Response to Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Draft Curriculum

Background

This joint submission follows a meeting with Emeritus Professor Graeme Aitken, arranged by the Ministry of Education, at the University of Auckland in May 2021. Those present – Dr Tze Ming Mok, Dr Christopher Fung, Dr Grace Gassin, Dr Lynne Park, Sun Min Park, Mengzhu Fu and Fiona Ting – were individuals of East Asian heritages brought together by Dr Gassin due to their expertise and experience across a range of areas relevant to the Aotearoa New Zealand Histories draft curriculum, including: (East) Asian New Zealand histories, treaty education, museums, sociology, Asian-Indigenous solidarities, community organising, activism, race and social justice. We would like to note that two other invitees – Faisal Al-Asaad and Rahman Bashir – had intended to join the meeting, but were ultimately unable to do so due to conflicting commitments.

This document has been reviewed by those who were present at the meeting and represents our collective feedback on the Aotearoa New Zealand Histories draft curriculum available for public consultation.

Our key points are as follows:

The historical construction of 'white New Zealand' and the identity of 'New Zealander' as hegemonically white should be explicitly named and addressed.

The creation of the settler-colonial nation of New Zealand and the evolution of national identity are clearly issues which should be addressed in a clear and ongoing way in the curriculum. These processes were justified by ideologies of race which not only devalued and delegitimised indigenous cultures as 'primitive', but also marked out Asian peoples, and particularly Chinese, as alien threats in a land 'naturally' belonging to white settlers. Turn-of-the-century politicians such as Prime Minister Richard Seddon and Sir George Grey specifically marked out the Chinese as threats to white working class interests in their attempts to promote a sense of race solidarity around a shared vision of a white New Zealand. It is not an accident that the term 'New Zealander', originally a reference to Māori, came to denote white settlers at a time which not only saw Māori lose much of their land and cultural dominance, but also heightened and extreme anti-Asian discrimination. These processes are two sides of the same coin.

We note on p.4 there is an intention to address the fact that "different stereotypes of a 'New Zealand' identity have been purposely constructed at different times to define who is included and who is excluded." However, at the moment, there are a number of risk around this, including that the specific use of anti-Asian discourses in the construction of New Zealand identity will not be discussed and that this conversation will not be resourced appropriately, resulting in teachers singling out only racialised identities without providing this fuller context.

One of the most powerful insights that can come from the study of history is understanding that what appears, on the surface, to be the natural (and unchanging) state of affairs governing one's existence is, in fact, simply the result of specific historical developments – and therefore is subject to change. When we consider this, the contemporary importance of naming race in the teaching of Aotearoa's history, and addressing questions of national belonging and identity in this way, are clear. The culturally hegemonic notion of a 'New Zealander' or 'kiwi' as referring to white New Zealanders, despite the increasing diversity of

New Zealand's population and the historical usage of the term in reference to Māori, is still very strong. We observe that many Asian and other new migrants (along with many white New Zealanders) simply come to use the term 'kiwis' to refer to white people because of this, and terms like 'New Zealander' and 'kiwi' therefore become placeholders for race. This state of affairs reinforces colonial constructs by placing whiteness at the centre of our 'kiwi' national identity and encourages Asian and other migrants to assimilate to an implied white norm - while also excluding them from full inclusion in the nation. Providing students with the tools to understand these connections between the past and present will contribute to their development as active citizens capable of participating in societal change.

Tangata Whenua/Tangata Tiriti is the appropriate framing of race relations in Aotearoa

We acknowledge and accept that biculturalism is the language and policy adopted by the public service. One key drawback, however, is that the emphasis on 'culturalism' obscures an understanding of Te Tiriti as *not* an agreement between two 'cultures' or 'peoples' but one between many hapū and the British Crown.

A tangata whenua/tangata tiriti framing places the emphasis back on the legal implications of Te Tiriti and is also inclusive of all non-Māori of diverse heritages who are here through the grace of Te Tiriti, avoiding the confusing and divisive politics of 'biculturalism versus multiculturalism'. It also creates space for non-Pākehā students to reflect on their own particular connections to Māori and to Te Tiriti which are experienced quite differently to Pākehā.

Biculturalism, for linguistic and historical reasons, tends to be interpreted hegemonically as 'Māori/Pākehā'. Therefore, the adoption of Tangata Whenua/Tangata Tiriti as the intended interpretation of biculturalism ought to be explicitly defined as such and training should be provided to teachers to understand the rationale behind this framing.

