



Asian languages feature strongly at inaugural LCNAU colloquium

The recent inaugural LCNAU colloquium clearly met a need for collaboration, communication and support among Australia's language teachers, write ANYA WOODS, JOHN HAJEK and COLIN NETTELBECK.

With the staging of a successful inaugural colloquium in September, the newly established Languages and Cultures Network for University Languages (LCNAU) is clearly on its way to becoming Australia's peak body for languages.

More than 230 languages and cultures professionals from across the tertiary sector and beyond registered for the three-day colloquium, held at the University of Melbourne from 26 to 28 September.

With 20 languages represented and 25 universities present—as well as a number of schools and teachers' associations—the event clearly met a need for collaboration, communication and support among colleagues in the sector. There was significant participation by colleagues in Asian languages (Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese) from around the country.

The creation and development of LCNAU, as previously reported in *Asian Currents* (April 2011), is the focus of a two-year national project entitled 'Leadership for future generations: a national network for university languages', funded by the [Australian Learning and Teaching Council](#) (ALTC—now administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) and strongly



LCNAU Project Team] L-R: Dr Lynne Li (RMIT), Prof Joseph Lo Bianco (Melbourne), Prof. John Hajek (Melbourne), Prof. Kerry Dunne (Wollongong), Prof. Colin Nettelbeck (Melbourne), Dr Anya Woods (Melbourne), Prof Marko Pavlyshyn (Monash).

supported by the [Australian Academy of the Humanities](#) (AAH). LCNAU's primary

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goal is to establish links and facilitate collaboration and best practice among languages academics to address issues shared by them, regardless of language and university. This was a need identified strongly by previous studies initiated by the AAH¹, and by the [Group of Eight](#)², which highlighted, among other worrying trends, a massive decrease in the number of languages on offer, falls in retention across languages and increased reliance on casual teaching staff.

The colloquium was therefore a landmark opportunity for educators—across Asian, European and Indigenous Australian languages—to come together and share the dynamism which, despite the problems, has long been a part of the sector, and to participate in LCNAU's creation of a national agenda for university languages and cultures teaching and research.

The colloquium was organised and run in record short time—with actual planning beginning in late February 2011 and assisted by additional direct financial assistance from RMIT, Monash University and the University of Melbourne. Many other universities also generously assisted their own staff to attend the event.

The three days of the colloquium featured sessions across a number of themes: university languages; the [National Curriculum](#) and languages education in schools; retention and attrition; the language–culture nexus; the teaching–research nexus; maintaining and fostering research in the languages area; Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL); collaborative models of teaching and learning; and the development vs. casualisation of language professionals.

Asian languages featured prominently across the three days and all presentation

types. It began with the first individual presentation of the colloquium when [Kayoko Enomoto](#) (University of Adelaide) spoke about deep learning by focused development of Japanese language and general research skills together. Other examples included [Richard Curtis](#) (Charles Darwin University), who focused on developing the teaching–research nexus in the context of Indonesian; [Yan-yan Wang](#), who discussed the use of conversation analysis in teaching Chinese at the Australian National University; while [Anne McLaren](#) (University of Melbourne) discussed the question of the language and culture nexus in the teaching of Chinese.

The colloquium was officially opened by [Professor John Dewar](#), Provost of the University of Melbourne. A number of plenaries featured on day one, including one by AAH president and LCNAU project team member [Professor Joseph Lo Bianco](#), which examined recent changes in [Excellence in Research for Australia](#) evaluation process and their implications for research on and through languages other than English.

One of LCNAU's goals is to foster new research projects for the sector, and several plenaries showcased current projects led by the network. [Professor Kerry Dunne](#) (University of Wollongong) presented preliminary findings on languages of smaller enrolment—research conducted with [Professor Marko Pavlyshyn](#) (Monash); and [Professor Colin Nettelbeck](#) presented work conducted with [Professor John Hajek](#) and [Dr Anya Woods](#) (University of Melbourne) on a significant new project focusing on the increasing casualisation of staff in the sector, and the need to address this negative trend.

An exciting LCNAU initiative springing out of this research on casualisation was the staging of the first-ever national Forum and Workshop for Sessional Teaching Staff, immediately preceding the

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colloquium's opening. Forty-five sessionals—many teaching in Asian languages—from various Australian universities registered for the opportunity to discuss the situation of sessional and short-term contract staff involved in teaching languages and cultures, as well as to hear findings from a national online survey³ of sessional staff. The survey report provided a series of recommendations to LCNAU on how best to interact with and help sessional teaching staff, further highlighting the network's important role within the sector.

The AAH's ongoing support for the project and network was evident in its inviting LCNAU to host its prestigious [Louis Triebel Lecture](#). This year's Lecture, 'Creating a languages future: how Australia can be world best practice in languages education' was delivered by [Professor Glenn Withers](#), Chief Executive Officer of Universities Australia.

Day two featured parallel sessions for individual presentations on a wide number of research areas. It also featured panel presentations on language teacher education and developments in TELL, and an interactive poster session to showcase current research projects.

LCNAU sees the fostering of research within the sector as vital. To further this goal, seven parallel workshop sessions were held with the intention of developing collaborative research projects. A number of promising research ideas were put forward for which LCNAU hopes to provide seed funding to develop and implement them as collaborative research projects.

A report by [Associate Professor Angela Scarino](#) (University of South Australia), lead author of the [Australian Curriculum](#),

[Assessment and Reporting Authority's \(ACARA\) draft document, *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: languages*](#), provided a valuable update on the national curriculum and the status of the draft *Shape* paper. This formed the basis of much discussion and, on day three, decision for action. The closing session passed a unanimous vote urging:

1) ACARA to respect the overwhelming response of the public in support of the draft *Shape* paper and proceed to developing the nominated languages in language-specific curricula as set out in the draft

2) all universities to follow the example of the universities of Adelaide, South Australia and Sydney, and Charles Darwin University, by introducing the teaching of Australian Indigenous languages—for the benefit of the nation and all students.

LCNAU's role in advocacy for all languages—Asian and European—is vital. Following the colloquium, a media release was sent to ACARA and various media outlets. LCNAU has featured prominently in the media recently, highlighting the positive impact the network is already having across and beyond the sector.⁴

For LCNAU to continue to be effective, it requires the engagement and support of everyone in the sector.

In the short term, direct outcomes of the colloquium include the hosting of presentations on the LCNAU website⁵ and the forthcoming publication of e-proceedings. In the longer term, collaborative research projects between languages and universities will strengthen the sector and embed the network institutionally.

The future of university languages in Australia is indeed in a stronger position with the establishment of LCNAU. However, for the network to continue to be effective, it requires the engagement and support of everyone in the sector.

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LCNAU needs ongoing funding to continue beyond 2012, and funding is dependent on the network's ability to show demonstrable outcomes. Funding and outcomes will therefore be a key focus of LCNAU's coming activities to ensure that the good work and goodwill so apparent at the colloquium can continue to assist and empower the sector into the future.

Further information about LCNAU can be found on the network's website, or by contacting the project manager, Dr Anya Woods.

