

Friends and Allies: The Impacts of Returning Asian Students on New Zealand-Asia Relationships

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FRIENDS AND ALLIES: THE IMPACTS OF RETURNING ASIAN STUDENTS ON NEW ZEALAND-ASIA RELATIONSHIPS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We need to consider Asian students within New Zealand's broader engagement with Asia. Asian students who studied in New Zealand under the Colombo Plan hold a particularly nostalgic place in New Zealand's collective memory. Likewise, contemporary Asian students who return to Asia will draw upon their social and educational experiences in New Zealand. Asian students, while they are in New Zealand and once they have returned to their countries of origin, have much to offer New Zealand. Yet despite decades of Asian immigration and Asian students, New Zealand's "Asian" literacy remains poor.

The decades of growth for international education in New Zealand brought with them changes in the New Zealand environment for Asian students coming to study in New Zealand. Frequently, Asian students encountered large numbers of other Asian students and, for many, much of their adjustment and socialisation occurred amongst co-nationals and other international students. Many Asian students have reported limited opportunities to engage with New Zealand domestic students and with host communities. The task of developing those friendships falls to Asian students as much as, if not more than, to New Zealand students, and to the institutions where Asian students study.

There are a number of issues of critical importance in order to develop and maintain positive relationships between New Zealand and its graduates in Asia. These issues include developing and maintaining personal relationships; interacting with Asian students while they are studying in New Zealand; developing and implementing programmes, strategies and policies that engage both Asian students and New Zealand students and develop their cross-cultural interactions; and connecting with New Zealand's Asian alumni in meaningful and productive ways.

The large numbers of Asian students coming to New Zealand to study have the potential for growth in relationships between Asia and New Zealand. The Asian student body in New Zealand and New Zealand's Asian alumni represent a unique resource for developing our relationships with Asia and Asian people. Asian students coming to study in New Zealand offer an opportunity for New Zealand to develop long-lasting and mutually trusting relationships.

This paper then provides: a brief history of Asian students in New Zealand; data on the international student as an export earner for New Zealand; comment on Asian students and New Zealand host communities; a précis of the export education policy environment; an analysis of Asian students' views of New Zealand culture; a summary of research on Asian students' perspectives on re-entry; a brief remark on Asian countries' incentives for returning students; a note about "third-place people"; and finally, conclusions and recommendations on ways to use returning Asian students to enhance New Zealand-Asia relationships.

INTRODUCTION

We need to consider Asian students within New Zealand's broader engagement with Asia. The New Zealand government has invested a significant amount of funding into the recruitment of international students to New Zealand, the professional development of those who work with international students and research into the experiences of international students in New Zealand. However, relatively less research has been undertaken on the experiences and implications of international students returning to their countries of origin. Where that research has taken place, it has tended to do so within frames of either development studies¹ or sociology², with a strong emphasis on the personal challenges international students face in their re-entry experiences. This paper seeks to consider Asian students within international relations more broadly. In particular, this paper asks how Asian students who have studied in New Zealand and have returned to Asia could be nurtured, maintained and developed as friends and allies to New Zealand longer term.

Much recent scholarship on Asian students' experiences in New Zealand has tended to isolate their experiences from wider issues of national identity, migration, notions of integration and issues around the global movement of people, the impact of neo-liberalism on the delivery and marketing of education, and effects on social cohesion. Tangential issues of border control, national security, aid and development, regional security, free trade agreements, global health issues and the changing contours of the global economic markets receive even less attention in discussions around Asian students in New Zealand or elsewhere.

These gaps present a serious deficiency in our discussions on and analysis of the issues surrounding Asian students in New Zealand so that, as Vivienne Anderson points out, ... *much literature concerned with international students'*

*experiences draws on "cultural difference" as a "primary analytical tool". At a surface level, this results in a distortion or oversimplification of complex human realities. The diversity of both "New Zealand" and "international" students (for example) is effectively obscured.*³

New Zealand has long hosted Asian students. Asian students who studied in New Zealand under the Colombo Plan hold a particularly nostalgic place in New Zealand's collective memory. The Colombo Plan helped to establish the first modern elite in many Asian countries. However, the world has changed since then to the extent that we can no longer necessarily use the experiences of Colombo Plan students as our benchmark.

Nonetheless, students who have returned to their home countries in Asia with positive first-hand experiences of New Zealand can act as some of New Zealand's best diplomats; they may also form a valuable pool of potential employees for New Zealand, Asian and multinational companies. Of course, returning students will draw upon their social and educational experiences in New Zealand. Therefore, an emphasis on quality and value and the social environment for students should provide enduring opportunities, especially if backed by consistent marketing.

Asian students, while they are in New Zealand and once they have returned to their countries of origin, have much to offer New Zealand. Despite decades of Asian immigration and Asian students, New Zealand's "Asian" literacy is poor.⁴ New Zealand needs to find ways to draw on the skills of Asian students to sharpen New Zealanders' knowledge of Asia. At the same time, we need to find ways to provide greater opportunities for our new Asian Kiwis to become "New Zealand literate" so that they can make an effective contribution to New Zealand as well as enjoy life in New Zealand to the fullest. Moreover, "New Zealand-literate" Asian students can effectively promote New Zealand overseas.

¹ Terry McGrath (1998). *Homecoming: Reverse Culture Shock in Graduate Re-entry: New Zealand Trained Graduates Returning Home to Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia*. Unpublished Masters thesis, Palmerston North: Institute of Development Studies, Department of Geography, Massey University.

² Andrew Butcher (2003). *No Place Like Home? The Experience of South East Asian International University Students in New Zealand and their Re-entry into their Countries of Origin*. Palmerston North: ISM New Zealand.

³ Vivienne Anderson (2006). "Who's not integrating? International women speak about New Zealand students", in *Conference Proceedings of ISANA 17th International Education Conference 5-8 December 2006* [CD-Rom].

⁴ Asia New Zealand Foundation (2006). *Preparing for a Future with Asia: How New Zealand can Benefit from Asia's Growing Influence*. Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation.

Do returned Asian students use their New Zealand study experiences to maintain and build linkages with New Zealand, and does New Zealand utilise these students as effectively as it could?

