



## Australia needs long-term cultural policy for the Asian century

*Australia must take a long-term perspective in developing our cultural relationship with Asia, writes LESLEY ALWAY.*

The Australian Government has committed to releasing a new national cultural policy in early 2012, and like many arts organisations, [Asialink](#) arts is hoping to contribute to the debate and consultation about the new policy.

It will be the first national cultural policy released since late 1994 when Creative Nation was launched by then Prime Minister, Paul Keating. Creative Nation was seen to be a watershed in cultural policy terms, not only because it was the first that Australia had released, but because it was groundbreaking in terms of the concepts that underpinned its policies and programs, in particular, the focus on industry and audience development.

The application of such concepts to arts and cultural policy had its origins in work undertaken by the Commission for the Future that had been established by then Science Minister Barry Jones in the Hawke government in 1984.

Subsequently privatised, in September 1992, the Australian Commission for the Future Ltd produced a report for the Commonwealth Department of Arts, Sport, the Environment and Territories, A *framework for improving viability in selected sectors of the cultural industry.*

This report adopted the radical approach of applying Michael Porter's 'value chain' to the cultural sector. In doing so, it identified opportunities for government policy and funding intervention in areas such as infrastructure distribution and market development areas—that is, in developing demand, rather than the historical focus on supply or product development, usually through grants for artist and project development. Many of these concepts were utilised in Creative Nation via the Labor Party's 'Distinctly Australian' election arts policy in 1993.

Interestingly, the establishment of Asialink also owes its origins to the Commission for the Future early research on Australia's engagement with Asia.

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## Cultural policy for the Asian century

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The Asialink Centre was established in 1990 as a joint initiative of the Commission for the Future and the [Myer Foundation](#), one of Australia's oldest and largest philanthropic organisations.

Asialink's mission was to create a new generation of Australians who are knowledgeable about the countries of Asia and who understand more fully what we can learn from our neighbours and what we can contribute to the region in which we live.

Following a series of conferences with experts from around Australia, Asialink developed programs in education, the arts, business and community awareness. In July 1991, it became a centre of [the University of Melbourne](#) under an agreement between the Myer Foundation and the university and in 1998 was established as a non-academic department of the university.

We are more than a decade into the Asian century—so named because of the remarkable geopolitical shift that is occurring from West to East. This transformation of the power balance over the past decade has been extraordinary and is exciting, but it also throws up major challenges for Australia as we navigate the opportunities to participate and benefit from this dynamic growth in Asia.

Certainly, the transference of economic power and influence has been accompanied by increasing interest in cultural engagement from within, without and across Asia. This also coincides with the rise of the concept of 'soft-power' as a more subtle means to exert influence and promote specific interests.

While cultural engagement for diplomatic reasons will always have a place, it is

important to be clear that the conscription of the arts in the service of 'nation-state marketing' may not actually be the most effective means of cultural engagement for the long term—or even to achieve better understanding, trust and engagement.



Daniel Jaber, Asialink performing arts resident at workshop in Malaysia.

The opportunities of the dynamic growth in Asia really require us to review the rationales and mechanisms for our cultural engagement to

ensure real respect and deep understanding.

From a cultural policy perspective there has never been a more important time for Australia to not only make a strong statement about the importance of cultural engagement with Asia, but also to identify new and meaningful ways to ensure this engagement results in long-term and sustainable relationships that will ultimately be more beneficial to national interest than overt national image campaigns, no matter how subtle.

Much of the language about Australia's international engagement is couched in terms of presenting Australia to the world or telling Australian stories and is usually 'export' and bilaterally focused. Indeed, this was evident in *The Creative nation* document that included a section on the International projection of Australian culture.

While it included arts development as one of the three rationales for international arts activity, the focus of the policy statements and funding was targeted towards national image and new market opportunities and was outward and export focused. However, it is clear from Asialink's experience and work in the

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region that Australia must respond to demands from the region for real exchange through reciprocity, collaborations and partnerships.

For over 20 years Asialink has been operating a major arts residency program and touring exhibition program into Asia. We currently send at least 30 artists,



Jacob Boehme and colleagues, performing arts resident in India, 2010.

writers, performers and arts managers into Asia every year, but currently only have three

reciprocal relationships to bring artists to

Australia. These are with Korea, Taiwan and Japan. We have no reciprocal program with our four other key priority countries, India, China, Indonesia and Singapore. While we are working strategically to rebalance the numbers over the next three years so that by 2014 we have at least 10 reciprocal relationships across the art forms, this aim does present some challenges.

First, Australia has a lack of dedicated residency infrastructure—both in terms of physical studio and accommodation space as well as on-the-ground people resourcing for hosting and assisting with inbound residents. Asia, in particular has higher levels of expectations about the level of resourcing and program structure that might be provided by hosts. Many of the studio spaces available in Australia are designed for local artists and do not provide accommodation.

Australia must take a long-term perspective and see reciprocal funding as a long-term investment in our relationship with Asia. Likewise the level of resourcing

on a daily basis, to provide induction, advice, support and introductions is usually underestimated or simply not available with the risk that artists' experience of Australia may not be as fulfilling or valuable as desired. This can have reputational effects if artists report back on unsatisfactory experiences in Australia, thereby completely undermining the objectives of improving understanding and building long-term relationships.

**If we are to build our profile and presence in the region, Australia needs to be proactive, as Asia is increasingly developing its own networks that do not necessarily include Australia.**

Second, there is the vexed issue of who pays? It is generally expected that Australia will pay for its own artists and managers to go overseas on residencies—and there are funding options to support this. In Asia, these funding structures or available funds do not necessarily exist, making it very difficult, if not impossible, for artists to travel overseas without external funding.

However, if this means that Australia must pay both ways, this can be a tricky issue to navigate on the grounds of principle, budget availability and 'true exchange'. Nevertheless, Australia must take a long-term perspective and see reciprocal funding as a long-term investment in our relationship with Asia.

After all, Australia cannot take it for granted that we are necessarily the destination of choice for Asia with Europe, the United States and the United Kingdom also being highly active in seeking out, and funding, cultural engagement opportunities in Asia. If we are to build our profile and presence in the region,

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Australia needs to be proactive, as Asia has is increasingly developing its own networks that do not necessarily include Australia. While bilateral relationships are crucial, increasingly multilateral partnerships may be more powerful as a means of cultural engagement. Asialink has initiated a new model for exploring this idea through the Utopia project.

Utopia has adopted an agile and experimental model based on a network of cities, including Melbourne, Tokyo, Singapore, Seoul, New Delhi and others, that converse and collaborate. Utopia seeks to harness these networks by infiltrating existing infrastructure and events in the Asian region through collegial projects and activities that cross sectors and disciplines.

Utopia has evolved since 2008 from its original idea of a major roving biennale event, based on the European Manifesta concept. As this model was being explored, there was questioning within the region whether yet another event could be justified, given the already substantial calendar of events and infrastructure that was already established in Asia.

Likewise, there was concern about whether the scale and audience expectations of such events could be sustained in the prevailing volatile economic climate. Simultaneously, other more multilateral and alternative models are also being explored in other parts of Asia. These include projects arising from the Creators Program, supported by the Japan Foundation, that have developed new forms of exchange through multilateral teams, and the West Heavens

cross-disciplinary cultural exchange project between China and India.

Already, this approach is bearing fruit with invitations for Utopia to present programs and participate in the Melbourne International Festival in October 2011, the Indian Art Fair in January 2012, Korea, in late September 2012 and in Tokyo in October 2012 in conjunction with the Res Artis Conference.

Through this collaborative multilateral partnership strategy, Australia is not only represented in a variety of Asian forums, it is participating in a collegial and collaborative way within Asia as opposed to projecting or presenting itself to Asia.

The multilateral platform is proving to be a far more productive model of engagement that has the potential to build credibility and respect that does not necessarily come with 'nation-branding' exercises, no matter how well executed or well meaning. One can hope that the new National Cultural Policy can be a truly (inter)national cultural policy by including strategies for collaborative, reciprocal and multilateral partnerships that will build long-term sustainable relationships in the Asian region.

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# E-governance, social welfare and the dream of control in India

*A new e-governance scheme designed to help India's poor may result instead in advanced discrimination, exclusion and harassment, warns URSULA RAO.*

**E**-governance is celebrated in India as a promising solution for continuing problems of social redistribution and economic integration. Chip cards, e-forms and biometric data banks are the trusted media that promise to link needy citizens directly to efficient government services and integrate also the poor into the official market.

The most ambitious and controversial scheme so far is the Unique Identity Number (UID), a centrally registered 12-digit number that is stored together with a person's biometric data—finger prints, iris and photograph.

The system was launched in 2009 as a solution to what in planning discourses is referred to as 'India's identity crisis'. Policy makers consider the lack of formal identity proof as the prime reason for economic marginalisation and thus push the project on, in spite of severe technical, social and economic concerns.