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2. Group of Eight, *Languages in crisis: a rescue plan for Australia*, 2007.
3. The [online survey](#) gives sessional teaching staff the opportunity to voice their opinions and experiences on a number of issues particular to their place within the sector. Preliminary findings were presented at the forum, and later at the colloquium. However the survey is still live until 30 November 2011 and the full results will form an important source of qualitative and quantitative data for the national study of casualisation which LCNAU is undertaking. Sessionals across the country are encouraged to participate.
4. The media release and links to articles in the media which feature LCNAU are all

available on the LCNAU [website](#).

5. Slideshows from most of the presentations featured at the colloquium are now available on the LCNAU website.

Anya Woods, John Hajek and Colin Nettelbeck are members of the LCNAU Project Team.

Knowing Asia: 19th ASAA Biennial Conference



Information about the Asian Studies Association of Australia's 19th Biennial Conference is now available on the [conference website](#). The conference will be held at the Parramatta campus of the University of Western Sydney, 11–14 July 2012.

The theme 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 Communication Arts, and the Centre for Studies of Contemporary Muslim Societies at the University of Western Sydney.

Confirmed keynote speakers are: **Professor Lily Kong**, Vice-President (University and Global Relations) and Acting Executive Vice-President (Academic Affairs), Yale–NUS College, National University of Singapore (NUS)

Professor Ji-Hyun Lim, Professor of History, Director of the Research Institute of Comparative History and Culture, Hanyang University, Seoul

Professor Prasenjit Duara, Raffles Professor of Humanities, Director, Asia Research Institute, and Director of Research, Humanities and Social Sciences, NUS.

Caste system adapts to a modernising India

The caste system may not be the barrier to restructuring and modernisation in India that some believe, argues SANDY GORDON.

The issue of the relationship between caste and economic development in India is important, contested and complex.

The fraught nature of the issue goes to the roots of the debates that raged during the colonial period between economic nationalists such as RC Dutt, Dadabhai Naoroji and, later, AK Bagchi, and economic historians and sociologists, who were largely Westerners, such as Max Weber and Vera Anstey.

The economic nationalists argued that India's failure to develop economically was due to British distortions of the economy in favour of their own mercantilist needs. The Western commentators attributed lack of economic development to the Indian social and religious system, particularly the rigidities imposed on the economy by caste, lack of individualism, acceptance of 'fate' (*karma*) and 'otherworldliness'.

With Independence, however, the debate has been 'flipped on its head'. As pointed out by Guhan and Harris in 1992¹, those who still believe caste is an impediment to development tend to frame the issue differently than in colonial times—that is, in terms of the causes of the poverty *in* India rather than causes of the poverty *of* India. Moreover, caste is now seen in a more ambiguous way as being not only a cause of poverty but also a positive factor in development.

The idea that caste might be a support of development arises in part from the example of the role of caste in Japan. Caste in Japan was, of course, very different to caste in India. But Japan managed to 'morph' very rapidly from a

feudal society divided into various castes to one that supported rapid industrialisation and militarisation. The reforms associated with the Meiji Restoration, which effectively 'cut loose' the samurai, are said to have greatly assisted this process by freeing up a dynamic industrial class.



Additionally, the work of scholars such as Lloyd and Suzanne Rudolph, who argued in *The modernity of tradition* (1967)² that some aspects

of traditional India, including caste, may actually support modernisation, stimulated a rethink on the role of caste.

Following their work, a whole body of literature, including from the [Subaltern Studies school](#), sought to explain the processes by which lower caste people attempted to enter the modern economy—not so much in terms of reference to Western, 'modern' tradition, but rather in peculiarly Indian ways that both incorporated existing Indian norms (including, ironically, those of higher castes in the process of what MN Srinivas referred to as 'Sanskritization') and also some elements of western modernity (see for example, Debjani Ganguly and Manuela Ciotti³).

What emerges from this literature, which is usually based on microstudies of particular castes, is the utter complexity of the process of incorporating caste into a modernising, and globalising, economy. In particular, the Western dichotomy between modern (read Western) and traditional (read Indian) simply does not apply. Further, we can also see that caste is a flexible idea well capable of being incorporated into a modernising economy and surviving at the same time. If we look

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at the problem in this way, it is soon transformed into a different set of issues and questions. For example, competition within a caste—say in the form of a street full of jewellers all apparently competing—could be viewed as a means of sharpening competitive capabilities or providing supportive cooperation rather than as an economic ‘race to the bottom’. The ability to raise capital from fellow caste and family members can be seen to support new entrants rather than entrench tradition. And the passing on of specialist economic skills does not necessarily stultify, as suggested by Weber, but can also stimulate. For example, commercial acumen, embedded in traditional practices, among some *banyia* (merchant, trader and money-lender) communities is highly prized in itself. It is therefore a skill to be learned and developed, including through modern education and innovation. Thus the scion of a leading *banyia* family who enters the family firm with a Harvard MBA is primed not only to benefit from leading modern business techniques but also the accumulated economic and cultural wisdom of centuries.

Nor are we likely to get uniform outcomes in relation to modernisation and caste across the vast, and highly diverse, spread of India. For example, in Western India, *banyia* castes historically had relatively high status. In Gujarat, they were wealthy and politically influential, while there was a saying, ‘*he is as poor as a brahmin*’.

Today, these Western locations are the most advanced commercial and industrial areas of India. Similarly, *brahmins* from the southern states, to an extent cut loose from traditional roles by the Non-Brahmin Movement, have used their intellectual prowess to dominate key intellectual endeavours such as India’s space, nuclear and other research institutions and some

elements of the bureaucracy, and so on, right across India.

One thing we can say is that there is convincing evidence of the persistence of caste, especially in rural areas. A study by the Department of Education, University of Lucknow, as reported in *The Diplomat*, found that in 40 per cent of schools across the sample districts of Uttar Pradesh, ‘teachers and students refuse to partake of the government-sponsored free midday meals because they are cooked by Dalits [former Untouchables]’. In rural areas, caste and subcaste associations (*khap panchayats*) still often dictate intercaste marriage strictures and sometimes carry out horrendous, so-called ‘honour killings’.

Not only does caste persist, but also, despite six decades of reservations for lower castes and poverty reduction programs targeting the poor, most researchers find there still seems to be a stubborn correlation between low-caste membership and poverty in many rural regions. One reason could be that the elites (from whatever case) who manage government programs designed to target the poor divert those resources for their own use. Researchers at the [Australia South Asia Research Centre \(ASARC\)](#), at the Australian National University, found that such diversion both exists and can also, to an extent, be mitigated by lower caste members bribing officials to gain access.

It has also been argued that the policy of reservations has itself helped to entrench caste, in that it provides benefits for low-caste membership and therefore fosters ‘identity politics’.⁴ Others argue that the so-called ‘creamy layer’ within individual low castes is only a small minority, one that both sets the agenda and benefits from it.⁵ The ASARC research cited above noted that one antidote to diversion of resources from the low castes is provision

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of education and knowledge. While perhaps true in poverty alleviation terms, the provision of access to information and knowledge does not necessarily seem to have lessened the political impact of caste. Robin Jeffrey noted as early as 1994 that the vast unfolding of knowledge and information in modern India not only encourages equality but can also be used by political opportunists to reignite ancient ethnic, religious and caste divisions.⁶ The increasing salience of caste-based politics in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar lend credence to this view.

So caste is definitely still a major factor in Indian society. But it is one that works in different ways in different places and at different levels of society. As a phenomenon, it is highly adaptable and perfectly capable of engaging positively with a modernising economy, sometimes in ways that are not at all obvious to the observer. It is a complicated picture as befits a complex and changing nation.

