

Executive Summary

This workshop focuses on international mobilities and migration as a way to understand the impacts of WWII across the Asia-Pacific region. Crises, including war, famine, natural disasters, political upheavals (such as revolution), epidemics and pandemics, create human mobilities and migration on a large scale. WWII was no exception. Charles Tilly describes World War II as “one of the greatest demographic whirlwinds to sweep the earth” (Tilly 2006). This demographic whirlwind also swept through the battlefields of the Asia Pacific region. While there is substantial research on war mobilities in the European context (deportees, expellees, refugees, etc.), much less is documented about similar experiences in Asia and the Pacific, despite ample cases of such mobilities (forced labourers, POWs, evacuees, etc.).

This disparity likely results from two factors. First, war histories tend to be researched within a paradigm of national history at the expense of inter-regional war mobilities. Second, international migration studies (IMS) have paid scarce attention to war migration/mobilities in Asia. This workshop will challenge dominant paradigms in both war histories and IMS and enrich various social histories of war.

Types of war mobility and migration that this workshop is concerned with include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Military personnel as (coerced) mobile/migrant military labour
- Civilian internees and labourers as forced migrants of war
- Evacuees and deportees as forced migrants of war
- POWs as forced migrants and forced labourers of war
- Embedded journalists and war artists
- Military medical staff
- Religious missionaries

The key factor that must be addressed is the crossing of borders, whether internal or external, across land or water. The period of war mobilities and migration for this workshop is set from 1931 to 1953. In East Asia there were several battles prior to 1941, including the Manchurian incident. And just five years after the end of WWII the Korean war began, so again the Asia Pacific region was fighting a war, with the line between hot and cold never clear. This workshop thus situates WWII within a chain of small and larger conflicts. Although the focal period is from 1931 to 1953, the impacts of war mobilities and migration created ongoing effects and the causes may have had roots prior to 1931. Therefore, the period from 1931 to 1953 may be flexibly interpreted as regards the causes and impacts of war mobilities.

By identifying various types of war mobilities and migration, the transnational connections or disconnections resulting from them, and the manifested outcomes of these mobilities, this workshop aims to present complex histories of World War II and to shift familiar ways of understanding this war, and the empires and (changing) borders that have often defined it. Some key questions include:

- How did war mobilities and migration create new transnational connections or flows of ideas, while disconnecting other ones?
- How did war mobilities and migration challenge a regional framework by connecting Asia and the Pacific?
- How did war mobilities and migration impact on colonial structures and create different social realities and connectivities?
- How did war mobilities and migration reproduce and enforce colonial power structures?

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- How did war mobilities and migration impact on gender roles and relations in colonial societies?
- How do war mobilities and migration in Asia and the Pacific enable us to contextualise this region in a world history of the Second World War?

