

Asian Migrations Research Theme

Un-thinking Asian Migrations: Spaces of flows and intersections

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ABSTRACTS

Keynote Speakers

Devanathan Parthasarathy (South Asian Studies Programme, National University of Singapore/Sociology, Indian Institute of Technology)

“Relationality, Simultaneity, Multiplicity: Theorizing Structures and Flows in Asia”

Anthropologists involved in ethnographic field research in India often speak of the difficulty of reconciling Appadurai’s interpretative mapping of transnational flows and ‘scapes’ with the ‘in your face’ structural contradictions of class, caste, patriarchy, ethnicity, power, and regional inequality that confront the ethnographer. This difficulty mirrors challenges reflected in broader social science research in Asia as they attempt to cope with discourses that are both derivative and rooted in binaries of rural-urban, tradition-modern, and global-local. Building on field research in Mumbai, Singapore and Bangkok, this paper addresses issues of temporality, spatiality, and scale in exploring and interpreting the intersections of flows, mobilities, and spatially demarcated but traveling and expansive structural contradictions in Asia.

Inspired by Doreen Massey’s critique of multiplicity and power-geometry, and Indian anthropological critiques of village studies and urban studies, this talk uses a series of ethnographic illustrations to innovate our ways of comprehending relationality, connectedness, simultaneity, and multiplicity in empirical analysis and theorization of migration, mobility and flows across temporal and spatial units and scales. It is suggested that temporal and spatial heterogeneity in Asia conceal simultaneous but linked histories of struggles against structural forms of domination which may express in a politics of aspiration, even as various forms of relationality and flows sustain entrenched forms of dominance and control. The talk also emphasizes the significance of some methodological issues related to the study of urban public spaces, the study of flows and mobilities, and our ideas of the temporal, the spatial, and the scalar. Asian migration in particular but all kinds of migration in general ought to be framed by a knowledge of multiplicity as a dimension of space, of “the more-than-one”, of “a plurality of positionalities”; flows of capital, ideas, policies, people, and technologies of production create, in the words of Amin Ash a new “politics of propinquities” that are as significant as the transformations engendered by such flows.

Eric C. Thompson (Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore)

“Circular Migration and Theatres of Accumulation”

In the 1980s, McGee and Armstrong proposed a model of cities as “theatres of accumulation” in order to provide a geographic point of reference for processes of capitalist accumulation within a world-systems or dependency theory framework. For McGee and Armstrong, the city was conceptualized as the site where global capitalism extracted local national surplus value – including both natural resources and human resources – and channeled that value, in the form of profits, from periphery to metropole in the world system.

While not discounting the value of their analysis, in this presentation, I examine the city as a theatre of accumulation not from the top-down but rather from the bottom-up, that is from the point-of-view of rural-to-urban and transnational migrants for whom cities are sites to accumulate financial as well as social and cultural capital in order to fulfill their own aspirations. Importantly, drawing on examples from Bangkok and Singapore, the site of those aspirations is often elsewhere – not in the city but “back home” in rural areas or other countries. I use this analysis to critique the “right to the city” framework that has become an important discourse within urban studies and to consider the implications that intentionally circular migration (coming to a city, but not intending to stay) has for articulating urban, national and transnational planning and policy.

Presenters

Grace H.Y. Baey and Brenda S.A. Yeoh (Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore)

“Debt-financed Migration and Transnational Livelihood Strategies amongst Bangladeshi Migrant Men Working in Singapore’s Construction Industry”

Insofar as circular migration is increasingly promoted as an effective development strategy for securing upward mobility through remittance and skills transfers, less is known about the processes and practices involved that enable and/or constrain these mobilities. In many parts of Asia, low-wage labour migration is largely mediated by networks of brokers who play a strategic role in helping prospective migrants navigate the increasingly complex and formalised regime of transnational migration. Whilst much of existing literature has tended to problematise the excessive costs involved in these processes—which often translates into protracted situations of indebtedness for migrants and their families—less attention has been focused on the spatiotemporal strategies through which migrants undertake to negotiate issues of debt and risk in their individual migration trajectories.

