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Australia's asylum seeker crisis

Put Indonesian boat crews to work as temporary migrant workers

A novel solution could dent people smuggling operations and help Australia's commercial fishing industry.

By Marshall Clark

Australian taxpayer dollars should no longer be spent on chasing Indonesian fishermen who crew boats of asylum seekers instead of the gangs organising people-smuggling rackets.

Indonesia fishing crew, Paotere Harbour, Makassar .

An internal survey of frontline Australian Federal Police officers has recently highlighted *a widely held view* that police are wasting their time and money. Police figures show that since 2008, Australian police have arrested only 15 organisers of people-smuggling operations, compared with 546 Indonesian crew members. Spending more

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money on capturing organisers of people-smuggling is one thing. Handing them 457 visas not only puts a massive dent in the people-smuggler's operations, but it can seriously raise productivity in Australia's commercial fishing industry.

According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), as of July 2012 there were 71 foreign fishing and deckhands working in Australian waters under the temporary 457 visa, all of them Indonesian citizens. In the period 2003–09, 500 fishing and deckhands worked here, almost all of them Indonesian too.

These figures are both good and bad. On the one hand, 71 Indonesian workers working on a standard Australian wage—which in this industry is around $50 000 plus a percentage of catch profits—is good. As with all migrant workers, this can be seen as a 'triple win'. As the receiving country, Australia benefits from the injection of semiskilled labour.

The temporary migrants benefit from learning new skills and the much higher wages that they receive. And through the money the migrants send home, their families, households and country of origin also benefit. At the end of their temporary contract, the migrants return home, thus not affecting Australia's permanent migration program. Everyone is a winner.

The bad news is that at the moment there are only 71 workers. This is a problem because sections of the Australian commercial fishing industry have been struggling in recent years, mainly due to a serious and ongoing shortage of experienced crew. Fishing operators are uniformly operating under capacity because they cannot source suitable labour to fill semiskilled positions for fishing and deckhands. Many potential crew members based in regional Australia have deserted the fishing industry for the better pay of the mineral resources sector.

One Adelaide-based operator working on the Southern Shark Fishery has recently claimed that half-a-dozen vessels under his management are operating at only 60 per cent of capacity. The reason for this was not related to the proposed national marine reserves, quotas, bad weather or a lack of stock. Rather, the difficulty was in sourcing good, experienced, reliable labour. Although he regularly advertises within Australia for crew members, on each occasion almost all applicants were either inexperienced or unemployable, or both.

Similar stories can be heard from other operators fishing for tuna, southern blue swimmer crabs, and numerous other fisheries working out of ports such as Port Lincoln and Wallaroo in South Australia, Eden and Port Macquarie in New South Wales and Lakes Entrance in Victoria. Some operators even tell of fully equipped vessels gathering dust and cobwebs at port, entirely due to a lack of reliable labour. Considering the global demand for seafood, this could almost be regarded as a national shame.

Fortunately, from 2010 DIAC consulted over a period of 18 months with a variety of stakeholders, including the peak industry body, the Commonwealth Fisheries Association, to establish what the labour needs of fishing operators are. Much of this consultation was done through roundtable meetings. The result of this process was the 2011 Fishing Industry Template Labour Agreement, which is now fully operational.

Since 2011, seven fishing template labour agreements have been signed, with ceilings of between four and 23 workers for each company. Because of the numerous vulnerabilities associated with low or semiskilled workers, the agreements are characterised by a number of very strict rules and regulations.

Indonesian fishing crews have an excellent reputation in terms of experience, skills and exemplary behaviour.

All workers must receive the market salary rate. They must have at least three years relevant experience, hold safety and rescue certificates and a current first aid certificate. They must also have English-language competency of at least an average IELTS score of 4.5, which is lower than the usual score for skilled workers of 5 in all categories. For their part, operators must demonstrate that the foreign workers are provided with initial access to an interpreter during induction

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training and to flexible English-language instruction options such as DVDs and phrase books. Operators must also provide training booklets for them in both English and their own language and signage in the native language of the foreign workers. Given that most of the foreign crew members in the past were Indonesian, and therefore all training booklets were translated into Indonesian, it makes practical sense to continue to employ Indonesians in the future. There are other important factors why Indonesians are favoured over other ethnicities. In the opinion of numerous Australian fishing operators and peak industry bodies, Indonesian fishing crews have an excellent reputation in terms of experience, skills and exemplary behaviour. But given the ongoing demand for labour in Australian fisheries we are barely scratching the surface.

Trepang fishing boats, Spermonde Archipelago, Indonesia.

For those fishers who can no longer survive through legal or illegal means, people-smuggling is becoming an increasingly viable option.

In Indonesia, there is a massive yet untapped supply of experienced, yet poverty-stricken, fishing crews scouring the Indonesian waterways for ever-diminishing catches. Over-fishing is rampant. In a structural sense, although the economy is growing impressively, Indonesia is struggling to achieve robust industrialisation and fishers represent one of the poorer sectors of the economy.

For those fishers who can no longer survive through legal or illegal means, people-smuggling is becoming an increasingly viable option, despite harsh penalties. But this is usually the course of action when all else has failed and, given the opportunity, most would be prepared to work overseas legally. Many have already done so, working for Japanese or Taiwanese fishing fleets, or on cruise ships.

By shifting potential people smugglers into gainful employment, could it also be regarded as a truly regional solution to Australia's asylum-seeker crisis? Given the unstoppable nature of the migration flows from the source countries, it is unlikely to be the golden key that unlocks all locks. But sponsoring and employing Indonesian fishing and deckhands to work in the Australian fishing industry has the potential to foster the conditions for sustainable long-term growth in Indonesian coastal communities. This promise of what has been termed as 'reliable prosperity' could also be described as a 'development-friendly' response to Australia's various maritime border issues.

Given Indonesia is set to grow into a significant economic power in the decades to come, Australia needs to recognise that massive aid spending in Indonesia is not necessarily allowing the relationship to grow on an even footing. As appears to be the case in our fishing industry, we need them as much as they need us.

Dr Marshall Clark is a senior lecturer in the Institute for Professional Practice in Heritage and the Arts, Australian National University.

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The death of rights in China?

The language and practice of rights in China appears to be losing traction to social management techniques.

By Jonathan Benney

Modern China, argues the academic and rights activist Yu Jianrong, is suffused with 'a kind of abstract anger'.[1]

The sources of this anger are varied, and it is expressed in many different ways. One might characterise it as anomie: the sense of frustration and normlessness which arises when different sectors of society develop at different paces, and some are left behind. Empirically, it can be linked to dramatic inequalities in access to resources, frequent internal migration and uneven urbanisation, a growing consumer culture with a consequent emphasis on getting rich and improving one's status, and an ever-increasing gap between the richest and the poorest.

Beyond all this, although the central Chinese Government is admired and respected by most citizens, the lack of local political transparency, and consequently of perceived legitimacy, has created intense dissatisfaction in certain local areas, most notably in the village of Wukan in Guangdong province, where dramatic protests erupted at the end of 2011.

Yu himself, however, chooses to emphasise self-expression in his analysis. The anger, he suggests, is abstract because it is not directed at any particular target or concerned with any particular problem. Rather, it is concerned with violations of human dignity and with the frustration that arises when people cannot express their discontent sufficiently.

The plethora of protests that occur in China might, therefore, be interpreted as mere symptoms of a much deeper malaise. To give one example, the parent protest movements which arose in rural Sichuan after school buildings collapsed in the 2008 earthquake, killing thousands of children—as depicted so effectively in the documentary 'China's unnatural disaster: the tears of Sichuan province'[2]—were not solely about strengthening building regulations or receiving compensation from the government. They were a reaction against the powerlessness that these citizens felt and the lack of engagement they had with government. The strategy of marches to regional capitals and petitions to higher authorities, evident in the Sichuan case as well as many others, reflects an underlying belief that, although the protesters are dissatisfied with the state as they immediately experience it, they still hold the belief that the next level up will be able to assist them.

This common paradigm of protest—abstract anger expressed in local protests—provokes two important issues. First, the role of rights: given the generality of the public discontent in China, might the use of the language of rights, which has historically been used to set out general conditions under which people's lives might be improved, be a viable strategy? Second, the role of geography: how does the large size and diversity of China affect the manifestation of dissent, and is it possible for localised movements to be unified into something larger and more comprehensive?

