

*International Students in New Zealand: The Making of Policy since 1950*. By Nicholas Tarling. New Zealand Asia Institute and The University of Auckland, Auckland, 2004. 238 pp. NZ price: \$35.00. ISBN 0-476-00588-4.

THE NEED TO CHART THE CHANGING PICTURE of international students in New Zealand has become an urgent one as the numbers of students coming to the country has grown beyond all expectations. In 2004 there were some 455,000 domestic and 50,400 international students enrolled in tertiary education qualifications. Much of the current story of international students in New Zealand is recorded, accessibly but not necessarily informatively, in news reports and columns. Newspaper reports tend to focus on the problems of adjustment of the students in secondary schools and tertiary institutions to New Zealand ways of life, or report statements from Ministers, principals or other officials about the impact of the students on New Zealand society and the economy.

As the NZIER Stocktake of New Zealand Literature on export education reports, relatively little 'academic style' literature has been written, with much of it out of date and difficult to locate,<sup>1</sup> although, as the website of the Ministry of Education ([www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz)) demonstrates, official interest has, over the past few years, increasingly been paid to gathering and reporting statistics and commissioning surveys about the position of international students. Gradually information is being built up, but anecdotal accounts and informal reports still dominate the discussion.

*International Students in New Zealand: The Making of Policy since 1950* is exactly the opposite. It provides a factual, detailed account, based on archival materials, of the growth of international students in New Zealand. Nicholas Tarling aims to set the current situation in context, being interested, he declares, less in 'the market' and more in policy formation. While the focus is primarily historical, at relevant points geographical comparisons are made with similarly situated governments. The book was undertaken with the support of the New Zealand Asia Institute 'partly in order to better understand what has happened, and partly with a view to shaping the future' (p.7).

The approach is chronological, with the first chapter recording the slow beginnings of overseas students coming to New Zealand under the Colombo Plan. Professor Tarling explains the way in which the plan came, in New Zealand, to be associated with the presence of international students although this was not its primary purpose. As in all the following chapters, the account is comprehensive with dates and details of decisions and numbers of students spelt out fully. In addition to covering the growth in numbers and changes in the types of students as private overseas students arrive, Tarling covers the debates such as whether it was better to bring the students into New Zealand or train them in their own countries. Ensuing chapters continue the detailed chronological account: chapter two, an account of the pressure created by increasing numbers in the 1950s and 1960s which led to calls for restrictions, is followed in chapter three by an account of the 1970s restrictions placed by the Malaysian government on which of their citizens might study in New Zealand (which led to Pacific Island students being given preference). Next, all sides of the debate about the raising of fees for private overseas students in 1979 are recorded in detail and followed by a full report of the controversy faced by Aussie Malcolm as Minister of Immigration over whether foreign students should pay full fees. As the issue was not resolved before the 1984 election, Russell Marshall had to face Treasury over whether tertiary education was a service or a commodity. While the account at this point is often confusing, with the major and minor points being hard to disentangle, defending tertiary education as a public good is one of Tarling's long-standing strengths.

His long-term association with the issues is revealed in the next chapter on the establishment of the Market Development Board (MBD) and the Standing Committee on Overseas Students 'that the VCC had finally set up under Tarling's chairmanship'

(p.169). There are other indirect references (e.g. p.179) to Tarling's long involvement with policy relating to international students. This is a book written by someone with a thorough knowledge of the issues.

Unfortunately the detailed nature of the research is a weakness as well as a strength. Despite the fact that most chapters include some opinion as well as fact — they usually end with a brief comment on the content — frequently the reader has a sense of reading research notes rather than a fully digested and crafted discussion. Several chapters report submissions on intended legislation or action rather providing an analysis of the relevant arguments. The chapter headings further suggest that the book is heavily indebted to hard work in the archives by research assistants without this being adequately supplemented by Tarling's undoubted analytical ability. The headings: OSAC; Forty Per Cent; \$1500; Aussie and after; Marshall Plans; MBD; Legislation; Implementation; and finally, The Chinese, read like headings for notes. The chapter on OSAC, the Overseas Students Admissions Committee, begins on p.30 but we do not learn what the acronym stands for until p.45. Most readers will guess who 'Aussie' and 'Marshall' are, but the signs of insufficient editing jar and regrettably are reflected in other parts of the book. The detail sometimes overwhelms the reader: the election mentioned on p.149 is that of 1987 but this is not specified, the Long Vac, a term that is no longer used, appears without quotation marks and there are some typographic errors. Although there is a list of abbreviations there is not a list of references, which is a pity in a book presumably intended as a resource.

Despite its failings this is a book that fills an important gap, and the final two chapters are particularly useful for their recording of the growth of international students during the 1990s. They are livelier than the middle chapters, with quotations that provide more vivid illustrations than the lists of figures or reports of meetings in earlier chapters. Again Tarling is thoughtful in, for example, his comments on the explosion in Chinese student numbers being a result of Chinese, not New Zealand, policies and suggestions for the future. The book then ends as abruptly as it began. While readers might wish for better editing we have been informed in detail about the making of policy about international students in New Zealand since 1950.

ALISON KUIPER

*Lincoln University*

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1 NZIER Stocktake of New Zealand Literature on export education: Final report to the Ministry of Education, September 2004, p.28.