Overall, it would be reasonable to conclude that economic restructuring and modernisation in India will not be significantly held back by the persistent presence of caste, and could even benefit from it. Poverty, however, could stubbornly persist in some areas. At the same time, as modernisation and urbanisation progress, so too will caste become less salient in Indian life. But it will also continue to exist—if in subtly transformed ways.

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PM names Asian century panel

Prime Minister Julia Gillard has announced the membership of a high-level advisory panel, led by Dr Ken Henry, for the White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century. The panel brings together experience from business, academia and government.

The panel also includes Emeritus Professor Peter Drysdale, from the Australian National University, Ms Catherine Livingstone, a leading Australian business figure and currently Chair of Telstra, and Mr John Denton a partner and the Chief Executive Officer of Corrs Chambers Westgarth. They will also sit on a Cabinet committee which will oversee preparation of the white paper.

The development of the white paper will include an intensive period of consultation with the Australian community, business, academia and international partners. The taskforce is due to report to Cabinet in the first half of 2012, with the white paper to be released in mid-2012

China's new socialist countryside

LIOR ROSENBERG questions China's plans to extend the creation of new rural residential communities to the entire rural sector.

Three decades of economic reforms and rapid industrial growth have changed China dramatically, from an undeveloped, collectivised, poverty-stricken country into one of the world's most important economic centres. But the countryside was left behind.

Until recently, infrastructure in rural areas was poor and dilapidated. In the early 2000s, for example, 300 million people in rural China still did not have up-to-standard safe drinking water, about 50 per cent of the villages did not have running water and in 70 per cent roads were unpaved. More than half still used firewood and straw as their main energy resource, 20 million villagers were not connected to electricity and 50 million were disconnected from television or radio.¹

Many villages were a cultural wilderness with few, if any, facilities for leisure activities.² Chronic underfunding and an explicit expectation that villagers would finance services and public amenities that normally should have been supported by the state, together with endless fees and fines—many of them imposed rampantly and illegally by local officials—culminated in a heavy economic burden imposed on the villagers. This resulted in a sharp deterioration in relations between villagers and officials, accompanied by protests and violence.

In the late 1990s, the central government already perceived the rural crisis as a threat to social stability, and in the early 2000s it banned local officials from charging the burdensome local fees. New policies set up, one after the other, to tackle rural problems culminated, in 2006, in a dramatic call by the national leader-

-ship to build a 'new socialist countryside'. By calling to build a new countryside, the state pointed the finger of blame towards the 'old' much more than towards itself. It was the 'old' that bore responsibility for the misfortunes of rural life and had to be changed under the guidance of the state—to uproot those obstacles impeding modernisation and economic development.

Although the expectation was to see changes in the living environment of the entire countryside, the central government paid special attention to prosperous rural areas. There, since 2007, the state has pushed a new policy to build new rural residential communities (*nongcun shequ*).

Behind this policy is the premise that the 'old' villages are too small and dispersed: they occupy too much land; infrastructure is too poor to support modern life; energy is wasted, with adverse effects on the environment; and they produce low-quality villagers who fail to integrate into modern life and the developing market economy. A newly constructed residential community, on the other hand, offers a path to modernisation and equates rural with urban life.

In many cases villagers are expected to move away from traditional houses to urban-like multistorey apartment buildings. There they will enjoy modern apartments with modern facilities, including the internet, running water, gas for cooking, air conditioning, solar water heaters, flush toilets and, in some cases, even central heating. Roads will be paved, trees and bushes planted, garbage-disposal facilities introduced, sports and culture facilities constructed and street lighting installed. In many cases the residents of several villages are to be moved into one community.

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Concentrating thousands of villagers together will facilitate provision of such services as schools, kindergartens, supermarkets, retirement homes, health clinics and even local police services. Residential concentration will also enable land saving—an important resource for further economic development for the benefit of the community and its dwellers. Chenggu County³, for example, is a prosperous, still largely rural county located in coastal Shandong Province, which has developed a profitable industrial base in the past couple of decades. In 2009, the county drew up a grandiose plan to concentrate its 800 plus villages in 173 rural residential communities. Most of these communities were expected to host several villages living together. In mid-2011 construction had already begun on 67 communities, of which 46 were at an advanced stage.



From this..

...to this. Villagers are often expected to move away from traditional houses to urban-like multistorey apartment buildings

All officials and most villagers supported the idea of moving to new residential communities. Although, in most cases, apartments were smaller than traditional rural houses, many of the villagers perceived the transition to a new, modern and hygienic living environment as a significant upgrading. Officials explained that when all or most of the villagers moved to new residences, it provided a rare opportunity to design a new, modern environment from scratch, rather than installing modern facilities in the chaotic, dispersed old villages.

The concentration of thousands of villagers who were previously scattered in various villages into higher-density residential areas would also facilitate the provision of public amenities and services to them. All villagers and officials also acknowledged the importance of saving land. For them, moving from rural houses to multistorey apartment buildings symbolised a transition from backwardness to 'living like in the cities'.

Officials and villagers' perceptions in Chenggu coincided perfectly with those of the central government and the province. So, has China found the golden path to modernisation of its rural areas and to decreasing lifestyle disparities?

Beian County, which is much less prosperous than Chenggu and is located in the poorer province of Anhui, is the other side of the story. Officials in that county objected fiercely to the central government's vision of moving villagers away from their old rural homes in the name of building a new countryside.

As in many other parts of rural China, the labour market in Beian is not developed enough to offer work to all of its inhabitants, and about one-third of its population are migrant workers who are absent from the villages during most of the year. Officials believe these workers are likely to refuse to buy new houses that they cannot use and enjoy. Also, many villagers have recently built new housing and are unlikely to move to new residences unless they receive compensation, which the county cannot afford to pay in its current financial situation.

Nor is saving land as important to officials in Beian as it is to those in Chenggu. In less-developed Beian, the realistic scenario is for agricultural land extension—not a strong incentive, taking into account its unprofitability. With lower incomes than in Chenggu but similar housing prices, fewer households

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in Beian can afford new housing. From the central government's viewpoint, transition to rural communities is not only preferable policy because it provides a modern living environment and better access to services, but also the ultimate manifestation of a modern countryside. Although still in its experimental stage, the policy is already influencing about 10 per cent of China's administrative villages.

Based on the experience gained from the experimental stage, the central government's goal is to extend the policy to the entire rural sector as an important part of modernising China. The cases of Chenggu and Beian, though, raise questions about whether the policy is the right solution nationwide.

New, urban-like residential communities are most suited to areas, like Chenggu, where villagers can afford to buy new houses and have a desire to move; where land is valuable and incomes from agriculture are a minor component of household income (so people can move away from their land); where the local government is prosperous enough to offer compensation for evacuated houses and funds are available to build the costly new residential communities. Clearly, China is betting on a model that mostly suits its prosperous areas.

According to the official narrative, the transition must be gradual, coinciding with the villagers' financial abilities and wishes. The experience, though, shows that when a policy is important enough to the central government, grassroots levels will be unable to ignore it—even if it means an unrealistic expectation to reproduce a residential model that fails to meet local needs and financial abilities.

