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Australia needs more than luck to build stronger bonds with Asia

As Australians, we need a much better understanding of how we are perceived in Asia.

By Louise Edwards

Despite some enthusiasm for affirming Australia's place in the Anglosphere, few business, political and community leaders deny the importance of Asia to Australia's short- and long-term prosperity.

Recognition that Australians must continue to deepen our engagement with Asia is now axiomatic. Asia is the world's fastest growing region and is set to continue on this trajectory well into the future. According to UNSW's Tim Harcourt, Asia's dominance in the 21st century liberates Australia from the 'tyranny of distance' and places us in the prime position to benefit from the 'power of proximity'.

No matter how pithy or alliterative the phrase, the 'proximity' argument reflects an enduring problem in Australian thinking about its place in the world. As the obverse of the tyranny of distance, it is the flip side of a Eurocentric coin.

While Australians may congratulate themselves for finally being in the 'right neighbourhood'—through the regional gentrification of Asian real estate—there are a series of inherent dangers in the distance and proximity dichotomy that retard Australia's deeper engagement with Asia.

Both distance and proximity rely upon geography—a variable that dominated success in trade and speed of communication in the 'olden days'. In the 21st century, neither are sensibly measured in geographic terms. Digital technology, and global supply chains are inexorable trends that mock geography's impact in trade.

The emergence of the BRIC grouping (Brazil, Russia, India and China) encapsulates the anachronism of geographic determinism in political alliances. While enthusing about our improved neighbourhood we often ignore reality. Channelling the glee of the recently gentrified inner-city dweller, we revel in the thought of a 'shorter commute to the centre of action'.

Yet, London is only 10½ hours from Beijing, Moscow only 9½ from Hong Kong, Vancouver less than 10 from Tokyo and Singapore only a few hours from *everywhere* in Asia. Australia's key economic and population centres on the southeastern seaboard have little or no advantage in travel time over other major economies.

Australia's best future lies in diversifying beyond the rollercoaster of the commodities markets and into high-end technology and services.

As the nations of Europe, Africa and the Americas turn their attention to Asia in this Asian century, the smugness Australians may feel about our closer proximity to Asia will be exposed as vanity. China is the number one trading partner for a rapidly expanding list of nations and they *all* feel the specialness of their ties and the intimacy of their relationship with that economic giant.

Nations dependent on dig-it-up and ship-it-out resource exports, such as Australia, are able to benefit from proximity to a certain extent—it is cheaper to ship iron ore to Japan from Australia than it is from Brazil. But, The gaping chasms in the

Commonwealth, Queensland and West Australian government budgets show the folly of reliance on commodity-based revenue streams.

The power of proximity overplays the 'luck' variable. Geographic luck blessed us with gold, coal and iron ore and neighbours that have developed demand for them. Geographic thinking is premised on the idea that Australia, this ancient, flat, red land now presided over by a predominantly white leadership simply *found* itself close to the action.

Michael Wesley: critical of Australia's insular internationalist thinking.

Congratulating ourselves over our newfound 'proximity' is dangerous and sloppy thinking. Why? Because it promotes the same laziness Donald Horne bemoaned in his *Lucky Country*.[1] It reflects the 'insular internationalist' thinking the Australian National University's Michael Wesley identified.[2] In coining this term, Wesley highlights the paradox whereby Australians frequent travel abroad is coupled with complacency about the implications of Asia's rise to our future and disinterest in changing to meet Asia's power. The allure of geographic determinism overshadows the pressing need for Australian leaders to facilitate the cultural and economic innovation required.

Distance and proximity in the 21st century are best measured in cultural and strategic terms. Australia's proximity to Asia comes primarily from the benefits of strong Asian immigration and the fruits of the investment in teaching Asia studies and Asian languages in schools and universities. It is the cultural attributes and new perspectives produced by these important policy-led shifts that will enable us to prosper in the Asian century.

When Australians wax lyrical about core values of fair play, cricket-loving citizens of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and New Zealand think underarm bowling and sexist, racist sledging.

Australians equipped with cultural and linguistic skills to work in the Asian region have multiple, lucrative options that enable them to depart these sunburnt shores. Unless we embed their expertise and energy within our businesses, governments, schools and universities we risk losing their skills. Where earlier ambitious generations left for London and New York, the current generation also moves to Shanghai and Singapore. The idea that by luck we find ourselves close to the action undervalues the significant cultural shifts of recent decades and ignores the challenge of harnessing the innovation produced therein.

Enhancing our cultural and strategic proximity to Asia demands acknowledgment that relationships require mutuality. What do our target proximate friends think of Australia? When Australians wax lyrical about core values of fair play, cricket-loving citizens of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and New Zealand think underarm bowling and sexist, racist sledging.

The stories we tell each other in domestic discourses are not always accepted internationally—often they provoke derisive guffaws. To form close bonds with the people, governments and business leaders of Asia, we need to understand how Australia is perceived. It is insufficient to trumpet correcting past mistakes (e.g. White Australia Policy) when Aboriginal Australians remain marginalised and forced evictions from land continue.

To many in Asia, Australia represents what could have been their own colonisation experiences—Europeans arrive, take land and productive assets rendering the original inhabitants dispossessed, impoverished and vulnerable.

We chuckle about 'descending from convicts'—rushing to the high moral ground occupied by the underdog—but when viewed from many parts of Asia, white Australian leadership simply looks like 'successful' European colonisation. How much of Asia would have looked like Australia without the nationalist independence movements, they ask? *Bumiputra* politics of Malaysia are sustained by desires to hold firm to indigenous prior rights.

We congratulate ourselves on our egalitarian values and increasing cultural sensitivity. But to many people in South and Southeast Asia our leaders look like modern versions of the same men that spoke in condescending terms to their grandparents as they worked for wages on land their great grandparents once owned.

Australians take pride in jocularity and irreverence and assume it is fondly viewed as quirky, larrikin cuteness. To many in Asia such flippant disregard for social hierarchies and ritual norms echoes the disdain for local culture and power structures that typified the brutal, greedy colonising forces from Europe of earlier centuries, confident as the latter were in their own cultural supremacist norms.

Appointing non-European leaders would prompt many in Asia to reconsider their perceptions of Australia. The extraordinary talent among Australians of Chinese, Indian, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Aboriginal extraction languishes—few become Australia's national representatives because we labour under 'bamboo ceiling' appointment processes. We cannot expect our neighbours to believe that overturning the White Australia

We chuckle about 'descending from convicts'—rushing to the high moral ground occupied by the underdog—but when viewed from many parts of Asia, white Australian leadership simply looks like 'successful' European colonisation.

Policy was anything more than cosmetic when another group of white men disgorges from Qantas 747s at international meetings.

Tourism Australia advertisement: projecting the right image into Australia?

Australia needs a coherent public diplomacy strategy that challenges outdated caricatures of Australians and leverages the cultural proximity recently garnered from immigration and education policy changes. Beyond improving Tourism Australia advertisements, it requires concerted coordinated innovation by strategists in government, business and education that is based on clear understandings of *how* Australia is regarded in the region. Being happy reproducing a 'white bread' culture encapsulated by *Home and* (not-so-far) *away* bottle blondes, misrepresents our society and jeopardises our 'proximity' with Asia.

A public diplomacy strategy is more than rebranding the nation. It should enhance business capacity and inform infrastructure and trade policy. The monumental success of the Republic of Korea's 'Korean wave' resulted from a government-led coordination of the nation's cultural, scientific and commercial talent. A country once known for the war in

MASH is now recognised as a high-tech, culturally rich international leader.

The power of cultural proximity will be manifest when we showcase leaders like the Race Discrimination Commissioner, Tim Soutphommasane, and Senator Penny Wong. Including Indigenous Australians, such as UNSW and ANU legal experts Megan Davis and Mick Dodson, and Northern Land Council CEO Joe Morrison as key figures in our international negotiating teams would give authority to discussions about mutually beneficial economic agreements and credibility to regional programs designed to enhance human rights.

Reflecting Australia's diverse demographic mix in our leadership teams and updating Asian perceptions of Australia is the vital first step. Doing nothing is not an option—she'll *not* be right, mate. Maximising the potential of our Asia literacy and Indo-Pacific connections requires that Australians understand the diverse views held about Australia in the region.

Ultimately these efforts should be embedded within a comprehensive clear public diplomacy program that builds a convincing narrative for cultural proximity and respectful partnership upon which our economic bonds with Asia can flourish.

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Louise Edwards is President of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, and Professor of Modern Chinese History at UNSW.

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Time to rethink language policy

An Australian institute of languages could do for language learning what the Australian Institute of Sport has done for sport.

By John Ingleson

For many Australians, understanding the social and cultural dynamics of Asian countries and their peoples does not come naturally. This is understandable, given the lack of a shared cultural framework and historical experience. We have to work deliberately at developing an understanding because in a democracy governments cannot stray too far from the views of the majority.

If we are ever going to be comfortable with our geography, curricula at all levels of our education system must have a greater focus on Asian countries. They must also ensure that this is not merely an option.

Language policy in particular seems to be captive to political expediency.

Considerable progress has been made in inserting Asia content into school curricula, particularly at the primary and lower secondary levels. Less progress has been made on the Asian languages front. In part this is because of constant changes in policy and short-term funding. It also reflects the difficulty of creating a language policy in a largely English-speaking society with such a wide range of migrant communities that, understandably, want to see their language heritage preserved.

Language policy in particular seems to be captive to political expediency.

We desperately need consistency in language policy. We cannot continue to be making constant 'reforms' and turning funds on and off. A national language policy must integrate language learning at all levels and must focus on a limited number of languages. I am told that we currently offer around 50 different languages in schools. This is not the basis for a language policy. Nor is the idea of spending scarce resources on teaching second languages in preschools.

Perhaps it is time to acknowledge that all language policies in Australia have failed and that simply doing more of the same or tinkering at the edges will only lead to more failure. Perhaps we should consider a different approach in order to produce greater numbers of people who are truly fluent in a second or third language.

The first question to ask is whether we really believe that educating a growing number of young Australia to master an Asian language is important? If we think that it is, then perhaps we should consider establishing an Australian Institute of Languages to do for high-level language learning what the Australian Institute of Sport has done for elite sport? We are very good at teaching English as a second language—there is no reason why we could not adopt the same methodologies and structures for other languages.

