Asians Supporting Tino Rangatiratanga

Commentary on Aotearoa NZ’s Histories Draft Curriculum

25th May 2021
Introduction

We are a group of tauiwi from various Asian backgrounds who support tino rangatiratanga and mana motuhake for Māori. One aspect of our work has been focused on community-based education on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and colonisation with Asian communities. Many of us have been through the NZ education system and know that the system has fallen short of teaching Te Tiriti of Waitangi or the colonisation of Aotearoa fully and accurately.

We welcome the attempts to address these gaps with the Aotearoa New Zealand’s Histories draft curriculum. There are many strengths of the draft curriculum that tries to recentre Māori histories and perspectives. It is refreshing to see colonisation as a central process directly named and space for regional and local histories to be explored. This is a great starting point for exploring the ongoing problems of colonisation and encouraging place-based education for young people.

However, we feel there are areas in the content and framework that require significant attention and improvement. We want to comment on four key areas: 1) understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and He Whakaputanga, 2) the silence on racism, capitalism and white supremacy in relation to colonisation, mobility and migration, 3) the significance of transnational connections in Māori history and resistance, 4) concerns around process and pedagogical practices.

Our ideal history taught in schools would be a full account of the ongoing colonialism in Aotearoa and clear understandings of why and how things happened centring indigenous truths. JJ Carberry has stated that a decolonised curriculum would mean that hapū would have direct influence on the information that is taught about the local region. Bringing in colonial history of Aotearoa can help young people connect the Aotearoa context to global colonialism in a deep and meaningful way.
Understanding Te Tiriti o Waitangi & He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni

It is absolutely critical that our history curriculum portrays and fosters an accurate understanding of the context, content and ongoing relevance of He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Our teaching of Aotearoa NZ history in schools has perpetuated many myths about Te Tiriti and colonisation, and with this curriculum we now have a critical opportunity to correct those myths.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the authoritative text

We welcome the curriculum’s acknowledgement that Te Tiriti (the Māori text) was the text signed by almost all the rangatira who signed. Beyond this, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Māori text) must be taught as the authoritative text. Te Tiriti was the text discussed and debated by Māori in the lead up to February 6th 1840. It was the only text that was signed at Waitangi and the only text signed by Hobson. There were 9 sheets produced which were signed at a total of 45 locations. 8 of these sheets contain the text in Māori, and by contrast only 1 contains the English text.

Under ‘Key Knowledge’ for Years 1-3 (p. 6) it states, “Te Tiriti o Waitangi and The Treaty of Waitangi were first signed on 6 February 1840 at Waitangi.” This is incorrect as The Treaty of Waitangi (the English sheet) was not first signed on 6 February 1840 at Waitangi, but signed only in March and April at Waikato Heads and in the Manukau respectively by a total of 39 rangatira, where a copy of the Māori text was not available. In contrast, over 500 rangatira signed Te Tiriti. The discussions among the rangatira at Waikato Heads and Manukau were of course in te reo Māori, and reflected the agreement in Te Tiriti. In effect, these rangatira were assenting to Te Tiriti, and it’s important to note that what is orally agreed is crucial in Te Ao Māori and is given weight under international law.

In addition, Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the only text recognised by international law under the principle contra proferentem, and as the text with “significant signature” i.e. the one with more signatures.

Throughout the draft curriculum there is reference to “Te Tiriti o Waitangi and The Treaty of Waitangi”, which falsely equates the two texts as ‘one agreement’ and gives them both equal weight. They are two distinct texts. Under ‘Key Knowledge’ for Years 4-6 (p. 6) it states, “There are two versions of the treaty – Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi.” Framing the document as having two versions is highly misleading given that Te Tiriti is the only authoritative text.
He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni is a declaration of Māori sovereignty

In order to understand Te Tiriti and what was agreed to by the signatories, it is crucial for students to gain an accurate understanding of He Whakaputanga. He Whakaputanga can be described as a pre-condition to Te Tiriti. Under ‘Key Knowledge’ for Years 7-8 (p. 6) it states, “Many factors led to the development of the two major agreements between iwi and the British government – He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni | The Declaration of Independence and Te Tiriti o Waitangi | The Treaty of Waitangi.” While the curriculum uses the notation “He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni | The Declaration of Independence”, suggesting the English-language document is an exact translation of the original, they are in fact distinct documents and should be treated as such.