⁵ Nick Lewis and Andrew Butcher (2003). *Place and Images of Quality in New Zealand's Export Education Industry*. Paper presented at the New Zealand Geography Association Conference, Auckland University, 8 July 2003.

There are already important linkages via returned students into the Asian region. Alumni networks build on existing connections and advance educational links. There are also person-to-person networks, computer-mediated communities, religious networks and other more informal networks between returned Asian students. All of these networks maintain important connections amongst New Zealand's alumni in the Asian region. Strategically, there are important issues to consider around ongoing engagement between these returned Asian students and New Zealand in industry, politics and education. At a people-to-people level, the types of community that returned Asian students establish and the success they have in entering the labour market are salient issues. There are also significant implications for New Zealand to consider: do these returned Asian students use their New Zealand study experiences to maintain and build linkages with New Zealand, and does New Zealand utilise these students as effectively as it could?

Before we go any further, however, a caveat is required. Asia is a remarkably diverse continent. Within the Asian continent, we have some of the wealthiest and some of the poorest nations of the world; we have democracies and autocracies; and we have the homes of many of the world's great religions. Similarly, not all Asian students are the same. As Lewis and Butcher have argued, Asian students are: ... *children and young people – often naïve but sometimes artful or simply criminal; sometimes respectful, but often rebellious; often accepting of authority, but commonly active regulatory arbitragers; often trusting, but sometimes terrified; commonly impetuous; often ill-informed, but sometimes highly discriminating; often wealthy, but sometimes not; sometimes English speaking, but often not. They are all young, potentially vulnerable, and experiencing often complex and abrupt changes in key identity-forming processes. They are not the informed consumers or the rational agents of economic textbooks.*

These students come to New Zealand for varied reasons and seek to extract varied "goods" from their experience.⁵

So while this paper speaks of "Asian" students in the broadest sense of the term, and in relation to connections between New Zealand and the countries that make up the continent of Asia, we do so arbitrarily for the purposes of this paper.

While, as we shall see, more international students are remaining in New Zealand, the vast majority still return to their countries of origin. And given that the vast majority of international students to New Zealand continue to come from Asia and return to Asia, this paper seeks to answer the question "What are the impacts of returning Asian students on New Zealand-Asia relationships?". To answer this question, we draw on our own extensive and ongoing research on the pastoral care and re-entry of international students, and other related literature in the field.

Drawing on the issues identified above then, this paper provides: a brief history of Asian students in New Zealand; data on the international student as an export earner for New Zealand; comment on Asian students and the New Zealand host communities; a précis of the export education policy environment; an analysis of Asian students' views of New Zealand culture; a summary of research on Asian students' perspectives on re-entry; a brief remark on Asian countries' incentives for returning students; a note about "third-place people"; and finally, conclusions and recommendations on ways to use returning Asian students, as well as the New Zealand diaspora in Asia and Asian New Zealanders, to enhance New Zealand-Asia relationships.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ASIAN STUDENTS IN NEW ZEALAND

Students coming from Asia to New Zealand first came under the Colombo Plan in the 1950s, ostensibly as a form of educational aid somewhat aligned with New Zealand's foreign policy. As a publication at the 50th anniversary of the Colombo Plan identified, "today, in New Zealand at least, the Colombo Plan is remembered mainly as a plan for bringing Asian students to New Zealand rather than as a wide-ranging effort to support the development of Asian countries".⁶

Alongside the Colombo Plan students, and eventually outnumbering them, was a cohort of private fee-paying students. These private students were generally from the same countries as the Colombo Plan students; they paid their own way in a subsidised environment. The largest single group were Malaysian-Chinese largely unable to find places in Malaysian universities because of Malaysia's bumiputra policy (a policy that positively discriminates towards Malay students being offered places at universities).

During this era, many New Zealanders involved in tertiary education came into contact with these Asian students. Many lasting friendships and professional relationships were formed, resulting in continuing contacts and positive views of Asian students. Many of the Asian students who studied in New Zealand during this period appreciated the social and educational opportunities they were given. Their experiences in New Zealand were genuinely life changing and set them on a path to influence in their home countries.⁷

On their return home, many Asian students entered professional life and contributed significantly at technocratic, community development and national levels in the years following their study. Beyond equipping these students to return to their countries of origin, the Colombo Plan enabled these students to develop and maintain strong friendships with New Zealanders and fond memories of their New Zealand experiences. These Colombo Plan graduates became a conduit for ongoing goodwill between Asia and New Zealand.

The Colombo Plan era ultimately drew to a close in the 1980s. Changes in foreign policy priorities, aid objectives and educational philosophy brought about changes towards open market policies and selling New Zealand education to international students at full cost for tuition and services.⁸ Under open market policies, the bulk of new international students came from Asia, and by the end of the 1990s increasing numbers of students came from the People's Republic of China. The importance of learning English, globalisation trends and desires for cost-efficient, high-quality, Western-style education appeared to be the motivating factors for those coming from China and elsewhere. Even though there was a dominance of students from China, there was also a greater diversity among international students, extending beyond Asian students to students from other parts of the world, including the United States, the Arab world and Europe. With the end of the Colombo Plan and education-as-aid, the full-fee-paying Asian students who came to New Zealand became important for new reasons, in particular as export earners.

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2001). *The Colombo Plan at 50: A New Zealand Perspective, 50th Anniversary of the Colombo Plan, 1951-2001*. Wellington: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

⁷ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2001).

⁸ See Nicholas Tarling (2004). *International Students in New Zealand: The Making of Policy Since 1950*. Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland.

GROWING PAINS: THE ASIAN STUDENT AS A NEW ZEALAND EXPORT EARNER

⁹ *The New Zealand Herald*, 27 December 1998.

“The Government has reversed its longstanding opposition to high fees for overseas students in a bid to earn export income from New Zealand’s education services”,⁹ proclaimed the *New Zealand Herald* in late 1988, in relation to the soon-to-be-enacted legislation that would allow New Zealand educational institutions to sell places to overseas students for profit. This change was to impact significantly upon Asian students.

