



ASIA SAVVY

NEW ZEALAND ASIA CONFERENCE 2019

Build a career for the Asian century

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The University of Auckland Business School
12 Grafton Road, Auckland



THE UNIVERSITY OF
AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tamaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

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Conference theme

Build a career for the Asian century New Zealand Asia Conference 2019

This year's Asia Savvy conference encouraged students to learn how to engage with Asia and develop skills to navigate and succeed in a globally connected and culturally diverse world. The speakers were from diverse backgrounds and industries, providing multiple perspectives on the topics including their own personal career stories and experiences.

The speakers encouraged students to think about the key areas for knowledge, skill, and capability development that they should focus on to be successful in the Asian century. They emphasized the importance of in-depth learning and understanding cultural nuances and country backgrounds, as well as building authentic relationships with other cultures.

The conference had two workshops, which guided students on how to get the best out of the various opportunities while engaging with Asia. Interns from Asia New Zealand Foundation Internship Programme facilitated one such workshop to help students understand how to get the best out of their internships in Asia.

To participate in the conference, students were required to submit essays relating to the conference topics. Judges then reviewed the students' essays and awarded prizes to the top writers. Thanks to the generosity of International Volunteers HQ, a New Zealand based volunteer travel company that operates internationally, one of the best essayists was awarded a two-week volunteer experience in Asia.



Opening address



Build a career for the Asian century

Professor Natasha Hamilton-Hart, Director of the New Zealand Asia Institute, opened the 2019 Asia Savvy conference, addressing the conference theme of Build a Career for the Asian Century. On topic, she emphasised the best way to understand the relationship between Asia and New Zealand is through engaging with real people who carry out in a wide variety of activities linking Asia and New Zealand, from family ties, tourism and cultural visits to business and trade links. Natasha highlighted the tremendous work done by the Asia Savvy student committee led by Dinah Towle and Deepika Jindal. Natasha closed her address by welcoming the students coming from Victoria University of Wellington, Massey University, Waikato University and AUT.

Kelsey Eaton, co-leader of the Asia Savvy Student Committee with Allan Chan, thanked everyone who attended the conference, introduced the committee members and acknowledged their committed input to producing the conference. Speaking to the conference theme, Kelsey accentuated to the audience the importance of building 'Asia Savvy' skills and networking in today's Asia-New Zealand business.

Keynote

Build a career for the Asian century



Carolyn Schwalger, career diplomat and Programme Director of NEMA transition, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, delivered an inspiring keynote. Carolyn, a University of Auckland graduate expressed her genuine joy at returning to her alma mater, this time as part of the conference. She commended the idea of putting two concepts together as the theme for this year's conference: on one hand the idea of why is Asia impacting the world currently, hence the name Asian Century; and on the other hand, the idea of how can we succeed, to point out the approach to take to manage and navigate our careers.

For Carolyn, these are meaningful concepts as they link to her own personal experience. Her first experiences of Asia came at the relatively early

age of 16, when she spent time as an exchange student at a small town in rural Japan. That event marked her life in such a positive way that on her return to New Zealand she studied both Korean and Mandarin languages and focused on learning everything possible about Asia. This very same focus took her to work as a New Zealand diplomat, including a posting to the United Nations, with important achievements as being part of the team that established a diplomatic relationship with North Korea for the very first time. As a direct witness to the evolution of New Zealand-Asia relationships, and the significance of the Asian region as a driver of global growth, Carolyn stressed how crucial language, cultural confidence and the mutual understanding of interests and equities are to build bridges between New Zealand and Asia.



Panel Discussion 1

Skills required to shape a successful career working with or in Asian markets

Panel 1 was composed of **Lorraine Salazar**, Knowledge Expert, McKinsey & Co., Singapore; **Felicity Roxburgh**, Director Business, Asia New Zealand Foundation; and **Chris Henderson**, Associate Director, Institute of Professional Learning, University of Waikato. **Marie Ysabel Landingin** moderated the panel.

