The histories and prospects of partnerships between New Zealand and Asia

For *News from Australia and the Pacific*, we ask contributors to reflect on their own research interests and the broader academic field in Australia and the Pacific of which it is a part. We focus on current, recent or upcoming projects, books, articles, conferences and teaching, while identifying related interests and activities of fellow academics in the field. Our contributions aim to give a broad overview of Asia-related studies in Australia and beyond, and to highlight exciting intellectual debates on and with Asia in the region. Our preferred style is subjective and conversational. Rather than offering fully-fledged research reports, our contributions give insight into the motivations behind and directions of various types of conversations between Asia and the region. In the current edition, we explore the histories and prospects of partnerships between New Zealand and Asia.

Articles are edited by Edwin Jurriëns edwin.jurriens@unimelb.edu.au and Andy Fuller fuller.a@unimelb.edu.au, from the Asia Institute in Melbourne https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/asia-institute. A special thanks to Stephen Epstein (Victoria University of Wellington) for his invaluable support for this edition.

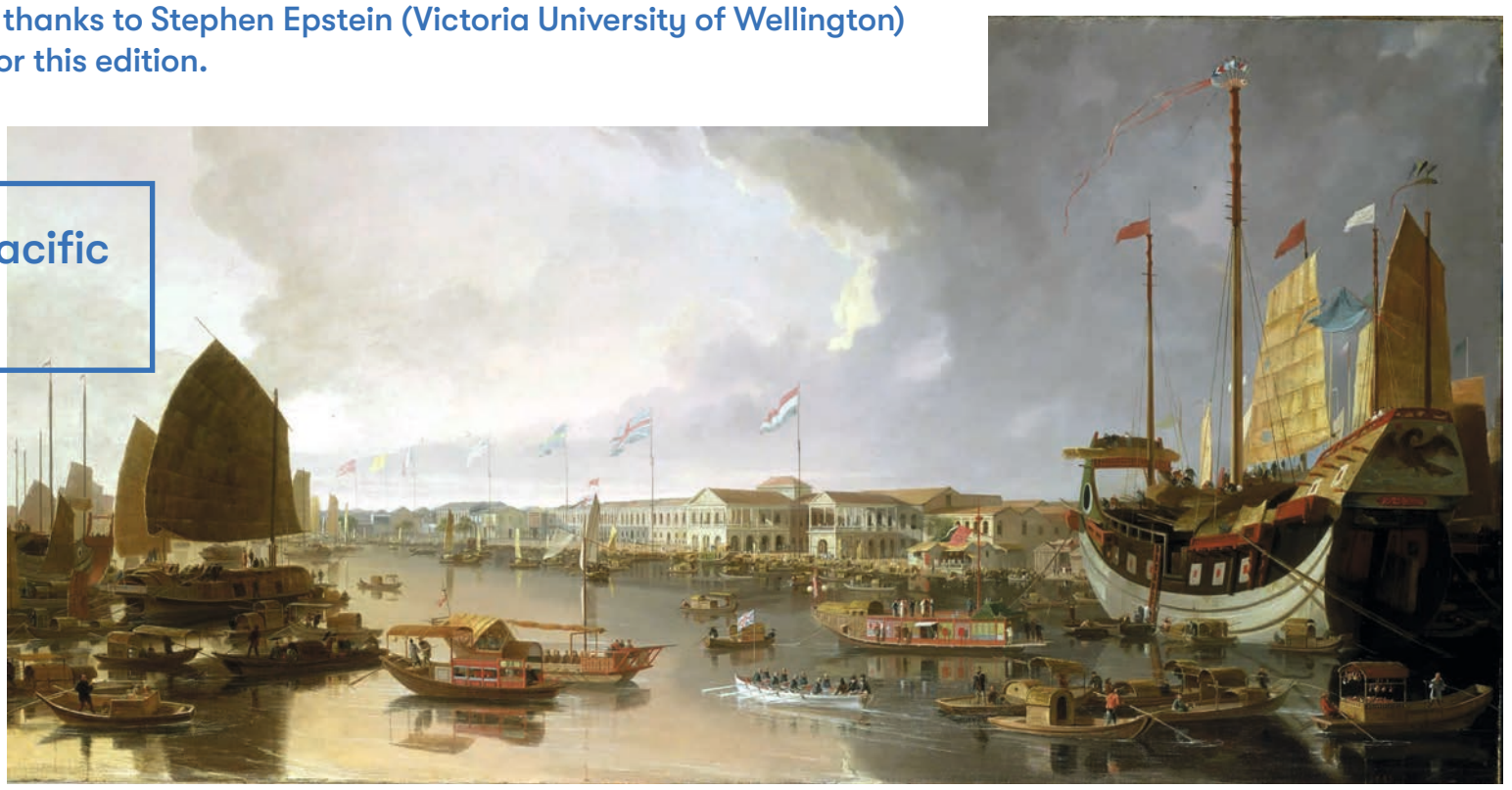
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

