



Language-teaching crisis

New network for universities

Inspired by the determination to foster a positive languages culture across the nation, a new universities network aims to address the many challenges facing the languages sector.
JOHN HAJEK, COLIN NETTELBECK and ANYA WOODS report.

Language skills are fundamental for individuals and nations to be able to participate fully in a globalised world.

However, over the past three decades, both the teaching and learning of languages in Australian universities have suffered enormously as a result of shifts in government and institutional policies, and of accompanying changes in public attitudes to the value of language study and to the intrinsic worth of one language vis-à-vis another.

The particular challenges facing Asian languages are frequently reported in the national press with such headlines as 'Australian students in the dark as Asia's century dawns'¹, but the same challenges also confront European and other languages in Australian tertiary institutions.

A number of recent reports have highlighted the need for considered and deliberate action to redress the situation for all languages in Australian universities. A 2007 report by the Group of Eight universities entitled *Languages in crisis*² revealed the following astonishing figures: in 1997 there were 66 languages on offer across Australian universities, but just a decade later this number had plummeted to 29.

This massive decrease in the number and range of languages on offer (both Asian and non-Asian), has been accompanied by increasing difficulties of access for students to existing courses and concomitant falls in retention across languages.

Two major studies³, supported by the [Australian Academy of the Humanities](#) (AAH), focused specifically on challenges facing beginners languages in Australian universities. A national languages colloquium was also staged in 2009⁴, drawing together from across the country colleagues who shared a common concern for the direction in which tertiary language education was heading.

As a result of this significant research and activity, including the unprecedented opportunity for national discussion, the need was identified to create a network to support language educators as an essential and critical step in ensuring and securing a dynamic and resilient languages culture within and across Australian universities. Continued page 2>>

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New language-teaching network

<<From page 1 The goal of setting up such a network has now been achieved with the new Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU), established in early 2011 as the focus of a national project entitled 'Leadership for Future Generations: A National Network for University Languages'.



Funded by the [Australian Learning and Teaching Council \(ALTC\)](#), strongly supported by the AAH, and based at the

University of Melbourne, it has Professor John Hajek as project leader, Dr Anya Woods as project manager, and a project team consisting of members with wide-ranging expertise, working around the country: Professor Kent Anderson (Australian National University), Professor Kerry Dunne (University of Wollongong), Professor Joseph Lo Bianco (University of Melbourne), Dr Lynne Li (RMIT University), Professor Colin Nettelbeck (University of Melbourne) and Associate Professor Marko Pavlyshyn (Monash University).

LCNAU will be a strongly improvement-oriented and positively-focused network. The network will:

- create avenues of communication to facilitate sharing of good teaching, research and administrative practice across the sector and to enable the best-informed discussion of models of delivery and collaborative arrangements
- facilitate and institutionalise effective cooperation thus far hindered by imposed 'silo' structures that have separated colleagues and weakened their power to represent their fields
- provide a mechanism for more effective promotion of languages programs and advocacy of their needs, and a strong forum for the defence of languages of small enrolment
- encourage initiative and leadership qualities at all levels.

It will also address, in a concerted and collaborative way, the many challenges facing the languages sector. Such challenges—which include high attrition rates, inconsistent student pathways, inadequate resourcing, the increased use of casual and junior staff—affect both student learning and staff wellbeing and morale. And there is an even greater challenge in widespread public diffidence about the critical importance of language learning.

Advocacy and promotion of languages are two of LCNAU's key goals. Languages are a vital part of education, not just in the instrumental sense of enhancing the nation's trade, economic or security position, but because of the immense benefits at the community level and individual level.

The network has project funding for two years and needs the fullest support across the sector.

While LCNAU is still in its planning phase, it has already responded to the *Draft shape of the national curriculum: languages*⁵, highlighting the need for greater contact hours at primary and secondary levels than have been proposed, and for the inclusion of content-based teaching as a means of achieving this. (The need for frequent, quality exposure to the target language is equally an issue faced in the university sector too, with the reduction in contact hours, and the resultant implications for language proficiency.)

LCNAU's primary goal is to establish links between colleagues who otherwise would not be connected or visible to each other, despite being part of the same sector, and to facilitate communication. A significant means of enabling this communication, and a key focus of LCNAU's activities for 2011, will be the staging of another national colloquium in September, which will once again bring together educators—across Asian and European languages—who will be able to be supported by the network.

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<<From page 2 Following the colloquium, a number of virtual cluster groups will be formed, out of which further professional development and policy development workshops will be developed. LCNAU's website is also being developed to maximise ongoing communication and collaboration through the establishment of online discussion forums and an extensive library of resources.

LCNAU is predicated on experience and research that has shown that languages are more likely to prosper if their representatives work together to help transform the Anglocentric monolingualism so prevalent in Australia.

From its conception, LCNAU has promoted the idea that the teaching and learning of both Asian and non-Asian languages in the Australian tertiary sector, whatever their particular needs, will benefit by collaborating on the many areas they have in common. The network has project funding for two years (2011–12) and needs the fullest support across the sector, in order to be effective now and to continue its work once ALTC funding ends.

LCNAU is hopeful that everyone working in all languages and cultures will lend their support and become part of the network; the engagement of Asian languages and studies programs (individuals and associations) will be essential to the network's success and to building a better future for university languages.

Further information about the project can be found on the [network's website](#). To register your interest in being part of the network, please email [Dr Anya Woods](#).

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Dr Anya Woods majored in Indonesian before completing her PhD in linguistics, and is currently a research fellow in RUMACCC and project manager for this ALTC-funded project to establish a languages and cultures network for Australian universities.

Indonesian language conference explores agenda for change

Ideas aplenty as academics meet to identify strategies to strengthen the teaching of, and demand for, Indonesian. DAVID T HILL reports.

Funding from the ill-fated Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) enabled Indonesian language academics from universities in every state and territory to hold an historic conference recently to discuss future strategies.

The National Colloquium on the Future of Indonesian in Australian Universities, held at Murdoch University on 9–11 February, attempted to identify strategies that might strengthen the teaching of, and demand for, Indonesian.

Academics were invited from every Australian university that teaches Indonesian. They were joined by scholars from Germany, Japan and Indonesia to provide international comparisons with Indonesian teaching programs abroad.

Among the 70 participants were representatives from the Australian and Indonesian governments, and from community interest groups such as the Australia–Indonesia Business Council, and state Indonesian language teachers associations.



Bill Johnston—we need to invest in Indonesian language skills.

Indonesian language skills is in the national interest of all Australians’.

Opened by Murdoch’s acting vice-chancellor, Professor Gary Martin, the colloquium was launched with an up-beat introductory statement by the Indonesian ambassador, Mr Primo Alui Joelianto.

The colloquium attracted good media attention and was mentioned positively in the WA Parliament. After attending, the Member for Cannington, Mr Bill Johnston, who had himself spent a year as an exchange student in Indonesia in his youth, declared ‘investment in

The program also included plenary addresses by Melbourne University’s Professor Tim Lindsey, Australia–Indonesia Business Council national vice-president Ross Taylor, Indonesian Embassy educational counsellor Dr Aris Junaidi, and Dr Sugiyono from the Language Development Agency of the Indonesian Ministry of National Education. The Indonesian Government, through both the Canberra embassy and the consulate-general in Perth, provided strong support.



Indonesian Ambassador Joelianto—upbeat

By contrast, participants were disappointed Senator Chris Evans, the Minister for Tertiary Education, declined to attend or to send a spokesperson.

Mysteriously, despite the meeting’s explicit focus on universities, no-one came from the Higher Education Group of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), with the department represented by an officer from the [National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools program](#). Both the Department of Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade were represented.

There were encouraging review sessions in which staff from each university reported on the highs and lows of Indonesian in their institution, and senior scholars in Japan, Germany and Indonesia reported on the state of the discipline there.



Anton Lucas—facilitator.

