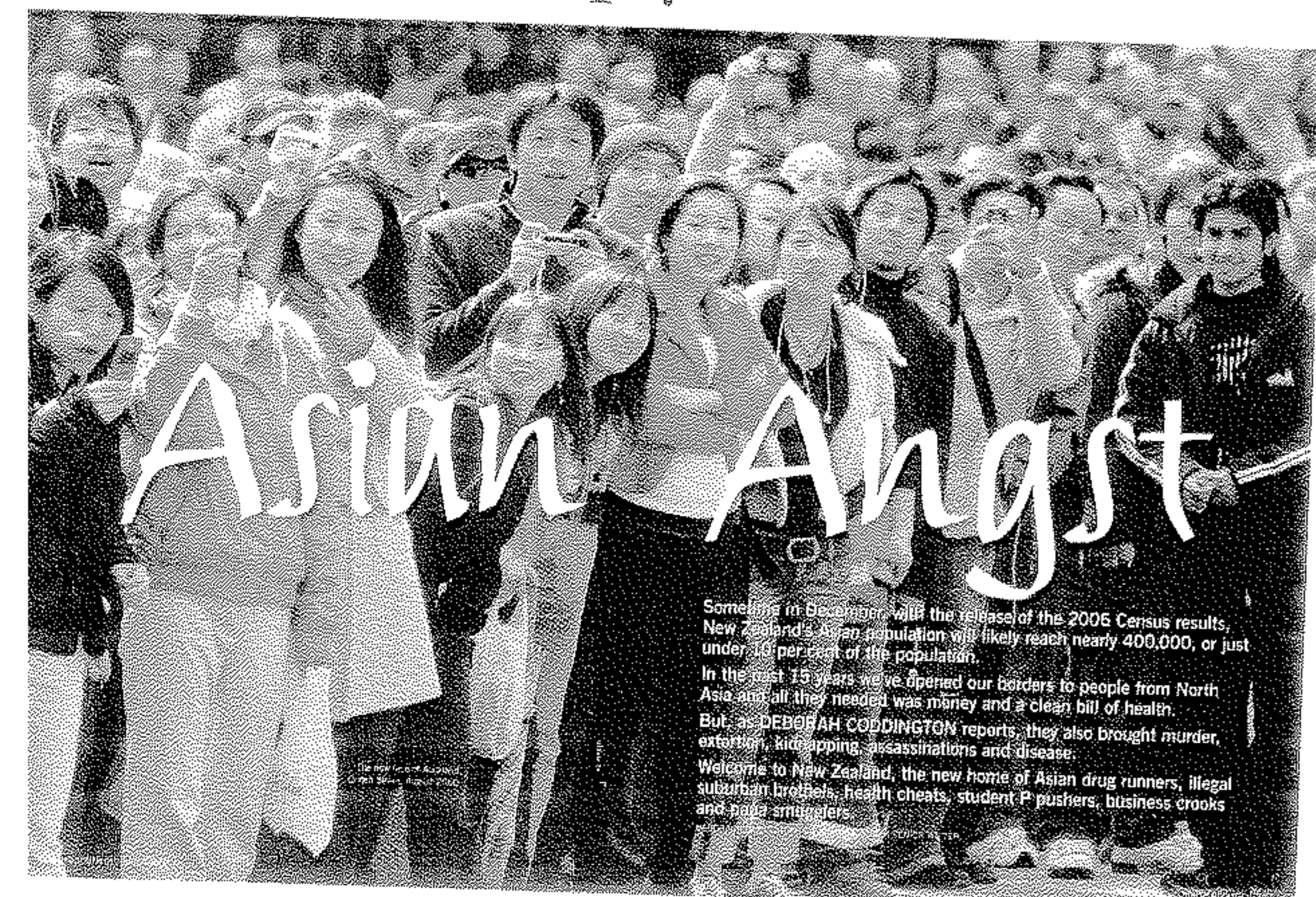


The Write Of Reply



Asia New Zealand Foundation Strikes Back

Deborah Coddington's article would be defensible if it weren't so damaging to the way in which Asian communities are perceived by the middle class in New Zealand she professes to be writing in the interests of.