The Asia Institute

The Asia Institute is The University of Melbourne's key centre for studies in Asian languages, cultures and societies. Asia Institute academic staff have an array of research interests and specialisations, and strive to provide leadership in the study of the intellectual, legal, politico-economic, cultural and religious traditions and transformations of Asia and the Islamic world. The Institute is committed to community engagement and offers a dynamic program of academic and community-focused events and cultural exchanges that aim to promote dialogue and debate.

China's long-term Pacific ecological footprint

James Beattie

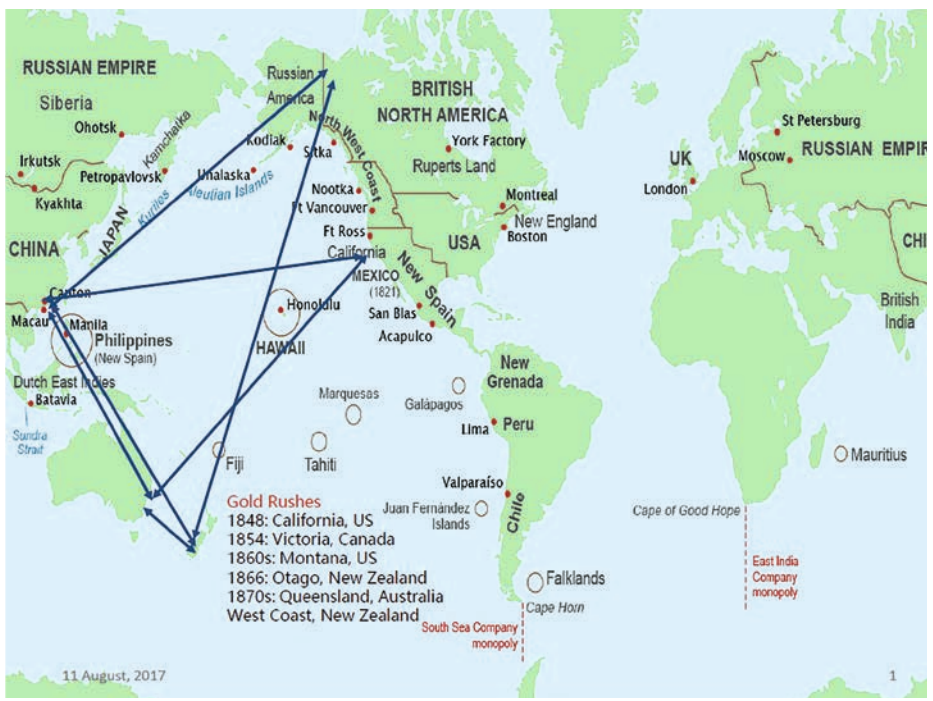


Above: Canton hoovered up products from around the Pacific. William Daniell, *View of the Canton Factories*, c.1805-10. Image wiki commons.