Through a case-study of Bangladeshi men migrating to Singapore as construction workers, this paper draws on findings from a quantitative survey (n=200) and in-depth interviews (n=30) to examine various migration and risk management practices, such as household decision-making, job placement strategies and remittance-sending, that shape the unique migration aspirations and outcomes of these men. It addresses the question: To what extent can debt-financed migration be utilised as a viable livelihood strategy of moving out of poverty, and under what circumstances does it lead to different forms of vulnerability? Attention is paid to specific conditions of (im)mobility and precarity that underpin various intersections of state, market, and workplace/employment conditions that in turn have significant bearings on determining the overall success (or failure) of an individual’s migration experience.

Alison Booth (School of Hospitality and Tourism, Auckland University of Technology)

“Changing Cultural Economy in the Production of Indian Performance”

This paper focuses on cultural economy: the “set of socio-economic relations that enable cultural activities” (Pratt, 2008, p. 49). It examines the production and representation of culture as a function of the economic relations that enable successful production and the diverse set of partially connected economies in the diasporic setting of Auckland’s South Asian community. The paper is based on ethnographic research between 2010 and the present.

Of events presenting Indian performance culture produced within Auckland's South Asian community, roughly 5% are entirely economically self-sufficient. Most producers rely on a set of economic relationships to supplement the revenues generated by the event itself. Producers activate economic relationships through other kinds of relationships; social, political, cultural identity, family or commercial, but as economic relationships they also depend on mutual self-interest and the potential for mutual economic benefit. The findings demonstrate the formulation of various production networks that affect the economic and cultural value to the South Indian community. Recent concerts and festivals demonstrate how the activation of social relationships plays as economic relationships that add value to various levels of the cultural economy. Value is not limited to within the local community as relationships engage transnational communities and funding partners that influence event production practices. Issues around economic relations that enable cultural activities have all been reformulated in the context of a changing diasporic population (both in size and makeup) and a changing event and festival landscape in the "new" supersized Auckland.

Mary Butler (School of Occupational Therapy, Otago Polytechnic)

"Crossing borders: mobilities in rehabilitation practice"

The flow of postgraduate occupational therapists has tended to move from east to west. The massive recent growth of India universities, with ready access to clinics, has begun to challenge this perspective. Rehabilitation education in Western countries is characterised by a bottleneck around access to clinical placements and separation between clinical and academic skills and environments. In contrast, India has built universities with a strong social commitment to the provision of health care services to surrounding areas. This means that clinics in Indian universities are staffed by skilled specialist rehabilitation therapists who are also involved in the education of students.

In 2014 a group of novice occupational therapy graduates engaged in a voluntary internship in India during the liminal space between completing study and finding a job. They were able to provide voluntary labour, under the supervision of skilled local clinicians. The placement was organised as part of an India Studies Research grant.

Little is known about how therapists educated in a New Zealand context might understand the provision of therapy within Indian rehabilitation clinics. In this paper I provide a preliminary analysis based on Arendt's (1958) concept of 'action' to examine the complex freedom of novice therapists attempting to articulate their experience of difference. Postcolonial theory is used to challenge the assumption of 'the Western' as the primary referent. The aim is to build a bridge that will bring transcultural educational and rehabilitation philosophies into focus and actualise the potential for cross fertilisation of ideas and practices.

Kate Clapham-Dorjee (independent scholar)

"Studying Tibetan Migration to New Zealand Using Decolonizing Methodologies"

Tibetan Studies, including migration topics on the Tibetan Diaspora, is well established in the United States and parts of Europe and usually has a more sociological or anthropological focus, rather than a historical basis for design and analysis. I conducted research into the migration decisions and settlement experiences of Tibetans in New Zealand from 1967 to 2012 using various historical methodologies: including oral history, comparative history, Marxist, feminist, and decolonizing methodologies. While it is true that, in the Diaspora, Tibetans are more properly regarded demographically as an ethnic minority in their new host country, Tibetans are also regarded as an indigenous population in their own country so theories and methodologies of indigenous studies can be useful.

The design of the project was not purely historical, but also incorporated decolonizing methodologies, in particular, 'representing' and 'sharing'. More than that, using decolonizing methodologies to underpin the design meant a more meaningful consultation process, which led to sourcing materials that gave much richer

analysis than would have resulted from conventional empirical design methods. 'Sharing' back of information can be regarded as almost an obligation on any researcher working with this particular community in that generosity is an extremely important value in Tibetan culture. This led to one part of the research on the subject of Tibetan identity being a collaborative, circular work informed by both oral history interviews and then several discussions with community members about the meaning of concepts raised in the interviews.

