

Nguyens keeping up with the Joneses

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When it comes to surnames, the Nguyens are keeping up with the Smiths and the Joneses.

Analysis of the international spread of family names has revealed Nguyen is the seventh most common surname in Australia after Smith, Jones, Williams, Brown, Wilson and Taylor.

Michael Dove - managing director of Melbourne-based company MD&A, which provided and helped analyse Australian data for a study on surnames by University College London - said of the top 20 Australian names originating from outside the British Isles, all but three were of Asian origin.

"The data is reflecting the diversity of the cultural background," Mr Dove told AAP.

"One of the things that is probably quite surprising is that the non-British names are so dominated by Asian names."

Mr Dove said the dominance of Asian names compared to those from other countries with large populations of migrants in Australia could be explained by the fact that many Asian surnames were extremely common in Asia, while there was more of a range of surnames in Europe.

For example, Greek, Greek Cypriot and Italian names are often tied to a particular village or region, while Nguyen is used widely throughout Vietnam.

"There is much more diversity of Greek names and Italian names than in Vietnamese, Chinese and Hong Kong names," Mr Dove said.

Cornish names, while not numerically strong in Australia, are well represented there compared to in the United Kingdom.

A total of 39 Cornish names are more common in Australia than they are in the UK.

Cornish names in Australia are most heavily concentrated in South Australia - six of the top 10.

University College London professor of geography Richard Webber led the British study with Pablo Mateos looking at 20,000 of the more common surnames using electoral records and census data.

Professor Webber said the prevalence of Cornish names in South Australia reflected the fact that many people migrated because of economic and geographical factors.

"In Cornwall in the late 19th Century, many of the mines declined and they had to find other employment," Professor Webber said.

"Many of the Cornish wanted to continue to be miners so they went elsewhere in the world where there were hard metal mines.

"South Australia was particularly where the activity was going on."

Other British names are now more prevalent in Australia than in the UK.

Mr Dove said the Sheathers had found the Australian climes more to their liking.

"Either because of migration, or due to admirable fertility, people with those names are more than 28 times as likely to be found in Australia than in the UK, mostly in NSW or the ACT," Mr Dove said.

The British study found people with the surnames Riddle, McRae and Granger were more likely than any others to leave Britain and start a new life abroad, but the Baggotts, Blewitts and Ruddocks were far more likely to stay at home.