

Asians in Wellington: Changing the ethnic profile of the capital city

# Outlook

EDITION

# 10

Asians in Wellington: Changing the ethnic profile of the capital city

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Cover Images: Courtesy of Ken Wright, Cue Design.

# INTRODUCTION

In the election of November 2008, six Members of Parliament of Asian origin were elected to Parliament – an event that, along with the election of Māori and Pacific MPs, resulted in the most ethnically diverse government New Zealand has ever experienced. The six Asian MPs were all originally migrants to New Zealand, coming from at least four different countries and representing several different religions.

Only 13 years ago, there were no Asian MPs, and this is symptomatic of the remarkable changes New Zealand has undergone in the past quarter of a century. From being relatively insulated from global trends, it has become one of the countries most influenced by globalisation as a result of economic, social, legislative and related reforms. One of these changes has been a substantial change in the ethnic composition of its population. A recent Asia New Zealand Foundation report has outlined the nature of this change in relation to the growth of New Zealand's Asian population and the demographic implications of this.<sup>1</sup> The 2006 New Zealand Census revealed an increasingly diverse population in terms of ethnicity and demography following 20 years of change since the introduction of the Immigration Act of 1987. The most notable aspect of this change has been the growth of populations of Asian origin, although other populations have also grown.

While the ethnic and demographic changes resulting from the change in immigration policy have been most pronounced in Auckland,<sup>2</sup> the Wellington region has the second-largest number of Asians in its population, resulting from a long-term history of involvement with Asia but especially resulting from the more recent changes to immigration policy. Wellington's relationship with Asia has been different from that of other New Zealand cities because of its status as the nation's capital. This difference relates not only to the presence of Asian diplomatic posts there but also to the tendency for national ethnic associations to be headquartered there, especially the central associations for Chinese and Indian communities. As in the other larger cities of New Zealand, the presence of respected tertiary education institutions is also important in attracting international students from Asia and elsewhere.

In this report, the Asian population is identified in two ways. The 'migrant' Asian population consists of those who were born in an Asian country i.e. are 'overseas born'.<sup>3</sup> This population does not include New Zealand-born people, even though the children of migrants are sometimes described as 'second (or third) generation migrants'. The 'ethnic' Asian population is made up of all of those who identified themselves in the census as 'Asian' or as one of the Asian sub-categories, irrespective of place of birth. At the most detailed level, people may have identified with a regional or sub-national identity such as Taiwanese or Gujarati.

More closely approximating national ethnic identities is the higher-level classification of Chinese or Indian, and this classification is often used in this report. Some tabulated census data is only released at the 'highest' level such as Asian, Māori, Pacific or European, and this level is sometimes also used in this report. It should be noted that in some cases, these higher-level identities have only been constructed recently i.e. some migrants from Asia may have only become 'Asian' once they migrated to New Zealand, since in their country of origin they had seldom thought of themselves as 'Asian'.<sup>4</sup> In other words, these constructions have generally been imposed by the host society rather than adopted by the migrants themselves.

1. Richard Bedford & Elsie Ho (2008) *Asians in New Zealand: Implications of a changing demography*. Wellington, Asia New Zealand Foundation, Outlook Paper 07.
2. Wardlow Friesen (2008a) *Diverse Auckland: The face of New Zealand in the 21st century?* Wellington, Asia New Zealand Foundation, Outlook Paper 06.
3. Within this overseas-born population, there are small numbers whose ethnicity is not Asian, since they may have been born in Asia, but of a different ethnicity (see Bedford and Ho 2008:4). At the same time, some overseas-born of Asian ethnicity are not included, for example Indo-Fijians and some others born in countries beyond Asia.
4. Allen Bartley (2004) Contemporary Asian migration to New Zealand: challenging the 'settler' paradigm. In P. Spoonley, C. Macpherson & D. Pearson (eds.) *Tangata Tangata: The changing ethnic contours of New Zealand*. Southbank, Victoria, Thomson. p. 163.

# ASIAN POPULATIONS OF WELLINGTON

5. Much of the material in this section derives from discussions with Nigel Murphy, as well as the references listed below.
6. See Nigel Murphy (2003) Joe Lum v. The Attorney General: The politics of exclusion. In M. Ip (ed.) *Unfolding History, Evolving Identity: The Chinese in New Zealand*. Auckland University Press, Auckland, pp. 48-67.
7. Jacqueline Leckie (2007) *Indian Settlers: The story of a New Zealand South Asian Community*. Otago University Press, Dunedin, pp. 68-69.
8. See Lynette Shum (2003) Remembering Chinatown: Haining Street of Wellington. In M. Ip (ed.) *Unfolding History, Evolving Identity: The Chinese in New Zealand*. Auckland University Press, Auckland, pp. 73-93.
9. Jacqueline Leckie (2007) op cit. pp. 34-35.
10. See Nicholas Tarling (2004) *International Students in New Zealand: The making of policy since 1950*. New Zealand Asia Institute, The University of Auckland, Auckland.

## THE HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS

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As the capital of New Zealand, Wellington has had an array of contacts with Asian nations and Asian people for a long time. Soon after Wellington became the capital in 1865, Chinese were attracted from the goldfields of the South Island, concerned by both economic and political opportunities, and took up employment as market gardeners, shop owners and interpreters. Towards the end of the century the number of Chinese was rising, and by 1915 there were 203 in the city, of whom only ten were women.<sup>5</sup> This was a period of escalating racism against 'Asiatics', with a poll tax being imposed on all new arrivals from 1881,<sup>6</sup> and between 1895 and 1907, in a period when New Zealand's (white) identity was being debated, four anti-Asian and anti-Chinese societies were formed. The intentions of these societies were to exclude Chinese and Indians from various aspects of New Zealand life and to undermine their economic base as traders and market gardeners.<sup>7</sup> Despite these discriminatory actions on the part of the dominant society, the Chinese community in Wellington was consolidating in the first decades of the 20th century. A Chinese Masonic Society was established in 1907, and a number of associations based on regions of origin in China were started. Some of these associations were involved in the changing politics of China, as discussed in the 'political ethnoscapes' section below. In the late 19th century, a small Chinatown was established around Haining Street, which was stereotyped as a slum and an area of crime by many in the dominant society, but was also an area of refuge and cultural association for Chinese.<sup>8</sup>

The settlement of Indians in New Zealand in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was more sporadic and often involved itinerant hawkers and labourers, although some did settle in the central cities of Auckland and Wellington.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Wellington, Indians also settled in the area of Chinatown and tended to undertake similar kinds of employment to the Chinese, especially in relation to trading and fruit and vegetable marketing. In the first half of the 20th century, Indian greengrocers spread throughout the Wellington region, but Indians also diversified into other retail sectors. Indian associations were established, including the New Zealand Indian Central Association in 1926 (see section on political ethnoscapes below), as well as others serving Wellington specifically.

A more recent historical connection of Wellington with Asia related to the intake of Colombo Plan students from the 1950s onwards.<sup>10</sup> These students attended tertiary education institutions in various parts of New Zealand, but Wellington hosted a significant number of them. The areas of greatest recruitment were South Asia and Southeast Asia, and this appears to have been one of the origins of a long-term connection of Wellington with Malaysian international students, which includes the establishment of a programme in Malay Studies at Victoria University of Wellington in 1996.

