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Australia urged to pay more attention to its reputation in Asia

Has Australia paid enough attention to its reputation in Asia? Former diplomat JOHN McCARTHY thinks not, and this could be damaging our interests in the region.

Although relations between Australia and Asia have come a long way in 50 or 60 years, the question arises: have we paid sufficient attention to our reputation in Asia?

Reputation first depends on the reality of what a country is about—its history, geography, economy (including state of development), government and, of course, domestic and external policies. All these aspects affect a country's ability to attract and persuade other countries.

The concept of soft power is the ability to influence other countries to move in the direction you want through attraction and persuasion. The exercise of soft power is not just about attracting others to further your security interests, but all other interests as well. Sometimes critics of the theory deride it, seeing it as something mushy, but proponents argue that it was never conceptualised as a substitute for hard power—rather as a necessary complement.

Secondly, reputation derives from perceptions of a country. Often external perceptions of a country or its policies will be distorted, out of date or simply insufficiently developed. It is here that the discipline known as public diplomacy becomes relevant. Public diplomacy cannot change black to white, or vice versa. But it can correct distortions, fill gaps and improve perspectives.

The methodology of public diplomacy is varied. It can involve the projection by television or radio of fairly clear messages relating to a county's reputation, say, as a place to visit or to do business, or of a country's culture in the broad sense. Properly conceived and directed, cultural diplomacy can be a strong weapon in the diplomatic armoury.

Australia—does well as a tourist destination but less well as a manufacturer or on technology or in culture. Photo S. Oost

So, what is Australia's reputation in Asia? Does it matter? And what should we do about it?

Looking at some polling, mainly on the internet—for example, the Anholt Nation Brands Index, the Reputation Institute website, to some extent Pew, and, on Australian perceptions of other countries, the Lowy Institute site—several conclusions can be drawn about Australia. Continued page 2>>

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<<Continued from page 1 In overall global reputation we rank well. In individual sectors we tend, predictably, to do well as a tourist destination and on governance but less well as a manufacturer or in technology or culture—or, surprisingly, as a place in which to invest.

Our rating is falling in Japan and we are very poorly regarded in India—in fact, about as low as you can get.

Generally speaking, in these surveys developed countries are ranked higher than developing countries, including by other developing countries. Even taking the latter factor into account, Australia's high overall ratings tend strongly to reflect our reputation among English-speaking developed countries. We tend to be less well regarded in Asia than a number of European countries. Also, in a Reputation Institute survey, Australia was much more highly ranked (number 3) by the G8 than by a group on non-G8 countries.

Looking at Anholt, the Reputation Institute and a Lowy poll on Indonesia, assessments of Australia's general reputation suggest that we are somewhere in the middle on Chinese perceptions and on the low side in Indonesia. Our rating is falling in Japan and we are very poorly regarded in India—in fact, about as low as you can get. A recent Japanese Cabinet Office survey showed an 8 per cent decrease between 2008 and 2009 in the sense of Japanese affinity towards Oceania (predominantly Australia in this context).

The way we perceive others is obviously going to affect how we deal with them—and the results are a touch worrying. Lowy's most recent findings indicate, understandably, that Australians view Canada and New Zealand most favourably, with scores at just over 80 out of 100. Japan is at 64, Vietnam at 60, India at 55 and China at 54. The only countries of those polled scoring less were Israel and Arab countries.

On the interactive poll on the Anholt site, on people-to-people ratings, Australians score Japan at 14 out of 50, China at 31 out of 50 (up from 38 last year), India at 41 and Indonesia at 42. A Japanese foreign ministry survey suggests that more than 60 per cent of Australians no longer see Japan as a reliable friend as opposed to 60 per cent seeing Japan positively in 2006—a dramatic change.

Many polls include a country's self-assessment. Several rate themselves first. According to all polls, we rate ourselves as number 1. It is instructive, however, that one poll indicates that a higher proportion of Australians rate Australia as number 1 than the proportion of citizens of other countries who place their own country at the top of the list.

Does reputation really matter? It is clear that it does in relation to specific sectors—for example, our reputation as a good place to visit affects the tourism and education sectors. Our reputation on technology affects trade in relevant areas. However, there is also a strong argument that reputation, in a general sense, can affect our interests very widely.

The Reputation Institute argues, with some conviction, that the better a country's overall reputation, the more likely it is to be considered as a country in which to invest, to visit or with which to otherwise deal. And private polling shows very clearly that our reputation in India has, since the student crisis, suffered in all sectors—not just as a place in which to study or to visit.

So what should we do? First, we should take account of foreign perceptions to a greater degree when actually formulating policy. We should not do this just to please foreigners, but to further our interests.

Let's start with a controversial one: boat people. While Asians acknowledge our right to control our own borders and to contain the criminal aspect of people smuggling, they find it difficult to comprehend that the illegal arrival by boat of about 6000 people a year (compared with hundreds of thousands of illegal arrivals in Europe or the US) can create such fears in Australia. What makes Australians so concerned? Is it fear of too many Asians, one Continued page 3>>

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<<Continued from page 2 senior Indonesian once put it to me, of 'spoiling your pristine country'?

Is it not time perhaps for the political parties in a post-election phase to show leadership and work out a bipartisan policy that is sensible, firm and humane and puts the issue in its proper proportions—for both domestic and external reasons. Should we not at least try?

Second: whaling. We are right to take a strong approach on whaling. But is it sensible to take Japan to the International Court when they have offered some compromises? Japan is, after all, still the biggest market for our exports and an important security partner. Polling in both countries shows the degree to which we have fallen in each other's regard.

Indian students demonstrating in Melbourne. Photo: ceoworld.biz

Third: Indian students. The problems here arose from a variety of bad policies at both federal and state level for which both political parties were responsible. The incidents involving Indian students have caused massive damage to our reputation in India across the board. This damage is recognised in government and steps have been taken to repair it, but it will be a long haul.

To repeat, we should not shape what we do by how others regard us. But we should at least recognise that such issues can affect our interests. We should take reputation into account when formulating policies.

We also need to explain ourselves. Here we get back to public diplomacy. Just as hard power and soft power are complementary, public diplomacy is inseparable from traditional diplomacy. Both are designed to advance the interests of Australia and Australians internationally.

Compared with other developed countries, Australia doesn't feature too badly in the amount spent on public diplomacy—but this is only if one includes figures for scholarships. Excluding these, we spend much less on a per capita basis than comparable countries.

While Asians acknowledge our right to control our own borders and to contain the criminal aspect of people smuggling, they find it difficult to comprehend that the illegal arrival by boat of about 6000 people a year can create such fears in Australia.

Australia also engages in a full array of public diplomacy activities. However a 2007 Senate report concluded that we faced fierce competition in getting our voice heard internationally. The report also raised the need for more resources, greater coordination and improved technology for public diplomacy. In connection with resources, the proportion of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's overall expenditure on public diplomacy declined from over 8 per cent in 1998–99 to 4.4 per cent in 2008–09.

In terms of recent government initiatives, the trade minister recently initiated a Brand Australia campaign, managed by Austrade, to broaden perceptions of Australia in the international marketplace and as a global citizen. These programs, on a larger scale, have had a positive effect in an economic context for countries such as Spain and Ireland—but as recent events have shown they can only work when reality is on side—and the programs need to be maintained over a long period.

Although independent ratings show that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation competes very well with other international broadcasters, we need to put more resources into international broadcasting. The British, Germans and French allocate 10 times as much as we do to on radio and television, (between $363 million and $ 413 million as compared with our $33 million.) The Dutch spend more than twice Continued page 4>>

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<<Continued from page 3 as much as we do. China is investing about $6 billion in public international broadcasting. Some argue here that the conduct of public broadcasting should be open to commercial entities in Australia. All other countries see the furtherance of the national interest (which is what international public broadcasting is about) as falling properly to the national or public broadcaster. Recent work by Lowy also underlines the importance of longevity in maintaining audiences and in strengthening perceptions of reliability, or reputation.

John Howard—'Australia's history and georgraphy not incompatible.'

Finally, our engagement with Asia requires enhancing our own knowledge of the region. An important part of our soft power and the ability to project ourselves in Asia depends not just on who we are, what we do and what we project, but on our understanding of our surroundings, and perhaps a wiser appreciation of what motivates other nations.

In short, we have to educate ourselves better—both formally and at the level of more informal and grassroots dialogue. In all this, the decline over the past decade in the study in Australia of Asian languages is instructive.

As we get further into the Asian century, we are fortunate that geography has placed us where we are and that our history, values and traditions have given us particular advantages as a nation. As former prime minister John Howard once said, our history and geography are not incompatible. Indeed they may have put us in the right place at the right time—but we cannot afford complacency. We still have to think how we relate to the region—and reputation counts.

John McCarthy AO is former High Commissioner to India and former Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, the US and Vietnam. This article is based on a presentation he gave to the ASAA 18th Biennial Conference in Adelaide in July.

Women in Asia conference

Crisis, agency and change

By Ruth Barraclough

The 10th Women in Asia Conference, held at the Australian National University from 29 September to 1 October, was the largest so far, with more than 100 presenters and over 150 registered participants. The biennial conference is a gathering of feminist scholars, writers, film-makers, journalists and activists whose work is in the Asia–Pacific region.

The conference began with a workshop for postgraduates that focused on methodology, problem-solving and developing the tools to establish a strong authorial voice. Academic papers were interspersed with cultural events, including a poetry reading, film screening and textile, art and photographic exhibits.

A keynote paper presented by Professor Susan Napier, from Tufts University, explored issues of representation, the politics of sex toys, and ethnicity in contemporary Japan. Another keynote paper, from Feng Yuan, from Shantou University, redefined China's rapid industrial growth as a period of deep crisis for women. She examined three sites—female-dominated factories, the family and cities as spaces of violence against women. She then looked at opportunities for female agency and self-strengthening in these locations.

Other presenters combined an activist background with a keen analytic focus: in papers on the resistance in Timor-Leste, female suicide in China, sex education in Kolkata, and HIV education in Cambodia.

