

Chinese Voice 21 January 1999 issue

Contributed by Lachlan
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Tail of the Tiger

When Asia sneezes, NZ catches cold they say, and when Asia caught the flu in 1998, NZ was hospitalised - such is the fate of a small country on the periphery of Asia. The year of the Tiger saw the Tiger economies turned into paper mache. Most dramatically the Indonesian collapse provided an opportunity for anti-Chinese sentiments to resurface, culminating in the use of rape as a form of ethnic cleansing. In Malaysia a politically cowed Chinese population saw a charismatic young Malay leader protesting the prevalent crony capitalism brought down from the deputy Prime-Ministership to defending charges of sodomy. Small-time property speculators in HK, buying apartments off the plans on 25% deposit, saw property prices drop by 25%. China's economic tsar Zhu Rongji became Prime Minister in time to stop China devaluing its renminbei thus averting the collapse of the whole Asian big top.

In NZ, Winston Peters, the "Great Satan" of the local Asians dropped off his exulted perch back into the political ooze. The damage had already been done however; immigration from Asia was down to less than half, (from Taiwan nearly zero), largely attributable to a tough language test, to be scrapped this year. Too late - the usual 250 million dollars inflow, flowed elsewhere. Perhaps partly to offset this, the Government dramatically increased to 4000 the quota of students allowed from China. The opening of Te Papa also saw the opening within it of a Chinese exhibition showing "our place" in the history of NZ. The presence of Pansy Wong the first Chinese MP has provided unprecedented access to the precincts of Parliament and to Ministers for Chinese community. Such was the year of the Tiger.

Y2K Rabbit

Now the Year of the Rabbit is upon us. Locally, you will be 'earing (or haring) about the Chinese community leaping into the New Year with festivals and dinners, hoping that they will be lucky with business and money, being clever, tender and sensitive; trying to be peace-loving but probably turning moody and crying easily at criticism, but always being refined, tactful, (heaven forbid) aloof and naturally, diplomatic. The wider community will probably show its Asian awareness and join in these Year-of-the-Rabbit celebrations later- probably around Easter. Nationally the carrot of chairing the Apec conference of Asian leaders in Auckland is keeping Jenny Shipley (gingerly) in government, praying she doesn't come a burton politically, even if her legislative programme is unlikely to proceed in leaps and bounds this year. Internationally, the world could find itself in a stew, as the Y2K bug bites like the rcd virus.

Gong he fa chai, Goong hee fatt choy from Chinese Voice.

STEVEN YOUNG