But, despite the undeniable power of rights as a means of expressing discontent and of providing a framework for describing how lives might be improved, it seems that the language and practice of rights is losing traction in China. In a recently published book[3], I tracked the language of *weiquan* ('rights defence') as it was used by different stakeholders in Chinese society.

Rights campaigns in China have run the gamut from fundamentally supporting the party-state to fundamentally opposing it.

The idea of 'defending rights' was coined by the Chinese party-state in the late 1980s, as part of a legal consciousness-raising campaign. It was then appropriated by small groups and individuals who used the language of rights as a strategy in cases of dispute resolution. It was only at this stage that activists began to take the language of 'rights defence' at its face value, and used the term to develop campaigns which, for example, suggested that China was violating international human rights treaties, or that it was not attempting to fulfil

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the broad rights in its constitution (freedom of speech or freedom of assembly, for example). Rights campaigns in China have therefore run the gamut from fundamentally supporting the party-state to fundamentally opposing it. Given the historically limited culture of rights talk in China, and indeed the almost complete opposition to the idea of human rights from the government until the early 1990s, Chinese rights discourse has developed in a different direction to that of the West.

Until the mid-2000s, it appeared that rights language was being used in a fundamentally fruitful way, albeit without much clear direction. Rights campaigners were identifying problems with government administration, particularly at a local level: in a number of successful cases, local governments were forced to abandon illegal levies and licence fees which had been used as a revenue-raising method.

In 2012, however, the situation is dramatically different. Having been imprisoned for over four years in 2006 under the charge of 'damaging property and organising a mob to disturb traffic', Chen Guangcheng spent over 18 months under house arrest before his highly publicised defection to the United States. As I argue in my book, Chen's close affiliation with activist lawyers who have championed human rights, and the consequent prioritisation of rights language in his campaigns, is one of the most important factors in the party-state's exceptionally harsh treatment of him.

Chen Guangcheng: over 18 months under house arrest.

It was not necessarily the content of Chen's complaints—the most controversial of which related to forced abortions in his home province of Shandong—that provoked the ire of the state. Rather, it was his frequent use of rights language and his consequent promotion of the idea of inalienable human rights, both of which are perceived by the party-state as constituting threats to their hold on power.

Chen's case is one clear example of the failure of Western rights discourse in China. Human rights (*renquan*) are increasingly not a part of public and government discourse in China, despite what appeared to be a gradual welcoming of rights talk during the 1990s and 2000s.

After reforms to the property law in the mid-2000s, some expected that the language of property rights might be used more frequently in public protest; this does not seem to have happened. Activists using the label *weiquan* are now far more likely to be directly opposed to the government and are thus at risk of persecution and imprisonment.

Maybe China is ahead of the West in realising how limited and ultimately pointless the discourse of rights can be when the rights described are unenforceable.

The failure of the Charter 08 project, in which lawyers and academics attempted to outline a charter for political reform that drew from China's broad constitutional rights and the rights contained in international treaties, demonstrates the overall sense of antipathy, and perhaps apathy, that the language of rights is increasingly evoking in China.

But maybe China is ahead of the West in realising how limited and ultimately pointless the discourse of rights can be when the rights described are unenforceable, either because they are too broad to be monitored properly or because there is no political or legal will to go through the process of enforcement.

The Chinese *weiquan* movement, as my book suggests, has often tried to be all things to all people, with 'rights defence' used by computer gamers, car drivers, political activists, and even the state itself, to label disputes. The attempted strategy—to add rhetorical weight to particular disputes by invoking the universal language of rights—has led to the invocation of rights becoming less, rather than more, meaningful. Protestors such as the Sichuan parents had access to the language of rights as a potential strategic tool, but they chose not to use rights to frame their protest. But, since China's level of abstract anger and its need for protest is clearly not

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decreasing, what strategies *are* being used to frame dissent? The clearest trend is a retreat from broad norms such as law, rights, and courts[4], and a move towards localised and personalised forms of dispute resolution. Over the past five years, the Chinese party-state has begun to implement strategies of *shehui guanli* (social management) and *weiwen* (stability maintenance).

A cornerstone of these strategies is the state's attempt to avoid legal proceedings and petitioning, and thus to resolve disputes between individuals and the state by local means, generally involving personal negotiation and financial compensation. Huge sums of public money have flowed from the central government to 'stability maintenance offices' at province, county and village levels. These offices distribute money to local activists in the hope that they will 'buy stability' and dissuade complainants from escalating their complaints. At the same time, stability maintenance money is used to prevent, often with physical force, protesters submitting petitions or complaints to higher authorities.

In response to this technique, which has been usefully labelled 'relational repression'[5], protesters have been forced to diversify their techniques of complaint even more. The boilerplate use of rights language is proving less and less effective and popular. The use of online social media to spread information about disputes is a well-known technique. But the growing fame of Ai Weiwei, long a well-known artist but now a cultural and political activist, demonstrates the increasing use of culture-based strategies—art, media, dramatised public demonstrations, comic use of language—in protests. Such strategies do not necessarily appropriate the language and political rhetoric of the central government, as the rights defence movements of the 2000s did. In some cases they subvert 'the centre' or simply ignore it.

Ai Weiwei: demonstrating the increasing use of culture-based strategies.

From a conceptual point of view, the rise of social management techniques shows that the Chinese party-state is still frightened of the potential uses of the language of rights. Although it may occasionally champion 'the rule of law' or 'human rights', it appears to have no interest in developing methods of dispute resolution that depend on anything other than interpersonal connections or state authority. Equally, though, the death, or dearth, of rights in China demonstrates that Chinese citizens understand the limitations of rights language as a means of solving social problems. These limitations transcend national borders, and so we should acknowledge the diverse potential that activism in China holds, even as we criticise the refusal of the state to cede any of its power.

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Dr Jonathan Benney is a postdoctoral fellow, at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. His book, Defending rights in contemporary China, *was launched at the ASAA 2012 Conference.*

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Korea obligations continue to deny East Asia peace and stability

Now is the time for Japan and the US to recognise North Korea.

By Leonid Petrov

On the 25 June, Koreans commemorated the tragic beginning of the Korean War (1950–53). What began as a civil war for unification, immediately escalated into an international war, a protracted conflict of the Cold War and a surrogate World War III. Now, after 62 years and despite an existing Armistice Agreement, the conflict shows no signs of ending and even threatens to resume again. The crux of the problem seems to be a by-product of the Korean Peninsula's geopolitical importance and its alliance policy.

On a map of East Asia, where China, Japan, and the Russian Far East occupy a vast majority of the landmass, one cannot help but notice Korea's position at the centre. The Korean peninsula has always been a natural bridge for migrants, trade and cultural waves commuting between the continent and the islands of the northern Pacific. At one point ancient Korea was a cultural fount of Japan and for centuries acted as a conduit that linked it with China. In the 13th century AD, it would see the end of the Mongolian military's eastward expansion, but would conversely become the springboard for Japanese expansion plans towards Asia in the 16th and then 19th centuries.

Ultimately the peninsula would turn out to be the focal point of the Cold War's hottest and longest-lasting conflict. For centuries, policy-makers and generals have recognized Korea's strategic importance in the region, prioritising its protection from potential enemies.

Relations with its neighbours, the dominating regional powers, have typically been unfavourable for Korea. Even the occurrence of a minor political event on the peninsula would attract genuine attention and hasty international reactions. For this reason, Korea has an exceptionally rich and dramatic political history.

The ruling dynasties of China time and again attempted to incorporate Korea into their empires but could hardly secure anything more formal than vassalage; a term synonymous with the modern conception of a security treaty. When planning to expand their sphere of influence towards the continent, Japanese military regimes would first have to defeat Korea before going any further.

The Imjin War (1592–98) was Asia's biggest international conflict and 'the first Korean War', setting the tone for relations between the combatants for centuries to come. The war came into being through the ambitious desires of a samurai warlord, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who intended to conquer China and dominate Asia. Unfortunately for the Koreans, the quickest way into China was straight through the Korean peninsula. As Korea refused to give free passage to Japanese troops, it became a target for Hideyoshi's marauding hordes. The Japanese marched to the Sino-Korean border before the Ming dynasty in China agreed to reinforce Chosŏn Korea and blocked the march of Hideyoshi.