Lorraine Salazar shared her own professional and personal experience with diversity and change in many areas of her life. She is a Doctor in Political Science and Southeast Asian Studies, having had Natasha Hamilton-Hart as one of her advisors. Lorraine call herself an “accidental management consultant” as 11 years ago she changed her career path to the corporate side - a path she still follows and enjoys. She reflected on lessons from her career, including the need to commit to your goals and take opportunities that arise. She also underlined the huge value of knowledge and study in order to further your goals. Lorraine’s experience in both academia and the corporate sector gave her an understanding of how changing paths is possible within an Asian environment. In general, her advice is to know and understand one’s own

value proposition well, summarised as “having a selection of tools you are good at, but always try to be an absolute expert in one of them.”

Felicity Roxburgh delivered a thought-provoking and humorous presentation. With a background in journalism, she started her career working as a foreign expert in the China Daily Newspaper, giving her a first-hand working experience in China. For Felicity, her experience in China, where she learnt to speak Mandarin, has been a vehicle to open access to other Chinese-speaking Asian countries. This learning was perhaps one of the most valuable tools she acquired. Then she joined the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade as a diplomat, at the time when New Zealand and

China signed a Free Trade Agreement in 2008. These events were her first close encounter with the world of politics. As a New Zealand diplomat representing New Zealand at the United Nations Security Council, she realised that Asian countries often worked flexibly in small-size blocks of regional peers. She also learned how to use her voice as a woman in an environment dominated by men. Felicity’s advice on how to



shape a successful career in the Asian region is summarised in developing cultural competency, the importance of language, specialisation, networking and market knowledge.

Chris Henderson concluded the first panel presentations. Chris, a leader in international and comparative education from the University of Waikato, believes New Zealand education needs to be agile to cope with the fast and frequent changes that the Asia-Pacific region is experiencing.

Chris emphasised how dynamic Asia has become and how slow New Zealand was to respond to this dynamism. Fortunately, vigorous leadership across New Zealand tertiary education, including Chris and his team, have been part of a growing

movement to change the education system to be more vibrant and focused. For example, Chris and his colleagues from Waikato University are teaching Maori history, since understanding our own culture is something that we, as a society, have neglected in comparison with others. Chris believes New Zealand's conservative education system is no longer appropriate for our current diverse and dynamic society. As stated by Chris, at the end of the day, the three greatest things in this world are 'people, people, people', regardless their backgrounds.



“Storytelling” by Willy Pham, Co-founder and Director, BizEyes Vietnam

Willy Pham was welcomed to the conference as special guest from Vietnam. Mitchell Pham introduced Willy as one of top digital marketing experts in Southeast Asia and a digital market pioneer in Vietnam. He came to New Zealand to talk about the new trend for digital marketing in Southeast Asia.

Willy then explained that marketing is always about telling stories, but in the digital era the content of the stories has changed. Today, marketing managers must deliver results by achieving a direct return on investment more so than in the past. This has come about from the emergence of new ‘hyper-empowered’

customers, who have a broad access to digital resources allowing them to interact with companies virtually face-to-face. What best illustrates this is CELTRA, a Unilever partner in Southeast Asia, that delivers and caters content individually to each of the customers, including the current weather, which the intention of forecasting the mood of the individual. That is an example of the new type of content available in the digital marketing environment.

Panel Discussion 2

First-hand Career Tips for Success



The speakers for this panel were **Michele Lam**, Export Markets Manager, Villa Maria; **Mitchell Pham**, Founder, Augen Software Group; and **Jerry He**, Founder, Olivia Premium. **Abby Wong** moderated the panel.

In **Michele Lam's** first slide she was holding a glass of white wine. She explained that it is 'pretty impossible to see a recent photo of her not holding a glass of wine'. That signifies how engaged she is, doing the work she enjoys, for a company she loves. The company, Villa Maria, is one of the largest recognisable New Zealand winemakers. Michele explained that the cities where she lives have become smaller and smaller. She loves science and her background in chemistry is proof of that, but at the same time she possesses a creative and social mind, enjoying talking to people, and her conjoint degree in marketing fits in with this other side of her passion. These two backgrounds were complemented by a Postgraduate degree in Wine Science at the University of Auckland.

For Michele, the wine industry and Villa Maria in particular mean one thing to her - passion.

She believes hard work, long days, short nights and many, many airports, are imperatives in this industry, as well as keenness to work with different cultures across Asia.

Mitchell Pham, a technology entrepreneur, introduced himself by describing his two passions: the tech sector in general, and connecting New Zealand and Asia with innovation projects developed in both countries.