Imagine an Australian institute of languages, with branches in every state, teaching languages and certifying language competency. It could offer courses in intensive mode —by far the best way to learn a language—as well as in extended mode. Intensive-mode courses could be made available on a HECS-basis and offered between university teaching sessions, thereby making it easier for students from all disciplines to add a language to their skills. Companies could pay for staff to learn in either mode. Its competency levels would be nationally recognised, much like those of the Australian Music Education Board (AMEB). And just as the AMEB complements music education in schools, so an Australian institute of languages would complement school language education.

There has been mixed success in the study of Asian countries and Asian languages at the university level. In 1988 I led an inquiry into Asia in Australian higher education for the Asian Studies Council. Since then the percentage of university students studying a language—any language let alone an Asian language—has declined. Chinese and Japanese have done much better than Indonesian or Korean.

There has been more success in incorporating Asia content into undergraduate courses. Areas of study such as international relations and media studies, as well as some areas of business studies have more Asia content than they did 25 years ago. Other areas, such as history and politics, have fared less well. However, the number of specialist Asia scholars—those with both language skills and a deep knowledge of one or more Asian country—may actually have declined in the last 25 years. If this is so, then it is a worrying trend.

The Australia that Asians will see would be largely one that reacts against, or responds to, changing Asia.

While there has undoubtedly been some progress, the goal of creating 'Asia literate' graduates is still a long way from realisation. Of the many thousands of Australian undergraduates undertaking exchange programs at overseas universities each year, very few go to universities in Asia. Language is a

barrier—though not in Hong Kong, Singapore or India—nevertheless, many of the best universities in Asia offer courses in English. Americans and Europeans are far better represented in these courses than Australians.

It was partly to rectify this that the current government created the New Colombo Plan. This year it will fund—and fund generously—about 60 undergraduates to study at an Asian university for between 6 and 12 months and, if they wish, undertake an industry placement. To her credit, the foreign minister has a vision of a considerably expanded scheme.

I have two concerns. First, as with all government programs it is only funded for four years. We had a similar scheme between 1990 and 1994—over 5 years more than 500 students were funded to study in Asia. The scheme was abandoned after an audit by people who had not the faintest idea of what it was all about.

If we are ever going to become Asia literate and fully part of the Asia region we need bipartisan commitment to the New Colombo Plan as a long-term investment, and it must be scaled up to become like the Erasmus Programme in Europe. We deserve better than yet another of the short-term policies that bedevil Australian education.

My second concern is that there have been very few applications from science and engineering students or from students in professional faculties. This reflects to some extent rigidities imposed on universities by professional associations. But it also reflects internal inflexibilities that need to be addressed by universities themselves.

The Indian Institutes of Technology and the technology faculties in Singapore, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea are first rate, as are those in the best of the Chinese universities. A year ago the Director of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore commented that while his school enrols around 200 students each year into its masters programs from almost every country in Asia as well as from the United States, Britain and Europe, it had yet to enrol an Australian. There is something deeply disturbing here.

Wang Gungwu argued that Australia is unlikely to be able to influence any part of Asia except marginally.

Wang Gungwu, a former vice-chancellor of the University of Hong Kong and before that Professor of Chinese History at the Australian National University, some years ago reflected on Asian perceptions of Australia and what the future might hold in the Asian region. Wang argued that '… Australia is unlikely to be able to influence any part of Asia except marginally. On the contrary, I shall expect those parts of Asia closer to Australia to have increasingly strong influence on it'.

He went on to say '… the Australia that Asians will see would be largely one that reacts against, or responds to, changing Asia. The future would then centre on how successfully Australia defends itself against what it does not like about Asia and how successfully it adapts itself and absorbs what it does like'. This is an enormous challenge and one that will require considerable effort to educate ourselves about a region that for most of our history we have either feared or ignored.

Fortunately, the very diversity of Asia means that Australia is just one more part of that diversity. This will make Australia's Asian future much less difficult to navigate than if Asia was an homogenous whole.

Nevertheless, there are so many differences between the dominant culture in Australia and the dominant cultures in Asian societies that Australians are not always going to

find the adjustments easy. And make no mistake, the smallness of the Australian economy and the growing prosperity of the region means that we will more often than not be playing 'away from home'. We will have to get used to having to accommodate the other's values, attitudes and belief rather more often than them accommodating ours.

Australia is much more diverse, much richer culturally and far more connected with its region than it was 50 years ago. The economic and social changes taking place throughout Asia and the rapidly changing geopolitical environment means that Australia has an Asia future, whether we like it or not.

The real question is whether we will embrace this future—including the uncomfortable bits—and seek to be an active participant rather than be reactive and defensive. I am increasingly confident we will.

And Australia can make a unique contribution to the diversity of Asia because of its European heritage. Asia can make a unique contribution to Australia that will enrich that heritage.

John Ingleson is emeritus professor of History, UNSW. This is an edited version of a public lecture he gave at the University of Western Australia, on 1 December 2014.

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Pushing boundaries: Turkey and the reframing of Asia and Asian studies

Researchers from Turkey, Japan, and Australia have embarked on a multidisciplinary project to reconsider the intersections between Turkey and Asia.

By Romit Dasgupta

The politics of framing Asia and Asian studies, particularly from where we are situated in Australia, is slanted heavily towards a focus on East, Southeast, and South Asia. Dominant contemporary imaginings would suggest that Asia ends at the Pakistan–Iran border.

Moreover, rather than being merely an abstract issue for academic contemplation, it actually has on-the-ground, policy implications. For instance, the overwhelming focus of governmental study-abroad programs in Asia continues to be exclusively on East, Southeast and South Asia. As a case in point, the expanded 2015 New Colombo Plan, while incorporating the Pacific, goes no further west than Pakistan.

This somewhat limited conceptual boundary-framing of Asia is, however, problematic. In particular, it leaves out locations and regions that historically were very much considered part of Asia. After all (particularly from Australia's perspective), we need to remember that the object of Edward Said's seminal work, *Orientalism*, was *not* those parts of Asia identified with the term orient (the Far East), but rather the Middle East. Similarly, the very name (and concept of) Asia itself was applied by the ancient Greeks, not with reference to those parts of the continent we generally associate it with, but with Anatolia in present-day Turkey.

Moreover, the concept of an Asian (or pan-Asian) identity, as connected with such intellectuals and thinkers as Rabindranath Tagore, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, or Okakura Tenshin, that emerged in the anticolonial discourses of the late 19th, early 20th centuries was very much referenced against Europe (or, more broadly, the West).

Arguably, both Europe and Asia are mutually intertwined constructs, with equally fluid, shifting delineations. Thus, in teasing out Asia (or, for that matter, Europe), it makes more sense to do so not from locations (such as India or China) that are unproblematically considered Asian, but from the continent's ambivalent edges. These are places like Australia, Japan, Turkey (possibly even Russia and the Philippines), which have historically, and into the present, engaged in one way or another with questions of belonging, or not belonging, to Asia. For instance, in Australia, Asia from the earliest days of colonial history has been a constant undercurrent within narratives of national identity, as somewhere that Australia wants to distance itself from *or* alternately seek acceptance into; a theme addressed, for instance, in the works of historian David Walker.

Japan's relationship with the mainland has similarly been characterised by dynamics of identification/disidentification, particularly following the establishment of the modernising (and 'civilising') Meiji state in the late-19th century. As with Australia, there is a substantial body of academic work on Japan's ambivalent intertwinings with 'Asia'.

Bringing Turkey into this conversation on conceptual mappings of Asia might, at first glance, appear a strange choice. However, Turkey occupies a special position in the global imaginary by dint of it straddling geographically, and indeed culturally, the two worlds/continents of Asia and Europe.

More so than other societies seemingly positioned between or across different physical and cultural worlds (such as Japan or Australia), the metaphor of the bridge has long been applied to Turkey as well as to the Ottoman Empire that preceded the establishment of the modern republic in 1923—a bridge between East and West, Europe and Asia, Europe and the Middle East, the Christian and Islamic worlds.

The notion of being both a bridge between two worlds *and* being caught in the faultlines, is, as Ayşe Zarakol argues, 'sometimes seen as a weakness that needs to be overcome (by choosing one side over the other) and sometimes as a blessing that needs to be exploited'. This ambivalence is given expression, for instance, in a poem in Bozkurt Güvenç's work *Turkish identity* (*Türk kimliği*), where he poses such rhetorical questions as: 'Are we Asians, or Europeans? shaman or Muslim, or secular. Are we a modern society, or a historic bridge? Are we eastern, or Anatolian, or western? who are we?' It even filters down to the level of popular culture—for instance, a tongue-in-cheek image on the Facebook Turkish memes page captures the same sentiment as Güvenç's questions.

As with Japan and Australia, Turkey's relationships with Asia have been characterised by processes of identification at times, and distancing at others. For instance, in the late-Ottoman period, particularly during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II, Turkey played a not insignificant part in the shaping of anticolonial pan-Islamic and/or pan-Asian discourses. Indeed, Istanbul became something of a magnet (often as a place of exile) for early pan-Islamic/pan-Asian activists like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Abdürreşid İbrahim. Dovetailing with these was the influence of pan-Turanic discourses highlighting the central Asian origins of Turkic peoples, and sociocultural and linguistic commonalities with societies in northeast Asia, in

particular, Japan (even today, the Japanese are sometimes referred to as Far Eastern cousins). Significantly, Japan, like Turkey, was at the time also an emerging modernising society, outside of the Euro–American cultural zone, confronting similar issues (like unequal treaties) vis-a-vis western powers. Thus Japan, particularly in the wake of its victory in the 1904–05 Russo-Japanese War, became an important referent for Turkey.

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the modern republic under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923, Turkey's Asia connections took on added significance. The extensive modernisation (and indeed, Europeanisation) project sought to reconfigure earlier more diffuse Ottoman identities pivoted around religion rather than ethnicity or nationality into a singular secular national identity. The pre-Islamic (and shamanistic) central Asian origins of the Turkish peoples were foregrounded, while Islamic/Middle Eastern links were de-emphasised.

In more recent years, particularly over the past decade or so, under the conservative, moderate-Islamist Justice and Development Party, there has been a shift away from highlighting Turkey as a European nation. Instead, these historic links and affinities with Asia have been drawn upon as an aspect of foreign policy, especially in relations with China, South Korea, and Japan. In the case of South Korea and Japan, in particular, the historic cultural and linguistic connections (regardless of whether they are real or imagined) are given particular symbolic weight.

This is the backdrop to a multidisciplinary project that a group of researchers from Turkey, Japan, and Australia have embarked upon. Specifically, using Turkey as a fulcrum, we aim to provide a framework within which historical and contemporary intersections between Turkey and Asia may be reconsidered, and existing boundaries of Asian studies interrogated.

