

Lees catching up with Joneses

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September 5, 2006

WHEN it comes to Australian surnames, the Smiths, Joneses and Williamses are still way out in front, but the Nguyens, Lees and Wongs are catching up fast, according to an analysis of electoral rolls.

It shows that Nguyen, a Vietnamese name, is now our seventh most popular surname, with Le or Lee 14th. Other Asian names to figure prominently include Tran, again Vietnamese, and the Chinese Wong and Chan.

Michael Dove, the managing director of the research company MD&A in Melbourne, said the increase in Asian names was probably far greater than recorded. The rolls were also more than three years old.

"Because the figures are based primarily on the rolls, they inevitably understate the number of new, younger migrants who either haven't won the vote or who are under 18," Mr Dove said.

The findings accord with a count of last year's Sydney White Pages. Smith topped the list with 7857 entries, but the top 10 also included Lee (4992), Nguyen (4136) and Wong (2530). Mr Dove said the Smiths still held a big lead nationwide, numbering more than 100,000. The Joneses, Williamses and Browns came in with about 50,000, with the Wilsons and Taylors about 40,000.

There were more than 30,000 Nguyens and about 20,000 Johnsons, Martins and Whites. Of the top 20 surnames originating outside the British Isles, 17 were of Asian origin.

While Mr Dove said the data, collected for a worldwide study of surnames conducted by University College London, reflected the increasing cultural diversity of Australians' background, the Nguyen example could be misleading.

The range of surnames from other migrant nations, such as Italy and Greece, was far greater, so no surname would repeat on the same scale as the Vietnamese one. "Names such as Nguyen are much, much more common than any other in Vietnam. It's like Smith, but many times over."

Despite the shortcomings of surnames, which may disguise the effects of Anglo-Asian marriages, Mr Dove said the "geo-demographic" findings were a reasonably accurate indicator of ethnic background.

They are of value to organisations, ranging from the hard-sell to health care, seeking to interpret customer databases to target products and services.

The British study found people with the surnames Riddle, McRae and Granger were more likely to leave Britain and start a new life abroad.

TOP NAMES

The most common surnames in Australia, their origin and which state or territory they are most likely to occur in:

- **SMITH** (English, Tas)
- **JONES** (Welsh, Tas)
- **WILLIAMS** (Welsh, Tas)
- **BROWN** (English, Tas)
- **WILSON** (Scottish, NT)
- **TAYLOR** (English, NT)
- **NGUYEN** (Vietnam, Vic)
- **JOHNSON** (English, Tas)
- **MARTIN** (English, SA)
- **WHITE** (English, SA)