For Mitchell, collaboration is crucial because when industries collaborate, they thrive. His perspective on the importance of collaboration is summarised by him as "we don't exist in a silo, and no business will succeed as a silo. All of what you call success in my career so far, none of it I have achieved on my own".

One of the lessons Mitchell left for the audience was the importance to visualise the future as a combination of economic and social factors. Civil society is very important for every venture we do, and that is why whatever we do as entrepreneurs we always need to have the social impact in mind. Instead of trying to predict the future, we need to start creating it.



Jerry He classified himself as a ‘Chiwi’ or a Chinese-Kiwi. He was born and raised in China and came to New Zealand at the age of eighteen. A couple of decades later he and his family were completely absorbed into the New Zealand culture. Nine years ago his daughter Olivia was born in this country.

Jerry’s first comment about the topic was that we are in the Asian Century now - the current success for Asia will mean success for New Zealand. Therefore, it is vital to keep abreast of growth in Asia. An example in China is the Greater Bay Area, the Silicon Valley of China. In about five years, the Greater Area will exceed current China’s GDP - imagine how big that will be in eleven years’ time. The main characteristic of the Greater Bay Area is the cost and speed of innovation - compared to Silicon Valley, it is cheaper and faster, and quality is about the same.

Jerry graduated in IT and worked for a tech company several years before starting his own import-export business with China. A few years later, he created his own brand producing

cereals, cookies, and other food products. The path to success for his company, Olivia Premium, was not easy - it took him more than five years to understand his customers, but nowadays he can say with satisfaction that he knows his customers very well, to the extent that he is also now acting as a marketing consultant for others.

Jerry’s lesson for the audience was - if you want to understand your customer, you need to be right there at their side.

Concluding Remarks



Natasha Hamilton-Hart closed the conference thanking the speakers and guest attendees. She mentioned the inspiring contributions from the guest speakers, and all the great ideas that emerged from the panels and workshops. One particular take home message she underlined was from Mitchell Pham, “think of Asia as an opportunity to create, rather than extract, value”. In doing so, you will hone your cultural intelligence and awareness of the wonderful complexities and variety in the people you meet as you build relationships.

Student discussions and recommendations



Workshop 1: Networking and navigating Asia

The first workshop was on networking. This provided an opportunity to challenge attendees to move out of their comfort zones, expand their networks, improve their cultural awareness and hone their relationship-building skills.

After an interactive activity of 'networking bingo,' the discussion was designed to take part within each table to report the themes that emerged through networking with fellow attendees. One of the themes agreed amongst most tables was

the idea of knowing your own value proposition, and in those terms how to build your networking. More ideas were brainstormed, such as the prominence of time in Asian cultures, and how important it is to be open to changes and new cultural settings. By interacting with each other in this workshop, attendees were able to identify the great value of networking in navigating the world of work in relation to Asia.





Workshop 2: Things you can do before and after an Asian internship to get the best of it

This workshop was led by **Nick Davies** and **Naushyn Janshyn**, recipients of Asia New Zealand Foundation's Internship Opportunity in Asia.

There were two streams in this workshop:

- Before the Internship
- After the Internship

During the Before the Internship stream, all participants agreed on some common 'must-dos':

- Carry out in-depth research of the company so you hit the ground running.
- Learn as much as possible about what is required for the particular internship.
- Talk to people and learn about the host country as it will be home for a good period of time.
- Do not to under-estimate the value of travelling – it is the best way to get closer to a culture.

The After the internship stream team ideas were summarised as follows:

- Use this experience to create genuine relationships because you never know where friends and networking can take you.
- Nurture these relationships.
- Do not be afraid of making mistakes or not understanding what is expected. The best way of learning is asking.
- Gain professional development from an overseas internship.
- Do not to under-estimate the value of travelling – it is the best way to get closer to a culture.





Student essays

Student essays

Participants in the Asia Savvy conference are required to complete a 300-400 word opinion piece on selected topics relevant to each conference theme.

This year's topics were:

- The rise of the Asian economies will have a positive influence on my career.
- In Asia, knowing the language is more important to career advancement than understanding a culture.
- Having a network is key to developing a career in Asia.