Those involved represent a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and approaches, including history, anthropology, cultural/literary studies, and international relations. However, what we have in common is that we all work on some aspect of Asia, while being physically located on the 'fringes' of the continent, in Japan, Australia and Turkey. Moreover, the reference point for all of us is Turkey. We are all either located there, or we work on Turkey's interactions with countries and regions within Asia (for instance, my own specific research within the broader project is on contemporary contact moments and interactions between Japan and Turkey).

As one of the first milestones of the project, we will be organising a one-day workshop during the ICAS9 conference in Adelaide in July, supported through an Asian Studies Association of Australia Events Funding Grant.

Finally, not without significance, the workshop with its physical location at the southern edge of Asia (in Australia), and its focus on a country on the continent's western fringes (Turkey), is being held in 2015, designated as the official Year of Turkey in Australia and the Year of Australia in Turkey.

Romit Dasgupta is an associate professor, Asian Studies, at the University of Western Australia, and a visiting fellow in the Asian Studies Program in the Graduate School of Social Sciences at Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey.

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Malaysia one step closer to authoritarian rule

The five-year jail sentence imposed on opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim last week raises serious questions about the future of Malaysia's politics and opposition movement.

By James Giggacher

The fate of long-time opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim was decided on 10 February—and along with it the increasingly slim democratic prospects for his native Malaysia.

With his five-year jail sentence for sodomy, the country's rulers aren't so much as goosestepping but making a mad dash towards authoritarian rule… again.

It may already be there, with one Malaysian MP labelling the country an 'electoral authoritarian regime'—elections merely giving the facade of democracy or the 'lipstick on the crocodile'.

Ruled by a potent mix of race politics and economic development, independent Malaysia has always swayed between democracy and authoritarianism—but recent developments show that the pendulum is firmly stuck to the right. This latest swing is based on sodomy, sedition, crackdowns and corrupt courts; and a real fear among the ruling elite that the sun may be setting on their seemingly endless reign.

The Federal Court's decision brings to a close a sorry saga beginning in 1998, when sodomy and corruption charges were first laid against the now 67-year-old Anwar. This latest ruling is based on further allegations made in 2008 and overturns a successful acquittal in 2012. With no more room for appeal, this will be Anwar's third jail sentence and the second for sodomy.

In the immediate aftermath of Tuesday's verdict, Anwar took to Twitter to lambast the courts for a failure of justice and for following the dictates of their political masters.

'In bowing to the political powers, you have effectively murdered the judiciary. You chose to remain on the dark side,' he wrote. He later declared on his website: 'You have sold your souls to the devil'.

Anwar Ibrahim: lambasted the courts for a failure of justice.

The claims aren't that far-fetched. A joint 2000 report from four major international legal organisations found a worrying lack of clear separation between the courts and government in the Southeast Asian nation.

'There are well-founded grounds for concerns as to the proper administration of justice in cases which are of particular interest to the government,' the group, including the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), reported back from its mission.

'This is only a small proportion of the total number of cases which arise, but they are of vital importance to the well-being of the entire system of justice in Malaysia.'

Speaking to Voice of America after last week's verdict, the ICJ's Asia-Pacific regional director Sam Zarifi, said the judicial processes in the Anwar case appeared more about politics than a fair trial.

'The timing of the case and the speed with which they moved through the conviction and the sentencing and not hearing the mitigation case at all … all this suggests very strongly that there is a political motive to this [and] that this is not a proper case,' said Zarifi.

The ICJ also noted that the trial assumed guilt from the outset, and 'the burden was on Anwar Ibrahim to prove that he had a credible defence'.

There can be little doubt that Anwar's protracted trial and conviction have a political edge. Section 377B of Malaysia's penal code, which criminalises same-sex relations, is a relic of British colonial rule and a clear violation of international human rights law.

Even if Anwar did engage in a sexual act with former political aide Mohamad Saiful Bukhari Azlan—an accusation he has always denied—only seven sodomy cases, two involving Anwar, have been prosecuted since the country's independence from British rule in 1957.

There's also the matter of questionable evidence with corrupted semen samples that were only retrieved from the accuser's body 36 hours after the incident was said to have taken place, kept in an unrefrigerated cabinet by the police and submitted for DNA analysis two days later.

Add to that the mysterious meetings that the accuser took with Anwar's main political rival, Najib Razak, and the police commissioner days before the sexual act allegedly took place.

'All neutral observers agree that politics was the key consideration,' says Dr John Funston from the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific in an interview with specialist Southeast Asia studies website *New Mandala* .

As the face of 'cleaner politics', Anwar has been in the sights of Malaysia's rulers for the better part of two decades. Funston notes that as far back as 1998, and the *reformasi* movement which called for an end to corruption and cronyism, a senior officer in Malaysia's intelligence agency the Special Branch, told the US embassy in Malaysia that they were 'going to file charge after charge … so Anwar spent the next 100 years in jail'.

As shocking as the court's decision is, it is hardly surprising considering the perilous path Malaysia has been charting for a number of years.

Human Rights Watch calls this hounding of the former deputy prime minister an erosion of human rights. They blame Prime Minister Najib Razak and his United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)—the keystone in the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition.

As shocking as the court's decision is, it is hardly surprising considering the perilous path Malaysia has been charting for a number of years.

In 2011 there were positive moves towards democratic reform under Najib, including ending a decades-long state of emergency, amending several repressive laws, and repealing the notorious Internal Security Act, with promises to do the same with the catch-all 1948 Sedition Act.

The law gives sweeping powers to the government, and bans any act, speech or publication that brings contempt against the government or Malaysia's nine royal sultans.

It also prohibits inciting race and religious hatred, or questioning the special position of the ethnic Malay majority and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak. Those found guilty could face fines and three years in jail. However, the way wide-ranging provisions of the sedition law are

worded makes them almost impossible to refute in court.

But the more things change, the more they stay the same.

'At the UMNO general assembly in November 2014, following an orchestrated groundswell of claims that the Malay race was under a dire threat, Najib announced that he would not repeal the Sedition Act but actually strengthen it,' explains Funston.

'In 2014, over 20 sedition cases were prosecuted or investigated, directed against members of the opposition, NGOs, journalists, lawyers and even legal academics.'

This trial—the sharp edge in a larger thrust—has stabbed at the heart of the opposition movement. With Anwar behind bars, Barisan Nasional has removed the greatest threat to almost 60 years of uninterrupted rule. Anwar came within a whisker of unseating them in the 2013 general elections.

In a historic victory, his Pakatan Rakyat Party took Barisan Nasional to the line, winning 51 per cent of the popular vote, but only 40 per cent of seats in parliament. Patent gerrymandering saw Barisan Nasional win the elections by 133 seats to 89.

With elections due by 2018, Malaysia's masters clearly want to remove any risk of a repeat. It may just work.

The conviction is likely to end Anwar's direct role in Malaysian politics. In addition to five years in jail, he loses his status as an MP, and is barred from holding any political office for another five years after his release.

The question now becomes: with the man seen as the only person capable of unseating Malaysia's rulers removed, what happens next, and what does it all mean for the country's politics and opposition movement?

Anwar may be able to influence politics from jail, as he was during his first stint in the slammer after his 1999 conviction for 'abuse of power'. There is a sense that this latest conviction may also galvanise the opposition and its support in the country's next election. Anwar now becomes a powerful symbol of oppression in the country.

However, what is a fairly loose and broad coalition must hold together, and it will lack the clear leader and figurehead which helped win the popular vote two years ago. The 2013 elections should have consolidated opposition forces; instead they are scratching each other's eyes out. The situation is compounded by the lack of a clear successor to Anwar. His wife, Wan Azizah, may take the mantle, as she did during his previous incarcerations, but won't be supported by all opposition parties.

Wan Azizah: may take the mantle again

'Without Anwar… uniting the conflicting policies and personalities, maintaining the opposition alliance will be extremely difficult,' says Funston.

As political analyst Kim Quek writes, the Anwar trial is a representation of a greater sellout for the country's democracy and justice.

'Now that the judiciary has virtually been taken over by the executive, and a lame duck parliament limping as rubber stamp for the executive, one wonders how much different Malaysia is from a dictatorship.'

James Giggacher is Asia Pacific editor at the Australian National University's College of Asia and the Pacific and covered Malaysia's 2013 elections for the specialist Southeast Asia academic website New Mandala.

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Mutual fears and suspicions continue to impede Korea reunification talks

The new year declaration by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un that he's open to discussions with South Korea provides a glimmer of hope for some bridge-building between the two regimes in 2015.

By Hyung-A Kim

North–South Korean relations have for 70 years teetered on the verge of war, with the Korean War of 1950–53 gruesomely demonstrating the drastic consequences of attempting to resolve the impasse with guns and bloodshed.

And yet, since that catastrophic lesson in the sheer cost of war, common sense has not prevailed, with multiple incursions and assassination attempts by North Korean agents, and the South clinging to the military might of the United States, including its nuclear umbrella, and its own massive military establishment, to neutralise the North's threats, including nuclear threats.

Surprisingly to many people, including North Korean watchers, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un declared in his new year address that he was open to holding discussions with South Korean President Park Guen-hye, stating, 'Depending on the mood and circumstances to be created, we have no reason not to hold the highest-level talks.'

Kim's declaration, along with several recent events, seems to indicate a thawing of the relationship, at least on the surface. This is so, especially when one considers President Park's Dresden proposal for reunification of March 2014, in which she outlined some potentially workable areas of bilateral collaboration. Despite their initial dismissal of Park's proposal, in October 2014, some of the North's highest officials subsequently paid a short friendly visit to the South that sparked substantial excitement and speculation.

As recently as 6 January, in response to Kim's offer of conditional dialogue, Park publicly said, 'North Korea should come forward for inter-Korean talks and cooperation as soon as possible, to discuss specific projects to establish peace and unification on the Korean peninsula.'

What do these recent statements actually indicate, and what would be accept-able to both sides, including the South Korean people, as feasible initiatives towards their ultimate aspiration of reunification?

Kim Jong-un says there are no reasons not to hold the highest level talks with South Korea.

A significant factor in the scope for dialogue between North and South Korea is the importance given to unification through dialogue by Kim in his new year address. Some relevant excerpts from the official transcript issued on the website of the National Committee on North Korea stated that:

> The north and the south, as they had already agreed, should resolve the national reunification issue in the common interests of the nation transcending the differences in ideology and system ….
>
> And there is no reason why we should not hold a summit meeting if the atmosphere and environment for it are created.
>
> In the future, too, we will make every effort to substantially promote dialogue and negotiations.

