



Strengthening Resilience: How to build resilience by overcoming challenges

18 September 2021



**NEW ZEALAND ASIA
INSTITUTE**



Contents

Symposium theme –
Building cross-cultural
competencies

Presentation summaries

Student essays

New Zealand Asia Institute

Acknowledgements

Contact information

Conference theme

Strengthening resilience: Asia Savvy 2021 Symposium

The unprecedented disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is the source of stress and adversity for many people. Resilience is what helps us get through and overcome hardship caused by the outbreak. The 2021 Asia Savvy Symposium entitled “Strengthening resilience: How to build resilience by overcoming challenges” discussed this topical issue. The event happened to aptly coincide with New Zealand’s 2021 national lockdown.

This year’s Symposium featured the four panellists from the industry sharing stories of how they and their businesses survived and flourished during New Zealand’s 2020 COVID lockdowns with creativity and resilience. Each of the speakers demonstrated what skills and strategies they used to navigate through these uncertain times.

Advice from the panellists included finding a sense of purpose around work; recognising the value of life’s challenges and the resilience that existed within ourselves; learning from feedback and criticism; building networks and collaboration; and promptly adapting to changing environments.

While the Symposium was opened for any students nationwide, participants could also join in the essay competition. Essay topics for this year could be either the factors that influence whether someone can be resilient in difficult times; what do examples from Asian societies tell us about resilience during the COVID pandemic; or the resilience strategies that got me through recent lockdowns. The essays are reviewed and the best essays were awarded winner and runner-up prizes. The prizes included an iPad and an opportunity for a one-on-one session with a University of Auckland Business School alumni expert from an industry of choice.



Summaries

Opening Address



Nigel Haworth, Director of the New Zealand Asia Institute, welcomed everyone to the Asia Savvy 2021 virtual symposium. Nigel expressed the commitment of the New Zealand Asia Institute with Asia Savvy, an event gathering enthusiastic students who share the same interest in Asia to discuss emerging topics of the year with industry leaders.

Regarding this year's theme about resilience, Nigel acknowledged the challenges that individuals, businesses, and the whole economy had to go through. Nigel thought the pandemic was also an opportunity to strengthen resilience by bringing together innovation and perspective.

Nigel appreciated the speakers for contributing to the events, allowing the students to learn from practical business experience. He also praised the organization team for their resilience in keeping the event running despite the changing context.

Introduction



Kaitlin Outtrim, student committee co-lead, firstly welcomed all participants from the Auckland University of Technology, The University of Adelaide, Victoria University of Wellington, University of Waikato, and the University of Auckland. Kaitlin then introduced the organizer of Asia Savvy 2021. The team comprises Dinah Towle, the project lead, Deepika Jindal, the project manager, the student committee - Kaitlin, Shisla, Nancy, Sanika, and Wilson, and the ambassadors - Marina, Thomas, Lydia, and Jason. She congratulated the committee members and ambassadors for working through the challenges to keep the event up and running.

Kaitlin expressed sincere thanks to the speakers and the sponsors of this year's events for their support. She then announced that there would be random prizes throughout the day for those who showed their engagement at the event.

Panel Discussion: Showcasing success stories

The panel was composed of Angela Lim, CEO and Co-Founder of Clearhead; Joe Bradford, Co-owner of Fiasco; Kristy Grant, Founder and Director of Miramar Creative and Chief Operating Officer of Lane Street Studios; and Leon Gurevitch, Head of Industrial Design at Lane Street Studios and Associate Dean of Research and Innovation, Faculty of Architecture and Design, Victoria University of Wellington.

The panel was introduced and moderated by Kaitlin Outtrim.

Angela Lim

Angela is originally from Malaysia. She came to New Zealand at the age of 15. Angela was trained as a paediatric doctor. Angela noted that COVID-19 restrictions triggered more mental health problems, especially for people who have family connections outside of New Zealand. Angela's presentation guided the audience from the background research of resilience to the problem that her team at Clearhead is trying to address.



