

National Issues — Treaty relevance to migrants of Asian descent: an exploratory approach to gain their insights

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Summary

Treaty education for the mainstream population has produced a positive output in the last decades. This facilitates many New Zealanders becoming more aware of the Treaty and gaining a good knowledge of its philosophy (Huygens, 2007). However, the annual immigration quota system which was introduced in the early 1990's increased the number of immigrants from Asia, and this steady flow of settlers has not eased since then (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). Through efforts in the community (e.g. ARMS) providing Treaty workshops, there are a number of Asian people who are willing to learn about the Treaty (State Service Commission, 2004). Apart from the issues with education programme coverage, some points were raised during my pilot study. They indicate that immigrants' psychological schema of political experience and sources of information about the Treaty in general may be an obstacle to gaining appropriate knowledge of the Treaty and its philosophy. Implications of this pilot study and wider scopes of the issues surrounding those immigrants (e.g. difficulties in their settlement process) will also be discussed.

Background

According to Statistics New Zealand, there were approximately 270,000 people who identified as Asian in 2001. This was projected to increase to 670,000 by 2021 (Statistics New Zealand, 2005). Indeed, the latest census in 2006 showed that the Asian population has increased to approximately 354,000, which comprises 9.2 percent of the national population (Statistics New Zealand, 2006b). However, while people identified themselves with a specific ethnicity, the label of "Asian" is still determined by the government officials. It is important to examine how Asians are externally identified so this subsection will present an overview of classifications in New Zealand and other countries.

There is a generalised classification for Asians across English speaking countries including New Zealand. Asians are classified based on their geographical origins, namely from south-east, east, and north Asian regions. Those from the Indian subcontinent are often classified

as Asians. The term, Asian, is frequently used in New Zealand, usually with reference to those who came from south-east, east, and north Asian regions. Statistics New Zealand has been using this label to collate ethnic groups of south-east, east, and north Asians (Statistics New Zealand, 2006a). However, this labelling has been problematic for researchers because it amalgamates specific ethnic groups from a diverse range of different ethnic and cultural groups; this obscures specific issues of different ethnic groups and their needs (Rasanathan, Craig, & Perkins, 2004).

Collective identity theories which predominate in the current mainstream social psychology align with a self-defining formation (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002); ethnic identities are now self determined. However, categories that are typically classified as Polynesian and Asian are, in fact, still externally defined (Lynn, 2006). Aspinall (2003) argues that these categories are social categories, rather than ethnic or race categories, which are constructed by external observers, hence Asian, may not be an identity but a social category. In entrenching this argument further, Webster (1997) discusses the perceived oddness of Asian was constructed through the notion of western neo-colonial discourses, namely orientalism, in his reference to Edward Said (1978). These arguments, however, do not automatically mean that all of those who are categorised as Asian are willing to define themselves with a specific ethnic identity. Kang and Lo (2004) elucidate the phase of forming Asian category that second generation Chinese and Korean Americans, unlike their parents who were first generation immigrants to the United States, tend to view their ethnic identifications as an inherited notion, which are not fully intrinsic to themselves. Instead, they see themselves as Asian Americans. Similarly in New Zealand, Park (2006) acknowledges the fact that the categorisation of Asian in New Zealand was initially established and imposed by the dominant group; however, she also argues that there was a subsequent acceptance of such a category by Asian people, due to its historical development.

Hence Asian as a social category implies the political development of those social issues which will be investigated in this study.

There are a number of issues with immigrants and their awareness of the Treaty. First, when it comes to Treaty compliance, the government's selection and settlement regime risks choosing people who are not likely to have sufficient awareness of the Treaty. Currently, having a sufficient knowledge of the history of New Zealand is not required to gain permanent residence for foreign nationals.