Engineers raise doubts about the ability of current technology to reliably handle the amount of data required to manage the entire population of India. There are also worries about privacy, as well as concerns about potential identity theft and data misuse through hacking and manipulation of entries.

Despite some harsh criticism, the project is underway. On 31 July 2011 the [official website](http://uidai.gov.in) (uidai.gov.in) counted 17.2 million enrolments, approximately 1.5 per cent of the Indian population.

While the data bank is yet to prove its practical worth, it is invested with a

plethora of fantasies and desires that give it the aura of a panacea for all major social evils. There are three official justifications: UID will exponentially expand bank services and bring the huge unaccounted wealth of the country into the official economy; it will enhance the efficacy of welfare payments; and it will assist the police in securing the country against terrorist insurgency.

**To work up the ladder of income and achievement, it is necessary to first get on it...**

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I am concerned here with the first two explanations targeted at poor people. The emphasis on banking and targeted welfare schemes as solutions for marginalisation rests on a particular construction of the problem of poverty.

In line with neoliberal economic theories, deprivation is conceived as the inability of poor people to take advantage of market opportunities for personal and collective upward mobility.

To be effective, social welfare payments must thus be administered so that they not only secure survival but also entice marginalised people to embrace the values and work ethics of economically successful classes, hailed as enabling the individual to become productive citizens.

The Chairmen of the India Development Foundation, Vijay Kelkar/Vijay Kelkar, uses the metaphor of a ladder to explain the expected benefits of the UID. 'To work up the ladder of income and achievement, it

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## The dream of control in India

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is necessary to first get on it, but the poor, the 'left behind', often find it difficult to get their hands on the bottom rung,' he said. 'Our approach must focus on giving the poor the tools to get on the ladder, and access the resources they need to move up and out of poverty.'<sup>1</sup>

UID will provide access to the bottom rung because it allows poor people to participate in all economic processes and welfare schemes by providing reliable identity proof. Optimally targeted schemes, the argument goes, will reach the correct people, who can now verify their entitlements as well as evidence reception with their finger imprints. As payments will be cashless, they are therefore claimed to be corruption-free. Poor people with an account will be empowered to begin saving and earn interest.

Interestingly, in Delhi, the first government body that has shown an interest in the UID is the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB). The state department handles *in situ* upgrading of slums as well as resettlement programs.

Forty-four slums have been listed for demolition in Delhi in 2011. Inhabitants who can prove residence in the slum before 2002 will be entitled to a resettlement plot or subsidised flat. Applications for resettlement plots will have to be accompanied by the UID number. Equipped with the number, the DUSIB will be able to identify all those who have been allotted plots and render them ineligible for future resettlement schemes. Such surveillance is necessary to force allottees to hold on to their plot and invest in legal housing.

In the past many resettled families found it impossible to carve out a living in the

places they had been assigned, which are usually located at the urban fringes. They decided to sell their plots for a profit and return to squat in the inner city near their workplaces.

**Government schemes disregard the talent of poor people to survive in spite of dire circumstances.**

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This example of advanced surveillance stands in stark contrast to the image of e-governance as a tool for empowerment. I have not used it to suggest, polemically, that UID is a mere instrument for scrutiny, exclusion and punishment. While exclusion is likely to be a de facto result of the UID project, that is not its purpose. The aim is to constrain the poor to act in accordance with a system considered to embody superior principles of economic rationality.

Electronic surveillance aims to persuade welfare recipients to follow the guidance of governmental intervention for their personal, as well as the common good. Seen in this light, resettlement is justified not only as a means to clear the inner city for rich investors, but as a measure to help disadvantaged citizens to acquire private property and become legal inhabitants of the urban space.

Such reasoning, of course, disregards the disastrous effects of relocation that deprives poor people of easy access to the casual labour market, while forcing them to invest in homes they cannot afford.

Thus, what in terms of the planning discourse seems like forward-looking economic planning is, from the perspective of many poor people, an implausible, impractical or even impossible imposition. It is this fundamental lack of alignment between policies and real-life situations that may

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turn UID into an instrument for advanced discrimination, exclusion and harassment. E-governance and the targeted welfare schemes attached to it suffer from several foundational weaknesses.

First, optimally targeted schemes ignore that most poor people experience multiple disadvantages. Any scheme that addresses only one disadvantage is very likely to fail. Thus the notion that marginal populations can use bank accounts to save money is predicated on the assumption that starving people have surplus money, just like resettlement policies assume that the labour class is sufficiently equipped to build homes at places cut off from the labour market.

Second, most schemes, which, due to biometric identification, may now be reliably available also to illiterate people, still require a basic education if beneficiaries are to take advantage of them. Thus, I found that homeless citizens who had signed up for UID were unable to participate in banking, because they did not know how to open a bank account and how to operate it without some basic numeracy skills.

Third, government schemes disregard the talent of poor people to survive, in spite of dire circumstances. Saving might be desirable from the point of view of the national economy. Homeless citizens have reasons for not saving. They send most of their earnings home to help their families survive and to secure networks as crucial support mechanisms in times of crises.

Finally, the aim to integrate the poor into the official market disregards the

Any scheme that addresses only one disadvantage is very likely to fail.

marginalising effect of the market. It is the free market and the abundance of manual labour that reproduces depressed wages and harsh working conditions.

We therefore need to treat current e-governance schemes with sufficient scepticism, not just because they are technically complicated but because they are open to fraud and raise privacy issues. Current investment in e-governance comes with the baggage of a particular economic theory that, in recent years, has increased the gap between the rich and the poor in India.

E-governance depoliticises poverty by treating it, once again, as merely a technological problem that calls for intelligent solutions, while ignoring the power relations that cement unequal access to resources.

### Reference

1. *Times of India*, 27 November 2010.



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# Dayaks reclaiming their heritage from Borneo's devastated rainforests

*Despite the devastation of Borneo's rainforests there are hopeful signs of a transition to a more sustainable use of resources. THOMAS REUTER and GREG ACCIAIOLI report.*

**T**ourists from all over the world head to Borneo for orang-utans, unspoiled ancient rainforests and an insight into the traditional way of life of the Dayak people. This ecotourism is based on an idyllic facade. The reality of Kalimantan's forests is logging, mining and palm oil plantations as far as the eye can see.

When we visited the Indonesian province of East Kalimantan in Borneo, we saw widespread devastation of the region's tropical rainforest. Many Dayak—as the people indigenous to interior Borneo are collectively known—have lost their traditional land and culture as a result of logging, coal mining and massive expansion of commercial palm oil plantations.

But there are also hopeful signs of a transition to a more sustainable use of resources, with democratic reform in Indonesia, local political mobilisation, and genuine cooperation in conservation beginning to have an impact.

Under the authoritarian regime of former President Suharto the Indonesian state was highly centralised. Almost all of the revenue from resource-rich provinces such as East Kalimantan flowed to the national capital, Jakarta.

Forests were divvied up among Suharto's cronies in vast concessions. Little consideration was given to conservation and the fate of local people whose livelihoods depended on the forest.

By the late 1990s local people were fed up with the situation. East Kalimantan was one of the provinces that threatened to secede from Indonesia if it did not receive autonomy and a better share of locally generated revenue.



Dayaks are losing their traditional land and culture as a result of logging, coal mining and massive expansion of commercial palm oil plantations.

The regional autonomy laws of 1999 partially met these demands. There are still problems with the implementation of these laws, however. Local

leaders claim that less than 10 per cent of local revenue is returned to the government of Eastern Kalimantan even now.

Meanwhile, Dayak groups have been free to organise and become politically active. Several indigenous people have been elected to political offices, and Dayak organisations have proliferated. These have ranged from urban ethnic associations for Dayak urban migrants to armed Dayak militias. These militias intervene when conflicts arise with mining or palm oil corporations, or between indigenous and migrant communities.

Dayaks are ambivalent about development. They clearly want greater prosperity and better road access, education and health services, but they are also disappointed. Investment in their region often does not benefit them enough, and destroys their traditional livelihood of small-scale farming, rubber-tapping, fishing and hunting. Pollution from fertilisers and herbicides from palm

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## Dayaks reclaim their heritage

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oil plantations and tailings from mining operations pollute rivers and destroy fish stocks. Land alienation for logging and plantations has led to a scarcity of agricultural land. Some local people work on palm oil plantations, earning around five dollars for a hard day's labour. This causes dependence and poverty.



Dayak art shows their connectiveness with the environment. Thomas Reuther.

The price of basic supplies in these remote areas is very high due to the cost of transportation upriver. Some local officials make large profits by exploiting their

position to help foreign investors obtain permits and land certificates, often at the expense of fellow villagers.

Such devastated communities are subject to further disruptions because companies import large numbers of labour migrants from other islands where local religious and cultural practices are intimately linked to traditional agriculture. It may be difficult to adapt to a new way of life.

Some peoples have managed to revive their customs because they are fairly cohesive communities, but Local culture and arts disappear more quickly in mixed communities of wage labourers. Local languages also are in decline under the influence of electronic media. Satellite dishes are a feature of most houses, even where there is widespread poverty.