The destruction caused by the invasion was so devastating that some parts of Seoul remained in ruins until the end of the 19th century.

The combined armies of Ming and Chosŏn finally pushed the Japanese out of the peninsula but the war tarnished the reputation of Korea's powerful ally. Rewarded by the number of heads taken in battle, Chinese troops often beheaded innocent Korean civilians in order to be remunerated for bravery at home. Japanese warriors, in contrast, collected enemies' noses in lieu of heads as proof of their deeds. The Hanazuka Monument in Kyoto enshrines the mutilated noses of at least 38 000 Korean and Chinese soldiers killed during Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasions and continue to serve as a reminder of past savagery.

The destruction caused by the invasion was so devastating that some parts of Seoul remained in ruins until the end of the 19th century, when once again Japanese expansionism would challenge Korean and

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East Asian sovereignty. The Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), in which Qing Dynasty China and Meiji Japan went head-to-head, once more saw Korea become the primary subject of contention. As a newly rising power, Japan wished to protect its own interests and security by either annexing Korea or by ensuring Korea's independence from other competitors. China was weak but had strong Western allies who were quick to intervene on its behalf. As the result of this 'second Korean War', in 1897 the Great Korean Empire was founded, but shortly thereafter began to fall under the influence of Imperial Russia.

As was the case in prior conflicts, piecemeal domestic reforms and sluggish administration made Korea an easy target for imperialist contest. Russia's tenuous foothold on Korea was once again challenged in the course of Russo-Japanese War (1904–05). This 'third Korean War' gave Japan a green light to 'protect' its closest neighbour and to later turn it into a full colony. Korea lost control of its foreign policy to Japan, which at the time was already planning the expansion of its influence into China. In 1910, Japan colonised Korea and forced it to serve the economic and military needs of its expanding empire. For the next 35 years radical Korean groups continued to resist the Japanese occupation in Manchuria and China, while Korean intellectuals fought a battle against cultural obliteration at home.

But even with the fall of Japan at the end of World War II, in August 1945, Korea was not granted its independence immediately. The Soviet Union and the United States, the allied powers which had liberated Korea, believed that Koreans were not yet ready for self-governance and divided the peninsula into two temporary zones of occupation. By that time a new global conflict known as the Cold War was already emerging, and this 'temporary' division of Korea became increasingly consolidated and ideologically cemented. Two antagonistic states –the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)—were established in 1948, creating conditions for a civil conflict. As soon as American and Russian occupying forces left the country a new Korean war broke out.

The 'fourth Korean War', which started on 25 June 1950 with a surprise attack from the North against the South, was an attempt to unify the country but soon escalated to the level of a proxy World War III, involving some 20 countries. The usage of nuclear weapons was contemplated and there are still allegations of bacteriological weapons use. Three years of fratricidal conflict cost millions of Korean lives, as well as the lives of hundreds of thousands of foreign soldiers. Despite the strong opposition from the ROK President Syngman Rhee, the Armistice Agreement was finally signed on 27 July 1953 by delegates representing North Korea, China and the United Nations Command. Nevertheless, a proper peace treaty has never been formalised.

Combat in the streets of Seoul during the 'fourth Korean War'.

The first step in ending the Korean War would be the formal recognition of the two Korean states by their regional neighbours. Both Japan and South Korea are firmly on the side of the United States, which originally fostered a regional alliance as an anti-communist containment strategy. Despite the formal collapse of the communist bloc in the early 1990s, the economic aid and security assurance from China and Russia keep North Korea afloat, but both countries have already established diplomatic and trade relations with South Korea. Now it is time for the United States and Japan to recognise North Korea, assuage its security concerns, and lift economic sanctions.

In the meantime, Korea remains a bone of contention among its powerful neighbours. The old system of block alliances persists in the multi-polar world of the 21st century and keeps Korea divided. Only when Korea frees itself from the obligations of its allies will East Asia achieve secure peace and stability.

Dr Leonid Petrov is a lecturer in Korean Studies at the University of Sydney.

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Korean Buddhism: the dangers of toeing the party line

The history of Korean Buddhism provides opportunities for us to better understand how religion has functioned in human history.

By Gregory N. Evon

Compared to Buddhism, Christianity took root only relatively recently on the Korean peninsula. Its profile in contemporary South Korea is therefore nothing short of astonishing.

At the start of the 20th century, some Korean Buddhists were already concerned over the challenge Christianity posed. In 1911, for instance, the Buddhist reformer Paek Yongsŏng (1864–1940) was led to ponder the state of his own religion after hearing the ringing of church bells. But if some leading Buddhists recognised the need to compete in the marketplace of religious ideas, this recognition was complicated by the history of Buddhism in Korea, on the one hand, and the reality of Korea's political situation under Japanese colonialism (1910–45), on the other.

Buddhism had played a prominent role in the lives of the political elite for several hundred years, but at the end of the 14th century, anti-Buddhist attitudes hardened in response to the institution's accumulated wealth and ability to meddle in politics. Through the dynastic shift from Koryŏ (918–1392) to Chosŏn (1392–1910), Buddhism's truth claims came under attack, while its sources of power and self-renewal (temples, landholdings and clerics) were drastically reduced. For the sociopolitical elite of Chosŏn, commitment to the orthodox Confucian teachings of Zhu Xi (1130–1200) became central. Buddhism's loss of influence and prestige among the male elite dealt it a blow from which it never fully recovered.

The advent of Japanese colonialism, however, represented a significant political shift. Much of the scholarship on Korean Buddhism in the 20th century has been nationalist in orientation. Yet it is essential to appreciate the nuances in Buddhist responses to the Japanese, and the way those responses were framed by differing interpretations of Korean Buddhist history. Paek Yongsŏng and Han Yongun (1879–1944), another important Korean Buddhist leader and reformer, are cases in point. These two men worked to strengthen Korean Buddhism, but sharply differed on the question of clerical marriage, which Han regarded as necessary for the vitality of Korean Buddhism and which Paek strongly opposed. Each could look to Korean Buddhist history to justify their claims.

The question of the relationship between state and religion was also crucial. The Koryŏ–Chosŏn transition had made it clear Buddhism was not nearly as powerful as it had seemed. What the government could grant, it could also take away.

Monks going down to their rooms after evening worship.

Confucianism's ascendancy through Chosŏn likewise came at a cost to both itself as well as the state it was to serve.

Monopolies are dangerous. They entail the suppression of competing forms of thought, stifle change and thereby forestall the ability to respond to new problems. Competition has benefits. Han, in particular, was prone to see Korean Buddhism's situation at the turn of the century in terms of the newly-imported idea of 'the survival of the fittest', something that held strong explanatory potential for assessing the history of Korea and Korean Buddhism.

The Japanese colonial period exposed the degree to which Korean Buddhism had remained notionally connected to the state in the clerical imagination. The majority of Buddhists, however, were lay adherents, not clerics. The pressing question was how to make Buddhism meaningful to the laity in the face of religious competition and under difficult political circumstances.

The fuller implications of this became evident in the '10/27' (27 October) assault on Buddhism by the South Korean Government in 1980. The claims and counterclaims, causes and consequences connected with that

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incident raise a variety of questions in relation to religious suppression, religious competition and the relationship between organised religion and the state. But above all else, the crackdown underscored how reliance on the state lessens the need for a religion to become integrated into people's lives while enabling the state to view religion as a political servant to be rewarded or punished.

The 1980 government crackdown thus can be read as a précis of tendencies that had concerned Han Yongun and which stretched back a millennium-and-a-half, from the pre-Chosŏn era when state and Buddhism were firmly linked and then through Chosŏn, when Buddhism's fortunes dwindled due to the withdrawal of state support and outright state-led suppression.

Just as important, it also exposed interreligious tensions between Christians and Buddhists. But such difficulties can have a stimulating effect. Institutional Buddhism came to re-think its position vis-à-vis state and society, and see itself as something other than an arm of the state. On balance, South Korean society and Buddhism have both benefited.

The history of Korean Buddhism raises questions that have yet to be adequately explored. These have become all the more apparent with the rise of the 'new atheism' and its core tenet that religious irrationalism imperils humanity. Korean Buddhist history and the history of religion in Korea more generally show that anti-religious rationalism can also be very dangerous.