Initially, numbers of international students to New Zealand reduced as New Zealand became less attractive to families from South East Asia struggling to afford study and for whom the subsidised study in New Zealand had been attractive. However, along with the lifting of the subsidy came a lifting of the limits on numbers of places and the countries from which students could be drawn. Initially, there was an upper limit imposed on the numbers of students from China. The overall effect was that international student numbers dipped in the early 1990s,

especially from Asia, but began increasing through the mid-1990s and on until levelling out and dropping a little around 2004. This can be seen in Figure 1 below and Figure 2 on the next page, which provide indications of numbers and countries of origin.

In the open market, international students increasingly represented both income for public education institutions and the opportunity for consolidation of profit for many private education providers. During the decade of 1994-2004, growth in both roll numbers and the size of the education sector adapted to cater for the inflow of students.

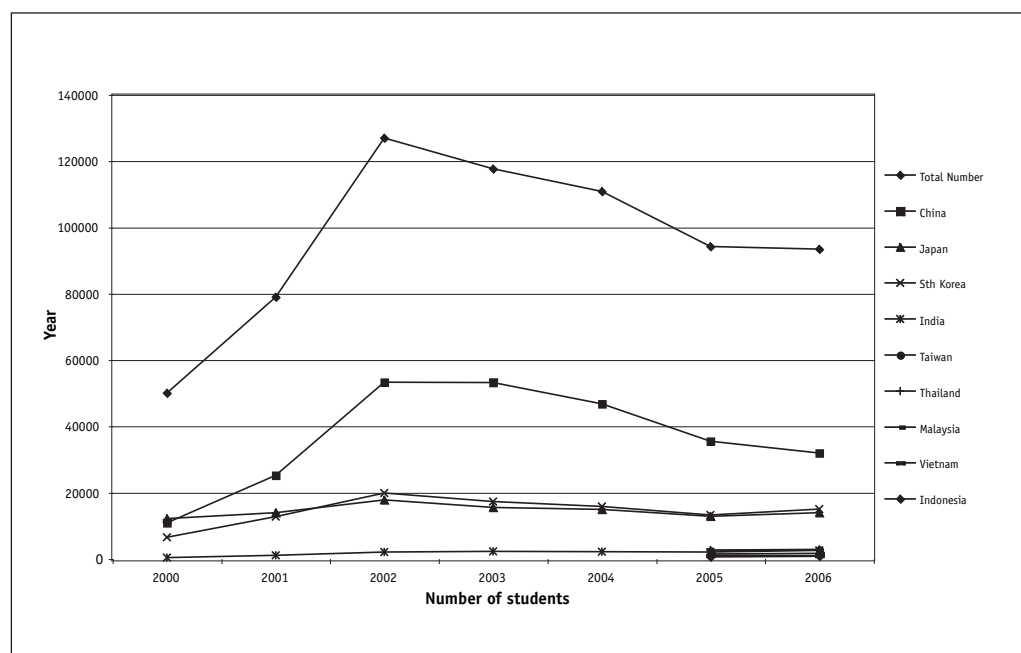


Figure 1: Foreign-fee-paying international students in New Zealand 2000-2006, by country

With the significant shift from aid to trade in export education, there was increasing alarm voiced about “cash cow” attitudes towards international students in general and Asian students in particular.

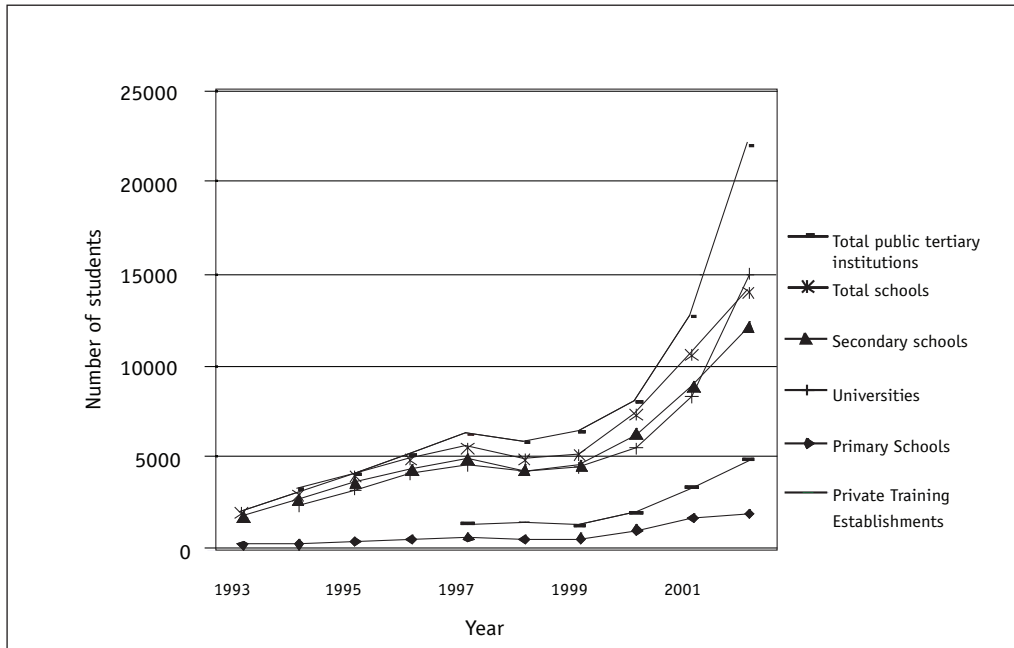


Figure 2: Foreign-fee-paying students in New Zealand schools and tertiary institutions 1993-2002, by educational institutions

Most export education marketing focused on Asia, where there was perceived significant opportunity. China, in particular, and Japan and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) became very important markets and a flood of students came in to learn English and to gain a tertiary education in New Zealand. Primary and secondary schools entered the market and total numbers of international students peaked at a little over 120,000 in 2003/04, compared with barely 5,000 ten years earlier. The proportion of Asian students during this period increased to around 87 percent of the international student body and while numbers of students from other regions also increased, they did so at a more modest rate.

Coinciding with this meteoric rise in numbers was an enormous rise in the numbers of Chinese students, which peaked at around 55,000 in the 2003/04 period. At that time, similar Chinese student numbers were recorded for Australia and the USA, although these two countries have significantly larger host populations than New Zealand.

ASIAN STUDENTS AND NEW ZEALAND HOST COMMUNITIES

¹⁰ Source: Education New Zealand.