Clearhead was established three years ago in 2018 in recognizing that the capacity of the mental health care system in New Zealand is far behind the demand and not culturally-responsive. Clearhead aims at addressing that problem by creating an integrated online platform to support mental health. The company's vision is to make personalised and culturally-responsive mental health and well-being support accessible to everyone.

To help the audience better understand mental health, Angela referenced back to the concept of well-being and resilience that were established in research. Well-being means feeling happy, purposeful, socially connected and supported, and free of negative thoughts and emotions. Having resilience is when you can develop self-awareness of what makes you unhappy, construct meaning of the situation, and decide to fill your cup with other things. Research also demonstrated that stress, resilience, and mindfulness practicing have a tangible impact on your brain.

Reflecting on her own journey, Angela stated that though being a doctor has bought her happiness, she did not feel reaching her full potential until she found Clearhead. During COVID-19 lockdown, while Angela had to give up on the hobby of travelling, transferring her energy into reaching a higher purpose in life had helped her overcome the stress of the situation. Angela suggested that finding a sense of purpose and seeing things in a bigger picture would help to be less dependent on short-lived external rewards and build up your resilience. Besides, gratitude practice, mindfulness practice, and exercising are among other ways to build up resilience. Angela also stressed the importance of having a support structure that people can reach out to before they come to the crisis level. Clearhead is trying to provide that support through offering well-being assistants, providing practical tools to learn about well-being for people who want to support others and an online therapy booking system that reduce the usual 3 to 6 months waiting to only a few days.

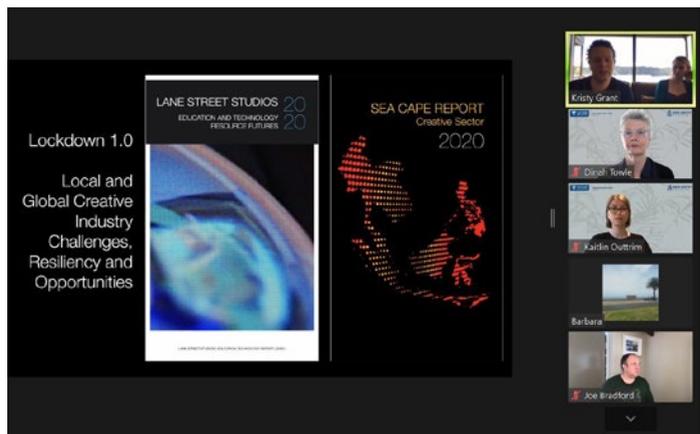


Kristy Grant

Kristy has been working on several projects providing pathways for young people into the creative industry, including the Roxy 5 Short Film Competition, Miramar Creative, and Courteney Creative. Kristy's projects also involved working with the Southeast Asia countries, where she successfully collaborated remotely through lockdowns. Her ten years of experience in creating infrastructure in the creative industry led to the establishment of Lane Street Studios. The studio is the most comprehensive screen production precinct in the southern hemisphere, with the latest production facilities all available on one site. Besides investing in building infrastructure, Kristy's team at Lane Street also

develop vocational training as the pathway for students to the international screen sector. Lane Street Studios created more than 1,000 jobs.

Lane Street Studios and few other projects of Kristy started around the time of lockdown, so there were a few challenges that the team went through. Kristy perceived resilience in the COVID-19 environment as similar to setting up a business. It involved constantly juggling through obstacles to achieve your goals. Kristy also stressed the importance of learning through criticism and rejection. For Kristy, rejection is not necessarily a failure, but experience and skills can take to move forward. According to Kristy, the most vital thing to strengthen the resilience of yourself or your business is to build the network. Kristy thought it's crucial to understand your product well, learn from feedback and criticism, and constantly upgrade your knowledge. Having a comprehensive understanding of what you do and what you want to achieve will help with the first impression of people you want to build your network with. Another suggestion to build a successful collaboration is to find people who do not have the skills you have and vice versa. In a nutshell, for Kristy, resilience comes from having good people around you, maintaining that network, and learning from what you already achieved.