There were also some excellent papers on masculinity, especially from Insook Kwon, of the University of South Florida, who examined feminism and masculinity in the conscientious objectors' movement in South Korea.

The high number of people who travelled from the region to attend, and the intellectual quality of the conversations, mark the event as one of the best feminist conferences around.

‘Benevolent’ giant shackled in quest for regional power

India’s ‘strategy’ as an emerging power is being constrained by its search for internal stability, says SANDY GORDON.

Since the end of the colonial period, the South Asian sub-region has been closely and often negatively linked to global pressures. During the Cold War it became a major focus of superpower competition. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, this competition intensified. After 9/11, the sub-region become the proving ground for the ideological–religious struggle between the West and militant Islam.

Partly because of these negative influences, South Asia has failed to reflect the successes of East and Southeast Asia, either in terms of alleviating poverty or building a sense of cooperative community with a capacity to mitigate the dissonances of the region. The antagonism between India and Pakistan has negatively affected the whole region and vitiated any capacity that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC—founded 1985) may have had to provide a cooperative framework. In part as a consequence, South Asia remains one of the poorest and most troubled regions of the globe.

In addition to these negative colonial legacies, a host of governance and environmental problems contribute to poverty and cross-border instability throughout the region, and in today’s globalised setting the ‘24/7’ reporting enabled by light video cameras and other technologies provides a crucial transfer mechanism for trouble and tension within countries and across borders. This range of negativities within the region has resulted in a situation in which dissonance in one country is often perceived in terms of the ‘other’ across the border. For example, relations within India between Hindus and Muslims are often portrayed as manifestations of Pakistani ‘interference’. Similarly, Pakistan today blames its troubles in Baluchistan and elsewhere on Indian ‘interference’.

As well as factors emanating from within South Asia, two major geostrategic shifts are now also affecting the subregion. The idea of global, violent jihad, aligned as it is with a growing tendency towards an erosion of syncretic versions of Islam within South Asia, has provided a religious–ideological basis for groups to link up across borders, such as the conspicuous linkage between the Student’s Islamic Movement of India in India and Lashkar-e-Toiba in Pakistan.

A second global phenomenon affecting South Asia has been the rise of China. A cashed-up China is able to meet the development needs of smaller nations in the region in ways that India cannot, not only because it does not have equivalent resources, but also because the smaller countries of the region would fear being crushed by their benevolent, giant neighbour. Added to this, a US that is experiencing growing concern about the rise of China in Asia is increasingly viewing its relationship with India as a possible long-term hedge against China’s rise.

The fact that so many internal and external factors troubling India are tightly enmeshed greatly complicates New Delhi’s efforts to alleviate both areas of dissonance: for example, it cannot solve pressing domestic issues such as terrorism without solving the ‘problem’ of Pakistan; and it is difficult to solve the ‘problem’ of Pakistan while the latter is so closely enmeshed with wider global concerns like China’s ‘strategic’ relationship and the role of Pakistan in the global war on terrorism. Given the closely interwoven sets of domestic and neighbourhood problems, two approaches would seem to suggest Continued page 6>>

Benevolent giant in search of regional power

<<Continued from page 5 themselves as a 'minimum' of a viable 'strategy' for India's rise to power.[1] India would first need to consolidate its domestic polity in terms of resolute government action to assert democracy and internal security and thus make itself less vulnerable to external interference. It would also need to find a way at least to 'neutralise' the South Asia region as a security factor.

New Delhi's increasing reallocation of its overall security spending towards internal and border security tends to detract from military modernisation and development of force projection capability. The share of defence spending on the 'blue water navy', the classic tool of force projection, has remained in percentage terms fairly constant over the past few decades, shifting only from 13 per cent of the defence budget in 1994 to 14.5 per cent today. This is low for a power seeking a force projection capability: it compares with a percentage share for the US Navy of 26 per cent.[2]

Spending on India's 'blue water navy' has remained fairly constant over the last few decades.

India is also intent on facing internal challenges of poverty and development in preference to ardent power-seeking behaviour. This has been particularly pronounced under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government, in office since 2004.

Following the security debacle represented by the attacks on Mumbai of 26/11, India also entered into a comprehensive reform of its governance and internal security apparatus. This process is far-reaching in terms of expenditure and initiatives but still incomplete in two important respects—reform of the ramshackle, state-controlled police, and reform of governance mechanisms. Governance in particular remains parlous and adds a substantial risk to the central government's strategies to 'spend its way' towards a more equal and stable society.

Although India's democracy is flawed in some respects, the domestic components of a 'grand strategy' are discernible in the UPA's activities. Such a strategy, while not necessarily explicit, involves internal security and governance consolidation and reform. It also involves measures to include all elements of Indian society in the development process, while deferring allocation of significantly greater shares of available resources on power projection. This kind of approach—deferring power acquisition in favour of development—broadly mirrors the strategy initially followed by that other mega-population power carrying a significant burden of poverty—China.

India could adopt the tactic of 'going around the edges' of Pakistan in South Asia to produce an area of prosperity in which Pakistan eventually would have no option but to participate.

But in India's case, there is a second broad area of risk that needs to be addressed. India's strategies in South Asia are not being pursued with the same determination and vigour as the strategies seeking internal stability. Some assert that India is doing all it can in respect of SAARC and South Asia and that time will be needed for 'liberal rationalism in other [non-Indian South Asian] states to find favour'.[3] Others argue that despite these manifest difficulties, India as the bigger power should act towards its neighbours and SAARC with 'strategic altruism'.[4]

Taj Hotel—target of Mumbai attack.

One area in which we should look for such altruism is the aid program. It appears, on first glance, that India's aid contribution to South Asia is relatively handsome given its own high levels of poverty. To put the aid program further in context, India's total program of US$360 million compares poorly with China's aid Continued page 7>>

Benevolent giant in search of regional power

<<Continued from page 6 program, which the World Bank estimated at up to US$2 billion in 2007.[5] Even accounting for the fact that China's economy is over thrice the size of India's, the proportion spent by India is not nearly as great, and it would seem that there is considerable scope for additional Indian aid to South Asia.

Another feature of India's South Asia aid program, however, is that Pakistan does not feature in it except for the recent contribution of US$5 million for the floods.[6] Probably this is a result of mutual choice. But even were Indian assistance to Pakistan feasible in non-sensitive areas, it is doubtful such assistance would do a great deal to untangle the knot of suspicion between the two. For India and Pakistan, a political breakthrough has to precede an economic breakthrough.

Even were Indian assistance to Pakistan feasible in non-sensitive areas, it is doubtful such assistance would do a great deal to untangle the knot of suspicion between the two.

India's problems with Pakistan should not, however, be taken as an excuse not to be more actively engaged elsewhere in South Asia. Strategically, India could adopt the tactic of 'going around the edges' of Pakistan in South Asia, in order to produce an area of prosperity in which Pakistan eventually would have no option but to participate.

The UPA government has a broad approach to India's emergence as a regional power but has never articulated it in terms of a strategy. In essence, it is to delay the acquisition of power—or at least the acquisition of some of the instruments of power projection—while India achieves economic development and growth with balance, in an effort to uplift all the Indian people.

The focus of this policy is on the welfare of the people and consequent political consolidation, while not unduly constraining the reforms and growth needed to pay for them. Risks to the strategy include the interlocking problems of security and governance. India has made some significant advances on these but has much more to do. Another risk relates to the stalled program to be more actively and positively engaged in South Asia, so all can 'rise on the same tide' along with India.

Although India has articulated the desire to be more comprehensively engaged with its South Asian neighbours, it has not yet found a way to 'go round the edges' of Pakistan in order to do so. This component of the strategy deserves a great deal more attention.

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References

1. We use the term 'strategy' loosely as indicating either a conscious set of policies or policies implicit in India's broad behaviour.
2. Such comparisons should not be taken too far. However, America's circumstances, in which it does not confront a contiguous, threatening land power, are vastly different from India's.
3. Ali Ahmed, 'South Asia at the crossroads', *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2009, pp. 335–345, p. 345.
4. Peter Jones, 'South Asia: Is a regional security community possible?', *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2008, pp. 183-193, p. 191.
5. Quoted in Carol Lancaster, 'The Chinese aid system', Centre for Global Development Essay, 2007, as at www.cgdev.org, accessed 22 July 2010, p. 3.
6. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, *Annual Report 2007–2008* (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, no date).

Sandy Gordon is a professor at the Australian National University and an Associate Investigator, ARC Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security Program, at the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific.

Afghanistan's uncertain road to stability

If attempts by the Karzai Government to negotiate with the Taliban are to have any chance of success, the government will need to win the trust of the Afghan people first, says NEMATULLA BIZHAN.

Since the beginning of his second term as President of Afghanistan in 2009, Hamid Karzai has focused his attention overwhelmingly on negotiating with the Taliban to bring stability through a political settlement. But while Afghans hope for and dream of such a settlement, this seems to be a complex and most challenging task for the government.

It took Karzai more than a year to organise a peace *jirga* (Afghans' traditional assembly) and to decide on 68 members of the peace council to conduct the negotiations. Membership of the council includes mostly ex-Mujaheedin leaders and commanders, a few moderate Taliban leaders, and eight women. As a goodwill gesture, the names of dozens of Taliban leaders were removed from the UN Security Council's blacklist, but so far the response from the Taliban has been negative. As a precondition for any negotiation, the Taliban have demanded the immediate withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan and increased their attacks on the negotiation initiative.

This follows the Taliban's pre-election strategy of warning people not to participate in the September 2010 parliamentary elections, and their attacks on the polls. Despite these warnings, people did participate, but the turnout was relatively low, around 50 per cent. The Taliban leaders have also recently announced that members of the peace council are 'useless', having been the cause of the previous conflicts.

International experience suggests that unless a conflict is resolved without a reconciliation process, it is more likely to reappear. Afghan history also indicates that a purely military intervention will not be successful and that a mixture of strategies, including a political settlement that favours peace building, seems imperative.