Two prizes were awarded for this year's best two essays: a two week volunteer travel experience in Asia kindly sponsored by International Volunteer HQ and an iPad. The winner of the travel experience was **Collin Quarrie**. The winner of the iPad was **Wei Heng Pok**.

Both their essays are included overleaf along with other finalists.



In Asia, knowing the language is more important to career advancement than understanding a culture

Jackson Blewden, The University of Auckland

It is true that knowing a new language exposes you to vast countries of new experiences, opportunities, and perspectives of life. All of these can advance your career, understanding of the world, as well as grow you as a person. However, it is equally, if not more important, to understand the culture that is inherently embedded within the language itself. At first glance, language seems rather black and white: a set of rules, essentially, that when combined with words, form meaning. But it is not until we consider how many subtleties exist within these rules and the phrases they produce that we can realise how imperative it is to have an additional sense of culture.

These subtleties and nuances of meaning are an important part of communication and ensuring mutual understanding. For example, in Mandarin Chinese (a language I've been studying for four years now) a common greeting is “你吃了吗”, or, “have you eaten?” While on a surface level, it sounds like an implied invitation to have a meal with the person, it is actually just a way to greet someone, in much the same way as we would use “what’s up?” in English.

English is no stranger to these kinds of implied meanings, such as when you tell someone “we must catch up some time” with no intention of doing so. Every interaction we have is loaded with these hidden meanings and messages, which are only available to be understood if we have the necessary cultural background to realise the actual intent. Our work lives and career are no exception. This sense of culture and understanding of what’s culturally appropriate is a valuable skill to have, and will almost certainly make you an even greater asset in future life, work, or even simply give you a richer experience travelling overseas.

While a solid knowledge of the language is undoubtedly required for anyone hoping to gain a pathway in Asia (or anywhere else in the world), the power of cultural knowledge to augment one’s ability to communicate should not be underestimated.

Corporate social responsibility markets a more significant ‘purpose’ to graduates and to proudly work for a company that is influencing positive social change.

The rise of the Asian economies will have a positive influence on my career

Xiaokun Deng, University of Waikato

Rising Asia, Promising Career

According to IMF projections for 2023, Asia will take 45% of the world economy based on Purchasing Power Parity (IMF, 2018 & Wang, 2018) in spite of the global economic volatility and regional political unrest. With the dazzling growth records over the past decade, Asia has proved to the whole world that it is going to be the powerhouse for the global growth in yeast to come with a huge market potential to be further tagged, particularly those emerging economies such as China, India, ASEAN countries.

I am confident the rise of Asian economies will present unparalleled opportunities for my career in the business world. First of all, the unfolding demands for better service and higher-quality good from Asian economies tend to be satisfied through cross-border cooperation. In this unprecedentedly inter-connected world, nations have evolved to a stage of specialising in their own competitive industries rather than seeking old-fashioned self-sufficiency at the cost of low economic efficiency. Such a global market requires business professionals who have international business background. Second, cross-border business deals involve numerous negotiations during which representatives from different cultures speak different languages, and thus need negotiators to be proficient foreign language users. Interestingly, English has become the common business language even between Asian countries. I, as an international

business student, can leverage my bilingual skills developed from my Chinese-English interpreting work experiences, to add value to both the firm that I work with and overseas business partners. Apart from language skills, culture awareness is another make-or-break element in international business context. Mis-interpreting behaviours of business partners from another country tends to cause misunderstanding and damage business relationships. This is exactly where I can play a big role. My study and work experiences in Japan, the UK, Pakistan and New Zealand have equipped me with strong awareness of effective communication in a culturally-diversified work environment.

I have always dreamed to build a career in the international context. With my study in business and management coming to close, my desire to return to and apply my communication and business skills in the real field is becoming even stronger than ever before. I would value any opportunities ahead to develop my career in international business and add value to my employer and business partners.

Reference

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The rise of the Asian economies will have a positive influence on my career

Antoine Ellis, Auckland University of Technology

The rise of Asian economies will have an exciting influence on my career as a hopeful international public relations practitioner. Indeed, I hope to transform my studies in public relations, international business and Chinese at AUT into a global career in cross-cultural communication throughout the Asia - New Zealand region. I am confident that the rise of Asian economies will offer stimulating challenges and opportunities which will help me grow as I navigate working in this dynamic space.

