

# SERIOUSLY ASIA REVISITED

SOCIETY AND CULTURE  
BETWEEN AOTEAROA  
NEW ZEALAND AND ASIA



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**Published**

March 2023

**ISBN (PDF)**

978-1-99-117183-2

Seriously Asia - Society and Culture - PDF

**ISBN (Print)**

978-1-99-117182-5

Seriously Asia - Society and Culture - print

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## ABOUT SERIOUSLY ASIA REVISITED

In 2003, at the request of the then Prime Minister Helen Clark, the Asia New Zealand Foundation — at the time known as Asia 2000 — ran the Seriously Asia initiative. It was a project designed to inject new ideas and energy into New Zealand's connections with Asia. The initiative canvassed views from across the country and in Asia; helped to grow New Zealanders' understanding of the region; and developed a set of recommendations to guide New Zealand's engagement with Asia in the years that followed.

In recognition of the far-reaching changes that had taken place in New Zealand and Asia over two decades, in 2022 the Asia New Zealand Foundation launched Seriously Asia Revisited. This project brought together a cross-section of informed voices to discuss how to best position New Zealand for success in Asia in the coming decades.

Seriously Asia Revisited is structured around the themes of the original Seriously Asia project. They are:

- Society and Culture
- Politics and Security
- Trade, Tourism and Investment
- Innovation and Sustainable Development

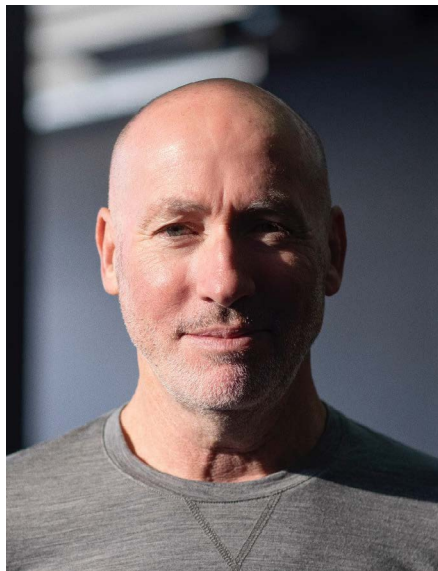
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## ABOUT THIS PAPER

The Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono commissioned this paper as one of four thematic reports that revisit the outcomes and recommendations of the 2003 Seriously Asia initiative. The papers reflect on how the context of New Zealand-Asia relationships have changed since 2003, what has been achieved and what could be done differently going forward. These papers informed a series of four hui held over the course of 2022. Hui participants shared their perspectives on the themes and contributed to recommendations on how New Zealand could best engage with Asia in the years ahead.

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## EDITOR-IN- CHIEF



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Finlay Macdonald is an award-winning journalist, editor, publisher and broadcaster with 30 years' experience in the New Zealand media. He is senior editor at The Conversation NZ., and has been editor of the *NZ Listener* magazine, a publisher at Penguin Books and HarperCollins, a weekly columnist for the *Sunday Star-Times*, and has written and presented for television and radio.

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Sekhar is Emeritus Professor of History at Victoria University of Wellington Te Herenga Waka. He was the founding director of the New Zealand India Research Institute. One of the areas of his research interest is the history of Indian migration and Indian diaspora. He has published seven books and edited or co-edited 12 books. Two of his recent books are *India in New Zealand: Local Identities, Global Relations* [Ed.] (Otago University Press, 2010) and *Indians and the Antipodes: Networks, Boundaries and Circulation* [Co-ed.] (Oxford University Press, 2018). He is a Fellow of the Royal Society Te Apārangi.



### Dr Andrew Butcher

Andrew has been Principal of Bethlehem Tertiary Institute since 2017. Prior to this he held senior management roles at the Ministry of Justice Tahū o te Ture and the Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono, fellowships at the University of Otago Te Whare Wānanga o Ōtago, Victoria University of Wellington Te Herenga Waka and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, and is an alumnus of the United States Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program. He also worked at Inland Revenue Te Tari Taake and Massey University Te Kunenga Ki Pūrehuroa earlier in his career.

## INTRODUCTION

To many New Zealanders, Asia means China. But Asia is so much more: an ideological construct, a geographical and cultural space, a vast region of extreme diversity. Above all, it is not remote. As Professors Henry Johnson and Brian Moloughney of the University of Otago asked as far back as 2006:

“What happens to our understanding of Asia when we recognise that it is no longer foreign, that it has a significant presence within New Zealand? And how does that alter how we see ourselves?”