It is important to note here that He Whakaputanga (the Māori text) is the authoritative text, as stated by the Waitangi Tribunal in their report on Stage 1 of the Te Paparahi o Te Raki Inquiry (Part 1). It is the only text that was debated and signed by rangatira and the 4 English witnesses.

The curriculum also refers to Te Tiriti and He Whakaputanga as “agreements between iwi and the British government”. In fact, both Te Tiriti and He Whakaputanga were signed by rangatira on behalf of hapū, not iwi. In addition, He Whakaputanga was not an agreement. The Waitangi Tribunal states that:

“He Whakaputanga, as the Crown told us, was a unilateral declaration by its signatory rangatira; it was not an agreement or treaty.”

He Whakaputanga was a declaration from the united assembly of hapū to the international world, as a clear statement of their sovereignty and rangatiratanga in New Zealand. The document was sent to King William IV, and formally acknowledged by the Crown in May 1836.

This international recognition of the sovereignty held by the collective of hapū is crucial to understanding Te Tiriti. In order for the British to have any formal presence in Aotearoa, the Crown understood they would need to enter into an agreement with the hapū who had signed He Whakaputanga.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a further recognition of Māori sovereignty

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a further affirmation of what the rangatira declared in He Whakaputanga. Article 2 of Te Tiriti guarantees that Māori will retain tino rangatiratanga, absolute sovereignty, over their lands, kāinga, and everything that is important to them. One of the new provisions that Te Tiriti allows is Article 1 which grants the Queen of England a right to have a kāwana, a governor, to govern over her peoples (British subjects in New Zealand).

Throughout the curriculum, the guarantee of Māori sovereignty in Article 2 is never explicitly mentioned. For example, under ‘Know’ (p. 10), it states that “It is clear that Māori did not
cede their mana to the Crown, and that they signed in the belief that it would give them power to govern in partnership with the Governor.” Clearer language is needed here for students to understand fully what is meant by those provisions in Articles 1 and 2. Māori were not agreeing to allow the Governor to govern over Māori peoples, only the British. This is partnership in the sense that it allows both Māori and Pākehā their own systems of authority and governance. In clearer language, this would read: ‘It is clear Māori did not cede sovereignty to the Crown, and that they signed in the understanding that their sovereignty would always remain, while granting the Queen the right to have a Governor to govern over her peoples.’

Under ‘Key Knowledge’ for Years 4-6 (p. 6) it states that Māori who signed Te Tiriti “were given assurances that it guaranteed their chiefly authority”. Under ‘Key Knowledge’ for Years 9-10 (p. 6), it states that “In 1840, the Treaty promised to protect tribal rangatiratanga.” The word “tribal” is a racially loaded term that arises from colonial racism which often associates Indigenous peoples with primitivism and savagery. It diminishes the complexity and sophistication of political and social organisation of tangata whenua. Again it is crucial for the curriculum to state explicitly that Te Tiriti promised to protect Māori sovereignty, tino rangatiratanga. Te Tiriti is clear in its language and in the political arrangement that was agreed to. This is well supported by latest scholarship such as in Ngāpuhi Speaks and by Waitangi Tribunal findings. To teach our histories using vague and muddied language and framing would be doing a huge disservice to our students and future generations.