## 'NEW' ASIANS IN WELLINGTON

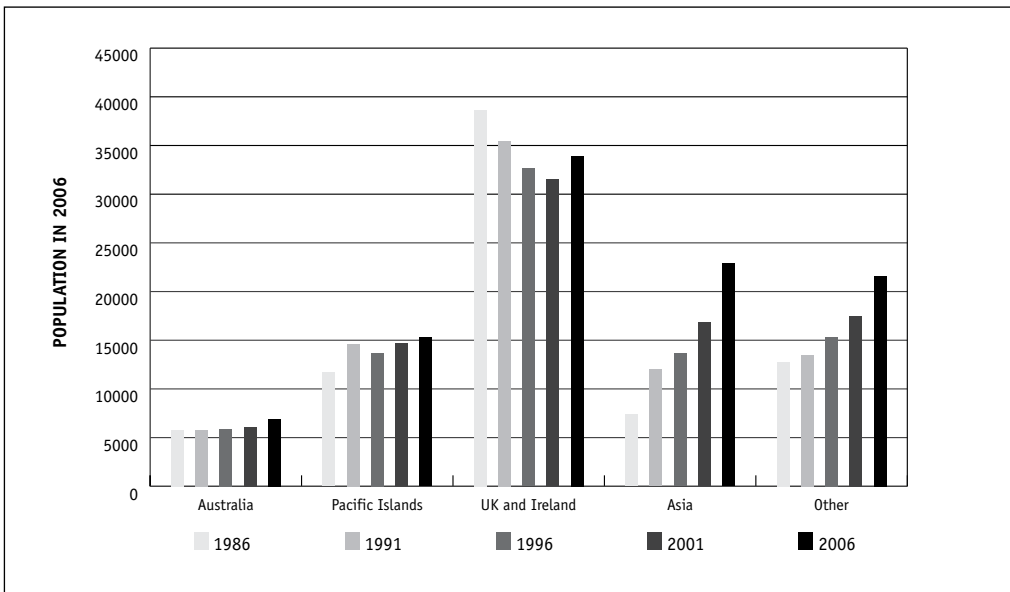
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Just as in other parts of New Zealand, the 'new' Asian populations of Wellington have their origins in the significant changes in immigration policy of the late 1980s. The criteria for migrant entry into New Zealand were substantially changed with the implementation of the Immigration Act 1987. While earlier immigration policy was based on preferred source countries, the new policy was based on the personal qualities of the migrants, especially age, educational levels and/or work experience, and the ability to bring investment capital into the country. These changes were specifically quantified by the points system introduced in 1991.

# Chinese and Indian are the predominant Asian groups by size in Wellington.

One result of these two changes was a shift in the relative importance of migrant countries of origin. The United Kingdom has consistently been important as a source of migrants for New Zealand and for Wellington, and this remains the case in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, but other countries increased markedly in significance after the introduction of the new immigration policy of 1987.

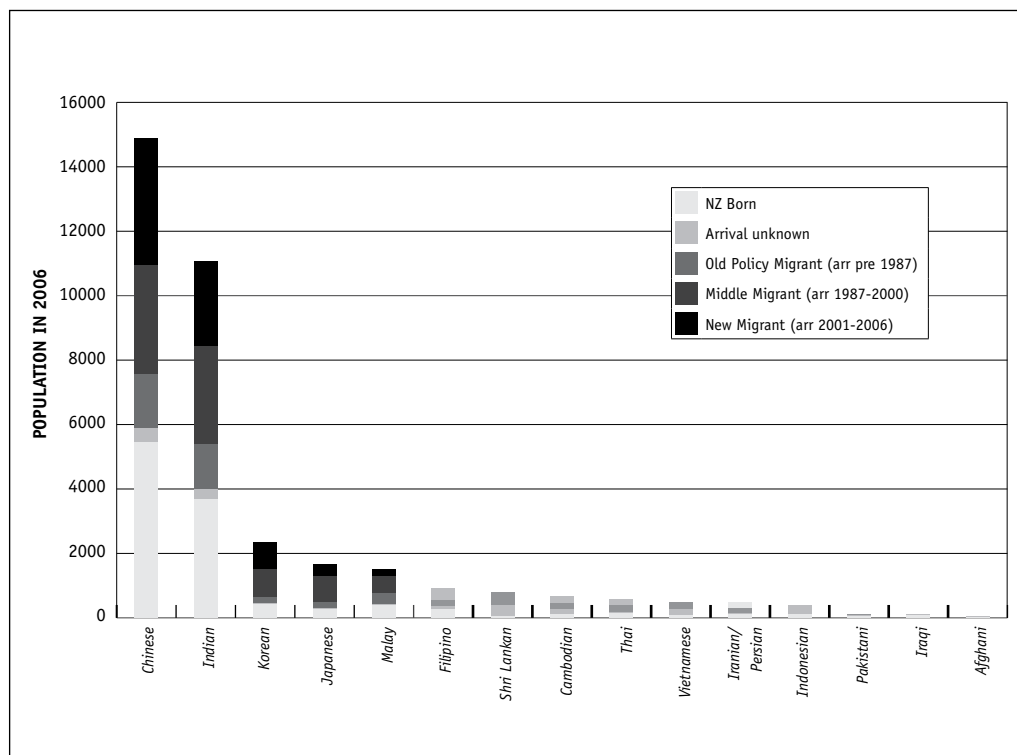
The world regions that have contributed the largest numbers of migrants to Wellington in recent decades are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Number of overseas born by area of birth, Wellington region, 1986-2006**

Source: Statistics New Zealand

The predominance of the United Kingdom and Ireland-born migrants is notable. The numbers declined through the 1990s as a result of the ageing of this population, and a small reversal between 2001 and 2006 is apparent, resulting from increased immigration since 2003. The number of migrants born in Australia and the Pacific Islands was relatively static through this period, while the ‘other’ category grew as a result of new migrations from Africa and the Middle East. However, in both proportional and absolute terms, the growth of the population born in Asia was the most significant change in the period 1986 to 2006, rising from about 7,400 to nearly 23,000 in this 20-year period (an increase of over 300 percent). Chinese and Indian are the predominant Asian groups by size in Wellington. Their migration histories and those of smaller Asian groups are shown in Figure 2 (page 4) in terms of the periods when migrants arrived in New Zealand.



**Figure 2: Asian ethnic groups in Wellington region, 2006: New Zealand born or period of arrival**

Source: Statistics New Zealand

It is notable that for both the Chinese and the Indian populations, at least one-third of the total was born in New Zealand, a proportion that is substantially higher than in Auckland, Christchurch or Dunedin. This is illustrative of the long-term linkages that Wellington has had with Asia and with Asian migration, and especially notable from the 1950s to the 1980s when diplomatic and educational linkages with Asia were relatively rare in most other regions of New Zealand. Also, for Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Sri Lankan and Cambodian groups, there is a relatively high proportion of ‘middle migrants’ who arrived between 1987 and 2001 in comparison with Auckland, where the ‘new migrant’ category arriving since 2001 is more significant.

A comparison of ethnicity with place of birth (Appendix 1, page 19) shows that while the Chinese and Indian populations have the highest proportions of New Zealand born, other groups are also relatively high, especially Japanese, Cambodian, Indonesian and Malay. As in other New Zealand cities, the Korean population has the lowest New Zealand-born proportions, highlighting the recency of Korean migration to New Zealand.

The comparison of ethnicity and birthplace in Appendix 1 (page 19) also reveals that for the Chinese and Indian populations especially, there is considerable diversity in terms of the birthplaces of the migrant population. Although the largest source of Chinese migrants is China, a great range of other birthplaces is also apparent, including Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Viet Nam, Cambodia and Indonesia, as well as many others. For the migrant Indian population, India and Fiji predominate as birthplaces but other places are also significant, especially, England and South Africa. For most other ethnicities, there is a predominant single-source country. These patterns are similar to those in Auckland, although the proportions that are New Zealand born are higher for most Asian groups in Wellington.<sup>11</sup>

There was twice the proportion in Wellington who spoke Gujarati (29 percent versus 14 percent in Auckland).