Second, immigrants, even current immigrants, are strongly encouraged to assimilate to the dominant host culture (Poot, 1993) which is Pākehā culture in New Zealand, due to its strong social presence in both public and private sectors. Assimilation takes the form of conforming to the mainstream core values (Doane, 1997; Harrison, 1995; Langlands, 1999; McCrone, 1997). Traditionally, the mainstream social group in New Zealand has been very reluctant to embrace the Treaty (McPherson, Harwood, & McNaughton, 2003; Nairn & McCreanor, 1990, 1991; Nairn, Pega, McCreanor, Rankine, & Barnes, 2006).

Third, while some immigrants are keen to learn about the Treaty, there are a certain proportion of immigrants who think that the Treaty is irrelevant to them, because in the current political atmosphere, Treaty debates often only focus on Māori and Pākehā issues (Ip, 2003). There is a significant lack of knowledge on the Treaty, which means they do not understand that the Treaty does actually include new immigrants (State Service Commission, 2004).

Fourth, the social position of Asians in New Zealand is generally lower than Pākehā/Europeans even within the mainstream population. Although there are a number of laws and policies which prohibit discrimination, Asians are less likely to be advantaged in New Zealand society (McIntyre, Ramasamy, & Sturrock, 2003). A considerable degree of tension often develops in the debates on ethnic affairs. Some Asian may resent the notion of acknowledging the Treaty due to their treatment in a society which discriminates in many life situations, and in which they do not qualify for 'privilege' (Ip, 2003).

Methods

This pilot study involved five key-informant interviews and one focus group with six participants .

Participants: Key-informants

Ethnic identities of participants were Chinese (2), Indian (3). Each interview took approximately an hour. Interviews were conducted at designated places where participants felt most comfortable to discuss (commonly at their office, except one was at home).

Participants: Focus group

Participants were recruited through a community organisation as one of the key-informant suggested. It took approximately an hour to complete. Six people

took part in this focus group. Their ethnic identities were Philipino (1), Indian (3), Chinese (1), and Korean (1).

Questions

Key questions (see appendix) were concerned around what their peers know about the Treaty, how they would gain knowledge about the Treaty, how they feel about the Treaty. I prepared a set of questions prior to interviews, however, since the main objectives were to explore how the Treaty philosophy was perceived and understood by immigrants' communities, I maintained flexibility in asking questions; in fact, apart from several key-questions, other questions I asked were to elaborate participants' views on certain aspects. All interviews were conducted in English.

Findings

Source of information

The most common source of information about the Treaty was education and/or training programmes, which they undertook mainly for work-related reasons. Public organisations such as local District Health Board (DHB), city council, and other organisations that closely work with government-funded agencies require knowledge about the Treaty, hence post-settlement job training became the most common way to learn about the Treaty. Interestingly, none of them gained knowledge about the Treaty through ethnic media, as local political issues are generally not well covered.

Barriers to gaining knowledge about the Treaty

All of the participants (both key-informants and focus group) told that post-settlement adjustment, such as cultural adjustments at work, schools, local community activities, has much higher priority than learning about the Treaty. Particularly work-related acculturation was regarded as the most important part to make their settlement successful. This can also be reflected back onto the previous findings that if their work requires them to know about the Treaty, its priority becomes higher.

Language of the Treaty was also listed as a major obstacle. Many of them stated that the Treaty is very difficult to comprehend although they did not have a major issue with communication in English. Some people said it was a full of legal terms, some people also said it was difficult to relate to their everyday life, and so on.

Social prejudice was also observed by some key-informants; they said because immigrants from Asian regions tended to be somewhat isolated from the host society, it was not easy to gain insights of social issues. With regards to the Treaty, it was not likely to gain appropriate knowledge of the Treaty through limited social networking.

Some key-informants mentioned that it was important to consider immigrants' political experience before coming to Aotearoa; not a small number of immigrants choose Aotearoa to seek safe and quiet lifestyle, without significant threats made by political instability. As previous findings indicated that ethnic media in Aotearoa were not regarded as source of information about the Treaty, mainstream media were likely to influence on their view of the Treaty. Most importantly, those key-informants told that repeatedly broadcasted images of 'violent protesters' on 6th February are not only providing ill-informed pictures of the Treaty issues, but also deterring immigrants to engage with the Treaty education; for some immigrants, negative media images would recall their experience back in their home countries.