Soraiya Daud (School of Environment, University of Auckland)

"Following the pickle - an exploration of a diaspora *achar* economy in Fiji"

Sitting on a shelf in an Indian grocery store in Auckland is a section of Indian pickles (known in Hindi as *achar*). Amongst the collection of varieties is a brand that on made in Fiji, a Pacific nation far away from the Indian subcontinent.

Using contemporary economic geography, this paper traces the *achar* back through its journey of migration, across the Pacific and back to India. It traces too the migrations of members and branches of the family who made it across the Indian and Pacific Oceans "with" their *achar*.

The paper tells a story about multiple migrations, double diaspora, and the gendered, intergenerational performance of cultural economy in new places.

The paper focuses in on the production of *achar* in Fiji, a place that could be thought of as the middle of its journey; the stopover point between its origin in India and its destination in New Zealand.

In this place the pickle is assembled, bringing together raw products, recipes, culture, labour and enterprises. Its production relies on the unique intersections of landscape, economy and culture that constitute Fiji and its backward and forward connections to India and New Zealand.

Through our story about the production of *achar* in Fiji I hope to explore the diverse migratory, cultural and economic experiences of Indians in the Pacific.

Stephen Epstein (School of Languages and Cultures, Victoria University of Wellington)

"Special K: "Korea" in the Making of 21st Century New Zealand"

According to the 2013 census, the number of those who identify as ethnically Korean in New Zealand has dropped slightly since 2006. Should one then regard it as a conundrum that, as most would agree, the presence of "Korea" in New Zealand life has increased substantially over this period? In the 2005 Otago conference that led to *Asia in the Making of New Zealand* I argued that formation of a hybridized Korean-New Zealand identity was being delayed as a result of forces driving globalization such as developments in information and communication technologies, and increased travel. In this paper, I probe the hypothesis that continued developments in these areas in the decade or so since, together with shifts in South Korea's standing in the world, are transforming the migration of "Korea" into New Zealand so that this migration relies shows a progressively lesser reliance on the permanent relocation of individuals. The advent of social media now means that many New Zealanders have regular close virtual encounters with South Korea, a state that has shown itself as an especially eager proponent of national branding with initiatives based around a "K-Wave" of K-pop, K-dramas, K-food and so on, stamped with the letter K. Through this case study, I hope to engage with the symposium's contention that broadening the concept of migration to encompass circulation of ideas and cultures will offer a fruitful approach for understanding the world we inhabit today.

Howard Gilbert (independent scholar)

“Sumo as ‘migration’: Japan’s national sport in the West and beyond”

The international growth of sumo in the past century represents a migration of Japan’s national sport. Beginning with the performance of sumo by Japanese immigrants in Hawaii, California and Brazil, the growth of sumo beyond Japan’s borders has increasingly involved no ethnic links to Japan. Many of today’s professional sumo athletes hail from outside Japan, and there are national and regional amateur sumo competitions in various parts of the world.

The spread of sumo as a cultural artefact relied initially on the migration of Japanese nationals. This was further enhanced by the growth of Japan’s formal (and informal) empire in the early 20th century. However, the 21st century realities of both professional and amateur sumo demonstrate complex relationships between Japan as the country of origin and the outside world. These necessitate broader and more nuanced understandings of the concept of ‘migration’ which focus on the flows of ideas rather than just people.

This paper will explore ‘migration’ through examples such as the labour migration of non-Japanese athletes into professional sumo, the increase in international fans of the sport and greater interest from foreign media, the reterritorialisation of amateur sumo in different locations, and the push by amateur sumo’s international governing body to seek recognition from the International Olympic Committee to one day become an official Olympic sport.