The Seriously Asia conference in 2003 acknowledged the importance of these questions. One of its goals was to “understand and engage” with Asia and Asian people living in New Zealand. In 2006, the Asia Knowledge Working Group also identified three strategic priorities: raise knowledge of Asia and its people, commit to Asians in New Zealand and connect with Asia.

Some progress was made in achieving these objectives. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Manatū Aorere created a Seriously Asia Fund, and the Asia New Zealand Foundation initiated several important programmes. Worthwhile initiatives, without doubt – but inevitably not enough, given the magnitude of the task.

In the past 20 years, New Zealand’s engagement with Asia and Asian peoples has changed substantially. Increased global travel, migration and ubiquitous social media have expanded the awareness of Asia and its geopolitical importance. Asian ethnic minorities in New Zealand also belong to much wider transnational communities that are far more connected in our digital world.

Today’s challenges are different from those of 2003 and we will need different strategies to address them.

At the same time, and while there is still a way to go, the Foundation’s *New Zealanders’ Perceptions of Asia and Asian Peoples* survey shows that popular perceptions of Asia have evolved. There is a strong correlation between an individual’s knowledge of Asia and how important they think Asia will be to New Zealand’s future.

Those who viewed developing political, social and economic ties with Asia as important rose from 67 percent in 2019 to 79 percent in 2021. Paradoxically, a noticeable hardening of attitudes towards China may also be a sign of this growing interest and awareness.

Meanwhile, the first-ever survey examining Māori perceptions of Asia and Asian peoples (published by the Foundation in 2019) found that a large section of the Māori population felt an affinity with the cultural values of Asian people, despite lacking a deeper knowledge of Asia in general. This positive attitude, the survey suggests, has developed over the years through people-to-people contact.



New Zealand's demographic profile has changed considerably in the past 20 years. The 2018 census recorded 707,598 Asian New Zealanders, almost double the number in 2006. The two largest groups were Chinese and Indian, followed (some way behind) by Filipinos, then Koreans.

Between 2013 and 2018 New Zealand's Filipino community grew by a remarkable 44 percent. The number of people born in southern Asian countries in 2018 (86,520) more than quadrupled since 2001 (18,867). For those from north-east Asian countries, the increase was 230.9 percent.

These demographic changes are nowhere more evident than in Auckland. In the 14 years since an Asia New Zealand Foundation report asked whether "diverse Auckland" was the "face of New Zealand in the 21st century", the question has become more of a statement. Even by 2011, New Zealand had the third-largest foreign-born population share in the OECD, after Australia and Israel.

At the 2018 census, 41.6 percent of Auckland residents had been born in another country. Combined with those with at least one migrant parent, this means approximately 60 percent of the city's residents were either first- or second-generation immigrants. From 2001 to 2013, the "residents born overseas" category grew from 19 to 24 percent of the national population – for Auckland, the increase was from 31 to 37 percent.

Specifically, people identifying as Asian now make up 23 percent of Auckland's population (15 percent nationally), compared with 60 percent European and "other", 11 percent Māori and 15 percent Pasifika. This adds to more than 100 percent because some – increasingly, more – identify with more than one ethnicity. This has been a significant upward trajectory: in 1991, only five percent of Auckland residents were of Asian ethnicity. These demographic changes mean that a far greater proportion of Aucklanders are personally connected to Asia.

We see this ethnic diversification manifested in the Asian languages now spoken more widely, the Asian birthplaces of growing numbers of residents and the Asian surnames now predominating. Tellingly, Singh replaced Smith as the most common New Zealand surname in 2020 and Smith was the only non-Asian surname in Auckland's top 10.

New Zealand has also seen increased representation of Asian New Zealanders in politics. Since Pansy Wong, a National Party list member of parliament, became the first cabinet minister of Asian origin in 2009, Asian political leadership has increased significantly. Every parliament since has had Asian representation through both major political parties, all as list MPs. In the current parliament, two Labour MPs of Indian origin are constituency MPs, representing Maungakiekie (in Auckland) and Hamilton West. These changes have the potential to increase New Zealand's capacity to engage with Asia at the political level.

At the public service level, the recent creation of the Ministry for Ethnic Communities Te Tari Mātāwaka shows the growing importance of ethnic minorities in Aotearoa New Zealand's national life.