¹¹ Tim Groser (2000). Keynote Address, 10th Graduation Address, International Pacific College, Palmerston North.

The increase in Asian students to New Zealand clearly had economic benefits. However, what quickly became apparent was that host communities were not necessarily prepared for the subsequent demographic changes in their neighbourhoods. In New Zealand, as the number of Asian students rose rapidly, the host communities became more aware of them. Host communities frequently provided goods and services such as accommodation, food, transport, recreation and entertainment along with education and its attendant services such as libraries, bookshops, teachers and computers. The economic benefits of providing goods and services to international students became quite clear quite quickly. The overall economic benefit to New Zealand is seen in Figure 3, below.¹⁰

In 2003, the economic benefit was \$2.09 billion and in 2004 \$2.15 billion, with over 40 percent of that coming from China and a further 40 percent-plus coming from other parts of Asia. New Zealand's export education industry had very significant links into Asia and became an industry in its own right in New Zealand.

The economic benefits of the export education industry to New Zealand were recognised and embraced quickly. However, the long-term gain from selling education would only come through quality education and a good living experience for the students. Positive experiences had been the hallmark during the Colombo Plan and subsidised eras and, during these eras, value for money was easy to demonstrate. But, with the significant shift from aid to trade in export education, there was increasing alarm voiced about "cash cow" attitudes towards international students in general and Asian students in particular. Tim Groser, at that time at the Asia 2000 Foundation, amongst others, warned of such an attitude,¹¹ especially as students were now paying clients and customers, people not commodities, and had the potential to develop positive or negative future relationships with New Zealand. These changes in philosophy towards international students were being mirrored in New Zealand's public sector at large, not least in tertiary education.

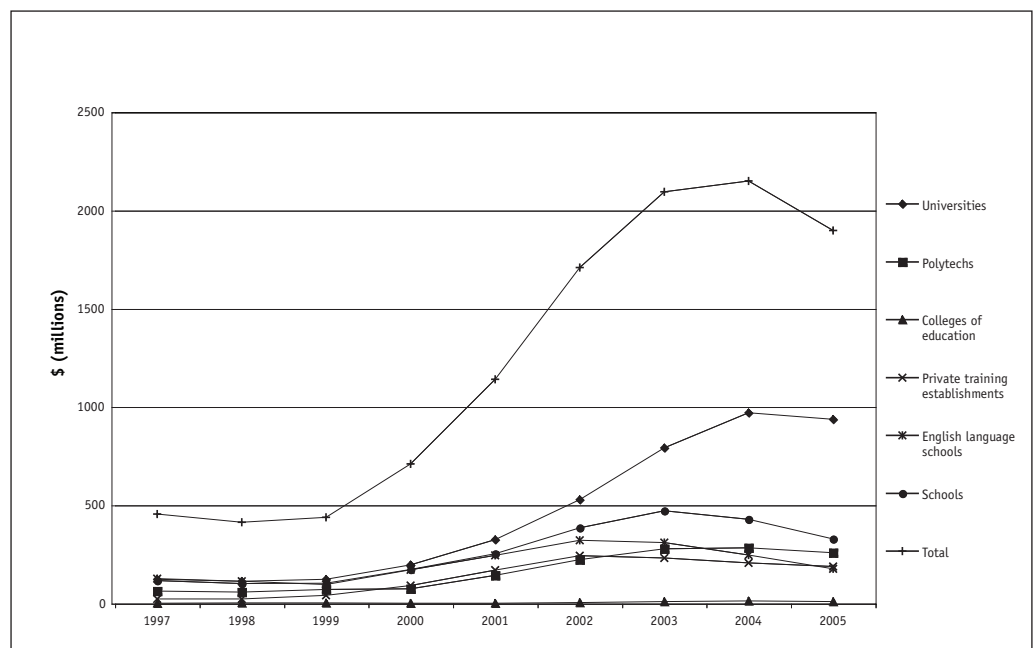


Figure 3: Economic benefits of export education to New Zealand 1997-2005

In moving to a model of international education as an export industry selling education for economic gain, the chance to affect bilateral and multilateral relationships at national, personal and community levels was not given as much attention as it could have been.

The rapidly increasing numbers of Asian students through this period coincided with increased Asian immigration, which was due, in part, to favourable changes in immigration policies towards non-Western countries. These policy changes also included allowing international students to work whilst studying and favouring them for longer-term migration on the completion of their studies.¹² This combination effectively put a lot more Asian faces into the New Zealand host community, whether the host community was prepared for this shift towards a more diverse population or not.

At a limited level of interest and interaction, host culture attitudes were generally supportive. But New Zealand's general under-preparedness for Asian migration at a host community level resulted in barriers to engagement,¹³ which inevitably affected Asian students. Examples of negative social behaviour increased both towards and amongst Asian students. Attitudes within the community sometimes expressed themselves as racism.

Incidents of racial discrimination reported by Asian students tended to have greater impacts on them than the positive attitudes and friendships they encountered.¹⁴ Portrayals in the media of Asian students also added to host community views.¹⁵ Media reports tended to identify Asian students as being responsible for health problems and crime and as visa abusers.¹⁶ High public exposure of negative incidents tended to magnify the influence on host community perceptions.

Similar effects were reflected in the countries from which students came, where (largely negative) New Zealand headlines were subsequently reported in Asian media and where Asian students reported personal incidents on websites, blogs and in chat rooms. Crime and safety issues began having an effect in countries of origin as Asian students experienced burglaries and other crimes. Whatever the

reality of the actual crime, the perception in Asia was consequential. Much of this may be seen as natural effects of the increased numbers. However, in its international marketing, New Zealand promised a clean, green, safe and purportedly "crime-free" environment with a high standard of educational institutions.

When a couple of the larger private education providers, Modern Age and Carich, went into receivership and hundreds of Asian students were affected, the perception in Asia of New Zealand as a good international education destination waned. Additionally, an increasing exchange rate and tuition fee rises raised the cost of education and the numbers of new students began declining as the perception of value for money diminished. Overall numbers dropped to a total of more than 80,000 in 2006/07 from the peak of more than 120,000 in 2003/04.