However, while the strategy of negotiation with the Taliban and other insurgents, such as Hazb-e-Islami of Hekmatyar, broadly aims at a political settlement, and the US, UN and a number of regional countries stand to support this initiative, it lacks an essential rationale on how to negotiate and integrate the insurgents into the political system within the current environment of political distrust and public discontent. Assuring a lasting peace will be difficult.

President Karzai: intent on negotiating with the Taliban.

In particular, peace negotiations will not only concern the government and the Taliban: the length of conflict in Afghanistan will depend also on the interest of other stakeholders in the war such as the US, and its allies and the main regional players, Pakistan, Iran and Russia. Furthermore, other factors—the product of three decades of armed conflict—have contributed to the insurgents uprising. These include a vast illegal economy, a cheap supply of modern weapons and an immense number of trained fighters who are now jobless.

These factors have not been properly addressed and have been compounded by the country's mountainous geography and the strategic interest of a number of regional players, in particular Pakistan, to support the insurgency. Afghanistan's complex social mosaic, the weakness of its state institutions and poor governance and widespread corruption have also critically undermined efforts to stabilise the country and deliver services.

Consequently, Afghanistan has very weak state and societal relations, and the population lacks confidence in the state government's Continued page 9>>

Afghanistan's uncertain road to stability

<< Continued from page 8 capacity to deal with this difficult state of affairs. If the negotiation process provides the Taliban equal status with the government, which received its legitimacy through democratic elections, the Taliban will also be legitimised as a consequence. This will further undermine the government's already weak legitimacy and fuel growing public discontent with the situation in the country.

The majority of people, especially the youth and women, are legitimately concerned that the government will make dubious policy compromises with the Taliban that will have immediate and long-term consequences for their welfare and future.

It will also add to the lack of societal cooperation with the state. These undermining factors will increase if any peace settlement is made without addressing the country's long-term needs and, in particular, its overarching national interests, to ensure the full political participation of different groups.

The length of conflict, however, has caused fatigue among the Taliban, the government and the international community on the one hand, while the Obama administration's announcement of a timetable for the gradual withdrawal of US forces has created a perception of uncertainty among the people and politicians in Afghanistan on the other. Hence Karzai seeks to shortcut this situation to strengthen his own position, no matter what the cost to his people and the emerging state.

It now seems apparent that Karzai and his international allies aim to use the already weak Afghan state as an instrument of reconciliation and to change the society—but without the assurance of societal cooperation in the first place. Thus this government may, by the end of the day, face unexpected consequences, as did many other 20th-century Afghan rulers who ignored the need for societal cooperation.

If, as part of a peace agreement, the state service delivery institutions are used to achieve the integration of the insurgents by providing them with a basis for patronage, this will further weaken the already poor service delivery across the country. Hence, more than ever, there is an increasing demand from the people for future national security to protect developmental institutions in Afghanistan.

Overall, a political settlement to end insecurity in Afghanistan is imperative, but this should be designed and managed. Transparency is needed to ensure societal cooperation and the building of the population's trust. This has been absent from the beginning of the latest peace process, as the Afghan people first learned of the proposed negotiations with the Taliban from the international media, not their government.

In addition, it is crucial to have a legal framework to guarantee a lasting peace-building process in Afghanistan. However, the majority of people, especially the youth and women, are legitimately concerned that the government will make dubious policy compromises with the Taliban that will have immediate and long-term consequences for their welfare and future.

There is a need for the process to be much more open. And while it is still too early to judge the results, the outcome remains doubtful.

Nematullah Bizhan is a PhD scholar at the Australian National University and former General Director of Policy, Monitoring and Evaluation of Afghanistan's National Development Strategy.

The Ayodhya judgement—good politics, bad history?

The recent High Court decision on the disputed ownership of the Ayodyha mosque may have been a shrewd political compromise—but PETER MAYER questions whether it will resolve the historical issues on which the contending claims rested.

While the world's media were hyperventilating about the poor state of accommodation in the athletes' village at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi, gloating over fallen footbridges and feral cobras and predicting the near-certainty of a terrorist attack during the games, they discovered something else that could go terribly wrong.

Just days before the games were to begin, the state High Court in India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, was scheduled to hand down its judgment on the ownership of the site of the Babri Masjid (Mosque of Babur) in the town of Ayodhya. No matter who won the long-running case, communal conflagration was almost certain; if the court decided in favour of the former custodians of the destroyed mosque, the Board of Waqfs of Uttar Pradesh, Hindu nationalists would be outraged, and vice versa. Police and army reinforcements were posted to the 30 or 40 towns in India known to be flashpoints of conflict between Hindus and Muslims.

In the most basic terms, at issue was what was to be done with the site of the former Babri Masjid, which was demolished by a rampaging mob of Hindu nationalists on 6 December 1992. In the weeks which followed the demolition over 2000 people died in clashes between Muslims and Hindus.

Built around the year 1528 by a noble lieutenant of Babur, the first of the Mughal dynasty, the mosque had not been a place of active worship for many decades. According to scholars of Indian history, at some point in the middle of the 19th century the claim was advanced for the first time that the 16th century mosque had been erected on the site of a pre-existing Hindu temple, one which marked the birthplace of the lord Rama—in Hindi the Ram Janambhumi.

The Ayodyha mosque—disputed claims. Photo: Shaid Khan.

The first suit in the case was brought in 1885 when the head of a Hindu order of holy men sought permission to erect a structure in the outer courtyard of the mosque to commemorate the birthplace. That original suit had been dismissed on the grounds that it was far too late to seek a legal remedy. In the late 1940s parties unknown broke into the locked compound of the mosque and installed a statue of Rama, an act which forced the authorities to block all further access to the site. That initiated the most recent set of suits, brought by two Hindu associations seeking the right to carry out worship at the site.

The day of judgement was delayed for a nail-biting week, until the last possible date. On the following day, one of the three-judge panel would retire, which would have forced a retrial of the entire case. (Even a judgment after 125 years wasn't a record for India's ponderous legal system. A property dispute begun in Calcutta in 1833 when the East India Company still administered Bengal was finally resolved in 2006 after 170 years in the courts).

In their judgment a majority of two of the three judges (coincidentally, both Hindus; their brother judge was a Muslim) ruled that the disputed site should be split between the defendants (the Waqf Board) and the two Hindu orders. In political terms, this was very much a Solomonic verdict, giving something to each of the parties to the Continued page 11>>

The Ayodhya judgement

<< Continued from page 10 dispute. The political wisdom of the verdict was immediately obvious: there were no reports of clashes anywhere in India. Predictably, though, both sides announced in due course—perhaps once they had read all 8000 pages of the verdict—that they would be appealing the decision to India's Supreme Court.

If the judgement could be interpreted as a shrewd compromise dividing the site between the claimants, judging by the case summary, it was disappointing in the way it dealt with the actual issues before the court—above all in the cavalier way it dealt with the substantive historical issues on which the contending claims rested.

One central question which had to be decided was whether Rama was a real, historical person and if so, exactly when and where he was born. The majority opinion of the Honourable Judges, written by Hon'ble Dharam Veer Sharma, J, as it appears in the summary, is that the disputed site in Ayodhya is indeed the birthplace of Rama, who was an historical person who attained divinity. While, understandably, this was hailed as a vindication by the Hindu faithful, it appears to represent the triumph of faith over evidence and reason.

My Indian colleagues who specialise in ancient and pre-modern Indian history have published evidence which convinces me that this judgement is very questionable indeed. Let us first consider when Lord Rama might have been born. According to the *Ramayana*, the great Sanskrit epic poem of nearly 50 000 verses which tells his story, Rama was born in the second of the four great ages of mankind, well before the present, last, degenerate age which began around 3 000 BCE, placing his birth well over 5000 years ago.

Then there is the question of where Rama was born. The few, very early references to Ayodhya refer to it as a town on the banks of the Ganges, not the river Saryu, the location of the present day town. Other legends tell that the location of the town was lost for many years after the ending of the second age and only later was rediscovered by King Vikramaditya, who fixed the location by following a cow and calf until the calf lactated, the fallen milk marking the sacred birthplace. And that, exact, spot is also disputed.

I have read that there are several Ram temples in Ayodhya, each of which claims to have been erected on the true sacred site. The earliest evidence of a belief that the mosque was erected on the site of an earlier temple dates, as I've noted, from the mid-19th century something rather different from the court's judgement that 'It is also established that Hindus have been worshipping the place in dispute as Janm Sthan, i.e. a birth place as deity and visiting it as a sacred place of pilgrimage as of right since time immemorial'.
My colleagues in India are also very critical of the learned judges' assessment of the archaeological evidence from the site of the demolished mosque. The court states in its summary: 'The Archaeological Survey of India has proved that the [mosque was erected on a] structure [which] was a massive Hindu religious structure'. A recent critical letter published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* by a *Who's Who* of Indian historians states:

the view that the Babri Masjid was built at the site of a Hindu temple, which has been maintained by two of the three judges, takes no account of all the evidence contrary to this fact turned up by the Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) own excavations: the presence of animal bones throughout as well as of the use of 'surkhi' and lime mortar (all characteristic of Muslim presence) rule out the possibility of a Hindu temple having been there beneath the mosque.

Or, should they accept that in issues such as this, faith trumps historical fact? If the vast majority of devout Hindus have come over time to believe that this spot was the birthplace of god, should we recognise that that faith constitutes another sort of fact? In which case, despite being a deeply flawed historical judgement, the Allahabad High Court may have given a verdict that will allow India to finally put this most contentious issue to rest.

Peter Mayer is an Associate Professor and Visiting Research Fellow, School of History and Politics, the University of Adelaide.

China's growing grassroots democracy

Decisions on issues, from food pricing to the law, are being encouraged at the grassroots level in China, writes BOAGANG HE.

The distinctive features of deliberation—responsiveness to reasons, discussion, and attentiveness to what others are saying—have deep roots within Chinese political culture. Some are traditional, building on Confucian practices of consultation and common discussion.

Centuries ago, Confucian scholars established public forums in which they deliberated national affairs. Though elitist, the Confucian tradition took seriously elite duties to deliberate conflicts, as well as certain duties to procedures of discussion. These traditions are alive today, expressed in the high value intellectuals and many leaders place on policymaking through combinations of reasoned deliberation, scientific evidence and experimentation-based policy cycles.