In a hierarchical political system such as China's, the attention of local officials can too easily shift from the communities and their needs to satisfying the expectations and demands of higher levels of government. There is already evidence of villagers being coerced into moving away from their agricultural land and forced into debt to buy new housing in the name of building a new socialist countryside. What may also incite local officials to push the policy of residential communities are the large construction contracts and land extension involved—a promising opportunity that many officials will probably not miss to pocket pay-offs and embezzlements.

It is up to the central government and the provinces to think about the consequences of implementing new residential communities in the less prosperous areas and to introduce needed safeguards to ensure that the wish for a modern countryside will not result in a tragedy for villagers.

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Small is good for China's large urban system

The experiences of rural workers entering China's labour market at the county town level are dramatically different from those of rural migrant workers in the large metropolises.
BEATRIZ CARRILLO reports.

Since the mid-1990s there have been numerous accounts of the unprecedented movement of rural migrant workers entering China's cities, and of the exploitation, discrimination and social exclusion they experience.

One of the main issues highlighted by the literature is the stark reality of rural and urban citizens having differentiated citizenship rights. Rural migrant workers do not have immediate permission to live and work in urban areas, and nor do they have immediate access to primary urban labour markets, or entitlement to public services, social insurances and welfare benefits. Added to this is the social contempt for the rural subject, who is seen by urban citizens as being of low quality (*suzhi di*). All this seems to point to a high degree of social tension in China's cities.

The reality of large cities, however, represents only part of the story of internal migration in contemporary China. China has a vast urban system comprising 668 cities and towns, and only around 35 million Chinese live in cities with a population larger than 10 million. It was, in fact, the development of small towns and their enterprises that was the initial engine of economic growth during the 1980s.

Until the early 1990s most rural workers had moved to their nearest county town in search for work, and not to a big city.

By the mid-1990s rural migrant workers had begun to travel longer distances in search of work but, again, this did not necessarily mean that they all headed for the big metropolises. Even though large cities had, by then, again become the main engines of economic growth, work opportunities for rural migrant workers were often located in the towns, where usually the actual manufacturing of goods takes place. Some migrant workers were even moving from one rural site to another across provincial borders, such as the Sichuanese workers who move to Xinjiang to work as cotton pickers and Gansu natives working in Shanxi's coal mines.

Over the past 30 years of reform small cities and towns in China have continued to be important recipients of rural



Small shop owned by a rural migrant worker, Dahuaishu Town, Hongtong County.

migrant labour, and yet up to now we know very little about the experiences of these workers. My own research seeks to address that gap and to renew interest in the rapid urbanisation of villages and the expansion of towns into cities. Its aim is to shed light on whether or not towns can become alternative platforms for a more inclusive urban development.

As part of my study in Hongtong County (Shanxi Province, one of China's main coal mining sites), I interviewed rural migrant workers, government officials and local urban dwellers in order to document the processes of social exclusion and inclusion taking place at the county town level. The study analyses the experiences of rural workers entering the county's urban labour market, finding housing, accessing

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health and education, and entitlement to social insurances. It presents a dramatically different account compared to that of rural migrant workers in the large metropolises. Despite the continued push (particularly by economists in the National Development and Reform Commission) to concentrate government resources and efforts on the development of large metropolitan areas, my research suggests there are real economic, social and political incentives to support smaller urban centres more strongly, particularly in the context of widening inequalities. Moreover, given the official policy discourse on the need to build a harmonious society by providing greater support for the development of small cities and towns, the party-state could also be promoting social inclusion and



Main square, Dahuishu Town.

stability, while gaining political legitimacy for the Chinese Communist Party.

How then do smaller urban centres provide a more inclusive environment for rural workers? Without intending to represent the reality of all towns across China, my research identifies factors and processes common to many towns and small cities that allow rural migrant workers to achieve a higher degree of participation in the socioeconomic life of their host community. The more obvious factor is the physical proximity to the countryside, which also results in sociocultural proximity. In this environment, it is harder to spot the migrant from the local, whereas in the big

cities the rural migrant worker stands out. Social ties provided rural workers with better knowledge of the labour market situation in the town, and many had initially moved to the town to work and live with relatives. Physical proximity also meant that many rural workers could return to their home village daily. Only as they strengthened their economic foothold in the town did they begin to consider building or buying a house in the town or in a suburban village of the town.

In small towns home ownership remains an attainable goal.

Small towns have enjoyed high home ownership rates, through self-built housing (not work-unit provision, as was the case in most cities at the start of economic reform) and, more recently, through commercial real estate development. While in most Chinese cities rural migrant workers would not be able to afford even economic public housing, in small towns home ownership remains an attainable goal for them. In my study, home ownership was not only high but also had a strong impact on migrants' intentions to stay permanently in the county town, rather than using it only as a springboard to a larger urban centre. As small towns expand, however, housing will increasingly become an issue as land prices rise and housing becomes more commercialised. Local governments need to actively explore economic housing and rental options for rural migrant workers, before the poor housing conditions of the big cities are replicated in these smaller urban centres.

There are other structural differences between the big city and the town that have implications for migrants' social inclusion. And this again has to do with the size of the public sector at the start of the reform era when small cities and towns had a much smaller proportion of their population working for state-owned

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Small is good for China

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enterprises and government departments. The implications of this were manifold. With the introduction of market mechanisms, the private sector experienced rapid growth; this was clearly evident in the boom of private mines, whose profit funded the retail and service sectors in Hongtong County. State-owned enterprises (SOEs) had not monopolised all the economic opportunities in this county. Moreover, the private sector (though often small scale) was mainly staffed by rural workers (and many coal mine owners themselves were of rural origin).

Having fewer public employees also meant a smaller burden from pensions (older work force) for both SOEs and local governments. In the late 1990s, when SOEs across the country went through a radical ownership restructuring, the problem of unemployment (due to lay-offs) was not as severe in small urban centres as it was in large cities, where the state owned sector remained a large employer.

On an institutional level, the central government has allowed small urban centres to make it easier for migrant workers to change their rural registration into an urban one. This allows them access to public services, social insurances and welfare benefits. However, on its own, the dismantling of the household registration system can bring little change to migrants if this is not accompanied by a wider overhaul of public service and insurances provision.

In Hongtong County, schools and hospitals were feeling the pinch of reduced government funding, and private competition. Public schools were no longer charging extra fees to rural children, which convinced many of my respondents to migrate with their families

and enrol their children into local schools. Local public hospitals and clinics proved less inclined to cater to rural workers, and continued to rely on expensive drugs and treatments to finance their activities. In Hongtong County, for outpatient services private healthcare providers and drug dispensers were the preferred port of call even among urban dwellers with medical insurance.

The picture painted here is one where the characteristics of the host society—in this case the small town—can provide more avenues for the rural worker to take part in the socioeconomic life of the town. The constraints faced by my rural workers in the town are more often than not the same as faced by local urban dwellers: expensive and limited health and education services and low social security coverage rates, among other problems.

My research suggests that the promotion of social development at the town level is very likely to benefit the town's rural migrant workers and, in turn, make it likelier for them to set roots in these towns, as they are already doing in growing numbers.

After three decades of reform, social development in China's big metropolises remains the right only of urban citizens.

The results of the study in Hongtong County are published in: Carrillo, Beatriz (2011) Small town China: rural labour and social inclusion, Routledge, 212pp.



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Surviving at the margins of Leviathan

LINDA MCRAE and DIRK TOMSA
discuss a small community's ongoing
quest for recognition by the
Indonesian state.

