence (Chand & Tung, 2011). At the same time, they contribute to the technology transfer and capacity development (e.g., human capital) to their countries of origin (Lin, 2010). Immigrants who maintain ties with their home countries remit payments to family members back in their countries of origin, which is an important source of support for developing or struggling economies (Mirabaud, 2009; Semyonov & Gorodzeisky, 2008). Overall, we believe that the benefits outweigh the costs of multiculturalism. In particular, we believe the reverse brain flow and brain circulation benefits the host countries as well as the rest of the world.

Conclusion

Both Canada and Australia have developed immigration policies based on economic and changing demographic imperatives. However, the political “glue” that bound the ethnocultural diversity in both countries was multiculturalism. There is growing evidence that multiculturalism facilitates immigrant citizenship and political integration (Bloemraad, 2007). The comparative case of Canada and Australia support this evidence. Both countries nurtured, albeit with different levels of success, national cultures of inclusiveness and tolerance aimed at attracting and retaining skilled migrants from different backgrounds to address their changing demographics and economic growth. Governments had a pivotal role in encouraging the (non)acceptance and (in)tolerance of migrants of different backgrounds (e.g., Betts, 2003). For example, multiculturalism and being part of Asia was specifically recognised as a valuable and integral to Australian culture and identity when Prime Minister Paul Keating said that Australia is a “multicultural nation in Asia” (Stratton & Ang, 1994).” This recognition was later reinforced by the ALP government’s 2011 multiculturalism policy aimed at combating racism (ABC News, 2011; DIC, 2011), which was evident during the so-called post-multiculturalism period in Australia (circa 1996-2010; Betts, 2003).

In sum, Canada and Australia are recognized pioneers and leaders in multiculturalism (e.g., Multiculturalism Policy Index, 2010). Two salient characteristics of the Canadian and Australian immigration histories in the last five decades are (i) the immigration policies driven by economic and changing demographic factors and (ii) the government-led multiculturalism policy as part of the national identity. These two characteristics have been essential to Canada’s and Australia’s long-term population sustainability and economic viability. However, more can be done, possibly more in Australia than in Canada, for multiculturalism to yield real benefits such as the full and equitable utilization of its multicultural workforce. Future endeavours will be more effectively achieved by continued government intervention, such as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), and recognition that public awareness of racism and education of multiculturalism is needed. Our principal recommendation to countries facing economic imperatives and changing demographics is to embrace multiculturalism as a strategy to enhance their international competitiveness. Government-led multiculturalism can be the political glue that allows the advantages of a diverse population (e.g., economic growth and healthy “brain flow”) to outweigh the disadvantages (e.g., racism and unhealthy COO ties).

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