The nascent Chosŏn state's anti-Buddhist ethos was readily understandable on political and economic grounds, but the state's grasp on power led, by the end of the 18th century, to the belief that it could and ought to control individuals' thinking. It was in this context that Christianity (Catholicism, to be exact) came under attack in Korea.

What is curious about this in relation to the 'new atheism' is how the Chosŏn political elite viewed Catholicism as equivalent to Buddhism, with both founded on baseless and absurd stories, and in turn recognised how the underlying capacity for faith was connected to thinking things not sanctioned by the state.

Literary production and reading also become causes of great concern. The consequence was a literary-cum-religious censorship regime centred at the royal court. Its chief target was perceived religious irrationalism.

North of the DMZ such tendencies have been taken to their fuller conclusion. A recent article in *The Guardian* quoted the Korean Central News Agency as saying that Kim Jong-un has a 'grandiose plan to bring about a dramatic turn in the field of literature and arts this year'. It is easy to miss the deep cultural significance of this given that the quote was made in the context of the improbably titled 'Mickey Mouse makes North Korean debut at concert for Kim Jong-un: inclusion of Mickey Mouse and Winnie-the-Pooh in concert marks a notable departure for performance arts in Pyongyang' (*The Guardian*, 11 July 2012).

The chief question is how this dramatic turn might fit with the views articulated by his father Kim Jong Il in *Life and literature* (1986), where ideology is fused with the writer's emotions in service to the will of the Party. This is, in fact, a mutated form of the classic Confucian theory that poetry originates in the stirring of the poet's feelings. Its chief nod to the 20th century is that it appears to have been originally articulated with cinema rather than literature in mind.

Two useful historical lessons can be drawn from this in connection with the question of religious suppression. First, the urge to eradicate something as intensely human as religious belief cannot be seen apart from the urge to control the way people think, dream, imagine, and create art. It is of course true that religions have done and at times still do the same and worse, but even so, there is something in the 'new atheism' that seems inhuman in its disregard for the full contours of human faith and religion, and the interplay of faith and religion in the complex messiness of human life.

The history of Korean Buddhism provides much for us to better understand how religion has functioned in human history precisely because so much remains to be explored. The second lesson can be drawn from Don Baker's *Korean spirituality* (2008), which emphasises the plurality of Korean religious practices and beliefs in contemporary South Korea. Here one can see why dominance is dangerous, but

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competitive coexistence can be fruitful. Of course, it is necessary to have recognition of the benefits of pluralism. South Korea now does, and this is fundamentally a political question. At root, these changes have derived from recognition of the dangers of 'groupthink' or toeing the party line for the sake of toeing the party line. This change is well represented in South Korean scholarship in which we find new and innovative questions, and above all else, an acceptance of questions that, in the past, would have been awkward, at best, to pose. Korean Studies and East Asian Studies more generally stand to benefit from this.

At the moment, I am acutely conscious of that fact as well as its connection to the broader historical questions of Korean Buddhism and religious suppression. South Korea's Academy of Korean Studies is sponsoring a project led by Professor Ross King (University of British Columbia) under the title 'Cosmopolitan and vernacular in the sinographic cosmopolis: comparative aspects of the history of language, writing, and literary culture in Japan and Korea' (AKS-2011-AAA-2103). The project members include Christina Laffin (University of British Columbia), John Whitman (Cornell University), David Lurie (Columbia University), and me.

When we met in July 2012 for our inaugural workshop, it was striking that questions on Korean Buddhist history and religious suppression occupied a significant position in the various discussions, ranging from how Korean Buddhist clerical learning was affected by the Chosŏn government's anti-Buddhist policies to how Buddhism functioned in popular literature. Comparisons of the Korean and Japanese experiences proved vital to seeing old problems in a new light and finding new problems where none had seemed to exist. Our ability to think through the fuller implications of the history of Buddhist suppression in Korea has much to gain from it.

Dr Gregory Evon is Asian Studies Program Convenor, Korean Studies & Japanese Studies, in the School of International Studies at the University of New South Wales.

Building demand for Asia literacy

The Asia Education Foundation has gathered proven ideas from around Australia to illustrate what works in building demand for Asian languages and cross-curriculum studies of Asia in Australian schools. Some of these programs were specifically set up to stimulate demand; many were not, and built demand incidentally to fulfilling other learning purposes.

The illustrations confirm that demand can and is being stimulated; and that strategies are varied according to the needs of the education jurisdiction, school or school cluster. These examples of what is working to build demand acknowledge the impact of the Australian Government's National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) and strategies at state, territory and school level.

The *Building demand for Asia literacy: what works* report, June 2012, summarises the successes and challenges of building demand for Asia literacy and makes recommendations for improving the current situation.

The report clearly identifies that studies of Asia will support Asian language learning and Asian language learning will encourage and build demand for studies of Asia.

A literature review was commissioned to provide an overview of research in this area and a report summarises the challenges and success of building student, parent, teacher and principal demand.

See Asian studies no longer optional extra.

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Centre fosters Australia–Mongolia ties

The first Mongolian studies centre in the Southern Hemisphere is providing a focus for growing Australian interest in Mongolia.

By Li Narangoa

Historical relations between Australia and Mongolia have been sparse. Though Australia and Mongolia opened diplomatic relations in 1972, a serious trade relationship began only in the 1990s when Mongolia introduced a democratic political system and free-market reforms. Especially in recent years, links between the two countries have grown in importance.

Both Australia and Mongolia are rich in minerals and energy resources. Mongolia is emerging as a mining giant in the world and Australia has expertise in mining and is in a position to provide technical and financial assistance. Australia has significant involvement in the Mongolian mining and energy sectors (20-odd Australian companies are present there) and Austrade opened an office in Ulaanbaatar in 2012.

Both countries have also been involved in seeking solutions to security problems in Northeast Asia and an increasing number of young Mongolians obtain secondary and university education in Australia. Australia and Mongolia have expertise to share in handling climatic extremes, in animal husbandry and in heritage archaeology.

In February 2011, the Mongolian Prime Minister Batbold visited Australia and witnessed four bilateral agreements: a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on vocational education cooperation, aimed at helping Mongolia build the capacity of its mining workforce; an MoU to promote agricultural development; an MoU between the two governments to foster the exchange of information on cabinet secretariat operations and on enhancing transparency and public access to information; and an MoU between the Australian Academy of Science and the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. The ANU has also signed an MoU with the Mongolian National University providing for research collaboration and staff and student exchanges.

The first Mongolian studies centre in the Southern Hemisphere was founded at the Australian National University (ANU) in 2011 to provide a focus for the growing interest in Mongolia at the university and in Australia more generally.

The ANU Mongolian Studies Centre hosts guest researchers working on Mongolia, organises occasional seminars on Mongolian topics, provides a support network for Australian researchers on Mongolia and promotes Mongolian studies in Australia in general.

Mongolian Prime Minister Batbold (right) and former ANU vice-chancellor Professor Ian Chubb sign a memorandum of understanding between Mongolian National University and the Australian National University.

Promoting Mongolian studies in Australia is important, not only because of the increasing ties between the two countries but also because of the growing significance of Mongolia in world politics and economy, especially in Asia and the Pacific.

Mongolia had been insignificant in world politics and economy, but its huge hidden resources and its growing economy is changing. Understanding the changing economic, social and political situation in Mongolia is significant to an understanding of the international politics of Northeast Asia.

Furthermore, the rapidly developing mining industry, fast growing economy and radical changes in environment and society in Mongolia provide researchers and students with many interesting research possibilities and questions. What does the growing economy of Mongolia mean to its two neighbours, China and Russia? How will Mongolia solve the problem of energy dependency on its two neighbours for its growing economy? How can a nomadic society like Mongolia cope with a rapidly developing heavy mining industry? How does

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Australia–Mongolia ties

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Mongolia deal with the environmental problems that the mining industry brings and how will it defend its reputation as having the purest air in the world? How will the country solve the issue of growing legal and illegal migrant labour from China? Would resource-rich Mongolia be cursed like Nigeria or blessed like Norway?

The expansion of the Mongol empire under Chinggis Khan in the 13th century also remains a pivotal event in world history which continues to catch the imagination of Australians.