Kim's uncannily strong focus on dialogue, however, needs to be

understood in the context of President Park's declaration of her own reunification model which she had announced in a speech in Dresden, Germany. Known as the Dresden Declaration, this model suggested three priority fields of collaboration that could build the foundations for future reunification.

President Park suggested three priority fields of collaboration with the North.

Firstly, her model focuses on *humanity*, prioritising family reunification. Since the Korean War it has been impossible to reunite the families separated by the war; and only since 2000 have a limited number of separated families been able to meet briefly for a few days.

Secondly, her model focuses on *co-prosperity* through the development of inter-Korean infrastructure projects and consequent improvements to the livelihoods of all Korean people.

Thirdly, her model focuses on the *integration* of the people of North and South Korea, redressing the overwhelming absence of people-to-people contact among those on opposite sides of the border.

North Korea initially rejected Park's unification proposal, pointing out that it again indicated South Korea's desire to annex North Korea rather than to unify with it. Yet, the North appears to have now again opened the door to dialogue with the South, although no one can be sure how genuine this thawing of the relationship is and what it will lead to or under what conditions.

It seems quite clear that both Koreas desire the reunification of the peninsula, but both sides also have grave fears and suspicions about the potential political, economic and societal consequences. The North fears that the economically powerful South, with the support of other western/capitalist countries, would, in the course of reunification, effectively absorb the North.

To protect the continued existence of the North Korean regime and ideology, Kim Jong-un does not want the South's allies involved in the reunification process. He thus saw the Dresden Declaration as having been made on a tour around foreign countries touting for international cooperation in resolving what is purely an inter-Korean relations issue, thus leaving Korea's destiny again in the hands of outside forces.

A notable proposal by North Korea to the United States on 9 January is, as reported by the *Korea Times*, that it would temporarily suspend nuclear tests if the United States were to halt its joint military exercises with South Korea this year. The United States has reportedly rejected Kim's offer, according to Yonhap News Agency, which quoted US Department of State spokeswoman Jen Psaki as having said: 'The DPRK statement that inappropriately links routine US–ROK exercises to the possibility of a nuclear test by North Korea is an implicit threat.'

The United States has reportedly rejected Kim's offer to suspend nuclear tests as an implicit threat.

Nevertheless, the United States appears to have agreed to delay its joint military exercises with South Korea this year to early March rather than late February for five days from 20 February, when the two Koreas are expected to hold reunions of families who have been separated by the 1950–53 Korean War. In a nationally televised news conference on 12 January, President Park expressed her hope for the two Koreas to hold this new round of reunions.

In spite of Park's personal hope, the South's perspective in regard to their country's reunification appears to be more complex and highly conditional, mainly because many South Korean people are fearful of the possible economic burden that would befall them as a consequence. Although nearly 87 per cent of the total respondents to a recent survey conducted by one of the leading think-tanks in Seoul, the Asan Institute of Policy Studies, agreed that while unification is necessary, nearly 44 per cent of those surveyed ticked the statement that 'unification is not urgent when the economy gets bad'.

From the South's perspective, reunification would appear to be more complex and highly conditional, mainly because many South Korean people are fearful of the possible economic burden that would befall them as a consequence. Although nearly 87 per cent of the total respondents to a recent survey conducted by one of the leading think-tanks in Seoul, the Asan Institute of Policy Studies, agreed that while unification is necessary, nearly 44 per cent of those surveyed ticked the statement that 'unification is not urgent when the economy gets bad'.

South Korea is the world's 15th largest economy, with a rich, modern 'Korean wave' culture sweeping across Asia and beyond, and North Korea is one of the poorest, with almost zero contact or relationship with the outside world, so the notion of reunification appears practically incomprehensible to modern young South Koreans.

Only 32.2 per cent of respondents in the October 2014 survey, according to the Asian Institute for Policy Studies, for example, were satisfied with the Park government's policy on North Korea, while 47.7 per cent of the total respondents were dissatisfied, with the degree of dissatisfaction for those in their 30s being 62.7 per cent, those in their 40s, 60.2 per cent, and those in their 20s, 50.3 per cent. The older generations in their 50s and 60s, by contrast, showed relatively low degrees of dissatisfaction, of 41.6 per cent and 24.6 per cent respectively.

On this basis, it can be concluded that the majority of the South Korean people are not eager to see their country's reunification at the cost to them of an intolerable economic burden, just as their opinion about North Korea and its people is generally negative.

To summarise, the three-pronged approach proposed by President Park may well begin to build small bridges, without compromising the integrity of each respective regime, but how far these bridges can unify when the respective modes of the two regimes are so far apart is highly problematic.

If Kim's words in his address were genuine, 2015 is perhaps the year for both Park and Kim to narrow their differences in their common goal to achieve reunification of the Korean peninsula, by finding a solution to end the North's nuclear gamble that has persisted for the last two decades.

Hyung-A Kim is Associate Professor of Korean Politics and History at the Australian National University. During 2014 she was Distinguished Professor at Yonsei University in Seoul.

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Sri Lanka opts for normality in Rajapaksa ousting

The surprise election of Maithripala Sirisena as president last month reflects a desire for a more open, less authoritarian political process.

By Damien Kingsbury

The recent election in Sri Lanka of the new president, Maithripala Sirisena, has surprised many who thought that ousted Mahinda Rajapaksa would remain in office more or less for as long as he liked.

After an impressive victory of around 58 per cent in the 2010 elections, changing the constitution to allow the president to run for more than two terms and with his grip on the levers of state power and suppression of dissent, it was widely believed that Rajapaksa would continue to consolidate his hold on Sri Lanka's politics.

President Sirisena—promised a return to something approaching normality.

However, Sri Lanka retained credible vestiges of its former democratic process and the 2015 elections were a fairly accurate representation of the wishes of the country's majority. Rajapaksa's popularity following the defeat of the separatist Tamil Tigers in 2009 was countered by increasingly high levels of corruption and nepotism, and being cast as essentially anti-democratic.

Striking a different note, Rajapaksa's opponent and former cabinet member until last November, Sirisena, promised a return to something approaching normality.

As the results of the election started to become clear, it has been claimed that Rajapaksa attempted to stage a coup. That claim is now being investigated by the new attorney-general. What is clear, however, is that the level of support Rajapaksa believed he had from the security services was less than he had anticipated.

Regardless of Rajapaksa's attempt to remain in office, Sirisena is now firmly in control. Sri Lanka's media has breathed a sigh of relief, after more than five years of close control, regular threats, the fleeing overseas of some journalists and the deaths of others.

High levels of official corruption are also being investigated, especially in relation to the Rajapaksa family's involvement in Chinese investments in Sri Lanka. In a high-stakes political game, it is unsurprising that the winner will want to diminish the losing opponent.

But much of Sirisena's attention on the Rajapaksa clan does appear to comply with conventional good governance practices. In this, Rajapaksa has no-one but himself to blame for what looks like an increasingly difficult predicament.

Among promised reforms, Sirisena says he will end Sri Lanka's executive presidency and return the country to being a parliamentary model, as it was until constitutional changes in 1978. From that time on, political power was vested in the formerly largely ceremonial role of the president, initially under a semi-presidential system, in which the president and the prime minister shared power, and then increasingly in which all executive power was vested in the president.

If Sirisena follows through on this promise—and it has been supported by Rajapaksa's parliamentary majority United People's Freedom Alliance—Sri Lanka will be returned to a more accountable and less

authoritarian political process. This appears to correspond to a general appetite for openness by most Sri Lankan people.

Ousted president Mahinda Rajapaksa: claims of coup attempt being investigated.

Sri Lanka's politics has, since the early 1970s, been subject to strong political shifts, with parliamentary majorities often controlling more than two-thirds of seats and hence holding constitution-changing power. However, with the election of Sirisena and the loss of Rajapaksa's patronage, Sri Lanka's parliament can be expected to return to something close to balance at the parliamentary elections called by Sirisena for a few months' time—two years ahead of schedule.

While a significant proportion of Sri Lanka's Sinhalese ethnic majority voted against Rajapaksa, they perhaps comprised a minority in favor of Sirisena. His vote was bolstered by overwhelming support from the Tamil and Muslim minorities, who between them make up around a quarter of the population.

The ethnic minority vote against Rajapaksa reflected their sense of alienation following the state's military victory over the separatist Tamil Tigers, which resulted in a 'winner takes all' triumphalism. Added to a growing sense of majority Buddhist chauvinism, Muslims, perhaps 10 per cent of the population, felt increasingly isolated.

For Sri Lanka's Tamil population, the events of 2009 did not mark the end of a war and the beginning of a healing process but the military occupation by overwhelmingly ethnic Sinhalese soldiers of Tamil lands. There have continued to be widespread reports of rape, disappearances, theft and other human rights abuses. While many Tamils did not support the Tamil Tigers, they have overwhelmingly felt targeted as the 'enemy' by the victorious Sinhalese.

As architect of the destruction of the Tamil Tigers and the continuing occupation of the north of the country, Rajapaksa was widely seen by ethnic Tamils as the problem rather than the solution to the question of inter-ethnic harmony.

The problem now facing the Tamils, and to a lesser extent Sri Lanka's Muslims, is that while Sirisena has lifted repression of dissent within the Sinhalese community, there was no promise and, to date, no sign that he will do so for the country's ethnic minorities. In some respects, then, Sirisena reflects Sri Lanka's past, before the rise of the executive presidency but within an environment still marked by ethnic discrimination and turmoil.

It may be that Sirisena will move to heal the deep rift between Sri Lanka's divided communities, and that he has an inclusive reformist agenda. But, as a former member of Rajapaksa's government and occasionally acting defence minister during the war with the Tamil Tigers, there is no guarantee that is his intention.

Professor Damien Kingsbury holds a personal chair in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Deakin University, and is author of Sri Lanka and the responsibility to protect: politics, ethnicity and genocide, *Routledge, 2012*.

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Also by Damien Kingsbury

Sri Lankan government unmoved by UN report on human rights abuses

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Modi's new broom aims to sweep India clean

Narendra Modi enlists the Mahatma in his ambitious campaign to make India a clean place in five years.

By Robin Jeffrey and Assa Doron

Narendra Modi, India's powerful new prime minister, chose Mahatma Gandhi's birthday on 2 October to launch a 'Clean India!' or *Swachh Bharat* campaign. He committed big funding to making India a clean place within five years—by the time of Gandhi's 170th birthday in 2019.