And while Victoria University of Wellington's New Zealand Contemporary China Research Centre (NZCCRC) has been running a programme to prepare a more China-capable civil service, perhaps similar initiatives dealing with cultural literacy are also necessary for policy planners, particularly in departments dealing with Asia and Asian peoples.

Of course, COVID-19 will have disrupted aspects of New Zealand's demographic change. Predictions about future migrant flows and demographic change are based on pre-pandemic baselines. Until borders fully open, we still won't know the long-term effects of the pandemic for at least a year or two. The immigration restrictions of the past years and the pains of separation they caused continue to be sore points for many Asian immigrant groups in New Zealand and their home countries.

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## LANGUAGE AND ART

Language is a gateway to culture, understanding and knowledge. Asked in 2020 what languages they want to learn, surveyed New Zealanders chose Spanish first (16 percent), just ahead of Chinese (15 percent) and French (14 percent), with Japanese some way behind (seven percent). Asked in 2021 what language they think young New Zealanders should learn, Chinese was seen to be the most useful language: 39 percent chose it, followed by Spanish at eight percent.

While Asian language education in schools has undoubtedly given students greater understanding of their geographical friends and neighbours, accessing Asian language learning at university is a real challenge. For example, there is now no Korean offered at Victoria University of Wellington (although community groups and the Korean consulate in Auckland have tried to fill the gap).

Indonesian is taught only at an introductory level at the New Zealand Asia Institute in Auckland, which also offers an introductory course in Vietnamese. There are no university-based courses in South Asian languages, and most Asian languages are taught in community language schools that primarily cater for the diasporic communities.

It's a similar story with history teaching. While Asian settlement and migration has been included in the new New Zealand history curriculum for secondary schools from 2023, students will struggle to pursue an interest in Asia through their tertiary education. Over the past decade, resourcing in New Zealand universities has shifted towards the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and Asian studies programmes have already been significantly truncated. This damages New Zealand's long-term skill development and its interests in Asia.

But as the Asia New Zealand Foundation's Perceptions of Asia surveys have shown, New Zealanders' interest in music, art and literature from Asia has nonetheless increased. In 2021, two-thirds said they had watched, played or listened to Asia-related entertainment within the year, with more than a third having done so at least monthly.

The growing popularity of South Korean pop (K-pop) and drama has enhanced perceptions of that country and seen demand for Korean language courses grow. Korean popular culture now sits alongside Taiwanese, Chinese, Japanese and Indian television, movies and music – all made more accessible through online streaming services. Bollywood films are now regularly shown in theatres in New Zealand's bigger cities.

Live theatre, too, has exposed New Zealand audiences to Asian cultural offerings and, in doing so, has helped foster greater social and cultural understanding. Proudly Asian Theatre delivers 'stereotype shattering' performances by local Asian artists. And the commercially successful Indian Ink theatre group celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

On screen, the Pan-Asian Screen Collective works closely with NZ On Air to increase Asian representation, and Asia New Zealand Foundation's Arts Project Fund supports Asia-focused art projects, connects local organisations and artists with Asian art foundations, and helps to promote those creative outputs to the general public.

But these initiatives are still not sufficient to really maximise and support cultural and artistic engagement. New initiatives must be conceived and planned, such as an Asian literary festival and more Asia-related special art exhibitions (like the famous and highly popular Terracotta Warriors exhibition at Te Papa in 2018) through collaboration with Asian museums and galleries.



## FAITH, FOOD, FESTIVALS AND SPORT

Perhaps the most common ways New Zealanders are exposed to Asian knowledge and experiences are through food, fashion and festivals – 87 percent say they enjoy Asian food, and the proliferation of Asian restaurants in New Zealand over the past two decades has been phenomenal.

Before COVID-19, Auckland's Lantern Festival attracted tens of thousands of people annually, and Diwali festivals in Auckland and Wellington attract thousands wanting to savour Indian food and enjoy Indian performing arts. Other festivals regularly celebrate Korean and Japanese cultures too, and not just in big cities but in many smaller towns with Asian populations.

Asian religious landscapes are changing as well. All large cities in New Zealand now have mosques, Hindu temples and Sikh gurdwaras, many of them with an impressive architectural presence. But of Asian migrants to New Zealand who are religious (and most are not), the majority are Christians and Catholics, reflecting in part the large migrant populations from the Philippines, who have propped up Catholic parishes as their local congregations dwindle.