Herders drive their horses in Must, Khovd Province, Mongolia (UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe)

The ANU Mongolian Studies Centre organised an inaugural open conference for Mongolian studies in Australia in November 2011. About 50 people participated from all over Australia and 24 papers ranging in topics from archaeology, literature and history to current political, economic and social changes in Mongolia were presented.

The conference was very successful not only because the papers were interesting and stimulating but also because people felt connected to each other for the first time. 'It is so refreshing to give my talk to people for whom I don't have to explain where the capital city of Mongolia is,' said one participant. One of the most encouraging aspects of the conference and for Mongolian studies in Australia was that more than half of the presentations were given by graduate students (14, and one undergraduate).

The centre not only promotes academic research and a research network, but also serves the broader community beyond the academic field. We deal with an increasing number of enquiries from private individuals, businesses, media and government organisations concerning Mongolian issues.

A growing number of Australian politicians, civil servants, business people and individuals visit Mongolia. The members of the centre have often been asked to brief government and business delegations to Mongolia. The ANU has been offering a Mongolian language course for beginners in collaboration with Indiana University (USA), via online teaching, since 2010. The course has been delivered by a lecturer at the Indiana University, in real time, to our students.

There has been, however, increasing interest from outside the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) in learning the Mongolian language. The nature of our existing courses that run within an academic semester make it hard for people from outside the ACT to come to Canberra to attend the course. The complexities of managing the available web technology make it impractical and expensive to include other sites in this virtual classroom. As a result, we are not yet able to extend our online teaching to the broader Australian community. To meet this need, the centre is exploring the possibility of organising an intensive Mongolian language course in Canberra for three weeks in January 2013.

The centre is also planning a Mongolia Update at the end of 2012. Modelled on the highly successful Indonesia Update, it will cover recent developments in politics and the economy, as well as recent social, cultural and environmental developments in Mongolia. The update will be very much academic in nature, but it will also be helpful for policy makers, business people and the broader public who are interested in current issues in Mongolia. We are planning to bring the top scholars and analysts who are working on Mongolian politics, economy, international relations and trade (especially mining) from overseas.

T0 recap, the ANU Mongolian Studies Centre was set up first of all to provide an academic forum for ANU researchers working on Mongolia-related topics and to promote Mongolian studies in Australia in general. It also serves the broader public interests in Mongolia by offering lectures and seminars and by dealing with enquiries from the general public.

Li Narangoa is head of the ANU Mongolian Studies Centre and a professor in the School of Culture, History & Language, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific.

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Far from provincial: contemporary literature in East Kalimantan

East Kalimantan writers are showing a broader preoccupation with the world beyond the region.

By Tiffany Tsao

The Indonesian province of East Kalimantan has experienced a surge in literary activity in recent years. A combination of factors are responsible.

After the nationally renowned writer Korrie Layun Rampan returned from Jakarta to his home province in 2001, he set to work organising networks, events, activities and publication outlets for local writers. Following this, two major local newspapers began to accept poems and short stories for publication in special sections devoted to showcasing new work. The provincial government has stepped in to lend a hand as well, providing funding and publicity for activities such as literary conferences and seminars, not to mention the publication of local authors' works.

Korrie Layun Rampan

In a country where literary production is mainly concentrated in Jakarta, where only a handful of other cities and regions (not including East Kalimantan) receive nationwide recognition for their literary achievements, and where writers from the literary periphery find it difficult to participate in this exclusive world, these efforts to boost literary activity are a source of great support and encouragement for East Kalimantan's writers.

One might expect East Kalimantan literature to possess certain 'local' qualities—to reflect the unique culture, settings, and issues of the region in which they are produced. Most certainly, those writing and promoting literature in East Kalimantan are aware of such expectations: terms such as 'local colour' (*warna lokal*) and 'locality' (*lokalitas*) often crop up in forewords to anthologies of East Kalimantan writing, in conversations among writers, and in news articles and reviews about such works.

Almost all of the anthologies that have been produced to showcase local authors' works identify themselves specifically with East Kalimantan, either bearing the province name in their titles or subtitles, or identifying themselves with specific cities within the province. Interestingly enough, however, this concern with local colour coexists with another seemingly contradictory concern: a broader preoccupation with the world that lies beyond the region. Take, for example, a foreword for the anthology *East Kalimantan in Indonesian short stories* [*Kalimantan Timur dalam cerpen Indonesia*], in which the author—the mayor of the provincial capital Samarinda—compares the universal values one finds in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to those put forth by the short-story writers featured in the collection. In a similar vein, one of the forewords penned by the head of the provincial department of education speaks of the hopes he harbours for the future of East Kalimantan writing, referring to the British poet William Blake, the American poet Walt Whitman, the Russian writers Boris Pasternak and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyin, and the literary accomplishments of Germany, the United States, and Japan.

The author and local writer Tri Wahyuni Rahmat in front of a merlion statue in Bontang—a sign of globalisation .

Government officials are not the only ones who think of East Kalimantan writing as participating in a much wider realm of literature. Korrie Layun Rampan has expressed similar views in his capacity as editor of several recently published anthologies of local writing. In the collection *A parcel of thunder* [*Bingkisan petir*], he observes that the unique literary dynamics of the province lend a special nuance to the literary dynamics of Indonesia as a whole. And in his preface to *East Kalimantan in Indonesian short stories*, he writes: 'literary works—especially short stories—are not just stories, but a means of expressing a culture of thought within the greater process of life, which is also embedded within the realm of the universal'. According to this logic, the 'local' is inextricably bound up with the wider world.

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East Kalimantan writers

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Stories and poems about local experiences are representative of the experiences of humanity as a whole. And even when local literature does highlight the unique cultures, landscapes, and issues of the province, it does do so not in isolation, but as one distinct literary expression among countless distinct literary expressions of timeless and universal human values across the nation and the globe.

One might note that the diverse backgrounds and experiences of writers in East Kalimantan already predisposes them to perceive the local, the national and the global as intertwined. Although many writers were born in the province, others have moved to East Kalimantan for employment reasons. Of those born in East Kalimantan, many do not belong to ethnic groups indigenous to the province, and many have spent extended periods of time living outside the province, attending university, working or both.

Furthermore, East Kalimantan's natural resources—coal, timber, oil, natural gas, and gold—make it a site of national and multinational industry, which in turn, attracts employees from all over Indonesia and around the world. In short, there is a strong cosmopolitan element to life as experienced by these writers both outside and inside the province.

This cosmopolitanism is reflected in the wide-ranging subject matter of the short stories included in anthologies of East Kalimantan writing. There are indeed those focused on depicting indigenous communities and traditions, or highlighting local issues and concerns, but there are also stories that are set elsewhere in Indonesia ('Illusion' by Wuri Handayani PS is set in Bali) and even outside Indonesia ('Waiting' by Gita Lidya is set in Japan; 'The first morning prayer at the Sacred Mosque' by Anna Fajar Rona is set in Mecca).

There are also stories whose setting is never specified, or which could take place anywhere. Tri Wahyuni Rahmat's 'She is my mother' ['Dia ibuku'] refrains from giving any location at all. Shantined's stories, several of which have been included in these anthologies, often don't give their whereabouts, or mention them only incidentally. When interviewed, Shantined said she was happy to accept the label of 'East Kalimantan writer', but as someone who grew up in Java and has been involved in Jakarta-based and international publications and literary events, she also feels herself to be simply a writer—part of a community of writers that transcends such labels.

Even stories exhibiting a strong concern with the 'local' may include the wider world within their purview: 'Mei's destiny' by Erni Suparti Morgan is set in the kingdom of Kutai Kartanegara during the 18th century—within what we now know as the province of East Kalimantan. The protagonist is a Chinese Uighur, who has accompanied her sailor father to settle in this new land. Towards the story's end, references are also made to the growing presence of the Dutch.

The literary works being written in East Kalimantan may revise any assumptions we have about 'provincial' literature being 'provincial'.