Another measure of diversity within the Asian populations of Wellington is language. The most-spoken Chinese language is Yue (Cantonese) with 4,800 speakers, followed by 2,640 speakers of Northern Chinese (Mandarin) and 2,730 specifying Sinitic not further defined; in other words, a Chinese language not further defined. When these data are compared with Auckland's, there is a similar proportion of Chinese who specify that they speak Cantonese in each city (about 30 percent) but a much higher proportion who speak Mandarin in Auckland (30 percent versus 17 percent in Wellington).<sup>12</sup>

These differences, resulting from different immigration histories in these cities, are also apparent in the Indian responses to language. The predominant Indian languages in Wellington in 2006 were Hindi with 3,501 speakers, Gujarati with 3,165 speakers and Punjabi with 348 speakers.

There was twice the proportion in Wellington who spoke Gujarati (29 percent versus 14 percent in Auckland), and for New Zealand-born Indians in Wellington, Gujarati was the predominant language, illustrating the importance of migrants from Gujarat in the earlier migration flows into New Zealand. In contrast, 45 percent of Indians in Auckland spoke Hindi, but only 31 percent of those in Wellington did.

12. There was also a higher proportion in Auckland who specified 'Sinitic not further defined', in other words an unspecified Chinese language (25 percent versus 18 percent in Wellington) and 'Min', a language from the Fujian province of South eastern China (3.6 percent versus 2.4 percent).

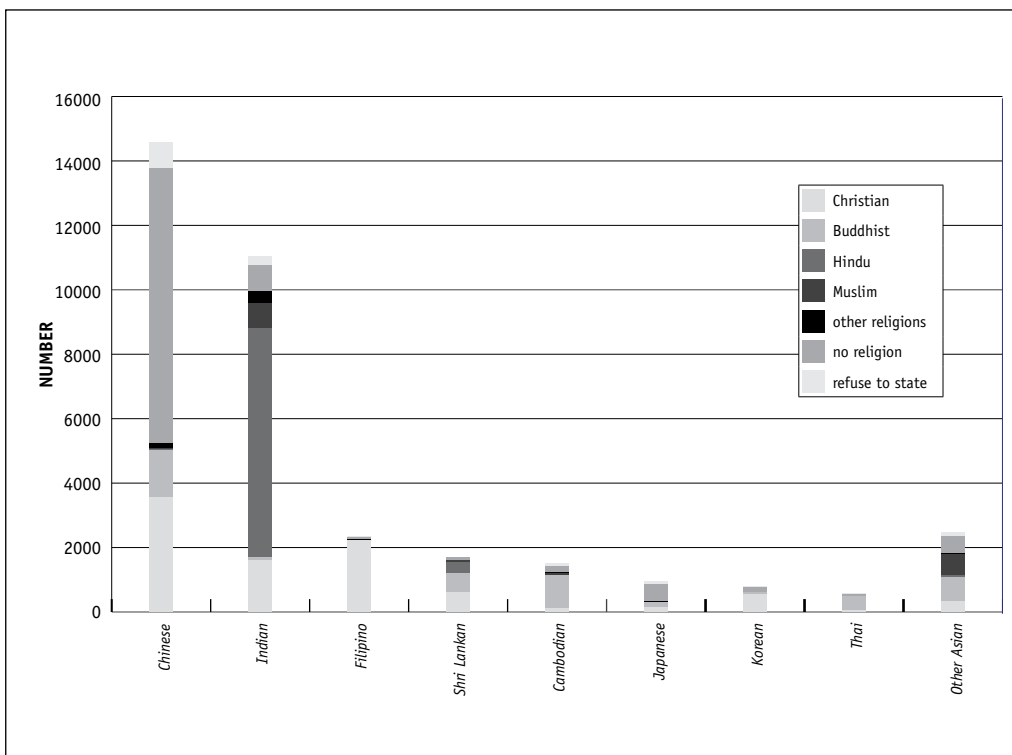
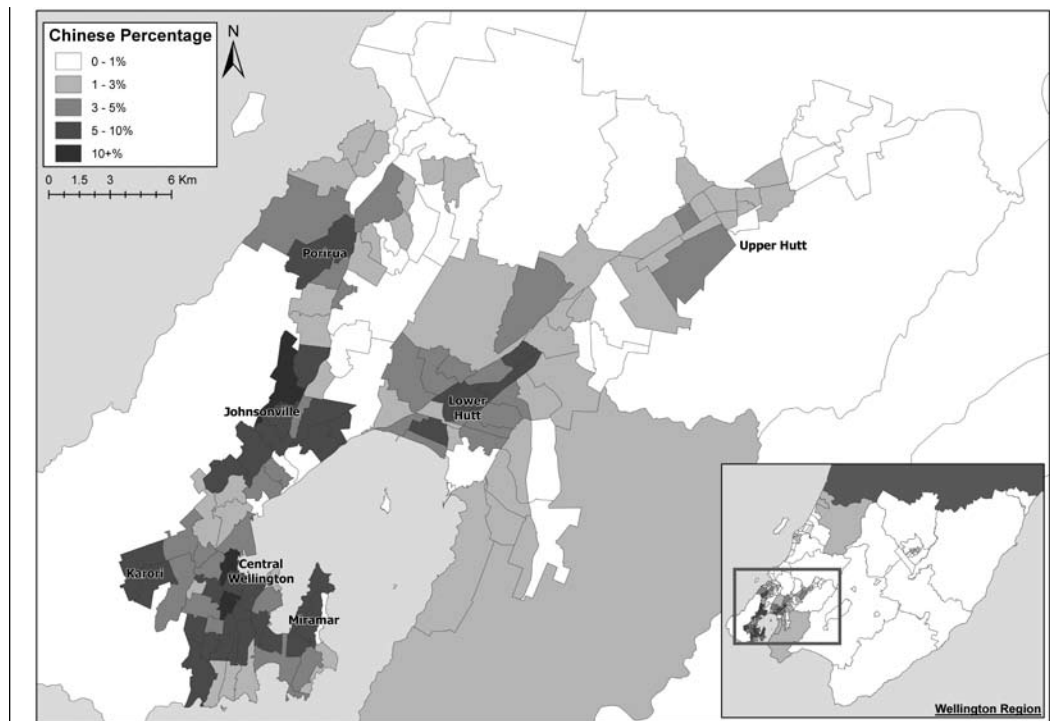


Figure 3: Religious affiliation of some Asian ethnic groups, Wellington region, 2006

Source: Statistics New Zealand

The religious diversity of the Asian populations of Wellington is shown in Figure 3. Among the Chinese population, the highest proportion specified 'no religion', although significant numbers specified Christianity and Buddhism. The majority of Indians in Wellington are Hindus, with relatively small numbers of Christians, Muslims and 'other religions'. Of the smaller groups, Filipinos and Koreans are predominantly Christian, while Cambodians and Thais are mainly Buddhist, with other groups being more mixed.