There are also indications of successful resistance to such incursions in some areas of Kalimantan province. Malinau, a landlocked district in the northwest, was

declared a 'conservation district' by its district head in 2005.



In Samarinda, boom times aren't all good news. Thomas Reuther.

Some critics have dubbed this move merely a naming exercise. But the conservation-inclined district

government has registered only five coal-mining licences. Four oil palm concessions have been granted—but none of these currently operates.

In fact, the operations of one company were blocked in 2008 by a local community during the land-clearing phase. Community members argued that their 'customary forest', was being destroyed. When unheeded, they took the company's tractor into their own custody. Eleven community members were initially jailed, though the community has argued that everyone participated in the action. As a result, the company's legal action has been stymied to the present.

**The 'Heart of Borneo' initiative will shield this vulnerable highland region from logging, oil palm concessions, and other environmentally destructive development.**

In this instance, it was a community of Punan—formerly seen by the government as forest nomads unable to fend for themselves and thus subjected to resettlement—that acted to defend their own community interests.

In Malinau district, and throughout the province as a whole, various ethnic groups are organising and banding together to defend their interests. The ethnic groups inhabiting the Kayan Mentarang National Park—Kayan, Kenyah, Lun Dayeh, Sa'ban,

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## Dayaks reclaim their heritage

<<From page 9 Tahol and Punan—have formed a Forum for Indigenous Peoples' Deliberations. They have successfully campaigned that the zonation of this national park must be based upon their own land-use patterns. The boundaries of their customary forest usage areas must be respected.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), in its role as co-manager of the park, has facilitated such efforts. WWF is now seeking partnerships with indigenous groups across the border area of East and West Kalimantan and with East Malaysia to create a string of protected areas.

This 'Heart of Borneo' initiative will shield this vulnerable highland region from logging, oil palm concessions, and other environmentally destructive development. WWF has also been working with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) to set up forest management units among the local populations.

GIZ has fostered pilot projects in Malinau, as well as in Berau and in Kapuas Hulu in West Kalimantan, to prepare local communities for international carbon trading under the REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) scheme.

Many Indonesians are looking to REDD+ as the key to realising sustainable development through forest conservation. In many cases their hopes are unrealistic, yet, in some parts of East Kalimantan, the groundwork for realising this potential through partnerships of international organisations, local NGOs and community organisations has already been laid. The efficacy of these partnerships in alleviating the environmental devastation of previous decades is beginning to be demonstrated.

*This article was first published in the online newspaper 'The Conversation'.*



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*Assistant Professor Greg Acciaoli currently lectures in anthropology and sociology at the University of Western Australia. He has also taught at Vassar College, Columbia University and the University of Arizona, as well as guest lecturing at Universitas Indonesia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Darul Iman Malaysia, and Universiti Malaysia Kelantan.*

## Historian appointed editor-in-chief of ASR



Dr Michael Barr has been appointed editor-in-chief of the Asian Studies Association of Australia's (ASAA) flagship journal

*Asian Studies Review* for a three-year term.

Dr Barr is an Australian historian with expertise in the modern political histories of Singapore and Malaysia, and best known for his work on Lee Kuan Yew (*Lee Kuan Yew: the beliefs behind the man*). He has also written on the Asian values debate of the 1990s.

Dr Barr's work focuses on religion, ethnicity and nation building, particularly in Singapore and Southeast Asia, but he also teaches classes on international political economy. He has been teaching international relations and Asian Studies at Flinders University in 2007, having previously taught at the University of Queensland. Dr Barr is a general councillor of the ASAA.

## Medicine and god: treating India's mentally ill

*A Hindu temple is achieving some success by combining psychiatry and religion to treat the mentally ill. LESLEY BRANAGAN reports.*

In 2001, a fire occurred at Erwadi dargah in south India, a highly popular Sufi Muslim shrine with reputed miraculous powers to heal the mentally ill.

The fire killed 25 people with mental illness who had been chained up in the surrounding boarding houses that functioned as unofficial asylums. Sensational media reports portrayed healing shrines as 'backward', and revealed that psychiatric services were in a dismal state across most of the country. There were widespread calls for the modernisation of the mental health sector.

The Supreme Court issued *suo moto* intervention directives to address conditions at healing shrines and to reform mental health services and institutions. The chaining of people at shrines was banned, and the adjoining boarding houses were ordered to meet mental health licensing requirements or close down. State governments were directed to move people with mental illness from shrines into psychiatric homes, and to improve psychiatric services in the area.

These interventions were justified by the various statutory agencies as a mode of defending the human rights of people with mental illness, and protecting them from exploitation by the operators of shrines and unlicensed asylums.

Reputed healing shrines in India attract visitors with the common belief that mental ailments are caused by sorcery or bad spirits. This explanation is generally accepted and it avoids the negative

stigma of mental illness. Attendance at a shrine allows the potent power of the shrine's resident deity to overcome the evil spirit within the afflicted person. The denomination of the shrine does not matter—cure seekers of different religions will visit well-known Hindu, Sufi Muslim or Catholic healing shrines.

Many cure seekers in India will also incorporate biomedicine into their religious healing approach. Even though psychiatric services are weak and very limited in many areas, people with mental illness will generally visit doctors and try psychiatric medication if it is accessible and affordable—particularly if they suffer from serious mental illness.

In response to the Supreme Court directives, one Hindu temple in Tamil Nadu state has adapted its practices and now offers a combined 'medicine and prayer' model of healing. The Gunaseelam Temple has a longstanding reputation for curing mentally ill devotees, and it recently established a licensed rehabilitation centre in its grounds, where the healing is overseen by the temple priests and a psychiatrist from nearby Tiruchirapalli (Trichy) city.

At Gunaseelam, the aim has been to create a culturally relevant mental health care system where families can share the responsibilities of care. The rehabilitation centre accepts about 12 chronic schizophrenic patients at a time. They stay with their family members for a ritually significant period of 48 days and receive free biomedicine prescribed by the psychiatrist.

The patients and families also attend five *pujas* (prayer rituals) a day in the temple. In two of these *pujas*, the priests splash holy water onto the faces of the devotees;

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this, they believe, drives out their bad spirits. This combination of 'medicine and god' is largely believed by patients, families and priests to be a more efficacious method of healing than just undertaking one aspect.

While the patients generally worship local 'small' or local gods in their own villages, at Gunaseelam, they are required to worship the 'big' of Brahmanic god Venkatachalapatty, which belongs to an upper-caste aspect of religion. Concerns have been raised by activists Treating India's mentally ill that freedom of religious expression would be impinged upon by government intervention at religious sites, my research at Gunaseelam found no evidence to support this.

The majority of people in India readily adapt to worshipping other deities for specific purposes, and the patients and carers at Gunaseelam did not believe their usual practices and beliefs were constrained. They expressed a willingness to worship Venkatachalapathy while at the temple, and deemed him to be a 'powerful' god, and firmly believed that he had more power to cure them than medicine.

As an ethnographer, it is not possible to assess the progress of patients in terms of biomedically acceptable parameters. However, the majority of the patients' carers believed that their mentally ill family member got better at Gunaseelam. World Health Organisation (WHO) studies acknowledge that there are better recovery rates for serious mental illnesses in 'developing' countries than in 'developed' countries.<sup>1</sup> They all acknowledge wide use of non-Western therapies at developing country research sites. Yet the studies fail to investigate

medical pluralism as a factor in differential outcome. This issue needs further research. However, it is questionable whether the perceived improvements in patients at Gunaseelam are long-lasting. Patients' narratives indicate that their illnesses often recur when they return home and can no longer access free medication. This supports other studies demonstrating that a significant proportion of patients in India abandon orthodox psychiatric treatment or stop medication. It must also be acknowledged that Gunaseelam offers a level of care and proximity to a powerful deity that is considered healing, and when patients leave the place of care, the cure diminishes. This acknowledgement in patients and carers is often what drives repeat visits to religious healing sites.

The relative 'success' story of Gunaseelam, from a governmental intervention point of view, lies in the fact that its new model continues to survive at all. Throughout India, there have been a variety of reactions from shrines to the intervention, but few have reconfigured in any substantial way. Attempts to introduce psychiatry services at healing shrines have often not been sustained, and many shrines continue to allow the practice of chaining people. This may not be emphatic resistance to laws on the part of shrines, but rather suggests that the state itself is not particularly uniformly effective in a large and diverse country like India. In effect, a number of intervention initiatives into temple practices quite simply dissolve over time, due to lack of will, lack of coordination, geographical issues and the difficulties of implementation, rather than because of any explicit resistance.