**Colonisation and Te Tiriti o Waitangi today**

It is a key strength of the curriculum that colonisation features as one of the three big ideas to ‘Understand’. In Aotearoa, colonisation involves an unceasing number of breaches of Te Tiriti - acts by the Crown which directly violate the agreement made between Māori and the Crown. The curriculum does not explicitly refer to these acts of successive governments as Te Tiriti breaches, many of which are ongoing today, or the central role they continue to play in colonisation here.

One of the most significant ongoing breaches that must be taught, stems from the New Zealand Constitution Act passed in 1852. This law passed by the British Government created the New Zealand Parliament, which illegitimately assumes power over Māori, directly violating Article 2 of Te Tiriti which guarantees that Māori will retain their tino rangatiratanga and independence. Our current systems of governance in Aotearoa are of course based upon this Act, and as such their exercising of power over Māori continues to breach the terms agreed to in Te Tiriti. This must be taught in order for students to gain a “broad and deep understanding” of colonisation and its role in Aotearoa.

While there is mention of the New Zealand Wars, the inherent violence of colonisation is not highlighted in the curriculum. This not only includes physical violence such as the Crown invasions of Māori territories, but also the structural violence enacted by the Crown which continues today. This includes legislation that forces Māori lands into the hands of the Crown, economic policies structured to impoverish Māori, policing and the criminal justice system that disproportionately incarcerates Māori, the state ‘care’ system that has specifically targeted
Māori whānau by the removal of Māori children from their families, and legislation and practices that aim to drive Māori ways of being out of existence. Students cannot be expected to develop a deep understanding of colonisation and its influence without understanding all of the violence that underpins it.

While the curriculum frames colonisation as in the past by referring only to its “consequences” as continuing to influence New Zealand society today, students need to understand how, as in the example of our government’s illegitimate exercise of power over Māori, colonisation itself and its processes continue today. This brings the curriculum’s guiding whakataukī to life, by ensuring that students understand the inextricable connection between our past, present and future in Aotearoa. It shifts Te Tiriti out of the realm of ‘history’ only, so that it can be understood by students as a living agreement that has yet to be fully honoured and fulfilled. Through the teaching of Te Tiriti in schools, all students should be able to see themselves as fully present and participating in the Tiriti relationship, and the responsibilities that come with that as being relevant to every community living in Aotearoa. To be fully inclusive, relevant and accurate, the curriculum needs to frame the Tiriti relationship as between tangata whenua and tangata tiriti, rather than between Māori and Pākehā as ethnic groups, to the implied exclusion of other ethnic groups. Tangata tiriti are all people who have entered Aotearoa through the Crown, it is broader than just Pākehā.

Honouring He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi

We appreciate that the curriculum acknowledges Māori efforts to “remedy injustice”. As part of the story of colonisation here, Māori have continually and relentlessly resisted and organised to have their rangatiratanga and sovereignty respected. The call for the Crown to honour the constitutional arrangement agreed to in Te Tiriti has a history that dates back to the 1840s and it continues today. There is a risk of the curriculum perpetuating the narrative that the redress Māori have fought for to receive means ‘we can all move on’.

For example, in ‘Key Knowledge’ for Years 9-10 (p. 6), it states, “The Waitangi Tribunal investigation process and subsequent settlements by the Crown have led to economic, political, social, and cultural growth for iwi. The settlements have also provided an opportunity for reconciliation.” This fails to acknowledge that the settlement process itself is on Crown terms, often returns less than one per cent of resources taken, doesn’t address the issue of sovereignty and constitutional transformation, and has been a traumatic process for many Māori involved (Mutu, 2019). This has also been emphasised by the Royal Society Te Āparangi Expert Advisory Panel in their response to the draft curriculum.