Modi's Clean India! goal is admirable. Public spaces in India can be filthy. Open defecation—the result of lack of options and often, in rural areas, of preference—is widespread. More than half the country is estimated to defecate outdoors.

Indians are being urged to be more community-minded when it comes to waste. This billboard reads: 'How long will you think only of the home. Have some shame. Clean up your thinking.'

The spread of disease through random defecation increases child mortality and can lead to stunted growth. Household waste is thrown into the streets in many towns and cities and left to sporadic collections and the forces of nature. Rapid urbanisation produces vast amounts of construction and demolition debris. Rapidly growing cities and the consuming middle class generates an estimated 65 million tonnes of garbage a year. (Australia produced 44 million tonnes in 2007; India has 50 times more people).

Mahatma Gandhi was a social reformer, not just a nationalist, and one of his constant invocations was to clean up the country. 'Nothing has been so painful to me,' he wrote, 'as to observe our insanitation throughout the length and breadth of the land.' For Prime Minister Modi, a cleaner India will signal progress and development. And his clever campaign has political advantages. By putting Mahatma Gandhi, the 'father of the nation', at its centre, the campaign enables Mr Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), never closely associated with Gandhi in the past, to celebrate a Mahatma of their own making. Until now, it was the Congress Party that claimed Gandhi as its own, and Congress politicians in their wilder moments would denounce the BJP's forebears as opponents—even enemies—of the nation's father.

Not only was Clean India! launched on Gandhi's birthday, its publicity uses Gandhi's round steel-rimmed spectacles as a logo. 'Gandhi's dream—Modi's mission', the posters say. The BJP's Gandhi is the custodian of cleanliness. Gandhi, the apostle of egalitarianism and inter-religious harmony, is covered with a dust cloth and put at the back of the national shop.

In another act of symbol-rustling, Clean India! has taken the street sweeper's broom as an icon. Such celebration of the broom has an advantage. A broom is the election symbol of the Aam Aadmi [Common Man] Party, a new organisation that has emerged as a serious rival to the BJP in New Delhi and potentially elsewhere—as demonstrated by the . party's spectacular victory in the Delhi National Capital Territory elections earlier this month, when it won 67 out of 70 seats. 'Who owns the broom?—We do', appeared to be

part of the Clean India! message of Mr Modi's party.

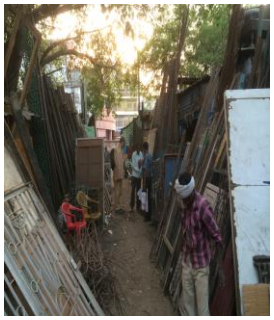
Photos of Mr Modi wielding the broom aimed to emphasise his humble, lower-caste origins—someone who knows the exhausting scrabble of everyday life. (Recall his oft-proclaimed origins as the son of a teashop owner?)

Lean pickings: child waste collectors at New Delhi railway station.

India struggles, however, to cope with enduring ritual oppressions and extreme inequalities. The awkward photos of 2 October 2014, in which business, social and political leaders took up the broom, underlined an inescapable 'do as I say, not as I do' tension. Written on the faces of some of the broom-wielders was 'Which end of this thing do I hold and what do I do now?'

Most of elite India, who brandished brooms for the cameras, come from higher castes. But most of the people who have dealt with waste in India historically, and largely today too, are Dalits (Scheduled Castes in bureaucratic language, 'untouchables' in the language of long ago) or others of relatively low caste. Much of upper-caste India feels uncomfortable dealing with 'waste'. In Hindi, garbage can be described as *chhuta*—'touched' or tainted, and people who carry away such things are *achhut*—untouchable.

The Clean India! campaign aims at a desirable goal. But even if it succeeds, it will produce losers. Millions of people augment their incomes by collecting, sorting and reselling waste. Some are municipal servants, poorly paid but at least on a salary. Other waste collectors are freelancers, paid by individual householders to remove rubbish. People don't ask where the garbage goes after it leaves their doorstep. Often it ends up in any available open space.



Any old iron. An iron recycling centre in Varanasi.

Satisfactory waste management requires investment in technology and infrastructure and enforcement of rules and standards. Many local governments in India are contracting with waste-management corporations to clean their jurisdictions. But corporate waste management requires careful study, segregation of waste, punctuality of workers, regularity of collection and relentless maintenance.

Waste has value. A waste-management company is likely to claim ownership of the waste generated in its territory. A company may incinerate waste in expensive furnaces to make electricity, compost it to make saleable fertiliser and methane gas and recycle the 'good stuff'—the metals, glass and paper that have fluctuating value. Enforcement of a company's exclusive claims drives informal waste handlers off the streets and out of their tiny but vital business.

In best-case outcomes, non-governmental organisations or socially farsighted companies absorb informal waste handlers into the relentless waste systems that modern cities and wasteful middle classes require. But corporate waste-work entails uniforms, punctuality, fixed (low) wages, thoroughness, controlled landfills—and no rights to the things of value that turn up in the daily collections. Not everyone can see the benefits of transforming oneself from a desperately poor self-employed waste-picker to a very

poor employee of a no-nonsense capitalist enterprise.

A municipal rubbish dump near Dharamsala.

Clean India! is one of the tests that the new prime minister and his BJP government have set for themselves. Can they make the campaign more than a picnic for advertising agencies and photographers? Will it leave, as so many Indian campaigns before it, only a few battered relics and no systematic or cultural change? Will the campaign link the BJP with 'the father of the nation' and break the bond that the Congress Party once regarded as securely theirs? And will it create widespread waste management that is systematic, effective and sustainable—and includes those millions who today eke out a living through the handling of waste?

Professor Robin Jeffrey is affiliated with the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore.

Dr Assa Doron is a Senior Fellow, Anthropology, and ARC Future Fellow 2012–16 at the Australian National University.

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Also by Robin Jeffrey

Anxiety persists over India's new government

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Haiyan's lingering aftermath

Fifteen months after super typhoon Haiyan battered the Philippines, life on the devastated Visayan Islands struggles to return to normal.

By James Francis Warren

On 8 November 2013, the most powerful cyclonic storm on record to make landfall in the Philippine archipelago—Haiyan, named Yolanda in the Philippines—struck the Visayan Islands.

Moving on a west-north-westerly trajectory, super typhoon Haiyan had maximum sustained winds of 315 km/h, and gusts of 379km/h when it swept in from the Pacific and hit exposed coastal fishing towns on the east coasts of Samar and Leyte.

Typhoon Haiyan: path of destruction. Source. ABC News.

With its brutal winds and resulting storm surge, the storm killed at least 6300 people and, at its peak, displaced more than 4.4 million residents and damaged 1.4 million homes. The World Health Organisation reported that, at the height of the disaster, over 398 thousand people were being housed in 1551 evacuation centres and that more than 600 health facilities had been damaged or destroyed.

On Leyte, the city of Tacloban and its environs were obliterated after catching the full force of the winds. But it was the storm surge that caused the heaviest damage and

killed the most people. The surge coincided with a high tide, sending an enormous wall of water crashing through Tacloban's low-lying areas and destroying nearly every building there, including the nearby airport.

Haiyan left a 600 kilometre-wide swath of destruction across the Visayan islands of Samar, Bohol and Panay. Most of the traumatised survivors spent their first few weeks sheltering in the ruins of destroyed buildings, or makeshift hovels. It was believed that in Tacloban alone, where hardly a building was left standing, 10 000 people died. Many already poor coastal fishing and farming communities in the central Visayas were destroyed.

Haiyan's fury caused unprecedented economic losses. Source: BBC News Asia

In Guiuan, a fishing town of 40 000 people in eastern Samar, which was the first to be hit as Haiyan swept in from the Pacific, the damage was catastrophic—described by American meteorologist Jeff Masters as 'perhaps the greatest wind damage any city on earth has endured from a tropical cyclone in the past century'.

Over a month later the unimaginable magnitude of the disaster continued to unfold. The United Nations announced that more than 14.9 million people had been affected, up to 5 million of them children. More than 4.3 million people remained displaced and the livelihoods of 2 million had been destroyed.

Given the enormous scale of the disaster, the overwhelmed, under-resourced and still shocked Philippine government faced huge constraints. Local medical infrastructure was gone, medical supplies had been washed or blown away, and many local health staff and first responders were either dead or unaccounted for.

The scale of the initial emergency became a logistical nightmare. Communication systems were offline, local and international rescue teams were unable to secure air and ocean transport to reach the more remote areas with essential supplies of food, water, medicine and shelter, and bad weather hampered relief efforts.

The Philippine government had always relied on the Red Cross and other members of the international community to provide relief and humanitarian assistance for typhoon-prone areas. But the disastrous impacts of typhoon Haiyan were unprecedented. The Philippines suffers an estimated $US1.6 billion in losses annually from calamities, but, according to environmental sociologist Tarique Niazi, Haiyan's economic losses alone were valued at $US15 billion, or 5 per cent of the Philippine's gross domestic product (GDP) of around $US300 billion.

The ongoing massive relief effort is expected to last for years as businesses, non-governmental organisations and charities help rebuild the worst-affected areas. Over a year later, more than 2.5 million people remain without proper housing. In addition, more than 100 000 displaced people are still living in unsafe coastal areas in temporary shelters made from tarpaulins or plastic sheeting.

Pyschosocial problems have increased as displaced communities and grief-stricken individuals struggle to restore their lives and livelihoods. The lingering impacts of Haiyan have adversely affected the lives of millions of Filipinos and pushed them further into poverty, with many still living in evacuation centres while having to continue to pay the mortgage on their destroyed homes.

In the central Philippines, there has been a constant struggle with the

forces of nature and global capital to balance escalating production costs and tenancy arrangements of monocrop economies against diminishing livelihoods. That extreme weather should turn against Visayan farmers with such venom is a blow from which tens of thousands have found it difficult to recover.

A Filipino girl pours water into a bucket next to a ship that was washed ashore a year ago by typhoon Haiyan in Tacloban. Photograph: Ezra Acayan/NurPhoto/Rex.

Agriculture has reached a lamentable state in various typhoon-prone areas of the Visayas. Farmers are facing growing indebtedness and uncertainty about their future on the land, and if conditions of deprivation and social inequality continue to persist, there will be periodic starvation in the future.

