



 Asia New Zealand  
Foundation  
Te Whītau Tūhono

# SERIOUSLY ASIA REVISITED

A ROADMAP FOR 2024  
AND BEYOND



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# FOREWORD

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ASIA NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION

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As the privilege of serving as Executive Director of the Asia New Zealand Foundation draws to a close, I am delighted to see this report on Seriously Asia Revisited published. It is the most important document we have produced during my tenure. My hope is it provides the intellectual infrastructure for New Zealand's engagement with Asia over the coming years. I encourage you to read it.

In 2003, at the request of the then Prime Minister Helen Clark, the Asia New Zealand Foundation — at the time known as Asia 2000 — ran the Seriously Asia initiative. It was a project designed to inject new ideas and energy into New Zealand's connections with Asia. The initiative canvassed views from across the country and in Asia; helped to grow New Zealanders' understanding of the region; and developed a set of recommendations to guide New Zealand's engagement with Asia in the years that followed.

Since 2003, New Zealand has changed a lot, and Asia even more so. Seven out of New Zealand's top 10 trading partners are now in Asia. Asian investment, international education and tourism flows have been vital to our economy. Māori have played a pivotal role in New Zealand's overall engagement with Asia, and the region's growth has provided increasing opportunities for the Māori economy.

Additionally, the number of New Zealanders identifying with Asian heritages has also grown significantly, from around seven percent of the population in 2001 to more than 15 percent at the time of the 2018 census. This change has not only helped New Zealand's connectivity with Asia but has also transformed the social, cultural and economic fabric of our towns and cities. Young New Zealanders are more connected to Asia than previous generations, through their family and peers, travel experiences, social media and pop culture.

The Asia region is considerably richer than it was in 2003, but also more complex, with increasing tension, climate disruption and fragmentation. In short, New Zealand is going to have to work harder, and success is going to demand different skills and resources from us.

In recognition of the far-reaching changes that had taken place in New Zealand and Asia over two decades, in 2022 the Asia New Zealand Foundation launched Seriously Asia Revisited. This project brought together a cross-section of informed voices to discuss how to best position New Zealand for success in Asia in the coming decades.

Seriously Asia Revisited was structured around the themes of the original Seriously Asia project. Those themes were:

- Society and Culture
- Politics and Security
- Trade, Tourism and Investment
- Innovation and Sustainable Development.



You will see in this publication that some clear insights emerged from our conversations. Overall, New Zealand was judged to have done “ok” in Asia, in some respects more than others. The Asia New Zealand Foundation heard widespread concern that New Zealand would continue to lose ground and pace in Asia if it continued with its current approach and level of activity.

We heard particularly strong desire for a cohesive Asia strategy and a clearly articulated vision that would guide both public and private sector engagement in the region. Additionally, there was a strong sense that New Zealand’s collective “Asia capability” - for instance, knowledge and languages - was not keeping pace with demand. Hui participants also spoke of the value that New Zealand’s significant Asian diaspora bring to this work and the edge that Māori have in engaging with a range of Asian cultures.

As you will read in the pages that follow, plenty of other opportunities and challenges emerged in the discussions. But in short, what was clear was that a refreshed approach is needed if New Zealand is to maximise the opportunities and minimise the risks across the breadth of its relations with Asia.

We are grateful to all those who have contributed to this project: the authors of four background thematic papers; the 120-plus participants of hui held across Aotearoa New Zealand; and those who shared their views through our surveys. The collective expertise and perspectives of these contributors - both in New Zealand and Asia - will help set the roadmap for New Zealand to thrive in and with Asia in the future.

We hope you will find this publication insightful.



**Simon J Draper**  
Executive Director



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# TWO DECADES OF CHANGE

## INSIGHTS ON ASIA FROM LEE HSIEN LOONG — PRIME MINISTER OF SINGAPORE

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*His Excellency Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore, delivered the keynote address at the Seriously Asia dinner in 2003. At the time, Mr Lee was Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, as well as an Honorary Adviser to the Asia New Zealand Foundation. He reflected on the impact of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, noting that the outlook in the region six years later was complex but stable.*

*In 2022, the Asia New Zealand Foundation invited Prime Minister Lee to share his perspectives on developments in Asia since 2003. This was his letter to us:*

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In 2003, anticipating the dynamic growth of Asia, the Asia New Zealand Foundation launched the “Seriously Asia” project to enhance New Zealand’s understanding and engagement of the region.

Since then, Asia has indeed prospered. Today, Asia accounts for 40% of the world’s GDP and is home to 4 of the world’s 10 largest economies - China, Japan, India, and South Korea. Regional economies have become more inter-connected. Nearly 60% of Asian trade is now intra-regional. New Zealand’s inter-dependence with Asia has also grown - 7 of its top 10 export partners are in Asia.

Most significantly, the last two decades have witnessed China’s dramatic transformation and development. China is now the largest trading partner of most countries in the region, including Singapore and New Zealand, and its international influence continues to grow.

Small countries have been lifted by this rising tide. But we have also been active in shaping the regional landscape. Singapore and New Zealand started the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (P4) together with Chile and Brunei in 2006, hoping that it would in time develop into a broader regional grouping. When the P4 later evolved into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), it exceeded our expectations.

Singapore and New Zealand are also members of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world’s largest FTA comprising 30% of global GDP. The RCEP was an ASEAN initiative, strongly supported by Singapore, to enhance ASEAN’s integration with partners like New Zealand.

However, the economic transformation has shifted the balance of power and changed the strategic picture in Asia. Twenty years ago, US-China relations were stable. Today, they clash over a wide range of issues as they jostle for influence, and the geopolitical tensions are felt keenly throughout the region. These affect both security and economic matters, including maritime claims, freedom of navigation, trade and investments, supply chains and technological bifurcation. This great power rivalry also makes it much harder for countries to cooperate on pressing global problems affecting us all, such as climate change and pandemic preparedness.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further darkened the strategic environment. The invasion is a grave violation of the UN Charter and international law. It profoundly undermines the rules-based, multilateral framework that all countries rely on in order to work together as friends and coexist as opponents. Its consequences are already being felt in Asia.