The curriculum is a significant opportunity to teach contemporary and historical perspectives that argue for constitutional transformation. Matike Mai Aotearoa, as one of the most recent and far reaching calls for constitutional transformation, must be incorporated in the curriculum as a current movement towards a future that fully honours He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti, one that is inclusive of everyone in Aotearoa.
White supremacy, racism and capitalism are foundational to the story of colonisation

The curriculum omits capitalism, racism, and white supremacy as underpinning the global colonial project and as the key ideological justification for colonialism in Aotearoa New Zealand. These underpinnings have resulted in policies and institutions that privilege Pākehā at every level. Capitalism and white supremacy are both part of the story of colonisation and migrations in Aotearoa. To neglect to teach this will leave a gaping hole in students’ understandings of the ‘why’ of colonisation.

The pseudo-scientific idea of ‘race’ as biological differences between people was used to explain and justify colonisation and slavery around the world. As a way to naturalise white supremacy, the idea of race and the structures of racism became replacements for prior religious justifications (the Doctrine of Discovery) after non-Europeans started converting to Christianity, which threatened the European powers’ moral basis for their well-established slavery-based colonial economies. The idea of the “warrior gene” and the “noble savage” emerged through racialisation that was established and reproduced by these economic imperatives of colonialism. Dr. Moana Jackson has articulated:

“Economic and political interests were key motivations behind the first decisions to “annex” New Zealand, but the colonisers’ presumption that they could assert their power in a land where they had never had jurisdiction before was race-based.”

The absence of capitalism and economic history in the curriculum misses the crucial foundation to the story of colonisation. The idea that land can be owned, commodified, bought and sold, privatised for individual use is intrinsic to the characteristics of a capitalist economy. European colonialism globalised and imposed capitalist economics across the world, including Aotearoa. Aotearoa was also not exempt from the racial capitalist logics that sought migrant labour for the profits of the British empire, specifically in the context of post-slavery colonial economies.

A curriculum that examined the Crown’s immigration policies as based on capitalist colonial motives for the recruitment and disposal of racialised labour forces, would give a much stronger context for the topics of ‘migrant’ histories, ‘ethnic diversity’, unequal conditions of migration and citizenship and how this still relates to how migrants are perceived today in Aotearoa. It would also situate Aotearoa’s experience with migration and the Asia-Pacific much more clearly in the historical context of European extractive colonisation as a global phenomenon. This would include how British and European global colonial expansion via capitalist economic and military instruments (resource extraction, labour-intensive cash crops, and trade dumping, via slavery, indenture, and gunboat diplomacy, across the Asia-Pacific and the Americas) pushed diverse global populations to migrate to Aotearoa for work and for settlement. It would also include how immigration policies have not only excluded people, but also used people and treated them as disposable, as ‘sojourners’ in building the colony through labour-intensive work (from gold mining and gum-digging, to post-war factory labour
and seasonal agriculture). The globally extractive and military trade-based economic policies of the British and European Empires also created specific ethnic communities and identities across colonised Asia and the Pacific through indenture and conquest (e.g. Indo-Fijians, Hong Kong Chinese, Chinese Samoans), that are now reflected in our diverse ‘Asian’ population due to past and ongoing colonial relationships governing migration. Curriculum elements that examine migration and ‘diversity’, especially Asian and Pasifika migration to Aotearoa through Crown immigration policies, cannot be separated from the colonial project and need to be framed as such.

The curriculum specifically names nineteenth century immigration schemes as “designed to create a British colony” (p. 4 & 11) however there is a failure to recognise that these schemes and policies continue well beyond the nineteenth century into the present day and have relied on racial and white supremacist ideology to continue to exclude or instrumentally use non-white people. For example the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act 1920 and related policies denied permanent residency, rights to vote, and pensions to Chinese people. These policies have parallels to those implemented across other white settler nations, and are inspired by the White Australia policy. Whiteness is a central concept to explore in the making of New Zealand as a nation-state. Dr. Tahu Kukutai and Dr. Arama Rata have looked at how the Crown has used mass (white) immigration as a strategy of colonisation. Their work also points out immigration ‘exclusions’ go beyond policies that attempt to keep migrants of colour out, decision-making around immigration has also excluded Māori. This is a major source of the tensions between Māori and Asian immigrants, which have been exploited and sensationalised at different times.