As well as exercising the minds of policy-makers and politicians, China's increasing role in Pacific affairs is generating considerable scholarly attention. Much of it centres on security issues as well as the PRC's access to resources and commodities.

Little acknowledged—and little understood—is China's long-term role in the Pacific. The project 'Making China's Pacific: Markets, Migration and Environmental Change in the Pacific, 1790s-1920s' challenges the presentism of policymakers and politicians. It demonstrates the key role played by China's market demand and exploitation of new resources in the Pacific. In doing so, it reveals China's considerable ecological footprint and role in stimulating Euro-American exploitation of a range of Pacific resources for Chinese markets since the late 18th century.

Based at Victoria University of Wellington's Centre for Science in Society, under Associate Professor James Beattie's leadership, the project draws in colleagues from Sun Yat-sen University, including Associate Professor FEI Sheng. It utilises archives on the Pacific, from China, Australia and New Zealand. The project's originality lies in its trans-Pacific dimension and in its emphasis on the environmental history of the overseas Chinese, a group largely ignored by both Pacific historians and historians of China.



Above: Map of Pacific gold rushes, indicating some routes taken by Chinese miners. Author drawn.

Voracious demand for luxury goods in late-eighteenth-century Qing China, combined with a balance-of-payments deficit with Europe, pushed Euro-American traders to find goods to sell in China. Australia's annexation by Britain in 1788 gave the East India Company and other traders a base in the southern Pacific from which to exploit a range of products for the Chinese market. Southern Ocean islands—including those in the Bass Strait area as well as those in and around southern New Zealand—supplied millions of sealskins, leading to the destruction of resources and long-term contact between sealers and local peoples.

Other resource booms emerged elsewhere in the Pacific. In Fiji and later New Guineau, for example, the sea-cucumber trade transformed environments and societies by linking together peoples, resources and markets. In Fiji, traders constructed large drying houses. American-built ones could measure as much as 100-120 feet in length, and 20 feet in width. Foreigners employed as many as 200 people finding sea cucumber, with as many as 100 cutting firewood, and 50 keeping fires burning.[1] Because sea-cucumber's drying required constantly lit fires, timber consumption rapidly reduced scarce island forest resources.

Overall, the trade associated with sealskin, sea cucumber and other enterprises, depleted a variety of resources, leading sometimes to extinctions. Ecological impacts abounded, through the intentional and unintentional introduction of a variety of plants and animals. In these transactions, islanders usually gained new technologies, as well as economic advantages and travel opportunities, but invariably experienced high mortality rates through exposure to new diseases.

Migration, environmental change and the Pacific gold rushes

The next key step in China's role in the Pacific emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. A combination of British imperialism and a succession of Pacific gold rushes provided opportunities for people from southern China to work overseas. Under the British, Hong Kong became "Asia's leading Pacific gateway ... linking North America and Asia". By 1939—nearly 100 years after its establishment—an astonishing 6.3 million Chinese had embarked from Hong Kong, with 7.7 million returning to China through the island.[2] Around the Pacific, Chinese worked as goldminers, plantation labourers, railway navvies, market gardeners, and merchants.

The project frames Pacific resource demand, and later Chinese enterprises like market gardening and agricultural investment, as examples of ecocultural networks—interlinked labour flows, migrant connections, and capital systems which transformed Pacific environments, and made nature into commodities.[3] It considers trans-local connections, rather than trans-national ones, to signal that only