**Figure 4: Distribution of Chinese in Wellington, 2006, percent of total population**

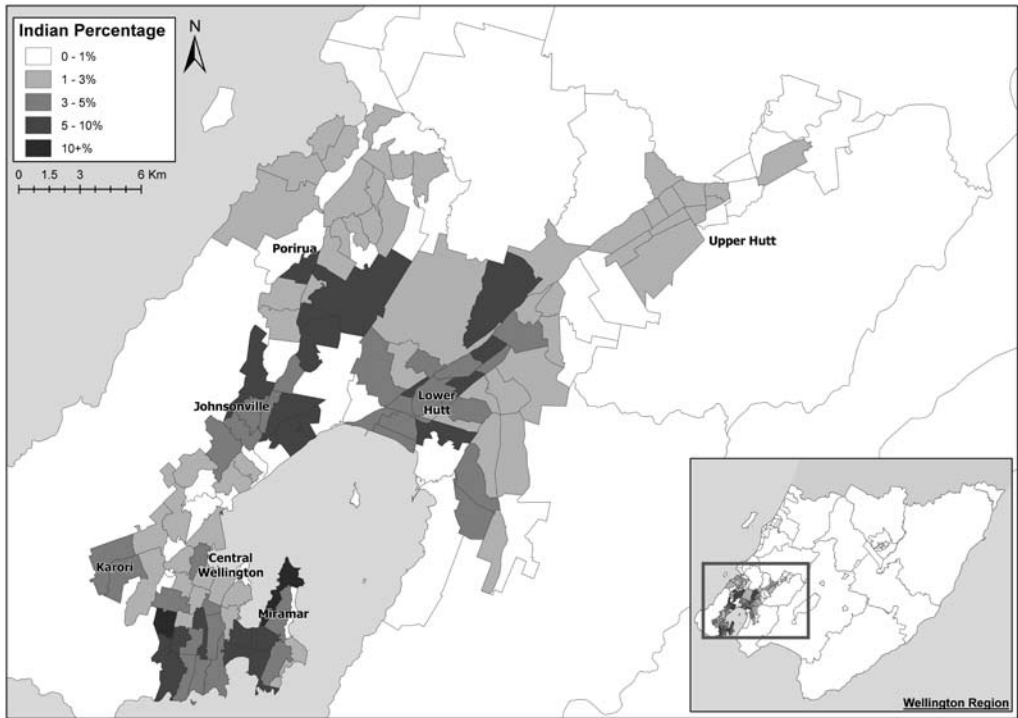
Source: Statistics New Zealand

It is interesting to consider the settlement geography of the larger Asian groups. In Figure 4, the distribution of Chinese in the Wellington region is shown. With exceptions, there are Chinese in the outer areas of the region but a considerable spread through the more central areas. Two concentrations stand out: around the central city of Wellington and in the area of Johnsonville and Churton Park.

The inner-city cluster is partly explained by the location of tertiary education institutions, which have attracted considerable numbers of international students, and partly by the fact that many of the longer-term Chinese population have settled centrally.

The concentration in Johnsonville, and to a lesser extent in the Hutt Valley and Porirua, can be explained by the availability of affordable housing, since many more recent migrants from China are highly educated but may not be as asset rich as some of the migrants of the 1990s from Hong Kong and Taiwan. A process of chain migration, in which new migrants follow the settlement decisions of earlier migrants, is also significant, since over time, various services related to culturally specific patterns of eating, shopping and worshipping have become concentrated in certain areas.

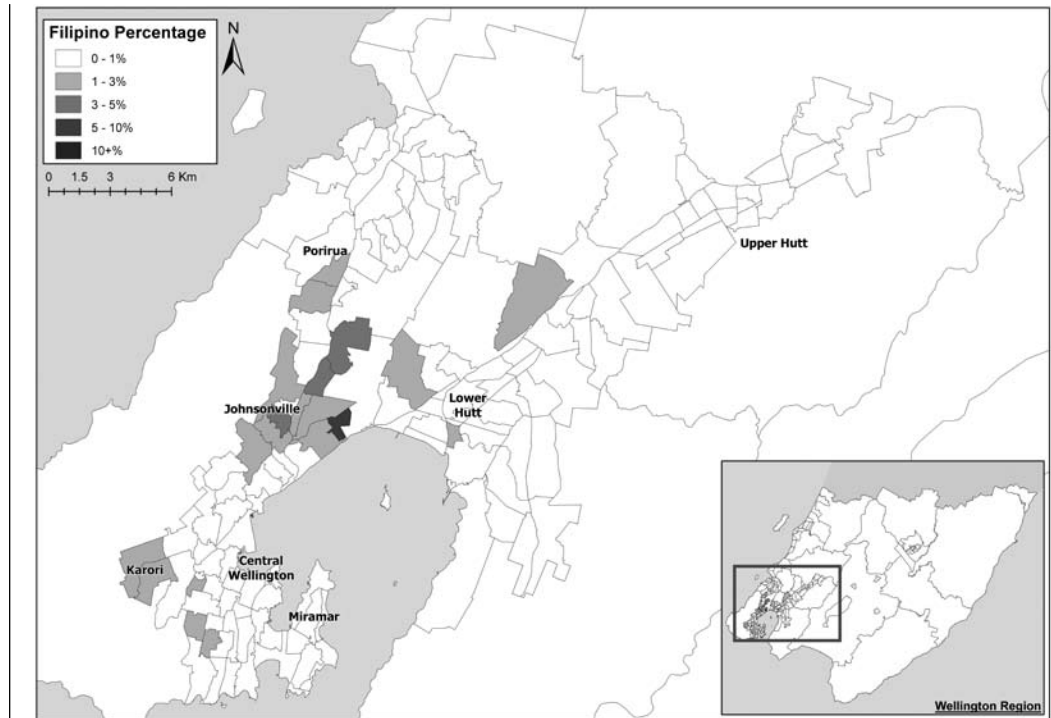




**Figure 5: Distribution of Indians in Wellington, 2006, percent of total population**

Source: Statistics New Zealand

To some extent, the distribution of the Indian population in the Wellington region (Figure 5) has similarities to the Chinese, with similar factors explaining this distribution. However, the greatest concentration is apparent to the south and east of the central city, perhaps relating to the settlement choices of earlier Indian populations and employment in the central city.



**Figure 6: Distribution of Filipinos in Wellington, 2006, percent of total population**

Source: Statistics New Zealand

The settlement geography of the third-largest Asian group, Filipinos (Figure 6), shows distinctive clusters around Newlands and Johnsonville, but the size of this population makes it difficult to determine the reasons for this pattern. However, as with the other groups, it is likely to be related to affordable housing and the impact of chain migration resulting in the increasing location of services and organisations serving the Filipino community.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF WELLINGTON'S ASIAN POPULATIONS

## DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE: AGE, SEX, FERTILITY

When the Asian population of the Wellington region is compared with the total population of the region (Figure 7), there are some distinctive differences.