In teaching the history of the women’s suffrage movement for example, there needs to be acknowledgement that the gain of ‘women’s suffrage’ was not and still is not universal women’s suffrage. Between 1908-1952 Chinese women (and Chinese people in general) were excluded from citizenship and thus could not vote. Today, incarcerated people of any gender still cannot vote (and this disproportionately affects Māori but especially wāhine Māori). We hope there will be considerations of the other nuances and colonial attitudes within the historical suffrage movement as well as the exclusion of the Chinese - for example, wahine Māori were expected to discontinue the practice of moko kauae in order to join the Temperance and Suffrage movements.

As part of the migrations and mobility section, we agree with the Royal Society Te Āparangi Expert Advisory Panel that specific communities should be named. The vague language of “migrants” and “some people” who were excluded by immigration and citizenship policies makes invisible how important race was as a foundation for these exclusions.

We are aware that other Asian groups have shared concerns about this omission too, calling for inclusion of specific histories. However, we propose that teaching and naming Asian and other tauiwi of colour and their migrant histories should go further. These histories should not be simply a gesture of inclusion into the nation-state, but should go further to address the ways in which all of us (as tangata tiriti) are specifically implicated in colonial (and anti-colonial) processes extending through to the present.

The explorations of historical relationships between Māori and non-Pākehā tauiwi
communities would also make these histories more engaging and relevant to students of diverse backgrounds. Within these histories, there have been specific attempts to divide and rule.

The pitting of Asian immigrants against Māori to prevent alliances has been around since the early 20th century where Chinese were cast as a threat to Māori through as the ‘yellow peril’. For example, outcries against sexual relationships between Māori women and Chinese men in market gardening contexts in the early 20th century culminated in a select committee inquiry into these relationships in 1929. This inquiry was supported by organisations such as the anti-Asiatic League and the White New Zealand league.

Māori-Chinese kinship relations have been well documented in *The Jade Taniwha* by Jenny Bol Jun Lee and various different kinds of engagement between our communities going back to the late 19th century have been discussed in *The Dragon and the Taniwha* edited by Manying Ip.

As well as the deliberate attempts to cause tension and divide communities through racist anti-miscegenation sentiments, there are also stories of mutual aid and solidarity that deserve to be highlighted. Dr. Moana Jackson has shared some of the lesser known stories of Chinese-Māori solidarity between Māori incarcerated in the South Island in the aftermath of the Parihaka Invasion and Chinese miners in Ōtepoti/Dunedin, and Chinese support for the anti-conscription resistance during WWI led by Te Puea in South Auckland.

The visceral violence of white supremacy has been in our recent collective memory with the mass shooting of Muslims in Christchurch on March 15th 2019. Students need to understand that there is a history of white supremacy on this land, that such violence is not an anomaly, but embedded in the history of colonisation in Aotearoa. The response from Māori and the relationships forged between Muslim and Māori communities in the aftermath are important stories, with Ngāti Whatua opening the Jummah Remembrance vigil in Tāmaki Makaurau and the support from Māori speakers for Muslim communities.

The curriculum should explicitly address colonialism and decolonisation as not ‘in the past’, but ongoing processes that relate to contemporary racism, migration policy and the racialised economic drivers of how ‘we’ come to be here. This is crucial to making the theme of colonisation in the curriculum relevant to Asian school students of Aotearoa, the vast majority of whom will be part of communities that arrived after the 1987 immigration reforms.
The significance of transnational connections in Māori history and resistance

We want to see the curriculum honour the power of social movements and have clear examples of how change happens. We see the stated purpose of the Social Sciences learning area of The New Zealand Curriculum for students to understand ‘how societies work and how they themselves can participate and take action as critical, informed, and responsible citizens.’ To equip students towards achieving this, the curriculum must provide examples of the methods of resistance, political organising and activism that has shaped our contemporary moment. Students should have a sense of the history of decolonial social movements up to present day, which involves independent histories of collaboration and mutual aid between tangata whenua and tauiwi of colour.