The contemporary wave of deliberative practices dates to the late 1980s, concurrent with the introduction of village elections and other participatory practices and administrative reforms. In 1987 the former general party secretary Zhao Ziyang outlined a 'social consultative dialogue system' as one major initiative in political reform in the 13th Party Congress, which was to have been followed by a comprehensive scheme of popular consultation to be implemented in a number of areas across China.

These experiments were derailed by the events of Tiananmen Square in 1989, which resulted in a period of authoritarian repression and retrenchment. Nevertheless, they survived as ideational precursors of institutionalised deliberative practices, not least because Chinese Communist Party elites were keenly aware of the damage wrought by Tiananmen,

and quite consciously sought ways of channeling dissent even as they engaged in repression.

President Jiang Zemin—stressed need to develop electoral and consultative democracy.

In 1991 former president Jiang Zemin stressed that China needs to develop both electoral and 'consultative democracy,' identifying the National People's Congress as the proper location of the former and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)—a body which engages in often lengthy deliberations, but lacks either the power of decision or veto—as the site of the latter.

In 2005 Li Junru, Vice President of the Central Party School, openly advocated deliberative democracy—as did the Central Party School's official journal *Study Times*, which published an editorial endorsing a deliberative polling experiment in Zeguo, Wenling. In 2006, 'deliberative democracy' was endorsed in the *People's Daily*, the official document of the Central Party Committee, as a way of reforming the CPPCC. And in 2007, the official document of the 2007 17th Party Congress specified that all major national policies must be deliberated in the CPPCC.

A participant raises sharp questions at a plenary session for public deliberation.

More generally, deliberative venues have become widespread, though they are widely variable in level, scale, design and frequency. They exhibit a variety of forms such as elite debates in different levels of the Peoples' Congress, lay citizen discussions via the internet, formal discussions in the public sphere and informal debate in non-governmental domains. They can be, and often are, held monthly, bimonthly Continued page 13>>

China' growing grassroots democracy

<<Continued from page 12 or even quarterly in streets, villages, townships and cities. In rural areas deliberative politics have emerged alongside empowerments such as village elections, village representative assemblies, independent deputy elections for the local Peoples' Congress and similar institutions. Beginning in the 1990s, many villages developed meetings in which officials deliberated village affairs with citizens, an innovation probably encouraged by imperatives of election, re-election, and approval voting. Indeed, the meaning of township elections was not that elections would produce majority rule—as we might assume in the West—but rather that they would serve as a mechanism of consultation—though in practice they can induce deliberation, particularly when issues are contentious.

Electoral empowerments are often buttressed by protests, obstruction, and 'rightful resistance' movements that have generated pressures for elites to consult with the people, but which can, in practice, shade into deliberation. There are some indications that these trends are widespread.

Small group deliberation.

The 2005 national survey provided some indications as to the (uneven) penetration of village-level democratic institutions that we might expect to generate deliberation (10 per cent). Respondents reported that decisions on schools and roads in their town or city over the last three years were decided by an all-villagers' meeting attended by each household. By contrast, 616 (20.7 per cent) said these decisions had been made by village representative meetings, and 744 (25 per cent) by villager leaders. The largest fraction—1318 (44.3 per cent)—was not sure.

The survey also found that the 547 (18.8 per cent) of respondents reported that decisions on village land contracts were made by an all-villagers' meeting; 524 (18 per cent) by village representatives; 650 (22.3 per cent) by village leaders; while 1192 (40.9 per cent) were not sure. The same survey found that 28.3 per cent reported that their villages held two village representative meetings in 2004, while 59.3 per cent were unsure. Such findings indicate that penetration of deliberative devices, such as the all-villagers' meeting, is at least broad enough for demonstrated effects, and probably broad enough to begin to alter the incentives of the 3.2 million village officials in the 734 700 villages in China.

Local leaders are increasingly using devices such as consultative meetings and public hearings designed to elicit people's support for local projects.

Some cases in rural areas exhibit an impressive density of deliberative devices. From 1996 to 2000 within Wenling City, a municipality with almost a million residents, more than 1190 of these deliberative and consultative meetings were held at the village level, 190 at the township level, and 150 in governmental organisations, schools, and business sectors. Wenling has, by increments, developed a form of democracy that combines popular representation with deliberation. A case in point is Zeguo township in Wenling, where in 2005 officials introduced deliberative polling, using the device to set priorities for the township's budget.

Deliberative polling uses random sampling to constitute small (typically a few hundred) bodies of ordinary citizens that are descriptively representative of the population. These bodies engage in facilitated processes of learning and deliberation about an issue, typically over a period of one or two days, and can produce results that represent considered public opinion.

Officials in Wenling altered the device by elevating the outcomes of the deliberative poll from its usual advisory status to an empowered status, committing in advance of the process to abide by the outcomes. In 2006, 10 out of 12 projects chosen through deliberative polling were implemented. Continued page 14>>

China' growing grassroots democracy

<<Continued from page 13 The device has also evolved: in the most recent uses, the government opened every detail of the city's budget to participants. Whereas deliberative venues in rural locales are often related to village elections, in urban locales deliberative and participatory institutions are more likely to emerge as consequences of administrative rationalisation and accountability. Some of these accountability measures generate deliberative approaches to conflict. Local leaders are increasingly using devices such as consultative meetings and public hearings designed to elicit people's support for local projects.

The practice of holding public hearings—a consultative institution that may sometimes produce deliberation—has also developed within the area of law. In 1996, the first national law on administrative punishment introduced an article stipulating that a public hearing must be held before any punishment is given. Another example is the well-known article 23 of the *Law on Price*, passed by China's National People's Congress in December 1997, which specified that the price of public goods must be discussed in public hearings. More than 1000 public hearings on prices were held across China between 1998 and 2001.

In one state-owned factory, allocation of income was decided after an intense deliberation among ordinary workers and managers.

The *Legislation Law*, passed in 2000 by the National People's Congress, requires public hearings to be an integral part of decision-making process for new legislation. More than 39 public hearings on new legislation were held at the provincial level between 1999 and 2004, including, for example, a national public hearing on income taxes. In Hangzhou, the government has developed a web-based public hearing process for comment on the various drafts of laws or regulations.

Finally, there are some emerging practices that include elements of democracy and/or deliberation, but which are quite limited in scope. They are, nonetheless, worth mention because they help to fill out the broader picture of a polity permeated by a diversity of highly uneven deliberative practices.

In one state-owned factory, allocation of income was decided after an intense deliberation among ordinary workers and managers. Intra-party elections with secret ballots were held in Ya'An in 2002. There has also been a trend toward publicly visible deliberation in the National Legislature, as was evident in the deliberations over the draft New Labour Contract Law in 2006–07.

In addition, there have been experiments with participatory budgeting with varying degrees of participation, as well as consultation—ranging from a highly constrained process in Wuxi to more inclusive and consultative processes in Xinhe and Huinan from 2004 to 2008. There are also instances of deliberation among government bodies, as in the case in which a committee of Municipal Peoples' Congress now examines the budget submitted by Shenzhen City.

Instances of rights-based representation are beginning to induce deliberation as well. In 1999, for example, the official trade union in Yiwu City began to actively represent workers, producing effective rights, which in turn led to broader forums on workers' rights. And in 2006, the government funded the Poverty Reduction Foundation, which invites international NGOs to not only invest, but also to engage recipients' ideas for poverty reduction.

Professor Boagang He is Chair of International Studies, School of International and Political Studies, at Deakin University.

Singapore's immigration dilemma

The Singapore Government's policy of maintaining high levels of immigration for the country's continued prosperity is proving unpopular—and a lightning rod for grievances in times of stress. MICHAEL D BARR reports.

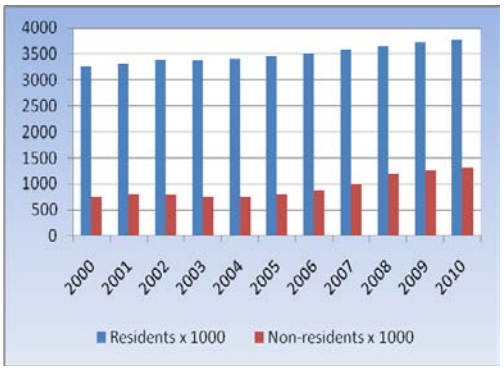
In 2009, immigration emerged as the most sensitive political issue in Singapore, and remains, unchallenged, in this invidious position today. The government is not only on the defensive, but it has been made to appear uncharacteristically indecisive on a matter that it regards as a core issue.

The key barometer of political sensitivity in a non-election year is always the prime minister's National Day Rally Speech, and in both 2009 and 2010 immigration was the key issue addressed. It is an article of faith in the Singapore establishment that high levels of immigration are absolutely necessary for the continued prosperity of the country because of the extra inputs migrants bring to the economy—professional skills or capital from the so-called 'foreign talent', and sweat and muscle from unskilled and semi-skilled 'foreign guest workers'.

The government's problem is that this is not a popular policy at the best of times, and it is a lightning rod for grievances in times of stress. Today migrants stand accused in the popular mind of not only taking locals' jobs, but also their housing, their places at school and university, and even their seats on buses and trains. To make it worse, the 'foreign talent' are routinely lampooned in coffee shops and even in locally made movies such as *I not stupid* as being overrated and overpaid mediocrities.

This situation would be a more manageable problem for the government if it had not pushed immigration to levels that are probably unsustainable politically. According to the latest (June 2010) population figures, 36 per cent of the people living in Singapore are non-citizens of whom 10.65 per cent are permanent residents and 25.7 per cent are on work permits or other temporary arrangements. Furthermore, if we isolate those who gained citizenship and permanent residency in just the last two years —since 2008—we find that they account for 1.25 per cent of citizens and 25.6 per cent of permanent residents. This suggests that there has been a drastic and recent increase in immigration rates, and the chart below (which is drawn directly from Department of Statistics figures) confirms that the big surge in citizens and residents began in 2005, and a much more drastic surge in the number of non-residents began in 2007.