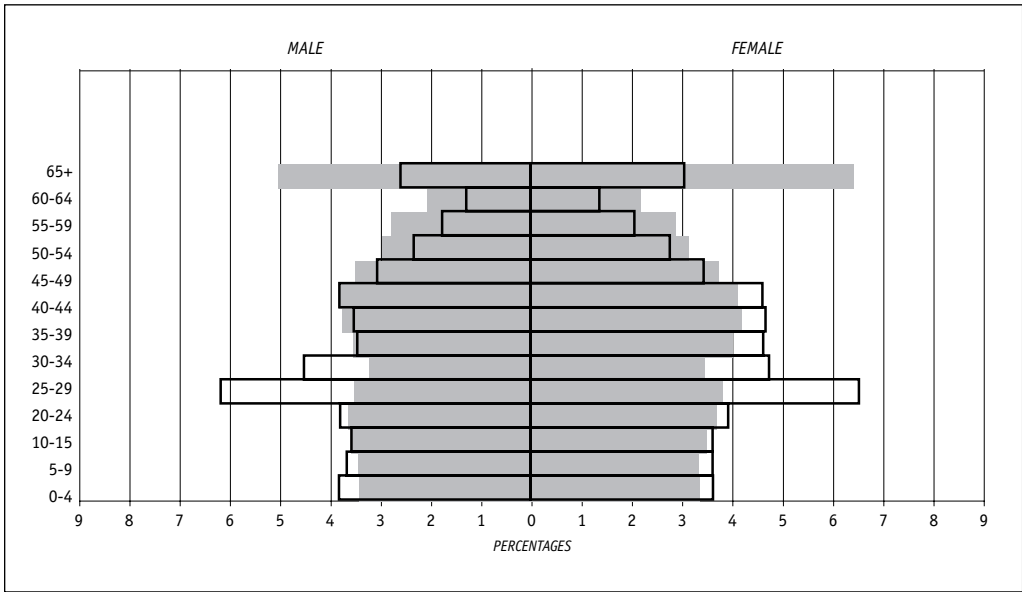
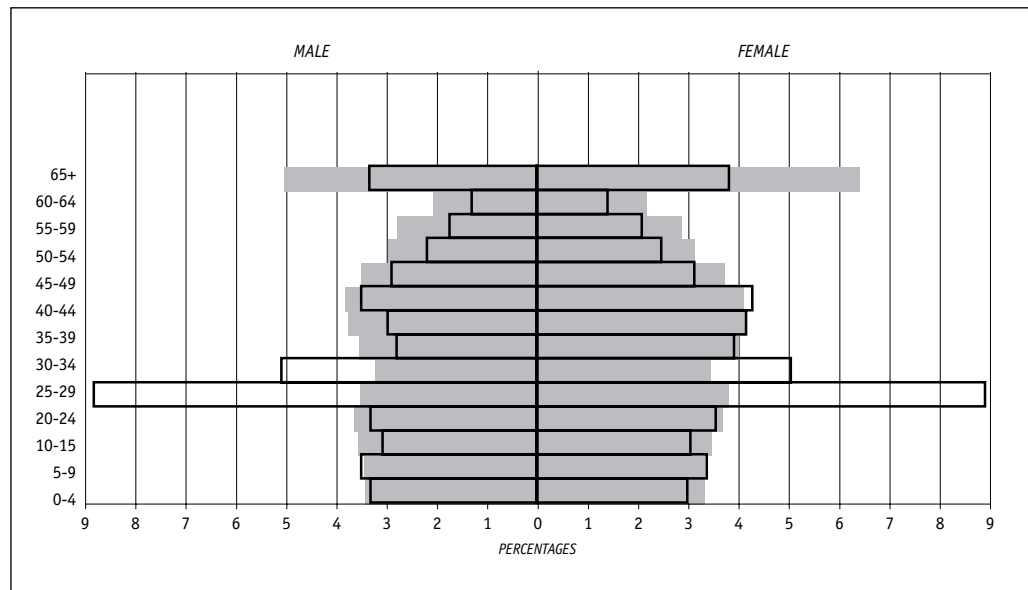


Figure 7: Asian (lines) and total population (shaded), Wellington region, 2006

Source: Statistics New Zealand

The most notable of these are a much higher proportion aged in their 20s and lower proportions in the older age cohorts above 45 years, especially in the oldest cohorts. This structure is similar to the national age-sex structure and approximates the Auckland structure but differs from the situation in Christchurch.<sup>13</sup> These differences are probably best explained by considering the specific age-sex structures of the larger Asian groups in Wellington.

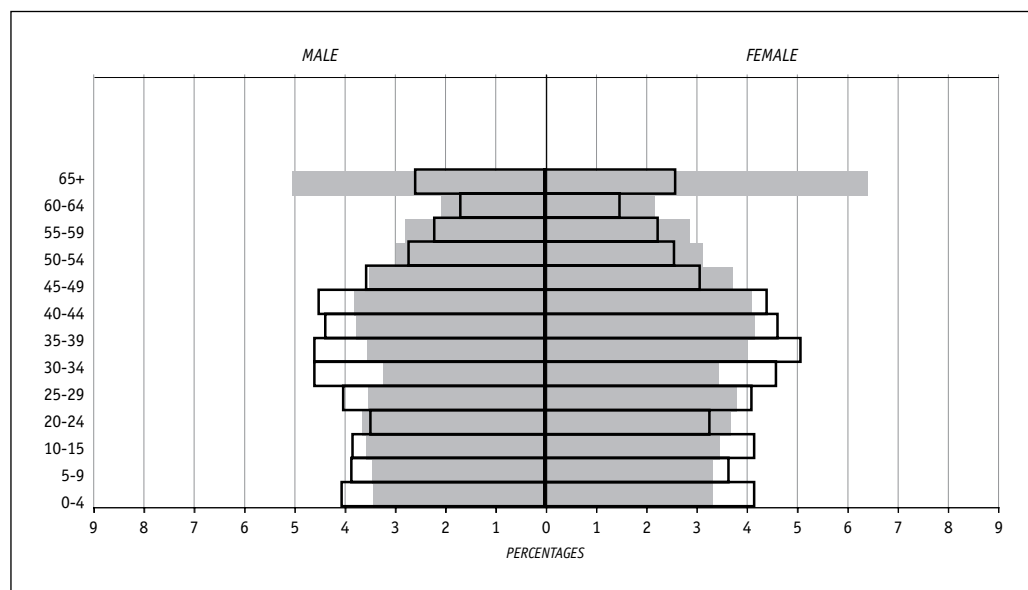
13. See Bedford & Ho 2008 for the national Asian populations, Friesen 2008a for Auckland and Wardlow Friesen (2008b) *Asians in Christchurch: The 'most British' city diversifies*, Outlook paper 08. Asia New Zealand Foundation, Wellington, for Christchurch comparisons.



**Figure 8: Chinese (lines) and total population (shaded) in Wellington region, 2006**

Source: Statistics New Zealand

The age-sex structure of the Chinese of Wellington is shown in Figure 8. The high proportion in the 20 to 29-year cohorts is dramatic, illustrating the presence of tertiary-level students in Wellington, as discussed below. In the age cohorts above 30 years, the proportion of Chinese is less than in the total population, especially in the oldest cohorts as a result of the age selectivity of immigration policy and the relative recency of much Chinese immigration.

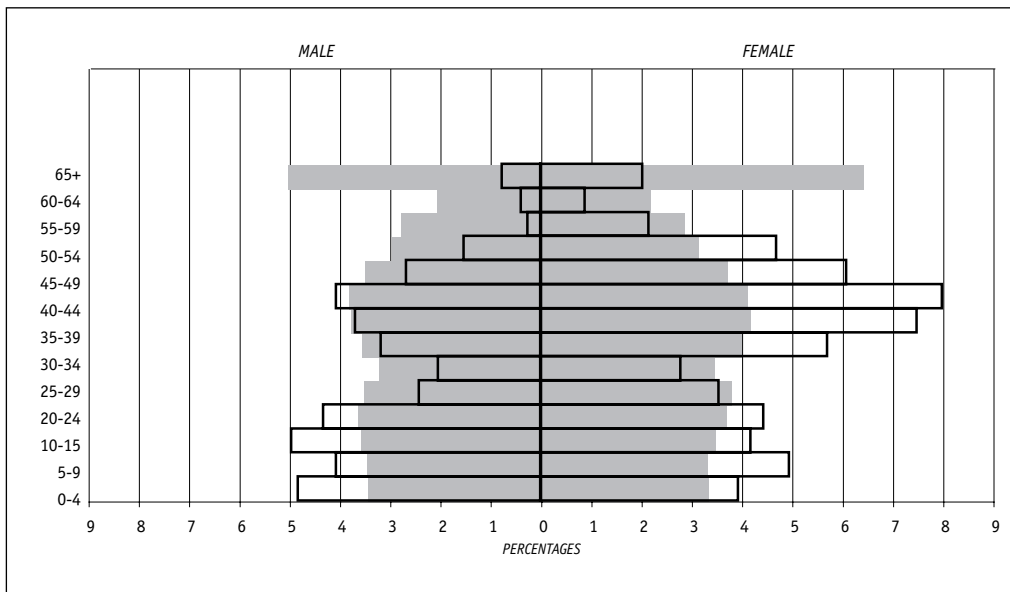


**Figure 9: Indian (lines) and total population (shaded) in Wellington region, 2006**

Source: Statistics New Zealand

The higher proportion of all Asian groups in the 'labour force' ages of 15 to 64 reflects the age selectivity of immigration policy.