In the heart of the Indonesian province of Southeast Sulawesi lies the Rawa Aopa Watumohai National Park.

Boasting a broad range of natural habitats, including mangroves, savannah, peat swamps, lowland tropical rainforests and submontane forests, it is home to hundreds of animal and plant species, including many of Sulawesi's endemic birds and mammals.

The park's extensive lake and swamp systems were recently declared wetlands of international importance due to their strategic significance as resting points for migratory waterbirds. But the pristine natural habitat is not only of importance to animals and plants. A small community of people continues to live within the boundaries of the park as well, in harmony with the natural environment, but in direct opposition to what the central government views to be the purpose of national parks, i.e. a wilderness reserve without the permanent habitation of people.

Following the establishment of the national park in 1989, the government tried repeatedly to remove the Moronene people from their ancestral land, but mediation by a group of sympathetic NGO activists eventually helped broker a solution that granted the Moronene people the right to live on what has been their homeland for generations.

However, even after securing the right to stay, the community still faces a number of challenges. Politically, the Moronene are still waiting for their main traditional village of Hukaea-Laea to be formally recognised as a fully-fledged administrative entity. Economically,

limited modern farming knowledge and heavy reliance on generator-based electricity, combined with a lack of government support, keep them dependent on traditional forest products and externally available food resources. Overcoming these challenges will be crucial for the long-term viability of the community.

The Moronene people have been living in the area that is now the national park for no less than six generations since at least the 19th century, cultivating small plots of land in rotation at the edge of the savannah and harvesting a variety of seasonal crops, primarily corn and rice from dry fields, along with the collection of edible forest products. Throughout the years, their way of life has barely changed. Even today the nearest road is still several kilometres away from the boundaries of Hukaea-Laea so that community members rarely venture out of their familiar surroundings. If they do, they tend to visit the market in a nearby town to sell weaved baskets and mats and buy rice, seasonings and clothes in return.



To reach the nearest road, villagers must negotiate their way through vast stretches of open savannah.

The image of idyllic rural village life, however, is deceptive. For several decades now, the community has been in continuous conflict with the Indonesian state. It all began in the 1970s, shortly after the central government announced the establishment of the area as a bird park—the predecessor to Rawa Aopa Watumohai National Park.

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Ignoring the fact that the community was, by and large, living in harmony with its natural environment, government representatives declared that no human



The school in Hukaea-Lae.

settlements were allowed inside the boundaries of the new protected area. Early on, the community was asked to choose where they would like to settle, but were given no compensation to support their new lives outside the national park. Over the years, the villagers were repeatedly forced to leave Hukaea-Laea, but each time they were unable to resist the urge to return home.

In the late 1990s the conflict's intensity increased. The government accused the Moronene people of being responsible for pushing a native deer species close to extinction within the park. The villagers, however, denied this, claiming that they only kill deer for occasional traditional events or if an animal strays too close to the village. Instead they believed that the largest influence on the deer (and indeed Anoa) populations is from non-locals hunting within the park.

Unimpressed with this objection, the government sent in police forces to evict the villagers and cut down traditional stilt houses and ancient village trees. A dozen or so community leaders were charged with resistance against the state and refusal to move at the request of police and jailed for a year. Once the conflict had cooled down, the community moved back

to Hukaea-Laea, but they were soon again confronted by the state.

Because of the ongoing conflict, the existence of Rawa Aopa Watumohai National Park, Southeast Sulawesi's first national park, became a point of interest for many people. Members of the local NGO community, in particular, began to question why the government was so disrespectful towards the Moronene people, even though they were acting as guardians for the native environment that the government was so intent on protecting.

The government sent in police forces to evict the villagers and cut down traditional stilt houses and ancient village trees.

Aware of a similar case in another Indonesian province, an organisation called SULUH eventually decided to help and represent the Hukaea-Laea people in their struggle against the government. One of SULUH's main premises was for the Indonesian Government to recognise that the ecosystem in this national park does not only contain plants and animals, but also people. After protracted consultations, the government eventually accepted this argument and acknowledged that the villagers had a profound relationship with the land. At long last, the Moronene were allowed to stay.

Hukaea-Laea is now officially recognised as both belonging in the national park and the Bombana district, but along with this long-sought recognition came new problems. For while the community had been locking horns with the state over a relatively small and confined space, bigger struggles for power and land unfolded all over Indonesia as the country embarked on an unprecedented decentralisation program. In Southeast Sulawesi, the devolution of power to the local level

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resulted in the creation of numerous new districts (*kabupaten*), subdistricts (*kecamatan*) and villages (*desa*).

As administrative borders were redrawn, different sections of Rawa Aopa Watumohai National Park were allocated to different districts. At the time of writing, the park straddled no less than four districts: Kolaka, Konawe, Konawe Selatan and Bombana. The Hukaea-Laea community is located in the Bombana district, but the local government there is yet to progress the recognition of the community. Thus the people now have the right to stay on their ancestral home soil, but they still have no right to access basic government services such as schooling or healthcare.

And so the struggle continues. Community leaders and NGO activists are currently waiting for the village to be formally recognised as a part of Bombana's administrative structure and one of the district's 22 subdistricts. It is hoped that achieving formal status as a *desa* or *tobu* (traditional village) will improve access to educational and health facilities, but increased interaction with the outside world is also likely to bring new challenges yet again. In recent years, numerous villagers have already opted to leave their traditional lifestyle behind and try their luck in one of the small towns nearby or in the provincial capital Kendari, about 150 km away. This trend is unlikely to stop as long as overall living standards in the village remain low.

Indeed, one may argue that the community's main challenge apart from their political struggle will be to lift basic living standards in the village without sacrificing too much of their traditional lifestyle. Improving educational opportunities will be a crucial part of this endeavour, and it is indeed anticipated

that the new school's curriculum will include what in Indonesia is often referred to as *kearifan lokal* (local wisdom), i.e. locally based knowledge about environmental and social issues.

Moreover, for a more positive future to eventuate, villagers may need to explore new ways of engaging with the outside world. Members of the local NGO community are hoping that the Moronene people could work in a variety of sectors, which would not only increase their current income but also improve their way of life and sustainability as an ethnic culture. Possibilities include increasing the capacity and irrigation of farming land, cultural integration tourism as well as eco-tourism and wildlife protection.

But to tackle these challenges, the community will need to demonstrate that it is not only remarkably tenacious, but also able to adapt to a rapidly changing sociopolitical and socioeconomic environment.



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Australian education broadens Chinese international student outlook

An Australian education is empowering Chinese students to take their lives to places they couldn't have dreamed of had they stayed in China, writes GLEN STAFFORD.

In August 2011 there were over 147 000 international students from China in Australia, over 95 000 of whom were in higher education. Although this number represents a slight fall from the heights of 2010, almost 30 per cent of all international students in Australia are Chinese. With so many such students coming to Australia (or going elsewhere) there is clearly a lot on offer overseas that is not available at home.

However, what Chinese students get and what they value from their time abroad will not necessarily be what they initially expected. And while understanding why students choose to study in Australia is no doubt important, knowing how their education affects and transforms them is critical to knowing what they may do in the future, where they will go, and the changes they may shape where they come to live.

The following reflections come from a study of Chinese students studying in Adelaide. They spoke about their experiences in China and Australia and their dreams for the future.