On a company level, the rise of the Asian economies will see a shift from current markets into new and potentially lucrative ones. The opportunity for reward and - equally - for disaster in these regions are both high. For example, many foreign businesses currently prioritise and hope to experience a rewarding establishment in China. What these companies do not necessarily expect is that while China offers huge potential, it is also extremely complex to navigate; from unique logistics systems and operative laws to - especially so - the country's many diverse consumer groups. I experienced China's true complexity firsthand as an exchange student in Shanghai last semester, and better understand that there are many hurdles that foreign businesses must tackle before seeing success in the country.

Further from the complexities of China, each specific economy in Asia are in their own ways significantly uniquely diverse from

each other, and thus challenging for foreign companies to bloom in. Indeed, while the rise of Asian economies may prompt international businesses to seek market share in the region, they must be perceptively attentive in their research and customisation processes to ensure a chance at success. A wealth of opportunities and challenges in Asia are highly concentrated and intertwined.

Moving from company to personal level, I believe that the intense market contexts that Asian economies offer incoming business will help me achieve my dream of enjoying a dynamic career in global public relations. I look forward to being involved in the research, creative thinking and intercultural cooperation processes that cross-border business with Asia will require. Learning more about different economies' diverse cultures and how to best communicate between these groups is a key skill that I am excited to develop as a public relations practitioner. I feel that the rapid growth of Asian economies will stimulate an awesome career; navigating the dynamism of cross-cultural communication. I can't wait to get started!

In Asia, knowing the language is more important to career advancement than understanding a culture

Tobias Kingi, The University of Auckland

Culture is an incredible, multifaceted phenomenon which has shaped the various laws, values and beliefs practiced all over the world. It is thoroughly intrinsic to all humanity, so much so that its presence is easily forgotten. From a simple gesture between passing strangers to a lively discussion between colleagues, culture facilitates communication. As an individual of a multicultural background, I believe it is important to understand the culture to understand the person. Humans are intrinsic towards connection, and knowing one's culture helps that connection.

Knowing a language is incredibly useful and can set you apart from the rest when it comes to your career, but much of a language is influenced by culture. As social creatures, we respond to more than just the words articulated, we respond to the expressions and tones of the situation. For example, many Asian societies see bowing as a sign of respect or for greetings, rarely expressing this through forms of physical touch. In contrast, Maori culture value the "Hongi" (the touching of nose and foreheads) as a commonplace sign of respect and greetings. Both acts have similar, if not the same intention, but can be mistaken as offensive if

these doctrines within each culture are not understood. A deeper understanding of the culture can help you to act more appropriately in these situations.

With a mother and father of Brazilian and Maori descent respectively, born in America and educated in New Zealand, I empathize with those who struggle to connect. I consider cultural consciousness as a more effective way of understanding someone from a foreign country speaking a foreign native tongue. For example, my parents' initial interactions were spent communicating simple phrases using translation dictionaries, clarity of what each other wanted to say was achieved. However, it was only when they spent time learning about each other's background, did a deeper level of mutual understanding and ultimately, respect occurs and solidify their relationship. As this is coming from a personal anecdote, my perspective is considered skewed, but as any other individual is subject to their upbringing, mine has reinforced the belief that culture is key to connection and career advancements for Asia and any other region of the world.

The rise of the Asian economies will have a positive influence on my career

Jessica Li, The University of Auckland

“The Future is Asian”. This is the title of a book I recently discovered by geopolitical strategist Parag Khanna. Here, he discusses the shift in power in the global economic system towards Asia. This book was thought-provoking and reinforced my impression that the rise of Asian economies will have a positive influence on my career.

As a first year student at the University of Auckland, I am still uncertain about my career pathway, although I have no doubt Asia will play a critical role in it. I am studying a conjoint degree in Commerce and Global Studies, where I intend to major in Economics and Global Environment and Sustainable Development. It is evident Asia has experienced the fastest rate of economic growth in the past decade. With the increasing involvement of China in the global economy, this is having significant impacts on New Zealand as well as the world. However, the richness and diversity within Asia should not be reduced to just China. It is also important to consider prosperous nations such as in South and Southeast Asia which will also influence my career.

