

Problems with the story:

- **Front cover and the issue of legal aid**
- **Serious lack of Asian perspectives**
- **Statistical and contextual selectivity**
- **Objectification of Asians**
- **Editorial policy and journalistic credibility**

Front cover and the issue of legal aid

The problems with the article start with the cover line - Asian Angst: Is it time to send some back? People have to ask themselves “Send who back?” If you are a migrant to New Zealand who has been granted permanent residency or citizenship then New Zealand is your home country and you have the same rights as any citizen or permanent resident of New Zealand.

On the issue of legal aid, the article states that the New Zealand taxpayer is picking up the cost for many of the “worst Asian criminals” but what is missing is an explanation of who qualifies for it. The Legal Services Agency provides legal aid for those unable to afford legal representation. Anyone appearing before the courts is entitled to a proper defence and this is a basic human right enshrined in the justice systems of western democracies. The Legal Services Agency does not make its decisions based on ethnicity and that is entirely in accord with one of the central tenets of our system of justice.

Serious lack of Asian perspectives:

For a feature article that puts the broad spectrum of the ethnicity of ‘Asian’ in the spotlight, there is a disturbing lack of representation of ‘Asian’ views regarding the issue of ‘Asian crime’. The views of two are reflected in the article – Rosemary Jones and iBall co-editor Lincoln Tan.

In Mr Tan’s case, although he was interviewed by the author, she only quotes from one of his NZ Herald columns. What is known is that the author also interviewed Justin Zhang of Skykiwi and Charles Chan, the other co-editor of iBall. She also sought to interview National MP Pansy Wong but was informed that Ms Wong only wanted to discuss Asians as victims of crime. Surely a corollary of any article with an ‘Asian crime’ theme must surely be that Asians must also be the victims of crimes?

It is likely that the views of Mr Zhang and Mr Chan did not make it into the article because they did not support the author’s thesis that crime committed by Asians is increasing dramatically. But why didn’t she talk to any of Auckland’s Asian liaison officers such as Jessica Phuang or Raymond Wong? Both Ms Phuang and Mr Wong are bilingual and work with student communities and new migrant communities. Their views would be essential to providing journalistic balance.

For any article, about such a sensitive issue that involves a particular ethnic category, to be balanced, the views of figures from those communities should have been included as a matter of course. It is elementary journalism.

Another point: If you went through the crime stories published in the last three years as the author has done, you could potentially select any ethnic group and find enough crime stories to fill several pages. This is a highly selective way of presenting an issue that is not borne out by the reality. Murders, kidnappings, fatal child bashings, teenage stabbings, dismemberment committed by non-Asians could be the material for an article on 'Kiwi crime'.

Statistical and contextual selectivity:

This has been well explored and made known to you by Keith Ng.

“(Coddington’s) claims of rising Asian crime came from Asians being represented in 1.9% of crimes in 1996, a figure that grew to 2.6% in 2005. During the same period, the proportion of Asians in New Zealand grew from 3.8% to 9.3%. In other words, the proportion of Asians grew threefold, while its representation in crime statistics grew by only a third.”

“These figures are unequivocal. In 1996, Asians were far less likely than the general population to commit crimes (by a factor of 2 to 1). By 2005, Asians became even less likely to commit crimes (by a factor of 3.7 to 1).”

But the article seeks to present a different reality and fails to note the evidence that Asians are nearly four times less likely than the national average to commit crimes. Although the author asserts that that the “vast majority of Asians making New Zealand their new home are hard working, focused on getting their children well educated, and ensuring they’re not dependent on the state”, there was no statistical support for this statement. Such statistical analysis would have thrown the rest of the article into sharper relief and provided better context for the predominantly imbalanced negativity of the story towards Asians.

Instead statistics quoted misleadingly present the view that there is a “gathering crime tide” – something that is not borne out by the figures. In essence, a crucial flaw in the story is the way crime involving Asians is presented to readers without any kind of overall context of crime in New Zealand.

Objectification of Asians:

Instead of presenting Asians as individuals, the article works to create a perception of a standard Asian identity that is ‘alien’, ‘ruthless’, ‘secretive’ and a ‘menace’. The language used effectively resurrects the ‘Yellow Peril’ terminology prevalent in the 19th and early 20th centuries that were used in part to justify the official pro-European immigration policies that existed for decades in Australia and New Zealand. Take for example this statement: “A flick through the crime files shows the Asian menace has been steadily creeping up on us.”

Although these adjectives are used to ostensibly refer to Asian gang cultures, they are hugely emotive, subjective and discriminatory. Criminal gang culture of any ethnicity is bound to be ‘ruthless’, ‘secretive’ and a ‘menace’. But the manner of the way the article is structured, the reader can only make one assumption – these negative qualities also are integral to the societies from which our Asian communities come from.

Here's another example of the way the article emphasises the outsider status of Asian communities in New Zealand: "Pakuranga's plethora of ethnic restaurants fill each night with noisy, cackling families." Witches cackle, hens cackle and so it seems Asians cackle. It begs the question; do non-Asian families cackle?

The article is also simplistic in who it labels Asian. People called Asian can come from places that are as different as Spain and Norway. Seoul and Shanghai are as different as Barcelona and Oslo. New Zealand is part of a global culture. People who settle here have done so because they see New Zealand as a good place to live. Instead of underlining that new Asian migrants are New Zealanders too, it presents them as aliens.

Editorial policy and journalistic credibility

The evident imbalance and discriminatory nature of the article is disturbing. It is evident that there seems to have been a failure of the editorial and journalistic process at North & South for such an article to be published in its final form.

It is evidential that the author either lacks formal journalistic training or at least has forgotten the most elementary principles of journalism. Those principles are balance and accuracy. The statistical analysis used in the story has been demonstrated to be misleading and inaccurate and the article has an overwhelmingly negative slant towards Asian communities.

The 'grab bag' approach taken to include as many negative features that can be possibly associated with immigration from Asian countries including, quite unnecessarily, a single case of TB presents a distorted, discriminatory and alarmist view of Asian communities in New Zealand.

So two questions loom: How did an article so biased and representative of prejudice against Asians get written by an "award winning journalist" (taken from an ACP media release) without paying due heed to the principles of balance and accuracy? And how did editorial processes fail to spot the inaccuracies and imbalance in the article before publication?