Most of the three-day program was devoted to small group discussions, facilitated by associate professors Michele Ford (Sydney), Pam Allen (Tasmania) and Anton Lucas (Flinders). These sessions focused on specific strategies raised in a discussion paper, based on input from staff and students during earlier visits to every

Australian university that teaches Indonesian. Continued page 5>>

Indonesian language conference

<<From page 4 Examples of inter-university language initiatives, and 'best practice' in teaching were shared. A lot of productive collaboration is taking place, most obviously in various in-country programs such as the [Regional Universities Indonesian Language Initiative](#) and the [Australian Consortium for 'In-Country' Indonesian Studies](#). Collaborations, such as that between Flinders and Adelaide universities to ensure Indonesian is available to students at both, have been fruitful for many years.

In the written feedback at the end of the event, respondents praised Indonesianists' 'strong spirit of community of practice', with another recommending 'linking large well-resourced unis with weaker smaller ones, or getting middle-range unis to work together in pooling resources and helping each other to move away from competition to cooperation'.

Attendees were keen to hear about innovative teaching practices that might be applicable to their own situation. At the University of Sydney, for example, in upper-level units, guest lecturers come in from the community to address students in Indonesian on a variety of specialist topics, while providing carefully structured support materials to assist students follow complex and authentic spoken Indonesian. It was an appealing model.

Other sessions evaluated the concept of having a national provider for external Indonesian courses, a national core curriculum, a national proficiency rating scale, a national teaching resources bank and the value of developing a national textbook.

Participants suspected that particular strategies—such as the provision of a national provider for external Indonesian—might have the undesirable effect of undermining smaller teaching programs, potentially attracting students away to stronger ones. Major reservations were raised about the concept of a national key centre for Indonesian studies or a single 'think-tank', with the predominant view that

such a concentration of resources could weaken the sector overall, by 'putting all eggs into one basket'.

The government's decision to close the ALTC at the end of this year removes one potential funding source that might have supported the implementation of language teaching innovations in our universities.

The example of the Netherlands was ominous. More than a decade ago all Dutch universities teaching Indonesian agreed to centralise the language at Leiden University as the sole provider on the assumption it would then be stronger and more viable. Subsequently, however, Leiden reduced its Indonesian language offerings and staff drastically, in a major restructuring.

By contrast, across the border in Germany, Indonesian remains dispersed, being taught in universities scattered across the country, often in relatively small programs. Yet it remains viable and continues to grow steadily.

Other ideas raised at the colloquium, such as a national teaching resources bank, were seen as having widespread benefit for virtually all Australian teaching programs. An ad hoc working group was established to advance that particular idea.

There was strong support too for the concept of a national body to promote Indonesian and for more targeted funding support for students to stimulate greater demand for Indonesian.

Most participants were surprised to learn that, since 2006, Indonesian (along with Arabic) had been categorised as a 'nationally strategic language' in Commonwealth funding agreements with Australian universities, and that DEEWR permission is required to close an Indonesian program.

However, while universities are discouraged from closing Indonesian programs, the government does not provide any specific funding to support a

nationally strategic language, making the classification rather Continued page 6>>

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<<From page 5 ineffective. The colloquium discussions will feed into the development of a national strategy for Indonesian in Australian universities. Later this year this strategy will be presented for consideration to the Australian Government, to individual universities and to the Indonesian Government.

Unfortunately, the government's decision to close the ALTC at the end of this year removes one potential funding source that might have supported the implementation of language teaching innovations in our universities. It remains to be seen whether alternative sources of support will be provided by a government that has shown little awareness of the urgent need to bolster the teaching of this 'nationally strategic language' in our universities.



David T. Hill is Professor of Southeast Asian Studies at Murdoch University, a National Teaching Fellow of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, and Director of the Australian Consortium for 'In-Country' Indonesian Studies. Details of the ALTC Fellowship and the colloquium are available at: <http://altcfellowship.murdoch.edu.au>.

Business urges bipartisan approach to Asian studies and languages

A group of leading Australian business figures has written to all federal MPs, urging a bipartisan approach to Asian studies and languages programs.

In letters addressed to all 226 federal MPs, the group says Australia's future 'depends on a bipartisan approach to our understanding of and relationship with Asia'.

The group, including Sir Rod Eddington, Hugh Morgan AC and Australian Industry Group CEO Heather Ridout, has urged the federal government not to drop its Asian

studies and languages program, due to end this year, warning that Australia will risk its wealth, harmony and security unless significant government investment goes to equipping the next generation of Australians to compete in the Asian Century.

'The world's wealth is moving to Asia,' the business leaders say, 'and we ignore this fact at our peril. We face many challenges in the coming century, many of which we cannot foresee. But if we do not take up the challenge of equipping our children effectively for the changes we do know are imminent, we fail as leaders, we fail as parents, and we risk Australia's wealth, harmony and security.'

Sid Myer, Chairman of [Asialink](#) and the [Asia Society](#), also a signatory, said the letters were in response to deep concerns among the business community that the federal government may decide to cut its Asian studies and languages program.

'We have one school generation before China is the world's largest economy,' Mr Myer said. 'Investing in Asia skills is productive spending—and we now know the full extent of the decline in both Asian languages and studies education in Australian schools.'

Asialink estimates there are just 300 students nationally studying Chinese language at Year 12 who are non-Chinese-heritage learners. Examiners reports show these numbers are falling every year, and the challenge is to turn that around, according to Mr Myer.

'The decline in the study of Indonesian is so severe that on current trends, there will be no Year 12 Indonesian language student in Australia in four to five years time.'

National language conference

The 18th Biennial Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations National Conference will be held in Darwin from 6–9 July. The program will include papers and workshops on the NALSSP languages, the Australian curriculum, Australian Aboriginal languages, using new technology in languages learning and teaching, and a range of other pertinent

topics. Further information is available on the [conference website](#).

Timor's youth—from *supermi* to sojourns

ANGIE BEXLEY discovers that young Timorese are finding new ways to express themselves outside the politicised and victimised identities of the past.

Young Timorese, who were children and teenagers during the period of Indonesian New Order rule between 1975 and 1999, have struggled to find a sense of belonging since Timor-Leste's Independence in 2002.

While the population at large felt disappointed with Independence¹, young Timorese in particular expressed their disillusionment. This sentiment intensified when decisions at a national level worked to marginalise young people from national narratives of belonging and nation-state processes.

During the early years of Timor's independence, young Timorese presented a united front and worked hard for recognition as legitimate citizens. Nine years after independence, however, postcolonial power relations continue to define limits of national belonging. Splits have now emerged among young Timorese themselves and a burgeoning youth generation finds itself marginalised from a previously all-encompassing 'Timorese youth' identity.

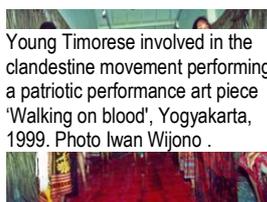
However, as increasing numbers of young Timorese are leaving Timor for education and employment opportunities, they are finding new ways to express their Timorese youth identities outside the politicised and victimised identities of the past.

During the period of national resistance against Indonesian occupation, Timorese youth became important symbols of Timorese nationalism. The then Commando of the resistance, Xanana Gusmao, was largely responsible for creating a discourse on youth as heroic and, above all, patriotic. Gusmao addressed young Timorese by the gendered label *Maubere Aswain* (Maubere Warriors) in order to foster a sense of

community and encourage them to become involved in the clandestine

movement that played a large role in Timor's achievement of independence.

The urban-based clandestine movement found particular traction among many Timorese students living in Indonesia throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. It is estimated that up to 15 000 students were



Young Timorese involved in the clandestine movement performing a patriotic performance art piece 'Walking on blood', Yogyakarta, 1999. Photo Iwan Wijono .

sent to Indonesia by the Indonesian New Order government on scholarships with the intention of moulding them into good 'Pancasila'² Indonesian citizens.

This had the opposite desired effect, however, as many Timorese came into contact with the nascent Indonesian pro-democracy movement and their identities as political youth rallying for an independent Timor-Leste became realised. While the Indonesian military remained the enemy, young Timorese became fluent in Indonesian language and cultures; they were comfortable reading and writing in Indonesian, listening to Indonesian pop and rock music and socialising with Indonesians.