Singapore residents and non-residents, 2000–2010



The significance of these figures is heightened by the fact that the resident birth rate is well below replacement levels.

The sudden surge in the number of immigrants to such high levels could reasonably be expected to cause political problems for any government, but the challenges in Singapore are particularly acute because the government has spent most of the last half a century emphasising the central importance of citizenship: driving home the message that serious responsibilities come with its 'privileges'. In the popular mind, the privileges include high standards of education, high quality and subsidised health care and housing, and upward social mobility. The price of these privileges is universal national service for young men followed by reservist duty for Continued page 16 >>

Singapore's immigration dilemma

<<Continued from page 15 decades after national service, a pressure-cooker system for children, and the absence of many freedoms for everyone. For many Singaporeans the dominance of English is another cost. Yet now migrants can receive most of the benefits without making many of the payments, blurring the distinction between citizen and resident. The government has even adjusted its language to accommodate the new realities. It no longer routinely speaks of citizens and non-citizens: it prefers to distinguish between residents and non-residents, with both citizens and permanent residents folded into the category of 'residents'.

We also need to keep in mind that the government's target population for 2010 (set in 1991 as a concept plan) was only four million. The current population exceeds five million, so if the target was taken seriously for infrastructure planning (and Singapore does tend to take such things seriously), then this helps to explain why the congestion problems have reached such intensity, with schools, housing, public transport and health services all bursting at the seams. This congestion provides much of the explanation for the strength of the popular reaction.

Nevertheless, the grassroots reaction against the high levels of immigration goes beyond issues of mere congestion. Many of these immigrants—especially those from the People's Republic of China—have not a word of English, but are working in the frontline of the retail sector and service sectors and appear to be threatening the primacy of the English language. There are also emerging problems of arrogance and inverse ghettoism emerging among both the Chinese and the Indian migrants, which probably finds its origins in government spokespersons telling them how important they are to Singapore and encouraging them to think of themselves as better than locals.

The government has responded with a mixture of concessions, defensiveness and assertion, which suggests that it is having real difficulties handling the politics of this issue. It has curtailed some subsidies, and in 2010 reduced the immigration intake, but it has too much at stake to let the electorate have its way.

In the government's mind it is not only economic prosperity that is at stake, but also its racial agenda, about which some members of the government (notably minister mentor Lee Kuan Yew) speak with what might be regarded as embarrassing candour. The government's racial problem is that the birth rate of the local ethnic Chinese is lower than that of the Indian and Malay communities. Lee Kuan Yew argued at his constituency's National Day Dinner in 2009 (as well as on many other occasions) that both Singapore's prosperity and its national security depend upon maintaining the ethnic Chinese proportion of the population at its historic levels of around 77 per cent. Hence it is not an accidental outcome that most (68.3 per cent) of the migrants are ethnic Chinese. The 2010 census provides the full set of figures, which are reproduced in the table immediately below. Continued page 17>>

Immigrant resident population by place of birth and ethnic group (extracted from Table A6 of the Census of Population 2010)

Place of Birth	Chinese	Others
Malaysia	338 501	47 478
China, Hong Kong and Macau	174 355	800
India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka	140	123 338 (122 703 Indians)
Indonesia	42 571	11 833
Other Asian countries	20 764	69 379
European countries	2278	11 073
USA and Canada	3605	3607
Australia and New Zealand	2017	2786
Others	3054	2208

Singapore's immigration dilemma

<< Continued from page 16 The most interesting figures in this table are those for Malaysia, Indonesia and the subcontinent. On the one hand the overwhelming dominance of ethnic Chinese from these two countries, where Chinese are a minority of the population (especially Indonesia where they are a tiny minority), reveals the effectiveness of Singapore's appeal to the ethnic Chinese of the region.

On the other hand, the softness of the immigration levels from China itself and the injection of a large number of Indians from the subcontinent illustrate the weakness of the program, and account for why, contrary to every government effort, commitment and public statement, the communal proportions of the resident population are shifting against the ethnic Chinese (and, incidentally, also against the Malays, despite resident Malays having a higher fertility rate than the other communities).

The following table demonstrates the demographic shift from one census year to the next, putting it in a longer-term context.

Resident population by ethnic composition, 1970–2010

Ethnic composition (%)	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Chinese	77.0	78.3	77.8	76.8	74.1
Malays	14.8	14.4	14.0	13.9	13.4
Indians	7.0	6.3	7.1	7.9	9.2
Others	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.4	3.3

The government has found itself caught in a cleft stick on immigration. It is desperate to expand the program, but it faces resistance from all segments of its electoral base—and elections count just enough in Singapore for this to be a serious concern.

This situation is made worse by the fact that it is difficult to isolate immigration from other issues because the rate of migration is so high that it affects many of the most basic aspects of everyday life (including health, housing and public transport). It is unlikely to threaten the government electorally while Lee Kuan Yew remains an effective political force, but it could easily undermine the government's legitimacy in the medium term.

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Dr Michael Barr is head of the Department of International Relations at Flinders University and a member of the Flinders Asia Centre Management Committee.

Endangered archives research grants

The Endangered Archives Programme is offering a number of grants every year to individual researchers worldwide. The grants are to locate vulnerable archival collections, to arrange their transfer wherever possible to a suitable local archival home and to deliver copies into the international research domain via the British Library.

The program's focus is on archives relating to the pre-industrial stages of a society's development, whether in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, or even Europe.

Applications are now invited for the Pilot Project Grant and Major Research Project Grant schemes. All applicants must initially submit a preliminary application.

The deadline for submission of preliminary applications is 5 November 2010.

After assessment of the preliminary applications, only those subsequently invited to do so may submit a detailed application.

The deadline for submitting detailed applications is 25 February 2011. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their applications by the end of May 2011.

APEC and ASEM: why trans-regionalism matters

China's growing influence is leading Asian nations to engage more deeply in extra-regional partnerships. JOEL RATHUS reports.

Asian regionalism is about more than only the Asian states cooperating. From the beginning, Southeast Asian nations have sought to bring in extraregional powers, chiefly the US and Europe, to better manage the intraregional balance.

Over time, these states have championed and abandoned a myriad of institutions to strike the 'right' balance, whether through the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), the Asia and Pacific Council, the Five Power Defence Agreement, or through the ASEAN Regional Forum.

This transregional strategy has been successfully prosecuted to bring the region peace and prosperity. However, as Chinese influence increased over the 1990s, the pressure to readjust the transregional balance has grown, leading to deeper engagement of extra-regional partners by ASEAN. In this context, the importance and role of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) as key institutions supporting peace and economic development is likely to increase.

This year's meetings—the 8th ASEM Summit held in Brussels, 4–5 October and the 18th APEC Summit to be held in Yokohama on 13–14 November—will continue the trend of greater extraregional participation in Asian affairs, a trend which is accelerating in light of the global financial crisis and China's key role in its resolution.

Asia's 'newest' transregional institution is the ASEM, established in 1996 by an initiative of then Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong. While officially Goh's plan to bring larger Asian power into the EU–ASEAN process was to buttress the global trend towards a multipolar order by 'forg[ing] the third link in the tri-polar world', ASEM has been more about resolving intraregional issues than building an institution of real global significance.[1]

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

Compared to APEC's more ambitious agenda on trade, finance and (informally) security, the ASEM is less significant. It has focused on the 'low hanging fruit' of opening trade and investment opportunities, development and exchange of civil society and, perhaps most usefully, as a site at which to discuss respective positions towards institutions of global governance such as the United Nations and now the G20.

This year's ASEM was significant for two unrelated reasons. Firstly, 2010 marks the year that Australia, together with New Zealand and Russia, formally took part in the ASEM, after applying in late 2008. Importantly for Australia and New Zealand, they have joined as 'Asian' rather than 'European' powers—further enhancing their credentials as being 'of' the region rather than simply 'in' it.[2] Secondly, the ASEM revealed its usefulness as a 'safe', neutral place at which regional issues can be resolved on an ad hoc basis.

Wen Jiabao: corridor meeting.

Probably the greatest contribution of this year's ASEM to regional peace and prosperity has been to permit the informal meeting of the leaders of Japan (Kan Naoto) and China (Wen Jiabao) in the corridor for nearly half an hour.[3] In the midst of escalations and retaliations due to the arrest of Chinese fishermen in what Japan considers its territorial waters, the ability for the two leaders to meet face to face and discuss the issue was clearly productive—and post-Brussels the relations between China and Japan have more or less stabilised (if still seriously injured). This, however, was the outcome of a bilateral discussion, and the ASEM (and the EU as host) provided no more than the opportunity for Continued page 19>>

APEC, ASEM and transregionalism

<< From page 18 a frank exchange. APEC as the elder of these two institutions has on the other hand already cut its teeth on major regional issues related to trade and security. Founded in 1989 by Australia and Japan, APEC has from the outset been seen as a site at which to engage both the US and China. Indeed, the importance of APEC to securing lines of communication between Beijing and Washington was realised in the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre. China, which had remained outside the forum initially due to its distrust of multilateralism, reached an understanding on Taiwan and moved to affirm itself as an indispensable party to APEC.[4]

After the success of the 1994 Bogor meeting, which generated an ambitious (if yet unfilled) pledge to liberalise regional trade, APEC struggled with a trade liberalisation agenda premised on an 'open' or non-discriminatory type of regionalism.

However, APEC's trade liberalisation efforts stalled in 1998, the flagship Early Voluntary Sector Liberalisation (EVSL) project being referred to the WTO after Japan and the US failed to reach an agreement. APEC did not manage any better on the financial side, and its response to the Asian financial crisis was regarded in the region as piecemeal at best.

This was due again in large part to disagreement between Japan and the US over the nature of the crisis and its solution. After these setbacks, APEC turned towards addressing the less sensitive and more technocratic issues related to trade facilitation.