Leon Gurevitch

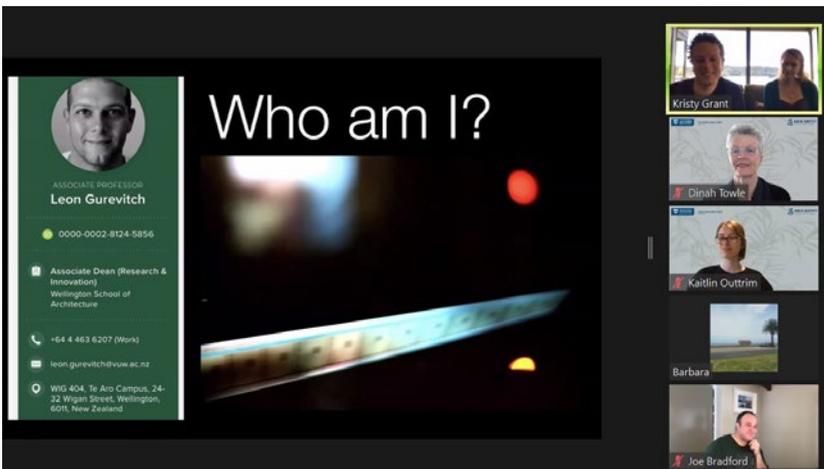
Leon was diagnosed with dyslexia when he was doing his BA honours, and with inattentive ADHD just a few years ago after he got his Ph.D. According to Leon, the fact that he could achieve what he had achieved proved that all the obstacles should not stop you. If you can navigate through all the obstacles, they might end up helping you to build your resilience.

Leon first came to New Zealand to research how the visual effect and tech industry help bring a large amount of entrepreneurial talents and high-quality skilled-based laborers into New Zealand. He wanted to visualize the migration patterns of highly skilled industry workers around the world into New Zealand and what value those high-skilled people bring into New Zealand. He found that they did not bring only skills but the connection between New Zealand and the world. It also helped develop the economic resilience of the country against crises.

When lockdown first happened in 2020, Leon and Kristy had discussed how they should operate and what kind of business they should do in the situation. They figured out that there was a need for film and television production during the lockdown, as the demand for home entertainment significantly



increased during COVID time. There is already resilience in industries that have access to people's homes. Being able to identify the opportunity of New Zealand, Lane Street Studios was constructed to provide the setting for the rising demand for screen production in a COVID-free location. To sustain the business in a longer term, the team at Lane Street Studios is working to develop talents from nearby places like Southeast Asia by building practice-based, advanced skills acquisitions education program. As Leon said, the team is "building the plane while it is flying." Leon concluded his presentation by saying that resilience is constantly in the mind of the Lane Street Studios team, which is the ability to adapt quickly to changing environments.



Q&A Session:

The Q&A session was very fruitful with many thoughtful and relevant questions for the four speakers. The first discussion was about how to find the gifts in life in an extremely challenging situation. Many helpful suggestions were provided by the speakers. The first piece of advice is gratitude practice, specifically thinking about how fortunate we are to live in a society where we do not have to worry about life being under threat as people in a dictatorship. Another piece of advice is not to give up on yourself; always find the confidence to support yourself and seek help when needed.

The second topic of discussion surrounding where and how to build your business network, should that be ASEAN regions, the Pacific, or the US. The speakers' suggestion is not to focus on what region it should be but look at where the engine of the world is operating and use that to drive your business. Most importantly, you should prepare yourself with skills and keep on learning. That includes taking criticism and conflict ideas as input for your learning process.

The third primary focus of the Q&A concerned how having a graduate degree help with your business. With a diverse background of the speakers, from having no degree to having a Ph.D., the speakers concluded that it does not matter if you have a graduate degree. What matters is the way you think, how you learn, how you approach relationships and motivate people, and how you think about yourself and your business in both the short term and long term.



The Q&A session was moderated by Shisla Macleod.