Nevertheless, Asia remains a vibrant region with enormous promise. More than half of the world's population live here. Asians are increasingly better educated, brimming with energy and dynamism. China's growth may be slowing amidst headwinds, but its consumer market is huge and expanding, and it is making strides in technology. India is developing steadily, from a lower base than China but enjoying a youthful demographic advantage. Southeast Asia has a growing middle class, and by 2030 is projected to become collectively the fourth largest economy in the world.

Realising Asia's promise depends on the region remaining peaceful and stable, and the major powers managing their tensions and keeping their relationship on an even keel. The US still plays an indispensable role in the region, as a major participant in the evolving balance of power. Meanwhile, China needs to find the right way to assume its place in the world, while being accepted and respected by other countries big and small. Then Asian countries can grow their links with both the US and China, and deepen ties with other partners even as they pursue interdependence and win-win cooperation among themselves.

Small countries are realistic about our influence on global trends. But we are not without agency. We need to stand up for an open, stable, and integrated international order underpinned by international law. We need to support multilateral institutions like the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation. We can make common cause on initiatives which benefit us all, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Like-minded countries can also work productively together. Singapore and New Zealand entered an Enhanced Partnership in 2019 to advance our cooperation in areas such as trade and innovation. We launched the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA) together with Chile in June 2020 to cooperate in the emerging area of the digital economy, and we welcome other countries to join the DEPA. Perhaps these modest initiatives will grow and foster a more stable region where all countries can prosper together, just like the P4 did.

As the COVID-19 pandemic reminded us, even while we insulate ourselves from the vagaries of the outside world, we cannot isolate ourselves from it. Asia remains a region full of opportunities and promise. Strengthening ties between New Zealand and Asia has never been more important. May the Asia New Zealand Foundation's "Seriously Asia Revisited" project be as successful as its predecessor.

*“ Asia remains a region full of opportunities and promise. Strengthening ties between New Zealand and Asia has never been more important.”*





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# SERIOUSLY ASIA REVISITED: THE JOURNEY

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Over the course of 2022, the Asia New Zealand Foundation brought together more than 120 informed voices from across Aotearoa New Zealand to reflect on Asia, and Asia-New Zealand relations; and consider what was needed to position New Zealand for success in Asia over the coming decades.

To inform the conversations, the Foundation commissioned four new reports that explained the outcomes and recommendations of the 2003 Seriously Asia initiative, and put forward a series of questions and key findings for participants to discuss.

These papers informed four hui held over the course of 2022, each exploring Asia-New Zealand relations from the perspective of society and culture; politics and security; trade, tourism and investment; and innovation and sustainable development.

The four hui were:

- Society and Culture: Paper by Professor Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Dr Andrew Butcher; hui held in Auckland on Friday 29 July.
- Politics and Security: Paper by Professor David Capie and Professor Bethan K. Greener; hui held in Wellington on Friday 19 August.
- Trade, Tourism and Investment: Paper by Professor Natasha Hamilton-Hart and Shamubeel Eaqub; hui held in Christchurch on Friday 9 September.
- Innovation and Sustainable Development: Paper by Hone McGregor and Kenneth Leong; hui held in Queenstown on Thursday 29 September.

Editor-in-Chief Finlay Macdonald provided editorial oversight and guidance to the eight authors and summarised the discussions at the four hui.

The Foundation also surveyed hui participants, members of our Asia Honorary Advisers' network, and about 60 additional stakeholders. Summaries of the survey results are also included in this publication.



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## A SNAPSHOT OF COMMENTS SHARED BY SERIOUSLY ASIA REVISITED PARTICIPANTS

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*“ New Zealand still has traditional views of Asia that haven't kept up with the times. We are more aware of what is going on socially, culturally, economically and politically in the West than in Asia. There is a cultural capability lag in connecting with Asia that needs to be attended to.”*

**Participant, society and culture hui**

*“ The most concerning development is that rising geopolitical tensions will affect New Zealand's relations with different parts of Asia in different ways but there has not been enough proactive strategic thinking and action about how the country can best respond, given its limited material resources ”*

**Participant, politics and security hui**

*“ New Zealand’s perception of Asia is outdated - shaped by people who engaged with Asia decades ago when doing so required little effort to understand culture, language and customs.”*

**Participant, innovation and sustainable development hui**

# ASIA: THE KEY METRICS



**50%**  
Asia is on track to exceed 50 percent of global GDP by 2040, which in turn will drive 40 percent of global consumption.



**1/6<sup>th</sup>**  
Today, one sixth of the world's population is Indian, 60 percent of whom are under the age of 30.



**800** million  
of the world's millennials are in Asia, compared to 66 million in the United States and 60 million in the European Union.



**99**  
of the top 100 cities facing the most extreme environmental risks associated with climate change are in Asia.

**26%**  
New Zealanders of Asian heritage are projected to make up 26 percent of the total population by 2043.



**2<sup>nd</sup>**  
New Zealanders consider Asia to be the second most important region to New Zealand's future, second only to Australia. For young New Zealanders, Asia is the number one travel destination.



**40%**  
Asia accounts for more than 40 percent of unicorns worldwide (start-ups valued at more than US\$1 billion). In 2021 alone, India produced 44 unicorns - nearly one per week - with a total valuation of \$165 billion.



**2/3<sup>rd</sup>**  
Two-thirds of New Zealanders now consume Asia-related entertainment regularly.

SOURCE:  
McKinsey, Schroders, Statista, Time Magazine, Statistics New Zealand, Asia New Zealand Foundation research.



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# DEVELOPING A ROADMAP FOR THE COMING DECADES

## ADVANCING AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND'S PLACE AND RELATIONSHIPS IN ASIA

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# OBSERVATIONS ON ASIA

Three key observations on Asia were made by participants at all four Seriously Asia Revisited hui. They were:

- 1** Asia's influence over the next 20 years will be more profound than the last 20. It will be the centre of key decisions that affect New Zealand and New Zealanders.
- 2** New Zealand is judged to have done 'ok' in Asia in some parts more than others, but there is agreement that what is needed going forward is different to what we have been doing.
- 3** The opportunity cost of continuing to lose ground and influence in Asia is too great to ignore.



