

Foreword

For a century or more, Australians have been interested in how our social and economic trends stand up against other nations. Such comparisons have helped us to identify bragging rights when things here are done particularly well, to show us where our performance is not good when compared with what is being achieved abroad, and to highlight what new issues and policies we ought to be thinking about.

Over that century, of course, the international comparisons of Australia's performance were mostly made against the other English-speaking countries with which, to varying degrees, we shared a common history – notably the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.

A quantum jump in the range of countries that became comparable to Australia took place over the late 1970s and the 1980s, when the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) first established a body of readily accessible information on a wide variety of social and economic trends in its member states. As a result, it became more feasible to show how Australia measured up against the rich countries of continental Europe, North America and Japan. Korea joined the OECD in 1996; however, there were long delays in the incorporation of Korean material into OECD data and studies.

Over recent years, a number of studies have tapped into the rich vein of what can be learned from a detailed analysis of how Australia's experience and trends look when compared with what is happening in one or more countries in Asia. It is inevitable that we will see many more Asian-Australian comparative studies over coming years and there is little doubt that they will be of great value to Australians; Australia is increasingly linked with Asian countries in trade, regional strategic interests and the exchange of people. More importantly, the social and economic variety of societies and policies across Asia provides great opportunity for

study and comparison and change in Asia is happening at a breathtaking pace.

The conference on generational change, hosted by the University of Sydney-based Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific in November 2005, is an outstanding example of the fresh insights achieved when experts from an Asian country and Australia are brought together to consider a topical issue. The focus of the conference was the nature and implications of generational change in Australia and Korea, with a strong emphasis on looking forward and suggesting important policy responses to key generational change problems.

Korea and Australia have much in common: on a global scale both are mid-sized economies; both are experiencing rapid change; both have large middle classes; both put a high value on education; and both populations are quick to adopt new technologies. At the same time, there are key differences. For example, demographic change is more rapid in Korea; Korea has a particularly powerful network for broadband; and compared with Korea the Australian workforce has a substantial build up of funded assets in superannuation (pension funds).

The Australia-Korea Foundation, which is, in itself, reflective of the important relationship between the two countries, provided the financial support for this conference. The Foundation was established in 1992, and is funded by the Australian Government, to broaden and to strengthen the relationship between Australia and Korea. On behalf of the Board of the Australia-Korea Foundation, I thank the Australian and Korean researchers who participated in the conference on generational change, and I congratulate The Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific on its initiative and achievement supporting the development and publication of this book.

Don Stammer

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