Finally, the discussion focused on how to help with the natural process of building resilience. The first suggestion is to recharge your battery when you need to, for instance, go tramping, climb mountains, go to gym, meet a friend, or make a new friend. Do extra physical activities is proved to be helpful, as it has a strong correlation with mental health. Then, it is vital to build a supporting system for mental health to help identify the problem and support people in need, including yourself. Travelling and living in a cross-culture environment is also advised to help building long-term resilience.

Gong Cha gift-giving

Four lucky participants who showed enthusiastic engagement during the Q&A session were chosen to be rewarded with vouchers from Gong Cha, one of the sponsors of Asia Savvy 2021.

Brief introduction of the Asia New Zealand Foundation by Alexis Allen

Alexis Allen congratulated the organizers and the speakers on the fantastic event before introducing a wide range of programs and initiatives that the Foundation offers. The Asia New Zealand Foundation was established 27 years ago in acknowledging that engaging with Asia is vital to the development of New Zealand. At the same time, the knowledge of Kiwis about the region is still limited. Therefore, the activities of Asia New Zealand Foundation range from researching Asia, connecting businesses and industries, leadership training to internships. The Foundation is keen on helping the next generation of New Zealand leaders and change-makers to have profound knowledge and connection with Asia.

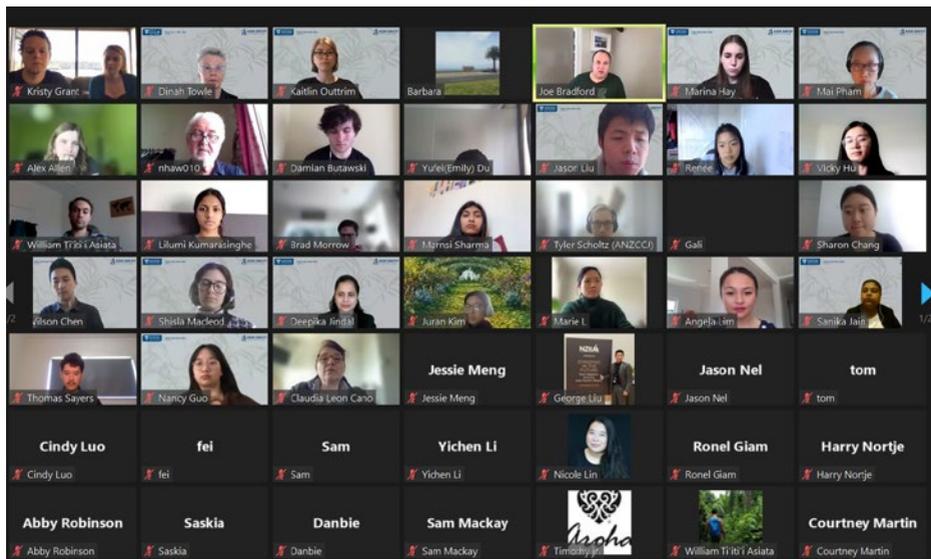
Alexis suggested that students and young people interested in Asia research more about the services that Asia New Zealand Foundation provides for its membership and go ahead applying for it if they feel interested. The services included travel funds, networking, leadership development programs, coffee catchup among members, and mentorship. The Foundation does not expect its new members to have an in-depth understanding of Asia, as that's what the Foundation will provide training on. The only requirements are leadership skills and a strong interest in Asia.

Awards and concluding remarks

Nigel Haworth thanked the speakers for the fantastic talks, stating that he learned a lot from what they brought to the event. Nigel also showed appreciation for the organizer, saying he was hugely impressed by the team's tremendous work, including the student committee, ambassadors, Dinah, and Deepika.

Nigel praised the excellent work that the students put into drafting their essays, adding how much he enjoyed reading their work.

These remarks were followed by award presentations for the best essay prize - Marnsi Sharma, and runners-up, Tyler Scholtz.



How can you develop resilience?

- Gratitude practice
- Daily interactions that generate positive emotions
- Replaying positive experiences to hold on to positive emotions
- Meditation/ Mindfulness
- Mood tracking to help people identify situations associated with positive emotions
- Practice optimistic thinking
- Exercise
- Socialising with family and friends
- Bring Clearhead into your school/workplace as availability of supportive responses from your immediate environment contributes to resilience outcome.