This was true even as APEC acquired a security role over the 2000s. In light of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US pushed APEC to address anti-terrorism, which resulted in the effective, if low key, Secure Trade in the APEC Region (STAR) initiative. But while Washington re-emphasised APEC—reflected by the then President George W Bush attending the APEC summits more consistently than his predecessor Bill Clinton—APEC was perceived narrowly only as a tool to manage a region 'hot' with potential terrorists. As such, APEC was not used to address fundamental questions of the larger security role of the US in Asia, and therefore the 'elephant in the room' question of how to manage China's rise. The outcome of this strategic neglect by the US was to allow the incipient East Asian (rather than Asia–Pacific) regionalism to take-off, with the institutionalisation of the ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asia Summit processes accelerating over this period.

APEC was perceived narrowly only as a tool to manage a region 'hot' with potential terrorists.

President Obama was acutely aware of this problem of neglect, and to reaffirm the US's role and interests in the region prior to the 2009 APEC in Singapore, branded himself as the 'Pacific president'.[5] At the same time, however, China's presence within the institution continues to rise. While Obama brought little to the 2009 APEC beyond his promise in effect to 'do better' by Asia, China contributed US$10 million toward an eponymous fund within APEC.

President Obama: branded himself as the 'Pacific president'.

This China APEC Cooperation Fund is focused on economic and technological cooperation. Intriguingly, the new facility comes on the back of similar such arrangements at the Asian Development Bank, both of these China-sponsored funds taking over an agenda item previously closely associated with Japan.[6]

The major item on this year's APEC agenda is to be trade liberalisation. Not least, the 2010 APEC is a milestone at which member countries will reflect on progress on the Bogor Declaration goals. Trade liberalisation will also rise to the top of APEC's agenda because a decade on from the failed EVSL, East Asia has been a hotbed of bilateral and subregional free trade agreements (FTA) Continued page 20>>

APEC, ASEM and transregionalism

<< From page 19 over the 2000s. Starting from 10 such agreements either proposed, in negotiation or ratified within East Asia in 2000, there are not less than 103 FTAs at various stages of activity at present.[7] The US is also involved and has attempted to use bilateral FTAs as a supplement to its broader strategic aims in the region, concluding deals with Australia, Singapore and South Korea (although Japan's has not yet even begun talks).

This so-called 'noodle bowl' of agreements crisscrossing the region has encouraged APEC members countries to consider a wider free trade agreement for the Asia–Pacific.

This strategic motivation was also true of the three major bilateral agreements signed between ASEAN and Japan, China and Korea. The mess of this so-called 'noodle bowl' of agreements crisscrossing the region without any single harmonised schedule for tariff reduction has encouraged APEC members countries to consider (whether it will be eventually realised or not) a wider free trade agreement for the Asia–Pacific (FTAAP). Such an agreement could potentially harmonise the disparate network of FTAs extant in the region—as well as (not coincidentally) restore the US's pride of place in the region.

The November APEC is to report on progress toward the FTAAP. However, it is highly unlikely a major breakthrough has occurred, especially in light of worsening US–China relations on both political and trade fronts. Regardless, this is certainly something to watch out for.

In conclusion, both APEC and ASEM have different but important roles to play in Asia. If these institutions are used successfully and developed, then the prospects for future peace and prosperity in Asia are better. Moreover, the trend towards greater US and European influences in the region, which is likely to be furthered in this year's meetings, should be viewed as a net positive. After discussion of 'decoupling' brought on by the crisis, it is important for both Asia and non-Asian powers to skillfully manage their significant interdependence, and in that context the APEC and the ASEM has an important role to play.

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Joel Rathus is a recent PhD graduate,University of Adelaide, and a former Monbusho Scholar (Meiji).

Asian arts essay prize

The Asian Arts Society of Australia is running an essay competition to celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2011. The society is offering a $2000 prize for the winning essay on an Asian arts topic encompassing any aspect of the arts in any medium.

The competition is open only to honours or masters candidates up to the age of 35 years studying at an Australian university. The winning entry will be published in the association's quarterly peer-reviewed journal *TAASA Review*. Essays must be submitted by 30 June 2011 and emailed to taasaprize2011@gmail.com. The award will be announced on 31 October 2011. All enquiries to Dr Ann Proctor at aproctor@bigpong.net.au

Agrarian change revisited: rural Thailand a generation on

PHILIP HIRSCH revisits the Thai village where he did his PhD fieldwork 25 years ago and finds that despite many changes some things appear to be much the same.

Recent events in Thailand have highlighted material gaps but also gaps in world views between rural and urban areas. Such events remind us of the size of the knowledge gap at both societal and academic levels. They also remind us that popular and some academic assumptions about rural life are quite outdated.

The heyday of rural studies in Thailand lasted from the 1950s, with the Bang Chan village studies in central Thailand and other anthropological studies in the north and northeast. These studies were in part, though by no means exclusively, generated by Cold War concerns to understand the rural populace. Anthropological and other ethnographic studies continued through to the 1980s. Within these studies, the theme of agrarian change was part of a wider interest in the impacts of the Green Revolution in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

More recently, there has been a significant decline in agrarian studies in Thailand. The reasons for this are complex, but among them is the sense that Thailand's development is largely driven by the urban industrial and service sectors. Village-based studies have also gone out of fashion with changes in anthropology and with the increasingly interconnected world, multi-locality of livelihoods, critiques of villages as uncomplicated and bounded communities, and the postmodern and postcolonial turns in the social sciences.

There has been something of a recent revival of interest in agrarian change in Southeast Asia, in part facilitated by a large international research program on 'Challenges of the Arariant Transition in Southeast Asia' (ChATSEA), funded by Canada's Social Science and Humanities Research Council. This program brings together about 20 Southeast Asia scholars from within geography, anthropology and related social sciences, and more than 50 PhD projects at 16 universities in North America, the UK, Australia, and of course several Southeast Asian countries. Other drivers for the revived interest in agrarian change include contemporary issues such as the food crisis, land grabbing, boom crop expansion, environmental concern over land conversion and intensified farming, and questions of the extent to which the rural sector can or cannot serve as a safety net in times of financial crisis such as 1997 and 2008.

Villagers harvesting in 1985…

…and in 2010.

One of the several large collaborative projects under ChATSEA is a revisiting of village sites that were the subject of earlier studies,—mainly for PhD fieldwork—by established scholars, in a series of restudies that are to be published in a book edited by Jonathan Rigg and Peter Vandergeest. I revisited one of the two villages that formed the core of my own PhD research, later revised and published,[1] as part of the project (Hirsch forthcoming).[2]

My 'revisit' to Nong Nae in Lan Sak District, Uthaithani Province, 25 years after spending 16 months there during PhD fieldwork was, in fact, just the latest in an almost annual set of visits that were mainly social in nature but also have included taking 10 groups of Sydney University and Silpakorn University undergraduates on field schools since 1988. I have therefore had the opportunity to observe, though not formally 'study', change in a smoother and incremental way that those who have returned to almost unrecognisable Continued page 22>>

Rural Thailand: agrarian change revisited

<< Continued from page 21 sites a generation on. In 1984–85 Nong Nae was an immediate post-frontier village near the edge of the band of forest clearance on the northwestern fringe of Thailand's central plains. Rice farming dominated an agrarian landscape dotted with tree stumps, land disputes were rife and centrally appointed government authorities employed rural development schemes and discourses to assert control and consolidate administrative authority in the newly established district of Lan Sak.

The village was very poorly linked, via a sandy track, to a laterite road four kilometers distant, and another 30 kilometres to a two-lane surfaced road at Nong Chang, the nearest market town of any significance and the site of the nearest telephone. From there, the connection to Bangkok was via a slow two-lane road. No families had members working in Bangkok, although one had been to the Middle East for a two-year labouring stint.

In 2010, Nong Nae is linked to the provincial town of Uthaithani by a good surfaced road, and from there it is a four- or six-lane highway to Bangkok. All families have mobile phones, used to communicate from one end to another of the scattered village, as well as with the large number of working-age family members working in Bangkok. Land has been titled with full NS4 Chanood title[3], NS3[4] utilisation certificates and in outlying areas of the village with Agricultural Land Reform Office title. The former are fully transferable, while the latter is in principle non-transferable but in practice changes hands just as easily as the agricultural land tax documents that previously served as surrogate proof of land ownership.

The village is much quieter than a generation before, as many households now consist of elderly grandparents caring for grandchildren whose parents are working in Bangkok and other central plains locations. All rice is now broadcast rather than transplanted. All harvesting is done by mechanical combine harvesters that also thresh and winnow the paddy. No rice is kept over in household granaries as before.

The restudy could easily have been expected to find, therefore, a fairly predictable trajectory of rural to urban migration, breakdown in social fabric of the village with the decline of traditional practices of reciprocal labour, less marking of village festivals, reduced participatory management of the hand-dug irrigation canal and other features of Nong Nae as observed and documented in the earlier period of study. It could also have been expected to reveal a greatly deepened level of agrarian differentiation, state domination and environmental deterioration, all processes underway in 1984–85 and the subject of my book *Development dilemmas*.

Revisiting Lan Sak District and Nong Nae village in 2010 brought some surprises, including mixed impressions of continuity and change. At the landscape level, there was much recognisable from an earlier era. In fact, several physical aspects of the countryside appeared to bear a greater resemblance to earlier times than had been the case on more casual visits during the intervening period, highlighting that change is not unilinear.

Enhanced local accountability and closing of the social gap between governors and governed was accompanied by continuing issues of corruption, lack of transparency and bringing of conflict into the realm of village and tambon politics.

For example, parts of Nong Nae that had seemingly been abandoned to rice farming were once again green with early dry-season rice shoots in flooded fields. The mix of crops grown in dryland areas was not very different to those grown in 1984. Tab Salao Dam, which had not yet been built in 1984, and which had suffered from periodic water shortages following its construction from 1985–88, was in 2009 once again filled with water after a decade of drought and a mainly empty reservoir. There are thus surprises in what has changed, but also Continued page>>23

Rural Thailand: agrarian change revisited

<< Continued from page 22 in what has apparently stayed the same or changed less quickly than expected. But surprises depend also on our conceptual frame of reference.

