

BETWEEN MOBILITIES AND MIGRATION:
NEW DIRECTIONS IN ASIAN RESEARCH AT OTAGO

Tui Nicola Clery

The Asian Migrations Research Theme is an inter-disciplinary project which was launched at the University of Otago on 7 June 2012. The Theme aims to provide a forum which links scholars working on all forms of migration across Asia and the Pacific. The Theme will connect academics working on Asian migrations both within Aotearoa/New Zealand and internationally:

The Asian Migrations Research Theme focuses on movements of peoples and ideas – past and present – in East, South, and South-East Asia and into the Pacific (encompassing the Pacific Islands, Australia, and New Zealand). It engages with the fields of diaspora, intercultural, global and transnational studies, which have grown over the last twenty years to become key frameworks for understanding culture beyond the boundaries of one nation.

We see significant shortcomings in the current theories and methodologies of Asian migration and diaspora and especially in their application to the Asia-Pacific region. Our focus on Asian migrations allows us to highlight and address these shortcomings and to develop new approaches. The goal of the Theme is to develop a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the Asia-Pacific region as comprised by movements of peoples, ideas, and commodities.¹

This research theme supports current and potential studies that would not necessarily be supported by existing departmental structures within the academy. One early example of such broad interdisciplinary practice was the Theme's inaugural event, a postgraduate masterclass led by Professor Haroon Akram-Lodhi on 7 June 2012. Professor Akram-Lodhi is Chair of International Development Studies at Trent University in Canada who specialises in agrarian political economy, gender relations and the political ecology of sustainable rural

livelihood in poor countries. During the masterclass, Professor Akram-Lodhi generously shared wide ranging expertise, including research experiences in Pakistan, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, China, Fiji, Tanzania and Kenya, with postgraduate students from across disciplinary backgrounds.

The masterclass attracted postgraduate students studying in the broad field of Asian migrations at both MA and PhD levels from a range of fields including Anthropology, Pacific Studies, Development Studies, Geography, Film, Media and Communications, and English. Postgraduate students were not only able to draw on Professor Akram-Lodhi's advice and extensive multicultural research experience, particularly in terms of methodologies and research design, but they were also enabled to dialogue with each other across disciplines. Students were given the opportunity to describe their research and talk about current issues faced in the research process. They were in turn given valuable advice, suggestions and support from their peers. The result was a highly engaging and stimulating interdisciplinary dialogue that participating students hope will be the first of many such discussions supported by the Theme.

The Asian Migrations Research Theme is also facilitating dialogue in Asian studies by organising an upcoming seminar series, with participation from invited scholars working both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and internationally. The Theme's current three-year funding schedule will involve a major international conference to be held in 2013. Transnational dialogue will be further supported by a soon-to-be-launched website dedicated to the Asian Migrations Theme and providing an interactive online forum for wide ranging debate.

The wide scope of the Theme is reflected in the interests and disciplines of the Asian Migrations Research Theme conveners based at the University of Otago: Associate Professor Jacqueline Leckie (Department of Anthropology and Archaeology), Dr Jacob Edmond (Department of English), and Professor Henry Johnson (Department of Music and Theatre Studies). For additional information and to become a part of the Theme, email us at:

asian.migrations@otago.ac.nz

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- 1 Asian Migrations Research Theme Mission Statement, 2012.