Asian visibility and influence extend to sports, too: martial arts, football and table-tennis teams are dominated by players of Asian ethnicity. Lydia Ko's success as an international golfer and Ajaz Patel's achievements as a member of the Black Caps cricket team have undoubtedly not only enabled other New Zealanders to see and accept their country's evolving demographics, but also helped to build positive connections between New Zealand and Asia more broadly.

Finally, one way to encourage these cross-cultural ties is through building sister city relationships, which can help build trust between communities and lead to business opportunities. But large parts of South and South East Asia remain untapped. In 2021, while 39 city and district councils in New Zealand had sister city relationships with Asia, these are limited to China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Taiwan.





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## **MEDIA COVERAGE OF ASIA AND ASIAN PEOPLES**

In 2003 Seriously Asia, as well as the Asia Knowledge Working Group, recommended that Asia and Asian peoples should be adequately represented in mainstream media in New Zealand, and the media's connections with ethnic communities should be enhanced.

Some major initiatives were adopted in the subsequent decades, including the Asia New Zealand Foundation's media travel grants and fellowships, which have enabled more than 400 New Zealand journalists to travel to Asia since 1994. The establishment of the Foundation's Asia Media Centre is another major step in the right direction.

Niche Media provides specialised services connecting ethnic media outlets with advertisers. News-sharing arrangements have been established also, including a short-lived agreement between *New Zealand Herald* and *Chinese New Zealand Herald*, and a partnership between the Stuff media platform and Indian radio service Tarana.

However, coverage of current affairs developments in Asia remains unsatisfactory, with no New Zealand journalist from a major organisation posted in Asia on a dedicated basis.

Mainstream media coverage, while recognising that Asian migration brings economic benefits, has still tended to focus on crime or pressure on infrastructure or house prices. At the same time, there is little recognition of the problems Asian migrants face and their everyday needs.

Asian participation in media content production remains minimal as well. The 2021 NZ On Air Diversity Report shows that Asian New Zealanders constituted only 7 percent of producers, 6.1 percent of directors, and 1.1 percent of writers of publicly-funded outputs. These figures represent improvements on previous years, but still suggest Asian media content creators are under-represented compared with the combined Asian proportion of the overall population (1.5 percent).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Asian minorities depend largely – exclusively in some cases – on ethnic and homeland media which cater to specific social and cultural needs. A 2021 NZ On Air survey of Chinese and Indian migrants confirmed this.

Since 2003, this ethnic mediascape has significantly expanded and become more complex. Each of the major Asian minority groups now has multiple printed and web-based publications in both English and vernacular languages, their own radio stations, and TV channels on the Freeview and Sky platforms.

Asian New Zealanders can also access media outlets in their home countries through satellite TV services. Social media guide preferences, influence general consumption patterns, strengthen group solidarities and connect Asian New Zealanders to their home countries and global communities.

However, some studies have noted that a preference for homeland media and local ethnic media can influence the level and quality of participation by Asian ethnic minorities in New Zealand's democratic political process.

In addition, as Asian ethnic media rarely engage with subjects concerned with tangata whenua, their consumers' knowledge of this important aspect of New Zealand public life, such as Te Tiriti o Waitangi, remains a work in progress.

To close these gaps, mainstream media needs to produce more Asia-related content to ensure relevance to Asian New Zealand audiences. However, content also needs to be made available through the channels Asian minority audiences use more frequently: YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, SkyKiwi and so on.

The Public Interest Journalism Fund created by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage Manatū Taonga is a welcome development, as it identifies 'Pan-Asian communities' as a target audience with needs that are not currently being fulfilled.

The Foundation's Asia Media Centre also works to improve the breadth and depth of coverage of Asia issues in the New Zealand media by improving the mainstream media's access to expertise on Asia. This work has included connecting mainstream media and Asian ethnic media.

## EXPORT EDUCATION

Until borders closed in 2020, a large proportion of the Asian population living in New Zealand was made up of temporary student visa-holders. International student enrolment reached its peak in 2003 when 126,500 arrived. Numbers declined and then rose again - 116,674 international students enrolled in New Zealand institutions in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of these, 84,311 - more than 72 percent - were from Asia. China remained the largest contributor (32 percent), with India emerging as the second-highest (15 percent) source country. About 55 percent of these international students lived in the Auckland area.

