

The International Diffusion of Ideas

Isabelle Sin, Stanford University California.

Wednesday 23rd March, 12.30–2.00pm

Spectrum Theatre: BP House, 20 Customhouse Quay Wellington

Abstract

Increases in the stock of ideas possessed by societies are central to modern economic growth. The implications of international idea flows are striking: according to one estimate, world production would be just 6% of its current level if countries did not share ideas. This seminar will examine how ideas are driving the modern era's accelerating growth, the types of ideas that matter for growth, and the central role of idea flows between countries. I will then discuss how ideas diffuse between countries, how economists have measured this diffusion empirically, what we have learned from these studies, and the implications for New Zealand. I will argue, however, that most of the standard measures don't capture the crucial defining feature of ideas, and will introduce a new measure of idea flows based on book translations. I will discuss the lessons this measure can teach us about the international diffusion of ideas more generally.

Biography



Isabelle Sin is a Ph.D. candidate in Economics at Stanford University, specialising in economic history and applied microeconomics. Isabelle will be joining Motu as a Fellow after she graduates in 2011. Her doctoral thesis proposes a new measure of the international idea flows, namely book translations, and uses it along with modern applied microeconomic research designs to study the factors that affect the international diffusion of ideas. She has also been researching the economics of migration and migrant flows, which shed light on other aspects of the international diffusion of knowledge. Prior to graduate studies, Isabelle received her B.Sc. (Hons) in Economics from the University of Canterbury, and worked at the Reserve Bank of New Zealand and at Motu.