# THE SIX ISSUES AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND MUST ADDRESS

Seriously Asia Revisited aims to position New Zealand for success across a range of sectors in which Asia is becoming more and more important, but at a time when the challenges are becoming more acute. If New Zealand atomises its efforts, or is inconsistent, then it will miss much of the opportunity but must contend with all the same risks.

In order to be successful, New Zealand's approach to Asia must endure beyond election cycles and be coordinated across agencies and sectors. Otherwise, any new efforts and initiatives are set up to fail.

Goals must be connected and progress tracked otherwise New Zealand is at risk of believing narratives that are not supported by the evidence.



Seriously Asia Revisited participants identified **six key issues** facing Aotearoa New Zealand in its relationships with Asia. The recommendations that follow in this roadmap are aimed at addressing these six issues.

**1** **New Zealand lacks a clear and publicly articulated vision for its engagement with Asia. Participants reported a sense of inconsistency, fragmentation, and duplication of effort, spending and focus.**

*“ It is still not clear what NZ wants from its Asia relationship/approach; and what it is that NZ hopes to offer Asia through this partnership. We need more clarity on that. There are lots of thoughtful NZ analysts who have some amazing ideas. I am just not sure what NZ as a state wants.”*

Participant, politics and security hui

**2** **New Zealand’s ‘Asia capability’ (Asia knowledge, languages, investment etc) is eroding, and with it, our ability to successfully navigate Asia going forward. Education is critical.**

*“ We have not invested in creating a cohort of Asia hands with deep knowledge and skills about the region. It has been ad hoc and represents a failure of the universities and their funders.”*

Participant, politics and security hui

**3** **New Zealand’s Asian diaspora could play a significantly greater role in helping inform and shape New Zealand’s Asia relationships.**

*“ We should look at our Asian migrant population as an asset and invest more in supporting New Zealand to better connect with Asia.”*

Participant, society and culture hui

**4** **New Zealand has looked at Asia too much through a transactional trade lens, in a region where personal relationships count the most.**

*“ We’re entering a difficult economic and geopolitical period, in which relationships will matter more than ever.”*

Participant, society and culture hui

**5** **New Zealand’s Asia conversation risks shifting from a trade to security focus, further perpetuating the narrow framing and understanding of Asia when a fuller, more balanced conversation is needed.**

*“ The security debate, largely focused on China, will intensify. The liberal view of the region (free trade and human rights) will become increasingly problematic as our only point of engagement. New Zealanders will need new ideas to have meaningful engagement and that will require listening to our Asian colleagues and having the skills to hear what they are saying.”*

Participant, politics and security hui

**6** **New Zealand could better maximise the skillset of Te Ao Māori, to build on the strong cultural connectivity that gives New Zealand an edge.**

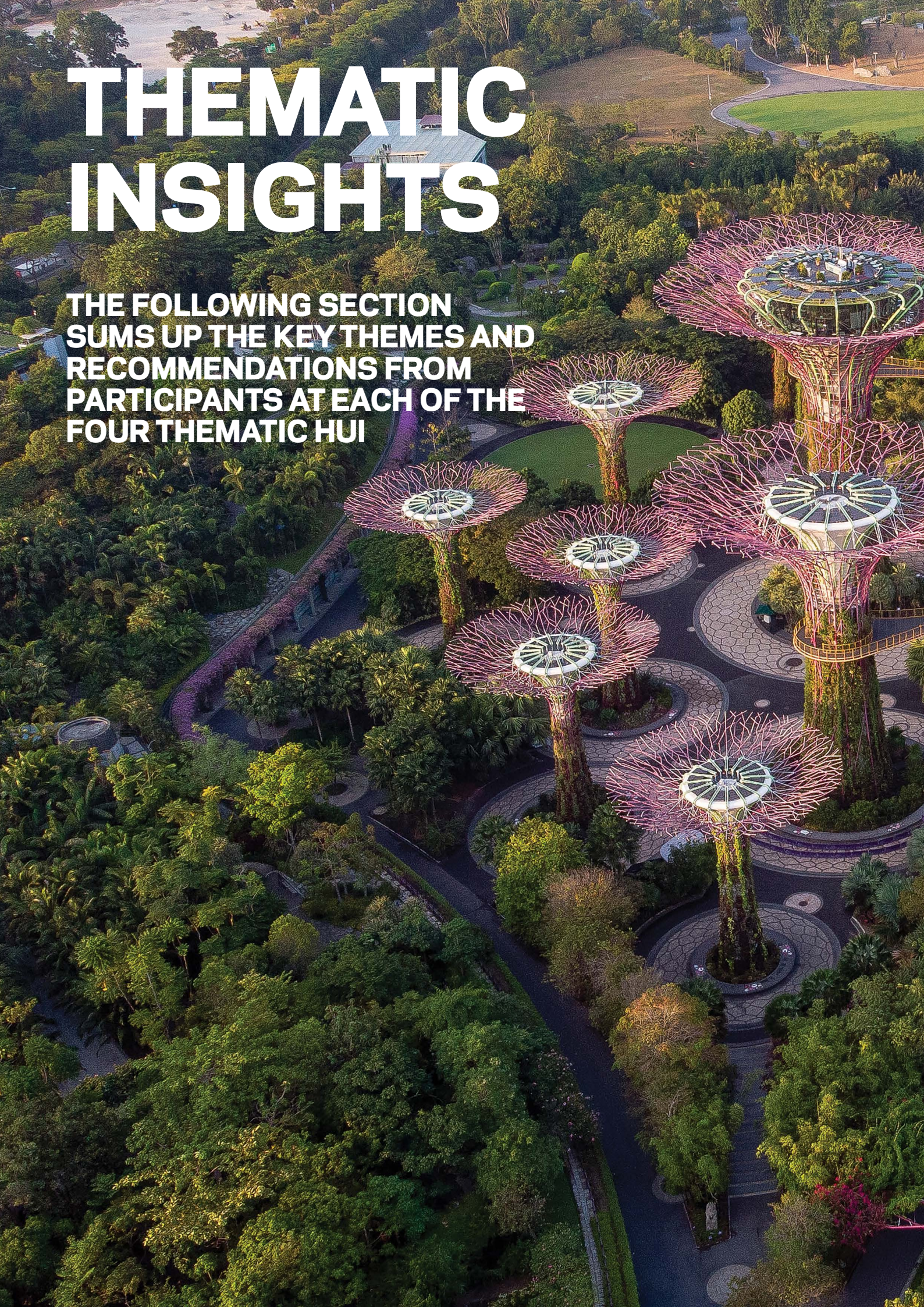
*“ I think Māori have more of a role to play in supporting our Asia relations beyond kapa haka.”*