Until that time, the export education industry had more than doubled in size between 2002 and 2019, from an estimated value of \$1.7 billion, supporting about 20,000 jobs, to \$4.6 billion, supporting 48,832 jobs. Its overall contribution to the economy, including fees and spending, was \$5.23 billion - the country's fifth-largest export earner.

Of course, the pandemic completely disrupted the flow of international students and revealed the vulnerability of New Zealand's educational institutions, which had depended too much on foreign, full fee-paying students to supplement their incomes. The fall in the number of international students following the pandemic dealt a sharp blow to the national economy.

Aside from its monetary value, the education industry brings in other benefits. The presence of international students exposes New Zealanders to diverse peoples and their cultures, and helps develop cross-cultural skills, language acquisition and an understanding of what's needed to work in a global world.

International education also enriches the local education system by bringing in talent and establishing valuable research links; and international alumni act as roving ambassadors for New Zealand.

As some studies have suggested, however, the presence of a large cohort of international students alone does not automatically lead to cross-cultural exchanges. Conscious efforts are required to encourage such interaction.

The many factors that draw Asian students to New Zealand - an English-speaking, safe and secure environment, natural beauty, quality of education and potential pathway to residency - mean most are satisfied with their experience. However, concerns have also been expressed about high living expenses, lack of employment opportunities, workplace exploitation, difficulty accessing health and counselling services, social isolation and challenges making friends with local people.



## IMPROVED EDUCATION INITIATIVES

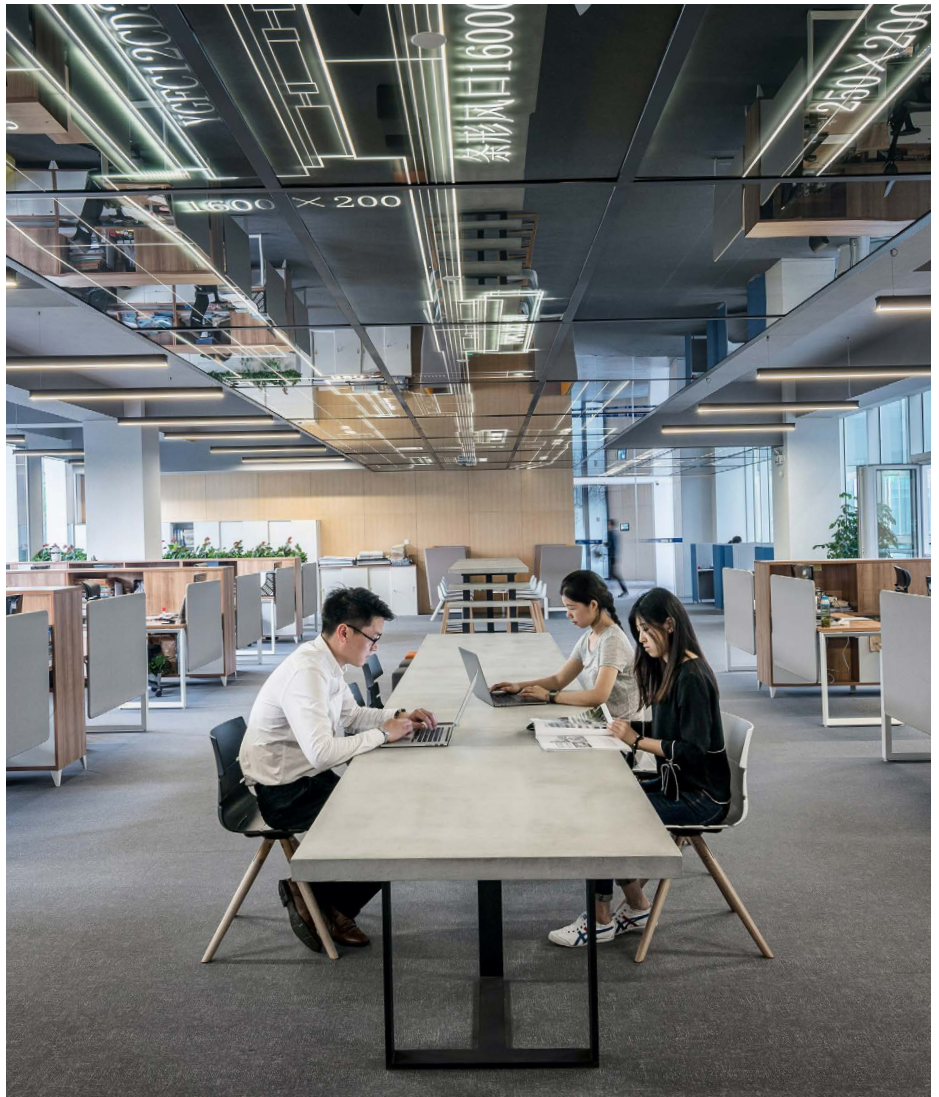
In 2018, Education New Zealand Manapou ki te Ao and the Ministry of Education Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga released the New Zealand International Education Strategy 2018–2030. It has three specific goals: ensuring quality education and superior student experience, sustainable growth focusing on “a high-value, high-quality sector”, and developing global citizens and global connections.