After Timor-Leste's independence in 2002, youth found they were no longer critical constituents in the national agenda. Young Timorese struggled for their right to be recognised as *Maubere Aswain* and instead were labeled *Generasi Supermi* (Generation Supermi) by the Portuguese-speaking political elite. *Supermi* refers to the Indonesian brand of instant noodles and was meant as a pejorative term to highlight their (negative) engagement with Indonesia and to delineate their influence at the nation-state level.³ This marginalisation acted as a catalyst for young Timorese to persistently express their identity and belonging in time and place.

After independence, young Timorese came up with their own label of recognition, the *Geracão Foun*, or New

Generation in the Tetum language. The label highlighted Timorese Continued page 8>>

Timor's youth—from *supermi* to sojourns

<<From page 7 youth's role in Timor's independence from Indonesia and imbued them with a legitimacy denied to them by the nation-state. In doing so, it also defined their difference from the 'Generation of '75' consisting of the Portuguese-speaking political elite who had marginalised them after Independence.⁴ Through this label, young Timorese envisioned themselves as the 'New Generation' of Timor's Independence and future leaders.

For the youth of the rising middle class, Indonesia remains a popular place to study because of cultural familiarities.

However, membership to the *Geracão Foun* has also been contested. As a younger generation of youth came of age after independence in 2002, it too feels it belongs to the *Geracão Foun* but older members of the group have marginalised this younger generation. They argued that they are not worthy of membership to the *Geracão Foun* because many were children during the resistance and did not share the same experiences of the clandestine movement as the older youth; for example, fighting against the military on the streets of Jakarta.

In 2006, the issue of membership was raised again as older youth pointed to younger Timorese's alleged involvement in the violence that helped bring down the prime minister, Mari Alkatiri, in 2006. In doing so, the same power relations of domination and marginalisation that the Portuguese-speaking elite of the 'Generation of '75' had enacted upon the *Geracão Foun* have been repeated by the *Geracão Foun* as a new generation of youth emerges and seeks acknowledgement of its rightful identities as youth.

Despite initial marginalisation from the older Portuguese-speaking elite from centres of power at the nation-state level, older members of the *Geracão Foun* are becoming increasingly involved in the

upper echelons of government in senior ministerial and parliamentary positions.⁵

However, it remains to be seen to what extent they will be able to formulate and realise their own long-held political aspirations. And, more importantly, it remains to be seen to what extent they can include the hopes and aspirations of the emerging youth generation and avoid repeating further cycles of disenfranchisement that have thus far marked Timor's transition to independent nationhood.

Meanwhile, young Timorese are forging new youth identities through experiences gained abroad. For the youth of the rising middle class, Indonesia remains a popular place to study because of cultural familiarities, including the ease with which young Timorese can communicate in the Indonesian language. It is estimated that around 5000 Timorese are in Indonesia studying at universities and technical colleges in Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Bali.

Beyond Indonesia, young Timorese are seeking higher degrees in places as far away as Hawaii and Australia. Most return to Timor, even if only briefly, before the next educational opportunity arises.

These young Timorese sojourners bring with them a host of new ways of both being in and, seeing the world. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, act as a platform to express their youthful identities in Timor and abroad. They converse in English, Tetum and local languages, such as Fataluku, and cover topics such as social theory, nationalism and world politics.

At the same time, as they become conversant in other languages they also aspire to a patriotic Timorese youthful identity. On asking what their plans are after they finish their studies, young Timorese will invariably say 'to return and help my country'.

Not only the young middle class seek opportunities abroad. Young Timorese who have little money and status are also going in search of modern futures for themselves and Timor-Leste by seeking employment opportunities in the United Kingdom.

In the immediate post-Independence environment, the colonial Continued page 9>>

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<<From page 8 relationship with Portugal meant that passports were freely offered to East Timorese in recognition of their former colonial subject status. As Portugal is a member of the European Union, a Portuguese passport offered a pathway to young Timorese to live and work elsewhere in Europe.

Over time, this has developed into new and complex forms of chain migration as young Timorese have established themselves as mostly workers in low-skilled occupations. The extent to which these new and complex forms of temporary migration and the ways in which their expanded cultural and socio-economic horizons impact upon their sense of self and their home communities is the subject of a study planned for next year.

As the limits of nation-state belonging are being redefined in Timor-Leste and postcolonial power relations continue to marginalise young people, the Timorese are constantly finding new ways to express themselves and carve identities as legitimate Timorese citizens.

Politicised identities remain important for young Timorese, as does a sense of patriotism. However, nowadays, they are gaining worldly knowledge through work and study opportunities—new experiences from which to build their identities as young Timorese.

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Dr [Angie Bexley](#) graduated from The Australian National University in June 2010 with a PhD in Anthropology with her thesis, 'Youth at the crossroads: the politics of identity and belonging in Timor-Leste'.



Creative misreadings of Christianity in Japanese popular culture

REBECCA SUTER reflects on the rise of the 15-year-old leader of the last Christian rebellion in Japan, nearly 400 years ago, to almost pop icon status in the postwar period.

Since the 1990s, Japan has seen a resurgence of interest in the 16th–17th century Christian missionaries and so-called *kirishitan*—or Christianity. This follows a similar surge of interest in the subject during another period of thriving cultural exchange, in the 1920s.

My current ARC Discovery Project (2010–12) investigates what I define as ‘creative misreadings’ of Christianity in Japanese modern literature and popular culture, particularly in modern works that are set in the so-called ‘Christian century’ of Japan—the brief period of evangelisation before the ban on Western religion and the prohibition of contacts with Europeans. I investigate these phenomena to reflect on issues of cultural identity and globalisation.

Part of my research project—and the focus of this article—looks at postwar popular culture in a range of different media, including literature, film, comics, animation and videogames. A particularly intriguing phenomenon I encountered is the rise to pop-icon status of Amakusa Shirô, the leader of the last Christian rebellion of 1637–38, and his reconfiguration as what in Japanese is commonly referred to as a *bishônen* (beautiful boy) figure.

Masuda Shirô Tokisada was the 15-year-old leader of the so-called Shimabara rebellion of 1637, a popular revolt against excessive taxes that relied on Christian symbols, and was crushed by the Tokugawa government, with a display of 100 000 armed soldiers on the part of the Shogunal forces, and a death toll of 30 000 on the rebel side.

In official discourse, Shimabara became a symbol of the final victory of the Shogunate over Christianity, and marked

the beginning of the *sakoku*, or ‘closed country’ system. Popular representations of the revolt, on the other hand, centred on the romanticisation of its young leader, who became known as ‘Amakusa Shirô.’

Accounts portrayed him as a Christ-like *enfant prodige*, intellectually gifted and endowed with divine/magical powers such as making white doves appear in his hands and walking on water. In the iconography, he is represented as culturally hybrid, combining Portuguese pants, a kimono top, a rosary with a cross, and the classic two samurai swords.



Akaishi Michiyo's comic Amakusa 1637 (2002).

While Shirô held a place in the popular imagination since the Tokugawa period, in the postwar years he became a true pop icon. He made a few first appearances in popular fiction in the 1950s, but his rise to fame arrived with

Yamada Fûtarô's *Makai tenshō* (Demon resurrection) in 1967. In the novel, after being killed in the revolt, Amakusa is reborn as a demon thanks to a combination of Christian magic and *ninjutsu*, and sets out to similarly resurrect a number of samurai of his time.

Very popular in its day, the novel became the basis for a series of spin-offs in other media, including film, theatre, manga, anime and videogames. In the adaptations, the character of Shirô became more central, and increasingly ambiguous. While in the first versions his cultural hybridity and youth were the main sources of his spiritual power, starting in the 1980s gender ambiguity also becomes a major factor.

The most famous adaptation was a movie directed by Fukasaku Kenji in 1981, with actor/singer Sawada Kenji in the role of Shirô. Sawada, also known by the pseudonym Julie, in honour of actress Julie Andrews, was famous for his gender-ambiguous performances. Continued page 11>>

Creative misreadings of Christianity

<<From page 10 In his interpretation, Shirô's gender and sexual ambiguity became a significant component of the character's seductive power.