The age-sex structure of the Indian population of Wellington (Figure 9, page 10) is quite different from that of the Chinese. Most notably, the age cohorts from 20 to 39 are over-represented, revealing the presence of tertiary-aged students but also the age selectivity of immigration policy, which favours migrants in their 30s. The child cohorts are also significant, the outcome of family immigration. Similarly to the Chinese case, the older cohorts are under-represented.



**Figure 10: Filipinos (lines) and total population (shaded) in Wellington region, 2006**

Source: Statistics New Zealand

The Filipino population of Wellington varies markedly from that of the total population (Figure 10). It should be noted that this age-sex pyramid is based on a population of about 2,400, which is much smaller than the Chinese and Indian populations but nevertheless shows some interesting trends. The pyramid suggests the importance of family immigration, with significant numbers under 20 years of age but a relatively small tertiary student presence. Also, there is a marked over-representation of women aged 30 to 55, which is an outcome of the presence of many females in the health care professions who have migrated in recent years, as well as some marriage migration.

In Table 1 (page 12) the age and sex characteristics of eight Asian groups in Wellington are summarised. The proportions of these populations aged less than 15 are slightly higher than the proportion for the total population of Wellington (all ethnic groups), with the exception of the Chinese, which is slightly lower. At the other end of the spectrum, the proportions of people aged 65 and over are lower for all groups. Overall then, the higher proportion of all Asian groups in the 'labour force' ages of 15 to 64 reflects the age selectivity of immigration policy emphasising the selection of primary migrants in their 20s and 30s.

14. Robert Didham (2004) *Fertility of New Zealand Women by Ethnicity*. Based on the 1996 *Census of Population and Dwellings*. Wellington, Statistics New Zealand, p. 9. These rates are age adjusted to overcome the unbalanced age structures of migrant populations as reflected in the age-sex structures of ethnic groups already shown in this report.
15. *ibid*: 35.
16. *ibid*: 39.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of Asian groups in Wellington, 2006**

Ethnic group	population number	Age structure			Sex ratio
		% aged less than 15	% aged 15-64	% aged 65+	sex ratio (males / 100 females)
Chinese	14,898	19	74	7	91
Indian	11,073	24	71	5	99
Filipino	2,370	27	70	3	65
Sri Lankan	1,698	22	73	5	97
Cambodian	1,515	22	73	5	90
Japanese	948	25	73	2	64
Korean	813	24	73	3	81
Thai	597	21	78	1	50
Other Asian	3,075	26	72	2	87
Total Asian*	36,477	22	72	6	90
All ethnic groups	448,956	21	67	11	94

Source: Statistics New Zealand

\* Note that these are total responses data, so total of all groups will be higher than Total Asian since some individuals may appear in more than one group.

For the total Asian population of Wellington, there are 90 males for every 100 females, compared with 94 in the total population (Table 1). It is only the Indian population that has a similar number of males to females, perhaps reflecting the importance of family immigration as well as higher levels of male migration for purposes of study and work. The most imbalanced sex ratios are among the Thai, Filipino and Japanese populations, reflecting a higher incidence of intermarriage but also occupationally selective migration, for example of Filipinos into care-giving jobs and Japanese into the tourism industry.

Only very limited information is available on other demographic variables by ethnicity. For example, detailed analyses of fertility are rare and dated and available mainly at the national level. One analysis of fertility by broad ethnic group is derived from the 1996 Census, so may not be fully representative of the ethnic groups a decade later. When the average number of children born per woman (Total Fertility Rate - TFR) is compared, the Asian rate of 1.88 is slightly higher than that of Europeans (1.83) but considerably lower than those of Māori (2.79) and Pacific peoples (2.84).<sup>14</sup> There was, however, a great deal of diversity within the Asian population. The TFR of refugee-origin groups was highest at 2.63 for Khmer and 2.47 for Vietnamese women. Of the larger groups, Indian women had a TFR of 2.15, Chinese 1.83 and Korean 1.54, and the lowest rate was for Japanese women at 1.01.<sup>15</sup> These rates partly reflect fertility rates in countries of origin but also levels of education and marital status, with an expected reduction in rates for those with tertiary qualifications, and increase for those who were legally married.<sup>16</sup>

## LANGUAGE SKILLS AND EDUCATION

One indicator of the degree to which a population may be considered to have become integrated into a host society is language ability. Also, multiple language skills can be viewed as a valuable resource that migrants bring with them. In the 2006 Census, the language question asked: 'In which language(s) could you have a conversation about a lot of everyday things?', and there may have been some variability in the interpretation of this question. Nevertheless, the responses are of interest in gaining some indication of the language skills of the population.

In the 2006 Census, 14 percent of Asians in New Zealand said that they could not speak any of the official languages of New Zealand (English, Māori, NZ Sign Language) and, although we do not have any further breakdown, we can assume that most of these were relatively recent migrants or older migrants who did not have to qualify under the minimum English language specifications of the immigration system.<sup>17</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, 25 percent of Asians said that English was their only language, presumably mostly New Zealand-born Asians.

The most common response from the Asian population to the language question came from the 61 percent of Asians who could speak English and at least one other language. Although the bulk of these spoke two languages, about 14 percent could speak three or more languages, a proportion much higher than all other ethnic groups except the Middle Eastern, Latin American and African group, which had a similar proportion. These multilingual abilities (three or more languages) were about five times as great within the Asian population as they were within the total population of New Zealand, and this resource might be considered one of the less-recognised benefits of immigration.

The language abilities of the Asian populations of Wellington are summarised in Table 2, although these data may not fully represent the complexity of the language capabilities of these populations. At the time of the 2006 Census 91 percent of all Asians in Wellington said they could hold an everyday conversation in English, a proportion lower than the 98 percent of the total population that made this claim.

The group with the lowest percentage in this category, Korean at 81 percent, is the group with the most recent history of immigration, so it must be assumed that some of the dependants arriving with the primary migrants had not yet had time to acquire sufficient language abilities. For those Asian populations with their origins in countries with stronger 'English-speaking traditions' that date from colonial times, such as India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, there is an expected higher proficiency in English, but also high are groups whose populations have high education levels in New Zealand, such as Thai and Japanese.

17. These percentages exclude those who were too young to talk and various categories of 'not specified'. These and other unreferenced census data come from both published and specially commissioned tables from the 2006 Census.

31 percent of the Asian population had a university degree, in contrast with only 21 percent of the total population of Wellington.

18. Department of Labour (2006) *Life in New Zealand: Settlement experiences of skilled migrants: results from the 2005 survey.* Wellington, Department of Labour, pp. 49-51.

**Table 2: Language and education characteristics of Asian groups in Wellington, 2006**

Ethnic group	% who could have everyday conversation in English	Multiple language indicator*	Education aged 15+	
			% no high school qualification	% university degree
Chinese	88	1.71	13	20
Indian	93	1.81	13	32
Filipino	99	1.81	6	46
Sri Lankan	97	1.66	3	44
Cambodian	85	1.73	38	8
Japanese	94	1.72	8	31
Korean	81	1.74	6	28
Thai	94	1.75	17	21
Other Asian	93	1.71	14	28
Total Asian	91	1.74	13	31
All ethnic groups	98	1.15	18	21

\* Average number of languages specified on census form i.e. number of total responses divided by number of people in group (not including 'too young to speak' and not specified.).

Source: Statistics New Zealand

There are a number of possible measures of levels of educational qualification, but only two are used in Table 2, representing the two ends of the educational spectrum: those without a high school qualification and those with a university degree. In Wellington, only 13 percent of the Asian population aged over 15 did not have a high school qualification in 2006, a proportion that was significantly lower than for the total population of the city. At the other end of the spectrum, 31 percent of the Asian population had a university degree, in contrast with only 21 percent of the total population of Wellington.

