

PART 1:

1948–1957

The first scholarship to be considered in this book is the South-East Asian Scholarship Scheme, which commenced in 1948. As the name suggests, the scheme was intended for South-East Asia and was closely tied to Australian diplomatic efforts in that region, addressing the nationalist and anticolonial movements that were coming to the fore as the impacts of the end of the Second World War became apparent. The beginning of this scholarship has determined the starting point of this book, but this period in Australian Government scholarship policy was not driven by the South-East Asian Scholarship Scheme, but rather by the Colombo Plan, which was agreed upon in 1950. It was the Colombo Plan concept and model that dominated thinking in Australian aid and scholarships over the 1950s.

While the Colombo Plan model dominated the thinking of Australia's international aid policymakers, bureaucrats and politicians considered the development needs of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea as being at a different stage. Access to senior secondary education was limited to those able to travel to continental Australia (with or without a scholarship), and there were no specific tertiary scholarships available for residents of TPNG.

This part of the book ends at the beginning of a new scholarship, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, which again challenged Australia's understanding of itself within the British Empire in the twentieth century.

Cyril Chan and Charters Towers

The Australian Government was mandated by the United Nations to work towards development in Papua and New Guinea. In relation to education the approach was, in many ways, in line with the concurrent Colombo Plan approach to training citizens of countries in the region. However, non-European Territorians were subjects, rather than citizens, and access to higher levels of education in Papua and New Guinea was difficult if not impossible. This ensured that the policy formula based on the Colombo Plan could not work in practice. Matters of immigration, citizenship and rights of entry tangled the administrators and the Australian Government in knots.

The confusion in the Australian policy and legislation was personified in the case of Cyril Chan. Chan was born in Rabaul, but his parents had emigrated to the Territory of Papua and New Guinea (TPNG) from China before his birth. This ensured his citizenship status was complicated by several factors, including race. Chan was sponsored by the Territory Administration (via a scheme to support non-European students to complete secondary school in Australia) to undertake his secondary schooling in Australia, along with around 300 other 'non-European' students from Papua and New Guinea.¹ In 1954, Chan was attending high school in Bowral, New South Wales. The headmaster held 'a very high opinion of this lad's ability'.²

Chan and his supporters had sought a Commonwealth Scholarship for Cyril Chan through the University of Sydney, but university officials had told him that because his parents were resident in New Guinea, he was ineligible for a scholarship designed for Australian citizens. The first proposed solution was to broaden eligibility for public service cadships to

1 This figure is changeable depending on the date and source. A report in 1957 notes 99 students having been sponsored since 1954 (JA Lee, 'Review of the Native Secondary Scholarship Scheme, 14 March 1958', A452, 1961/2382, National Archives of Australia (NAA)). A newspaper article in 1959 discusses the 118 students having been sent to Australia for Secondary School ('Most Students Now Have Jobs', *South Pacific Post*, 13 March 1959). In 1956 the cohort was 291 students – '56 natives, 28 mixed race and 207 Asian students', 'Notes on Discussion on Guidance and Supervision of Papua and New Guinea Students in Australia, Director of Education, Port Moresby, 1956', A452, 1961/2382, NAA.

2 'Letter from HR Cooper Regarding Cyril Chan', A452, 1958/743, NAA.

British citizens and ‘protected persons’ in the territories.³ The Department of Territories sought advice from the Commonwealth Office of Education in Sydney, writing:

our Minister is interested in this case and has asked if it is a fact that any resident of Papua and New Guinea is debarred from the Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme?⁴

The Commonwealth Office of Education confirmed that residents of Papua and New Guinea were in fact eligible, although they noted that the circumstances of Mr Chan’s case were still being investigated. This related to his Chinese heritage – there was significant uncertainty as to whether his parents were considered resident or subjects of Australia ‘enough’ for eligibility for the scholarship program – highlighting the complex interplay of race-based immigration policies, Territory Administration policies and education policies that students like Cyril Chan had to negotiate in order to access higher education in Australia. The decision regarding the eligibility of residents of Papua and New Guinea had been decided two years previously, when the government accepted a recommendation from the Universities Commission that these students could apply for a Commonwealth Scholarship, and would compete against students in the state in which they completed their matriculation exam. Officials at the time considered providing Papua and New Guinea with a quota of Commonwealth Scholarship places, but they decided that:

Should the Territory authorities provide education at the secondary level, there could perhaps be a case for reviewing the present position either with the objective of considering the practicability of adopting a special scheme, or of providing a special quota of places within the Commonwealth’s scholarship scheme.⁵

3 ‘Briefing Note for Minister Hasluck’, A452, 1958/743, NAA. Cyril Chan may have been considered a British citizen or subject because his parents had migrated to Papua and New Guinea from another British colonial territory. Nevertheless, Chan was eventually considered a citizen of an Australian territory. These complications were caused by Australia’s race-based immigration policies and the problems that this caused for an understanding of Australian citizenship. A similar confusion was also experienced by the United States of America when considering its own territories outside of the ‘mainland’ such as the Philippines. This is discussed at length by Daniel Immerwahr in *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (London: The Bodley Head, 2019).

4 ‘Letter to Commonwealth Office of Education’, A452, 1958/743, NAA.

5 ‘Acting PM Fadden to Minister Hasluck Letter, 1952’, A452, 1958/743, NAA.

The confusion of the administration in Port Moresby and the Department of Territories about the eligibility of students from Papua and New Guinea is clear from the archival material. It is highly likely that this confusion at senior levels of decision-making stymied the attempts of other students to access the Commonwealth Scholarship, particularly if they did not have the persistence that Cyril Chan and his supporters showed.

Cyril Chan was eventually offered a Commonwealth Scholarship, and completed Arts and Law degrees at the University of Sydney. The Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, took great interest in Chan's progress, and the student kept the minister apprised of his progress until his graduation.⁶ Chan's case was not plain sailing once he received a scholarship; he lost his scholarship after repeatedly failing an English class. This led to a proposal being put to the Territory Administrator that non-European territory students required additional support during their university studies, support similar to that provided to secondary school students from the territories.⁷ Chan was nevertheless considered a success story by the administration in the territories, and featured in the *Rabaul Times* after he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts.⁸

The experiences of Cyril Chan demonstrate how the scholarship policies of the Australian Government were impacted by and tied to other policies, especially those relating to TPNG. The colonial subject status of Papuans and New Guineans reflected a confusing collection of ideas around race, residency and entitlement. His was certainly not the first case from Australia's territories that challenged the White Australia Policy. The Australian bureaucracy had been asked to address this issue in the early 1950s when seeking to take over the administration of the Cocos Islands from the United Kingdom. Section Three of the Immigration Act created a loophole that allowed non-mainland territories other than Tasmania to be excluded from the standard rights of travel associated with citizenship. In the Cocos Islands the Australian Government had agreed on a specific solution, after much negotiation, but it was very clear that the Immigration Department would not allow for exceptions from TPNG.⁹

6 'Letters from Cyril Chan to Minister Hasluck (Various)', A452, 1958/743, NAA.

7 'Letter, Administration to Department of Territories', A452, 1958/743, NAA.

8 'Graduated in Sydney – Extract from Rabaul Times', A452, 1958/743, NAA.

9 David Goldsworthy, 'British Territories and Australian Mini-Imperialism in the 1950s', *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 41, no. 3 (1995): 356–72, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8497.1995.tb01266.x.

Cyril Chan was only able to access his entitlement (to a Commonwealth Scholarship) because of the support of high-status individuals in Australia. His entitlement was constantly questioned, based on his Chinese ethnicity, his birthplace and, during the term of his scholarship, the wealth of his family. Access to the Australian mainland was restricted for non-European (or non-white) residents and citizens, making the entitlements of Australian citizenship impossible. Despite a requirement under the trusteeship obligations that the Australian Government work towards the development of TPNG in preparation for independence, administrators and politicians decided that independence was so far away that access to higher education could be extremely limited.

Papuan and New Guinean students like Cyril Chan began their schooling in Australia at secondary level. These students, often in their late teens or early twenties, were often placed with much younger classmates, because of the lack of access to senior secondary education in the territories. This created problems for many students. In one circumstance, 10 students (all male) were placed in secondary school in Charters Towers, Queensland in 1957, and resided in a boarding house managed by a Mr McCulloch. Events in Charters Towers became a demonstration of the problems faced by students, teaching staff, scholarship administrators and territory administrators. JA Lee, Acting Senior Guidance Officer in the Territory Administration, wrote about the students in his report of his Tour of Duty (his visit to students in Australia in 1957). He noted the problems with the accommodation:

It is quite evident that the real difficulty at Charters Towers has been the hostel accommodation and supervision ... management appears to be quite hopeless and I recommend that all students now at the hostel be removed at the end of the year.¹⁰

Despite these warnings, the situation soon deteriorated in Charters Towers, with a group of four students sent back to Port Moresby having been stripped of their scholarships. The incident was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* with the headline: 'Natives Taken from School', noting that the students were drinking with a sailor. The Territories Assistant Administrator is quoted in the article as blaming the behaviour on lax attitudes by hostel managers.¹¹ This view was supported by Minister Hasluck, who was quoted

10 JA Lee, 'Mr JA Lee – Tour of Duty in Australia – April 25th – June 13th', A452, 1961/2382, NAA.

11 'Natives Taken from School', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1957.

in an article in the Melbourne *Herald* blaming those who led the boys astray, rather than the boys themselves.¹² The Territory Administrator DM Cleland was compelled to explain the decision to return the students to TPNG after stories of the incident were published in metropolitan newspapers. He wrote that despite the four students being warned about their 'attitude', their behaviour was not meeting expected standards. Cleland noted that 'all four students were well above the age of their class and below the intellectual norm for Australian students. They showed no promise of success in the Junior Certificate'.¹³ This assessment was paired with news that on their return to the territory, the four students would be placed in employment.

These students, returned home for poor behaviour, were different to Cyril Chan in another important way. Even within the territory, treatment and rights were related to ethnicity. Expectations of academic success were linked to ethnicity – a Melbourne psychologist, Dr Alex Sinclair, visited the territory for three months in 1958 and it was his view that 'while the Asian students were doing well, the natives appeared likely to present a picture of dismal failure'.¹⁴ Dr Sinclair objected to the fact that students from the territory were treated like other students coming from South-East Asia – 'without any realisation that the Papua New Guinea background was considerably more primitive'.¹⁵

The students of Papua New Guinean background did not have universally poor experiences. Many students were supported well through their studies, aided by the structures put in place by the Rotary Club, Apex and other organisations to support Colombo Plan students. The *South Coast Bulletin*, a newspaper printed in Southern Queensland, carried a photo in August 1959 of students from New Guinea and New Britain – calling them a 'happy group' of boys unable to return home for the holidays.¹⁶ The boys were listed as attending secondary schools in Brisbane, and it was noted that they were all 21 years old. This would make the boys significantly older than their fellow students. This links the experience of these students to both the psychologist's report and the administrator's report regarding the

12 'Don't Blame Native Boys Says Minister', *Melbourne Herald*, 24 July 1957.

13 'Papuan Students – Charters Towers, Letter from DM Cleland, 31 July 1957', A452, 1961/2382, NAA. A more flattering assessment of the capabilities of students from the territories describes them as having 'inadequate intellectual equipment'; A452, 1961/2382, NAA.

14 'Report Does Not Satisfy Director', *South Pacific Post*, 3 October 1958.

15 'Report Does Not Satisfy Director'.

16 'Happy Group of New Guinea and New Britain Secondary Students', *South Coast Bulletin*, 28 August 1959.

students from Charters Towers – these students were expected to enter into Australian schools despite having little educational preparation, being older than their year level peers and coming from immensely different cultural and social backgrounds.

As has been noted, one of the reasons for students coming to Australia for secondary schooling was the lack of secondary schools in Papua and New Guinea. This created a situation where ‘native’ students in Papua and New Guinea were asked to travel to Australia for schooling, and expected to perform at an Australian senior secondary level, despite no preparation for that level of schooling, or forced into newly established ‘secondary schools’ that were not teaching at the secondary school standard. The inequity of access was made very clear in a newspaper article published in the *South Pacific Post* in September 1958, discussing the higher standards to be imposed on ‘native’ students in Australian secondary schools in the future. In the article, the Director of Education, DGT Roscoe, noted that the administration intended opening two secondary schools in the territory early next year: ‘These will be of European type and will be attended by European children and children of mixed race, but a number of selected native students will also be admitted’.¹⁷ That schools were being established in the territory to cater to non-native students, while academic standards were also being increased for those same students while they were in Australia, seems a contradiction not recognised by the administrators. Asking students to conform to an entirely foreign concept of education, and then frustrating their access to that education marked this period of Australian administration in TPNG.

17 ‘Natives’ Exams to Be Made Tougher’, *South Pacific Post*, 16 September 1958.

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