The large numbers of Asian students coming to New Zealand to study had the potential for growth in New Zealand-Asia relationships. However, because the increase was rapid and planned primarily for an economic benefit to New Zealand, there has been a slowness to perceive the value to New Zealand in others ways, such as using the growth to assist internationalisation and to build a foundation for future relationships. During the Colombo Plan era, there was a clear focus that students were brought here as part of New Zealand's foreign policy interests (albeit quite benevolently). In moving to a model of international education as an export industry selling education for economic gain, the chance to affect bilateral and multilateral relationships at national, personal and community levels was not given as much attention as it could have been. The potential for building a firm foundation for future relationships occurred in an ad hoc way rather than being managed with clear public good objectives in mind.

¹² 17 percent of new migrants in 2006 previously held study permits; see Department of Labour (2006). *Migration Trends 2005/06*. Wellington.

¹³ For a fuller discussion of this, see Terry McGrath, Andrew Butcher, Hilary Smith and John Pickering (2005). *Engaging Asian Communities in New Zealand*. Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation.

¹⁴ Terry McGrath and Andrew Butcher (2004), *Campus-Community Linkages in the Pastoral Care of International Students*, Palmerston North: Ministry of Education and Education New Zealand.

¹⁵ Paul Spoonley and Andrew Trlin (2004). *Immigration, Immigrants and the Media: Making Sense of Multicultural New Zealand*. Palmerston North: New Settlers Programme, Massey University.

¹⁶ E.g. Fiona Rotherham (2003). "Export education – blip or bust", *Unlimited Magazine*, 1 September 2003, <http://www.sharechat.co.nz/features/unlimited/article.php/ea52f8f5n> [accessed 10 April 2007].

THE EXPORT EDUCATION POLICY ENVIRONMENT

- 17 See Andrew Butcher (2004). "Quality care? Export education policies in New Zealand from 1999 to 2002." *Access: Critical Perspectives or Communication, Cultural and Policy Studies* Volume 23 (2)pp.21-31.
- 18 See Andrew Butcher (2003). "Whither international students? University reforms in New Zealand 1984-1999." *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 38(2) pp.151-164.
- 19 For a further discussion on this, see Terry McGrath and Andrew Butcher (2001). *Submissions to The Governance of Services for International Students within the Tertiary Education System*. Tertiary Education Advisory Commission. Unpublished.
- 20 Ken Back, D. Davis and A. Olsen (1998). *Internationalisation and Tertiary Education Institutions in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Education; C. McInnis, R. Peacock and V. Catherwood (2006). *Internationalisation in New Zealand Tertiary Education Organisations*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

This ad hoc development may be a reflection of the policy environment around export education in New Zealand. Until the late 1990s, New Zealand's export education industry was largely unregulated. However, enacting a mandatory *Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students* and relying on quality assurance, such as New Zealand Qualifications Authority audits, were the main tools used as the means of assuring both care of students and quality systems in delivering education.¹⁷

Little or no attempt was made to consider the effects on and of large numbers of Asian students entering education in New Zealand.¹⁸ In four large reports by the then Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (subsequently the Tertiary Education Commission) related to future directions in New Zealand tertiary education, international students received one fleeting reference, yet at the time they accounted for almost eight percent of the student body and their numbers were rising.¹⁹ Successive reports on the internationalisation²⁰ of education have generally been ignored in relation to the opportunity afforded for building international relationships. "Internationalisation" has largely been viewed within narrow terms and not with reference to broader issues of international relations long-term.

All of this points to a need for careful consideration by government and educational institutions in developing and implementing policies. The opportunity afforded by the presence of Asian students in New Zealand is significant for engagement with Asia in long-term, sustainable ways. This opportunity needs to be considered in-depth in policy development and given due consideration in connection with New Zealand's overall goals of engagement with Asia. The Asian student body in New Zealand and New Zealand's Asian alumni represent a unique resource for developing our relationships with Asia and Asian people. As hosts to such large numbers of potential New Zealand-Asia relationship facilitators, we need to become more proactive in intentionally nurturing the relationships at the foundational stages when the Asian students are here. Given that then, it is instructive to consider Asian students' views of New Zealand culture and the extent to which it welcomes them.

ASIAN STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE NEW ZEALAND CULTURE

The decade of growth for international education in New Zealand brought with it changes in the New Zealand environment for Asian students coming to study here. Frequently, Asian students encountered large numbers of other Asian students and, for many, much of their adjustment and socialisation occurred amongst co-nationals and other international students. Many Asian students reported limited opportunities to engage with New Zealand domestic students and with the host communities.²¹ Research shows that international students and Asian students in particular felt that the education they received in New Zealand was of a generally good standard and that accommodation and living were generally good but a little more costly than the students would have liked.²²

Asian students readily report in research that New Zealanders are superficially friendly but somewhat reticent to engage in quality relationships.²³ There are exceptions and these frequently relate to quality home-stay experiences and deep, lasting friendships with some domestic students, but the majority of Asian students return home having not achieved a level of engagement with the host community or New Zealand student peers that they would have liked. Some Asian students have received negative messages, such as racist remarks, financial exploitation or poor treatment by service providers. In our current preliminary research on returning students, the most frequently encountered problems returned Asian students identified in New Zealand were transport and communication. New Zealand's poor transport infrastructure and the struggles to communicate well in English, along with experiencing cultural distance and being unable to make New Zealand friends, were also the leading problems encountered by international students in New Zealand in a national survey.²⁴

Asian students are less likely to maintain friendships with New Zealanders once they have returned home if they have not developed those friendships in the first instance. The task of developing those friendships falls to Asian students as much as, if not more than, to New Zealand students, and to the institutions where Asian students study.

Research illustrates that many Asian students end their time in New Zealand with a desire to stay on, but the lack of employment opportunities and the pull of home and family mitigate that desire.²⁵ Approximately four-fifths of Asian students who study in New Zealand return to Asia. However, there are increasing numbers of international students remaining in New Zealand after completing their studies. New Zealand's Department of Labour reports that 17 percent of students granted their permits between 1997/98 and 2005/06 had gained permanent residence by June 2006, although this figure is lessened by the inclusion of the most recent cohorts (where migrants have had less time in New Zealand). If sufficient time is allowed, approximately 20 percent of students gain permanent residence in New Zealand.²⁶ (Note that these figures relate to immigrants in general, not Asian immigrants per se.) This trend may be seen in part as due to the desire to stay on and to immigration policies that favour New Zealand-trained graduates. As Asian graduates who return to Asia are a great resource, so are those graduates who remain in New Zealand: together, Asian students who return or stay are invaluable in building relationships between the countries of Asia and New Zealand.