Although the Tacloban economy appears to be recovering, several large typhoons since Haiyan have thwarted efforts to resuscitate the devastated farmlands, coconut plantations and fishing fleets of the regional economy. At the end of 2014, charities reported large numbers of indebted people leaving for Manila and other cities in search of work, including young women entering the sex-industry to support their rural families.

Typhoon Haiyan also affected the national economy. In 2014, the Philippines experienced lower growth due to the fallout from the storm despite major reconstruction getting underway. The World Bank predicts the Philippine's GDP will grow by 6.6 per cent—slightly lower than its pre-Haiyan economic growth forecast of 6.7 per cent.

Cyclonic storms have helped shape the character—physically, economically, socially and culturally—of particular regions of the Philippines. A well-developed culture of response to disasters, rather than a deeply embedded culture of mitigation, has existed among Philippine governments, donors and humanitarian organisations. But, in the aftermath of Haiyan, that kind of short-term thinking to strategic disaster management no longer prevails to the same extent.

Further government support and cross-sectoral cooperation are needed to expand the Philippines's institutional and legal framework to ensure environmental sustainability and to manage the risk posed by these emerging super storms, which are likely to increase in intensity and size with global warming.

The effects of global warming—in particular an increase in cyclonic storms like Haiyan—offer a frightful warning not just for the Philippines but for the planet itself. As Tarique Niazi noted: 'The cumulative losses in lives and livelihoods, homes and hearths, businesses and infrastructure have no parallel in Philippines history, just as Haiyan has no precedent in the annals of meteorology.'

James Francis Warren is emeritus professor in Southeast Asian Modern History at Murdoch University.

This article has been published on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

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Gender inequality persists in Japanese politics

Despite professed enthusiasm from the Abe government to increase the number of women in the workforce and in leadership positions, the statistics on women in politics in Japan are grim.

By Emma Dalton

Anyone with a passing interest in contemporary Japanese politics will have heard of 'Abenomics'—the bundle of policies created under the Abe government for the purpose of reigniting Japan's stagnant economy. Prime Minster Abe apparently did not come up with the name, but it is very catchy and seems to have stuck.

There are three main elements to Abenomics, the third of which is a package of structural economic reforms. Within these reforms is 'womenomics'—a set of policies that aim to increase the number of women in the workforce and also increase the number of women in leadership positions.

Ensuring more women remain in the workforce rather than leave it after having children, and enabling them to reach higher positions will, apparently, increase Japan's economic productivity. Certainly it makes economic sense to better harness the female portion of the population in the labour market. According to an International Monetary Fund report, if Japan's female labour force participation rate increases from 63 per cent in 2010 to 70 per cent by 2030—which would bring it to the level of other G7 countries—the GDP would increase by 4 per cent. The report goes on to predict that if the female labour participation rate were to increase even further, to that of northern European countries, GDP would increase by a further 4 per cent.

As for specific measures in place to achieve higher numbers of women in the workforce and more women in positions of power, upon prompts from the government and relevant government agencies, many private companies have implemented a number of 'positive action' policies. For example, almost 60 per cent of member companies of *Keidanren* (Japan Business Federation) have implemented policies that aim to increase the number of women in managerial and executive positions, some with specific numerical targets and deadlines.

Despite this enthusiasm for empowering women in the workforce and an apparent drive to increase the number of women in power in the private sector and public service, there remains an eerie silence on the issue of gender inequality in politics.

Haruko Arimura: well-known for her conservative views.

The statistics on women in politics in Japan are grim. In local and regional councils, women occupy approximately 12 per cent of seats. On a national level, the percentage of women elected to the Lower House in 1946, the first year women could run for office, was 8 per cent. Almost 70 years later, that figure is now 9.5 per cent.

The percentage in the Upper House is somewhat better at 16 per cent. In the Diet as a whole, women occupy 12 per cent of seats, which places Japan at the bottom of the table amongst industrialised countries with regards to female political representation, and puts it on par with Nigeria, Congo and Bahrain. Prime Minister Abe's current cabinet has two women in it. Eriko Yamatani and Haruko Arimura are well known for their conservative views, including towards gender equality.

Abe's appointment of Haruko Arimura, who opposes the idea that married couples should have the right to retain separate surnames and holds conservative views on women's reproductive health rights, to Minister for State for Gender Equality, is indicative of the Abe government's ambivalent approach to gender equality.

The government's prioritised focus on womenomics and Abe's public statements about it in international arenas might suggest a recent feminist awakening in the corridors of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government. In fact, the government has ostensibly been proactively pursuing a 'gender-equal society' since the implementation of the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society in 1999. Many of the policies touted as part of womenomics have been in place since then. 'Positive action' measures, for example, to increase the number of women in senior positions and in 'decision making roles' are a major part of the Basic Law.

Yet Upon the directive of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and in the wake of many gender-equity policies implemented by the government over the last decade and a half, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has been documenting the uptake of 'positive action' measures, including numerical targets and quotas, in the private sector.

The dissonance between the plethora of policies to put more women to work and the lack of policies to include more women in politics is striking.

Yet there has been minimal pursuit, by any ministry of the political parties' measures to address gender inequality in politics. This is left mostly to frustrated women's groups. When asked by women's groups, such as the Alliance of Feminist Representatives and the Women's Action Network, about the possibility of introducing gender quotas as a form of positive action to increase the number of women elected to office, the opposition Democratic Party of Japan has shown interest, but has failed to follow up on this articulated interest. The LDP simply rejects the idea, on the basis that it nominates candidates on 'merit'.

As sociologist and policy expert Mari Osawa notes, over the last few years, the men in the LDP have realised that 'equality is good for business.' Language in official documents and speeches makes this clear. Womenomics is about 'utilising' women as 'human resources'. It is best understood as having emerged in the context of a government facing prolonged economic recession and seeking solutions to the issues of low fertility and an aging population.

While encouraging women to participate more in the workforce makes economic sense, the benefits of having more women in politics are perhaps not as clear to LDP powerbrokers. Putting measures in place to ensure more women are elected to office would mean a redistribution of power—it would mean that the men at Nagatacho (the location of the Diet) would have to make way for women and their ideas and opinions, and in the

process, relinquish some of their privilege and power.

The DPJ's Masaharu Nakagawa is heading a bipartisan group to look at legalising an electoral quota system.

The lack of political will by the leaders of the LDP to address gender inequality within the ranks of the party and the failure by the government, despite both domestic and international pressure, to encourage other parties to address the issue raises questions about the sincerity of the LDP government's recent enthusiasm for policies that aim to empower women. Until the LDP takes concrete measures to address the enduring gender imbalance in representative politics, and in its own ranks, the ethos of the 'gender-equal society' that apparently underpins policies to create a society 'where women shine' is questionable.

Indications of change have begun to appear. In welcome news for frustrated women's groups, on 26 January, a group of bipartisan Diet members was formed, with the objective of legalising an electoral quota system. The group is headed by DPJ's Masaharu Nakagawa and LDP's Seiko Noda is the deputy head.

Dr Emma Dalton is a lecturer at the Japanese Studies Research Institute at Kanda University of International Studies and the author of a book Women and politics in contemporary Japan, due to be published in March.

This article has been published on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

Conference will mark 70th anniversary since end of war with Japan

The concluding conference in a series of five conferences charting the reconciliation process between Japan and its neighbours since the end of the war will be held at the University of Sydney, from 30 September to 2 October 2015.

Titled 'Wounds, scars, and healing: civil society and postwar Pacific Basin reconciliation', the conference will mark the 70th anniversary since the end of the war.

The conferences, which have been held annually since 2011—in Sydney, Seoul and Kyoto—have charted how Japan and its neighbours have negotiated a fragile but real transition towards lasting peace and reconciliation since the war.

Previous conferences explored measures taken at official and government level, gestures of memorial diplomacy and the impact of the arts, literature and cinema in challenging stereotypes and offering new grounds for understanding.

The final conference will examine the significant role of civil society in contributing to the process of healing

A number of cultural events will be associated with the conference, including the premier performance of a Noh drama**,** *Oppenheimer,* written by Allan Marett.

Submissions for panel proposals and individual papers are due by **30 April 2015.** Until the conference homepage is available in March, enquiries should be made to Dr Yasuko Claremont or Dr Roman Rosenbaum.

For information on past conferences, see the *School of Languages and Cultures Magazine*, Issue 29, June 2014, and the conference homepage.

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Guilt and shame linger over Indonesia's 1965–66 killings

Many Indonesians risked their lives to help fugitives from the anti-communist purges that marked the birth of the New Order regime—but their stories remain untold.

By Vannessa Hearman

In spite of the extensive violence against the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in 1965–66, sections of the party's leadership and activists, as well as its mass base, survived the anti-communist purges.

They managed to do so because the Army and its propaganda campaign did not succeed in completely alienating Indonesians from their fellow citizens and comrades. Many people were not immediately convinced by the campaign or supportive of the new regime, and found the witch-hunts repugnant.

The nature of clandestine activities is such, however, that even today—in spite of the need for a national accounting of the events of 1965–66—the helping of fugitives during this time remains a grey area that is still difficult to research and publicise.

The mass killings of PKI members and sympathisers occurred as a result of a failed coup on 30 September 1965, which was blamed on the party. Seven high-ranking army officers, including Armed Forces Chief General Ahmad Yani, were kidnapped and killed by the 30 September Movement, a grouping consisting of sections of the military.

The Movement's leadership argued that they took pre-emptive action to save President Sukarno from an imminent coup by the Army leadership. The facts surrounding the plot, and the Movement's origins and intent, are still debated today.

The propaganda war against the PKI associated the party with the 30 September Movement. This was possible because of the presence of a number of leftist volunteers at the Halim Airbase in Jakarta on the days that the Movement was most active, and by the suggestion that PKI chairman D.N. Aidit and the party's Special Bureau had had discussions with Movement leaders before the coup attempt. Lacking support in the Armed Forces, the Movement was isolated and defeated by the Army within days.

Major General Suharto (*at right, foreground*) attends a funeral for generals assassinated on 5 October 1965.

The Army then moved against a larger enemy, spearheading a suppression campaign against its main political rival, the PKI. The campaign involved intense violence and media propaganda against the left. Half a million people were killed in the anti-communist purges from October 1965, mostly in Java and Bali. More were imprisoned for varying lengths of time, frequently without trial.

When the purges began, many leftists were unprepared for their ferocity. The PKI and its mass organisations of women, farmers, students, youth groups and trade unions were supported by more than 20 million Indonesians, according to Aidit in 1965. From being feted to being hunted overnight, the party's followers were unaccustomed to the clandestine existence they were now forced to lead. Some, like Oey Hay Djoen, who had been actively involved in the left-wing cultural organisation Lekra (People's Cultural Institute), refused to run and hide because they disagreed with the

accusation that the PKI had masterminded the coup attempt. They would prove they were unafraid by not going into hiding.