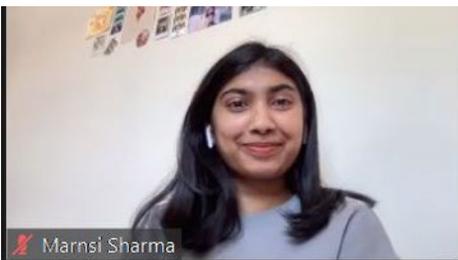


Student essays

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

- The resilience strategies that got me through recent lockdowns.
- What do examples from Asian societies tell us about resilience during the COVID pandemic?
- Discuss the factors that influence whether someone can be resilient in difficult times.

Two prizes were awarded for this year's best essays. The first prize was an iPad and the second an opportunity to meet one-to-one with an expert from an industry of choice, organised by the University of Auckland Business School Alumni. The first prize was awarded to **Marnsi Sharma**. The runner-up was **Tyler Scholtz**. The winning essays are included below along with those of all other finalists. The winning essays are included along with those of all other finalists.



Marnsi Sharma, University of Auckland

The resilience strategies that got me through recent lockdowns

Reading is, and has been the catalyst for, my resilience strategies this lockdown.

My usual daily routine involves friends and family. Social interactions and life experiences are bountiful. However, with lockdown, feelings of boredom and stagnation rapidly rise. With limitations on movement, I have searched for new ways to face these spatial restrictions.

My lockdown started with a soft stack of borrowed books. Reading was to be my primary method to get through level four. At the top of the stack sat Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*. The text resonated with me. Though *Norwegian Wood* does not feature a lockdown, the story is set in the past and the protagonist is isolated at university; I could see him search for how to spend his time. Throughout the novel, there is a growing sense of appreciation for one's surroundings. Whilst my non-lockdown routine did not feature exercise, *Norwegian Wood* encouraged me to begin walking around my neighbourhood and have a deeper appreciation of my environment.

My reading continued. Eventually, I came across Fumio Sasaki's *Goodbye, Things: The New Japanese Minimalism*. The text covers examining one's possessions and valuing what we have, while not being defined by what we own. With time on my side during the lockdown, I looked inwards. I was able to, and am still, decluttering my belongings. The process has been long. However, it has allowed me to be intentional with my time and energy during this lockdown. Letting go of my possessions has re-focused me. I have started digital art again, a hobby I had not done since after high school.

My resilience strategy for this lockdown began with reading. However, reading has allowed me to explore my surroundings and neighbourhood, to consider my true values, and to find myself.

Tyler Scholtz University of Auckland

What do examples from Asian societies tell us about resilience during the COVID pandemic?

Remembering back to the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, Asian societies, (particularly East Asia near the original Wuhan outbreak) served as a role model for the rest of the world regarding their pandemic response. Certain elements of Asian culture were viewed as imperative by the west to adopt for their own pandemic resilience. This includes the norm of mask-wearing during winter and flu season, non-physical greetings such as bowing, and the degree of compliance to national health measures – indicative of the 'collective mindset' (compared to western individualism) which characterises many Asian societies. It has been over a year since then, and much has changed. Asian countries are generally not viewed as top global leaders for pandemic resilience in 2021. News conglomerate Bloomberg's 'Covid resilience ranking' includes only one Asian country in the top 20 (Hong Kong at 18th). Despite this, certain events which occurred in Asia over the past year, in my opinion, do highlight moments of resilience.

One example of Asian resilience is the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. Following decades of economic stagnation, an ageing population, and the 2011 'triple disaster,' Japan sought for the 2020 Olympics to convey a message to the world similar to the 1964 Olympics: a message of resilience. Japan's battle with the pandemic added yet another 'hurdle' to its display of resilience. Despite a large outbreak coinciding with the Olympics, the games reluctantly went ahead. Yet, I think the Tokyo Olympics, despite all the negative press, created a global (but small) sigh of relief; a message that life must eventually carry on and bounce back in the 'new normal.' Japan sent a message to the world that they can persevere no matter what challenges the universe presents.