Participant, politics and security hui



# THEMATIC INSIGHTS

THE FOLLOWING SECTION  
SUMS UP THE KEY THEMES AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM  
PARTICIPANTS AT EACH OF THE  
FOUR THEMATIC HUI





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## THEME 1

# SOCIETY & CULTURE



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### KEY FINDING:

Māori and New Zealanders of Asian heritage want a better sense of their role and greater opportunity to help build New Zealand's relationships in Asia.

This includes a clearer articulation of and support for the role people and culture play in New Zealand's Asia relations and a plan to maximise these skills to help achieve better positioning for New Zealand. New Zealanders of Asian heritage expressed concern that a securitised view of Asia could worsen, rather than improve, their sense of alienation in New Zealand.

### RECOMMENDATION

Government agencies work with the Asia New Zealand Foundation on a public-facing document and action plan for the Government to endorse.

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**KEY FINDING:**

## Better coordination is needed across New Zealand Government agencies engaging with Asia.

Participants at all four hui said an apparent lack of coordination resulted in decisions in one area (e.g. immigration, education) impacting another (e.g. foreign policy, business), which led to unintended consequences (reputational damage, bilateral damage).

**RECOMMENDATION**

**Designate a senior whole-of-government focal point for policy decisions affecting Asia — one that operates better than the status quo.**

*“ There appears to be a lack of a masterplan on what government and our big businesses want to achieve, with and from their relationships with Asia. Policy and commercial initiatives would also appear at times to be conflicted, and there is definitely a lack of consistency and follow-through.”*

Participant, society and culture hui.

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**KEY FINDING:**

## Asia capability is eroding in New Zealand.

Asia-related skills, like languages and cultural acumen, appear not to be valued in New Zealand, whether in schools, universities, business or government.

**RECOMMENDATION**

**Government agencies should consider changing incentives — e.g. Performance-Based Research (PBRF) criteria and funding — so that Asia knowledge and skills are recognised as important in government-funded institutions.**

*“ We need a deeper pool of Asia specialists at the government, academic, and societal level. It should be one of the core missions of the New Zealand government to invest in the development [both quantitatively and qualitatively] of that expertise.”*

Participant, society and culture hui.

## THEME 2

# POLITICS & SECURITY

### KEY FINDING:

The Government needs to build greater public awareness about the significance of Asia's rise and New Zealand's vision for the region.

This will enable it to make the investments needed to be credible in Asia (e.g. for relationship-building, resourcing and defence assets). This needs to go beyond the policy, academia and business sector and not be limited to China and business.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The Asia New Zealand Foundation to coordinate a series of ministerial-level public engagements to raise New Zealanders' awareness of New Zealand's equities in Asia. The Foundation could also commission a new 'Asia Perceptions of Aotearoa New Zealand' study to accompany its domestic New Zealanders' Perceptions of Asia and Asian Peoples annual survey, to help inform a broader discussion.

*“ There needs to be greater strategic focus (within and beyond government) on how New Zealand can best respond in smart, multifaceted ways to the geopolitical challenges besetting the region. That includes fostering greater public debate and understanding about those challenges. In particular, New Zealand could be putting more effort into its relations with Southeast Asian states, both in bilateral terms to secure important partnerships and multilaterally to help bolster the ASEAN centrality that has helped maintain regional stability.”*

Participant, politics and security hui

*“ Maintain and, if necessary, increase the tempo of interactions, both ways. Build knowledge of security perspectives of all countries of the region. Build awareness in New Zealand of the role Asian countries play with us in our future.”*

Participant, politics and security hui

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**KEY FINDING:**

Tackling climate change, both mitigation and adaptation, will get harder as conditions - both environmental and geostrategic - get tougher.

Combating climate change in partnership with Asia presents an area of practical cooperation that is mutually beneficial and provides another avenue for dialogue and exchange - particularly for China and India.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Consider whether greater support for climate-related scientific exchange with key partners across Asia might be possible, including in areas such as research for young scholars and innovation for young entrepreneurs.

*“ With increased natural hazards, climate events and climate impacts, there is an opportunity for NZ, Asia and the US to explore a collaborative Climate Corps, to support communities impacted by climate and environmental events in the region. Reshaping and co-designing regional security forces could help shift the tensions from a threat response to care response.”*

Participant, politics and security hui

*“ Southeast Asia (the closest Asian region to NZ) is ecologically fragile. A large-scale ecological crisis there will have huge consequences for NZ, especially if it leads to the displacement of people.”*

Participant, politics and security hui

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**KEY FINDING:**

Resource constraints will require rationalisation and possibly consolidation of taxpayer funding to various Asia-related bodies so that New Zealand is more impactful.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Review Government funding to Asia-focused New Zealand organisations with a view to increasing coherency, coordination, efficiencies and impact.



## THEME 3

# TRADE, TOURISM & INVESTMENT



### KEY FINDING:

The Asia landscape is daunting and complex for most New Zealand firms.

It is difficult for firms to get a clear understanding of the New Zealand Government's assessments and judgements of politics and security opportunities or risks across Asia, and how this might impact the private sector. Businesses want more real-time, relevant assessments beyond trade figures or simple statements of risk to enable them to make informed decisions.

### RECOMMENDATION

Agencies to consider what they can do to respond to this articulated need.

