

WHY SHOULD ASIA MATTER TO CHRISTCHURCH?

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Introduction

Why should Asia matter to Christchurch? Why indeed, when the statistics show us that Christchurch is one of New Zealand's most ethnically homogeneous cities?

Almost eighteen percent of Christchurch's population is born overseas and like most of the New Zealanders who are born overseas, are born in England. Eighty-seven percent of people in the Canterbury region only speak one language. Almost seventy-eight percent of people living in the Canterbury region identify with the European ethnic group, compared to 67.6 percent for New Zealand as a whole.¹

The diversity of "Asia"

Asia is a remarkably diverse term. It is a term used by geographers to describe a particular part of the world, though even geographers don't agree on what and what not to include. Statistics New Zealand considers Asia to stretch from Afghanistan in the West to Indonesia in the East, while Asia New Zealand's definition is narrower than that. We exclude what should be called West Asia, but what is more commonly known as the Middle East, but include every other part of Statistics New Zealand's definition. 'Asia' is an even less helpful term when trying to describe populations in New Zealand who come from countries within the Asian region. Sixty percent of the world's population lives in Asia and there is a huge amount of diversity between and within those born in countries in the Asian region. So when Statistics New Zealand talks about "Asians" they are referring to the population of New Zealand who identify with an Asian ethnicity, whether they are born in Asia or not.

Christchurch's Asian population

Christchurch's population that identifies as Asian is eight percent of its total population (or 26,631 people). This compares to a national population of almost 10 percent. The vast majority of Christchurch's Asian population was born in Asia (84 percent), though 4,251 people of Asian ethnicity were born in Christchurch (16 percent).

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all data comes from Statistics New Zealand

These data show clearly that not all of Christchurch's Asian population is migrants. When we look at the growth of Asian populations, we shouldn't assume that that growth is caused by migration from Asia. Asians have migrated to New Zealand for over a century, since the 1860s, and arrived in New Zealand long before other migrant groups, particular those from Eastern Europe and the large wave of Pacific migration. Many Asians are well established in New Zealand and many New Zealanders of Asian ethnicity have had family in New Zealand for more generations than many New Zealanders of English ancestry.

We know from Statistics New Zealand projections for New Zealand's population generally that the New Zealand-born Asian population is set to increase significantly in the next twenty years. This projection is borne out by other research that Asia:NZ have commissioned looking at Auckland's Asian population² and New Zealand's Asian population generally³, and we can say confidently that the same will be the case for Christchurch. To that end, Asia:NZ will be producing a report in July that will examine in close detail Christchurch's Asian population.⁴ However, using 2001 census data, Statistics New Zealand projected that the Asian ethnic groups in Christchurch will reach a population of approximately 37,300 people by 2016. This is a growth of 89.3 per cent or 17,600 people.

Christchurch City is becoming more ethnically diverse over time. In 1991, the Pacific Peoples, Asian and Other ethnic groupings made up 4.1 per cent of Christchurch city's total population. This equates to 12,015 people. By 2001, this proportion had grown by 127.8 per cent to 8.4 per cent of Christchurch city's total population, or 27,366 people. In 2006, these three groups had grown further by 42.7 per cent to make up 11.2 per cent of the population, or 39,063 people. Since 1991, the Asian ethnic groups have had the greatest population growth out of the three groups, with an increase of 20,439 people, equating to a growth of 330 per cent.⁵

² Ward Friesen (2008), *Diverse Auckland: The Face of New Zealand in the Twenty-First Century?* Outlook Paper No.6, Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation

³ Richard Bedford and Elsie Ho, (forthcoming), *Asians in New Zealand: Implications of a Changing Demography*, Outlook Paper No. 7, Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation.

⁴ Ward Friesen (forthcoming), *Asians in Christchurch*, Outlook Paper No.8. Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation

⁵ Data in this and following paragraphs come from Fleur Thorpe, Jenni Marr and Jill Richardson (2007) *The Migrants Report 2007: a demographic profile of ethnic minority migrant groups in Christchurch City*, Christchurch: Christchurch City Council. Retrieved from <http://www.ccc.govt.nz/Reports/2007/TheMigrantsReport2007/TheMigrantsReport2007.pdf> [May 9 2008].

