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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF “ASIAN” NEW ZEALANDERS: A CASE STUDY OF ETHNIC CHINESE AND KOREAN NEW ZEALANDERS

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Studies

The University of Auckland
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ABSTRACT

Politics is a numbers game. Having sufficient numbers is a prerequisite for any ethnic minority group to have political influence in a host country. But numbers are only a prerequisite – numbers do not automatically increase the group’s political power. Individual members of the group need to have sufficient resources, interest, knowledge, and the confidence to participate in politics in order for the group to transform its numbers into political power. Having strong ethnic communities and political parties that actively seek out minority voters can also facilitate this process by encouraging ethnic minority groups to participate in politics. But even with the right combination of these individual and community factors, without a liberal institutional structure which facilitates political participation, it would be difficult for any minority group to have adequate political representation in a host country. A study on the political participation of Asian New Zealanders proves that understanding ethnic minority groups’ political participation is a complex yet interesting issue, which challenges various aspects of traditional theories on political participation.

This thesis is a first in many ways. The thesis introduces Asians for the first time into the literature that seeks to explain what factors influence the political participation of people living in New Zealand. The thesis also introduces Asian New Zealanders for the first time into the international literature that seeks to explain what factors influence the political participation of Asian immigrants in Western democratic countries. The findings of the survey conducted as a part of the thesis indicate that Asian New Zealanders, as the newest and most rapidly growing segment of New Zealand society, provide an important and unique insight into our understanding of political participation, and that Asian New Zealanders are set to emerge as even more important players in New Zealand politics in the coming decade.
I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Raymond Miller and Prof Jack Vowles, whose advice and assistance have been extremely valuable in completing this thesis. Thanks also to the Department of Political Studies, the International Education and Diversity Committee of the University of Auckland, and the Asia New Zealand Foundation for providing the funding for the survey. I would also like to thank Anna Tse, Nola Yao, Brendan Tu, and Amber Chang for translating the questionnaire and responses written in Chinese. Special thanks go to Dr Rebecca Foley and Rob Moore-Jones who have kindly proof-read my thesis. Most of all, thanks to the Asian respondents of the survey, without whose participation this thesis could not have been completed. The high level of interest and goodwill expressed by the respondents made what could have been a daunting experience a very humbling one.

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