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**KEY FINDING:**

Hierarchy, relationships and the support of government count more in business in Asia than they do in other regions of the world.

Government and business are intertwined in Asia in a way they are not in New Zealand. Businesses feel that only a narrow and select band receive the support of NZ Inc. They have asked for greater flexibility when it comes to supporting a wider array of New Zealand business interests in Asia.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Increase understanding of the role government and senior leaders (ministers, officials, others with mana) can play in assisting business in Asia, leading to better cross-government support of those New Zealand businesses in-country.

*“ Ministers need to prioritise visits, dialogue and resources to the region to ensure we have sustained engagement across a substantive number of areas.”*

Participant, trade tourism and investment hui

*“ High-level political investment over the long term, consistent across successive governments, is important: SE Asia, China, India, etc.”*

Participant, trade tourism and investment hui

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**KEY FINDING:**

New Zealand needs a simple, consistent, authentic narrative for businesses to take to their Asian customers that explains New Zealand's Asia vision, speaks to the interests of Asian countries, and draws on Te Ao Māori insights.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Government agencies to consider, in the context of the New Zealand Story, what additional outputs might be possible.

## THEME 4

# INNOVATION & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



### KEY FINDING:

Investment from Asia in New Zealand is not as good as it should be in terms of both quantity and quality.

There is a need to champion New Zealand's R&D (research and development) in particular.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The Government should develop an Asia-focused investment policy that recognises more explicitly the value of Asia to New Zealand and the key (R&D) sectors New Zealand wishes to excel in.

*“ I believe we could make a strategic decision to be the ideas lab for Asia - but only if we start modelling innovation and sustainability authentically and consistently at home, then bringing Asian influencers here to impress the vision on them, learn from their responses, then emerge with co-designed approaches that have sufficient impact they will be adopted globally”*

Participant, innovation and sustainable development hui



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**KEY FINDING:**

Māori will carry on with a long-term, sustainable approach regardless of how the rest of New Zealand acts.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Māori ask that the Government provide backing in meaningful ways - or at the very least not get in the way.

*“ NZ can do a better job at leading and promoting Te Ao Māori as our differentiator. A lot of people say this, but I feel it is still in its infancy. We can better position our education products as well, and be more competitive against other English-speaking countries by showcasing our point of difference better... I think that being able to drive major economic outcomes through sustainable sectors is a big area of untapped potential ”*

Participant, innovation and sustainable development hui

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**KEY FINDING:**

Young people will drive New Zealand's sustainability and innovation agenda.

This will require more engagement with Asia, but young New Zealanders are not as Asia-equipped as they should be.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Consider a transformational increase in how we equip young New Zealanders (similar to Australia's Reverse Colombo Plan) to thrive in Asia. Continue to invest in young peoples' digital skills and Asia knowledge across Government spending.

*“ The next generation is confident, innovative and future-focused. Through the rise of social media they see no barriers in engagement. Our approach should embrace their preferred approaches.”*

Society and culture hui









# SURVEY OF SERIOUSLY ASIA REVISITED PARTICIPANTS

## Here is what they said:

**71%**

**felt that New Zealand's current approach would not be fit for purpose in the coming decade.**

Only nine percent agreed that the same approach would work; the rest of respondents were neutral.

**84%**

**agreed that New Zealand generally thinks of itself as part of the West, rather than part of Asia.**

**87.5%**

**agreed or strongly agreed that New Zealand needs to move faster and with more effort to keep pace with Asia.**

Only 4 percent disagreed, while the remainder were neutral.

**85%**

**said the Government needs to put more effort into leader-level, ministerial and official visits to Asia.**

**94%**

**felt that extra effort should be invested at the non-government level**

to support talented and interesting New Zealanders to travel to Asia and exchange ideas, innovations and developments.

**92.5%**

**felt that New Zealand should invest more in supporting education opportunities and facilitating exchanges of talented young people.**

**66%**

**said they were optimistic or very optimistic about their sector's future engagement with Asia, while 27% were neutral, while only 7% felt negative.**



# EXPERT COMMENTARY

## ON EACH OF THE FOUR THEMES

### SOCIETY AND CULTURE HUI

*“ The arts are universal, flexible and agile enough to uplift all of the other sectors. New Zealand culture is one of our greatest trades to the rest of the world.”*

*“ We should look at our Asian migrant population as an asset and invest more in supporting New Zealand to better connect with Asia.”*

*“ We need more diversity of media to ensure we are hearing more about economic, social and cultural developments in Asia that will be more impactful on New Zealand than it has been in the past.”*

*“ There needs to be a deeper cognitive understanding at the societal level that New Zealand is a state whose economic, diplomatic, and military security is inextricably linked to the Asian region.”*

Participants in the society and culture hui expressed concerns that intersecting economic, political and health challenges had negatively impacted New Zealand's capacity to engage with Asia from a societal and cultural perspective.

After two years of disrupted connections created by the pandemic, they saw a need for New Zealand to reconnect with Asia. Deep and meaningful engagement was needed at all levels, as opposed to transactional outreach when it suited New Zealand's purposes.

Participants were concerned that New Zealand lacked a coherent strategy or a clear way forward, with New Zealand still clinging to traditional views of Asia that had not moved with the times. The biggest barrier was an assumption that Western ways of operating were superior, and that New Zealanders did not need to upskill to build their 'Asia capability'.

There was a clear message that New Zealand had not invested enough time and effort developing connections with Asia through Māori culture. The role of Te Tiriti in relation to Asia would need rethinking, alongside indigenous-to-indigenous connections. Respondents also articulated the value of increasing cultural and sporting exchanges of Māori and Pacific peoples in Asia.

However, respondents were positive about developments in New Zealand's relationship with Asia through collaborations across media, art, fashion, the creative sector and student exchanges. The flow of Asian culture into New Zealand and the growing profile of Asian artists was enriching society. Fifty-seven percent of respondents said they were optimistic about the future of New Zealand's relationship with Asia from a society and culture perspective.