Here, the focus on a local setting involves discovering the diversity present inside it: East Kalimantan's cultural heritage is shown to be cosmopolitan, a node in a worldwide network of exploration and trade. Even the protagonist's growing appreciation of the customs of the local people and their mindful stewardship of nature is connected to the larger realm of human existence and thought: when asked about the story, Erni replied that she wanted to show how 'local wisdom' may share 'the same goals and ideas' of 'any other place', reflecting also the 'wisdom of humanity'. The literary works being written in East Kalimantan may revise any assumptions we have about 'provincial' literature being 'provincial'. For in between the lines, we may discover other countries, continents, and perhaps even a whole universe.

Dr Tiffany Tsao is a lecturer at the University of Newcastle and an honorary associate at the University of Sydney. She keeps a blog concerning her research and writing.

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Doorstep interactions: Chinese influence in Southeast Asia

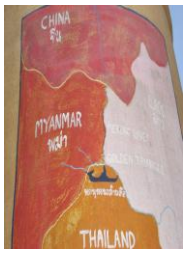
The Sino-Southeast Asian relationship is more complicated than current higher level theories allow for, argues SUNSANEE McDONNELL.

The geopolitical rise of China appears to be the talking point of the 21st century. Open any present-day newspaper or scroll through an online news site or blog and there are multiple mentions of China's economic rise and its growing geopolitical dominance.

The underlying questions appear to be 'what will China do?' and 'how will we respond'? While there is much rhetoric and debate about China's interactions with the existing larger powers in the Asia–Pacific region, such as Japan, Korea and the United States, much less is understood about how China is influencing smaller, developing nations on its own doorstep, in particular those that share its borders, such as Burma/Myanmar, Laos Peoples Democratic Republic and Thailand.

Southeast Asian countries have much to win or lose in terms of their relationship with China. Moreover, the importance of Southeast Asia as a trading bloc that is emerging as an economic power in its own right is increasingly being recognised and will be of importance to countries such as Australia as we enter the Asian Century. Beginning with Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, China's subsequent 'going out' strategy has had positive results for China in terms of engagement in the region. Regional forums such as ASEAN + 1, ASEAN–China Free Trade Area, reinvigorated bilateral diplomacy and the development of atransnational transport infrastructure have the potential to bring these nations closer together than perhaps ever before.

Despite the dire predictions of Western-based security analysts of the growing China threat, most commentators believe that Southeast Asian countries are choosing neither to 'bandwagon' alongside China by currying favour nor to 'balance' against it, by making alliances with other powerful states. In fact there is much evidence that suggests that Southeast Asia sees much opportunity in engaging with China. Commentators have instead sought to affix various labels such as hedging, hiding, accommodating, or engaging to the apparently non-traditional reactions of developing countries to China's rise. Moreover, the difference between the social, economic and political situations of each country in Southeast Asia and the history of their individual relationships with China make it difficult to generalise about Southeast Asia as a whole.



The 'Golden Triangle'–an image on a pole in the region.

My research seeks a better understanding of the extent of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia by taking a multidisciplinary approach linking overarching theory with in-depth empirical research. In doing so, I will attempt to answer the questions of what are the mechanisms by which frontier regions, such as the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), are being integrated and what role does China play? What is the Southeast Asian response?

I argue that the Sino-Southeast Asian relationship is more complicated than current higher-level theories allow for. These theories tend to neglect the complexity and layers of interactions that occur across borders. I suggest that a framework that focuses on intricate networks between both states and formal actors and local and informal actors will offer new insights into the Sino-Southeast Asian relationship and the emergence of a new dynamic in Asia.

My work focuses on this Chinese interaction in the GMS, an area that encompasses the Mekong riparian countries of Thailand, Myanmar, Laos People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Vietnam, and Cambodia in addition to Yunnan province and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China. The border

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Postgraduate awards

Chinese influence in the Greater Mekong

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region of the GMS is a prime space for analysing the grey area where the top-down driven processes of regionalism and bottom-up driven processes of regionalisation overlap.

With the assistance of the Prime Minister's Asia Endeavour Award, I will spend up to 12 months based in Chiang Mai, hosted by Chiang Mai University, where I will conduct research at strategic nodes of newly formed transnational networks in the GMS, particularly those that connect China, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar.

The R3B in Mai Sai Thailand, one of the highways that now connects Thailand to Myanmar and which eventually crosses the border with China.

In recent history the intersection between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos has been synonymous with the 'Golden Triangle', better known for the illegal trade of drugs and contraband goods as well as people trafficking and bloody ethnic wars. Over the past decade this region has undergone an economic face-lift, with an attempt by member states to transform the previous 'backwater' from a battlefield to a market place.

In 1992, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) assisted the above countries in launching a GMS program of subregional economic cooperation—an agreement to work together in the sectors of agriculture, energy, environment, human resource development, investment, telecommunications, tourism, transport infrastructure, and transport and trade facilitation.[1]

A strategic thrust of the program is the development of a number of economic corridors, an ADB construct which integrates infrastructure development with trade, investment and other economic factors. The North–South Economic Corridor (NSEC) is almost complete and includes a combination of road, rail and shipping routes which link Kunming in China with Bangkok in Thailand via Myanmar and Laos.

The rapidly developing economies of some of the GMS countries, although uneven, are producing visible changes in terms of economic, social and cultural developments many of them supported by China. Using the NSEC as a geographical framework, I will investigate Chinese involvement in the areas of energy and resources, trade and labour, illegal and informal activities and cultural developments in the Mekong.

I hope that my research will add to the growing literature about China's activities in mainland Southeast Asia and inform theory by combining aspects of concepts such as international relations theory, globalisation, networks and informal economies. In an increasingly globalised world there is a need for country specialists to expand their outlook and collaborate with those who are attempting to improve and build on existing theory of transnational relationships across many sectors, especially as it is applied to Asia.

I welcome any feedback and comments on my proposed research and will be based in Thailand as of August 2012.

Reference

1. (ADB), Asian Development Bank 2011, *The greater mekong subregion economic cooperation program: strategic framework 2012–2022,* Philippines: Asia Development Bank.
—2012 *Greater mekong subregion economic cooperation program: overview.* Philippines.

Sunsanee McDonnell is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne's Asia Institute and a winner of the Prime Minister's Australia Asia Outgoing Postgraduate Award.

Tell us about your research

If you're doing, or about to do, postgraduate study in an Asian country and would like to tell us about it, we would like to hear from you. Articles should be between 1000–1500 words and submitted to the editor.

The Australia–Netherlands Research Collaboration 2012 round of Overseas PhD Travel Fellowship funding

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Asian studies in an Asian Century

The ASAA's 19th Biennial Conference, held at the University of Western Sydney's Parramatta campus from 11 to 13 July, attracted more than 440 speakers, including some of Asia's most distinguished thinkers.

The international conference saw experts from Australia and abroad outline new ways to better understand Asia in the Asian Century.

The 'Knowing Asia: Asian studies in an Asian century' conference addressed the critical issues now facing one of the fastest changing regions in the world today, and reflected upon the challenges and opportunities Asia poses to Australia.

The Director of the UWS Institute for Culture and Society, Distinguished Professor Ien Ang, said Asia's rising economic influence had transformed the way the region is understood.

Former secretary of the Department of Treasury and current special advisor to the Prime Minister, Dr Ken Henry AC, led a panel discussing the Australian Government's White Paper on 'Australia in the Asian Century'.

A series of three panels explored the special economic zones that have been crucial to the emergence of postcolonial Asia as an economic power.

Other presentations included:

Professor Lily Kong, National University of Singapore, who examined the changing higher education landscape in Asia, from the increased government and private investments in universities in many parts of Asia, to rethinking the balance of specialisation vis-à-vis broad-based learning, to the rising interest among Western universities in setting up campuses in Asia.

Professor Jie-Hyun Lim, Hanyang University, Seoul, who drew on the entangled pasts [of the political production, consumption and distribution] of the victimhood representations between Korea and Japan, and between Poland, Germany and Israel. He highlighted the transnational history of victimhood nationalism and argued that if the history of reconciliation is crucial towards a transnational Asia, overcoming victimhood nationalism is a key.

Professor Prasenjit Duara, National University of Singapore, who argued that modern universalisms developed from Kant to Marx are apparently in retreat, yielding to nationalism and consumerism, yet the physical salvation of the planet is of greatest urgency, and is becoming in some quarters the transcendent goal of our times.