Major Asian populations in Christchurch

Christchurch has five major populations that identify with particular countries in Asia. In some cases, people may identify with a country and an ethnicity. So, for example, someone from Malaysia may identify themselves as being Malaysian Chinese, which is of Malaysian nationality but Chinese ethnicity. Even within countries, someone may identify themselves as a Gujurati Indian, which is an Indian from the Gujurat region in India; or perhaps as a Fijian Indian, that is a Fijian national but of Indian ethnicity. So, where for example, we see that four percent of Christchurch's ethnically Asian population identify as being Chinese, we should not automatically assume that that population is born in China. After Chinese, the next four biggest groups from Asia in Christchurch are, in order, Koreans (two percent), Indians, Japanese and Filipino, all at one percent or less of Christchurch's Asian population.

The multi-lingual Asian population in Christchurch

The vast majorities of people of Asian ethnicity in New Zealand speak two or more languages and is true in Christchurch as it is elsewhere. While Christchurch in general is one of New Zealand's most mono-lingual cities, reflecting its more homogeneous population, amongst Christchurch's population of Asian ethnicity we see a great diversity of languages spoken. Other than English, which is spoken by the vast majority of those of Asian ethnicity, other dominant languages include Sinitic (or Chinese), Korean, Northern Chinese (or Mandarin), Yue (or Cantonese), Japanese, Hindi, Tagalog and Punjabi. Having access to such a multi-lingual population is one of the most over-looked benefits of migration and a diversifying society.⁶

Where Asians live in Christchurch

The Chinese ethnic group has a strong location pattern in Christchurch. People in this ethnic group tend to cluster in the Christchurch's central city, around Cathedral Square, which we could attribute to student accommodation around this area. This clustering around the CBD is also mirrored by Auckland's Asian population.⁷ Amongst Christchurch's population that identify with the Chinese

⁶ See Friesen (2008)

⁷ see Friesen (2008)

ethnicity, high proportions also live in the northwest of metropolitan Christchurch in Riccarton, Riccarton West, Wharenui and Upper Riccarton, as well as around the University of Canterbury and the former Christchurch College of Education. High proportions of Korean people live in similar areas to that of the Chinese ethnic group, such as in Riccarton, Hawthornden, Wairarapa and Belfast South Area. The main concentrations of people who identify with the Indian ethnic group occur in the Upper Riccarton, Avon Loop and Linwood Area Units.⁸

In 2006, out of the seven wards that make up Christchurch City, the Riccarton Wigram Ward had the highest proportion of its population belonging to Asian ethnic groups, at 13.5 per cent or 8,208 people. The Fendalton-Waimairi Ward had the second highest proportion of Asian peoples at 11.9 per cent or 6,303 people. The two largest groups in the Fendalton-Waimairi Ward were both Asian, with Chinese being the biggest group with 3,141 people, followed by the Korean ethnic group, with 1,497 people. Like the Fendalton-Waimairi Ward, the Chinese ethnic group was by far the largest in the Riccarton- Wigram Ward, with 4,878 people. The next largest group was Korean, with 1,170 people⁹

Further research by Asia:NZ on the location of Christchurch's Asian population may shed light on the different settlement distribution patterns of Christchurch's Asian populations over time¹⁰ but what we know from other research is that Auckland's Asian population is spread across a wide geography.¹¹ Asia:NZ's research later this year will reveal whether similarly widespread distribution is true of Christchurch's Asian population.

Whether clustering of particular ethnic populations in one place is a problem in a matter of some perspective. As we noted, particular suburbs of Christchurch have higher proportions of Asians than other suburbs, though the extent to which this has shifted over time is not revealed in the data we currently have. By comparison with other countries, such as the United States, the concentration of Asian ethnic groups in New Zealand is not as great. There are benefits for groups from particular ethnicities to be living in close proximity to one another. For example, clustering may facilitate the formation of ethnic associations, goods and

⁸ Data from Thorpe et al (2007)

⁹ Data from Thorpe et al (2007)

¹⁰ in Friesen (forthcoming)

¹¹ Friesen (2008)

services for consumers from particular ethnic groups and provide a place of familiarity for minority ethnic populations¹²

Asian international students in Christchurch

Another significant feature of Christchurch's Asian population is in the form of its international students. Eighteen percent of foreign fee paying students in New Zealand in 2007 studied in the Canterbury region, proportionally second highest only to Auckland.¹³ The top five source countries for foreign fee paying students mirror those of Christchurch's top Asian populations and include China, South Korea, Japan, India and Thailand.