The notion of 'lack of will' and associated concepts of apathy and corruption are commonly used in India to explain the non-delivery of services and the failure of certain initiatives. But the lack of certain

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follow-through of the Supreme Court directives could possibly be better explained as a fundamental mismatch between the world views of the paradigms of psychiatry and religion in India. There has long been an uneasy dialogue between culture and psychiatry, where the relative credibility and 'truth claims' of scientific models such as psychiatry are pitted against the 'folk models' held by patients, and their rather different notions of cure. It is also important to acknowledge the difficulty of incorporating notions of spirit possession and exorcism into the same paradigm of illness that antipsychotic drugs claim to treat.

Although the notion of integrating the two paradigms is plausible only in a rudimentary fashion, Gunaseelam appears to be a practical and relatively successful marriage. The head priest and psychiatrist do not overwhelmingly endorse each other's methods, but can see the benefits of co-treating patients. From a psychiatric point of view, patients can be treated within a framework that is cheaper and more community-based than a hospital. From a priestly point of view, the benefits of the rituals are assisted by medication that helps control symptoms, and the consistent recovery rates reinforce the temple's long-standing reputation as a healing site.

Gunaseelam has also been a favourable site for intervention for other reasons. Unlike many temples, it does not have large commercial interests to protect, such as those gained from healing services. There was also an already-established relationship between the temple and the psychiatrist before the intervention—and therefore a degree of recognition of each other's paradigm. Additionally, the local culture supports such pluralistic measures, and the model

of healing on offer is acceptable to a wide range of people. Gunaseelam is therefore one of the few examples of the intervention in India that sustains an interface between the paradigms of medicine and religion. The fact that very little has changed in the way that most healing shrines operate indicates that the new technologies of rule do not always achieve their stated effects. Ironically, it is the very looseness of the Supreme Court directives, and their lack of benchmarks, models or clear objectives that not only allows shrines to sidestep governmental intervention, but also enables them to respond with new models of mental health healing that are sensitive to the local context and capacities.

Gunaseelam seems to be a rare case of a collaborative effort where the paradigms of psychiatry and religion have also combined harmoniously to meet local needs with a culturally relevant model of healing. Such projects are driven by committed individuals or teams that have utilised the uncertain space offered by the mismatch gap and the lack of detailed directives to develop appropriate initiatives in response to the needs of people with mental illness. The scope for NGOs to utilise the fluid terrain to further develop innovative new collaborative models of mental healing is large, yet almost no NGOs in India work in this area.

### Reference

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*Lesley Branagan is an anthropology student at Macquarie University. She is conducting research and undertaking fellowships in India for 18 months after receiving an inaugural Prime Minister's Australia Asia Endeavour Award in 2010.*



## Pluralist encounters at an Islamic NGO

*An Islamic NGO in Indonesia is using intellectual discussion and grassroots education to promote appreciation of religious difference, writes*  
MAX M RICHTER.

The International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP), like many NGOs in Jakarta, operates from an unassuming office with half-a-dozen computers amid a zigzag of chest-high dividers. But ICIP's international scope sets it apart from most other small-scale organisations. Its activities can be broken down into the sometimes overlapping categories of intellectual discussion and grassroots education. International visitors contribute to intellectual discussions, and ICIP is very active in internet education with *pesantren*.

ICIP's executive director, [M Syafi'i Anwar](#), is an activist and intellectual with a background in journalism; there are a dozen staff members, and I spent much of 2009–2010 there, learning how intergroup tolerance and understanding are being promoted in Indonesia today.

ICIP's focus on Islam and pluralism also takes in human rights, democracy and gender equality. Over the time I was there, intellectual discussion included an international conference on gender equality and women's empowerment in Muslim societies, and also visits by nine Bangladeshi religious and secular leaders, and by Professor Hans Kung, Swiss theologian and philosopher and President of the [Global Ethic Foundation](#). These kinds of visits centre on lectures, discussion and information sharing at a wide range of institutions among remarkably diverse and forward-thinking public figures united broadly by the theme/s of Islam and pluralism.

As an example, the 82-year-old Professor Kung began his visit to Indonesia by delivering a seminar in which he managed to compare the six historical paradigm shifts underpinning each of the three Abrahamic faiths. Far from presenting a dry and abstract treatise on theology, Kung argued persuasively that today many people of different faiths who live in the contemporary paradigm get along better than those of the same religion who are living within different historical paradigms.

Comments then followed by intellectuals Syafi'i Maarif and [Franz Magnis-Suseno](#), as well as Said Aqil Siradj, the newly elected chairman of the 40-million strong [Nahdlatul Ulama](#). By discussion time the event was running late, and most questions were as usual lengthy, but everybody remained glued to their chairs as Professor Kung gave wise and measured responses to a range of theological and sociological questions.



Professor Hans Kung compares the epoch-making upheavals of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to a diverse audience.

Such events are sometimes derided as mere 'talk fests' for the elite, but working at ICIP exposed me to how a few carefully chosen words in the right arena can persuade hard-headed leaders to rethink their assumptions. This may, in turn, help to disseminate moderate views across the wider society.

Over recent years, the greater part of ICIP's day-to-day energies have been channelled to grassroots education, particularly through 'Open, Distance and e-Learning' (ODEL) in eight *pesantren* across Java, a project supported by The Ford Foundation. The practical aims of his project are to improve information and communication technology (ICT)

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## Pluralist encounters at an Islamic NGO

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capabilities and schooling completion rates in the *pesantren* and their surrounding communities. More broadly, ODEL is part of ICIP's goal of promoting a moderate and progressive Islam in Indonesia and across the Asia region. While ICT can also be used to promote intolerance and even radicalism, with ICIP's subtle guidance greater access to the superhighway is broadening mindsets in the *pesantren* and their surrounding communities, and has helped hundreds of students to study for and pass their national school examinations.

With financial support for the eight *pesantren* winding down, ICIP and the ODEL *pesantren* have been working to maintain and build on the work started with ODEL. Among the eight *pesantren*, Al Musri has become a focal point for international donors and scholars. This is because, on the one hand, it is a conservative *pesantren* associated with the Salafi ideology and tradition, wherein, among other things, all female students are required to wear the niqab or purdah, but on the other hand, ODEL and group discussions have managed to facilitate a number of changes. A female student is now deputy to the chief executive of the *pesantren board*, and Al Musri is cooperating with international bodies to implement a number of small-scale sustainable agriculture initiatives.

A new ICIP project, titled 'Strengthening Constitutionalism and Pluralism among *Pesantren* Communities in West Java Region' and supported by the [Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation](#), has produced some interesting and, in some cases, quite alarming findings. While the majority of respondents from the initial needs assessment and focus group discussions argued that violence is most definitely against the spirit of Islam as a religion of peace, some respondents

maintained that Muslims should not condemn terrorist actions if they are committed to the jihad struggle.

Rates of religion-related social conflict are comparatively high in contemporary West Java, Banten and parts of Jakarta, pitting so-called 'radical conservative Islamic' groups against 'civil society Islamic' groups represented by ICIP and others. Concepts such as liberalism and secularism remain too hot and

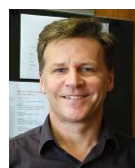


Female students all wearing the niqab at Al Musri pesantren welcome Bangladeshi leaders and representatives from the Ford Foundation, the Asia Foundation and ICIP.

contaminated to insert into discussions with radical conservative Islamic groups, so ICIP is working the slow art of gentle persuasion with local communities through workshops and

magazine productions. For future projects the NGO is also looking to include radio talkback shows and youth camps.

As an anthropologist working in a religious NGO, I continuously grappled with both the big-picture and everyday cross-cultural understandings of terms such as relativism and multiculturalism, and have recently become interested in civic pluralism. The central premise is that no one religion will ever rule the world, and nor will secularism, so we may as well learn to understand, tolerate and even appreciate difference. It is heartening to see ICIP and their network of like-minded thinkers spreading that message to the world.



Dr Max M. Richter is a lecturer in anthropology in the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University.

## Confronting the taboo

*Indonesian women speak openly about their experiences of sexual pleasure.*

JOANNE McMILLAN and ALIMAH report.

**O**n a Friday afternoon in late 2010, a crowd has gathered in Gramedia in Cirebon, West Java, to participate in a discussion with expert panellists about *The 'O' project*, one of the most talked-about books of the year.

The 'O' in the title is for 'orgasm' and the book, by activist Firliana Purwanti, is based around conversations with women from diverse backgrounds about their experiences of sexual orgasm. These conversations include frank discussion of controversial topics such as female circumcision, virginity, polygamy, lesbianism, sex work, HIV and masturbation.

Many Indonesians, particularly those from devout Muslim backgrounds, would consider it taboo for women to speak openly about their experiences of sexual pleasure. Like *The 'O' project*, this afternoon's event aims to confront that taboo head on and, in doing so, inspire critical discussion about sexuality and related social justice issues. Participants in the event, most of whom are affiliated with *pesantren* (Indonesia's traditional academies of Islamic studies), seem happy to embrace the taboo-breaking spirit of the book, and speak frankly (or at least listen to others speak frankly) about the issues it raises. It's a lively discussion, provoking a lot of questions, giggles and sometimes raucous laughter from participants.