The film also introduced the character of renowned Christian convert Hosokawa Garasha (Gracia), who is resurrected shortly after Shirô as a helper for his mischievous plans, an element absent from Yamada's text. Compared to the novel, the film thus gives greater prominence to gender ambiguity and to hybridised Christianity; both are associated with demonic power and presented as perverse and evil.



Fukasaku Kinji's film *Makai Tenshō* (1981)

Later filmic and theatrical adaptations continued in this vein, staging gender-ambiguous 'pretty boy' actors or female actresses in the role of Shirô, and

featuring prominently crosses and other

Christian paraphernalia as instruments of Amakusa's black magic.

Beginning in the late 1980s, the work was also adapted into manga format, such as Ishikawa Ken's *Makai tenshō* (Yamato comics, 1987) and Tomi Shinzô's *Makai tenshō* (Leed-sha, 1995). Both comics present Shirô as the villain of the story, and contrast him with the character of renowned samurai Yagyû Jûbei, the main enemy of the demon gang.

While Shirô is gender ambiguous, culturally hybrid and inherently evil, Jûbei combines attributes of traditional masculinity and of moral and cultural integrity. Dressed in traditional samurai clothes, he is portrayed as a protector of women and children, and stubbornly resists Shirô's offers to resurrect him as a demon. His cultural and sexual purity emphasise, by contrast, the pernicious nature of Shirô's queer identity.

Up until the mid-1990s, representations of Shirô were prevalent in the genre of horror, and his queer Christianity was portrayed as demonic. In more recent

years, the character has become associated with spirituality in a more positive, yet even more ambiguous, sense.

Up until the mid-1990s, representations of Shirô were prevalent in the genre of horror, and his queer Christianity was portrayed as demonic.

A pivotal moment in this process was the year 1999, when the renowned drag queen Miwa Akihiro, during the new age TV show *Aura no Izumi*, declared that a Shingon-shû spiritualist had revealed to him that he was the reincarnation of Shirô. Coming from Miwa, a flamboyant transvestite turned spiritual guide, this declaration created a powerful connection between cultural hybridity, gender ambiguity and salvation.

This has become the main framework through which Shirô is perceived in the popular imagination, and has affected in turn his representation in contemporary popular culture. Since the 2000s the character has become the monopoly of girls' comics (*shôjo manga*), and this has further transformed his perception and representation.

While earlier literary and filmic representations of Shirô portrayed him as a demonic other—an object of simultaneous fascination and fear—contemporary *shôjo manga* celebrate Shirô's hybridity and ambiguity, on the level of gender as well as on that of culture, as a source of both critical reflection and spiritual salvation.



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Living with robots—Japan’s way of harmonious coexistence

Japanese approaches to humanoid or android development reveal strong adherence to deep-rooted traditional cultural values and practice, writes HIROKO WILLCOCK.

Japanese syncretism is characterised by the propensity to maintain a harmonious unity through the balancing of the entities. Each entity finds analogous elements and retains independent, separate distinctiveness, and without a hostile polarity—or a total submersion of one into the other, in an open-ended, embracing whole.

Syncretism complements a characteristic feature of a Japanese thought pattern that emphasises spontaneous, moving and self-generating elements, rather than the metaphysical world of rationalism and principles. In the course of synthesis, the indigenous elements constitute the principal elements of the hybrid that relegate the new, alien elements to secondary importance. Hybridisation is therefore seen essentially as producing a strengthened and reinvigorated existing cultural and thought tradition, a vital element of Japanese syncretism.

Such a pattern of syncretism is found conspicuously in the acculturation of the 13th and 19th centuries, and in the fusion of cultural practices as in that of Christianity and Bushidō. It is also found in the Japanese approaches to the development of humanoids, which to a degree contrast with those of some Western counterparts.

An insight into a characteristic feature of Japanese syncretism will be proffered through a brief observation of the contemporary Japanese attitude towards ‘robotisation’.¹

Patently, robots induce the consideration of dual elements such as machine vs. human, hard vs. soft, concrete vs. fluid and science vs. humanity, and further provoke the ontological question of man and God, or free will vs. design.

Roboticians and robot pundits persuade us that the advance of robotics will lead inevitably to the blurring of the distinction between humans and machine, or the creation of another species much superior to *Homo sapiens* in the not so distant future.



Ken Warwick.

While roboticists such as [Ray Kurzweil](#) maintain the impossibility of preventing the advance and the wide use of biotech, nanobots, cyborgs and humanoids, [Kevin Warwick](#), a

cybernetics expert, sees it

as inevitable that humankind is heading to a future dominated by a hybrid species of human and robot. In fact, a rapid development towards the blurring has long been under way.

In Japan, the leader in robot production, a drive to disseminate the idea of ‘robotisation’ was accelerated in the second wave of the robot industrial revolution after the IT bubble of the late 20th century. Japan has so far been more enthused with the creation and production of robots closely associated with direct interaction with humans and their practical use by general consumers, mainly in combating pressing social and economic needs and demands. Indeed, as observed by Tadokoro Satoshi, the president of the [International Rescue System Institute](#), the Japanese strength in robots lies in their strong attachment to humanistic concerns and nature.²

More specifically, Japanese robotisation is marked by a keen interest in humanoid or android development. Their preference for humanoids over military, space or industrial robots may reflect their strong adherence to deep-rooted traditional cultural values and practice, and their desire to re-evaluate and rejuvenate the national cultural identity. This reflects the characteristics of Japanese syncretism. The melding of humans and machines envisioned, for example, by Warwick encompasses

Continued page 13>>

Living with robots

<<From page 12 *Homo sapiens* becoming machines through the grafting of human 'consciousness' into a machine body that is fast and durable. The keenness of such roboticists to create a hybrid may be contrasted with a dominant Japanese approach to the concept of hybridisation.

While Japanese creators' perception of the resultant hybrids of machines and humans shares similarities with cyborgs, it does not share the enthusiasm for the Warwick's kind of blended *Robo sapiens*. A lack of enthusiasm for cyborgs probably derives not so much from fear of the potential loss of human hegemony, but from a perception that they represent the blending that would shed their original, distinctly independent forms to become one mixed whole. Such a blending resulting in *Robo sapiens* does not resonate well with the Japanese preference for hybrids created with the harmonious coexistence of disparate elements.

Roboticists both in the West and Japan focus on the substantial benefits of robots serving human society. They find value in the process of creating robots as a means of investigating human nature, rather than as a means of gaining power, or material wealth. Nonetheless, in Western society people are more inclined to see humanoid robots as potential destroyers of humankind as we know it and restrict some aspects of their development. Alarmists would find a solace in the faithful pursuit of Asimov's three principles of robotics³ to ensure that there is clear polarisation between humans and machines, and that robots remain merely functional tools to benefit humans.

In Japan the antipathy towards the cohabitation with robots in society is not profound. The Japanese are less sceptical and fearful about their future world of robots than some Westerners. They seem to innately embrace the idea of their cohabitation.

The idealist vein of Japanese roboticists tends to see more than a utilitarian value in robots. They do not necessarily seek to define a taxonomic hierarchy of species dominated by humans. Rather, they embrace a future society where

mechanical products of technoscience and humans cohabit in a close, non-hostile way.

Their attitude would be that by the development of robots that are both the product of physical and mental simulation of humans, and capable of adapting to the human conditions, the harmonious coexistence of humans and machines is achievable by finding affinities and through their coexistence independently, but without antipathy of division, in the embracing whole.

As illustrated by the approach of Takahashi Tomotaka,⁴ the principal element of their developing humanoids is to build the emotional link between robot and human needed to establish an intangible spiritual connection so as to attain the cohabitation of robots and humans in society. They seek affinity of feelings of intimacy, congeniality and anthropomorphic kinship. Further, they believe a peaceful and prosperous society is only possible when humans can cohabit with robots that 'understand' the actions and conduct of humans, 'empathise' with human behaviour and 'appreciate' a harmonious existence.

The establishment of anthropomorphic kinship is one way to achieve a hybridisation of a balancing and harmonious coexistence through strengthening analogous elements. For some leading Japanese robot creators, then, the creation of humanoids encompasses an ontological inquiry into humankind, as well as a process of redefining and rearticulating value elements unique to humans.