²¹ Colleen Ward and Anne-Marie Masgoret (2004). *The Experiences of International Students in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Education; Elsie Ho, Wendy Li, Jenine Cooper and Prue Holmes (2007). *The Experiences of Chinese International Students in New Zealand*. Wellington: Education New Zealand.

²² Ward and Masgoret (2004); Ho et al (2007); McGrath and Butcher (2004).

²³ Ward and Masgoret (2004).

²⁴ Ward and Masgoret (2004).

²⁵ Butcher (2003).

²⁶ Department of Labour (2006). *Migration Trends 2005/06*. Wellington.

At re-entry, many of these Asian students regret that they did not engage more with New Zealanders and domestic students, although many admit that this was a demanding task.

²⁷ Ward (2004).

²⁸ See Butcher (2003).

During their time in New Zealand, many Asian students form friendships with their peers. Frequently, these friendships and networks are maintained after graduation and developed into successful business and community service relationships. Research shows that amongst recent Asian students studying in New Zealand, their friendships are more likely to be made amongst co-nationals and other internationals rather than with local domestic students and other New Zealanders.²⁷ And at re-entry, many of these Asian students regret that they did not engage more with New Zealanders and domestic students, although many admit that this was a demanding task. By contrast, during

the Colombo Plan era Asian students reported many friendships with local domestic students and host communities. This has implications for New Zealand-Asia relationships, especially if it is accepted that the presence of Asian students living and studying in New Zealand offers a significant opportunity to lay foundations for future developing relationships. Of particular importance to us here is where those long-term relationships are with students who have returned to Asia.

HOME AGAIN: ASIAN STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON RE-ENTRY

The re-entry of graduates to their countries of origin is motivated largely by the twin factors of the pull from home and the lack of employment opportunities in New Zealand. Amongst return graduates, a common theme has been their under-preparedness for their re-engagement into their home societies.²⁹ Making good adjustments in the areas of lifestyle expectations, worldview change and the Asian work environment³⁰ is important for successful re-entry.

Ongoing work by the authors amongst returned Asian graduates indicates that these major areas for adjustment in re-entry remain but a new trend has begun to emerge. In our current research, for which we have undertaken a preliminary pilot survey of 25 returnees, almost a third of respondents indicate some awareness of re-entry issues. The term "reverse culture shock" is used a number of times in the responses, along with other indications of knowledge around lifestyle expectations, worldview change, especially around values, and an expectation of adjustment to the work environment. Many returnees also comment on the effect of New Zealand culture on their lives. Returnees' awareness of re-entry adjustment seems to have been drawn from a combination of general knowledge about re-entry issues and sources of specific information, which we have assumed to come from re-entry preparation workshops conducted in their education institutions. Clearly, we cannot draw too much from such a small sample, but indicatively these findings suggest some potentially interesting trends.

Exposure to different family models and values, and coping with the expectations laid upon them, present unique personal adjustments for returnees. Most returnees recognise the

issue of relating back to family as part of their personal growth and a further challenge for their bicultural skills and personal qualities they developed while studying overseas; or they see it as a period of adjustment to live through rather than to grow through. The following themes of worldview-related areas in re-entry adjustment are indicators of the complexities of the adjustments in re-entry:

- changed concepts of individuality and freedom,
- changed nature and importance of relationships with peers and colleagues,
- changed views of family,
- changed values in areas of integrity, ethics, environment, materialism and relationships,
- changed religious beliefs,
- changed self image, and
- changed lifestyle beliefs.³²

Here, we are particularly interested in returnees' adjustments to the workforce. In the same preliminary survey mentioned earlier, returnees strongly recommend that they could be better equipped for the adjustments in the workplace in Asia. Returnees' comments include criticism that the courses they studied had done little to prepare them for the workplace and that there was limited knowledge of Asian working environments, as most of the material in New Zealand courses was inherently theoretical and set against Western-style work cultures and places. Again, these indicative findings suggest that there may be a need to adjust New Zealand courses (particularly where they are in business studies) to better reflect an international workplace and a wider range of international literature.³³

²⁹ G. Mullins, N. Quintrell and L. Hancock (1995). "The experiences of local and international students at three Australian universities." *Higher Education Research and Development*, 14, 201-232; Butcher (2003); McGrath (1998).

³⁰ McGrath (1998).

³¹ V. Christofi and C. Thompson (2007). "You cannot go home again: A phenomenological investigation of returning to the sojourn country after studying abroad." *Journal of Counselling & Development* Vol 85(1) pp. 53-63.

³² McGrath (1998).

³³ See Lance Beath (2007). *New Zealand Capability: Lessons from Asia: Part One – Singapore and Malaysia*. Outlook Paper 04. Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation.

Where the graduate returns to a family-related business or enterprise the family has set in place for them, inevitably they go through greater adjustments in returning to family-desired levels of filial piety.

³⁴ Butcher (2003).

Re-entry research has demonstrated that in terms of the working environment, graduates tend towards two types of profession. The first type is to return to work in family-owned businesses; often, there is a purpose in overseas education for that. Frequently, overseas education relates to plans for the family to expand their business in some way or other. Sometimes it might simply be to gain quality understanding and methods in running a business, such as accounting and business practices. Other times it is to ensure current technology can be incorporated into the business without the need to go outside the family for partnerships. Where the graduate returns to a family-related business or enterprise the family has set in place for them, inevitably they go through greater adjustments in returning to family-desired levels of filial piety.³⁴

In contrast, the other tendency noted in research was where graduates are freer in their choices of job selection and the family has no intention of involving them in a family business. This second set of professional choice is a tendency

amongst the graduates to move away from locally-owned companies and local employers to overseas-owned or multinational companies or employers. Seemingly contrary to the point noted above regarding the transportability of their New Zealand education, returnees commented that their overseas education was better fitted for international companies or multinationals and that they were more comfortable working in that type of environment as the work practices were more in keeping with those for which they were educated in New Zealand. However, it is worth noting that these comments were made in discussing the contrast of working for either the family business or a multinational company; the issues around the transportability and relevance of New Zealand education nonetheless remain.