This essay prompt also made me think of an anecdotal example. As part of an internship I

recently completed, I would sit on zoom calls with Austrade delegates who were posted to various Asian countries. One of these delegates was based in Myanmar. Not only did the people of Myanmar have to navigate Covid, but also a military coup. Despite the political situation, the delegate carried on with their Austrade work and was always present for meetings. When local internet service was severed, a workaround was found. Seeing this delegate carry on in their utmost professional capacity, and by extension, the people of Myanmar carrying on, served as an inspiring example of resilience to me.

Lisa Wang, **University of Auckland**

The resilience strategies that got me through recent lockdowns

Having robust resilience strategies is important for people to adapt to changes in difficult situations, like the recent lockdown. I built my resilience in the face of the crisis through the following strategies to maintain my physical and mental wellbeing.

Firstly, I created a routine of doing everything that makes me happy to help me cope with the lockdown stress. Activities included calling friends, going for a walk and watching Korean dramas. Doing these simple activities prevented me from getting distracted by the bad news related to the COVID infection and trapped into negative emotions.

Secondly, I kept myself calm by looking out the window while listening to relaxing music. This action allowed me to empty my mind so that I could think more logically and become more productive to get my work done.

Thirdly, the lockdown allowed me to build meaningful connections with people close to me by showing compassion. I showed my care through actions like cooking breakfast for my flat mate and asking my parents about their situations in China. As a result, I felt happier when others were in a better mood.

Lastly, I also took care of my physical health by having a stable sleep schedule and exercising regularly. During the lockdown, it was very easy to get lazy by sleeping too much. So I set the alarm to remind myself to go to sleep and wake up at certain times. I followed it quite well by preventing myself from using my phone two hours before I went to sleep. My normal exercise routine has been interrupted by the lockdown. I started looking for alternatives to keep exercising so that I will not go down the slippery slope of becoming unfit. In the end, I found an exercise routine on YouTube that I can do with my flat mate. During the lockdown, we motivated and monitored each other to do the routine.

In conclusion, I used the lockdown as an opportunity to become more resilient in the crisis and grow stronger and happier by using the above strategies.

Lilumi Kumarasinghe, **University of Auckland**

The resilience strategies that got me through recent lockdowns

Resilience is the ability to cope with challenges in life while maintaining your mental and physical wellbeing. It is a form of adaptation to sudden changes, such as the recent lockdown. During the recent lockdown, my primary strategy for dealing with the lockdown was to keep living my day-to-day life “as normal as possible, as flexible as necessary”. This meant going on with your everyday lifestyle and habits while simultaneously being flexible and accepting change when necessary.

Since resilience is built and improved throughout our lives, not all individuals will cope with hardships the same way. Unprecedented events such as the recent lockdown meant that individuals experienced sudden stress and adversity.

While an event such as a lockdown typically hinders social activity, I found that one efficient resilience strategy is maintaining and encouraging connections with family and friends.

Many people are prone to feeling isolated and depressed, especially if they live by themselves. Maintaining solid relationships with friends and family will allow you to maintain social connections, so you don't feel alone during hardships.

Practicing mindfulness is another resilience strategy I used during the lockdown. For instance, due to lack of travel and other commitments, ample time is available to try out new hobbies, practice meditation or reading new books to help you to stay occupied. New activities such as this enable you to stay away from negative thoughts and focusing more on what you truly enjoy in life. Remaining positive is highly advantageous during a hardship, as I learned that keeping yourself occupied will help maintain positive thinking while eliminating negative thoughts and feelings. In addition, focusing on self-care and maintaining a healthy diet is also essential as this contributes to your mental and physical health.

These are a few resilience strategies that got me through the recent lockdown. The most critical approach I used to deal with hardships is keeping on doing the things I enjoy, such as going on walks, exploring nature, finding a new hobby, while accepting the new normal while remaining positive and working towards your goals.

Sam Mackay, University of Auckland

What do examples from Asian societies tell us about resilience during the COVID pandemic?