The most common (but not universal) story of the students in the study, before they came to Australia, was one of failure. They were, like the other 100 million Chinese secondary school students, focused on their education as their path to success, but it was not leading to where they wanted to go. Their results were not going to get them into the universities they wanted, or even into university. Their failure was thus relative—in all cases they still had opportunities to study in China, but these

did not fit the ambitions of either themselves or their families.

We can see this disjunction most clearly in how and when the decision to go abroad was made. Usually the catalyst was a realisation that plans were not working out as anticipated. Sometimes this came slowly as test results stubbornly refused to improve, sometimes much faster, as when a major exam bombed. Would going abroad be the way out of a terminal downward spiral?

Of course, for each student and family the costs and benefits are weighed up differently. Different strata have different conceptions of the acceptability of educational achievement. Where one family may consider a second-tier university perfectly fine, another might think anything but the top is a waste of time. The family's finances are clearly important as well.

On the benefits side, for some, getting into any university was something not achievable at home. For others, the chance of a Western—and thus likely high-quality—university was enough to make up for not getting into a top Chinese one. Having the chance to learn English was also a plus, but getting the desired academic qualifications was central.

Decisions to study in Australia are about achievement and, importantly, being able to achieve while circumventing the intense competition of the Chinese education system. For most, but by no means all of the Chinese international students in Australia a degree, diploma or certificate of some kind is indeed an outcome of their time abroad. As is improved English. After being in Australia for some time the students in my study do not think that these qualifications are quite so important

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anymore. The ways they have changed are much more important.

Part of the students' change comes as a result of having to deal with living alone in Australia without the support networks of family and friends. If there is a problem it is up to them to solve it. *How do you find out your tax file number? Work it out yourself. How do you deal with the beehive that has taken residence in your rental house? Work it out yourself. Who is going to wash your clothes and cook? You are—your mother is no longer there to do it for you so you are not distracted from your studies. How do you finish your assignments and pass your exams without being forced to study day and night? Again, work it out yourself.*

Working it out and being able to be independent, survive and thrive is a point of great pride for those who manage it. Even more satisfying than being practically flexible is having the flexibility of thought that comes from being around and learning to accept aspects of life beyond a Chinese experience.

Each day of living and studying in Australia gives proof of the fact that different ways of life both exist and can be challenged and accepted (even if not agreed with). Yes, there may be more than one solution to a problem. Perhaps the previously understood line learnt in China might be open to debate after all? Or perhaps there are unexpected problems with Western ways of life? And in terms of social issues, maybe homosexuality is something that can be tolerated or even accepted a little more? Maybe premarital sex isn't so bad either.

In experiencing and learning to understand difference, the students believe they have become more broadminded and open to more than simply the content of their textbooks. Even if only a small number explicitly

claim a new interest in international affairs, almost all claim to be more understanding of different people, cultures and places. They have learned to understand and live in a different culture and, in the process, have developed the skills to learn how to understand and live in different cultures.

No longer are life goals primarily framed in terms of achievement. Getting on to the next step of the social escalator is not so important.

Moreover, armed with their new independence and broadmindedness, the students believe they are more in control of their lives. They feel they have a much better grasp not only of the world, but also of their place in it, and they make decisions for themselves accordingly. They believe that they are more mature, and that their maturity is qualitatively different than if they had not left China.

The new confidence and flexibility are also reflected in how the students think about where they might live in the future. Firm views about a permanent place of residence are uncommon, but a high value is placed on having the opportunity open to live in different places and being able to move between them. Their cultural flexibility allows the possibility of doing this fruitfully, and flexible post-study visa options allow the possibility of doing this practically.

In the meantime, views about aims in life change as well. No longer are life-goals primarily framed in terms of achievement. Getting on to the next step of the social escalator, such as getting into the best university as a prerequisite for getting into the right kind of job, is not so important. Having a relaxing and happy life is now also *a*, if not *the*, priority. Nevertheless, being independent, being able to determine their own life course, being flexible, mobile and culturally aware are indeed the characteristics necessary

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for success and achievement in contemporary globalised societies. Many of the students believe what they have learnt and how they have changed gives them the 'double background' to be the bridge or intermediary between China and Australia, if not the West more generally.

The social and language challenges the students face as they try to find their way in Australian society indicate that many will struggle.

As cultures and countries become increasingly interconnected there is great value in being able to live and work between them, and in whatever field they study, whether they plan to live in Australia or China, the students see this and cherish it dearly.

This is not to say that each and every Chinese international student will become a globetrotting, interculturally fluent business person. Indeed, the social and language challenges the students face as they try to find their way in Australian society indicate that many will struggle. However, just as they left China due to *relative* failure so too are the benefits relative.

The above-mentioned changes gleaned from living, studying and working in Australia might seem unremarkable in an Australian context, but back in China they can provide great advantages over the students' solely Chinese-educated counterparts. Moreover, they provide great advantages over their hypothetical non-overseas educated selves.

This is where the value of studying in Australia for Chinese international students is. It is not that they can simply achieve more because of it, but that they have learnt about the world and

themselves and are empowered to take their lives to places they couldn't have dreamed of if they have stayed in China.

This may or may not make them more money, but at least from where they stand as students, it is likely to make them happier.



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Australia-India Council grants

The Australia-India Council (AIC) is now welcoming funding applications until 18 November 2011.

AIC grants are intended to provide seed funds for innovative proposals for projects that are likely to promote long-term contact and cooperation between Australia and India.

Priority areas include the Arts (including literature and film), education, social initiatives (including public health and sport), science/technology/environment and public policy activities (including media links).

Information on the grants program is available from the AIC [website](#).

Rethinking early Chinese thought

Recent archaeological discoveries in China have presented new material for studying the development of early Chinese thought, literature, and script, writes SHIRLEY CHAN.

The Guodian bamboo manuscripts, often described as China's equivalent of the Dead Sea Scrolls, are considered a hugely significant find in the field of early Chinese thought. These manuscripts are dated to the mid-to-late Warring States period (475–221 BCE). First unearthed in 1993 in the tomb of an elderly noble scholar dated to around 300 BCE, the discovery of these texts has provided fresh information on the study of ancient Chinese thought and the history of early China.

The excavation in what was the former capital of the historical state of Chu, prior to its conquest by the Qin (221–206 BCE), in present day Jingmen, Hubei Province, has revealed a large number of philosophical texts, of which there are no counterparts among previously received texts. Discovered were some 800 bamboo slips containing roughly 12 000 Chinese characters, approximately one-tenth of which comprise part of the *Dao De Jing*, the foundational Daoist text by the thinker Laozi (571?–471 BCE?).

The remaining strips are attributed by scholars to followers of Confucius (551 BCE–479 BCE), including his grandson Zisi (ca. 481–402 BCE), who belonged to the first generation following the death of Confucius. These texts shed light on the formation of the early Daoist and Confucian traditions, in particular filling in the missing gap during the century between the two most famous Confucian philosophers, Confucius and Mencius (372–289 BCE).

My research into the thinking of the period based on these texts is part of an ongoing project that has already included the publication of several articles and papers on the Guodian manuscripts, including discussions on human emotions and moral cultivation, the concept of heaven, and ideal rulership.