Indian cultural research: an Auckland reflection

Alison Booth

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As I write, New Zealand is in a four-week Covid-19 lockdown, prohibiting any public events or family gatherings. With this in mind, I am reflecting on the impacts on the visibility of Indian popular culture in our current closed environment and from my personal family 'bubble'. Global conferences that were planned are cancelled. In New Zealand, Indian food stores have not been included in the essential services category of supermarkets, dairies, hospitals and banks. Places of worship and community gatherings are no longer accessible, a situation in strong contrast to only a couple of weeks ago, when we hosted a *sarangi* (bowed zither) player from Mumbai and a *tabla* (set of two hand drums) player from Australia, performing at community events in New Zealand. They asked to stay with us, as we share performance experiences, friends and lineages that span the global musician networks and the Indian musical diaspora. Although both classically trained musicians, they have found the only formula for their survival has been to collaborate with western musicians on global tours. With India's borders closing on 20 March, the *tabla* player headed home to Australia and to a 14-day quarantine. The *sarangi* player cut short his New Zealand tour schedule, catching the last plane back to Mumbai before the Indian borders closure and further restrictions.

There will be no more live performances for the foreseeable future, as all venues and borders have been closed. What has appeared are more virtual performances, as online communities reform creative spaces for musicians. For instance, Shashank Subramanyam, a Carnatic flautist in Chennai, announced a free workshop through his Facebook site. The global challenge will be to manage the immense broadband connections to keep our networks and creative works alive.

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In sum, Chinese resource demand and then Chinese people contributed to a great acceleration of environmental change in the seas and countries of the nineteenth-century Pacific. This project is one that gives back Chinese individuals their agency, and places them back into the narrative of the Pacific, its exploitation and integration. Their story is one that politicians and policymakers need to hear when they assess contemporary China's activities and resource use in the Pacific.

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An absence of dissent. New Zealand's Asia-Pacific engagement, 1989-2020

Malcolm McKinnon

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But where security and trade have developed, critical debate or dissent have not followed. At their most recent bilateral meeting in April 2019, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Chinese President Xi Jinping "discussed a range of topics central to our bilateral relationship, and both welcomed the significant growth in recent years of trade, cultural and social ties, and other connections ..."[1] However, no mention was made of difficult issues such as human rights.

The recent ASEAN-New Zealand dialogue meeting was equally bland; it welcomed "the drafting of a new five-year Plan of Action next year to focus on strengthening the partnership through focused areas of cooperation such as, trade through the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA), food and agriculture, renewable energy, and governance and public sector leadership".[2] Tellingly perhaps, the ASEAN co-chair was the Permanent Representative of Cambodia to ASEAN, Yeap Samnang, the representative of one of the least democratic governments in Southeast Asia.

It is true that governments, in dealing with other governments, face diplomatic constraints. Moreover, since 1990 protest over global issues in New Zealand has waned, as it has in other Western countries. But two reasons for this absence of dissent are more specific, the first arising from New Zealand circumstances, the second, from the nature of the Asia-Pacific community itself.

First, where there has been dissent in New Zealand, it has not 'Asianized' or has been confined to an 'Asian' space. A New Zealand civil society campaign against the Trans-Pacific Partnership (2010-16) was directed primarily against the United States, taking no account of analogous protest in Asian countries (or for that matter the massive support for TPP in some, notably Vietnam). The West Papua movement has strong supporters among Maori and Pakeha (non-Maori) New Zealanders, but arguably this is a function of Papua's place in Oceania rather than testimony to strength of feeling on an 'Asian' issue. Conversely, recent disputes on NZ campuses over the Hong Kong protests arose primarily between Mainland and Hong Kong students. Moreover, while there are several Chinese-language media outlets, voicing dissent in them can be problematic.[3] For its part, the English-language media tends to foreground US and UK news in international coverage and rely on UK and US-based news sources for reportage of Asian events.[4] The contrast with a newspaper like the *Straits Times* (Singapore) is striking.

Second, the 'dissentscape' in Pacific Asia is harsh. History provides insights. Pacific Asia in the later 20th and early 21st centuries was shaped by three mid-century victories – the US victory over Japan in 1945; the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War in 1949 and – not quite a victory but significant nonetheless – the triumph of anti-colonial nationalists in Southeast Asia. ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), at its outset in 1967 straddled the pro-American/anti-colonial non-aligned divide and overcame the other divide when Communist states joined the grouping between 1995 and 1999. For most ASEAN states, anti-colonial or anti-imperial struggles have remained benchmarks for state authority and challenges to that authority, however crafted, are met with scepticism. Communist China's joining of APEC (1991) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (1994), in no way indicated a readiness to tolerate domestic dissent, as the suppression of student protest in Tiananmen Square in 1989, and many subsequent events, have made clear.