Kuniyoshi Yasuo believes it would be essential for humanoid needs to simulate human empathy through a cognitive social ability so that robots can even be considered as an exploration of what is meant by aesthetic tastes, or sources of spirituality. Similarly, Sakura Hitoshi argues that the humanoids can be treated as a 'window' through which humans enhance their perception of the world external to the self, as well as a medium in which the internality of humans is projected externally.⁵

For Sakura, humanoids also represent a 'mirror', a reflection Continued page 14>>

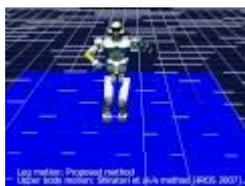
Living with robots

<<From page 13 >> and physical perception of the world external to the self, as well as a medium in which the internality of humans is projected externally.⁵

For Sakura, humanoids also represent a 'mirror', a reflection and physical manifestation of the self that can reveal the innermost being of humans. To enhance humanoids as a 'mirror'-like reflection of humans, therefore, would ultimately mean the pursuit of creating robots with multilayered complex human 'emotions', and ones that could express, for instance, exaltation when encountering phenomenal beauty, or the torment of undergoing an agonising process of self-criticism and self-identity.

It is a part of an intense ongoing quest to challenge humanity and delve into the question of the relationship of the self to the external, a field of scholarship in which the Japanese have been engaged for centuries.

Japanese keenness in the retention of existing elements is reinforced, on the one hand, by their intense concern for the self and the deep-rooted value element of self-cultivation, and on the other, by their predisposition to pursue excellence, seeing the outcome of the syncretic process as the reinvigorated, enhanced foundation.



Dancing robot. Photo: YouTube.

As observed, for example, in the creation of **Ikeuchi Katsushi's** robot dancer or a robot painter, they work towards the creation of robots that demonstrate

cognition of the intent of their action and conduct combined with their built-in voluntary 'will' to learn more, improve and critically assess the result, and redo the task if they judge their work as unsatisfactory.⁸

The idealistic line of roboticists will no doubt continue to explore the creation of self-cultivating robots with ability to comprehend the feelings and behaviour of others.

A notable characteristic of the Japanese worldview is to regard human existence as a part of nature. Every perceivable existence, be it animate, or inanimate, exists as a part in an all-embracing whole of no clearly defined form, or framework. The strong presence of an inclusive sense of their existence readily embraces a keen, optimistic vision of the future world, with a romantic perception of humanoids.

Thus, a pattern of Japanese syncretism is found in the contemporary Japanese attitude towards 'robotisation'. If the nature of Japanese syncretism stays immutable, Japanese 'robotisation' will undoubtedly remain eager to retain the separateness of the seemingly dichotomous premises of human and anthropomorphised robots in all levels of society.

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Writing the life of Herb Feith

Writing a biography of Indonesia scholar and peace activist Herb Feith, JEMMA PURDEY finds a man who rarely lived his life as others thought he should.

It is fair to say that Herb Feith, world-renowned Indonesia scholar, pioneer of volunteerism, activist and educator was not averse to the idea of his biography being written.

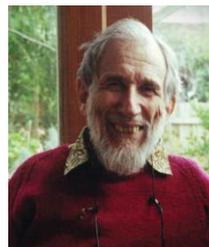
In the late 1990s he had started discussions with his friend Angus McIntyre, who was interested in editing Herb's letters from Indonesia in the 1950s for possible publication. Two Indonesian students in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s, Fachry Ali and Bob Hadiwinata, had interviewed Herb, and both had written intellectual biographies of sorts.

Hadiwinata's work comprises a manuscript for a book in Indonesian, to which Herb contributed a great deal of comment and guidance, but which was never published. Herb's own attempts at autobiography were brief and not entirely satisfying. As he told an audience at the Australian Association of Asian Studies (ASAA) conference in 1984, 'I found that autobiography can be very fascinating but also that it's a lot harder than I thought'.

Herb's sudden accidental death on 15 November 2001, a week after his 71st birthday, left his family, friends and colleagues from around the world shocked and alarmed by their loss. The manner of his death, an accident between a cyclist and a suburban passenger train, contributed even more to this sense of tragedy. Biographer Hermione Lee writes it is 'unusual for death in biography to occur as random, disorderly, without meaning, without relation to the life lived and without conclusiveness'.¹

However, Herb's death, like most, defies such a rendering. His close friend Goenawan Mohamad, Indonesian journalist, publisher and poet, wrote after

Herb's death that the manner of his dying, so violently in a collision between modern machine and simple pedal-power, was in extreme contrast to the way Herb had lived his life. Mohamad described his friend as 'he who would never disturb those around him with ambition or coercion, nor quarrel with anything or anyone'.²



Herb Feith—an unlikely journey.

I approached my task with a primary goal of writing a biography that would be of interest to and could be read by a wide readership. In his life, Herb Feith reached into many facets of Australian and Indonesian society and beyond, not only through his intellectual engagement within academia and as a public intellectual in the broader sense, but also as an advocate, activist and friend to many, particularly the oppressed, in these countries and elsewhere in the world. He is remembered as much for his contribution to scholarship as he is for his passion for education, peace activism and the development of cross-cultural understanding.

The biography documents the story of Herb Feith's unlikely journey from Nazi-occupied Vienna to Indonesia, the nation that became the focus for his work, scholarship and activism for 50 years. This story begins in the 1930s, continues to 1940s Melbourne where his family found refuge, and on to the establishment of his lifelong connection with Indonesia in 1951 and his later academic achievements.

Herb's engagement with Indonesia saw him play multiple roles, as a pioneer in relations between Australia and Indonesia, a civil servant working alongside Indonesians on a local salary, a leading scholar, observer, analyst and teacher of Indonesia's political system and society, and an activist fighting for a better outcome for the impoverished, oppressed and marginalised in Indonesia and around the world. Continued page 16>>

Writing the life of Herb Feith

<<From page 15 My first and last conversation of any length with Herb Feith took place the day before he passed away. We both attended a seminar given by my friend Kate McGregor in the History Department of Melbourne University on the work of Herb's old friend and controversial figure,

Indonesian historian Nugroho Notosusanto. I remember Herb asking Kate some thought-provoking question on some topic or another, and afterwards he sought me out. Herb asked me about my thesis then in process, and was especially keen to know when I hoped to finish it. I remember Herb's particularly sharp gaze, which seemed to hold me quite close to him and made me sure that he was 100 per cent focused on me. The gaze was at the same time probing and reassuring.

Some years later, in the course of researching this biography, my many interviewees were almost uniform in recounting similar experiences with Herb, noting that he was what might be called an active listener. People told me that after spending time with Herb they often felt, as I had, that they had talked more than they expected to. Herb got a lot out of his interactions with people, however brief.

My subsequent encounters with Herb have been mediated through the memories of his family, friends, colleagues, admirers and students. My key informants were Herb's wife Betty and children David, Annie and Rob. More than 100 interviews I conducted around Australia, Indonesia, East Timor, the United States and Europe have been crucial for piecing together his life and its impact on others.

It must be said that at times the accounts given to me by respondents from Jakarta to Brisbane to Ithaca were so overwhelmingly similar that the challenge of finding alternative versions or contradictory perspectives on my subject was considerable. However, in the end I decided there was much to be said for the consistent picture emerging from the interviews. Together with the oral sources, paper and text—boxes and boxes of it—including his large and eclectic list of published works, formed the deep well

from which I drew my understanding of Herb.

Many recall Herb as having the appearance and giving the impression of someone less than organised, perhaps even scattered. Spending time with his archives quickly does away with that idea. These were piles of filed and labelled manila folders containing a lifetime of letters (often both to and from correspondents), and small handwritten memos on scraps of recycled paper containing his random thoughts and notes from myriad conversations with informants, students and friends.

The care he took upon his retirement from Monash to transfer the contents of his office (more or less) to the university's archive demonstrated his intention then for his work, letters and various ephemera to be a lasting and lively documentation of Australia's engagement with Indonesia, the study of Indonesia during an extraordinary life spent between these two places. After his death, his family donated his other papers to the National Library of Australia.