Mr Christopher Kremmer, University of Western Sydney and University of Melbourne, who spoke about the rise of a more assertive, nationalistic Indian media and how it has become a live issue in the Indian Government's relations with the nations of its region and beyond, and is testing India's capacity to forge stronger relations with key regional neighbours.

Dr Tim Winter, University of Western Sydney, who addressed the growing unease in Asia in recent decades about the applicability of philosophies and practices of cultural conservation imported from the West. He argued that declarations about Asia's culture, its landscapes, and its inherited pasts are the combined manifestations of postcolonial subjectivities and a desire for prestige on the global stage of cultural heritage governance.

Dr James Arvanitakis, University of Western Sydney, who argued that the question of resilience is increasingly important in our contemporary world as climate change, rural and urban migration patterns, competing demands for land and water and globalisation create a number of complex challenges for communities.

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Asia business failure and the new conquistadores

Australia is probably less Asia-ready than we were 20 years ago.

By John Menadue

Since our settlement as a small, remote 'white' English speaking community, we have been afraid of Asia and its large populations. We have clung to remote global powers for protection—Britain and now the United States.

We have broken the back of White Australia, but it keeps coming back, particularly since the time of John Howard and Pauline Hanson. The campaign by Federal Opposition leader Tony Abbott and his immigration spokesman Scott Morrison to demonise asylum seekers is really a proxy for a campaign on race. The campaign against Chinese investment is really a replay of the hostility to Japanese investment 30 years ago.

It seems counterintuitive when one considers the Asian presence—students, visitors and trade. But we are probably less Asia-ready than we were 20 years ago. In the 1980s and early 1990s, at the time of the Garnaut Report, we were making progress in such areas as Asian language learning, media interest in Asia and cultural exchanges, but we have been 'on smoko' for the last 20 years. For example:

- The national policy on Asian languages adopted by the Hawke government and the Council of Australian Governments has run into the sand.
- The first working holiday program was with Japan in 1980. We didn't have another one in Asia until 1996 with the Republic of Korea. We still don't have one with China, India or Vietnam.
- The Australia media is still embedded in our historical relationships with the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Why did we go on smoko? Change is always painful, and the end of White Australia, particularly with the Indochinese program during the Fraser period, followed by the Hawke government's economic restructuring, was unsettling and painful for many. And Paul Keating was no slouch either. He became a true believer in Asia almost overnight. It was full throttle: a defence treaty with Indonesia and an Australian Republic. In retrospect, we didn't manage the rapid change well enough.

An unsettled community provided an opportunity for John Howard to reassure us that under his guidance we could be 'relaxed and comfortable' again. Fear of Asia was engendered with dog whistling about Asian numbers and then boat arrivals. John Howard was the big interruption in the process of Asian involvement and Asian literacy.

Can we really imagine our new mining conquistadors building long-term relations with Asia?

The biggest failure has been in our business sector. The business sector's failure to skill itself for Asia has been a major barrier to developing Australia's potential in the region. I don't think there is a chair, director or CEO of any of our top 150 companies who can fluently speak any of the languages of Asia.

John Menadue: 'The biggest failure has been in our business sector.'

This lack of knowledge and understanding of Asia in corporations has meant that university graduates with Asian skills have not found the employment opportunities they hoped for.

Only four Australian companies in the top 150 bothered to put in a submission to the Henry Review. A recent survey by the Business Alliance for Asian Literacy, representing over 400 000 businesses in Australia, found that 'more than half of Australian businesses operating in Australia had little board and senior management experience of Asia and/or Asian skills or languages'.

It is obviously too late for chairs, directors and CEOs to acquire Asian language skills, but it is not at all clear that they are recruiting

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Asia business failure

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executives for the future with the necessary skills for Asia. It is hard to break into the cosy directors' club. Success in Asia requires long-term commitment but the remuneration packages and the demands of shareholders are linked to short-term returns.

Our mining industry is in the front line in our commercial relations with Asia but can we really imagine our new mining conquistadors building long-term relations with Asia?

Plenary panel discussants, from left, John Menadue, Ric Smith and Ken Henry.

The Australian conquistadors spent $22 million on an advertising campaign and got rid of a prime minister and saved $66 billion in taxes. It would be even easier in future if they owned a newspaper. I am confident the report on Australia and the Asian Century will have some excellent policy proposals as did the Taxation Review. But the hard part is implementation. In a different context, on climate change, Ross Garnaut referred to the influence of vested interests as a 'diabolical problem.

In implementation, we particularly need a group of eminent champions drawn from all sectors of the community to keep the Asian Century continually at the top of public discussion. We also will need periodic reports on implementation mile posts. The key is for Australia to be open—open to new people, new investment, new trade, new languages and new ideas. We are both enriched and trapped by our Anglo–Celtic culture.

John Menadue AO was a discussant on the Plenary panel 'Australia in the Asian Century: reflections on the Australian Government White Paper'. He is a Fellow at the Centre for Policy Development, a former secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and of the Department of Trade and Immigration, a former Australian Ambassador to Japan, and a former CEO of Qantas. This is a summary of his speech to the conference 2012, and was published in Crikey *on 16 July 2012.*

ASAA going from strength to strength

The Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) moved from strength to strength during the past year, said ASAA president Purnendra Jain.

Professor Jain told the association's 19th Biennial Conference dinner that the ASAA had participated in consultations for the White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century and prepared one of the roughly 250 papers submitted to the taskforce to help inform the White Paper.

The association had also made submissions and written to Australian university vice-chancellors and others whenever Asian language programs came under threat.

ASAA president Purnendra Jain (left) honours past president Professor John Ingleson, for his contribution to Asian studies and service to the association.

During the year, the association made submissions directly to the Australian Government—to Mr Peter Garrett, Minister for School Education and Early Childhood, about the National Asian Languages in Schools Program, and to Mr Chris Evan**s,** Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, about the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. It had also actively contributed to the Excellence in Research for Australia initiative.

Other new initiatives during the year included:

- Expanding international networks: the ASAA formed a consortium of Asian studies associations with the US-based Association of Asian Studies and also established a link with the Japan-based Asian Studies Conference Japan. It continues its efforts to expand the association's institutional networks in other Asian countries as well.
- Event funding: the ASAA started a new funding arrangement that is open to ASAA members who want to organise a

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ASAA strength

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workshop, symposium or conference that is of interest to other ASAA members the broader scholarly community. One round of funding will be disbursed every two years for events held in the following year. A separate pool of funds has been allocated for supporting postgraduate events.

- Thesis prizes: the ASAA now awards two prizes annually for best theses submitted to Australian universities. Money for the awards comes from a funding pool established as a result of the donation by [Emeritus Professor] Tony Reid of his whole Fukuoka Prize to the ASAA President's Fund. The India-based publisher DK agencies provides $500 worth of books from its catalogue. The ASAA also has a mid-career award for authors of books.

Professor Jain said the ASAA expected to publish nearly a dozen books in the ASAA publication series over the next 12 months—including the five he launched at the conference. The association's flagship journal, *Asian Studies Review*, was also doing well.

Conference videos

Videos of conference highlights are available from the following links:

ASAA 2012 conference highlights
ASAA keynote address day one: Professor Lily Kong
Interview with Professor Azyumardi Azra
Interview with Professor Prasenjit Duara
Interview with Professor Wang Gungwu
Interview with Professor John Ingleson
Interview with Professor Etsuko Kato
Interview with Professor Jawanit Kittitornkool
Interview with Professor Lily Kong
Interview with Professor Jie-Hyun Lim
Interview with Mr John Menadue, AO
Interview with Professor Brian Turner

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Conference highlights

Conference convener JUDITH SNODGRASS reflects on some conference highlights.

If numbers are an indication, the 2012 ASAA Conference was a success.

The panel 'Australia in the Asian Century: reflections on the Australian Government White Paper,' chaired by Krishna Sen and comprising former Treasury secretary and head of the White Paper taskforce Ken Henry, former Asia diplomats Ric Smith and John Menadue, and former ASAA president John Ingleson was one of the highlights. Another was the plenary session of leading scholars—Tessa Morris Suzuki, Tony Reid, Maurizio Marinelli, John Ingleson and Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan. Chaired by ASAA president Purnedra Jain, the session reflected on the 'Future of Asian studies'.