As part of the big ideas that “Māori history is foundational and continuous history of Aotearoa New Zealand” and “the course of Aotearoa New Zealand’s history has been shaped by the exercise and effects of power,” the curriculum should take into account the transnational connections Māori have had with Indigenous peoples and histories in Asia, Pacific, Europe, Australia, the Americas and Africa. This ranges from histories pre-European contact to contemporary relationship building with Indigenous peoples around the world including the Ainu in Japan, Indigenous Taiwanese, Kanaka Maoli, and solidarity with contemporary movements such as Idle No More, Standing Rock and Protect Mauna Kea.

The methods of peaceful non-violent resistance developed by Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi in Parihaka have had international and ongoing significance in social movements.

Another example is Dr. Moana Jackson’s role in drafting the UN Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Indigenous peoples across the world have used to fight for their rights. Prominent Māori activists like Tame Iti have told stories about visiting China over the last 40 years, first as part of a delegation of Māori members of the Communist Party to meet with the Chinese Communist party in 1973. Māori have contributed to shaping politics internationally as well as being influenced by social movements in other places. We can see this in Māori involvement in the protests against the Springbok Tour to end South African apartheid. We can see the influence of the Black Panther Party in the formation of the Polynesian Panthers. In more recent times, MP Marama Davidson travelled on the Women’s Boat to Gaza to end the illegal blockade in Gaza, in solidarity with Palestinians. International relations are not only shaped by the exercise of state power but through the power of community organising.

In the history of Asians Supporting Tino Rangatiratanga, much is owed to the visibility and strength of Māori activism and social movements that has compelled us Asians to confront the meaning of our place in Aotearoa. Contemporary Asian activism around Te Tiriti o Waitangi and decolonisation can be traced to the Māori mobilisations against the Foreshore and Seabed bill in 2004. We would be open to sharing our knowledge of this history if these aspects will be considered in the curriculum.
There are rich and thriving histories of political movements and resistance to colonisation led by Māori that have not only shaped the landscape of Aotearoa politics but have also influenced/been influenced by social movements transnationally. The curriculum could integrate this in the area of international relations in acknowledging global indigenous connections and leadership, including in relation to Indigenous peoples in Asia. These stories of connections between Māori and the rest of the world should be taught and remembered to present students with more breadth and depth of how power works and how change happens and is still happening.
Concerns around process and pedagogical practices

Teaching these histories is a hopeful start, but some major questions are also left unanswered throughout the draft curriculum. It does not outline the processes through which it was developed and what sorts of histories and information are being centred in teaching this content. There needs to be some thought around what counts as history, whose voices are being prioritised and if oral histories will be given similar weight and how these will be sought. As the curriculum outlines a commitment to local context, will there be a requirement of schools to speak to mana whenua before teaching the histories of the particular area and how will mana whenua be resourced to support schools?

It would also be good for us and the wider public to understand the process of accepting the draft curriculum. Who will be consulted in the final stages before implementation? Is there a proactive process for students to input their feedback and what they would like to see in the curriculum?

The curriculum also fails to identify and consider cultural safety. It is important to ensure that the delivery of this curriculum does not prioritise ‘whiteness’ as the standard and recognises the diverse experiences and backgrounds of students who may be affected by its content. We understand that the curriculum serves as a guide to educators however it would be useful to pose questions and address concerns and limitations educators may encounter in its delivery. The topics in this curriculum are emotionally heavy and may trigger different responses from students who have and are continuing to experience this history and therefore cultural safety needs to be actively considered and prioritised with resources and measures in place to provide support for these needs.

In addition, educators will also need to think about their own positioning in relation to their students and be attentive to dynamics between students in the classroom.