

Researcher says change the discourse on Asia

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Murdoch University's Dr Craig Whitsed has joined with the University of Queensland's Dr Wendy Green in calling for legislators and educators to reconsider how Australia is engaging in the Asian Century.

Dr Whitsed said while much has been made of Australia taking advantage of Asia's rising [economic power](#), there has been a distinct lack of 'social imagination' in envisioning Asia in Australia.

"In terms of Australia's engagement with Asia, we generally hear about mining and export, cheap tourism or business, with the focus being on how we can best exploit Asia as a resource," Dr Whitsed said.

"Alternately we hear 'keep them out', which applies to [foreign](#)

[investment](#), especially when this is presented as an issue of national security, and the asylum seeker debate.

"If you're on the Asian side of the relationship, or a [young person](#) in Australia, and these are the messages being reinforced, you have to ask how Australia is actually engaging, and what exactly the country is in the Asian Century for."

Dr Whitsed said he was alarmed by the reductionist manner in which much of the asylum seeker had been treated by both sides of politics, and said it was symptomatic of a view of Asia as 'the other', either to be feared or dictated to.

He said there was currently little opportunity for Australians to imagine integration with Asia, along the path Paul Keating may have taken, and said this was one reason Australian workers were not always capable of working in the Asian context.

"Being able to work together requires intercultural understanding, not just learning another language. Graduates can't go into Asia with the attitude of 'this is how we do things in Australia'.

"They have to unlearn certain norms and acquire the ability to appreciate different ways of doing. For instance, in Japan, being an extrovert who offers an opinion to superiors in a meeting isn't valued and isn't part of protocol."

Dr Whitsed said universities had to play a significant role in challenging and changing perceptions, and said he was in the process of initiating a study to look at how domestic students perceived and envisioned Asia, noting very little baseline data existed on undergraduate beliefs and attitudes.

He is also interested in exploring why interaction between domestic and international students studying in Australia is so limited, which he said may be linked to motivation, confidence and perceptions about commonality.

"Australia is not seen as important in Asia as we're led to believe. In the coming decades we're going to need them more than they need us, so now is the time to stop, re-evaluate and act," he said.

Drs Whitsed and Green's article 'Mapping the Curriculum in the Asian Century' can be found [here](#).

Provided by Murdoch University

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