This afternoon's event has been organised by the executive student body of a local Islamic tertiary college, Fahmina Institute

for Islamic Studies (ISIF), which has strong links to the local *pesantren* community.

Joining the author of *The 'O' project*, on the expert panel are Nyai Masriyah Amva, the head of Pondok Jambu *pesantren* and herself a bestselling author, and Rozikoh Sukardi, the Manager of Islam and Gender Programs from Fahmina Institute, the nongovernmental organisation behind ISIF. Most audience members also come from a *pesantren* background. It is not surprising, then, that a large part of this afternoon's discussion considers how the issues and ideas raised in *The 'O' project* relate to Islamic teachings and the lives of devout Muslims.



*The 'O' project* was not written with the *pesantren* community specifically in mind, and Firli, though Muslim, is not from a *pesantren* background.

Nevertheless, both she and her fellow panellists agree that the book is relevant to the *pesantren* community.

Firli explains that confronting myths and taboos about women's sexuality was a way for her to provoke discussion about inequality in sexual relationships.

'I think the stories about orgasms in this book, told by women who have found the courage to break through taboo, can help other women who have experienced discrimination or injustices in sexual relationships,' says Firli. Achieving equality for women in sexual relationships, she argues, is an important aspect of achieving equality for women more broadly.

'If discrimination in the bedroom can be wiped out,' she says, 'then discrimination in the public arena will be easier to overcome.'

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## Confronting the taboo

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Nyai Mas, from Pondok Jambu *pesantren*, agrees that this underlying message about the need for equality in sexual relationships is highly relevant to people from *pesantren* backgrounds. 'I feel that we in the *pesantren* community really need this book,' she says. 'I agree with the author that women often do not obtain justice, including behind closed doors such as in the bedroom. This book would be of benefit to couples by helping them to respect and appreciate each other.'

But although Nyai Mas approves of *The 'O' project's* message about the need for gender equality in sexual relationships, she does not agree with Firli about everything. During the discussion, a young woman in the audience called Cici asks a question about masturbation. Cici has attended a *pesantren* and has never masturbated—indeed, she says that before reading *The 'O' project*, she hadn't really even understood what the word meant. When Cici asks the panellists about how masturbation is seen from a religious point of view, Firli and Nyai Mas give very different responses. Firli does not claim to be an authority on religious teachings, but she argues that masturbation is both natural and an important way for women to get to understand their bodies. Nyai Mas does not agree.

Although she stresses that it is not her place or her right to tell other people not to masturbate, she believes masturbation is an example of deviant sexual behaviour and thus is not permitted according to Islam. 'This is religious doctrine,' she argues. Despite living alone since her husband's death in 2004, Nyai Mas says she has no need to masturbate. 'Of course, I still want to experience orgasm, but I've replaced sexual orgasm with spiritual orgasm,' she says. 'And if I'm bored and have nothing to do, I'd rather just read a book.'

One of the topics raised in the discussion was the issue of whether sex education should be compulsory for school students. The issue became topical in Indonesia in 2010 following the sex-tape scandal involving pop singer Nazril Irham (better known as Ariel, from the band Peterpan) and concern about school students accessing the sex tapes online. At the time, Indonesia's Education Minister, Mohammad Nuh, rejected the idea that sex education should become part of the curriculum in secondary schools, saying that young people will learn about sex 'naturally'. His comments were criticised by a number of reproductive health education advocates and led to public debate about the issue of sex education in schools.

Elements of sex education are, in fact, already taught in many Indonesian schools—including some *pesantren*-based schools—in subjects such as religion, biology and citizenship. However, research shows that young people's knowledge about reproductive health is poor, particularly in devout Muslim families.

Firli says that the lack of knowledge about sex among young people was one of the factors that motivated her to write *The 'O' project*. She believes that comprehensive sex education does not necessarily have to conflict with religious beliefs or morality. 'Sex education doesn't mean teaching young people how to have sex,' says Firli. 'It means teaching about equality, autonomy and the rights of all parties in sexual relationships.'

Panellist Rozikoh, from Fahmina Institute, agrees with Firli about the need for young people to receive sex education. According to Rozikoh, recent research conducted by Fahmina shows that young people in local *pesantren* communities have poor understanding of reproductive

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health and sexuality. For example, many *pesantren* students believed that men have a stronger libido than women, that women always experience bleeding the first time they have sexual intercourse, and even that eating pineapple while menstruating can make you pregnant. Fahmina's research also found that *pesantren* students are often confused about what is or is not permitted according to Islam because of differences in interpretation of texts both among well-known Islamic scholars as well as by local religious leaders and their own teachers.

One of the ways the Fahmina Institute is trying to improve awareness of reproductive health issues among young people in local *pesantren* communities is through their magazine *Tanasul*. 'Tanasul' means 'reproduction' in Arabic, and the magazine contains feature articles about local *pesantren*, news about reproductive health issues and advice about reproductive health issues from experts and local community figures. There is also a regular column in which a young female doctor answers readers' questions about medical issues, and another column in which local Islamic scholars analyse religious texts used in *pesantren* that discuss issues relevant to reproductive health.

According to Maimunah Mudjahid, one of the people behind Fahmina's program, *Tanasul* aims to provide a source of information about reproductive health and other issues relevant to young Muslims. 'Usually, young people only have a choice between Western-style media and conservative religious media,' says Maimunah. 'We want to offer a third alternative that reflects the modern realities faced by young people, without confronting the taboo and losing sight of our cultural and religious identity.' Asked what she thinks of *The 'O' project*,

Maimunah, who grew up in Buntet *Pesantren* near Cirebon, replies: 'I enjoyed reading the book and I think it's important not only for women to read it, but also men.' The author is a human-rights advocate, and she uses the book to advocate for the rights of marginalised groups, such as lesbians and prostitutes, who are stigmatised in Indonesian society.

But Maimunah is also concerned that the book's discussion of controversial material may alienate some readers from *pesantren* backgrounds. 'Advocating just treatment for stigmatised groups is laudable,' she says. 'My only worry is for women from devout Muslim communities, the book may give the impression that only "immoral" or "disobedient" women demand their right to orgasm and equality in sexual relationships. I want them to understand that every woman has the right to enjoy sex.'

It's an argument that would be popular with the participants in this event. They may not agree with everything Firli has written about in *The 'O' project*—indeed, many of the subjects the book discusses may conflict with their religious beliefs. But the enthusiasm with which both panellists and audience members have engaged in the discussion suggests that there is plenty of appetite in the *pesantren* community for knowledge and debate about reproductive health, morality, religion and—above all, perhaps—the benefits of mutually satisfying sex.

*This report is adapted from an article published in Inside Indonesia on 22 April 2011.*

*Joanne McMillan is a freelance writer and researcher based in Canberra. From 2007–2009 she was placed as a translator and editor at Fahmina Institute by Australian Volunteers International. Alimah worked as a journalist in Fahmina Institute's Centre of Data, Information and Media from 2008–2010.*



# Australia's dilemma: overseas Japanese civilian internees during World War 2

*Australia's attempts to repatriate postwar Japanese civilian internees were entangled in shifting levels of power and competing political interests, writes ROWENA WARD.*

In the context of the ongoing debate about Australia's compulsory detention of 'illegal arrivals', it is important to recognise Australia's long history of detention and internment of civilians.

As is well known, during both world wars 'enemy aliens' or citizens of enemy countries resident in Australia were subjected to internment. The internment of Germans during the Second World War is presently the subject of an exhibition at the Museum of Sydney (until 11 September 2011). What is less well known is that among those interned were 'enemy aliens' who were specifically transferred to Australia for internment.

During the Second World War Japanese residents of French and British colonies in the South Pacific and the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) were brought to Australia to be interned and were sometimes housed in the same camps (e.g. Loveday in South Australia and Tatura in Victoria) as the resident Japanese. In total, over 3000 overseas Japanese were transferred to Australia for internment.

The two most numerous sources were New Caledonia (901) and NEI (1949). Other sources included New Guinea, the New Hebrides condominium, New Zealand and the British protectorate in the Solomon Islands. Among the internees were Japanese citizens of Korean and Taiwanese origins.

The negotiations for the transfer of the overseas Japanese to Australia, Australia's participation in an exchange of internees in Lourenço Marques in September 1942, and the postwar repatriation of the overseas Japanese, is a story of shifting levels of power, competing political interests and Australia's attempt to influence a situation when it had little control over its own external relations.

The Australian Government agreed to a request from the United Kingdom to accept civilian internees from other countries shortly after the fall of France. Under this policy, Italians and Germans from the Straits Settlements and Palestine, as well as Germans from New Guinea, were brought to Australia.

Negotiations for the internment of the overseas Japanese began in December 1940 when the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific in Suva approached Australia about the possibility of it accepting Japanese living in the British colonies in the South Pacific in the event of war with Japan.