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Nonetheless, change may be more likely in Pacific Asia than in New Zealand. The New Zealand government has supported some low-key initiatives in support of civil society activity in Southeast Asia.[5] But recent surveys disclose minimal awareness on the part of the New Zealand public of, for example, APEC. There have been episodes of anti-Asian prejudice since the advent of Covid-19 and majority support for an ongoing blanket ban on travellers from China, first imposed at the outbreak of the epidemic, despite the extreme disruption this has caused many New Zealanders with family ties to China.

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New Zealand aid and dairy development in Sri Lanka

Jasmine Edwards

Above: A dairy farmer and her cows. Used with permission (2018, author).

New Zealand aid funds dairy development projects in Sri Lanka to rebuild people's livelihoods and support New Zealand's trade interests. In October and November 2018, I conducted field research in the rural north of Sri Lanka, hearing from local female dairy farmers about how the project has impacted their livelihoods. While the economic impacts are clear, this micro-level research also captures an insight into the perceived environmental and social impacts of dairy development on female farmers in Sri Lanka.

Army checkpoints intercede long, quiet stretches of road in Northern Sri Lanka. The lush jungle gradually encroaches upon the weathered shells of abandoned homes. Their departed occupants fled or were killed in the brutal civil war that gripped the country for nearly three decades between 1983-2009. As one participant said, "There is not anyone here who has not experienced trauma". Persecuted Tamil and Muslim communities in the North – who were also worst hit by the 2004 tsunami – have suffered intense violence and loss, and efforts to address the war's legacy are needed to ensure livelihoods, wellbeing and continued peace.

My friend, a former refugee who has resettled in New Zealand, asked me to visit his family in Sri Lanka. His mother showed me her cows, dog-eared photos of her adult children, and her shrine, where she performed a puja (Hindu prayer ritual); his sister cooked Jaffna-crab curry – the local specialty – over red-hot embers; his nieces told me about their dreams to travel; his father asked me simply if his son was okay. My friend and his family, like countless others, have endured unimaginable losses and are attempting, with admirable resilience, to rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Any attempt to research and understand the experiences of Sri Lankan people, particularly relating to a development intervention, such as a New Zealand aid-funded dairy development project, is inextricably situated within the specific post-conflict context. Despite economic growth and social development in Sri Lanka since the end of conflict, a large portion of the population lives only slightly above the extreme poverty line and there is significant regional disparity with the poor being disproportionately rural. The dairy development project selected as a case study for this research originated in the intensely affected post-conflict zone, the Mullaitivu District, to address the needs of the community in rebuilding their livelihoods. Dairy development is recognised for its potential to improve economic, health and food security issues, as farmers can increase dairy production and sell milk to increase their incomes. My research focuses on understanding Tamil female farmers' perspectives of livelihood impacts of dairy development.

Understandings of the issues (and potential issues) of dairy development are predominantly represented by agricultural actors, governments, scientists and academics; are typically focused at the macro- and meso-level; and are reliant on quantitative data. This research, therefore, employs a qualitative methodology using interviews, observation and photovoice methods, which addresses a gap in the literature on subjective, lived experiences of participants in dairy development projects.

I carried out field research over a five-week period in October and November 2018. I used purposive sampling to identify the primary participants for this research. The primary participants – five female dairy farmers – provided in-depth data for this research and other participants – development partner organisation (NGO) staff, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, academics and local dairy farmers – were interviewed to provide additional information on the project and to add depth and context to the understandings derived from this research. I wanted to find out how their lives have changed since they dairy project began. In addition to the positive economic impact of the project, which is well understood, I wanted to hear the women's stories, to build a whole picture that included social and environmental impacts.

