

Seuta’afili Dr Patrick Thomsen is a lecturer in global studies at the University of Auckland. He completed his doctoral training at the University of Washington in Seattle and holds a MA in international studies from Seoul National University. As the first Sāmoan scholar to complete a PhD in Korean studies and international studies anywhere in the world, his doctoral study was the first to deploy Pacific research methodologies and ethics to investigate the complex factors that impact the (in)visibility of Korean gay men in a transnational setting (Seattle and Seoul). As an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary scholar, his work is positioned at many edges including the Pacific and Asia, whilst running research projects that currently deal with how race, religion, culture, community and the impacts of colonialism, shape discourses and relationships between queer Pacific worlds and communities among New Zealand’s Pacific population. He is currently the principal investigator for the Manalagi Project, New Zealand’s first health and wellbeing project focused specifically on the wellbeing of Pacific Rainbow+ communities. He was recently appointed to the academic advisory board to the North Asia Centre for Asia-Pacific Excellence.



Keynote Abstract

Problematising the Hyphen: How Can We See Asia from the Pacific?

Dr Patrick Thomsen

Asia – a heterogenous region rich in cultural and linguistic diversity – is often discursively homogenised and casually tied to the Pacific, another discursively homogenised region rich in linguistic, cultural and racial diversity of its own. This super region (Asia-Pacific), constructed by outsiders, is joined together by a hyphen which celebrates possibilities, but is rarely problematised for its incongruity with local realities and tendency for erasure. As a Sāmoan scholar raised in Aotearoa, I ask, does Asia *really* know the Pacific? And *how* does the Pacific know Asia after centuries of division and imperialism? As the balance of power begins to tilt toward China, I believe that opportunities to recalibrate possibilities have emerged for the Pacific and Asia to know each other once again in confronting our shared and differentiated legacies of imperialism. In this talanoa, I propose a discussion on how Asian studies research based in Aotearoa-New Zealand should also allow scholars to engage Asia *with* the Pacific and Pacific scholars; validating Indigenous ways of knowing. To do so creates space for conversations beyond hawkish geopolitics in problematising and reimagining how the regions can be generatively hyphenated. I suggest that this recalibration in relations of knowing is critical for imagining a future across Asia and the Pacific disentangled from the inevitability of conflict. For Pacific scholars, I also posit that meaningfully re-connecting our region with Asia beyond a colonial and imperial hyphen is a task of critical decoloniality.