Nick Guoth (Pacific and Asian History, Australian National University)

“Shanghaied Sheep: Uncovering trade relations between Hong Kong and Australia from 1860-1880”

On November 24, 1861 a small flock of sheep were led off the *Florence Nightingale* in Melbourne. Originally purchased in Shanghai and transshipped to Fuzhou, the sheep were placed on to the tea ship, eventually being delivered to the Reverend William Newton Guinness. Their destiny unknown, it is more the fact sheep were transported from Shanghai to Australia that reveals a fascinating discussion and somewhat alternate analysis of trade relations between China and Australia at the time, one that has been, in the past, dominated by the tea. Yet, current historiography shows Australia as not one of the principal players in the import/export industry of China of the nineteenth century. However, through a more complete analysis of the 1860s and 1870s, this perception may now be queried. Deconstructing records from the archives of many western companies based in China paints a different image of the extensiveness of trade; from Melbourne and Sydney-based companies dispatching gold to India to pay for the opium transported to China, to a combination of western and Chinese companies conveying both migrants and goods to the goldfields of the Palmer River of Queensland and Pine Creek of the Northern Territory of South Australia. Taking a sample of these records, this paper uncovers a picture of a forgotten part of Australian history, one where sheep became prominent in more ways than one.

Barbara Hartley (School of Humanities, University of Tasmania)

“Yumeji in Berlin: Nationalism, Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism”

This presentation examines the experiences of Japanese poet and illustrator, Takehisa Yumeji, during an early nineteen thirties sojourn in Berlin. One of the most popular artists of nineteen tens and nineteen twenties Japan, Takehisa’s cultural production remained largely outside the parameters of institutionalized artistic practice. Instead, his work was an eclectic combination of proletarian consciousness – his first material was published in journals edited by socialist icons Sakai Toshihiko (1871-1933) and Kōtoku Shūsui (1871-1911) – and international modernist influences – evident in the large, round eyes that are a feature of his images – grounded in a distinctive Japanese style. Always an outsider, Yumeji departed Japan for a tour of the United States and Europe to escape the rise of Japanese militarism. Teaching “oriental” art mainly to young Jewish students at the Johannes Itten School (formerly associated with *Bauhaus*) in Berlin, he was confronted with the excesses of anti-Semitism evident even at that time. By “reading” a number of Takehisa’s so-called “Berlin” images and by referring to lectures he delivered while in the German metropolis, I will discuss the manner in

which the artist sought to deflect through his diasporic experiences the nationalistic tendencies of the time – including the expansion of Japanese proto-colonial territory on the Asian mainland – with an appeal to cosmopolitan aesthetics intended to transcend the boundaries of the nation state.

Dr.M.H.Ilias (India Arab Cultural Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia)

“Malayalee Migrants and Translocal Indian Politics in the Gulf: Re-Conceptualizing ‘Political’”

Migration of Keralites to the Arab Gulf region has generated various forms of translocal political moorings in the host countries. What seems to be happening is not simply the extension of Kerala-centric or India-centric politics beyond the boundaries, but an opening up of a new avenue of expression for, the otherwise politically silenced Malayalee expatriates in the Gulf. Being connected politically to the issues of the homeland, Malayalee migrants create a new political space into which they clandestinely bring ideologies which are otherwise sensitive to the local dynasties. This is particularly significant, when it happens in a place where any sort of political organizing is illegal and where political associations of any sort inevitably end in imprisonment or deportation. Many political outfits in Kerala maintain frontal organizations operating secretly with the activities that are not apparent but do not invite intolerant reactions from the host. Active Islamization of political life among Kerala Muslim migrants to the Gulf, not in tune with the global trend but with the Kerala-specific socio-political developments, is another phenomenon being discussed in this work.

Emerald King (School of Languages and Cultures, Victoria University of Wellington)

“School Boys and Kimono Ladies”

This paper will concentrate on the influence that Japanese clothing – in particular the kimono and the school uniform – had, and continue to have on global fashions starting in the 1920s. These two items of clothing can be read as symbols of Japanese femininity and young Japanese masculinity. Sandwiched between the rapid modernisation of the Meiji Period (1867-1912) and the militaristic early Showa (1926-1989) years, the Taisho Era (1912-26) is a short period of peculiar exuberance and political unrest. Kimono fashions of the time are brightly coloured and sport stylized patterns that would come to influence the art deco fashions of Europe in terms of design and style – tubular body types with cross-over V necklines. Meanwhile the school uniform, which was heavily influenced by the Prussian Army uniforms of the time, hints at the coming military activity of the following era. Both garments continue to influence not only Japanese fashions but also western haute couture. The current trend in Japanese kimono that has seen young women in their 20s and 30s wearing kimono again borrows heavily from the bright colours and stylised motifs of the Taisho period and is known as *Taisho roman* (lit. Taisho Romance/tic).