The Asian crime wave that she purportedly has her pulse on has me mystified. The statistics she presents in her article. A comparison of national apprehension figures for New Zealand actually show that between 2001 and 2005, arrests involving Asians were almost identical at around 1.6 per cent of the total New Zealand population figure.

Asians in New Zealand are in fact under-represented in crime and prison statistics but she projects the perception that Coddington wants to project of Asians being a threat and menace to New Zealand way of life when the reality is anything but exciting.

Amazingly she didn't consult any of the police or Asian liaison officers working for the police in Auckland. If she had she might have got a more accurate take on the work being undertaken to educate new migrants on the legal and cultural differences between New Zealand and their countries of origin.

The words of Inspector John Mitchell of the Central Police on *Campbell Live* a few months ago in the wake of the Wan Biao investigation: in crime statistics, Asians are severely under-represented and they're a law-abiding community by and

How then did Coddington get it so spectacularly wrong? Seizing on a number of high-profile and lurid crimes involving Chinese names that occupy a disproportionate amount of print and broadcast news content isn't the way to go about researching a fair and balanced feature article, but then fair and balanced is a strategy that wouldn't sell magazines and grab eyeballs in quite the same way as an alarmist, distorted and — dare I say it — bigoted opinion piece that's dressed up as reporting.

Given the recent spate of cases highlighting fatal child bashings, teenage stabbings,

manslaughter, murder and dismemberment that are not associated with Asians, I could quite conceivably pen an article about "Kiwi crime" and make the country seem the most violent place outside of Iraq.

North & South has done New Zealand's Asian communities an enormous injustice, but depressingly we've seen it all before in the mainstream media. It's not the first time, if you recall the "Asian Invasion" articles written by Pat Booth in the mid 1990s.

Then, as now, Asian New Zealanders face discrimination and hostility from the wider public and I sincerely hope *North & South* recognises how it has done its bit to encourage the ugly behaviour that many New Zealanders exhibit towards Asians, whether they are residents, international students, fellow New Zealanders or simply tourists. Keep up the good work. Yeah right!

Charles Mabbett media adviser, Asia New Zealand Foundation, Auckland

Messenger Shooting

I was disturbed to learn the editor and a senior journalist of *North & South* have been the targets of personal attacks resulting from the publication of *Asian Angst: Is It Time To Send Some Back?* The emphasis on "some" is mine.

Free speech is a cornerstone of our society and any attempts at censorship, no matter how misguided, should be abhorred. *North & South* has long been a defender of free speech in New Zealand. It has a proud history of addressing social issues, promoting not only the good but

also uncovering the ugly facets of New Zealand society.

And while we as citizens may not always want to read about our less desirable traits, we have to address them. *North & South* does not pluck issues out of thin air, the writers reflect discussion on the streets.

I wonder if most of those so quick to criticise the *Asian Angst* article actually read it — or were they simply angered by a provocative headline? Rather than levelling their sights at the messenger, perhaps their efforts would be better placed to actually examine the issue.

Or have we become so PC we are simply forbidden to discuss issues at the risk of offending anyone?

Deborah Peard Mt Eden

Damn Lies And Statistics

Deborah Coddington's statistical obfuscations in her *Asian Angst* article are ill-advised, given the usual stereotype of Asians as maths geeks rather than ruthless criminals.

She noted that in 2001 Asians were 6.6 per cent of the population but contributed to only 1.7 per cent of crime but that between 1996 and 2005 crime committed by "Asiatics" had risen by 53 per cent.

Since she was using data from the national apprehension figures, I'm surprised that she didn't pick up on some other interesting figures: the number of Asian criminals apprehended in 2001 was 3182. The number in 2005: 3182.