Furthermore, I am curious about the influence of Asian economies towards the global environment and sustainability issues. Many

people look towards Asia as the largest contributors of pollution and global warming. This is problematic, however, is often severely blamed without considering how the cost to the environment resulted in significant improvements in poverty, hunger, and economic growth. There have been many disputes between economists and environmentalists as capitalism’s growth imperative almost always results in environmental degradation. I hope to learn and challenge these two arguably conflicting disciplines and strive for solutions that are sustainable yet also provide economic benefits. I would love to work in Asia and be involved in global economic and environmental policy and planning.

The rise of Asian economies, combined with the environmental problems prove major challenges that are unnerving. However, I am ready to take on this challenge. I look forward to not only learning, but also challenging Western perceptions of Asia in my courses. I have no doubt the rise of Asian economies will have a positive influence on my career.

In Asia, knowing the language is more important to career advancement than understanding a culture

Joshua Murphy, The University of Auckland

Some people may ask “In Asia, is knowing the language is most important to career advancement than understanding a culture?” With diversity of thought in mind I set out to challenge if this was the correct question to ask.

I believe language and culture to be inseparable. There is a Chinese proverb “如影随形” (Rúyǐngsuíxíng) which means to be inseparable as a shadow. In the same way as any object and it’s shadow, language and culture are inherently tied. In the most spoken language in the world, Mandarin Chinese, characters as well as some idioms come from the ancient way of living. Today the way mandarin words are used is based around their culture, which in a lot of ways may differ from ours. For example, the character for man is strength + field, meaning that a man is the one to work in the fields. In Mandarin Chinese the number 8 (Bā) sounds similar to making a fortune (Fā). In order to learn the language of Mandarin Chinese one needs to learn the culture and origins as well. In the field of Art History, many academics learn Italian as to understand it more deeply. Similarly, in Asia, knowing the language is a way to understand the culture more deeply. It is impossible to know a language without understanding a culture.

When you are trustworthy and of good reputation, you are more likely to advance your career as these are the type of people that are desired to be leaders. Reputation is everything. In the workplace an employee, especially people who have advanced in their career are the face of the company. The reputation of how company acts is entirely tied to the people that work there. In order to be successful, companies need to be reputable. When a company wants to be reputable they need to be led by people with that same quality. The New Zealand government’s China Perception Research says “Show you understand Chinese culture, and this will have a high impact on your reputation”. This means that people who understand Chinese culture can advance their careers.

Hearing these points I again challenge whether the question we previously asked was the correct one to ask. In setting out for career advancement we can seek to have an in-depth understanding of culture as well as knowing a language well. With this in mind we can advance into global citizens.

In Asia, knowing the language is more important to career advancement than understanding a culture

Wei Heng Pok, The University of Auckland

Asia is a complex, living and breathing region. Home to over 4.6 Billion of the world's population, Asia spans from China to Philippines, with 90% of developing country exports originating from Asian countries (Kim, 2015).

One may claim that language is quintessential to career advancement in a foreign country, but cultural understanding allows one to understand the unique characteristics in which Asian economies work, and the way citizens think. Essentially, whilst language may open doors, cultural understanding allows us to be invited in through the door.

A key example of how culture is linked to the ways economies work is the difference between America and China's innovation ecosystem. America believes strongly in a 'First Inventory to File Patent' rules system, which has stifled innovation and bled out competitors (Hall, 2013), with absurd patents such as Amazon's patent on a one-click purchase button. Alternatively, China believes in the opposite and embraces an open-sourcing culture, with a new term of shanzhai, where open-source software allows for developers to be able to rehash and remix each other's work, leading to variations of one piece of software in order to meet a variety of needs. A popular example is the dual SIM card, something only recently introduced on Apple phones but on shanzhai products for over a decade (Mina & Chipchase, 2018). Culture plays a deep role here – whilst America seeks to protect inventors, China is governed by a deep sense of progress and constant improvement – and can lead to varying different qualities in Asian economies.

In addition, Asia's collectivist attitude differs from the West's individualistic attitude. Richard Nisbett, in *The Geography of Thought*, commented that whilst "people in the West think the world is relatively linear, stable, people in the East think its complex, always changing and organic" (Kallasoja, 2015). In addition, Asians think as a collective, and often look towards decisions that benefit the masses (and even society at large) than a select few, whilst the West often strive to stand out as an individual and fulfil their respective goals in life. These unique cultures govern the way businesses run - a multinational firm may hence have different operating principles in USA compared to in Thailand when it comes to making economic decisions.