Elena Kolesova (Communication Studies, Unitec Institute of Technology)

“‘Asians – freaky chaps!’ (De)constructing Asia by popular culture tribes in New Zealand context”

New Zealand youth, as with youth all around the world, greatly enjoy popular culture originating from North East Asia. The consumption of imported popular culture by local people does not happen passively, but influences their identity construction by incorporating foreign forms into their local cultural context. Local consumers of global popular culture construct their own cultural “tribes”, or “zoku” using Japanese equivalents, or “whanau” in the Maori language. Following Michel de Certeau’s argument that popular practices are full of importance for understanding our everyday lives, I will discuss not only the symbolic dimension of cultural products or merchandise, but also the mechanisms of consumption of these products by consumers or “users” of this culture who construct their own tribe culture. The local people’s life experiences, although influenced by the global culture, remain in a local cultural context. The question is how global, or in this context North East Asian popular culture, contributes towards local articulations of New Zealand cultural

identity? Also we can ask what can we learn about everyday performance and the consumption of East Asian popular culture? Why does New Zealand youth choose East Asian popular culture? And finally, what are the images of Asia that New Zealand youth construct through their experiences with East Asian popular culture?

Using a series of case studies, this paper explores the consumption or the 'use' of East Asian popular culture in a local New Zealand context through the appearance of a tribal culture.

Bible Lee (Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Otago)

"Elderly Korean New Zealanders: Can Cultural Competency Reduce Ethnic Health Disparities?"

Palliative care may be defined as a form of health service that aims to improve the quality of life of patients and friends, when faced with problems associated with life-threatening illnesses (World Health Organization, 2012). It is also a holistic form of health care service. Hospice service is often referred to as a form of palliative service across western countries.

The New Zealand population is changing. It is diversifying. It is also ageing. While it is commonly perceived that the Asian population has a younger age structure (Statistics New Zealand, 2009, p. 12), statistics show that that Asian peoples will comprise the second largest share of the 65 years and over cohort in New Zealand over the next decade (Statistics New Zealand, 2009, p. 17). Asian peoples are ageing. The young migrants from the 1980s and 1990s influx are also ageing.

Attitudes and beliefs associated with dying, death and end of life care can be different across different cultural groups (Blackhall, Murphy, Frank, Michel & Azen, 1995). However, research about the palliative and hospice needs of minority groups in New Zealand yet remains scarce. This presentation will discuss some of the challenges of being located and dislocated as experienced by the Elderly Korean communities residing in Christchurch.

Sophie Loy-Wilson (Australian Studies, Deakin University)

"Customer Number Eight: Decoding Chinese-language account books in Australian archives"

In 2011, a 19th century terrace house was renovated in the Sydney suburb of Surry Hills. In the ceiling of the ground floor builders discovered an archive of Chinese account books belonging to On Lee & Co, the Chinese grocery business which had occupied the terrace from 1870-1890. These account books are just one of many archives which document Chinese-language 'trade talk' in Australia in the 19th century. On the surface, the accounting systems they use record straightforward economic transactions. But behind the figures on the page (Customer Number Eight, Debtor Number Nine) is the world view of Chinese shopkeepers who had to keep a mental and written record of the suppliers, debtors, lenders, bank tellers, customs officials, regulations and pay offs which oiled the system of economic interconnection linking Australia with the Asia-Pacific region in the 19th century. Using these account books as a starting point, this paper reaches beyond the shop counter to recreate the trade flows and business languages that linked Chinese shopkeepers in Australia with nodes of trade in Hong Kong and the Pacific between 1870 and 1890. In these account books is an emotional language of anxiety, aspiration, fatalism and commercial stratagems that show us how small Chinese shops shaped and were shaped by larger flows, interconnections and disconnections. These archives suggest new ways of conceptualizing movement within the Asia-Pacific region at this time by treating numerical sources as maps of cultural and commercial encounter in the 19th century.

