

Welcome to the ASAA Newsletter for April-June 2008. The Newsletter is an informal quarterly report about the workings of the ASAA Council and other issues of interest to our members. If you have something you'd like to be considered for inclusion in future newsletters (or if you wish to be removed from the mailing list), please contact the Association's Secretary, Michele Ford (michele.ford@usyd.edu.au).

We'd also like to take this opportunity to remind you that the ASAA represents the interests of the Asian Studies community on a shoestring budget. **If you are behind in your dues, you can become financial again by paying your membership dues by credit card online at <https://www.registernow.com.au/secure/Register.aspx?ID=594>** or by downloading the membership form on the website.

Cooperation with the Japanese Studies Association of Australia

The executives of the ASAA and the Japanese Studies Association of Australia have agreed to offer a discount to people who pay for membership of both associations through the ASAA online membership site, <https://www.registernow.com.au/secure/Register.aspx?ID=594>.

Joint membership costs \$168 per year (a 10% discount on the cost of two individual memberships which would be \$186) as well as offering the added convenience of making a single online payment. Joint student membership is \$70 and joint retired membership is \$105.

The JSAA is the professional association for those in Australia who teach, research or study Japan. The Association was established in 1978, and membership is open to Japanese Studies practitioners in Australia or overseas. They hold a conference every two years, alternating with the ASAA conference. Members receive a reduced registration rate at this conferences.

The Association publishes a fully-refereed journal, *Japanese Studies*, edited by Dr. Judith Snodgrass, UWS, and distributed by Routledge. Members receive three editions of the journal every year. For more information on the JSAA, see <http://www.jsaa.info/>.

From the President (Assoc. Prof. Robert Cribb)

The new government's 2020 summit in Canberra is almost upon us, and indications are that a good range of Asia specialists will be represented there. Asia is not mentioned in the list of ten topics for debate, but it is clearly relevant to many of them – productivity, climate change, health, social inclusion, creativity and security, at the very least. We can expect our (informal) representatives to be making sure that Asia is not forgotten in the course of the discussion.

Charting the best direction for Australian education about Asia is no easy task. For pretty much the whole of the twentieth century, each Australian generation claimed to be the ones to discover Asia – culturally, strategically, economically and socially – and successive generations of Asia specialists in our universities were able to parlay this sense of discovery and opportunity into new investments and new initiatives. As

we head deeper into the 21st century, the sense of discovery has lost some of its force and we need a new round of careful thought about the strategies needed to develop Australia's fitness to engage with Asia.

Australia's continuing economic and social engagement with its region drives a demand for knowledge about Asia and proficiency in Asian languages to a degree that has no parallel in any Western country. A generation of Australians is aware that when it comes to Asia a little knowledge is a useful thing. We can be disappointed that a generation of Australian students now finds Asia to be routine and thinks that Spanish is a more exotic language than Japanese, but we need not fear that awareness of Asia will disappear from the public consciousness.

Nonetheless, we still need a strong cohort of Asian specialists who can do battle with prejudice and presumption and who can feed a diversity of serious analytical points of view into both the policy process and public debate. The significant long-term individual and institutional investments needed to deliver high quality Asian Studies mean that market forces alone are unlikely to deliver the outcomes that Australia needs to function effectively in the Asian region.

Remedial attention to Asian Studies is needed in two areas:

- Training a younger generation of academic specialists on Asia who will understand different parts of Asia at the highest scholarly level both as university teachers and as public intellectuals familiar with the specific needs and interests of Australian society. This generation must be large enough both to provide its own quality control and to offer a diversity of analysis and approaches from which decision-makers and members of the public can draw their conclusions. Current indications are that the specialist expertise on Asia is becoming increasingly scarce.
- Maintaining a high quality of Asian language training through the proper training for Asian language teaching, proper recognition and career rewards for excellent performance in language training, the development and maintenance of course materials appropriate to Australian students, support for in-country programmes, the development of strategies to sustain languages of lesser demand and the development of structures which allow multiple entry points into Asian language study for students and citizens as their needs develop. Current indications are that the teaching of Asian languages at schools and in universities is languishing as a consequence of formula funding, negative reporting and lack of economies of scale.