ASIAN COUNTRIES' INCENTIVES FOR RETURNING STUDENTS

Some Asian countries are also providing incentives for their graduate students to return. For example, in talking about returning Chinese migrants in general, Manying Ip notes that:

*The current Chinese policy is designed to reverse the brain-drain, and it has been compared to what the Taiwanese government did very successfully from the late 1970s onwards: to attract overseas trained highly-skilled people to "return to the motherland". A number of "Science Parks", "Special Development Zones" or "Hi-Tech Zones" have been set up in Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. Returnees enjoyed simplified application and registration procedures for setting up new business ventures, and they also enjoyed "tax-breaks", access to research funding, low interest loans, tax-free equipment, and even tax-free goods for personal use. But in the long term, it is the potential scope, the chances for further professional advancement, and the opportunity to "play a bigger role" that China can give to its talented returned migrants that would be considered the most important factors for attracting returnees.*³⁵

Iredale and Gao, in a comparative case study of the roles of returnees to Taiwan, China and Bangladesh, identified benefits to an origin country in recruiting its overseas graduates to return and also showed the transforming and influential roles these same graduates have. Amongst the vehicles for ongoing influence these graduates form were the transnational communities that become agencies for social transformation and conduits for flow-on effects in business and other relationships.³⁶ In another study of graduates returning to Indonesia³⁷, a higher stock was placed on such things as changes in intellectual abilities, attitudes and cultural perspectives than on narrower career advantages such as salary and promotion, which frequently suffer in the immediate term as a consequence of time out for international education.

It is also useful to see returning Asian students within a broader trend of what is called

transnationalism amongst migrants. Gone are the days where migration was a one-way journey from the home country to the host country, or when returning to the home country was seen as failure. The vast majority of international students in New Zealand do not remain in New Zealand, but either return to their home countries or travel elsewhere. In talking about Chinese migrants to New Zealand who returned to China, Ip identified that while China's strong economy was a significant factor in migrants' returning, there were also subtle cultural factors at play. Similarly to returnees to Hong Kong and Taiwan, returnees to China identified better work opportunities, the chance to take up their parents' businesses, "matching up" with Chinese spouses and a return to familiar surroundings as factors instrumental in their return to China. Similarly, the factors that impact on a student's choice to return are manifold and will be influenced by the countries from which they come and the expectations with which they come to New Zealand. Whether they return or stay, however, Asian students remain a significant conduit to building and developing relationships between New Zealand and Asian countries and peoples.

Many returnees retain contact with New Zealanders and with their own cohort of Asian graduates. These networks are retained in two ways, formally and informally. Formally, Asian students may be part of alumni associations or international business or trade councils. However, these formal bodies are largely dominated by less recent graduates.³⁹ Recent graduates, by contrast, use more informal links, including computer-mediated communities such as chat rooms and blogs.⁴⁰ These computer-mediated communities are increasingly seen as an important and ubiquitous feature in the migration experiences of skilled migrants, in the formation of their identities and in their settlement or re-settlement experiences. Any endeavours to engage with returning Asian students will have to utilise both these formal and informal networks.

³⁵ Manying Ip (2004). *PRC Migrants and Returnees: New Trends in Globalisation*. A paper submitted to the fifth Conference of the International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas ISSCO V Nordic Institute of Asian Studies University of Copenhagen, 10-14 May 2004.

³⁶ Robyn Iredale and F. Gao (2001). *The Transforming Role of Skilled and Business Returnees: Taiwan, China and Bangladesh*. Centre for Asia Pacific Social Transformation Studies, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia.

³⁷ R. Cannon (2000). "The outcomes of an international education for Indonesian graduates: the third place?" *Higher Education Research and Development*, (3)357-379.

³⁸ Manying Ip (2006). "Returnees and transnationals: Evolving identities of Chinese (PRC) immigrants in New Zealand." *Journal of Population Studies*, 33:61-102.

³⁹ See Butcher (2003).

⁴⁰ For example, skykiwi, Ringo, Skype.

THIRD-PLACE PEOPLE

⁴¹ Canon (2000).

⁴² Butcher (2003).

⁴³ McGrath (1998); Butcher (2003).

Cannon argues that the value of the overseas experience lies primarily in what he calls a “third place” – a distinct intercultural group in professional society that gives advantage to employers, individuals and communities through its unique potential and relationships within global society.⁴¹ Butcher similarly refers to a place to call “home” being a place of reintegration of self-identity and upon which a returnee’s sense of identity and security may be based, that is a changed “home” or place from the country they left for study or the New Zealand in which they studied.⁴² This “third place” or “home” is the place where the graduate has made accommodations with family and friends, is comfortable in the lifestyle of the home community, has integrated their worldview change, and has adjusted to their situation within the work environment. Potentially, this “third place” can be one of significant influence, as returnees are equipped to work cross-culturally, with personal experience and understanding of both Asian and New Zealand cultures. For New Zealand, there is a unique opportunity for connection with these “third-place” people, as they already have good connections with both Asia and New Zealand and have made the adjustment into their countries of origin. However, this unique opportunity is often neglected.

New Zealand-educated Asian graduates are an invaluable resource because in their experiences back in Asia they are instantly capable of being ambassadors for New Zealand, commentators on New Zealand values, people and lifestyle as well as witnesses to the net good they obtained from their education and experience whilst living in New Zealand. “Third-place” people in Asian communities greatly influence New Zealand’s relationship with those communities. Their potential is enormous, from providing education about New Zealand in that community to mutually enhancing relationships of that

community with New Zealand, perhaps serving as catalysts for further relationships of varying kinds. Asian graduates tend to be socially and economically upwardly mobile. Their occupational and social profiles are indicative of growing influence throughout life. Potentially, each New Zealand graduate in Asia is of significant influence.