Connection is crucial: (Non-Pākehā) communities' historical and cultural connections with each other and with tangata whenua

There are many more continuous connections between various different kinds of activity, individuals and communities across historical time in Aotearoa than is often acknowledged. We would like to see a greater emphasis on historical connections between communities (particularly non-Pākehā) with each other and with Māori. This will allow a more diverse range of students, including students of mixed background, to see themselves in Aotearoa's histories. For instance, there are many people who have Māori-Chinese whakapapa, but yet, for most of their history, they have not been viewed as Chinese, though they are of course part of that community. Allowing more space for students to explore those kinds can be powerful.

We have already raised the importance of an inclusive tangata whenua/tangata tiriti framing of race relations in the curriculum. In addition, we discuss below the need to teach New Zealand history in global context with attention to other histories of colonisation, capitalism, racism and imperialism. We hope all of these suggestions will help students of diverse heritages see the resonances between their various histories and cultures and help them to understand their positioning within Aotearoa.

Beyond 'International Conflicts' – international relations, connections between Aotearoa and Asia, civic participation of diverse communities in global social movements

As it stands, it is currently unclear in the curriculum where histories which are not about international conflicts from the perspective of the state, but about other transnational

histories relevant to Aotearoa would sit within the draft curriculum. However, making space for these histories to be told is vital.

We especially would like to highlight:

- The internationally-recognised leadership role which Māori have played in pan-indigenous politics and scholarship – for instance, Dr Moana Jackson's role in the drafting of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith's standing as a world-leading scholar.

- The significant whakapapa connections linking Asia and Aotearoa, in particular between indigenous Taiwanese and Māori.

- Māori history outside of Aotearoa, including everything from exchange programmes with other indigenous communities around the world to the transnational experiences of Māori diasporic communities in Australia, the United States and elsewhere.

- Civic participation in global social movements, including diasporic communities' involvement in such activities. For example, many Hong Kong Chinese living in New Zealand have been actively involved in solidarity rallies aligned with the global Hong Kong protest movement – the history of Chinese diaspora and their involvement in pro-democracy movements globally is long and rich.

Asian experiences in Aotearoa must be named and the diversity of this category must be respected

It is vital that the histories of Asian communities in New Zealand be explicitly named and included in the draft curriculum. The Chinese, for instance, have been in New Zealand since the mid-nineteenth century and omitting explicit reference to their presence in Aotearoa and the significant role that their presence, both real and imagined, has played in the making of New Zealand (see section one) is a serious one.

However, the categories of 'Asia' and 'Asian' are themselves colonial constructs built on Orientalist and homogenising discourses. To work against this is to resist the pull towards conceiving of the existence of one, cohesive Asian community. Asian experiences are highly diverse and even categories such as 'Chinese', 'Indian' already include myriad communities which are culturally and linguistically distinct from one another. This must be taken into account and respected in the process of including Asian stories in the curriculum.

Inclusion of Asian and other minority communities' experiences should be rooted in global histories of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism and forms of racial supremacy

We have observed in our work a tendency within Aotearoa for the state to draw Asian and other minority histories into nation-building narratives of 'happy' multiculturalism. This does a disservice to students of Asian heritages in Aotearoa by denying them the opportunity to access the fuller social and historical contexts which have shaped their lives and to see the resonances between their histories and those of New Zealand – one settler colonial state among many.

We believe that Asian communities' histories are more appropriately explored within the context of global histories of interconnected forms of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism and forms of racial supremacy, which also enables a fuller understanding of Aotearoa's history.

Greater emphasis on the decades from the 1980s onwards, a critical period in the history of Asian communities in Aotearoa, is required

Demographically, the vast majority of Asian migrants to Aotearoa have come in the decades following the passing of the Immigration Act 1987. Indeed, between 1986 and 2018 the Asian population grew from 1.7% to 15.1% of the total population – a growth of almost thirteen-fold (Statistics New Zealand, 2019). These decades therefore represent a critical period in the history of Asian communities.

Placing a greater emphasis on this period in the draft history curriculum will enable many more students of Asian heritages to see themselves and their families represented in Aotearoa's histories and also provide more room for discussion about the growing ethnic and cultural diversity of tangata tiriti broadly. It will also make it clearer to Asian students how Aotearoa's history is relevant to them and help nurture within them a sense of belonging as tangata tiriti.

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