

Title: The Transformative Experiences of Asian Working Holiday Makers in Australia

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Abstract:

Asia has a history of travel that extends as long, if not longer, than that of Europe. Despite this, it has often been a neglected site of enquiry for those investigating travel as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Many countries in Asia are presently undergoing a process of rapid transformation, with peoples, cultures, social structures, cities, landscapes, politics, and economics changing at a pace that has arguably never previously been seen in human history. International travel (whether for the purpose of leisure, study, business, transitory work, military service, migration, asylum seeking, etc.) is deeply enmeshed within this flux, being both reflective of it and influential upon it. Given these rapid transitions and economic growth, Asia becomes a fascinating site of enquiry for investigating travel as an embodied, sensual, and transformative phenomenon from a perspective beyond the familiar 'western' lens. It also provides an important context in which to explore the interconnection of travel, and its affective consequences, with other forms of mobility, life courses, and social and cultural transitions.

This paper presents findings from research looking at the transformative experiences of Asian working holiday makers travelling to Australia. Building upon a 10-year longitudinal study of travel and transformation with participants from mostly 'western' cultural backgrounds (see Lean, 2016), over 100 online surveys and email interviews were conducted with current and former working holiday makers from the nine Asian nationalities eligible to participate in Australia's working holiday programme. The paper will illustrate how working holidays are framed and narrated as transformative in policy and lived experience. It will also explore how these travel experiences affect, and become entwined in, the life-course of working holiday makers. The paper concludes by considering the implications of these findings for previous, 'western'-centric, conceptualisations of transformative travel.

References:

Lean, G. 2016. *Transformative travel in a mobile world*. Wallingford: CABI.