Our earlier research into re-entry and our ongoing research in this area clearly indicate the value of the New Zealand experience to the Asian graduate. It is also apparent that the experience could be improved in several ways that would enhance and build on what are generally positive relationships. In thinking about the building of relationships, two key principles have emerged from comments of New Zealand’s Asian graduates.⁴³

These two principles are:

- Relationship or *guan xi* – the establishment of long-lasting and mutually trusting relationships, and
- Relevance or *guan lian* – whatever we do needs to be relevant to those to whom we seek to relate; ideally of mutual relevance.

Asian students coming to study in New Zealand offer an opportunity for New Zealand to develop long-lasting and mutually trusting relationships. However, the most commonly reported regret of Asian graduates is in making friends with New Zealanders, ideally domestic students. This is an area for further development if we wish to enhance New Zealand-Asia relationships in the future. These friendships and networks may be developed while Asian students are still studying in New Zealand, but they can also be promoted through the formal and informal networks noted earlier.

Working hard to build long-lasting and mutually trusting relationships must start early: when Asian students are living and studying in New Zealand.

However, relevance is also important. Often New Zealanders discover relationships with Asian graduates when they have a particular need met, like hosting or information. That can be one-sided. More recently, the marketing of international education into Asia has been more about economic benefits to New Zealand than the emphasis of the earlier era, which was about providing quality education of relevance and use for development within Asia.

Thus, international education in New Zealand needs to be about mutual relevance and ongoing relationships. Opportunities for mutual relevance could include joint venture projects, business partnerships, community linkages, advisory networks, professional associations and continuing personal contacts and friendships. Working hard to build long-lasting and mutually trusting relationships must start early: when Asian students are living and studying in New Zealand.

There is a significant need for New Zealand to note the value of relationships formed at this stage that will be of mutual benefit in the future. There is a lesson to learn from the Colombo Plan era: the building of lasting friendships can begin in the student days and those relationships, friendships and experiences can be of lasting value to the New Zealand-Asia relationship. Asia is becoming increasingly important to New Zealand; New Zealanders need to be equipped to engage successfully with Asia. The education environment is formative for engaging with Asian students. Here, learning can happen to relate and build connections and friendships between New Zealand and Asian students.

TOWARDS MATURITY: RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE NEW ZEALAND-ASIA RELATIONSHIPS

⁴⁴ See McGrath and Butcher (2004).

⁴⁵ See Andrew Butcher (2007). *Asian Students in New Zealand: From a "Cultural Invasion" to a National Conversation*. Unpublished lecture at the School of Asian and European Languages, Victoria University of Wellington.

Amongst many Colombo Plan students there is tremendous goodwill towards New Zealand because of the positive experiences many of those students had here and the ongoing contacts they have with New Zealanders and other alumni. Will the same be able to be said of present Asian students in New Zealand? Or has globalisation wreaked its effect upon the world in such a fundamental way that we need to re-think completely how effective person-to-person relationships are? Should we instead undertake a broader, more significant engagement socially, politically and economically with the Asian region, whence most of these Asian students shall return? We would suggest that we need to be careful about how much we rely on nostalgia and the goodwill of students past. This will only get us so far.

By all means, we need to support building, facilitating and maintaining person-to-person relationships between Asian students and others in New Zealand, whether that is done formally through educational institutions or informally through groups such as churches and sports clubs. Incidentally, it is more often than not that Asian students in New Zealand have found their social support through these informal groups rather than through any institutional support, yet these informal groups are often ad hoc and sometimes have hidden agendas.⁴³

Not only do we need to strengthen these informal groups that play such a crucial role in providing social networks for Asian students, we also need to address issues in the school or university of mono-cultural curriculum and pedagogy, and in society at large of social exclusion and discrimination. We need to discuss "Asian students" as part of a broader conversation about what it means for New Zealand to engage with Asia.⁴⁴

Personal relationships are central to developing ongoing New Zealand-Asia relationships. Every three to five years, approximately 20,000 Asian students enter New Zealand to commence their studies or leave New Zealand at the conclusion of their studies. This movement represents an enormous potential for increasing cross-cultural understanding and linkages and facilitating the flow of ideas and transnational relationships. The opportunity afforded for a significant expansion of New Zealand-Asia relationships through initiating relationships with Asian students studying here is critical. Asian students studying in New Zealand are uniquely placed to be part of the foundations of long-lasting cross-cultural networks. Engagement with New Zealanders and New Zealand students in particular must be enhanced. Programmes that bring New Zealand and Asian students together will positively develop the broader relationship between New Zealand and the Asian region. Additionally, the creation of structural initiatives to build future potential links is important.

Such things as involving Asian students in business and industry events, like conferences, internships, retreats and training opportunities, need consideration by institutions, business and industry. Community service and local community linkage opportunities need proactive enhancement to ensure Asian students who have no background of life in New Zealand can be assisted to an awareness of an involvement in New Zealand life to a greater degree. Policy frameworks need enhancement to ensure that a greater engagement of Asian students with New Zealand occurs and that New Zealand and New Zealanders remain in connection with our Asian alumni when they return. Attention needs to be given to how New Zealand can nurture and develop the relationships formed.

We need to discuss “Asian students” as part of a broader conversation about what it means for New Zealand to engage with Asia.

People-to-people links are also important. Common interests and affinities can be used to promote ongoing relationships. The vehicles of common interest such as business, industry and sports bodies; civil, cultural and community groups; religion; and local body politics have significant potential for enhancing ongoing relationships. So too informal links such as computer-mediated communities need to be encouraged and New Zealand students need to have involvement in these at the formative stages. The Asia New Zealand Foundation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, the international education industry, specific friendship societies, community groups, sports clubs, religious organisations, churches, non-governmental organisations, aid organisations and educational institutions all have roles to play in assisting the promotion of services in growing the New Zealand-Asia relationship. These organisations can be initiators of focus on the resource of Asian students as catalysts in growing New Zealand’s relationship with Asia. New Zealand is a small nation and it is essential that what we do has high-quality parameters if we are to engage successfully with Asia.

But further work needs to be done. This further work should include considering Asian students within the framework of international relations more broadly and not just within the education framework within which they are most often researched. Additionally, opportunities in industry and education need to be grasped to ensure the present generation of Asian students becomes significant as returned graduates in positively influencing their countries’ relationships with New Zealand, so that these countries, along with their New Zealand graduates, become our friends and allies both now and in the future.

ASIA NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION

THE ASIA NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION

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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