In 2019 there were about five million international students worldwide, expected to rise to seven million by 2025. In this highly competitive international marketplace, New Zealand needs to diversify its sources of recruitment. It will require onshore, offshore and online offerings of attractive education packages.

Education New Zealand’s strategy paper prescribes measures to achieve these goals. But the coming years will demand robust investment, as all other major international education provider countries will be competing to recover and enhance their own market shares as well.

The strategy paper also envisages that international education should contribute to a thriving and globally connected New Zealand through world-class education.

An important first step in growing global citizens in New Zealand has been the Prime Minister’s Scholarships for Asia. Since 2013, through these scholarships, more than 2,400 New Zealanders have had “life-changing learning experiences” in Asia and Latin America. The Asia New Zealand Foundation’s postgraduate research scholarships for conducting short-term research in Asia are another step in the right direction. But the lack of language learning resources and facilities referred to earlier remains a major problem that needs to be urgently addressed with more investment.





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## SUMMARY

In the nearly two decades since the 2003 Seriously Asia conference and papers, Asia has become less remote to New Zealanders, geographically and culturally. Growing migrant communities, especially in Auckland, have exposed the local population to new foods, cultural practices, festivals and lifestyles. At the same time, many still conflate Asia with China, and other Asian cultures can struggle for visibility and acceptance.

Meanwhile, New Zealanders' levels of understanding and knowledge of Asian language, culture and history are supported by people-to-people connections but confined by limited educational opportunities and media engagement. Māori need to be heard more in discussions about migration, integration and social cohesion. And there is much work still needed in the frontline areas where Asian and Aotearoa New Zealand's people meet and interact most: education and employment.







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## ABOUT THE SERIOUSLY ASIA REVISITED THEMATIC PAPERS AND HUI

### Society and Culture

In this paper, authors Professor Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Dr Andrew Butcher discuss how New Zealand's demographic profile has changed in the past two decades and how this has impacted relationships with Asian countries and New Zealand's cultural landscape. It provides a summary of developments in immigration, international education, education initiatives and the media. The hui for this theme was held on Friday 29 July 2022 in Auckland.

### Politics and Security

Authors Professor David Capie and Professor Bethan K Greener examine how the political and security situation in Asia has changed since 2003, and the implications for New Zealand's engagement with the region. The hui for this theme was held on Friday 19 August 2022 in Wellington.

### Trade, Tourism and Investment

Authors Professor Natasha Hamilton-Hart and Shamubeel Eaqub assess how New Zealand's trade, tourism and investment relationships with Asia have performed since 2003, and discuss the opportunities and challenges in the decades ahead. This hui was held on Friday 9 September 2022 in Christchurch.

### Innovation and Sustainable Development

Authors Kenneth Leong and Hone McGregor examine the growth of innovation in Asia, the opportunities for New Zealand, and how Te Ao Māori perspectives on sustainable development are shaping relationships with Asia. This hui was held on Thursday 29 September 2022 in Queenstown.





# ABOUT THE ASIA NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION

The Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono is New Zealand's leading non-partisan, non-profit authority on Asia. We were set up in 1994 to build New Zealanders' knowledge and understanding of Asia. We provide experiences and resources to help New Zealanders build their knowledge, skills, connections and confidence to thrive in Asia.

We work in partnership with influential individuals and organisations in New Zealand and Asia to provide high-level forums, cultural events, international collaborations, school programmes and professional development opportunities. Our activities cover more than 20 countries in Asia and are delivered through programmes with a focus on arts, leadership, entrepreneurship, sports, business, media, education, research and informal diplomacy (Track II).

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