Herb Feith was a direct witness to 50 years of Indonesian history. The telling of his life story reveals a history of Indonesian nationhood, beginning with its failed early attempt at parliamentary democracy in the 1950s (his study of which is still regarded as the seminal account³) through to autocratic rule and repression from the mid-1960s until *reformasi* and democracy were reborn in the late 1990s.

It is also a history of Australia maturing as a nation after World War II, as it carved out its own identity, and of its deepening engagement with our nearest neighbour and the Asia-Pacific region, providing a window on the post-colonial world. It tells of Australians like Herb who led this engagement in the 1950s out of a drive not only to do good but also to discover and cross borders and cultures of all kinds. Their legacy survives today in the deep and complex relationship between Indonesia and Australia and in much broader global networks connecting 'peace-minded' people around the world.

Herb Feith rarely lived his life as others thought he should. Continued page 17>>

Writing the life of Herb Feith

<<From page 16 From his childhood experiences as an outsider in Nazi Vienna in the 1930s he had learnt to be culturally flexible and adaptive, as he did again in 1940s Australia and 1950s Indonesia. He understood what it took to blend in while retaining a strong sense of himself. His cross-cultural experiences provided Herb with a set of what he referred to as his 'craft skills', which he recognised as giving him the ability to cross or transcend cultural and social divisions. These skills were apparent in his interpersonal style of engagement—a style that was open, genuine, respectful and generous.

Herb possessed the skill of transcending cultural and societal difference bodily, behaviourally, linguistically and intellectually. He could easily blend into a room full of Indonesians. His friendships and human interactions are key clues to understanding Herb. He was clearly buoyed by contact with others; he loved to listen, to probe and question. This was the way he gained a great deal of his knowledge. Unlike most scholars, I think, Herb's insight was achieved largely by way of this interpersonal skill-set, rather than primarily from books and models, although he would process what he learned in a very systematic and structured way.

It explains his need to visit Indonesia often, to talk to people there, to witness, in order to be free to know what was happening. It was a model of experiential learning that he passed on to his many students and friends. An appreciation of Herb's ability to connect with people from all walks of life and in a wide range of cultural contexts is critical in order to understand his approach to his work and activism.

This is ultimately a very human story of struggle between a man's intellectual ambitions and pursuits, his work and family responsibilities, and his moral compulsion to act. Where did Herb's very strong moral compass come from? Herb was a spiritual being who later in his life described himself as a 'syncretistic Jew'. Throughout his life he was drawn to religion in many forms, from the Student

Christian Movement to the Quakers, Buddhism and the Uniting and Catholic churches; it was a journey that he described as one of attempting 'to make my Judaic religion the starting point of learning to live religion in the plural'.⁴

Like most human beings, Herb was complex, multidimensional and sometimes contradictory; he was at the same time self-assured and vulnerable, a great intellect and a confused student, a leader and a follower. After he died many people remembered Herb as akin to a saintly figure in their lives—a gentle, tender, yet feisty advocate for the oppressed and for just causes. Herb, I think, might have seen himself in terms more like those medical anthropologist and psychologist Arthur Kleinman uses to describe an 'anti-hero', as someone who

... may not change the world but helps make clear to others what needs to change if the world is to be a less unjust and desperate place ... anti-heroism legitimates, at the same time, alternative ways of living in the world that offer new and different personal answers to the question of what an adequate life is. Heroic acts that change society are rare and more often than not meretricious fictions, whereas protest and resistance as well as perturbing and disturbing the status quo are, at best, the most ordinary people like us can achieve.⁵

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Singapore's declining dialects reflect debate over Chinese identity

JASON LIM traces the effect of political and social change and successive waves of migration on the use of Chinese dialects in Singapore.

Sir Stamford Raffles established a trading station for the East India Company on the island of Singapore in 1819. Singapore became a free port and the British colonial authorities adopted a laissez-faire policy for immigration. Large numbers of Chinese entered Singapore as a result.

In 1867, the administration of the island was transferred to the Colonial Office in London but the practice of allowing Chinese to enter Singapore continued as China continued to be embroiled in wars, political turmoil, natural disasters and economic malaise.

The Qing Dynasty was unable to tackle these problems. Overpopulation and unemployment added to the court's woes by the early 20th century. Bandits roamed the countryside and this made life extremely difficult for the villagers. Migration was punishable by death but the situation had already become intolerable for the Chinese. They heard about the 'Nanyang' (South Seas), referring to Southeast Asia, and they chose to migrate there. Many Chinese who left for Singapore came from the southern provinces of Fujian and Guangdong as the people from these provinces had traded, worked or lived in the Nanyang. The Qing Dynasty only lifted the restrictions on migration in 1893.

The journey to Singapore was a perilous one. A large number of unskilled Chinese left China from the 1850s and that was the start of the coolie trade. The coolies were employed to do menial tasks; more often than not, they could not pay for their

passage to Singapore and they had to work to pay their debts. The unsanitary and inhumane conditions during the voyage to Singapore resulted in deaths on the high seas.

However, not everyone was forced to come to Singapore. Along with the coolies were the merchants who came to trade. Some of them continued with their family business networks in China but there were also those who came to Singapore because the island was at the centre of the Malayan rubber, pineapple and tin trade. In 1906, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce was formed. Recognising the economic and financial strength of the Chinese merchants in Singapore, the Qing Dynasty called on their support for new government economic and communications programs in China.



Thian Hock Keng, a Chinese temple in Singapore completed in 1842, was the home of the earliest Hokkien association (Hokkien Huay Kuan) in 1860.

When the Chinese arrived in Singapore, they needed food, shelter and employment. It was

natural that they looked for fellow migrants who had come from the same province, district, city, town or village. Family connections would also be crucial for the new migrant. The new migrants would approach the different associations that had grown up around the island based on dialect affiliation.

The new migrants who had arrived from Fujian and Guangdong spoke an assortment of dialects. The five main ones—reflecting the dialect groups of migrants who came soon after 1819—were the Hokkiens, Teochews, Cantonese, Hakkas and Hainanese. The Hokkiens (called *Minnanren* in China) came from southern Fujian. The Teochews came from the border of Fujian and Guangdong. The Cantonese migrated out of Guangdong province. The Hakkas mainly migrated out of eight districts in Guangdong and two in Fujian. The Hainanese were from Qiongzhou district in Guangdong (now Hainan province).

There were also four minor dialect groups who arrived in Singapore Continued page 19>>

Singapore's declining dialects

<<From page 18 Singapore from the late 19th century. They were the Foochows from Fuzhou in northern Fujian, the Henghuas and Hokchias from northern Fujian, and a group loosely called 'Sanjiangren' (people from Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Jiangxi) who came from areas outside Fujian and Guangdong.

Over time, the different occupations available in Singapore came to be controlled by different dialect groups through a system of apprenticeship and economic control. This could be seen in the control of the rickshaw industry by the Henghuas. These migrants had arrived in Singapore in the late 19th century when different trades had been monopolised by other dialect groups. When rickshaws were introduced in Singapore in 1880, the Henghuas quickly moved into the new industry. They became rickshaw pullers; wealthier migrants became rickshaw owners.

The Henghuas also dominated the bicycle industry since rickshaw repairs were carried out in bicycle shops. When new Henghuas arrived in Singapore, they could go to the Hin Ann Association (an association for Henghua migrants). Members of the association would hire the new migrants as apprentices or rickshaw pullers.

Both the rubber and tin industries took a big hit during the Great Depression from 1929. The Depression also forced many Chinese businesses to close. There was a fear that these economic problems could cause a rise of unemployed Chinese in Singapore. Accordingly, the British colonial authorities began to introduce a series of measures to slow down, if not halt, Chinese migration into Singapore or to send the Chinese back to their hometowns and villages in China.

In 1930, a quota for male migration was announced by the governor. The Aliens' Ordinance passed in 1933 meant that Chinese migration was regulated by registering them as they entered and/or departed from Singapore. In December 1941, the Japanese invaded Malaya and the British surrendered in Singapore on 15 February 1942.

