

EDITORIAL

In November 2008 New Zealanders voted in a hotly contested general election. The so-called ‘Asian vote’ received considerable attention from politicians and the media. This reflected the growing proportion and significance of New Zealanders of Asian ethnicity and heritage in New Zealand’s current and future population. The ‘Asian vote’ had little reality and hardly proved pivotal to the election results. There has never been a block political ‘Asian vote’ or homogenous ‘Asian identity’ in New Zealand, as unravelled in several papers in this journal. Nevertheless political parties endorsed an unprecedented number of New Zealand Asians as candidates while voters of Asian ethnicity (like many voters) indicated more diverse political preferences than in previous decades. In the lead-up to the 2008 elections several politicians also took special care to participate in ‘ethnic festivals’, especially the South Asian celebration of Diwali. The huge public celebrations of this are relatively new and until recently, Diwali was privately observed within Indian families and by New Zealand’s Indian associations. One reason for this was the limited tolerance for public displays of ethnic and religious diversity in New Zealand. The expense, time and organisation of the huge Diwali celebrations celebrated today in Auckland and Wellington was also beyond the means of the original Indian settlers. This points to the complexity of histories and contemporary patterns within Asian communities in Aotearoa. Although New Zealand has a long history of Asian settlement reaching back into the nineteenth century, the 2006 census revealed that most Asian residents in New Zealand arrived after 1987. This census also predicted the growth of New Zealand’s Asian population at a similar or greater proportion than other minority ethnic populations in New Zealand, including Maori.

The papers in this special edition of *Sites*, ‘Asia and Aotearoa New Zealand’ comprise a selection of recent research on connections between Asia and New Zealand especially as this impacts upon Asians in Aotearoa. This new research is indicative of the growing literature on Asian diasporas in the South Pacific (as represented in Kate Bagnall’s book review of Manying Ip’s *Being Maori-Chinese: Mixed Identities* and Jacqueline Leckie’s reviews of Edwina Pio’s *Sari: Indian Women at Work in New Zealand* and Bruce Connew and Brij Lal’s

Stopover in this volume). Michael Belgrave's review of *Settlers: New Zealand Immigrants from England, Ireland and Scotland 1800–1945* reminds us of the dominant sources of emigration to New Zealand.

Andrew Butcher's paper opens the volume through discussing broader perceptions of Asia and Asians in Aotearoa. Ip and Liangni Liu historicise these perceptions while Vivienne Anderson focuses on contemporary (mis) perceptions of Asian and international students. Rachel Burke's examination of socialisation in Japanese pre-schools also challenges stereotypes many New Zealanders have of Asian children being raised in 'academic hot-houses' from an early age. Bevan Chuang and Kathryn Hardy Bernal's paper on the 'Loli-Pop' exhibition at Auckland Museum further disrupts conventional representations of Japanese culture both within Japan and New Zealand. This also indicates how Japanese Lolita and Goth popular culture has been transposed into New Zealand. Henry Johnson's research into the first Japanese *Taiko* festival in New Zealand further challenges stereotypes of Asia as 'other'. Most *Taiko* participants here are enthusiastic Kiwis but are not of Asian descent.

Gender is explicitly addressed in Ip and Liu's historical and contemporary analysis of Chinese women's emigration to New Zealand and in Anderson's critique of the *International Education Agenda*. Ip and Liu's findings echoes my research concerning the gendered patterns of Indian emigration to New Zealand where contrary to stereotypes, Indian and Chinese women have been agents in choices about migration. Also, according to Ip and Liu, Chinese women in Aotearoa have recently 'greatly outnumbered their male counterparts not just because they were 'wives left behind in New Zealand', but also because more Chinese young women migrated to New Zealand on their own initiatives.'

Most of the published literature on Asians in New Zealand has focused on the larger and well-established Chinese and Indian communities. This special edition of *Sites* contains three papers with a Japanese focus. These all report research into the hybridisation or fusion of aspects of Japanese ('Asian') and New Zealand ('Western') cultures. Johnson not only documents *Taiko* in New Zealand but also asks 'why *Taiko*?' to interrogate issues of authenticity and innovation. This paper, like Chuang and Hardy Bernal's addresses identity and representations of 'Asia' in public spaces. The latter paper is also an indictment of the commitment institutions, such as museums, have with engaging local Asian and other audiences with less conventional forms of popular Asian culture. Rachael Burke extends her earlier research on values and practices in Japanese pre-schools to early childhood institutions in New Zealand. This

is pertinent as increasing numbers of children of Asian heritage access these facilities. She asks how values of the 'harmonious group' will mesh with those of independence and creativity.

The final paper by Minghong Sun, Sue Cornforth and Lise Bird Claiborne leads on from Burke's paper. Both these papers pose questions concerning the transfer and adaptation of 'Asian' values to education and health in New Zealand. Sun, Cornforth and Bird Claiborne's contribution also reiterates the difficulties some recent Chinese immigrants have experienced in adjustment to New Zealand. Their paper however indicates how the transference of aspects of Asian cultures and beliefs can be positive. For some new Chinese immigrants, drawing upon Confucian and Taoist belief systems can assist settlement in a new land.

The impetus for this special edition of *Sites* originally came from the 17th New Zealand Asian Studies Society International Conference held at the University of Otago in 2007. Much of the energy for this conference came from the university's Asia New Zealand Research Cluster (<http://www.otago.ac.nz/humanities/research/clusters/asianz/>). The Cluster plans to launch this special issue of 'Asia and Aotearoa New Zealand' at a forthcoming symposium, 'Localising Asia in Aotearoa/NZ', to be held at Otago University in early 2009. This meeting will further develop themes addressed in this volume to examine how Asian heritages and contemporary Asian modalities have become localised in New Zealand. These are challenging dominant and national representations of identity, both within and beyond the bi-cultural framework. There may have been no block 'Asian vote' in 2008 but Kiwis of Asian descent, and significant aspects of Asian culture, are central to the making of Aotearoa New Zealand in the twenty-first century – as they have been in the past.

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