

## Conference Report

### Labour Migration in the Asia-Pacific: Race, History and Heritage

Australian National University, 14-15 February, 2013

This research symposium was generously supported by the Asian Studies Association of Australia and the ANU's College of Arts and Social Sciences. It was held at a time when understanding the racialised dimensions of labour migration is important, especially as many labour receiving countries in the Asia-Pacific region have a long history of accepting migrant workers. This event aimed to address the question of labour migration in the Asia-Pacific, with an emphasis on its racialised nature and its ongoing cultural history and heritage. The focus on the Asia-Pacific was deliberate, as this region is historically home to some of the world's busiest hubs of international labour migration.

The symposium was opened by the first of three international keynote speakers, Prof. Mae Ngai (Columbia University), who delivered a paper comparing the history of Chinese labour migration in the Californian goldfields with the experiences of Chinese gold miners in the Victorian goldfields of the 1850s. Another international keynote, Prof. Timo Kaartinen (University of Helsinki), spoke on the interactions between migrant labourers of different ethnicities in the ports of Kei, Banda and Ambon, in eastern Indonesia. In the same panel, A/Prof. Kornel Chang (Rutgers-Newark, State University of New Jersey), presented a paper on the history of labour disputes involving Chinese and Indian labourers on the USA-Canada borderlands. Rounding out an excellent panel, Prof. Laurajane Smith (ANU) presented a paper on the emotional responses of visitors to Australian migration museums.



*Prof. Mae Ngai  
(Columbia University)*



A highlight of the event was the film screening of *Dreams of Dutiful Daughters*, which was introduced by the film-maker, Ma Khin Mar Mar Kyi. This powerful documentary, which is based on one-on-one interviews, reveals the devastating personal and economic impact of labour migration for Burmese women migrant workers in Thailand. Still shots from the documentary, depicting workers crossing the Moei or Thaung-yin River which separates Thailand and Burma, are below:



In closing, this 2 day symposium was a significant gathering of key thinkers, writers, artists and practitioners. The event was attended by 40-50 participants over the 2 days, including 22 paper presentations. The formal program and informal interaction stimulated new thinking, collaboration and directions for further work within and between disciplines. It is envisaged that the papers presented will be used as a basis for a volume of essays, to be edited by Dr Marshall Clark from the ANU and Prof. Timo Kaartinen from the University of Helsinki.

Dr Marshall Clark  
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