



The importance of Asia awareness in New Zealand

Full text of the letter by Dr Richard Grant,
Executive Director of Asia:NZ, which was published in *The Listener*

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Dear Pamela,

How encouraging that a publication such as *The Listener* has again highlighted the issue of New Zealand's growing relationship with China specifically and by dint Asia at large.

While New Zealand has come a long way in recognising the arrival of China and other players in the Asian region as powerful forces reshaping the world's economic and political landscape, the issue of whether we should be doing a lot more to prepare our young people for a changing world order remains.

As Rodney Jones and David Mahon point out, the teaching of Asia in our schools remains fairly static and at a low level although the numbers of Asian students in New Zealand have contributed to a greater awareness of the region amongst educators and fellow students.

While the demand for learning Japanese remains a bright spot, the paradigm shift to learning Mandarin has yet to occur and I believe it is only a matter of time before we see more parents taking the responsibility to urge their local school boards that there is an evident demand.

But contrary to Mr Jones' views, I would like to point out that New Zealand does have plenty of Mandarin speakers. That human resource exists especially among the so-called 1.5 generation and New Zealand born children of Mandarin speaking migrants who have come here over the past 25 years.

Unlike their parents, these young people have been through the New Zealand education system and it is they who represent a potential that is now being realised and it is they who can be employed in facilitating this country's relationship with China.

On the issue of journalists, I would like to advise that two New Zealand media organisations, RNZ and NZPA, did in fact send reporters Ian Llewellyn and Chris Bramwell to accompany the Prime Minister on his recent trip to Thailand and China. A third journalist, Fran O'Sullivan, went to Beijing independently to provide coverage of the China leg for various other media outlets.

But perhaps what was most disappointing about the coverage that Mr Key's trip received was the notable absence of both our television broadcasters, particularly of our national public broadcaster TVNZ.

It is therefore vitally important for publications like The Listener to stimulate a national conversation on what it would mean to be an Asia-literate society, one that does its utmost to prepare its young people for the changed world ahead.

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