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Having a network is key to developing a career in Asia

Collin Quarrie, The University of Auckland

Guanxi, jinmyaku, dharma, and inwha. These words originate from Asian cultures and represent a core element of personal and business transactions: building relationships. The Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist teachings of Asia revolve around human connections, in contrast with Greek philosophical teachings of thinking and objectivity found primarily in Western societies. Understanding the essence of culture and using it to build trust in the Asian context is critical to successfully developing a career in this fascinating part of the world.

Relationships, based on cooperation, require a building of trust and avoidance of uncertain outcomes. In several Asian languages, the structure of the word “trust” is a combination of “people” and “words,” which implies that the amount of good faith in a relationship is the perceived belief in the legitimacy of interactions between them. These connections are formed through patience and perseverance, strengthened over time by events and actions. Gift-giving is common in Asian cultures, but they should not be relied upon or given in such a way that it does not violate ethic principles or conflicts of interest. Earning trust before leveraging its advantages, and skillfully combining this with the value they bring to an organization can realize career potential.

Knowing where to start building your network is a challenge, which becomes more difficult with increasing cultural distance. To overcome these challenges, one can use the layers of culture presented by Schein, which divides culture into visual artefacts, values and underlying assumptions. While giving gifts or appropriately offering business cards to associates are visual representations, these overlie the values instilled on relationships. At the heart of these values are the underlying assumptions of a collective mindset, where individuals are a part of something greater, whether that is their family or a business organization. Correctly building a network may involve simple adjustments to visual actions and words if you are familiar with Asian culture. However, where a considerable cultural distance exists, challenging assumptions about Asian culture will help to build a career from the ground up as you adjust to all three layers.

Regardless of your cultural background, or what part of Asia you choose to build a career, networking plays a central role in maximizing your goals. Challenging your internal assumptions of culture, aligning values, and adjusting visible cues will shape your network and put you on the path to success in whatever venture you choose.

In Asia, knowing the language is more important to career advancement than understanding a culture

Yonghui Tao, The University of Auckland

Career advancement in Asia is highly dependent on both language fluency and cultural knowledge. Assessing language fluency is easy, while cultural fluency demands us to be more observant and sensitive to codes of conduct. The two intertwine, each reinforcing the other. Globalisation has given us more opportunities for cultural interaction and further emphasised the importance of cultural understanding. As a result, businesses have highlighted cultural intelligence (CQ) in intercultural communication as a significant professional skill to develop.

Language conveys and reflects a culture. The advancement of technology has enabled convenient methods for communication. An abundance of language translation and learning apps have increasingly made cultural exchanges accessible. Even with the assistance of technology, there always remains some things that cannot be encapsulated by other languages. Especially in Asia, where indirectness of communication is prevalent and importance is placed on 'saving face'. Simply possessing language fluency only reveals the tip of the cultural iceberg and cannot sustain long-term career development.

The nuances in the social codes of conduct are cultural knowledge learned through observing and experiencing the cultural environment. Work culture also presents another set of social customs, which requires more than language proficiency to understand. Progressing ahead in your career will highly depend on your acclimatisation to the attitudes and approaches towards aspects such as authority, business relationships and criticism. CQ encompasses the ability to bridge knowledge gaps and differences, build interpersonal connections and consider issues from multiple perspectives demonstrates adaptability and consideration. This essence of CQ is the reason why employers highly regard it.

Language offers a peek into Asian culture, but it is the cultural knowledge that propels career advancement. Technology has minimised the barriers to language fluency and can similarly be used to further remove obstacles of cultural fluency. What is most valuable is how individuals can adapt to the communication style and social customs presented in Asia.

The rise of the Asian economies will have a positive influence on my career

Denham Watson, The University of Auckland

What “career advancement” is can often be touted as subjective. However, we tend to share an intuitive understanding of what such advancement means: improving one’s abilities or skills, developing connections, climbing the corporate ladder, increasing market share. In each, there is a feeling of power growing; resistance being overcome. To understand culture and language in the context of career advancement is to see them as useful in improving abilities, in supporting business expansion.

