

## An overview of the geographical backgrounds of the new wave of Chinese immigrants to New Zealand

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### Introduction

Following the phenomenal economic growth in Asia, and New Zealand's intention to increase trade with Asian countries, a liberation of New Zealand immigration controls began in 1986 (Bolger, 1993, 1994; Burke, 1986; Pang, 1996). This major review of immigration policy, and the subsequent introduction of new legislation such as the 1987 Business Immigration Policy (BIP) and the 1991 Points System, adopted a non-discriminatory approach. It aimed at bringing in migrants with professional skills and capital for investment, without discrimination on grounds of race, or national or ethnic origin (Burke, 1986; Ip, 1995; McKinnon, 1996). Since then, Asian immigration, especially Chinese immigration, has increased sharply.

Over the past decade, the Chinese population in New Zealand has more than tripled, from 26,616 in 1986, to 81,309 in 1996. Chinese now make up 45% of all Asian people in New Zealand, comprising 2.25% of the total New Zealand population. This makes Chinese immigrants the largest minority non-European and non-Polynesian group in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand,

1997). This new wave of Chinese immigration to New Zealand is part of a world trend of ethnic Chinese migrating to countries such as the United States of America, Canada and Australia in recent decades (Ip, 1995; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1996; Skeldon, 1990). The main reasons for the trend towards migration to Western countries include political instability, over-population and the lack of educational opportunities for their children in the home country (Skeldon, 1990; Wang, 1990).

### The effect on schools

The influx of Chinese immigration has resulted in a sharp increase in the number of Chinese students in New Zealand schools. While schools do not usually keep a record of the number of Chinese students, they do maintain a record of the total number of Asian students. The *New Zealand Education Gazette* (1997) put the number of Asian students participating in education in New Zealand in 1996 at more than 60,000. Of these, 33,450 studied in primary and secondary schools, with two-thirds (64%) of this number in Auckland schools. Students from various Asian ethnic groups make up one-third

of the total student population in some Auckland schools. Nearly half of these are Chinese. In addition to permanent residents, there were also 4,495 overseas Asian students studying in NZ schools in 1996 (*New Zealand Education Gazette*, 1997).

The difficulty, however, of many New Zealand schools placing the diversity of Asian cultures into one Asian grouping is that schools fail to differentiate between understanding the values, beliefs and lifestyles of one Asian culture and of another. Recent Chinese immigrants themselves come from diverse origins. They mainly come from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and People's Republic of China (Ip, 1995; Vasil & Yoon, 1996) and may have vastly different backgrounds. They have different cultures, and display different lifestyles, attitudes and behaviours (Ho, 1995).

Over the past decade, school teachers and counsellors in New Zealand, especially those working in schools with a high concentration of Chinese, very often feel perplexed and unprepared for such a sharp increase of Chinese migrants. Many mainstream New Zealanders feel they lack adequate understanding on how to help Chinese adolescents (Eyou, 1997). "We are working in the dark. We do not fully understand their culture and consequently can only make assumptions.... We can only guess what the best ways to help are" (Neilson & Liddle, 1997, p.14).

This lack of adequate understanding often leaves teachers relying on Chinese students to provide much of the information about their varying cultures.

### **The clustering of Chinese settlements**

Auckland has the greatest concentration of Chinese (Thomson, 1993, 1999). Auckland is preferred because most of the immigrants come from an urban background and they feel more at home in Auckland's cosmopolitan and urban environment. Secondly, Auckland offers the greatest opportunities for business and employment (Vasil & Yoon, 1996). Thirdly, the Chinese are a gregarious ethnic group, preferring to settle close to their friends and relatives in the community.

Even within Auckland, the highly localised pattern of Chinese settlement is obvious. They cluster in suburbs such as North Shore, Epsom, Remuera and Howick-Pakuranga (Ip, 1995).

As Chinese parents place a high value on formal education, they strive hard to enroll their children in good schools, and tend to buy or rent houses in good school zones. This explains why some good schools in certain areas have such a high concentration of Chinese students.

### **Features of recent Chinese immigrants**

#### **Social status**

The earliest Chinese immigrants to

New Zealand came as gold-miners in 1866 (Ho, 1995), and the unskilled first-generation Chinese took low-capital and labour-intensive jobs, such as working in market gardens, fruit shops and laundries (Ip, 1990).

However, Chinese people who have immigrated since 1986 are well-educated, highly skilled professionals and relatively wealthy entrepreneurs (Ho & Farmer, 1994). Unlike their earlier counterparts, who encountered adverse discrimination and racism, and who were prevented from integration into New Zealand, the recent Chinese immigrants are quite outspoken and have a high profile (Ip, 1990).