The Chinese community in Singapore was to suffer much hardship and Japanese atrocities for the next three-and-a-half years. With a civil war going on in China between 1945 and 1949, more Chinese from Fujian and Guangdong provinces arrived in Singapore. Chinese migration continued to be the main reason for the growth of the Chinese community in Singapore in 1947.

With the proclamation of the founding of the People's Republic of China, (PRC), Chinese emigration from China was severely restricted. The British were determined to ensure that new Chinese migrants would not arrive in Singapore, out of the fear during the Cold War that these migrants could spread communism on the island. In 1953, the British passed the Immigration Ordinance, which restricted the number and quality of Chinese immigrants into Singapore.

In 1959, the British granted Singapore full internal self-government and the People's Action Party (PAP) won the general elections in June. The new government also took a cautious stance against Chinese immigration as it was thought that it would only add to the racial problems on the island between the Malays and the Chinese.

Singapore joined the new Federation of Malaysia on 16 September 1963 but seceded from it on 9 August 1965. Chinese migration into Singapore was limited during this period as new migrants could only enter Singapore on family or compassionate grounds.

It has reached a point where it is possible for a member to join the dialect association, despite being unable to speak that dialect!

From 1968, highly educated and/or wealthy Chinese from Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan and Hong Kong were allowed to migrate to Singapore and be granted employment passes and/or permanent residence. The organisation of the Chinese community in Singapore continued as these new Chinese migrants also traced their ancestry to Fujian and Guangdong. *Continued page 20>>*

Singapore's declining dialects

<<From page 19 The organisation of the Chinese community according to dialect went into decline from the late 1970s. In 1979, the Singapore government began promoting a 'Speak Mandarin' campaign. The aim of the campaign was to encourage the Chinese community to use Mandarin as its *lingua franca* and discard the use of dialects. The consequence of this campaign was the decline in the number of dialect-speaking Chinese Singaporeans.

The other reason for the decline in the use of dialects is the increasing number of mainland Chinese migrants to Singapore from outside Fujian and Guangdong. The limited Chinese migration to Singapore had continued until the death of Mao Zedong and the opening up of China to the world from the late 1970s.

In 1980, the PRC passed a new Nationality Law which ended dual citizenship. The Chinese, however, were allowed to leave the country to work, visit families or study in other countries. Some of them eventually settled down in Singapore.

Since the 1990s, Singapore has witnessed an influx of mainland Chinese to study, work and live in Singapore. Many of them take on permanent residency. Some of them eventually give up Chinese citizenship and became Singaporeans. Many of these 'new migrants' are from provinces and municipalities in northern China such as Shandong, Hunan, Beijing and Shanghai.



Film director Royston Tan—uses dialects in his films. Photo: Wikipedia.

The presence of these 'new migrants' sparked a debate about the Singapore Chinese identity from the 1990s. In 1991, a candidate from the Workers' Party won the seat of Hougang, a constituency in northern Singapore where the Chinese were mainly Teochews. He spoke Teochew and secured a victory over the candidate from the PAP, a Cantonese who

could not speak Teochew. Local film directors such as Jack Neo, Royston Tan and Eric Khoo also began to use dialects (mainly Hokkien, Teochew and Cantonese) in their films.

However, the decline in the general use of dialects meant the dissolution of smaller dialect associations and major changes in membership in the larger ones. It has reached a point where it is possible for a member to join the dialect association, despite being unable to speak that dialect!



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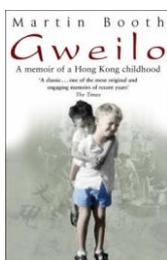
Walking in the shoes of others

By Sally Burdon, [Asia Bookroom](#)



Reading a good biography is the closest most of us are going to come to living someone else's life. Whereas a poorly researched or written biography can bore, frustrate and anger, often in equal measure, a beautifully written work allows you to 'experience' what another has lived through.

The magic of biography, when combined with information about a period or region, adds up to a work of entertainment and real educational value. This month I have made a small selection from many excellent biographies related to the Asian region. All of the books in this selection are very readable and give insight into the issues, time and regions they cover. As importantly, they are an excellent way to spend a few hours.



Gweilo. Memories of a Hong Kong childhood. By Martin Booth, 380pp, paperback, Transworld, United Kingdom. \$27.95.

Martin Booth died in February 2004, shortly after finishing the book

that would be his epitaph—this wonderfully remembered, beautifully told memoir of a childhood lived to the full in a far-flung outpost of the British Empire.

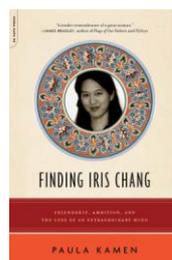
An inquisitive seven-year-old, Martin found himself with the whole of Hong Kong at his feet when his father was posted there in the early 1950s. Unrestricted by parental control and blessed with bright blond hair that signified good luck to the Chinese, he had free access to hidden corners of the colony normally closed to a *gweilo*, a 'pale fellow' like him.

Befriending rickshaw coolies and local stallholders, he learnt Cantonese, sampled delicacies such as boiled water beetles and 100-year-old eggs, and participated in colourful festivals. He even entered the forbidden Kowloon Walled City, wandered into the secret lair of the Triads and visited an opium den. Along the way he encountered a colourful array of people, from the plink plonk man with his dancing monkey to Nagasaki Jim, a drunken child molester, and the Queen of Kowloon, the crazed tramp who may have been a member of the Romanov family.

Shadowed by the unhappiness of his warring parents, a broad-minded mother

who, like her son, was keen to embrace all things Chinese, and a bigoted father who

was enraged by his family's interest in 'going native', Martin Booth's compelling memoir is a journey into Chinese culture and an extinct colonial way of life that glows with infectious curiosity and humour.



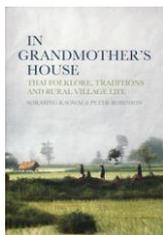
Finding Iris Chang. Friendship, ambition, and the loss of an extraordinary mind. By Paula Kamen, 280pp, paperback, Da Capo Press, \$23.99.

Written by a friend and confidante of Iris Chang, this extraordinary book reveals the private woman behind the international celebrity. Iris Chang's mysterious suicide in 2004, at the age of 36, didn't seem to make any sense. She had more to live for than most—fame and fortune, beauty, a husband and child. Some even wondered if the controversial author of *The rape of Nanking* had been murdered. Long-time friend Paula Kamen, whom Iris had called just days before her death, was among those left wondering what had gone so wrong.

Seeking to reconcile the suicide with the image of Iris's seemingly 'perfect life', Kamen searched her own memory and scoured Chang's letters, diaries and archival material to fill in the gaps of Chang's transformation from awkward teen to homecoming princess at college, from 'ex-shy person' to world-class speaker and international Continued page 22>>

Books on Asia

<<From page 21 human rights pioneer—and later decline into mental illness and paranoia. A literary investigation of an important writer's journey, *Finding Iris* is a tribute to a lost heroine, a portrait of the real and vulnerable woman who inspired so many around the world.



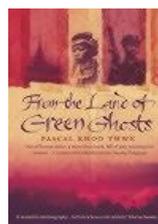
In grandmother's house. Thai folklore, traditions and rural village life. By Sorasing Kaowai, and Peter Robinson, 240 pp, paperback, Monsoon, Singapore, \$22.99.

In grandmother's house is the fascinating true story of a boy's childhood in a remote Thai village. Brought up by his grandmother—the village matriarch, healer and midwife—Sorasing Kaowai retells some of the folk stories, traditions and superstitions that his grandmother passed on to him, including the strange tale of a mysterious forest-dwelling tribe of pygmies, a 15-metre-long python and even a local Bigfoot!

Sorasing recounts how village healers diagnosed and treated illnesses with a ball of sticky rice and a length of string or, in especially difficult cases, an egg. He explains why some Thai men were, and still are, terrified of being visited by Phi Mae Mai, a female ghost with an insatiable sexual appetite. He remembers his delight at seeing his first tractor, only to be warned off the machine by his grandmother: 'And what does a tractor return to the Earth Mother?'

Thailand has developed greatly since Sorasing's grandmother returned to the Earth Mother last century. Many of the ancient rural traditions that influenced and guided her long life have now been lost and forgotten. *In grandmother's house* preserves at least a few of them for future generations.