Participants noted a growing interest from Asian communities to participate in mainstream politics. But they also expressed that New Zealand was not engaging with diaspora communities well enough to leverage the connection and capabilities they could bring.

Racism was an area of concern. Respondents noted that New Zealand's more challenging relationship with China could overshadow perceptions of Asia more broadly. They also noted that the rise of political authoritarianism and religious polarisation in some Asian countries could negatively impact Asian diasporic populations in New Zealand.

Respondents also identified a need to support a strong and diverse media environment, to communicate more information about Asia to the public and to better serve Asian New Zealanders.

They noted the importance of youth connections and felt more support should be provided to young people to access scholarships, internships and exchanges — as well as increased Asian culture, language and history in school curricula.



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## **POLITICS AND SECURITY HUI**

*“ There needs to be much more debate and reflection on what the reconceptualisation of the Asia-Pacific as the Indo-Pacific means for New Zealand.”*

*“ New Zealand needs to have a trading position that matches our geopolitical reality. This means increased focus on non-China Asia, so we have some resilience, and are less vulnerable to leverage from the CCP.”*

*“ We have not invested in creating a cohort of Asia hands with deep knowledge and skills about the region. It has been ad hoc and represents a failure of universities and their funders.”*

Participants in the politics and security hui highlighted major power competition and the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a geostrategic concept as important current developments, influencing contemporary politics and security thinking.

New Zealand needed a clear plan on what it wanted to achieve in and with Asia over the next 20 years, with appropriate resourcing to deliver it.

China featured heavily in many of the comments, with respondents expressing a range of views. Many noted China's increasing authoritarianism and assertiveness (extending into the Pacific) and tensions with the United States. This sat in contrast to the fact that China is New Zealand's largest trading partner.

Participants noted that New Zealand appeared to be rebalancing its interests, and was re-committing to English-speaking Western alliances, including Five Eyes. There was clear understanding that New Zealand's dependency on China for trade could be used against it.

To protect its interests, New Zealand would need to break ground in new areas of cooperation, including in cyber, maritime and digital infrastructure. Energy, water and food security were also critical areas where New Zealand would need to step-up, in order to help maintain regional peace and stability.

New Zealand might be a minnow on the global stage, but it was also a critical player. One respondent pointed out, “We need to stop talking about being a small country. We have agency and we have a positive brand. We should be more confident in drawing on this”.

Participants expressed concerns that New Zealand still had a poor understanding of Asia and called for sustained efforts to engage and educate the public.

They also said the Government could be doing more to leverage the connections between Māori, Pacific and Asia - both at home and offshore - to grow Asia-New Zealand relations.

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## TRADE, TOURISM AND INVESTMENT HUI

*“ Asia works through relationships, which require high-quality engagement. Asia is heterogeneous so we need to tailor our approach to different countries.”*

*“ Free trade agreements have helped and airline connectivity helps. We could do better when it comes to being an easier place to invest (NZ ranks at the bottom of the OECD for FDI).”*

*“ As the world’s growth engine - in wealth, innovation, trade, etc - Asia represents a massive opportunity for New Zealand from an economic, political, security and cultural perspective.”*

*“ We need a stable equilibrium with China. Whether we like it or not they are one of the two largest world economies and NZ’s largest trading partner.”*

*“ The tourism scene has shifted in the past few years. Eco-tourism will be a huge opportunity focused on sustainability.”*

Participants in the trade, tourism and investment hui said the New Zealand Government should better communicate its own objectives and priorities, and improve its engagement with non-government organisations in planning and implementing its strategies.

High-level political investment over the long term and consistency across successive governments were vital.

Ministers needed to prioritise visits, dialogue and resources in Asia. The Government needed to ensure airline routes were maintained and extended across the region, and keep its eye on growth industries and markets - including renewables, AI, fintech, agritech, health and beauty.

Participants said New Zealand needed to change its narrative in Asia and position itself as an incubation nation for startups and innovation, with opportunities to partner with Asia in “new” industries such as tech, aerospace and communications.

Many expressed concern that immigration had become a thorn in the side of Asia-New Zealand relations, and felt the Government needed to seriously rethink immigration settings and policy to match competitive countries, especially in education.

On China, participants noted that while politics and security differences were inevitable, they should not stand in the way of a productive and resilient trade and economic relationship supported by cooperation in areas of mutual interest, such as climate change.

Participants agreed that New Zealand needed a whole-of-government Asia strategy and Asia capability-building plan. Languages and cultural understanding in key sectors were seen to be lacking, along with an understanding of how to build and maintain deeper Asia relations.

While the hui was focused on trade, tourism and investment, participants noted the need for a range of initiatives — like youth exchanges, science cooperation, arts and culture engagement — to support greater understanding, goodwill and deeper dialogues between countries.

On tourism, respondents noted that climate change would be a major issue, and new tourism models would be needed in the future. Offerings would need to be updated to cater for young people.

## INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT HUI

*“ New Zealand could in partnership with others help shift the dial on climate change through investment in mitigation.”*

*“ We haven't focused on young people who are the future. We need to better connect young ambassadors across New Zealand and Asia, and to focus on innovation and cross-pollination across key sectors.”*

Participants in the innovation and sustainable development hui said that, from a tech point of view, New Zealand had been slow to adopt innovation. New Zealanders could not fathom the rate of change in Asia, particularly in China, and how quickly they needed to adapt.

Some participants felt New Zealand needed to double-down on what it had built its reputation on: being a safe, clean producer of high-quality goods. Its products could command a premium if it invested more in providing premium experiences - in tourism, education and consumer goods. But this required a government and public sector who were attuned to the rise of Asia, and ready to invest in it, and not just China.

New Zealand could begin to shape consumer behaviours, but only if it acted early enough to be seen as a global thought leader.

New Zealand also needed to look beyond trade and business interests to explore how to foster meaningful connections across areas of indigenous rights, environmental and social sustainability, climate change action, and strengthening democratic institutions and practices.

Many participants saw great potential and opportunity to become thought leaders in sustainability through Te Ao Māori perspectives, to lead through manaakitanga and become famous for it around the world.