In early February 1941, the War Cabinet agreed to the request, but at the same time accepted the recommendation of the Department of External Affairs that the internment of the Japanese living in British colonies would be ineffectual unless plans to deal with the Japanese residents of New Caledonia—where the Japanese population was the largest in the South Pacific—were also developed.

The Australian Government subsequently initiated discussions with the French administration in New Caledonia about what to do with the Japanese living

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## **Australia's dilemma: overseas Japanese civilian internees**

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there should war break out. The New Caledonian administration agreed to arrest and to locally detain Japanese residents in the event of war. However, once hostilities began and the Japanese had been arrested, the New Caledonian administration requested the transfer of those Japanese to Australia for internment.

While NEI was the source of the largest group of Japanese internees, no details of prior discussions about internment in Australia have so far been identified and it is possible that the transfer of the Japanese proceeded with little negotiation beforehand.

One of the interesting aspects to the internment of overseas Japanese was the residual control that the detaining power had over the administration of the internees. As is explored below, in a similar manner to what Trefalt mentions regarding the release of BC Class war criminals transferred to Japan, the detaining power had authority over the internees' futures.<sup>1</sup> This had ramifications for negotiations for any exchange of internees and their postwar repatriation.

The Geneva Convention of 1929 outlined the terms for exchange of POWs yet it did not include any reference to civilians. Nevertheless, Japan, which was not a signatory to the convention, accepted a US proposal within days of Pearl Harbour to consider the possibility of exchanging civilian internees. Fundamental to the final agreement was reciprocity in numbers, that is, for every one Japanese person who was repatriated to Japan one American had to be repatriated.

The agreement formed the basis for the parallel British-negotiated exchange of British and Japanese citizens in Lourenço

Marques in September 1942. However, due to a disparity in the number of Australians exchanged for Japanese—Australia sent 63 resident Japanese while Japan repatriated only 31 Australians—Australia refused to participate in any further exchanges until some equity in numbers—and the Australians held in Malaya were included—could be guaranteed. These requirements proved a stumbling block to further exchanges, partly because the United Kingdom, as the primary negotiator, put the safety of its Britain-based citizens first and, as most of the Japanese civilians were interned in Australia, no exchange could proceed unless Australia was prepared to be involved.

More than half the Japanese internees held in Australia were overseas internees and, as noted above, the 'detaining power' had a residual right of control over the internees whom they had detained. Consequently, NEI, the United Kingdom and France had to agree to the repatriation of any of the Japanese they had detained and sent to Australia.

While this situation restricted Australian Government sovereignty over people within its borders, the main problem arose when the detaining power gave permission for the repatriation of the internees, yet Australia considered them to be a potential threat to regional security and did not want to release them. For instance, the Australian Government was concerned that some of the Japanese internees from New Caledonia had access to information that would assist Japan and wanted the Japanese from New Caledonia excluded from the exchange.

The exchange proceeded despite these concerns, as it was feared that the exclusion of the Japanese internees from New Caledonia would be contrary to the commitment that Australia had given to support the United Kingdom on the issue.

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## Australia's dilemma: overseas Japanese civilian internees

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An additional issue for Australia was Japan's unwillingness to advise Australia of the safety and location of Australian POWs. For the Australian Government, the issue of civilian internment was linked to the conditions of the Australian POWs.

The residual control over the overseas Japanese internees continued postwar, where the detaining power maintained veto power over if, and where the overseas internees could be repatriated. In the case of the Japanese from New Caledonia, 30 requested to be repatriated to New Caledonia but the administration there stipulated they be returned to Japan.

The situation regarding the internees from NEI was compounded by the changing political situation in Indonesia and many ended up being repatriated to Japan. Most of the Japanese internees who had been resident in British colonies were also repatriated to Japan.

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*Dr Rowena Ward is a lecturer in Japanese, at the Language Centre, Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong.*

## Students map out Asia-Pacific future

The future of the Asia-Pacific region and its potential to radically reshape the world was the focus of a four-day conference at the Australian National University in July.

Asia Pacific Week 2011 saw 100 of the world's top university students engage with leading thinkers on Asia and the Pacific through a series of themed panels and interactive sessions.

The student-organised conference offered fresh thinking on a number of important issues affecting Asia and the Pacific, including cybercrime and legal systems, human rights, meeting the challenge of climate change, responding to natural disasters and the prospects for war and peace in the region.

Highlights of the event included a panel discussion on the transition of power in Asia and the Pacific, a session on post-triple disaster Japan, a war-game simulation and a master blogging challenge.

The conference also featured the inaugural Q & Asia debate which saw a panel of ANU experts, reflect on where the Asia-Pacific region is headed.

Student delegate Jacqueline Menager said the diversity of sessions at Asia Pacific Week really broadened her knowledge of the region. 'In addition to the knowledge gained through sessions, the opportunity to meet other students from Australia and around the world is one of the strengths of Asia Pacific Week,' she said.

'Asia Pacific Week brings together a younger generation of scholars to engage with each other and more established academics. By bringing together younger students of the region, the conference offers a chance to look at the region with a fresh set of eyes.' *Report ANU News*

# What war? Reimagining Vietnam for the 21st century

*CATHERINE EARL finds signs that, for some of Vietnam's young, the war of the 1960s and 1970s may not even be a distant memory.*

**M**id-morning at a roadside cafe during a recent trip to Vietnam, my imagining of Vietnam was jolted into the 21st century.

This took me by surprise, not because I had an unchanging view of Vietnam, but because my view of Vietnam has gradually evolved through regular visits since 1998. Over that time, I have seen the gap between rich and poor in Vietnam gradually widen as the economy gradually opens. I have seen Ho Chi Minh City expand, with buildings becoming taller and suburbs sprawling further. I have seen privately owned cars appear on the streets and global brand names sprout on shops across the city. A sudden, dramatic change was unexpected.

At the roadside cafe I was talking with a young Vietnamese woman. A graduate, she had relocated to Vietnam's commercial hub (and day spa capital) Ho Chi Minh City a decade earlier. Like other young graduates she frequently switched jobs, switching between companies with the aim of increasing salary, responsibility, and status. Being between jobs—or perhaps on a rare day of leave—she had agreed to meet me for coffee.

As we chatted, I noted our surroundings including an impressive building across the street that was decorated with a banner: 51st Anniversary of National Tourism Day, 1960–2011. Struck by the dates, I commented questioning the

extent of tourism in Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s. The young woman laughed at my reaction, suggesting that I viewed Vietnam as an underdeveloped and backward place that was not capable of entertaining tourists.

**'You must be confused. We've not had a war with Americans.'**

'Actually', I said, 'I was thinking about the war. How was tourism in Vietnam during the war?'

'What war?' she replied. Then, 'Oh, the war ended a long time ago, in 1954 or 1955. Vietnam became independent from France.'



Victorious NVA troops at the Presidential Palace, Saigon.

Indeed Vietnam had fought a war of independence, the First Indochina War, between 1945 and 1954 that ended with the defeat of French troops at the iconic Battle of Dien Bien Phu in

Vietnam's far north-west. Vietnam was subsequently divided into North, led by Ho Chi Minh's communist government, and South, led by a Catholic republican government.

'Yes,' I said, 'But what about the other war? The war with the Americans?'

She thought for a moment, then answered: 'You must be confused. We've not had a war with Americans.'

I was unsure whether she was joking or not. While I had never discussed the war directly with young people in Ho Chi Minh City, others I met frequently mentioned

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wartime events such as fleeing a home, visiting a father or uncle in prison, or losing a family member as a result of injury or malnutrition. Even if they were too young to be directly involved, they seemed to know there was a war.

As a graduate professional in Ho Chi Minh City, this young woman's life was relatively comfortable and insulated from hardship. It would have been easy to interpret her comment as youthful ignorance or flippancy.

'How do you know about it?' she asked me.

'It's a very famous war,' I said, 'Everyone knows about it. How can you not know? What did you study at school?'

'School!' she exclaimed. 'Very boring! I never paid attention at school. Especially not to history. Boring! I don't remember any of that.'

I was still wondering if she was joking.

Ho Chi Minh City's graduate professionals are a group of highly educated young people, although their qualifications and interests tend to centre on economic development and marketing rather than history or sociology. Most are migrants, having relocated from Vietnam's poorer and less developed provinces to its wealthiest and most highly developed region where they can build a brighter future for themselves.

'What about 30 April?' I pressed her, 'Why is there a national holiday in Vietnam on 30 April?'

I expected her to recognise the date of Reunification Day (alternatively dubbed 'the fall of Saigon'), the day a tank rolled through the gates of the Presidential Palace in Saigon to take control of the

city. Instead, she said, 'Oh, you mean 1 May? That's International Labour Day. It's a holiday weekend. We usually go to the beach.'

I could not stop wondering if it were possible that a young graduate who had grown up in Vietnam could actually not know about the American war.

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'Isn't 30 April an important day in Vietnam?' I inquired.

'I don't think so. It's 1 May you're thinking of.'

'No, I'm sure it was 30 April. They drove a tank into the palace gate and the war ended.'