However, as evidence mounted of mass killings of the left in the countryside, activists went on the run to avoid capture or violence. Support networks enabled fugitives to survive on the run for two years or more, in spite of Army instructions not to assist the PKI in any way.

The Provisional People's Consultative Assembly passed a decree in 1966 banning the party and associated mass organisations. As this decree remains in force, I found when researching these support networks that it was more likely for the fugitives to reflect on these acts of kindness, rather than for the 'rescuers' to speak about what they did. The secretive nature of these acts means that the rescuers are often difficult to trace, and information about their deeds survives predominantly in the oral accounts of the people they helped.

Why did so many Indonesians agree to risk their safety to shelter or provide for the fugitives? First, they were reluctant to cooperate with the Army because they were suddenly required to cut ties with communists, many of whom were their workmates, colleagues, relatives and friends. Their willingness to help those on the run also attests to the political uncertainty at the time.

Differences within the military and the survival of tattered remnants of the PKI led to a situation in which the new regime's victory was not assured. The purges also gradually extended to target pro-Sukarno activists such as those on the left wing of the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI). Harnessed effectively, these elements, if combined, could have spelt trouble for Suharto's New Order regime. The regime that was to govern Indonesia for the next three decades had a shaky start.

In hindsight, such opposition movements might seem ridiculous given the seemingly omnipotent strength of the New Order.

Glimpses of this opposition movement could be seen up to 1969, with the fragmentation and decentralisation of opposition forces such as in Borneo/Kalimantan and in East and Central Java.

In hindsight, such opposition movements might seem ridiculous given the seemingly omnipotent strength of the New Order. The opposition was certainly outnumbered and outgunned—as the counterinsurgency Trisula Operation in East Java, from June to September 1968, showed when thousands of New Order soldiers and auxiliaries, aided by tanks, artillery and air power, decisively defeated a small PKI-led base in mountainous areas in south Blitar.

Putmainah, one of those who lived on the run until her capture in 1968 in south Blitar.

However, the many acts of kindness and resistance by ordinary people that enabled many fugitives to survive remain largely unresearched. These acts, too, constituted a form of opposition—though scattered, fragmented and less dramatic than the early attempts to take-up arms in Java and Borneo.

Some fugitives returned to their hometowns, usually in the bigger cities where anonymity was easier to achieve and sought refuge with their families. In contrast prominent activists often sought refuge away from their families, because they had been identified as targets of the military or raiding gangs.

One man, Harsutejo, who had been a history lecturer and a member of the Indonesian Graduates' Association, headed for Jakarta after he was imprisoned for six months in Malang. Upon arrival in the capital, he cut ties with his family, took on a new name and found work in a private foreign bank, where he worked until his retirement. He laid low until it was safe enough to contact his wife to ask her to join him. For decades, the couple had very little contact with their families in East Java, but they survived, unlike many of Harsutejo's cousins and brother.

Other fugitives did the opposite. They relied squarely on political networks to avoid capture. While living on the run, lower ranking cadres managed to act as couriers themselves and to find food and medicines for those in prison.

As killings and raids intensified in rural areas, political refugees arrived in the city of Surabaya, which became the gathering point, whenever possible, for surviving PKI leaders from the rural areas. Local groups that protected and hid party cadres and activists grew, partly driven by the fugitives themselves. But the city itself was not necessarily easy to reach, because of curfews and military checkpoints in many parts of the province. Those activists who arrived in the city but did not have connection with these networks also suffered alone on the streets of Surabaya.

Members of my own family felt this way. They felt they could not have refused military orders to turn over their tobacco warehouses in Jember, East Java, to the military, who used it as their base during their nightly operations into the surrounding plantations to rout out 'communist' trade unionists. In the mornings, my uncle rode in a horse-drawn cart on his way to the warehouses. He rode past the corpses littering the streets and he felt somehow implicated in the mounting death toll in the Jember area.

There is enormous guilt and shame among some Indonesians about what occurred in this period.

The company tried hard to protect its workers and insulate them from the violence, but still one staff member was taken, never to be seen again. Years later he wanted to recount this to me in the course of my research. He insisted on being interviewed. But always at the last moment, upon seeing the voice recorder, he changed his mind. Some, like he, believed they should have done more to stop the violence. In this context, stories of survival and small acts of resistance in the climate of fear and violence of the mid-1960s are vital to mitigate this guilt and for people to understand their experiences and actions.

The continuing ban on the PKI and its affiliated organisations, however, means Indonesians are still hesitant to speak about how the violence affected them and their choices of action, because of concerns about how they might be perceived.

Dr Vannessa Hearman is joint winner of the ASAA's 2014 Thesis Prize. This article is based on her prize-winning thesis, entitled 'Dismantling the "fortress": East Java and the long transition to Suharto's New Order Regime (1965–1968)'. *Dr Hearman is lecturer and Acting Chair, Department of Indonesian Studies, at the University of Sydney. She is also a member of the ASAA council as the Southeast Asia region representative.*

This article has been published on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

See Joint winners for 2014 ASAA Thesis Prize.

Also by Vanessa Hearman

Remembering Munir

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Portrait of a pragmatist

Hun Sen's Cambodia. By Sebastian Strangio. Yale University Press, 2014. 322pp.

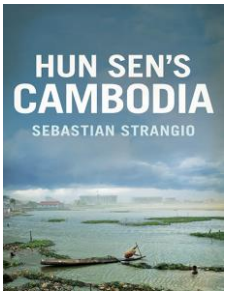
By Jonathan Bogais

During a recent conversation, a foreign affairs official confided to me his views on the remarkable development experienced by Cambodia in the last 30 years but, as I listened to him, it struck me as amazing that he knew so little about the recent history of this country.

Like many others, he was an unconscious victim of constant propaganda on how better life has been for Cambodian people since the end of the Khmer Rouge era, since the signature of the 1991 Paris Agreements that led to the deployment of UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia), and since international development aid started to flow in 1992.

Little did he know that what started out as an investment in Cambodia's future in the early 1990s evolved into an entrenched development complex that eroded democracy, undermined the livelihoods of the poor, and gave powerful elites a free hand to keep plundering the nation's resources for their on gain.

Against this backdrop, the new book by Sebastian Strangio, *Hun Sen's Cambodia,* sheds considerable light on Prime Minister Hun Sen's rise to power, his grip on the country, and his long-lasting turbulent relationship with international donors. How did this man, whose political journey started when he left school in 1969 (aged 17) to join the Communist rebellion, and who was appointed foreign minister at 27—when he had never been outside Cambodia or Vietnam—become one of the longest serving leaders in the world?



Most of the people who have met Hun Sen admit that he does not believe in any ideology, and he acts out of pragmatism only. I have met him three times on different occasions and observed his uncanny ability to bend with the political wind and manipulate the best of his interlocutors. His faith in himself is remarkable and, as far as he is concerned, the past actions of foreign powers indemnify him from criticism of any kind. He said, in 1995: 'Let me say this to the world: whether or not you want to give aid to Cambodia is up to you, but do not discuss Cambodia's affairs too much.' In response to US criticisms, Hun Sen threatened anti-American demonstrations and called for US$20 billion reparation for the B-52 bombings of the 1960s and 1970s.

Hun Sen—remarkable faith in himself.

Strangio lifts the veil from Pol Pot (Saloth Sar)'s Faustian partners in the West, without whom he would never have seized power, and who later restored and sustained him in exile, in the service of their own imperial imperatives.

In September 1979, the UN General Assembly refused to recognise Hun Sen's Vietnamese-backed government and voted instead to continue recognising the Khmer Rouge's Democratic Kampuchea (DK) as Cambodia's legitimate government—despite evidence of genocide committed under its ruling between 1975 and 1979. DK was the first government in exile to be accorded that privilege. Washington's overriding strategic interest was the

isolation of the Soviet Bloc and Vietnam. Cambodia and its suffering was of secondary importance.

With Hun Sen's rise over the past two decades comes 'Hunsenomics', a blend of old-style patronage, elite charity and predatory market economics. Hunsenomics has succeeded in forging a stable pact among Cambodia's ruling elites, but has done little to tackle poverty. It evolved in reaction to outside pressures and the demands of foreign aid donors, resulting in 'reforms à la carte' to appease donors while resisting any change that would throw light on opaque operations. The effect has been to concentrate Cambodia's wealth in relatively few hands selected by Hun Sen himself.

Western governments accept Hun Sen because nothing can be done without him, either for Cambodia or for themselves. Working with him, however, means accepting his terms of engagement and that's where it ends up: not with democracy and human rights, but with partnership—and paralysis, as Strangio rightly points out.

Meanwhile, with each passing year, more international corporations are moving into the country, and the World Bank and Asian Development Bank continue to apply their neoliberal economic models in apparent disregard for Cambodia's political and social context.

As in many other developing countries, free market templates have fuelled economic growth, yielding an impressive annual crop of GDP growth figures, but they have also produced a typhoon capitalism that has empowered a predatory elite, opened up a massive gap between rich and poor, and undercut one of their supposedly central priorities: poverty reduction.

When the UN pitched its blue tents in 1992, hundreds of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) sprang up overnight. With millions in foreign aid, foreign advisers and consultants arrived by the plane-load bringing development chaos. The result—according to Strangio—is more than an aid economy, it is an aid society, marked by relationships of dependence at every level between donors, government officials, NGOs and ordinary people.

Decisions about aid are not made in Phnom Penh, but in faraway capitals, each pursuing its own institutional and foreign policy agenda. Calls for more 'coordination', more 'capacity-building', and more consultants to write more reports that will end up collecting dust on a shelf in an NGO office somewhere abound.

From the perspectives of the Cambodian villagers, one NGO treats the people as a subject of charity; the other as a subject of capacity-building. Both see the rural population as a malleable entity, traumatised by years of conflict, and so in desperate need of guidance from the outside.

There is no intent in Strangio's account to polemicise or debate, but rather to bring to life a persona, an interpretation of the biographical and political career of a man who is now part of Southeast Asian history. I shall strongly recommend *Hun Sen's Cambodia* to the foreign affairs official I referred to earlier, as to anyone interested in Southeast Asia.

Jonathan Bogais is a political sociologist and a specialist in foreign affairs. He is an adjunct associate professor, Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Sydney.