### **Countries of origin**

Usually, the term “Chinese” refers to the group of people who belong to the ethnicity of China. Conceptually, it is thought of as the ethnic group which has its roots in the Hua-Xia region of central-northern China and which spread over many centuries to become present-day China. The number of Chinese has grown to include over one billion people, or nearly one-fifth of the total world population. Although most Chinese live in Mainland China (i.e. People’s Republic of China), others live in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia or as overseas Chinese in many other parts of the world.

### **People’s Republic of China**

China is the third-largest country in the world, occupying most of eastern

Asia. It has an area of 9,572,900 square kilometres. China has a recorded history beginning nearly 4,000 years ago. Throughout history, China, or the “Middle Kingdom”, as it is called by the Chinese, regarded itself as superior to all others – a view shared by philosophers of the Enlightenment. However, it weakened towards the end of the 18th century and the Chinese dynasty ended in the Chinese Revolution of 1911. The Republic that followed Sun Yat-sen’s brief presidency degenerated, and there was civil war between the National Party and the Communists. In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party under Mao Zedong won the civil war and established the People’s Republic of China on the mainland (*Oxford Interactive Encyclopedia*, 1997). Since then, mainland China has become a Communist country, and traditional Chinese values are not highly valued.

- **Language**

The official Chinese language is Mandarin, although there are many different dialects. Immigrants from mainland China usually speak Mandarin. Those from the southern part of China, such as Canton, speak Cantonese. Although spoken languages may vary, there is only one type of written Chinese. Children begin learning English in junior high school, but their command of English is often comparatively limited.

## Hong Kong

Hong Kong is situated at the mouth of the Pearl River at the southeast end of China. It has an area of 1,044 square kilometres. Ninety-seven percent of the population is Chinese. Hong Kong became a British colony after the Opium War of 1839. Under British influence, Hong Kong has developed as a commercial city and as a trading centre, attracting both Europeans and Chinese. In the 1970s and 1980s Hong Kong became an important international economic and business centre. In 1984, Britain agreed to transfer sovereignty of the entire colony to China in 1997. China promised not to alter Hong Kong's existing economic and social structure for 50 years, but there remained some unease among Hong Kong people (*Oxford Interactive Encyclopedia*, 1997).

- Language

People in Hong Kong mainly use Cantonese, a kind of Chinese dialect. As Hong Kong has been a British colony, English is commonly used. Children learn English once they start kindergarten schooling. Hong Kong people have frequent contact with Westerners and are more westernised than other Chinese. Yet, Hong Kong people still uphold the Chinese cultural heritage.

## Taiwan

Taiwan comprises a large island and several much smaller ones off the southeast coast of China. It has an area of 36,000 square kilometres. The island of Taiwan was given to Japan when China lost the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and was under Japanese occupation for half a century until its return to China in 1945, after World War II. Following the civil war, in 1949, the Communists gained control of mainland China and the National Party withdrew to Taiwan. By 1950, almost two million refugees from the mainland also arrived on the island. Supported militarily by the USA, Taiwan maintained its independence from communist China, as the Republic of China. There was complete separation from mainland China for nearly four decades until the late 1980s when communication between the two resumed. Since the 1950s, Taiwan has undergone dramatic industrialisation and become one of the world's major industrial nations (*Oxford Interactive Encyclopedia*, 1997).

- Language

The official Taiwanese language is Mandarin, but they also use the Taiwanese dialect. Taiwanese preserve strong traditional Chinese culture. Students start to learn English formally in junior high school.

## Malaysia

Malaysia is a country in South-East Asia. It is divided into two parts: Western Malaysia and Eastern Malaysia. These are separated by the South China Sea. It has a total area of 330,442 square kilometres. Malaysia is a multicultural society with Malays as the majority race, followed by Chinese and Indians. Chinese people make up 31% of the population (*Oxford Interactive Encyclopedia*, 1997).

Malaysia is a resource-rich country and is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The official religion is Islam.

- Language

Chinese students in Malaysia are trilingual, mainly speaking Bahasa Malaysian, English and Mandarin. The main medium of instruction in all educational institutions is its national language, Bahasa Malaysia. English is compulsory in all schools. As a result, Malaysian Chinese usually have quite a good command of English and they are more multicultural. Chinese families in Malaysia still usually preserve a strong traditional Chinese culture.

## Conclusion

It is hoped that the above information may be of use to teachers and counsellors. Very often, New Zealand schools just group all Asians such as Chinese, Koreans, Japanese and Indians into one

big category, without realising the great diversity between them. As this article shows, there are many important differences between Chinese peoples, and they come from different countries of origin. With better understanding, teachers and counsellors may have more confidence in helping Chinese students and can encourage Kiwi students to do likewise. Better interaction between Chinese and Kiwi will result in mutual respect and understanding.

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