'What palace?' she asked.

'The one near Diamond Plaza'—I was confident she would know Ho Chi Minh City's first designer shopping centre—'Across the park, on Khoi Nghia Street.'

'I know the place but I don't know about that. I don't remember history. It was before I was born.'

Taking a new tack, I asked, 'Don't you have an aunt who married an American man and moved to America? How did your aunt meet her husband?'

'I don't know. I've never met her.'

I stopped questioning her but could not stop wondering if it were possible that a young graduate, who had grown up in Vietnam, could actually not know about the 'American war'. Was it possible that the young woman's views were widespread among other young professionals? Were her views shared among a growing urban elite whose ideas could draw the attention of policy makers

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## Reimagining Vietnam

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and international investors? Was it an indication that Vietnam has moved on from the 'American war' and has become a vibrant Southeast Asian destination rather than a struggling post-war nation? This is what jolted my imagining of Vietnam into the 21st century.

While the Second Indochina War is far from forgotten among Vietnamese, its legacy is so widely known in the United States and Australia that it has become symbolic of an era of change. Not only did it politicise war, but it also raised the political and social conscience of a generation. Widely televised, the war motivated protest that spilled into the streets of Australia's capital cities. It popularised the acceptance of post-traumatic stress disorder and drew attention to atrocities, civilian massacres, and the use of biological and chemical weapons.

It raised awareness of social issues including underage prostitution, sex worker health, drug use in the military, birth defects, and acquired disability. It prompted opposition to military conscription and doubt about the legitimacy of governments using war in foreign relations. It changed the reception of returning veterans who were not honoured but physically abused and publicly humiliated. It resulted in Australia's first boat people, which led to public debates about multiculturalism and tolerance. It also inspired film, television, violent video games, and a stage musical.

Thanks to its influence on political and social conscience, the Vietnam War endures. The word 'Vietnam' is still used in English as shorthand for the Second Indochina War, a war that ended a generation ago.

Perhaps it is time to forget this retrospective idea of Vietnam and, like the young Vietnamese woman I met, move on to a new imagining of a Vietnam for the 21st century.



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## Applications open for Asialink leaders program

Applications for the 2011 Asialink [Leaders Program](#) are underway, and will close at 5 pm on 17 October.

The program produces a regional network of leaders from the corporate, government and community sectors with a solid understanding of contemporary regional trends and issues to lead us into the future. It runs in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane over a nine-month period.



It brings together more than 50 participants from a wide variety of sectors with the aim

of enhancing their participants' knowledge of contemporary Asian societies and giving them access to leading Asia specialists in Australia and the region.

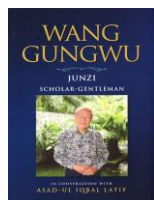
Interviews will be conducted in November 2011 and successful applicants notified in December 2011. The program starts in March 2012.

Further information from David Paroissien at Asialink on 03 8344 4800, or email [leadership@asialink.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:leadership@asialink.unimelb.edu.au).





SALLY BURDON, *Asia Bookroom*, previews a selection of recent biographies.

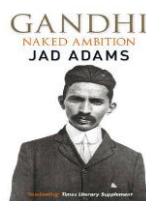


**Wang Gungwu: Junzi: scholar-gentleman in conversation with Asad-ul Iqbal Latif**, paperback, 261pp, ISEAS Singapore. \$44.95.

This book of interviews with Professor Wang Gungwu, published to felicitate him on his 80th birthday in 2010, seeks to convey to a general audience something of the life, times and thoughts of a leading historian, Southeast Asianist, Sinologist and public intellectual. The interviews flesh out Professor Wang's views on being Chinese in Malaya; his experience of living and working in Malaysia, Singapore and Australia; the Vietnam War; Hong Kong and its return to China; the rise of China; the place of Taiwan, Japan and India in the emerging scheme of things; and on the United States in an age of terrorism and war.

The book includes an interview with his wife, Mrs Margaret Wang, on their life together for half a century. Two interviews by scholars on Professor Wang's work are also included, as are his curriculum vitae and a select bibliography of his works.

What comes across is how Professor Wang was buffeted by feral times and hostile worlds but responded to them as a left-liberal humanist who refused to cut ideological corners. The book records his response to tumultuous times on hindsight, but with a keen sense of having lived through the times of which he speaks.



**Gandhi. Naked ambition.** By Jad Adams, paperback, 323pp, Quercus, United Kingdom. \$24.99

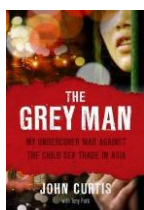
The pre-eminent political and spiritual leader of India's independence movement, pioneer of nonviolent resistance to tyranny through mass civil disobedience (*satyagraha*), honoured in India as 'father of the nation', Mohandas K. Gandhi has inspired movements for civil rights and political freedom across the world. Jad Adams offers a concise and elegant account of Gandhi's life, from his birth and upbringing in a small princely state in Gujarat during the high noon of the British Raj, to his assassination at the hands of a Hindu extremist in 1948, only months after the birth of the independent India which he himself had done so much to bring about.

He delineates the principal events of a career that may truly be said to have changed the world: his training as a barrister in late Victorian London; his civil rights work in Boer War-era South Africa; his leadership of the Indian National Congress; his focus on obtaining self-government and control of all Indian Government institutions, and the campaigns of noncooperation and nonviolence against British rule in India whereby he sought to achieve that aim (including the famous 'salt march' of March/April 1930); his passionate opposition to partition in 1947 and his fasts-unto-death in a bid to end the bitter and bloody sectarian violence that attended it.

Jad Adams's accessible and thoughtful biography not only traces the outline of an extraordinary life, but also examines why Gandhi and his teachings are still profoundly relevant today.

More Books on Asia on page 26>>

## Books on Asia



### **The grey man. My undercover war against the child sex trade in Asia.**

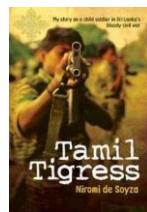
By John Curtis and Tony Park, paperback, 276pp, Pan Macmillan, Australia. \$34.99.

In northern Thailand a 12-year-old girl is sold to a middle-aged Western man for sex. It's a transaction as ordinary as it is disgusting. In this case, however, the man in question is not a paedophile—he is a rescuer, working undercover to free child sex slaves from an appalling life of exploitation and misery, securing their freedom as well as seeing to their subsequent long-term care, nurturing and education.

The rescuer works for an organisation known simply as The Grey Man, an Australian army term for a quiet and dedicated professional who operates under the radar. This unique organisation is the brainchild of John Curtis, a former special forces soldier who has put his talents, energy and passion into fighting the child sex trade throughout Asia.

*The grey man* documents John Curtis's personal story, from his restless early life to his military career and his search for meaning in his life—a search that took him to northern Thailand and the dramatic first rescue of a young victim of the sex trade. In the years since Curtis rescued that first child, The Grey Man has gone on to rescue literally hundreds of women and children in Thailand and Cambodia.

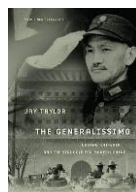
The organisation, now an official charity working with other NGOs and law enforcement agencies, has also contributed to the arrest of paedophiles from Australia, Europe and the United States. Their work continues today, with plans to expand into several other countries.



**Tamil tigress. My story as a child soldier in Sri Lanka's bloody civil war.** By Niromi de Soyza, paperback, 308pp, Allen & Unwin, Australia. \$32.99.

Two days before Christmas in 1987, at the age of 17, Niromi de Soyza found herself in an ambush as part of a small platoon of militant Tamil Tigers fighting government forces in the bloody civil war that was to engulf Sri Lanka for decades. With her was her lifelong friend, Ajanthi, also aged 17. Leaving behind them their shocked middle-class families, the teenagers had become part of the Tamil Tigers' first female contingent. Equipped with little more than a rifle and a cyanide capsule for each person, Niromi's group managed to survive on their wits in the jungle, facing not only the perils of war but starvation, illness and growing internal tensions among the militant Tigers. And then events erupted in ways that she could no longer bear.

How was it that this well-educated, mixed-race, middle-class girl from a respectable family came to be fighting with the Tamil Tigers? Today she lives in Sydney with her husband and children; but Niromi de Soyza is not your ordinary woman and this is her compelling story.



**The generalissimo. Chiang Kai-shek and the struggle for modern China.** By Jay Taylor, paperback, 736pp, Harvard U.P, United States. \$29.95.

One of the most momentous stories of the last century is China's rise from a self-satisfied, antimodern, decaying society into a global power that promises to one day rival the United States. Chiang Kai-shek, an autocratic, larger-than-life figure, dominates this story. A modernist as well as a neo-Confucianist, Chiang was a man

Continued on page 27>>

## The generalissimo

<<From page 23

of war who led the most ancient and populous country in the world through a quarter century of bloody revolutions, civil conflict, and wars of resistance against Japanese aggression. In 1949, when he was defeated by Mao Zedong, he fled to Taiwan, where he ruled for another 25 years. Playing a key role in the cold war with China, Chiang suppressed opposition with his 'white terror,' controlled inflation and corruption, carried out land reform and raised personal income, health, and educational levels on the island. Consciously or not, he set the stage for Taiwan's evolution of a Chinese model of democratic modernisation.