Culture is often stated as critical to business success in Asia. Parables of the importance of fostering guanxi, handling business cards, or understanding the business place hierarchy abound – and these are important, to be sure. Developing understanding of another perspective, viewing the world through different eyes fosters our ability to engage with different markets, be more effective relationship builders, and become global citizens. These are aspects crucial to any career developing in Asia.

Indeed, language is only one aspect of communication. Difficulties can arise from differences in ethic and culture, even if language is shared. Furthermore, the process of acquiring a new language delivers insights into local culture. Consider, for example, the importance of formal politeness and respect in Japanese.

It is also crucial to place cultural understanding in context. One danger is how preconceptions of

Asian culture (in dominant Western narratives) can lead to misunderstanding particular companies’ needs. For example, some Chinese firms shun traditional rituals of gift-giving in building relationships, favouring professionalism and capabilities in partnerships.

Language and culture are both impacted by the globalising economy. The ubiquity of English (while sometimes overstated), and the prevalence of translators or equivalent apps leads some to doubt the utility of knowing another language. Yet this misses possibly the most crucial aspect: relationship building. Like developing intercultural skills, language abilities help to develop more meaningful connections with business counterparts. Therefore, the increasingly global nature of economic relationships leaves knowing a second language more important.

To sum up, language is crucial to both understanding and engaging in different cultures. Yet, understanding a diversity of cultures is key to successfully communicating. In learning a language, insights into local cultures are garnered.

The answer, then, is to increase an understanding of language and culture in tandem. It is to recognise how both facilitate the development of trust and determine successful communication. Communication is endemic to all business activity; neither can be ignored in developing a career in Asia.

The New Zealand Asia Institute (NZAI)

The New Zealand Asia Institute (NZAI) was established in May 1995 as part of The University of Auckland’s strategic plan for internationalisation. The decision to set up the Institute was a response to the growing importance of Asia to New Zealand politically, economically and culturally. It signified an evolving recognition of the need for an organization able to reach across academic boundaries within the University and relate this national resource to policy-making and the wider community in New Zealand.

As a university-wide initiative, NZAI has core objectives including:

- Strengthening interdisciplinary and inter-faculty cooperation in order to ensure interested students in all academic fields have access to Asia-related courses;
- Maximizing the University’s location in New Zealand’s largest city with its many commercial links to Asia;
- Brokering the University’s Asian expertise in policy advice and case-study analyses to Government departments and the private sector;
- Building a core of specialists on New Zealand-Asia issues and to provide a forum for informed and forward-looking discussions on what is happening in Asia and its implications for New Zealand;
- Involving the increasing Asian population both in the University and the city.

NZAI’s current positioning in The Business School was of strategic importance as it added to the Institute’s policy focus with a complementary

applied business dimension. It also allowed NZAI to enrich and enhance its research portfolio with more programmatic projects, which will better engage targeted groups in the public. As a result, the Institute is better enabled to serve as a focal point for the development of multidisciplinary activities that will involve research teams and postgraduate students.

Continuing the support for Asia-Savvy fits with NZAI’s overall mission to “Develop graduates, knowledge and ideas that enhance New Zealand’s understanding of, and ability to engage productively with, Asia.” Through bringing together and engaging increased numbers of Asia-savvy students, businesses and other leaders with interests in Asia in this student-led conference, NZAI is helped to create and sustain a platform for engagement with Asia.

Acknowledgements

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Asia Savvy Alumni Network

Asia Savvy holds networking events aimed at conference alumni and friends who are keen to be part of an on-going community of like-minded Asia-savvy seekers.

Our activities will include:

- Organising events and reunions
- Communicating with alumni and friends by email
- Keeping our alumni and friends in touch with one another

Our informal networking events are held at the University of Auckland Business School during the evening. They provide a great opportunity for you to:

- Learn from our selected Asia Savvy experts
- Expand your own network of like-minded contacts

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Asia Echo

Asia Echo provides news relevant for New Zealand businesses engaging with Asia. Every month we bring you information that will help you to learn more about Asia. We select the most interesting articles from a variety of reputable sources.

If you would like to receive our e-newsletter, please send your details to Dinah Towle at d.towle@auckland.ac.nz.





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