From fun times to putting it on a shelf: A case study of COVID-19 resilience in Kabul, Afghanistan

Covid-19 has been felt across the Asian region. In Afghanistan, United Nations (UN) workers have experienced Covid alongside a volatile security environment. One expatriate worker's experience highlights the resilience that has been developed in response to Covid – but also indicates its fragility.*

Pre-Covid, UN workers in Kabul spent most of their time within protected compounds with significant restrictions on movement. The pandemic has made these restrictions even more extreme. The worker noted that they were unable to visit the compound “literally across the road” or have non-UN personnel visit them: “[for] six months... I couldn't see anyone outside of [my organisation] or the UN.”

Whereas expatriates would typically have the opportunity to regularly leave Afghanistan for a rest and recreation (R&R) period, this has not been possible during Covid. In a normal period, “you're living and working with the same people every day for six weeks in a row.” During Covid, due to a reduction in flights to and from Afghanistan and the availability of international staff to run the organisation, “it [has been] for up to 21 weeks in a row. We're all stuck here.”

While the worker initially enjoyed the exhilarating effects of Covid – “it was fun to run the mission with a very small team in a kind of in a crisis situation” – over the longer term they found it difficult to separate work from personal life in an environment where “my office is literally 20 metres away from my bedroom.” When asked how they cope with such a challenging scenario, the participant acknowledged that things have got “frayed” and manifested in “negative ways” like excessive alcohol consumption. They noted their key response was to, “just put it on a shelf and say, ‘this is life’”.

While this is just one individual's experience, it speaks to similar experiences within Afghanistan and highlights the multifaceted nature of people's experiences of Covid. While demonstrating remarkable degrees of resilience, it raises profound questions regarding the sustainability of that resilience – particularly if individuals are ‘coping’ by “putting it on a shelf”.

*Research participants have been interviewed for my PhD research “A qualitative enquiry into expatriate work and wellbeing in ‘the Kabubble’ (Kabul, Afghanistan)” which was approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 21/06/2021 for three years. Reference number UAHPEC22451. Quotes in this essay are from one research participant, de-identified as research participant 3.

The New Zealand Asia Institute

The New Zealand Asia Institute (NZAI) was established in May 1995 as a research institute of the University of Auckland. It has been hosted by the University of Auckland Business School since 2009. The Institute aims to foster better understanding of Asia among New Zealanders and to increase awareness of Asia in this country.

The mission of the NZAI is to:

- Undertake, support and disseminate research that addresses the needs of New Zealanders for improved understanding of contemporary Asia.
- Provide visibility and leadership for the development of research expertise on Asia within the University.
- Contribute to building the capabilities of New Zealand business and government to develop productive relationships in Asia.
- Contribute to developing Asia-relevant awareness, skills and knowledge among students.

As part of the Business School, the NZAI support's the School's strategic focus on knowledge of international business. Our focus on Asia recognizes the importance of this region in economic and cultural terms, and the need to better understand this dynamic region.

The Institute is proud to have supported the Asia Savvy student conference since 2011. Through bringing together and engaging students from across New Zealand, along with businesses and community leaders, we hope to create and sustain a platform for engagement with Asia.

The New Zealand Asia Institute

NZAI and the Asia Savvy committee would like to thank Natasha Hamilton-Hart, Antje Fiedler, Dinah Towle and Deepika Jindal for their valued contributions towards developing the conference along with the ambassadors who volunteered their energy and time towards making the conference a success.