In work that I did with Terry McGrath in 2004 on the links between campuses and the cities of Palmerston North, Wellington and Christchurch, we found that there were a number of factors that were important in the links between the community and campus in the pastoral care of international students. These factors included:

- That international students who become linked with community groups benefit and are assisted in forming friendships with New Zealanders;
- That the majority of international students in this research, in each place, are not connected with community groups, attributable to a lack of fostering of connections by educational institutions, community groups themselves and city leadership structures;
- Churches and sports clubs seem to be the main community groups that international students connect with and it is most often through these groups that international students form friendships with New Zealanders;
- Most international students have difficulty forming friendships with New Zealand students and gain most of their friends amongst co-nationals and other international students, and;
- Community groups receive limited encouragement to enable their services to be used by international students.¹⁴

¹² For discussion on clustering amongst Auckland's Asian populations see Friesen (2008), p.18

¹³ Data sourced from the Ministry of Education.

¹⁴ Terry McGrath and Andrew Butcher (2004), *Campus-community linkages in the pastoral care of international students, with specific reference to Palmerston North, Wellington and Christchurch*, Wellington: Ministry of Education and Education New Zealand. Online at <http://www.educationnz.org.nz/secure/eedfReports/A1.1.pdf>

These findings could easily be applied across to Christchurch's Asian populations generally. The interactions between the various ethnic groups in Christchurch, including the European ethnic group, take place at a range of levels and responsibilities. Clearly, positive and forward-thinking policies about engaging with Asia at governance levels in the city council and key institutions, like universities, are extremely important. Decisions that are made to cut resources to Asian studies or move focus to other areas at the expense of Asia are remarkably short-sighted and will have significant negative consequences. But, thankfully, engaging with Asia and those of Asian ethnicity does not rest solely with institutional leaders. Community groups play a vital role in bridging one culture with another and, in this respect, they are often the unsung heroes in promoting awareness and understanding of other ethnicities, cultures and ways of life.

Christchurch's engagement with Asia

We can see Christchurch's engagement with Asia reflected in Asia:NZ's annual *Perceptions of Asia* study for 2007. Feelings of warmth towards people from Asia were higher in Christchurch than for New Zealand as a whole. We know that there is a relationship between degrees of warmth and levels of contact and that the greater the contact, the higher the warmth.¹⁵ For Christchurch, some of that contact and exposure to Asia will come in the form of the annual Lantern Festival.

The Christchurch Chinese Lantern Festival typically attracts 40,000-plus people to the Victoria Park venue over two nights. 2009 will be the fifth year of the festival, which is organised by Asia New Zealand Foundation in association with Christchurch City Council. The Festival's success lies in the participation of all sectors of the Chinese community as well as mainstream Christchurch, and is accompanied by a very popular mid-week schools programme utilizing international performers. The Festivals are marketed as high-profile free-to-the-public events celebrating Chinese culture and they receive high levels of television, radio and print coverage. The Chinese Lantern Festival is the only sizeable Asian event staged in Christchurch in recognition of the contribution made by its significant Asian population. Asia:NZ is keen to expand the Festival in Christchurch in order to keep it fresh, interesting, authentic, and an icon event for Christchurch.

¹⁵ Colmar Brunton (2007), *Perceptions of Asia*, Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation. Online at <http://www.asianz.org.nz/files/Perceptions%20of%20Asia%20reportfullpdf.pdf>

Conclusion

Christchurch's Asian population needs to matter to Christchurch because Christchurch's population is changing and the city and its people will need to change with it. The changes in New Zealand's, and Christchurch's, Asian populations may be more noticeable here than in other cities. The growth of Christchurch's Asian population is starting from a lower base relative to other cities and Christchurch is a more mono-cultural city than other New Zealand cities. Changes in the appearance of Christchurch's Asian population will be in the form of new faces in the neighbourhood, new customers in the stores, new businesses, new students in the classroom, and new foods in the supermarkets and food courts. The reality is that if Christchurch doesn't take an interest in Asia and its Asian populations, if it doesn't see that Asia *matters*, it will fall well behind the other three large cities in New Zealand (Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin). Christchurch then has a choice: be an artifact of the twentieth century, or follow the rest of the country into the twenty-first century and turn its face from England and toward Asia.