For those who expect differentiation based on initial advantage, for example in terms of landholding, there have indeed been surprises in the very mixed fortunes between families, but also within them, where there was little to differentiate them in 1984, but who in 2010 experienced very different standards of living. The contingent events that have determined life paths confound the predictive value of earlier ways of seeing.

Other surprises include the degree of return migration. However, the return migrants are not responding to national and transnational institutions' views of the rural economy as a safety net. They are mainly coming back to farm or to play a role in local governance as part of a collective household choice. In many cases, their child-rearing role in Nong Nae helps make possible the continued work of siblings in the city, on the one hand, while their assistance on elderly parents' farms helps keep agriculture viable on the other.


Elderly farmers, 2010.

At the level of governance, a village time-traveller from the 1980s would indeed have been surprised to see the degree to which district functions had been devolved to the Tambon Administrative Organisation level.

The surprise might have been heightened by the extent to which this enhanced local accountability and closing of the social gap between governors and governed was nevertheless accompanied by continuing issues of corruption, lack of transparency and bringing of conflict into the realm of village and tambon politics.


Ploughing, 1985


...and in 2010.

The violence associated with this would be quite familiar to postfrontier settlers, but it is a violence based in a quite different set of material interests than those of an earlier era.

Perhaps the greatest surprise, however, is the sense in 2010 that not very much remains transitional. In 1985, Nong Nae was unequivocally a place in transition. Its post-frontier setting, the transformation of agrarian livelihoods that dominated life and characterised differences in wellbeing between households, and the discourse of development all gave observers and those living in Nong Nae a sense that this was a period of fundamental social and agronomic adjustment.

Despite all the changes that Nong Nae continues to experience, in 2010 it no longer feels transitional. On the contrary: there is a prevailing sense of *plus ca change*...

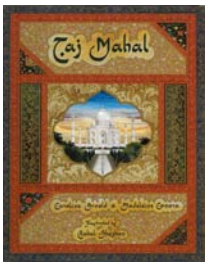
References

1. Hirsch, Philip, 1990, *Development dilemmas in rural Thailand*, Singapore, Oxford University Press.
2. Hirsch, Philip, forthcoming, *Nong Nae revisited: livelihood, governance and ecology*, in Jonathan Rigg and Peter Vandergeest, eds.
3. Title deeds with land accurately surveyed, giving incontestable ownership of the land.
4. Land title deeds where clear records of ownership are maintained, and that may be sold or leased, but are less accurately surveyed than Chanood titles.

Philip Hirsch is Professor of Human Geography in the School of Geosciences at the University of Sydney and has research interests in natural resource management, rural change and the politics of environment in Southeast Asia, notably Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and the wider Mekong region.

New books on Asia

From the Asia Bookroom

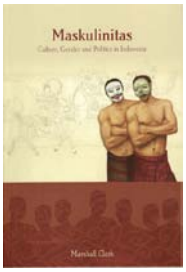


Taj Mahal. *By Caroline Arnold and Madeleine Comora. Children's fiction picturebook, dustjacket. Carolrhoda Books. $27.95.*

This beautiful book brings the Taj Mahal to life for children. It recounts the love story behind the building of the Taj Mahal, discussing how it was constructed and providing information on Indian culture. Suitable for primary school age children.

Muslim portraits. Everyday lives in India. *By Mukulika Banerjee, 140pp, paperback, Indiana University Press. $37.95.*

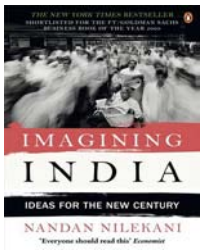
The 12 narratives in this book offer portraits of Muslims in India today, recounting their stories, predicaments, aspirations, and the highs and lows of their lives. Intimately told and stripped of jargon, yet nuanced and incisive, these essays portray individuals from many walks of life—men and women, young and old, from various regions of India. Scholars, students, and general readers will welcome this collection and its emphasis on the everyday and on multifaceted social positions and relationships.



Maskulinitas. Culture, gender and politics in Indonesia. *By Marshall Clark, paperback, 181pp, bibliography, Monash Asia Institute. $29.95.*

Maskulinitas is a groundbreaking treatment of the representation of men and masculinity in Indonesian culture, from Suharto's New Order era to the present. It includes critical analysis of Indonesian cultural expression in literature, cinema, society and politics. Drawing on the ideas of Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Maier and others, Marshall Clark explores, with acute insight and a critical eye, constructions of the masculine in contemporary Indonesian society. The book also challenges the way scholars of Indonesia have held firm to the categories and frameworks of gender studies—a field still often equated with women's studies—while offering fascinating insights into representations and images of men as engendered and engendering subjects.

A timely addition to the generally conservative field of scholarship on gender in Southeast Asia, Maskulinitas demonstrates that gender studies need to encompass 'the man question', especially considering Indonesia's strongly patriarchal society, where the norms of feminine subordination and submission are legitimised by the ideologies of the state and the strictures of religion. Ultimately, this book challenges us with the notion that if the subordinate status of Indonesian women is to be highlighted and some sort of gender equality achieved, then the representations, subjectivities and practices of Indonesian men must be addressed.



Imagining India. Ideas for the new century. *By Nandan Nilekani, paperback, 511pp, Penguin Books Ltd. $28.*

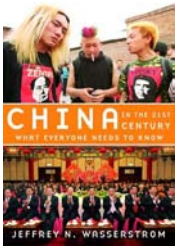
Is India's huge population actually her greatest strength? How has rapid urbanisation transformed both social and political life? Can we learn from India's difficult journey towards a single internal market? And how will India's developing future be shaped by her young people? Giving us a fascinating new perspective for the 21st century, Nandan Nilekani—previously named one of the '100 most influential people in the world' by *Time* and 'Business leader of the year' by *Forbes*—defies imported wisdom to reveal what is defies imported wisdom to reveal what is really at stake in a fast-changing India. Continued page >>25

New books on Asia

<< Continued from page 24 Nilekani gets to the heart of debates about labour reform, language, education and asks vital questions about the impending future of what is now the world's largest democracy.

New views of Tibetan culture. *David Templeman (ed.), paperback, 188pp, Monash Asia Institute. $34.95.*

This wide-ranging book brings new and fresh visions of important aspects of Tibetan culture. It considers fields as diverse as power in Lhatok in eastern Tibet, the dynamics and politics of lattice window design in Rebgong (Amdo), humour in old Tibetan verse, and concepts of the self in modern testimonia. The authors approach their topics with verve and insight, employing novel and often groundbreaking ways of dealing with their respective fields.



China in the 21st century. What everyone needs to know. *By Jeffrey N Wasserstrom, paperback, 164 pp, Oxford University Press. $32.95.*

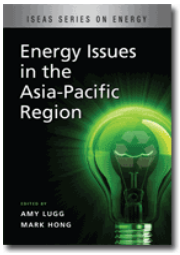
The need to understand this global giant has never been more pressing: China is constantly in the news, yet conflicting impressions abound. Within one generation, China has been transformed from an impoverished, repressive state into an economic and political powerhouse. Jeffrey Wasserstrom provides cogent answers to the most urgent questions about the newest superpower and offers a framework for understanding its meteoric rise.

Focusing his answers through the historical legacies—Western and Japanese imperialism, the Mao era, and the massacre at Tiananmen Square—that largely define China's present-day trajectory, Wasserstrom introduces readers to the Chinese Communist Party, the building boom in Shanghai and the environmental fallout of rapid Chinese industrialisation. He also explains unique aspects of Chinese culture such as the one-child policy, and provides insight into how Chinese view Americans.

Wasserstrom reveals that China today shares many traits with other industrialised nations during their periods of development, in particular the US during its rapid industrialisation in the 19th century. Finally, he provides guidance on the ways we can expect China to act in the future vis-a-vis the US, Russia, India and its East Asian neighbours.

New books from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies

The ISEAS has published almost 2000 scholarly books and journals since 1972 on economics, politics, and social issues in Southeast Asia.



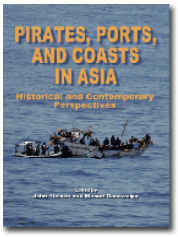
Energy issues in the Asia–Pacific region. *Amy Lugg and Mark Hong (eds).*

As the global economy recovers from the global recession and uses more oil and gas, we can expect oil and gas prices in 2010 will again increase beyond US$100 a barrel. It is therefore important for the general public to read and understand more about complex energy issues which affect their lives.

Based on lectures delivered at the ISEAS Energy Forum, as well as papers written by invited experts, this useful book provides a means to access energy information. It is part of the ISEAS Energy Books series, which serves to educate and raise public awareness on energy issues.
http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg/bookmarks/ENERGY6/

More new books from ISEAS on page 26.

New books from ISEAS



Pirates, ports and coasts in Asia: historical and contemporary.
By John Kleinen and Manon Osseweijer (eds).

This study aims to fill in some of the historical gaps in the coverage of maritime piracy and armed robbery in Asia. It highlights activities ranging from raiding, destroying and pillaging coastal villages and capturing inhabitants, to attacking and taking over vessels, and then trading the cargo and its people.

Generally speaking, what connects these activities is that they are carried out at sea, often in the coastal inshore waters, by vessels attacking other vessels or raiding coastal settlements. Acts of maritime piracy cannot be regarded as being located outside the relevant framework of the coastal zone. Coastal zones have therefore become highly desirable places, subject to great social and ecological pressures. Piracy being the most dramatic of marginal(ised) maritime livelihood, this book brings the relationship between pirates, ports, and coastal hinterlands into focus.
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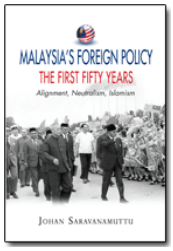

Malaysia's foreign policy, the first fifty years: alignment, neutralism, Islamism.
By Johan Saravanamuttu.

This book captures Malaysia's foreign policy over the first 50 years and beyond since the date of the country's formal independence in 1957. The author provides 'macro-historical' narratives of foreign policy practices and outcomes under five prime ministers. He posits that foreign policy should be appreciated as the outcome of socio-political-economic processes embedded within a Malaysian political culture.