I am also working on the deciphering of other significant manuscripts recently discovered, namely the Tsinghua bamboo manuscripts. The *Xing Zi Ming Chu* (Nature derives from mandate), a text from the cache of Guodian bamboo slips, has attracted the attention of scholars. In recent years, a number of articles have been devoted to specific topics ranging from the possible affiliation of the text with a particular intellectual camp, the function of music, and the concept of spontaneity in human emotions. My paper, 'Human nature and moral cultivation in the Guodian text of the *Xing Zi Ming Chu*' (2009), provides a broad account of the text by looking at the key concepts of *xing* ([human] nature), *xin* (heart-mind), and *qing* (human emotions or feelings).



Bamboo strips dating from the Warring States period (403–221 BC), containing a commentary on the *Classic of Poetry*.

In exploring these concepts, my discussion relates to the debate on human nature and self-cultivation among early thinkers in the Warring States period,

observing that the *Xing Zi Ming Chu* provides an account of how *xing*, *xin*, and *qing* were viewed before Mencius's time. This allows for the re-examination of the concept of *xing*, including the controversy over whether human nature is good (morally desirable) or bad, the role of human emotions or feelings in moral cultivation, the internalism and externalism of morality,

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and the importance of learning and habitual practice. By arguing that *xing* is contributing to the 'being' and 'becoming' of things in constituting their qualities and characteristics, I put forward that the concept of *xing* in relation to moral cultivation, as presented in the *Xing Zi*.

Ming Chu has revealed that the text itself is a thesis emerging from an intellectual discourse that is more syncretic and dynamic than has been previously considered, suggesting a possible influence on later thinkers. An emphasis on spontaneity and natural response also suggests a possible blending of Daoist and Confucian practice, a theory that I merit as requiring further study of the Guodian manuscripts.



Part of Part of the Guodian Chu Slips: 'The Great One generates water'. Photo was taken in [Hubei Provincial Museum](#).

The Guodian bamboo manuscripts are such a significant find that they allow us a fresh opportunity to ask crucial

questions about ancient Chinese culture and history. They rewrite early Chinese philosophical thought and fill in a huge gap in the intellectual history in early China.

The Baoxun (Instructions for preservation) text of the bamboo manuscripts recently acquired by Tsinghua University, Beijing, is also proving a rich avenue of research. Much like the Guodian manuscripts, the Tsinghua bamboo slips are dated to the mid-to-late Warring States period.

The Tsinghua slips were donated to the university in 2008. Though the means of their initial recovery are not entirely clear, it is thought likely that they were also

recovered from the historical state of Chu in present day Hubei Province. The text is written in admonition and speech form similar to the *Book of documents* (*Shangshu*), and appears to be a record of an admonition by the Zhou king, Wenwang (1152?–1056 BCE?), on his deathbed to his son and heir, Wuwang (1087?–1043 BCE?), the then Prince Fa. The king refers to the notion of *zhong* through stories of the sage king Shun and the Shang ancestor Wei. He goes on to state that Wei subsequently transmitted *zhong* to his descendants, as far as Chengtang (1675–1646 BC), who came to rule all under heaven.

My recent paper, 'The concept of *Zhong*' (centrality) and ideal rulership in the *Baoxun* (Instructions for preservation) text of the Tsinghua collection of bamboo slip manuscripts', (2012, forthcoming) conducts a textual analysis and philosophical interpretation of the concept of *zhong* in relation to ideal rulership. The text shows that in order to receive and to preserve the Mandate of Heaven, ruler and heir alike must attain *zhong* as a complete virtue and ruling principle that defines the authoritative personhood, which in turn will then enable the occupation of the *zhong* (central) position.

My analysis reveals how, starting with such semantic references as 'flag in the centre' and 'central position', *zhong* in the *Baoxun* text has developed into an all-embracing term encompassing a series of philosophical meanings such as 'harmony,' 'balance,' and 'appropriateness'. The text provides a structured message about leadership and related political model revolving around the concept of *zhong*. It is the central principle which serves to regulate the conduct of a ruler and involves cultivating his mind, giving the correct names to things, and instilling morality in his people

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through the urgent setting up of regulatory institutions. *Zhong* symbolises a holistic approach to establishing a kingdom by the charismatic power of the ruler. This charismatic power allows the Mandate of Heaven to endure by attracting people from all directions, and it is what a ruler should seek in every aspect of his political life. *Zhong*, as a symbol of power, is no longer merely represented by a flagpole set up in the middle of the territory (as its original archaic script suggests), but has developed into an abstraction representing ideal rulership, constituting 'the Way' and 'complete virtue'.

Considering the background against which the current slip manuscript texts were dated, one may suggest that the advice on rulership from the founder of the Zhou to the future king is probably used to serve as a moral argument to the state ruler(s) from the composer(s) of the manuscripts, because in the Warring States period, the various states were struggling to establish a centralised administrative structure through the incorporation of alien lands and communities.

The themes of historical change, of struggle and political strategies were the central themes for the thinkers of this period. King Wen's speech, as it appeared in the *Baoxun* text, could thus be an example of using historical events and a revered past for didactic purposes. A study on this text therefore will help us reconstruct the evolution of the concept of *zhong* in the Warring States period, to which the excavated bamboo texts have been dated.

This research is important to re-evaluating an understanding of how the dynamism of the discourse in the newly discovered texts has laid the foundation of Chinese philosophical and political development.

In a larger context, it is also important in the process of understanding some of the dominant ideas that influenced and shaped the minds of one of the world's oldest and most continuous cultures.

Confucianism and Daoism are influential, not just in mainland China but also in other parts of Asia such as Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. It is not simply a religion but a mindset that influences the way one sees the world. With such relevance in the world, even today, it is an extremely exciting prospect that, through the textual and historical studies of the newly discovered texts, we may broaden our perspective on Chinese thought and, in doing so, will overturn or modify our current understanding.

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Asian treasures unearthed

ANDREW GOSLING fulfils a long-held ambition to write a book highlighting the National Library's great strengths on Asia.

The National Library of Australia's first full-length book devoted to its acquisitions from the region describes 42 precious pieces selected on the theme of Asian writing, books and printing.

Asian treasures : gems of the written word describes the works under seven topics: Buddhism and the book in Asia; Islamic and Hindu art and writing; Confucianism and the book; Japanese books and printing; language, print and culture in Qing dynasty China; Indonesian writing traditions; and maps, prints and early Western missionaries in China.

Part of the library's series called Collection Highlights, *Asian treasures* aims to make the institution's major resources better known. Many of the library's oldest, rarest and most beautiful holdings come from Asia.



Tesukiwashi Taikan (Great Collection of Handmade Japanese Paper). Tokyo: Mainichi Newspapers, 1973–1974 手漉和紙大鑑. 5 cases of samples; colour illustrations; height 55 cm. Japanese and English. Asian Collections. OJ 6293 1312 ef.

Asian treasures covers items from Iran to Japan. It includes palm-leaf texts from Sri Lanka and Bali, magic writings on bark from Sumatra, colourful Thai and Persian manuscripts, a letter from a

Manchu prince and a magnificent collection of handmade Japanese papers. The oldest printed work in the library is a Chinese volume dated 1162. There are Burmese Buddhist scriptures created from

marble rubbings in Mandalay, and a huge world map in Chinese printed on silk. Two Japanese periodicals rank among the library's most beautiful titles. They are *Kokka*, Japan's first art journal and *Kogeï*, on arts and crafts.