One of the most important developments that would help New Zealand's relationship in Asia was the integration of Māori cultural values into frontline engagements.

There was a growing acknowledgment that cultural values, such as kaitiakitanga and 'kiwi can-do' goals like a predator-free New Zealand, had much to offer in Asia.







# INFORMED VOICES ON ASIA

## STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

A survey of 60 informed voices on Asia, who did not participate in the Seriously Asia Revisited hui, was also conducted. Here is a snapshot of what they said:

*“A better and more effective engagement with Asia requires far greater understanding of the politics, economies, languages, histories and cultures of the regions. This is lacking even at tertiary level.”*

*“Aotearoa imparts a very distinctive and recognisable indigenous element across the globe, and especially in Asia. Very rarely is that element utilised to its full potential, outside of ministerial visits.”*

*“We aren’t doing enough in terms of building industry and skill sets to meaningfully engage with Asia - particularly with regards to advanced economic outputs like innovation and technology.”*

*“The biggest challenge for New Zealand is how to balance its relationship with China and its relationship with traditionally Western allies.”*

*“Creating soft power and influence requires years of relationship-building and connection.”*



# EXPERT VIEWS FROM ASIA

## ASIA HONORARY ADVISER SURVEY

The Asia New Zealand Foundation is supported by a network of senior advisers from across the Asia region. They hold key positions in business, government, academia, community and other sectors. As part of Seriously Asia Revisited, the Foundation sought their views about New Zealand relations and role in Asia. Here is a summary of what they said.

*“ Global development of geo-political issues will require governments to take sides. New Zealand can be a lighthouse of being strongly principled and yet inclusive and respectful.”*

Asia Honorary Adviser

*“ New Zealand has already taken the initiative to know and understand more of Asia. The step is growing into being more integrated rather than as an outsider looking in. Blending into Asia will be more significant than just understanding it”*

Asia Honorary Adviser

New Zealand has an opportunity to reclaim its position as a strong soft power in Asia, with a real presence politically, economically and socially. New Zealand can also play an influencing role for a more strongly bonded Asia, but only if it resists the urge to become more insular. New Zealand has strong equities in the Asia region, but it looks and feels like New Zealand is scaling back engagement. This would be a mistake.

With global supply chains being challenged by the pandemic and the Ukraine war, countries needed to spread risks and diversify supply. New Zealand is in an even stronger position to market its agricultural produce to Asian countries. Doing so would strengthen both trade and people-to-people relationships.

Advisers strongly advocated for investing in young people to grow familiarity and understanding. All agreed that extra effort was needed to support education opportunities and facilitate the exchange of talented young people between Asia and New Zealand. There were opportunities to position and market New Zealand as a “cool, hip” country to young people, but also one with strong green credentials.

Advisers were unanimous on the value of getting talented and interesting New Zealanders into the region, to exchange ideas, innovations and developments. But they also warned that New Zealand needed to create a cordial and welcoming environment for visitors, both in leisure and business, and to foster fellowship among people of different countries.

Advisers recommended that New Zealand refresh its 'Asia story' in order for New Zealand to gain the right kind of attention and traction in their countries. This included working with media to reach as wide an audience as possible in Asia, as well as through government and non-government (track II) engagement.

Advisers named the Russia-Ukraine war; China's political and military activity; US-China rivalry; tensions between autocracy/authoritarianism and democracy/democratisation; and the role of tech, especially AI-based technology as the big trends that could impact New Zealand's future prosperity and security.

Asked about the most exciting developments in the region, advisers pointed to areas of innovation and entrepreneurship, developments in technology and app-based payments, and areas such as sustainable and responsible development.



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# THE LAST WORD

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This report has identified six key issues that set the context and operational environment for New Zealand's engagement across Asia. It has also put forward twelve specific recommendations to better position New Zealand for success in the Asia region over the coming decades.

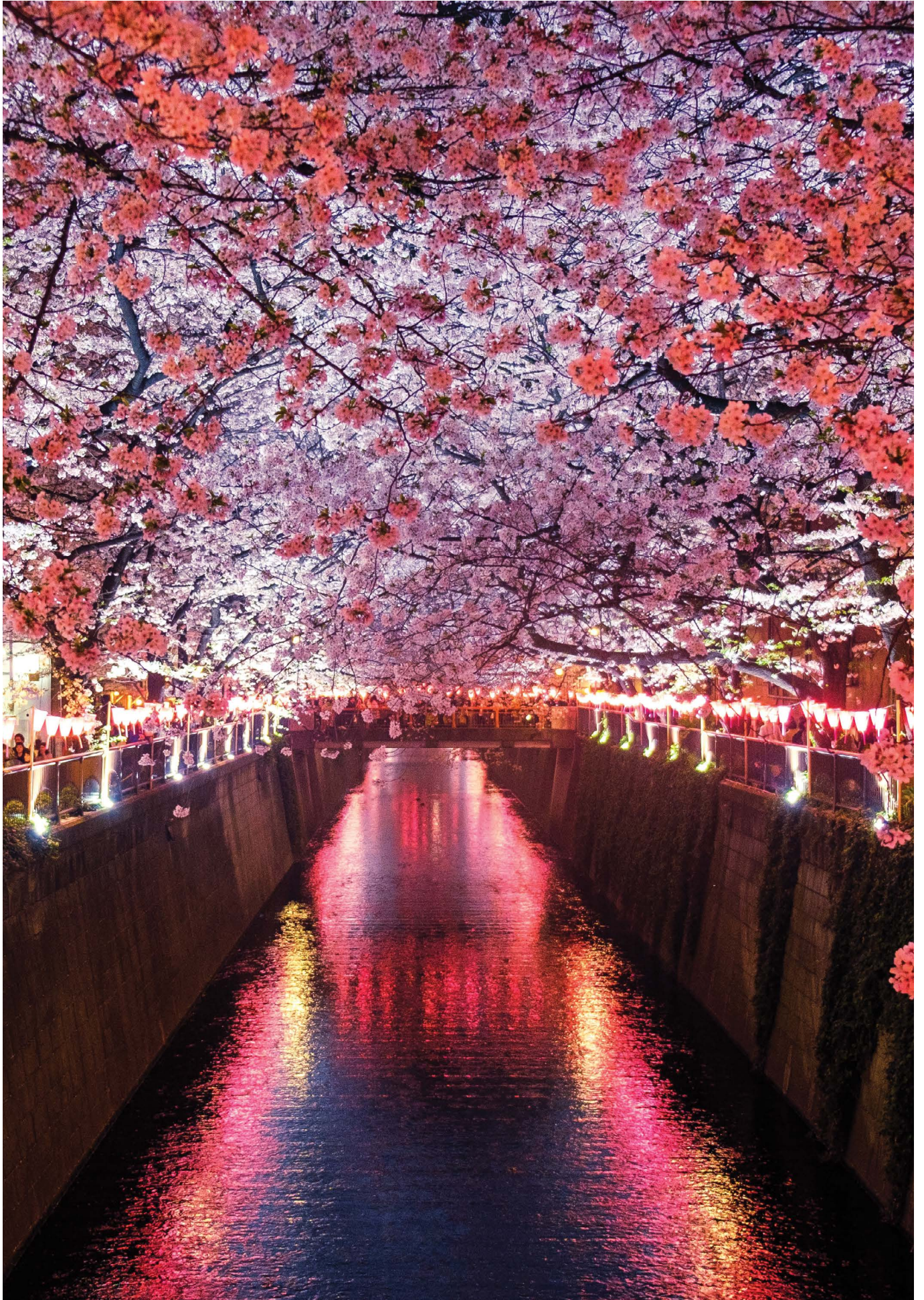
While these recommendations lay down the foundations for a roadmap for New Zealand's Asia engagement, they do not deliver the full journey. It is critical to have a clear sense of our destination, along with the drive, commitment, and resources to get us there.