This review has been published on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

Also by Jonathan Bogais.

Religious apartheid in Myanmar

Cambodians continue to struggle in an inequitable society

Greed the unseen peril on Myanmar's road to democracy

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Adelaide prepares for Australia's largest-ever Asian studies conference

By Gerry Groot

The largest Asian studies conference ever to be held in Australia will take place in Adelaide in July.

Preparations for the International Convention of Asia Scholars Conference, ICAS9, are well underway for the five-day event, which will be held at the Adelaide Convention Centre from 5–9 July.

Some of Australia's specialist Asian studies associations will hold their conferences as integral parts of ICAS. These include the Chinese Studies Association of Australia (CSAA), the Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia (MSSA) and the South Asian Studies Association of Australia (SASAA). Each association will hold its annual general meeting and have its own keynote speakers.

The theme of ICAS9 is interculturality. 'The interculturality sessions are designed to help develop policy suggestions for government and business in a special partnership,' said conference convenor Dr Gerry Groot said.

'Anyone interested in participating in this part of ICAS should contact me or Dr Amrita Malhi at the University of South Australia (UniSA).

South Australia's three universities—Flinders University, UniSA and the University of Adelaide—are cooperating to bring together as many events as possible.

Former prime minister Bob Hawke is expected to attend the launch of a special program on Pakistan, organised by the UniSA's Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding.

Flinders University will highlight its long-standing connections with Indonesia, while the University of Adelaide will launch its Adelaide Hub on Learning about Indonesia, and run special Asia Business Update sessions as well as highlight European Union–Asia links.

The conference will culminate in the public ICAS9–OzAsia keynote by Ibu Mari Pangestu, one of the highest profile members of the previous Indonesian government and credited as 'the woman behind Indonesia's economic growth'.

Keynote speaker Ibu Mari Pangestu

With over 25 years in academia, international organisations and government, Ibu Mari will talk about lessons from Indonesia for Australia and the world. Her address to ICAS9 delegates will also act as a curtain-raiser for the 2015 OzAsia Festival, featuring Indonesia.

Another keynote speaker will be Professor Takashi Shiraishi, from the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo. Professor Shiraishi is a world-renowned international relations expert with a special interest in South East Asia. His address will be supported by The Japan Foundation, which is also sponsoring a roundtable on regional relations.

The University of Adelaide's Institute of International Trade and its EU Centre of Global Affairs will hold a series of business updates on China, South Asia, Southeast Asia and EU–Asia relations, as well as the implications of free trade agreements.

ICAS9 promises to be a very special event, both in size in nature,' said Dr Groot. 'Some 700 individual papers, panels and roundtable proposals approved so far.

'Although the formal closing date for abstracts is 15 February, those wishing to lodge submissions after that date can do so through the Asian studies associations participating in the event—the Asian Studies Association of Australia, the CSAA, the MSSA and the SASA.

'Anyone having trouble trying to submit should not hesitate to contact me,' Dr Groot said.

Further information is available from the conference website.

Dr Gerry Groot is convenor of ICAS9.

This article has been published on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

AII opens flagship program in India

The Australia India Institute has announced the opening of its flagship program in India, Aii@Delhi.

The program will promote public policy dialogue and academic debate. It will also facilitate research partnerships and serve as a resource hub for academics, policymakers and businesses.

A program of lectures, seminars and events will enable thought leaders from India and Australia to engage on current issues across a diverse range of disciplines.

The Aii @ Delhi will work closely with the Indian government, the Australian High Commission, a range of Indian universities and think tanks to expand the work of the Melbourne-based institute.

Joint winners for 2014 ASAA Thesis Prize

A Murdoch University PhD student who spent four months covertly employed by a construction firm as part of his research, and a specialist in the history of activism, social movements and the Indonesian left are the 2014 joint winners of the ASAA's prestigious Thesis Prize for the best Asian Studies doctoral thesis written in Australia.

Dr Charanpal Bal: worked covertly as part of his research.

Dr Charanpal Bal, who studied at the Asia Research Centre and the School of Management and Governance at Murdoch, and Dr Vannessa Hearmann, a lecturer in Indonesia Studies at Sydney University, will each receive $2000 in prize money.

Dr Bal's thesis, entitled 'The politics of obedience: Bangladeshi migrant workers and the migrant labour regime in Singapore', links adjustments in the Singapore migrant labour regime to patterns of conflict in the workplace, in the case of Bangladeshi construction workers.

Through working at a construction firm in Singapore, Dr Bal was able to record the patterns of workers' daily engagement with immediate supervisors and their employers.

He also travelled to labour-sending communities in Bangladesh, where he was able to link workers' grievances and struggles in the workplace to their own migration objectives, their family and community's expectation of that migration and the political economy of the recruitment process.

Since completing his thesis, Dr Bal has had a journal article accepted for publication by the *Journal of*

Contemporary Asia and is finalising a book proposal from the thesis.

Dr Vannessa Hearman: studied early resistance to the New Order regime

Dr Hearman's thesis, entitled 'Dismantling the "fortress": East Java and the long transition to Suharto's New Order Regime (1965–1968)', charts the journeys of a group of activists and individuals caught up in the persecution and banning of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965–68 in East Java, including the party's final attempt to resist the New Order regime by constructing a base in the southern reaches of the province.

Using an array of sources, including oral testimonies from survivors and perpetrators and military and government reports about the repression, the thesis captures experiences of activism from the 1940s onwards and then in living under the shadow of the repression. The thesis presents new dimensions about the slaughter of leftists and the power struggle occurring in East Java.

Dr Hearman is presently drafting this thesis into a monograph and has begun researching the history of Timorese and Indonesian activists working together in the 1990s for Timorese self-determination.

The runner-up was Dr Tom Cliff for a thesis at the Australian National University entitled 'Oil and water: experiences of being Han in 21st century Korla, Xinjiang'.

The 13 nominations for the prize were judged by Associate Professor Romit Dasgupta, Professor Louise Edwards, Dr Nick Cheesman, Professor John Ingleson and Professor Robin Jeffrey.

This article has been published on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

New ASAA Council

The Asian Studies Association of Australia has elected a new council for 2015.

President: Prof. Louise Edwards, UNSW

Vice-president: Prof. John Ingleson, UNSW

Secretary: Dr Amrita Malhi, UniSA

Treasurer: Prof. Colin Brown, Griffith University

China representative: Dr Gerry Groot, Adelaide University

South Asia representative: Dr Michael Gillan, UWA

Southeast Asia representative: Dr Vannessa Hearman, Sydney University

Japan & Northeast Asia representative: Dr Shoko Yoneyama, Adelaide University

West Asia representative: Dr David Radford, UniSA

General councillors: Mr Allan Sharp, Asian Currents, Dr Yeow-Tong Chia, Sydney University, Dr Seiko Yasumoto, Sydney University

Library Representative: Ms Michelle Hall, Melbourne University

Postgraduate Representative: Mr Tets Kimura, Flinders University

Publications Officer: Prof.Mina Roces, UNSW

Asian Studies Review Editor: Dr Michael Barr, Flinders University

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Coming events

'Latent histories, manifest impacts: interplay between Korea and Southeast Asia', international conference, 26–27 February 2015, Canberra. An interdisciplinary, interregional conference, co-sponsored by the ANU Southeast Asia Institute and the Academy of Korean Studies. Further details.

4th International Conference, 'Buddhism & Australia', 26–28 February, 2015, Perth. The conference will investigate the history, current and future directions of Buddhism in Australasia region. See conference website for details.

'Grassroots regionalisation and the frontiers of the humanities in East Asia: Korea as a hub', 9–10 March 2015, ANU, Canberra. This international conference will examine the role of civil society (including non-governmental organisations, social movements, networks of scholars and media networks) in promoting interaction and understanding between the countries of East Asia. The conference is co-sponsored by the ANU Korea Institute and the Academy of Korean Studies. Register.

Myanmar (Burma) Update 2015, 'Making sense of conflict', 5–6 June 2015, ANU, Canberra. Hosted by the Department of Political and Social Change at the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific. Details of previous conferences and publications are available at the Update series website. For further information please contact the convenors: Dr Nick Cheesman, ph. +612 6125 0181 or Dr Nicholas Farrelly, ph +612 6125 8220.

The 8th Indonesia Council Open Conference (ICOC), 2–3 July 2015, Deakin University, Waterfront campus, Geelong. Registration details and call for papers to follow. Join the ICOC 2015 (Indonesia Council Open Conference) Facebook group and stay updated. For information contact Jemma Purdey.

International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS 9), 5–9 July 2015, Adelaide Convention Centre**.** Further information is available from the conference website, or contact the convenor, Dr Gerry Groot**.**

'Wounds, scars, and healing: civil society and postwar Pacific Basin reconciliation', 30 September–2 October 2015, University of Sydney. The concluding conference in a series of five conferences charting the reconciliation process between Japan and its neighbours since the end of the war. It will mark the 70th anniversary since the end of the war. Submissions for panel proposals and individual papers are due by 30 April 2015. The conference homepage will be available in March. In the meantime, enquiries should be made to Dr Yasuko Claremont or Dr Roman Rosenbaum.

Asian Studies Review

Asian Studies Review is the ASAA's flagship journal. It showcases high-quality scholarship on the modern histories, cultures, societies, languages, politics and religions of Asia through the publication of research articles, book reviews and review articles.

About the ASAA

The ASAA was founded in 1976 to promote and support the study of Asia in Australia. Its membership is drawn mainly from academic staff and students at Australian universities, but it also takes a strong interest in Asian Studies and the use of Asia-related materials in schools, and in Australian attitudes to and policies towards Asia.

The association supports two refereed journals, the *Asian Studies Review* and the *e-Journal of foreign language teaching.* It holds a biennial academic conference which offers members and other scholars the opportunity to hear the latest in research and to develop contacts with other scholars.

It also sponsors four book series, covering Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia, and Women in Asia, and makes regular submissions to governments and universities on issues of importance to Asian studies.

Website changes

The ASAA is developing a new website. You can soon expect a new and more interactive site featuring *Asian Currents* on its front page, and an expanded social media presence. For now, our current website cannot incorporate any new changes, although it remains a source of information on the ASAA and its activities.

In the meantime, *Asian Currents* is available as a Tumblr.

Amrita Malhi
ASAA Secretary

Asian Currents is edited by Allan Sharp. Unsolicited articles of between 850–1200 words on any field of Asian studies are welcome and will be considered for publication. *Asian Currents* is published six times a year (February, April, June, August, October, December).

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