For many years I wanted to write a book highlighting the National Library's great strengths on Asia to help make these important collections better known to the public. After retirement in 2003 I was encouraged by the library to undertake several projects, including writing about some of the older and rarer holdings. In a way this led on to the book. While *Asian treasures* was a collaborative effort involving many people, particularly in the library's Asian collections and public programs, this article concentrates on my role as author.

It was certainly a daunting task deciding on just a few items from the library's vast collections about Asia. *Asian treasures* concentrates on Asian writing traditions, thus largely excluding Western publications about Asia, which could easily be the topic of another volume. An exception was made for the final section on early Western missionaries in China, where the examples were based on collaboration between Europeans, mostly scholarly Jesuits, and the Chinese.

The criteria for deciding what constitutes a treasure were age, rarity, beauty and historical significance. These are not necessarily straightforward. It can be very difficult, if not impossible, to judge the age of some items. There are degrees of rarity. Beauty, as we are often told, lies in the eye of the beholder. Historical significance is also, to some extent, subjective. Nevertheless the criteria proved helpful in deciding what to include, though it would have been

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relatively easy to choose 40 or so different but suitable items for the book.

The selection of items was based in part on earlier articles and collection descriptions by staff and scholars, which are listed in the bibliography to Asian treasures. In recent years, I have also been preparing a longer online guide to the library's Asian treasures, which should be available to the public in due course. This draft list containing 160 items was useful when choosing a smaller number of precious pieces for the printed book.

Asian treasures is intended for the public. The aim has been to make the book as accurate as possible without it reading like an academic paper. It is in plain English to inform and entertain the general reader who knows little about the subject. Primarily for a popular audience, the book tries to balance colour and glamour against age, rarity and importance. Even for plainer items the photographer and designer have managed to bring out attractive aspects—for example, the cover of the rare Cambodian Buddhist scriptures or the beauty of the Burmese script in the Burmese Tripitaka. An example of where colour was preferred to age, though without sacrificing much, was for the map of Nagasaki. Rather than the older black and white version from 1778, an almost identical but coloured map from 1801 was chosen. It was also decided to include several high-quality colourful modern replicas. So for example, as well as the 18th century miniature edition of the *Tale of Genji* there is a beautiful modern reproduction of the *Tale of Genji* scroll.

The book makes no claim to geographical balance within Asia. It reflects the fact that the library's collecting from and about the region has long concentrated on East and Southeast Asia. It would have been quite easy to fill the book entirely

with Chinese and Japanese treasures but the intention was to show interesting items from many countries. Mainland Southeast Asia is represented quite strongly in the section on Buddhism. A section on Indonesian writing traditions was included, partly inspired by Ann Kumar and John McGlynn's magnificent work *Illuminations*. There are only three examples in the book from South and West Asia, notably the Sri Lankan palm-leaf manuscript, the Indian miniatures and the Persian Qur'an. The library holds relatively few such treasures from this part of Asia, though there are good holdings of Western language works, including old and rare items.



Qur'an. Persia, c.1850–1899. Handwritten and bound in lacquer covers; colour illustrations; height 16 cm. Arabic. Manuscripts Collection, MS 4949.

Help from experts was vital, especially for establishing age and rarity. Particularly in the last five years or so scholars and rare-book librarians from

Australia and overseas have provided detailed advice on several of the library's rarest Asian treasures. An obvious example is the Chinese Buddhist volume dated 1162. Although long known to be rare, its great age was only authenticated by experts from Australia, China and Singapore in 2008.

Dating the manuscripts was more of a problem. While *Asian treasures* was being prepared scholars examined the two bark books of magic, divination and medicine in Batak script and the palm-leaf text of the Indian Ramayana epic from Bali. Often the only clear date for such works is when they entered a collection. Thus the world's oldest known Batak bark book was donated to the British Museum in 1764. This does not greatly help with the examples at the National Library, as the

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Asian treasures unearthed

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Batak items were obtained by the Australian writer Ray Aitchison in Sumatra in 1969–1970, and he donated them to the library in 2009. The manuscript from Bali came to the library in 1971. None of these examples are thought to be very old, as manuscripts on fragile materials do not survive well in the tropics.



Batak bark books, undated, 8 x 6 x 1. Batak. Manuscripts Collection, MS 3048.

Based on earlier titles in the library's Collection Highlights series, certain aspects of the book were fixed. It was to include about 40 entries each of about 400 words in length. It was not easy to keep to the 400 words and much editing of the text was necessary. The description for each item focuses on its significance as well as how, why, when and where it was produced. Details of provenance were also added. Because of the unfamiliarity of much of the material to the general public, it was agreed that there should be not only a general introduction but an introduction to each of the seven topics.

There were many fascinating discoveries associated with writing the book. One of the most exciting was finding out that the library's illuminated Persian Qur'an is so special. As Asian treasures contains many Buddhist items, Muslim works were sought to redress the balance. The library does hold a number of published and handwritten Islamic texts but most are not particularly striking visually. One of the staff in Manuscripts pointed out the colourful Persian Qur'an. Middle East

experts at the British Library subsequently provided much information, particularly on the significance of the portrait it contains showing the first three Imams or leaders in line of succession from the Prophet Muhammad. They pointed out that it is extremely unusual, if not unique, for a Qur'an to contain such an illustration.

I would like to pay tribute to Ian Proudfoot, a good friend, who provided considerable help with Asian treasures. His exceptional knowledge of books, libraries, languages and scripts proved invaluable. He was also a source of moral support and encouragement while I was writing. With Ian's recent death, Australia and the world have lost a great scholar on Asia.



Andrew Gosling is former Chief Librarian, Asian Collections, National Library of Australia.

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Jobs websites

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

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.

www.aasianst.org is the website of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS). New job listings are posted on the first and third Monday of each month. You must be a current AAS member to view job listings.

www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/jobs_home.asp is *The Times Higher Education Supplement*.

www.comminet.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

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

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', will be hosted by the Westerly Centre at the University of Western Australia, in conjunction with the Asia–Pacific Writing Partnership. See [website](#) for further information.

'History as controversy: writing and teaching contentious topics in Asian histories', at the University of Singapore,

14–15 December 2011. See the Asia Education Foundation [website](#) for further information.

'Malaysia, Singapore and the Region: Current Issues, Current Research', **8–9 December 2011, Canberra.** The 17th Colloquium of the Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia will be held at the Sir Roland Wilson Building, Australian National University. See [website](#) for further information.

Asia–Pacific Economic and Business History Conference 2012, 16–18 February 2012, at the Australian National University, Canberra. The main conference theme is 'Economic integration: historical perspectives from Europe and Asia–Pacific'. See [website](#) for further information.

'Intercity networks and urban governance in Asia' conference, Singapore, 8–9 March 2012. A multidisciplinary conference that will examine urban governance in Asia from the perspective of intercity networks. See [website](#) for further information.

'Reading Dutch for historical research', intensive residential course, to be held at South Durras, NSW, **18 June–5 July 2012.** The course is intended for those needing a working knowledge of written Dutch for professional purposes, including the study of Asian history. Open to academics, professionals and current and intending postgraduate students. **Call for applications closes 31 January 2012.** See [website](#) for further information.

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. *Asian Currents* is published by the ASAA and edited by [Allan Sharp](#).