Following the Seriously Asia Revisited hui, Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta tasked the Asia New Zealand Foundation to draft an 'Asia vision' for Aotearoa New Zealand - one that not only broadens New Zealand's discourse on Asia, but also signals the value the Government places on ensuring Aotearoa is equipped, networked and capable in the Asia region for the years to come.

This vision must drive us to take a more deliberate and strategic approach to how New Zealand is going to invest its time and resources to promote and protect its interests in Asia. It will not be possible to be all things to all countries all at once. New Zealand must make tough choices. It will have to navigate challenges and risks, as much as it must harness innovations and maximize opportunities. And it must do this in the context of a fast-paced but also contested regional environment.

Our task now is to draft this vision, drawing on the many expert voices who contributed to Seriously Asia Revisited. The Asia New Zealand Foundation looks forward to sharing this vision with you and to working together to chart a new roadmap for successful Asia-New Zealand relations.







## FULL PARTICIPANT LIST 2022

The Asia New Zealand Foundation acknowledges the contributions of the following individuals who contributed to Seriously Asia Revisited, by participating in meetings or hui.

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Alex Worker	Entrepreneur: sustainable foodstuffs
Alice Canton	Award-winning performer/director
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HE Mr Amris Hassan	Former Indonesian Ambassador to New Zealand
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Name	Sector/Organisation
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Professor Priya Kurian	Environmental and public policy
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William Ho	Director International Relations and Recruitment, Auckland University of Technology
Ziena Jalil	Asia New Zealand Foundation Trustee; business and public sector leader; inclusion advocate

\* Many other additional stakeholders were consulted for the newly commissioned research in preparation for Seriously Asia Revisited, and for the Seriously Asia surveys.

## GLOSSARY OF TE REO MĀORI TERMS

A range of words in Te Reo Māori, an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand, are used in this publication as well as in our Seriously Asia Revisited research reports. We include brief descriptions below for international readers.

Word	Meaning
Hapū	Often described as subtribe, this describes a section of a larger kinship group
Iwi	An extended kinship group, often referring to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a particular area/territory
Kaitiakitanga	Guardianship, stewardship
Kaupapa	Principle, topic, theme, plan
Kotahitanga	Unity, togetherness and solidarity
Mahi tahi	To work together as one
Mana	Authority, influence, charisma - describes a supernatural force and spiritual gift in a person, place or object
Manaakitanga	The process of showing respect, generosity and care
Mauri ora	Life essence, breath of life
Ora	Health and wellbeing
Tangata ora	The health and wellbeing of people
Tangata whenua	Used to describe local people or indigenous peoples
Tau utuutu	Reciprocity; also a speaking protocol where speakers alternate between home and visitors
Te Ao Māori	This describe the 'Māori world', but is a rich term and encompasses many areas, such as language and customs
Te taiao	The Earth, the world
Te Tiriti	Te Tiriti o Waitangi, also known as the Treaty of Waitangi, is New Zealand's founding document. Signed in 1840 between Māori chiefs and the British crown it sets out the framework for New Zealand as a bicultural nation. More information about Te Tiriti: <a href="https://waitangitribunal.govt.nz/treaty-of-waitangi">https://waitangitribunal.govt.nz/treaty-of-waitangi</a>
Tikanga	Customary practices. It is derived from the word "tika", which means "to be right" or "correct", so following tikanga means behaving in a way that is culturally appropriate
Tūpuna pono	The concept of being good ancestors for the generations that follow
Whakapapa	Genealogy, lineage
Whakawhanaungatanga	The act of creating relationships and connections and relating well to others
Whānau	Extended family, a family grouping
Whanaungatanga	Relationship, kinship, a sense of connection





# ABOUT THE ASIA NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION

The Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono is New Zealand's leading non-partisan, non-profit authority on Asia. We were set up in 1994 to build New Zealanders' knowledge and understanding of Asia. We provide experiences and resources to help New Zealanders build their knowledge, skills, connections and confidence to thrive in Asia.

We work in partnership with influential individuals and organisations in New Zealand and Asia to provide high-level forums, cultural events, international collaborations, school programmes and professional development opportunities. Our activities cover more than 20 countries in Asia and are delivered through programmes with a focus on arts, leadership, entrepreneurship, sports, business, media, education, research and informal diplomacy (Track II).

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