Relevance to immigrants

Some key-informants and focus group participants, particularly those who were from Hong Kong and India, discussed that as they learn more about the Treaty, they felt the British colonisation of Aotearoa was quite similar to how their people were treated by the British. They saw similarities in resource confiscations, introduction of British law and enforcement, and override of political system. Knowing the history of Aotearoa made them more aware of the background issues of the Treaty which helped them to feel the Treaty more relevant to themselves.

Still not reaching out, but...

All of the key-informants told that the Treaty education is yet to reach out to immigrants' communities. One person said "some people don't know what they don't know about the Treaty", meaning that complete lack of knowledge about the Treaty is still quite common amongst immigrants. However, they also indicated that the demand for Treaty education is substantially high. Public seminars for the Treaty were often filled by migrants, according to several key-informants. Also, all participants in the focus group expressed their strong interest to take part in Treaty workshop, if offered to them.

Discussion

The pilot study was conducted to explore key-issues with Asian immigrants' perceptions and understanding of the Treaty and its philosophy; including how they learned about the Treaty, how they feel about the Treaty, and how they relate the Treaty to themselves.

As the findings show, Treaty education is yet to reach out to immigrants. They are less likely to learn about the Treaty through their ethnic media or peers, but often relying on mainstream media reports many of which do not provide quality information about the Treaty. The nature of the language used in the Treaty is difficult for them to understand the context and implications of the

Treaty to various parts of our lives. Comprehensive guidance must be made available to those immigrants to establish relevance to them, with historical and cultural contexts.

Most importantly, positive messages to engage them with Treaty education must reach out to immigrants. Second, such an educational programme should be delivered in a way that does not heavily affect on their daily life. Third, educators must realize that the psychological schema of the Treaty amongst immigrants may well be different from Pākehā in general; and may also be quite different amongst different ethnic groups. Establishing historical relevance of the Treaty issues and British colonisation might be considered for a possible future direction in this field, however, it will have to be thoroughly discussed within ethnic communities before formalizing a programme implementation.

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Appendix

Interview questions in details

1. How they view ToW
 - a. The level of their awareness of ToW
 - i. Pre and post migration
 - ii. And after they had a chance to learn about it
 - b. How they perceive ToW (in details)
 - i. Pre and post migration
 - ii. and after they had a chance to learn about it
 - c. They view ToW as :-
 - i. New immigrants?
 - ii. 'Settled' Immigrants?
 - iii. Specific ethnicity (e.g. Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Korean, etc...)
 - iv. Non-Māori, non-Pākehā?
 - v. 'Outsiders'?
 - vi. Not sure or don't know?
 - vii. Or something else?
 - d. Their understanding of ToW (in details)
record what they know about ToW
2. How they developed their views and thoughts of ToW
 - a. How they felt about it first time when they heard about ToW
 - b. How they feel about ToW now
 - i. Do (did) they feel "included" or "excluded"?
 - ii. Do (did) they feel ToW important?
How and Why? Record details
 - iii. What does ToW mean to them?
 - c. How they relate (or don't relate) ToW to themselves
 - d. How do they position themselves with ToW
 - e. What do they discuss about ToW?
 1. Record what they discuss about ToW
 2. Discuss with whom?
 - i. Their family members?
 - ii. Their friends?
 - a. Same ethnic group?
 - b. Other Asians?
 - c. Pākehā?
 - d. Māori?
 - f. Their sources of information about ToW

What are their main source of information?

- i. Their family members?
- ii. Their friends?
- iii. Same ethnic group?
- iv. Other Asians?
- v. Pākehā?
- vi Māori?
- vii. The media
- vii. Mainstream media?
- viii. Their ethnic media?

g. Did knowing about ToW change their views? How did it change their perception?

- i. Did it change how they view Māori issues?
- ii. Did it change how they view immigration issues in NZ?
- iii. Did it change how they view other ethnic affair issues in NZ?