Finding a solution to these problems will not be easy, but the first step should be serious attention to the problem by means of an enquiry or a national summit.

ASAA Biennial Conference

The early bird registration date and the deadline for abstracts have been put back to 16 April 2008. Please register as soon as possible if you have not already done so.

Further details on the conference site at

<http://www.conferenceworks.net.au/asaa/index.php>

ASAA Elections 2008

The current Council of the ASAA will reach the end of its term in December 2008. If you have an interest in promoting Asian Studies at the national level and in working with a dedicated team of volunteers, please consider nominating. Forms for nomination will be available at the ASAA Conference in July and on-line.

How You Can Lobby for Asian Studies (Prof. Barbara Hatley)

Perhaps like me you have been wondering if anyone out there is button-holing members of the Rudd government, asking to help them follow up on Kevin's pre-election promises about boosting the study of foreign languages and promoting awareness of Asia. It seems there are a few Asianists attending the 2020 summit, who will no doubt push the line. But how far will their voice reach among all that clamouring? Is there anything that the rest of us could be doing?

Well, here's a thought.

On Saturday April 5 in Launceston the Labor member of parliament for the seat of Bass, Jodie Campbell, hosted a local 2020 summit, a miniature version of the event happening in Canberra. Apparently other Labor parliamentarians are holding such meetings in their electorates. This one took the form of deliberations by panels discussing different topics, chaired by people with some expertise in that field and made up of ordinary citizens. The panels were asked to produce recommendations which the member would take to the big event. Swayed by the persuasive arguments of my colleague, Dirk Tomsa, and I, the panel discussing Australia's place in the world recommended that the single most important thing needed was training in Asian languages and studies, with all school students taking an Asian language and all education students taking some units in Asian Studies to be better prepared for teaching it at school level. The panel on economy, innovation and education included the need for education in foreign languages and global awareness.

I don't know how widespread these local summits are and how many are still to come before the big day. But if lots of good Asianist citizens went along and spoke persuasively, so that the resolutions going forward from these events indicated grass roots enthusiasm about Asia and Asian languages, it would be another way of getting the message across. Could help boost the Government's resolve on the issue if they are scared of electoral unpopularity. And if not, if nothing happens, at least we tried...

Is there a mini 2020 coming up in your neighbourhood?

Appointments and Promotions

Marcus Mietzner (PhD ANU) has been appointed Lecturer in Indonesian Studies at the Faculty of Asian Studies at ANU, starting 1 July. His field is Indonesian military politics.

Jane Ferguson (PhD Cornell) has been appointed Lecturer in Mainland Southeast Asian Studies at the ANU. Her field is the Thai-Burma borderlands.

Elisabeth Jackson (PhD ANU) has been appointed Lecturer in Indonesian Studies at the University of Sydney. Elisabeth works on Islamic education and student politics.

Mark McLelland is currently in Michigan as the Toyota Visiting Professor. The position is a prestigious endowed chair established in 1988. Previous incumbents have included Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, Donald Richie, Jennifer Robertson and Takie Sugiyama Lebra. Mark is the first Australian Japan Studies scholar to have been invited to take up the post.

Carl Thayer (Humanities and Social Sciences, UNSW@ADFA) was appointed the foundation chair of the Frances M. and Stephen F. Fuller Visiting Professor in Southeast Asian Studies at Ohio University. Professor Thayer will join the Center of Southeast Asian Studies for the 2008 academic year.

Paul Hutchcroft has been appointed professor of Social and Political Change (succeeding Ben Kerkvliet) at ANU. He works on Southeast and Northeast Asia, with a particular specialty in the Philippines; he did his PhD with James Scott at Yale.

Richard Rigby becomes Director of the ANU's China Institute in mid-April. Richard is a career diplomat and public servant as well as a published scholar of China and Chinese language. He has been ambassador to Israel and recently deputy director of the Office of National Assessment.

Members of the ASAA are always interested to hear news of the latest appointments and promotions. Please drop a line to the editor (michele.ford@usyd.edu.au) when something interesting happens.