Kilim Park (Interdisciplinary Studies, The University of British Columbia)

"Migrant Women, Work and City in Southeast Asia: My research on/with Indonesian Migrant Women Workers"

My research investigates and tries to understand the notion of exclusion and marginalization of women working and living in cities. To do so, I examine the experience of Indonesian women migrant workers in manufacturing and service industries, living and working in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. In undertaking this research, I seek to cast away the notion that migrant women are victims of abuse and manipulation and treat them as significant actors and agents in their life in the city, by focusing on urban-to-urban migration and using participatory research. I then explore how the migrant women's expectation in navigating through the systems begins to change over time and what happens to their "city" in reciprocation and interaction between the urban women of Southeast Asia and society around them as articulated in their experience of uprooting, migrating, and living. Following approaches found in feminist and critical theories, my research flows out of the urban migrant women's account of their lives, who as co-researchers will guide, control and modify the project through the continuous and iterative process of engaging, participating, giving feedback and in some cases, leading. My paper will discuss methodologies and concepts that ground my research and explore some of the preliminary findings. The paper will look at the women's experience when requiring a wide range of assistance and experiencing a sense of frustration, loss, and un-belonging, and when her conceptualization of citizenship weakens or even disappears.

Nadia Rhook (Australian Studies, La Trobe University)

"Urban Translations: Chinese carpenters and the Chief Chinese Interpreter in late colonial Victoria"

In the late nineteenth century, Chinese residents of Melbourne, Australia, were concentrated in the trade of wooden cabinet and furniture making. Accordingly, the Chinese furniture trade became the focus of heated racial and legislative debates. From 1890, the Victorian government passed a series of Shop and Factories Acts and Amendments. Violations of these Acts were policed as a means to restrict the hours of Chinese production and thereby restrict Chinese profit and, ultimately, to exclude Chinese from the colony. This paper explores the urban politics of labour during the decade that culminated in the 1901 Federal Immigration Restriction Act, a time when white men were mobilizing to excise Chinese people from the British settler colony of Victoria. It studies how the politics of migration in late nineteenth century Victoria were not only about the macro, transnational flows of ideas, peoples and objects across oceans, but worked out through the micro-mobilities of urban daily life; the movement of Chinese carpenters from their factories into the Melbourne Supreme Courtroom, of Factory Inspectors from their suburban residences into 'the Chinese Quarter', and of a cabinet from a Chinese shop into a European home.

Yiyang Wang (School of Languages and Cultures, Victoria University of Wellington)

"Art and Chinese Modernity in Connection with Lyon, France, 1920-1936"

Modernisation of art became an integral part of China's national modernization project at the beginning of the 20th century, after a number of the colonial powers had claimed part of the country. Many Chinese students went to study art in France and L'Ecole Nationale de Beaux-Arts de Lyon provided training to a significant number of Chinese students from 1920 to 1942. As part of a research that examines how and why China engaged in art modernisation, this paper focuses on the changes in both the concept and the practice of art through case studies of selected Chinese art students in Lyon. The paper will demonstrate how the ideal of modernising China's art was conceptualised, debated and implemented through institutional practices and individual efforts primarily as a response to the presence of colonial powers in China.

Chen Xi (Institute of Chinese Historical Geography, Fudan University)

"Anti-Urbanization: Compelled Migration from Urban to Rural in Mao's Era"

Along with the start of industrialization in late 19th century, the process of urbanization in China has also initiated and population continued to gathered and formed some large modern metropolises. However, the urbanization process was interrupted in the Mao era, not only the doors migrate from the countryside to urban were blocked, but through a series of political movements and compelled migrations, large numbers of urban population were moved to rural areas. These movements include the Tightening the Urban Population Movement during 1955-1956, the Great Leap Forward, Rustication of Youth, Three-lines Construction and so on. These migratory movements had constituted the mainstream of China's domestic migration, because the freedom of individual migration was severely restricted by the household registration system and the individual migration was in "solidified" state. These anti-urbanization policies, not only led by political and ideological factors, but also by profound economic needs. Urban bias, food supply difficulties, heavy industry development strategy and so on resulted in the implement of the anti-urbanization migration policies. This paper will re-examine these movements from migration perspective and discuss the reasons and impact on China's urbanization.