In terms of broad policy orientations, Malaysian foreign policy over five decades has navigated over the terrains of neutralism, regionalism, globalisation and Islamism. However, the critical engagement of civil society in foreign policy construction remains a formidable challenge.
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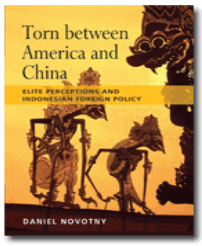

Torn between America and China: elite perceptions and Indonesian foreign policy.
By Daniel Novotny

How can a developing, democratic and predominantly Muslim country like Indonesia manage its foreign relations, while facing a myriad of security concerns and dilemmas in increasingly complex post-Cold War international politics, without compromising its national interests and sacrificing its independence?

Approaching this problem from the vantage point of the Indonesian foreign policy elite, this book explores perceptions about other states and the manner in which these shape the decision-making process. Its research strategy draws on a unique series of in-depth interviews with 45 members of the Indonesian foreign policy elite that included the country's (present and/or former) presidents, cabinet ministers, high-ranking military officers, and senior diplomats.
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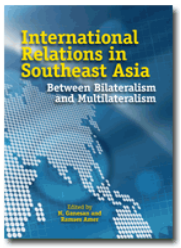

International relations in Southeast Asia: between bilateralism and multilateralism.
By N Ganesan and Ramses Amer (eds).

The sometimes stormy and often tense bilateral relationships of the region and ASEAN's contribution to regional security and cooperation are the focus of this collection of essays which cover the interrelationships of Southeast Asia's states since 1975. The nine case studies focus on the management of persistent bilateral tensions involving eight of the region's states. The diversity and expertise of its contributors and its up-to-date analysis will make this collection appealing to a wide audience of students, academics, and regional security specialists.
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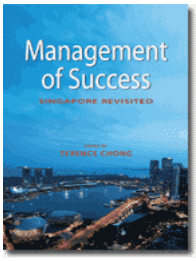
More new books from ISEAS on page 27.

New books from ISEAS



Management of success: Singapore revisited.
Terence Chong (ed.).

In 1989, ISEAS published the milestone volume *Management of success: the moulding of modern Singapore,* edited by Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley, which delved into a wide variety of issues that were integral to the growth of modern Singapore. The world that Singapore faced in 1989 has changed irrevocably. Meanwhile, within Singapore, the city-state has seen two prime ministerial transitions and the installation of third-generation leaders who have articulated their vision for the 21st century. This new volume updates and reviews public policies from the early 1990s onwards, gathering prominent thinkers and scholars on Singapore to examine issues of leadership and policy, economic restructuring, societal transformation, foreign relations and national identity.
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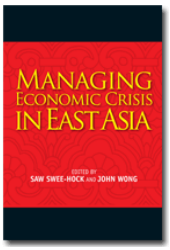

Managing economic crisis in East Asia.
Saw Swee-Hock and John Wong (eds)

Incorporating a selection of eight revised papers presented to the conference on managing economic crisis in East Asia, this volume analyses the impact of the 2008–09 economic crisis in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Japan, and the stimulus packages that were swiftly put in place by the governments to mitigate the economic recession and pave the way for a quick recovery. With contributions from experts, the book will be valuable to businessmen, analysts, academics, students, policymakers and the general public interested in seeking a greater understanding of the global economic crisis. The conference was organised jointly by the Saw Centre for Financial Studies, NUS Business School, and the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, in November 2009.
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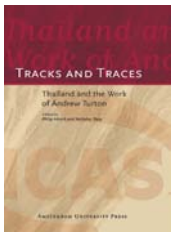


Tracks and traces: Thailand and the work of Andrew Turton.
Philip Hirsch and Nicholas Tapp (eds). Paperback, 164pp, Amsterdam University Press. €27.50.

This book traces the threads that tie together an understanding of Thailand as a dynamic and rapidly changing society through an examination of the work of anthropologist Andrew Turton. His anthropological studies cover a wide spectrum from politics and economy to ritual and culture, and have been crucial in shaping evolving models of Thai society. In this collection, 10 leading specialists from a variety of disciplines consider aspects of Turton's work in relation to the changing nature and different aspects of Thai society.

New books from the ASAA series

Southeast Asia Series

The Southeast Asia Publications Series seeks to publish cutting-edge research on all countries and peoples of Southeast Asia across disciplines including anthropology, geography, history, literature, political economy, politics, sociology and the fields of cultural studies, communication studies and gender studies.

Women in Asia Series

The Women's Caucus of the ASAA operates a publication series in conjunction with Routledge that focuses on promoting scholarship on Women in Asia. See the Routledge web site ASAA Women in Asia Series for full details.

Job websites

These sites offer career prospects for graduates and postgraduates in Asian Studies. If you know of other useful sites advertising jobs for postgraduates in Asian Studies, please send them to the editor.
www.jobs.ac.uk advertises worldwide academic posts.
http://isanet.ccit.arizona.edu/employment.html is a free-to-access website run by the International Studies Association.
www.reliefweb.int is a free service run by the United Nations to recruit for NGO jobs.
www.aboutus.org/DevelopmentEx.com has a paid subscription service providing access to jobs worldwide in the international development industry.
http://h-net.org/jobs is a US-based site with a worldwide scope. Asia-related jobs (mostly academic) come up most weeks.
www.aasianst.org is the website of the Association for Asian Studies. New job listings are posted on the first and third Monday of each month. You must be a current AAS member to view job listings.
www.timeshighereducation.co.uk is *The Times Higher Education Supplement*.
www.comminit.com is the site of The Communication Initiative Network. It includes listings of jobs, consultants, requests for proposals, events, training, and books, journals, and videos for sale related to all development issues and strategies.

Diary notes

Manga: the cartoon in contemporary Japanese life, Sydney, 27 October 2010**.** The last in a series of short cultural films shown by the Japan Foundation,Sydney during October to introduce Japanese society and culture to English audiences. Dr Rebecca Suter, University of Sydney, will present a talk and answer questions after the screening. Time and venue: 6.30 pm–8 pm, multipurpose room, The Japan Foundation, Sydney, level 1, Chifley Plaza, 2 Chifley Square. Admission free but bookings essential. RSVP or phone 02 8239 0055. Further details.

Iranian arts and crafts**,** a one-day seminar by The Asian Arts Society of Australia, Sydney, 30 October 2010, to familiarise the audience with the art of Persian calligraphy. Venue: Coles Theatre Powerhouse Museum. The presentation features works of contemporary Iranian and Middle Eastern artists who have created modern artworks using traditional Persian and Arabic calligraphy in their compositions. Mail registration form or for further information contact: Gill Green, on 02 9331 1810 or at gillians@ozemail.com.au

Life death and magic**,** Australian National Gallery, Canberra, until 31 October 2010**.** An exhibition of sculpture, jewellery and textiles from Southeast Asia.

SUNTA graduate student paper prize**.** Students in anthropology and PhD programs are invited to submit papers on urban, national, and transnational/global anthropology and/or any of the areas of interest for the Society for Urban, National, and Transnational/Global Anthropology annual graduate student paper prize. The winning paper will be considered for publication in the international, refereed journal *City and Society*. Submit papers to Dr Gautam Ghosh (gghosh2@gmail.com or gautam.ghosh@otago.ac.nz by 31 October 2010)**.**

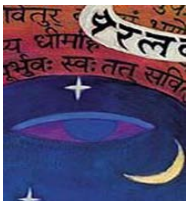
The ideas of regionalism in Asia workshop, on 11-12 November 2010, Burwood Campus, Deakin University, Melbourne.

Spatial cultures and cultural spaces in Taiwan**: *historical and contemporary perspectives conference***, Melbourne, 9–10 December 2010, organised by the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne, in association with the Melbourne University Taiwan Research Reading Group. The conference will be run in conjunction with a postgraduate symposium on Taiwan Studies to be held on 7–8 December, also at the University of Melbourne. Further details about the conference will be available from the conference website.

Indonesians overseas: historical perspectives conference**,** University of Wollongong, 10 December 2010. The organisers invite proposals for papers on the history of Indonesians overseas. Send abstracts to Julia Martinez by 1 November 2010. See conference website.

Interrogating multiculturalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand: an Asian studies perspective symposium, University of Otago, Dunedin, NZ, 19 February 2011**.** The one-day symposium, hosted by the Asia–NZ Research Cluster at Otago University, will examine multiculturalism in New Zealand. The symposium is free of charge and open to the public. The organisers have called for papers. Please see www.otago.ac.nz/humanities/research/clusters/asianz/ for more details.

Traditional Chinese Studies scholarships



The School of Culture, History & Language at the Australian National University (ANU) is calling for applications for honours scholarships in Traditional Chinese Studies.

The Liu Ts'un-Yan and Liu Chiang Szu-Yung Scholarships are available to outstanding Chinese Studies students from Australian Universities seeking admission to the ANU Bachelor of Asia–Pacific Studies with Honours. They are open to Australian citizens and Australian permanent residents. Preference will be given to candidates using Classical Chinese language sources in their research.

Applications close 26 November 2010. Information: john.makeham@anu.edu.au

Contributing to Asian Currents

Contributions, commentary and responses on any area of Asian Studies are welcome and should be emailed to the editor. The general length of contributions is 1000–1500 words. As *Asian Currents* is intended for scholars and general readers, please avoid technical language and keep references and notes to a minimum.

About the ASAA

The Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) promotes the study of Asian languages, societies, cultures, and politics in Australia, supports teaching and research in Asian studies and works towards an understanding of Asia in the community at large. It publishes the *Asian Studies Review* journal and holds a biennial conference. The ASAA believes there is an urgent need to develop a strategy to preserve, renew and extend Australian expertise about Asia. It has called on the government to show national leadership in promoting Australia's Asia knowledge and skills. See *Maximising Australia's Asia knowledge: repositioning and renewal of a national asset*.

Asian Currents is published by the ASAA and edited by Allan Sharp. The editorial board comprises Kathryn Robinson, ASAA President; Michele Ford, ASAA Secretary; Mina Roces, ASAA Publications officer; and Lenore Lyons, ASAA Treasurer.