Statistics showing that the Asian population of Wellington has higher levels of education than the average are not surprising, since New Zealand's immigration policy emphasises educational levels of new immigrants and attributes considerable points on that basis. The main exception to the higher educational levels of Asian groups is the Cambodian population, since it did not arrive under the general immigration criteria; most arrived as refugees.

At the same time, it cannot be assumed that all of the higher educational qualifications of these Asian groups have been 'imported', since recent Asian migrants have a high rate of participation in the educational system. A survey of skilled migrants showed that 52 percent of Asian migrants undertook further education and training in New Zealand, especially to improve their English language skills, upgrade existing qualifications and in general get better jobs.<sup>18</sup>



# ASIAN ETHNOSCAPES OF WELLINGTON

The ways in which cultures interact, and the impacts that 'new' ethnic populations may have on a host society, may be considered in a number of different ways. In the social sciences, the term 'ethnoscape' has been used in recent years to describe the impacts that new migrant populations make, including various kinds of interaction with the host population, especially in urban areas.<sup>19</sup> These range from things visible in the landscape, such as people, housing, shops, restaurants and temples, to less visible aspects such as language and changing attitudes, as well as different kinds of participation in social and political activities. In between are the visible but transitory phenomena such as festivals and markets.

## POLITICAL ETHNOSCAPES

The nature of Asian settlement in Wellington is affected by its position as the capital of New Zealand. As mentioned earlier, some Chinese settlers were attracted to the capital because of its economic potential, but there was also political potential in being located near 'the centre of power'. Not only are Parliament and most national government ministries located here but also the embassies, high commissions and counsels of Asian countries are located in Wellington.

As early as 1909, there was a Chinese counsel representing the Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty based in Wellington, an initiative of the Chinese government taken to look after the interests of Chinese in New Zealand.<sup>20</sup> When Sun Yat Sen's revolution occurred soon afterwards, there was an ongoing rivalry between supporters of the newly formed Nationalist (Guomindang/Kuomintang) government and those who were still loyal to the Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty. A similar dynamic developed when the New Zealand government became one of the first western governments to recognise the People's Republic of China in 1972, resulting in considerable tension between the newly established Chinese embassy and the resident Chinese population, of whom many tended to be anti-communist or had sympathies with the Nationalist government that had retreated to Taiwan. These dynamics illustrate the reality that the Chinese population of New Zealand has never been a single, homogeneous entity, and while these political dynamics have been present throughout the country, they have often been especially strong in the nation's capital.

India has also had a diplomatic presence in Wellington since soon after independence in 1947, and many Southeast Asian countries also established posts soon after they gained independence. In 2009, at least 11 Asian countries have diplomatic representatives in Wellington. These include China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, South Korea, Viet Nam, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

While most of the Asians elected as MPs in the 2008 election are Auckland based, Wellington often serves as a lobbying point for Asian ethnic associations. There are a number of Chinese associations surviving from the earlier periods of immigration and the changing political dynamics mentioned above. Some of these are based on regional origins within China, and in some cases mostly involve older members of the Chinese community. Although established 70 years ago, the New Zealand Chinese Association (NZCA) has a contemporary and a political focus so that it "... represents the interests of both long-established and new Chinese migrant groups".<sup>21</sup> This organisation is headquartered in Wellington and has 13 branches throughout New Zealand. The NZCA serves the usual functions of an 'ethnic association' in that it organises language and dance classes as an aspect of cultural maintenance, it organises sporting competitions and conferences, and it attempts to service the specific needs of new migrants and older members of the community. However, since it represents Chinese nationwide and is located in Wellington, it has more political functions than some other ethnic organisations. These include conducting research on the Chinese poll tax and laws and policies relating to Chinese and the promotion of 'national conversations' on diversity, biculturalism, the Treaty of Waitangi, multiculturalism and related topics.

19. For example, see Stephen Shaw, Susan Bagwell & Joanna Karmowska (2004) *Ethnoscapes as spectacle: reimagining multicultural districts as new destinations for leisure and tourism consumption*, *Urban Studies* 41(10):1983-2000.
20. I am grateful to Nigel Murphy for much of the information in this section.
21. See [www.nzchinese.org.nz](http://www.nzchinese.org.nz). This section is based on this website, and also on a conversation with Steven Young, President of the New Zealand Chinese Association.

Wellington was often considered to be a relatively cosmopolitan city as measured by the diversity of cuisines available.

22. See [www.nzindians.org.nz](http://www.nzindians.org.nz). Information in this section is derived from this website, and also from a conversation with Ratil Champaneri, President of the New Zealand Indian Central Association.
23. *The Dominion Post* 9 February, 2009.

As well as developing its online presence, the NZCA is interested in developing linkages with other 'pan-ethnic' groups, as well as maintaining and developing relationships with various levels of government.

The New Zealand Indian Central Association (NZICA) is also located in Wellington. Founded in 1926, it now has ten independent, self-governing branches throughout New Zealand. The objectives of the NZICA are many, but include promoting and advancing the interests of the Indian population of New Zealand in relation to cultural preservation, international linkages and relationships with various sectors of New Zealand society, and organising national events.<sup>22</sup> To some extent, some of these functions are devolved to the regional associations, so the more specific functions that the NZICA takes on as a national organisation relate to political lobbying. In recent times, there have been two particularly notable aspects of this political role. One is the representation to central government agencies on behalf of individuals in relation to issues of immigration status and related issues. The second is a broader role in relation to political representation on behalf of the whole Indian community (communities). Recently the issues of law and order have been high on the agenda of the NZICA, with a number of crimes committed against Indian individuals, especially shopkeepers. Meetings with government ministers have promoted 'more rigorous' law and order policies in general, as well as specifics such as more effective security systems for dairies and the recruitment of Indian police officers.

#### **CULTURAL CELEBRATION: RESTAURANTS AND FESTIVALS**

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Even before the acceleration of 'new' migrations in 1987, Wellington was often considered to be a relatively cosmopolitan city as measured by the diversity of cuisines available, to some extent a result of the presence of diplomatic missions and their associated personnel. In recent years, this diversity has increased. The 2008/09 Wellington Yellow Pages listed 121 restaurants that were identified as 'Asian'. These were, in order of number: Indian 30, Chinese 29, Thai 15, Malaysian 12, Japanese nine, 'pan Asian' six, Turkish three, Cambodian two, Korean two, and one each of Mongolian, Nepalese and Vietnamese restaurants.

In many countries where migration has increased in recent years, there has been a proliferation of festivals celebrating events of cultural significance to growing migrant groups. These have tended to both serve as celebratory events for the migrant groups and create linkages between host and migrant societies. In Wellington, three such festivals are worth mentioning here.

In October 2008, the seventh Diwali Festival of Lights to be held in Wellington was held in the TSB Bank Arena, Queens Wharf. With an estimated 30,000 people in attendance, this festival, although a celebration that originated within Hinduism, embraces a variety of Indian cultural forms, including a highly competitive Bollywood competition. The diversity of music, dance, food and other cultural forms attests to the great diversity of the Indian community in Wellington.

The Chinese New Year was ushered in by the Wellington Chinese New Year Festival 2009 (Year of the Ox) in February 2009. Thousands of people turned out to a parade of dragon dancers, puppeteers and a fire-breathing bull to welcome the Year of the Ox.<sup>23</sup> The celebration included a range of local and international cultural performances as well as a very successful Asian market selling food and crafts.

The presence of a significant Southeast Asian community in Wellington was illustrated by the first Southeast Asian Night Market in August 2008. Six ASEAN nations – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam – were the major participants in this new event, with smaller inputs from Cambodia and Myanmar. A variety of cultural forms were showcased, including batik painting, Indonesian shadow puppetry, Filipino and Vietnamese martial arts and Thai kick-boxing, as well as a wide range of cuisines.