From the land of green ghosts. A Burmese odyssey. By Pascal Khoo Thwe, 304pp, paperback, Harper Perennial, London, \$24.99.



In lyrical prose, Pascal Khoo-Thwe describes his childhood as a member of the Padaung hill tribe, where ancestor worship and communion with spirits blended with the tribe's recent conversion to

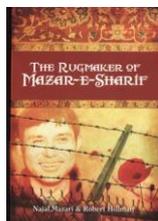
Christianity.

In the 1930s, Pascal's grandfather captured an Italian Jesuit, mistaking him for a giant or a wild beast; the Jesuit in turn converted the tribe. (The Padaung are famous for their 'giraffe women'—so-called because their necks are ritually elongated with ornamental copper rings. Pascal's grandmother had been exhibited in a touring circus in England as a 'freak').

The brutal military regime of Ne Win cracked down on 'dissidents' in the late 1980s. Pascal's girlfriend was raped and murdered by soldiers, and Pascal took to the jungle with a guerrilla army. How he was eventually rescued with the help of Cambridge don, Casey, is a dramatic story, which ends with his admission to Cambridge to study his great love, English literature. Pascal developed a love of the English language through listening to the BBC World Service, and it was while working as a waiter in Mandalay to pay for his studies that he met Casey.

The rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif. By Najaf Mazari and Robert Hillman, 262pp, Insight Publications, Australia, \$24.95.

This book traces the extraordinary story of an Afghani refugee's journey from shepherd boy in the mountains of northern Afghanistan, his flight from torture and certain death by the Taliban, to owner of a successful traditional rug shop in Melbourne. His story begins with him in the infamous Woomera Detention Centre in the remote desert country of central Australia. This is the first book-length account of an asylum-seeker in Australia to be captured in his own voice. From the compelling opening sentence to the beautiful final chapter, Najaf's integrity, his

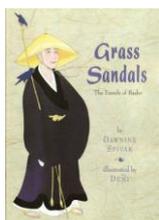


Continued page 23>>

Books on Asia

<<From page 22 extraordinary optimism and his generosity of spirit will win the hearts and minds of all readers.

There are a number of wonderful Asia-related biographies for children too. This picture book about Japanese poet Basho is an excellent example.



Grass sandals. The travels of Basho. By Dawnine Spivak and Demi (illustrator, children's picture book, paperback, Simon & Schuster. \$21.95.

A simple retelling of the travels of 17th-century Japanese poet Basho across his island homeland. The book includes examples of the haiku verses he composed. Suitable for kindergarten to year 6.

New books from the ASAA series

[Southeast Asia Series](#)

The series seeks to publish cutting-edge research on all countries and peoples of Southeast Asia.

[Women in Asia Series](#)

The Women's Caucus of the ASAA operates a publication series in conjunction with Routledge that focuses on promoting scholarship for women in Asia.

Job websites

www.jobs.ac.uk advertises worldwide academic posts

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 (AAS). 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.cominit.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.

<http://isanet.ccit.arizona.edu/employment.html> is a free-to-access website run by the International Studies Association.

Diary notes

Exploring the kingdom of characters, lecture series presented by the Japan Foundation to coincide with the *Japan: kingdom of characters exhibition*, which showcases Japan's most popular manga and anime characters from the 1950s to the present: **27 April 2011**, *From empire of signs to kingdom of*



Mio Bryce

characters: from kanki to kyara (Emiko Okayama, University of Melbourne); **18 May 2011**, *Manga: empathetic media expressing the pain of the individual* (Mio Bryce, Macquarie University);

25 May 2011, *Cult media pilgrimages to Japan's kingdom of characters*, (Craig Norris, University of Tasmania). Further information, Susan Yamaguchi 02 8239 0060 or at susan_yamaguchi@jpf.org.au.

Japan in Sydney, Professor Sadler and Modernism 1920s–30s, Friday, 6 May 2011, 10am–4pm, symposium organised by the University Art Gallery, University of Sydney, in conjunction with the Australian Centre for Asian Art and Archaeology. The symposium will bring together Australian and Japanese art historians and scholars to reconsider the political and cultural conditions of modernism during the 1920s–1940s. Venue, New Law School LT024. Free, but booking essential. RSVP by 2 May, phone 02 9351 6883 or at art.collection@sydney.edu.au.

Inoue Yasushi on the Silk Road, Sydney, until 12 May 2011, photographs of Dunhuang by Otsuka Seigo, levels 3 and 4, Fisher Library, University of Sydney. An exhibition by one of Japan's most prominent and popular postwar writers.

Mapping the Edge, Art and Community Beyond Identity, Sydney, Thursday, 5 May 2011, seminar by Dr Francis Maravillas, Associate Researcher at the Transforming Cultures Research Centre at the University of Technology Sydney, as part of Continued page 24>>

Diary notes

<<From page 23, the *Edge of elsewhere* exhibition series, 5pm–6.30pm, University of Sydney, Main Quadrangle, History Room S223.



Myanmar/Burma Update: Obstacles to the rule of law; effectiveness of international assistance; political and economic update, Canberra, 9am–4pm, 16–17 May 2011,

School of International, Strategic & Pacific Studies ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, Hedley Bull Lecture Theatre, Hedley Bull Centre, ANU.

Edge of Elsewhere: emerging critics workshop and curatorium, Sydney, 27–28 May 2011, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art in partnership with Campbelltown Arts Centre. 4A is seeking emerging artists, curators, critics and other cultural practitioners (sociologists, writers, urban planners, architects, historians) to collaborate with Indonesian artist FX Harsono's project 'In Memory of a Name' to develop new work for the Edge of Elsewhere project 2012, a major three-year project that brings together contemporary artists from across Australia, Asia and the Pacific to develop new artworks in partnership with Sydney communities. To apply, please send a CV and expression of interest on what you hope to gain from the workshop to simon.soon@4a.com.au. Applications close 29 April 2011.

Timor-Leste Studies Association (TLSA) conference, Timor-Leste, 30 June–1 July 2011. This two-day conference for researchers is organised by the TLSA, an interdisciplinary, international research network focused on all aspects of research into East Timorese society, including politics and history, economics, communications, health, language and agriculture. The 2011 conference, 'Communicating new research on Timor-Leste', will be co-hosted by the National University of Timor-Lorosa'e, Swinburne University of Technology, and the Technical University of Lisbon. See [conference website](#) for details.

The world and world-making in art: connectivities and differences conference, Australian National University, Canberra, 11–13 August 2011. This international conference coincides with the ANU's Humanities Research Centre's theme for 2011 on 'The world and world-making in the humanities and the arts'. Venue: Sir Roland Wilson Building, ANU. Further information: [Dr Michelle Antoinette](#).

National language teachers conference in Darwin, Darwin, 6–9 July 2011. The 18th Biennial Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) will take place at the Darwin Convention Centre in the new Wharf 1 Precinct. The program will include papers and workshops on the NALSSP languages, the Australian Curriculum, Australian Aboriginal languages, using new technology in languages learning and teaching, and a range of other pertinent topics. More information at www.afmlta2011.com.au.



Cambodia: Angkor Wat and beyond, 30 October–16 November 2011. A travel program organised by the Asian Arts Society of Australia for enthusiasts and

experts, led by Daryl Collins (co-author *Building Cambodia: New Khmer architecture 1953–70*) and TAASA president and Cambodian textile expert Gill Green. Further information, Ray Boniface, Heritage Destinations, PO Box U237 University of Wollongong NSW 2500, 02 4228 3887, 0409 9721129, or heritagedest@bigpond.com.

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 between 1000 and 1500 words.

About the ASAA



The Asian Studies Association of Australia 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. The ASAA believes there is an urgent need to develop a strategy to preserve, renew and extend Australian expertise about Asia. 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.

ASAA secretary resigns

Associate Professor Michele Ford has resigned from her position as ASAA Secretary. ASAA president Professor Purnendra Jain thanked her for her contribution over the past four years, and for her passion and commitment to ASAA aims and objectives. He wished her well on behalf of the ASAA Council.