Additionally, NZAI acknowledges the generous support from sponsors for this year's conference:

- Gong Cha
- ubiq
- University of Auckland Business School

Supported by:



NEW ZEALAND ASIA
INSTITUTE

Sponsored by:

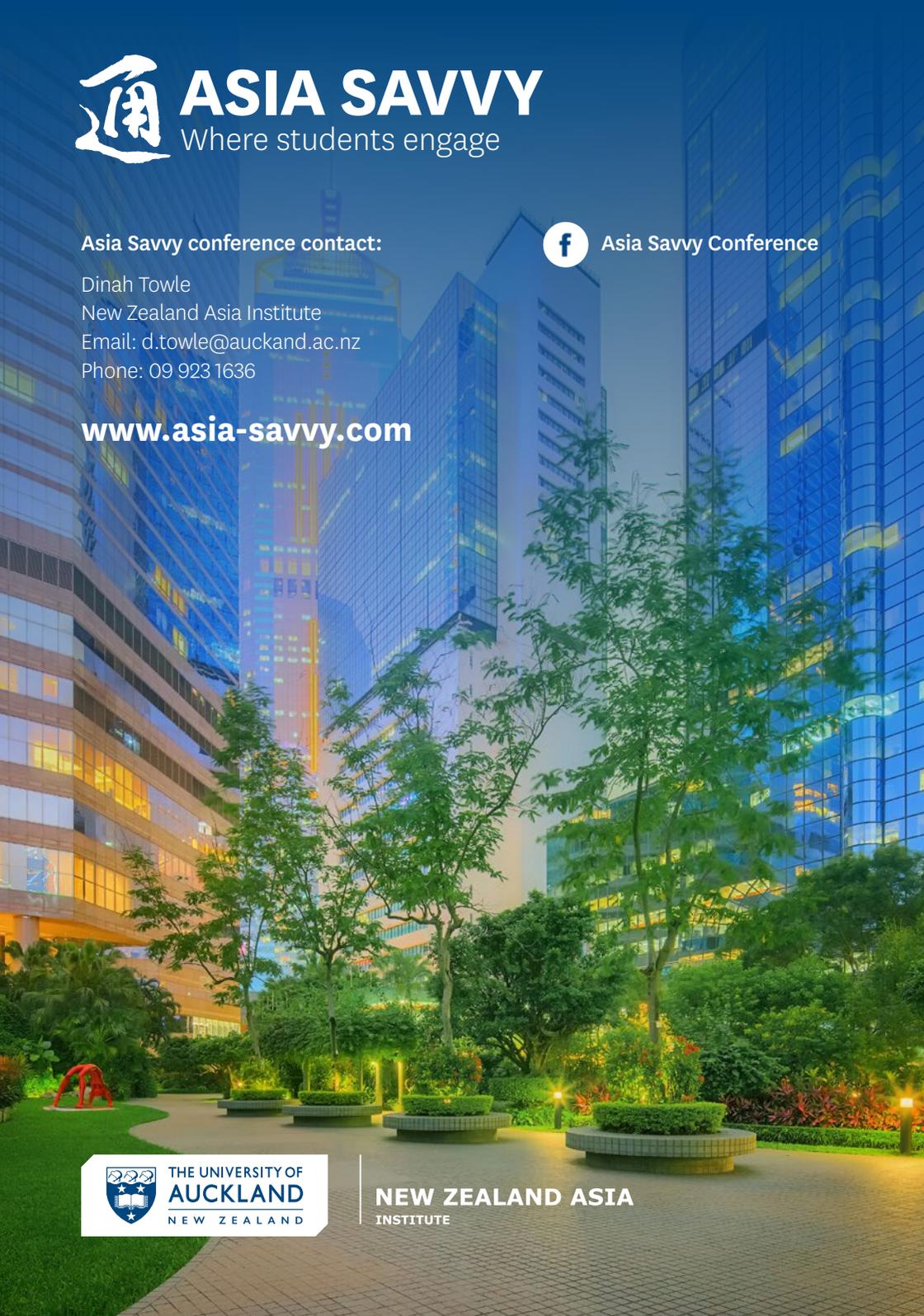


Gong cha



BUSINESS SCHOOL

Thank you!



ASIA SAVVY

Where students engage

Asia Savvy conference contact:

Dinah Towle

New Zealand Asia Institute

Email: d.towle@auckland.ac.nz

Phone: 09 923 1636



Asia Savvy Conference

www.asia-savvy.com



THE UNIVERSITY OF
AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND

NEW ZEALAND ASIA
INSTITUTE