Her claims of rising Asian crime came from Asians being represented in 1.9 per cent of crimes in 1996, a figure that grew to 2.6 per cent in 2005. During the same period, the proportion of Asians in New Zealand grew from 3.8 per cent to 9.3 per cent. In other words, the proportion of Asians grew threefold, while their 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).

Is this the "gathering crime tide" that Coddington refers to?

She used the numbers and calculations above for her conclusions on Asian crime in 2001. She then inexplicably sidestepped to an irrelevant and misleading comparison with Pacific Islanders, and implied that the national apprehension figures actually supported her claims that Asian crime is rampant.

The main assertion of the article is refuted by these statistics. They plainly and strongly demonstrate that crime in the Asian community is far below the national average and that it is proportionally decreasing, not increasing. No



"Well done! You've passed."

reasonable reading of them could conclude otherwise.

Coddington deliberately manipulated the figures to support the opposite of what was true. It is an act of intellectual dishonesty for which she and the magazine should apologise.

Keith Ng Wellington

Footnote: Ng alleges my statistics are wrong. He's the one who's mistaken. He uses "crime statistics" involving all Asians aged 0 to 99 to show "the number of offences attributed to Asians in 2001 was 3182. In 2005? 3182". My article clearly stated this: "Statistics New Zealand national apprehension figures from 1996 to 2005, total offences committed by Asiatics (not including Indian [Statistics' definition, not mine] aged 17 to 50 rose 53 per cent from 1791 to 2751." Instead of covering four years (as opposed to my decade) and all ages, Ng should compare like with like if he wants to attempt to discredit my article.

— Deborah Coddington

Weasel Words?

Stories on "Asian" crime often tell us more about the journalist or headline writers than about Asians, and your December issue is no different. Positive first: the article provides a valuable insight into an underworld the public needs to be alert to. If we need a debate on immigration then we should have it, without all the liberal cant about potential "White New Zealand" policies.

However, Coddington's propensity for sensationalism is evident in her use of the term

"Asian". With one exception, the criminals she refers to are Chinese or Taiwanese. Why not use that term? I would suggest it's because such specific profiling is considered racist. The holes in that argument are self-evident but all too common in New Zealand media: "Chinese" crime is racist but "Asian" crime isn't. It's not good to lump 180,000 people together but 400,000 is okay.

Despite the acknowledgement by Graham Gill of the Commerce Commission that Chinese, Koreans and Japanese are as different as Germans, Australians and New Zealanders, Coddington clearly does not agree because she repeatedly uses that weaselly, sensationalist term "Asian".

While I'd like to think *North & South* readers are clever enough to recognise gross generalisations about race, my own experiences with New Zealand attitudes towards "Asians" does not give me much encouragement. New Zealanders do not tend to speak in terms of Chinese or Koreans or Thai; rather they use the lazy moniker that enables them to confirm their own innate prejudices.

Thus when a story about "Asians" is published, people from across that vast geographic region — Japanese or Koreans or those Chinese New Zealanders who have worked their arses off to gain some kind of acceptance here — must brace themselves for the usual ignorant backlash. Unfortunately for these people, Coddington "saying it loud and clear [that] the vast majority" are good folk amounts to little.

While living in an Asian country, I was constantly aware of my "foreign-ness" because crimes committed by foreigners were reported in dichotomous terms. Thus, for example, some octogenarian pervert who just happened to be French would be reported as a "foreign sex criminal", casting aspersions on everyone who didn't have Asiatic features. It would get to the point where I would cringe whenever a foreigner committed a crime. After a while I would even feel embarrassment, as though I were somehow partly responsible for the actions of people with whom I had little in common. Inevitably, embarrassment would manifest itself in bitterness, directed in equal part at the host country and at other foreigners.

Rosemary Jones, one of Coddington's interviewees and an "established" Chinese New Zealander, speaks of a "wee bit of conflict" between her ilk and the new Chinese who erode the work of those who have gone before them. What is especially grating is good people like Jones are made to feel they need to justify themselves in this way.

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