Drawing heavily on Chinese sources, including Chiang's diaries, *The generalissimo* provides a sweeping and objective biography of a man whose length of uninterrupted, active engagement at the highest levels in the march of history is excelled by few, if any, in modern history.

Jay Taylor shows a man who was exceedingly ruthless and temperamental but who was also courageous and conscientious in matters of state. Revealing fascinating aspects of Chiang's life, Taylor provides penetrating insight into the dynamics of the past that lie behind the struggle for modernity of mainland China and its relationship with Taiwan.

## 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.

### The East Asia Series

The series welcomes proposals on subjects principally concerned with any part of the East Asian region (China, Japan, North and South Korea and Taiwan).

### South Asia Series

The series publishes outstanding research on the countries and peoples of South Asia across a wide range of disciplines.

## Asian Studies Review



*Asian Studies Review* is multidisciplinary and welcomes contributions in the fields of anthropology, modern history, politics, international relations, sociology, modern Asian languages and literature, contemporary philosophy, religion, human geography, health sciences and the environment.

The journal focuses on the modern histories, cultures, and societies of Asia and welcomes submissions that adopt a contemporary approach to critical studies of the Asian region. *Asian Studies Review* welcomes research in new fields and emerging disciplines, including cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, film and media studies, popular and youth cultures, queer studies, diasporic studies, transnational and globalisation studies. *Asian Studies Review* also includes review articles and book reviews.

## Job websites

[www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk) advertises worldwide academic posts.

<http://reliefweb.int/> is a free service run by the United Nations to recruit for NGO jobs

<http://www.aboutus.org/DevelopmentEx.com> has a paid subscription service providing access to jobs worldwide in the international development industry.

<https://h-net.org/jobs/home.php> is a US-based site with a worldwide scope. Asia-related jobs (mostly academic) come up most weeks.

<http://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.

[http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/jobs\\_home.asp](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/jobs_home.asp) is *The Times Higher Education Supplement*.

<http://www.comminit.com/global/spaces-frontpage> is the site of The Communication Initiative Network.

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

## Diary notes

**'Japan Design Today 100', 29 July–16 September 2011, Sydney.** An exhibition on the evolution of Japanese design on everyday products, at the Japan Foundation Gallery, Level 1, Chifley Plaza, Chifley Square, Sydney, Monday–Friday, 11 am–4 pm, Wednesday until 8pm. See [website](http://www.jpff.org.au). [www.jpff.org.au](http://www.jpff.org.au).

**'Religion and Society in Indonesia after the Cikeusik Murders', a public forum on religious diversity and social harmony in Indonesia, 5.30pm, 29 August 2011,** Monash University Law Chambers, 555 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, organised by the Monash School of Political and Social Inquiry, in cooperation with the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law. The panellists are experienced educators and religious leaders from West Java, whose institutional involvements put them in privileged positions to comment on religious conflict in the region.

**'Living Histories' 2011 interview series,** the Japan Foundation of Sydney. Attendance is free. Interviews will be held in the Multipurpose Room, the Japan Foundation, Shop 23, level 1, Chifley Plaza, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney, on the following dates: **31 August**, Tetsu Kariya; **7 September**, Dr Christine de Matos and Kathy Wray; **14 September**, Walter Hamilton and Alan Stokes; **28 September**, Father Paul Glynn.

**Asian Art Institute of Australia (AAIA) exhibitions, Sydney exhibitions and presentations, 1–2 October 2011, 10am–5pm.** Blue and white Chinese ceramics from the Ming and Qing dynasties, a collection of high quality blue and white Chinese ceramics. Venue: 459 Harris Street, Ultimo, RSVP by email or phone Larry Lucas mobile 0411 156 720 or AIAA 02 9660 199. Admission is free.

The Inaugural Colloquium of the Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities, Melbourne, 26–28 September 2011. The colloquium will be held at the University of Melbourne. Further information from the website.

Indonesia Update Conference 2011, ANU, Canberra, 30 September–1 October 2011 on 'Indonesia's place in the world'. The conference is free of charge, and being convened by Anthony Reid and Michael O'Shannassy.

**Conferences on Asia literacy in Singapore and Malaysia.** The 2011 Asian Literacy Conference in Penang, Malaysia, **11–13 October 2011** provides a space for interested groups and individuals to explore and share success stories and unfolding narratives on their experiences and journeys in language and literacy education.

**Workshop on media freedom in Indonesia, the Australian National University, 27 October 2011.** Organised by the Island Southeast Asia Centre, the [workshop](#) is open to postgraduates, early career researchers and senior academics researching in the field of media freedom in Indonesia and elsewhere in Island Southeast Asia. It will be part of a two-day public event entitled 'Youth, Media and Public Tolerance'.

More Diary notes page 29

## Diary notes

**'Great Asian Writers and Surrounding Vernacular Literatures in a Postcolonial Perspective', National University of Singapore, 11–13 November 2011**, organised by Reading Asia: Forging Identities in Literature (RAFIL) consortium and the Department of Malay Studies, NUS. Further details on the [web](#).

**Dragon Tails Conference 2011.** The second Australasian conference on overseas Chinese history and heritage takes place at the Museum of Chinese Australian History, Melbourne from 11 to 13 November 2011. See the [Dragontails](#) website for further information.

**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, or [heritagedest@bigpond.com](mailto:heritagedest@bigpond.com).

**The 14th Biennial Symposium on Literatures and Cultures of the Asia Pacific Region, 4–7 December, 2011.** The symposium on 'Asia–Pacific literature and culture in the era of the digital revolution' is being hosted by the Westerly Centre at the University of Western Australia, in conjunction with the Asia–Pacific Writing Partnership. See [website](#).

**History as Controversy: Writing and Teaching Contentious Topics in Asian Histories, the University of Singapore, 14–15 December 2011.** Further details from the Asia Education Foundation [web page](#).

### Malaysia, Singapore and the region

Call for papers for 17th Colloquium of the Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia, Melbourne, **8–9 December 2011**. Those interested in presenting a paper or organising a panel are invited to submit a paper or panel title before 30 August 2011 to the secretary of the society, [Dr Marshall Clark](#).

## PhD scholarship for research on political representation in Southeast Asia

A fully funded three-year PhD scholarship is available to work under the supervision of Australian Professorial Fellow Garry Rodan, who is undertaking a five-year project entitled 'Representation and Political Regimes in Southeast Asia,' funded by the Australian Research Council.

Applications are invited for candidates with similar or complementary research interests. These interests can be pursued through study of one or more political regime in Southeast Asia. This includes, but is not limited to, projects oriented towards: analysing new forms of political participation, including examination of ideologies and/or institutions of political representation; analysing the significance of state political co-option and/or independent civil activity for ideologies and/or institutions of political representation. Projects can be dedicated to the study of formal or informal political institutions of political representation and focused on democratic and/or non-democratic ideologies of political representation.

The successful candidate will be based at Murdoch University's Asia Research Centre in Perth, Australia, which has a strong concentration of scholars with specialist research expertise on Southeast Asian politics and societies. Joint supervision between Professor Rodan and a relevant centre colleague is thus possible, depending on the precise project. The centre holds workshops, seminars and conferences that further enrich the intellectual climate on offer to the successful candidate. Details of the centre's researchers and activities are available from the [website](#).

The three-year scholarship carries an annual stipend of \$27 222 plus fieldwork and conference attendance support. Please forward expressions of interest or enquiries to [Professor Garry Rodan](#). Expressions of interest should include completion of the Asia Research Centre's thesis [proposal form](#) and a current curriculum vita. These can be submitted at any time before and up to 15 October 2011. The successful candidate can take up the scholarship from as early as late 2011 and would be expected to start no later than May 2012.

## 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 [Maximizing Australia's Asia knowledge: repositioning and renewal of a national asset](#). Asian Currents is published by the ASAA and edited by [Allan Sharp](#).

## 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. Citations should be kept to a minimum and follow the documentary–note system. Citations should appear at the end of the article rather than at the bottom of each page.

### **Asian Studies Association of Australia 19th Biennial Conference, Parramatta campus of the University of Western Sydney, 11 to 14 July 2012.**

The theme of the conference will be 'Knowing Asia: Asian Studies in an Asian Century'. The conference will be hosted by the Institute for Culture and Society, the School of Humanities and Communications, and the Centre for Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies. Co-convenors: [Professor Len Ang](#), Professor of Cultural Studies and the founding Director of the Centre of Cultural Research (CCR) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS), and [Associate Professor Judith Snodgrass](#), UWS Centre of Cultural Research.

The website is currently under construction and will open soon with news of keynotes, panel themes, and events. There will be a link from the [ASAA homepage](#).