Six percent or 5,200, of New Zealand's ('foreign fee paying') international students were enrolled in the Wellington region in 2007.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Many of the studies of the impacts of immigration and the resulting ethnoscapes have mainly focused on the role of permanent resident migrants in bringing about change. However, even with a downturn in international student numbers in recent years, there are still more international students arriving in New Zealand each year than there are permanent residents. Although their impacts are not as great as those of permanent residents, because their stays are shorter term and they are not usually accompanied by dependants, they are nonetheless major contributors to new ethnoscapes and many are possible permanent residents in the future. This is especially the case since immigration policy has facilitated 'on-shore' applications for permanent residency and given greater emphasis to tertiary education undertaken in New Zealand as part of the points system.

The number of international students arriving in New Zealand rose dramatically from the mid-1990s to peak at over 120,000 in 2002 then declined to about 91,000 in 2007.<sup>24</sup> Of all international students in 2006, about 15,000 were in schools (about 43 percent from South Korea), about 31,000 were in tertiary education institutions such as universities and polytechnics (about 43 percent from China) and the rest were in other institutions such as language schools.<sup>25</sup> Thus, although data are not readily available, it is apparent that the English language schools attract large numbers of Asian students.

Six percent or 5,200, of New Zealand's ('foreign fee paying') international students were enrolled in the Wellington region in 2007. Of these 3,000 were at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW). The largest source country for these students was China, although it is especially the case for these students which has resulted in an overall decline.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, there was an increase in the number of students coming from Malaysia and Viet Nam, two countries with which VUW has been developing ongoing relationships. As well as international students at VUW, the presence of a considerable number of Asian permanent resident students is attested to by the fact that 17.4 percent of the student population identified as being Asian.

## CITY COUNCIL INITIATIVES

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According to its website, Wellington City Council '... is committed to making the most of Wellington's ethnic diversity'.<sup>27</sup> There are several Council programmes and projects that bear out this assertion. An Ethnic Communities Advisor has several roles, including general awareness-raising on issues facing minority communities, advising the Council on intercultural issues and supporting people and organisations who work with ethnic communities. Further, the advisor is responsible for organising 'ethnic forums' in which particular themes relevant to the well-being of ethnic communities are chosen for discussion, resulting in suggestions to the Council and others as to appropriate paths of action. Further, the Council has established an interpreting service for minority languages and outlined an Intercultural Relationships Framework 'to improve intercultural relationships in Wellington'. In each of these initiatives, various Asian communities have played a significant role.

24. Terry McGrath, Paul Stock & Andrew Butcher (2007) *Friends and Allies: The impacts of returning Asian students on New Zealand-Asia relationships*, Outlook paper 05. Wellington, Asia New Zealand Foundation.
25. For data on school and tertiary education enrolments, see [www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/international\\_education](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/international_education).
26. See *VUW Annual Report 2007*, [www.vuw.ac.nz/annualreports/2007-Documents/AnnualReport.pdf](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/annualreports/2007-Documents/AnnualReport.pdf).
27. See [www.wellington.govt.nz/services/ethniccomm/](http://www.wellington.govt.nz/services/ethniccomm/). Also a discussion with Alice Hang, the Wellington City Council Ethnic Communities Advisor, contributed to the background information in this report.

Thus by 2021, the Asian population of Wellington is likely to be about 61,500, an increase of 51 percent.

## CONCLUSIONS

Ethnic projections by Statistics New Zealand, based on the 2006 Census and released in April 2008, were for a near doubling of the Asian population of New Zealand between 2006 and 2026 (medium projection). This increase, averaging about 3.4 percent a year, is significantly higher than the growth of other broad ethnic groups. Even more recently released are the ethnic projections for regions and territorial authorities, and these include projections for Wellington.

The Asian population of the Auckland region is projected to grow at an annual rate of 3.8 percent by 2021, while for Wellington this rate is projected to be 2.8 percent (medium projection), which is still significantly higher than that for other ethnic groups in this region. Thus by 2021, the Asian population of Wellington is likely to be about 61,500, an increase of 51 percent.

However, it should be noted that in all broad ethnic population groups, there has been an increasing incidence of intermarriage so that many of those who declare Asian ethnicity in the future may belong to other ethnic groups as well.

The future composition of the Asian population of Wellington will vary according to changes in New Zealand's immigration policy. China is the largest source of Asian migrants for Wellington but policy changes that emphasise language skills have been shown in the past to reduce flows from China, so such changes could slow down the rate of immigration into Wellington. India is also an important migrant source, and the potential for increased migration from South Asian countries is considerable and likely to be supplemented with an ongoing outflow of Indo-Fijians from Fiji.

A recent diversification of migrant sources indicates the ongoing importance of Southeast Asian countries and, for Wellington, the Philippines is already an important source of migrants. Recent national immigration trends suggest an increase from this country.

Projections suggest that the ethnic composition of Wellington's population will continue to diversify and that the Asian component will grow. So at both national and local levels, the economic, cultural and political inputs of various Asian groups will become increasingly important, and this will particularly affect Wellington as the national capital but also in terms of the evolving local ethnoscapes of the city.

# APPENDIX 1

**BIRTHPLACES OF 15 LARGEST ASIAN ETHNIC GROUPS IN WELLINGTON REGION, 2006**

Birthplace	Chinese	Indian	Filipino	Sri Lankan	Cambodian	Japanese	Korean	Vietnamese	Thai	Iraqi	Malay	Indonesian	Iranian/Persian	Pakistani	Afghani	Total, these Asian groups
New Zealand	5,448	3,657	441	276	378	261	63	123	111	66	114	102	24	24	12	11,100
% New Zealand born	36.6	33.0	18.6	16.3	25.0	27.5	7.7	18.0	18.6	12.7	23.0	24.6	17.0	18.6	20.0	30.5
China, PR	6,264	6	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,279
India	3	4,176	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	4,188
Fiji	57	2,253	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,313
Philippines	39	0	1,869	0	0	3	0	3	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	1,920
Malaysia	1,212	237	3	30	3	0	0	3	3	0	324	3	0	0	0	1,818
Sri Lanka	0	51	0	1,299	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,350
Cambodia	117	0	0	0	984	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,119
Korea, Republic of	0	0	0	0	0	0	720	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	720
Viet Nam	138	0	3	0	30	0	3	522	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	696
Japan	6	0	3	3	0	621	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	633
Thailand	27	3	0	0	96	0	0	3	459	0	3	0	0	0	0	591
Hong Kong (SAR)	459	6	0	3	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	477
Indonesia	102	6	3	0	3	6	0	0	3	3	9	282	0	3	0	420
Iraq	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	402	0	0	3	0	0	405
Singapore	297	57	3	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	6	0	3	0	393
Taiwan	270	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	273
England	48	108	6	15	0	9	0	0	3	3	3	0	0	6	0	201
Iran	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	99	0	3	123
South Africa	6	105	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	114
Australia	51	30	3	9	6	6	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	111
USA	30	27	6	0	0	24	3	3	3	0	3	0	0	3	3	105
Pakistan	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	81	3	105
Samoa	96	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	102
All Other	225	330	24	54	18	9	18	6	9	30	9	12	9	3	39	795
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,898</b>	<b>11,073</b>	<b>2,370</b>	<b>1,698</b>	<b>1,515</b>	<b>948</b>	<b>813</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>597</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>36,354</b>

Source: Statistics New Zealand

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The Asia New Zealand Foundation (Asia:NZ) was founded in 1994 as a non-profit, apolitical organisation dedicated to building New Zealand's links with Asia. Through its activities in education, business, media, culture, research and policy, Asia:NZ aims to promote initiatives which deepen understanding and relationships between New Zealanders and the peoples of Asia.

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