First, I asked the women if they wanted to take photos of what is important to them. Photovoice is a qualitative method that asks participants to take photos that highlight their experiences to reflect research themes. They all participated, despite never having used a camera. These photos began our conversations about the ways that their lives have changed since they began the dairy project. In interviews later the women relayed with pride the significance of the images they had captured: a calf that will produce more milk than all the other cows, a partially finished cattle shelter, a beautifully kept home built without help from anyone, a homemade shrine.

I held seventeen semi-structured interviews, five of which involved in-depth interviews, photovoice and observation with the primary participants, and the rest of which involved interviews and observation with various project stakeholders and local dairy farmers. The women described their triumphs since being involved in the project – money earned to buy school supplies, a reliable income to help when their husbands were without work, being able to sell milk when their crops fail due to extreme weather, and feeling that they are independent women who do not need to beg from others to survive.

As a result of this success, the women all wanted to expand their dairy production. Private sector partners and the New Zealand and Sri Lankan governments also have plans for dairying expansion. On the one hand, dairy development is seen as positive for communities, companies and governments in this context and, on the other hand, this research explores the nuances of dairy development that include the potential long-term implications for farmers' environmental and social wellbeing.

The environmental implications of increased and intensified dairy farming, for instance, (such as livestock's impact on climate change, declining soil, air and water quality) are little considered in the dairy project or understood by farmers beyond small-scale production. The integrated nature of farmers' livelihood strategies is central to maintaining an environment in which resources are in balance as production increases – as has been the case for over a thousand years of dairying in Sri Lanka – but this appears to be in potential conflict with farmers' priority to intensify livestock farming. However, farmers expressed concern for protecting and enhancing the natural environment, upon which their livelihoods depend.

I argue that it is critical that the impact of dairy development projects in developing countries on environmental factors – both local and global – receives adequate attention to ensure that short- to medium-term development outcomes are not at the expense of the environment and long-term livelihoods. Consideration of the full environmental impacts of dairy development initiatives is a fundamental responsibility of macro-level development actors who are supporting livelihood changes.

This field research in Sri Lanka provided rich, contextual data on female farmers' experiences and New Zealand aid. Reports provided to the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and their partner NGOs in this project communicated the findings of this research, sharing knowledge across local and donor partners in development, and resulting in greater consideration of local, holistic impacts of dairy development.

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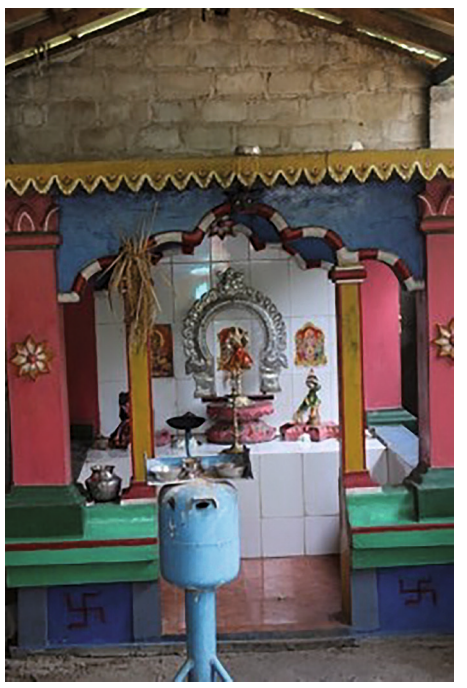

Left: Lost crop preparation due to the rains - dairy farming helps increase farmers' resilience.
Above: a partially constructed cattle shelter.
Right: A Hindu shrine – religion is an important factor in farmer's worldviews and farming practice.

Photos by female dairy farmers (identity confidential, 2018). The women had never used a camera before, and were proud of the significance of the images they had captured.