

ASIA: Demography, diaspora and diplomacy

Asia:NZ's research director Dr Andrew Butcher recently authored a paper that looks at the challenges New Zealand may face in the long term in its relationship with Asia, both at home and abroad. The paper, 'Demography, Diaspora and Diplomacy: New Zealand's Asian Challenges', was published in Volume 36 of the New Zealand Population Review.

Read and excerpt from the introduction, or download the full paper (below).

In surveying a growing 'Asian New Zealand' population and New Zealand's future in Asia, this article considers three themes: demographic changes, diaspora opportunities and diplomatic challenges.

Asian peoples are usually defined in two ways: people born in the countries of Asia, or people who identify with one or more Asian ethnicities. Generally, this article refers to those in the second category, who are of Asian ethnicity (whether New Zealand-born or overseas-born).

Statistical projections suggest that 'Asian New Zealanders', ie. people born in New Zealand who identify with an Asian ethnicity, will be a growing population in New Zealand over the next few decades (Bedford and Ho, 2008). This raises questions such as how this group might be presented in the New Zealand media, which tends to resort to the lowest common denominator in their reportage? What connections they will have with other ethnic groups? What role might they play politically? How might they distinguish themselves and be distinguished by others from migrant populations from Asia? What about those who share Asian-Pacific ethnicities, such as New Zealand's current Governor-General (at the time of writing) Sir Anand Satyanand, who is of Indo-Fijian ethnicity?

These questions are significant for New Zealand in these first decades of the 21st century. They are unique to New Zealand's history, central to New Zealand's identity, crucial for the measure of New Zealand's various ethnicities and necessary to both ask and answer to understand New Zealand's place in the world.

New Zealand's place in the world is represented not just geographically as a series of islands in the South Pacific, but also through the dispersed nature of its population, its diaspora. One estimate puts New Zealand's diaspora population – that is, the population of New Zealand citizens and permanent residents who live outside New Zealand - as one of the highest in the world, at one-fifth (one million people) of its total population (refer to Gamlen, 2011 for a discussion on definitions of diaspora; Bedford, 2001).

New Zealanders overseas predominately live in Australia, the United Kingdom or the United States of America. However, an increasing number are living in Asia, particularly if a broader definition of diaspora is used, which encompasses returned migrants and students alongside New Zealand-born citizens and permanent residents.

Scholarly literature is divided on the meaning of diaspora and, like other well-worn academic terms, it risks meaning all things to all people. Inasmuch as there is a common understanding, 'diaspora' is taken to include an ongoing orientation towards a homeland and the maintenance of a group identity over time (Gamlen, 2011 page 5). However, there is no significant, large-scale research measuring New Zealand's diaspora populations, so while we may subscribe to a common understanding there is no way (yet) in which we can be assured we are using it correctly. In this field, for

New Zealand, we have to make do with a certain amount of interference, supposition and speculation.

Regardless of the precise figures, increasing numbers of New Zealanders abroad (as both diaspora and tourist populations) can put increased strain on New Zealand's diplomatic posts, particularly in instances of natural disasters, terrorist attacks or self-inflicted troubles (Blue Ribbon Panel Report, 2009).

To download the full report go to:

<http://www.asianz.org.nz/sites/asianz.org.nz/files/files/nzpr%20-%20democracy%20diaspora%20and%20diplomacy.pdf>

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