The over-richness of current research on Asia was clearly demonstrated over the three days, with 16 parallel panels. Panels on Southeast Asia were particularly well attended, and included a strong showing from young scholars from the region. The postgraduate participation in the conference was particularly pleasing. Thirty per cent of the registrations were from postgrads, and a significant number were from Asian universities.

Among other panels that illustrated the new directions of research referred to by the theme of the conference was 'Climate change in South Asia.' New directions were also evident in the panel 'Conceptualising connectivity in an Asian Century: regional integration and transnational exchanges in the Greater Mekong Subregion', which brought together an international team of scholars to explore the ways new cross-border interactions and transnational connections are giving shape to a rapidly changing Asia. But the celebration of new directions needs to be placed in the context of the continuing vitality and excellence of scholarship on Asia evident across the 400-odd papers, and most particularly in the addresses of the internationally renowned invited speakers.

Judith Snodgrass is an associate professor, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, University of Western Sydney.

Asian studies no longer 'optional extra'

Studies of Asia can no longer be considered an optional extra in Australian schools, the head of the task force on the Australian Government's White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century, Dr Ken Henry AC told the conference.

Instead, Asian studies need to be embedded into the curriculum learned by students at all stages of their schooling.

Dr Henry said that embedding Asian studies into the curriculum would ensure all students had the opportunity to learn about Asia.

'This will help create the demand for acquiring deeper knowledge and can act as a gateway for more Australians to move on to higher levels of study—potentially gaining language fluency and cross-disciplinary expertise about Asia,' he said.

Dr Henry said the ASAA's 2002 report, *Maximising Australia's Asia knowledge*, sounded a warning bell about the declining state of Asian studies in Australia. Unfortunately, a decade on, the ASAA's submission to the White Paper has described the situation as a crisis.

'We need to find ways to encourage our people, young and old, to engage with the region with greater understanding. That can't be left up to those of you for whom Asia is a passion,' he said.

Dr Henry said the new Australian school curriculum provided a place to start. In July last year, all Australian governments agreed there would be an Asia focus in the curriculum.

Asia, and Australia's engagement with Asia is now one of only three cross-curriculum priorities in the curriculum, providing the framework to embed Asian literacy in our school system. That's an encouraging sign. But more needs to be done, over a sustained period, to ensure that the reality faced by our children in the classroom changes,' he said.

If Australia is to prosper as a result of the shift in economic and cultural activity to our region, Australia has to build its 'Asia-relevant' capabilities. This would require world-class schools, and vocational training, as well as higher education.

'We need to ensure that all Australians can access quality education at all stages of their lives, and that they have a full understanding of Asia's diversity and importance,' Dr Henry said.

'Australians need to be able to look across our neighbourhood, learn from what others are doing well and find ways to work collaboratively with them.'

Ken Henry: Asia is where Australia's future lies.

'Developing that knowledge of Asia from an early age at school should be a priority. We need to enable those who want to know more about Asia to learn—through school, vocational education, higher education and in their workplaces,' he said.

Demand from business would likely play a role too, as it increasingly understood the need for people who could operate in cultures, languages and mindsets other than our own.

Dr Henry said the test would be when people looked back in five or 10 years time and saw how Australia had responded to the White Paper.

'The test will be whether Australians have adopted the new mindset of the Asian Century. Because that is what is required: a new mindset,' he said. 'I get the sense that Australians are ready for this. There's certainly been enormous interest in the White Paper project. But, the idea that Australia's future lies squarely in and with Asia is gaining currency among Australians.

'We seem to have moved on from debates about whether or not Australia is a part of Asia. We seem to have recognised that, whatever the geography, Asia is where Australia's future lies.'

A full copy of Dr Henry's speech is available on the ASAA website.

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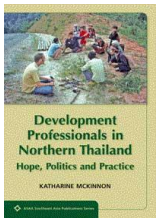
New ASAA series books

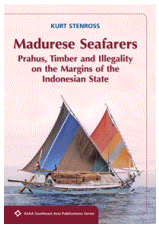
ASAA president Professor Purnendra Jain launched five new books in the ASAA's book series.



Development professionals in Northern Thailand: hope, politics and practice, by Katharine McKinnon, a lecturer in the human geography program at Macquarie University, Sydney, where she teaches Asia–Pacific development and geographic theory.

McKinnon lived in the highlands of northern Thailand as a child and returned at age 24 to work as a volunteer for a local NGO. She draws from her real life experience in the 'field' to raise some serious questions about 'development' as she seeks to come to grips with what this slippery term means, especially for foreign researchers and development professionals working in economically poorer countries. She finds that the majority of the 'development' workers were dedicated to lofty ideals of altruism, emancipation and advocacy for local people, but were resigned to the inevitable failures and shortcomings that emerge when development efforts are co-opted by the powerful hand of geopolitics.

Taking a critical approach to post-development theory, she argues that politics and ideology are intrinsic to so-called 'development' work, and active engagement with the politics of development is essential for professionals hoping to make a difference. This solid work, grounded in ethnographic research, will be valuable in academic and policy fields.

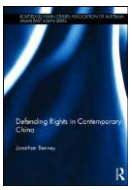


Madurese seafarers: prahus, timber and illegality on the margins of Indonesia, by Kurt Stenross. Stenross lived with the Madurese—one of the great maritime and trading peoples of the Indonesian Archipelago over time—to better understand their traditions and practices. His first visit to Madura in East Java as a Customs officer in 1983 would inspire the 28-year journey that culminated in this seminal work.

Filled with curiosity after that first trip Kurt enrolled as a mature-age student, majoring in Southeast Asian studies. He was passionate about detailing the rich and unique story of the Madura seafarers, convinced that if *he* didn't do it, this tradition would pass into history unrecorded. In 2000 he converted his passion into a PhD study, with extensive travels among the Madurese community and a focus on its distinctive but largely unknown seafarers.

This remarkable study takes readers into the trading villages of Madura, on board the seafarers' traditional *perahu* boats that were powered by wind until the late 20th century. It examines the informal-sector economic niches of this maritime trade, notably cattle, salt and timber, as well as the carriage of people. It argues that the nature of village society, the physical characteristics of the island's coast, the cultural traditions of frugality and self-reliance, and an appetite for risk all contributed to the enduring success of Madurese seafarers and profoundly shaped their trade behaviour.

Stenross collected data during visits to remote ports and unlicensed sawmills in Kalimantan, to *perahu* harbours in Java, and 'wild' beach ports in Madura. He explores the inner workings of Madurese maritime trade during a critical period that brought this village-based transport industry into a modern and increasingly regulated economic environment. Kurt's personal expertise as a skilled carpenter and an experienced small-boat sailor has positioned him well for this insightful study.



Defending rights in contemporary China, by Jonathan Benney. Published in the ASAA's our East Asia Series, its concern is *weiquan* or rights defence. The opening page of the book, narrating the story of the tainted milk scandal in 2008 and a concerned father's campaign to make information publicly available through a new social media, engages readers right from the start. As Benney writes, 'the history of the *Weiquan* idea sheds light

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New ASAA series books

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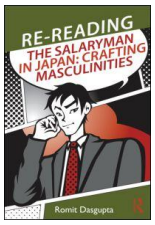
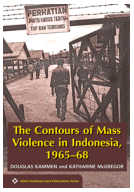
on the emergence of new stakeholders in Chinese politics and society. Since the early 1990s lawyers, NGOS and independent social campaigners have become increasingly prominent'. Yet defending rights is important in China not just because of the political ramifications of its campaigns, but also because of the strategies its activists have used. In recent years, lawyers and legal campaigners have used the idea of rights defence to attack the party-state. While rights defence may not pose an immediate threat to the authority of the party-state, it is nonetheless an important symbol of a developing social pluralism in China. The rights campaigns reflect the changing lives and priorities of Chinese citizens, and their increasing capacity to shape their own civic discourse to achieve diverse goals.

Two books soon to be released:



Re-reading the salaryman in Japan: crafting masculinities, by Romit Dasgupta, will be published this month by Routledge in the East Asia Series. Dasgupta immediately pulls the reader into his story, with his opening paragraph recalling his first encounter with a book on 'salaryman' at a bookstand at Narita Airport. His descriptions of Japan's salaried workers as 'corporate soldiers', of *shakaijin*, OL, *hikikomori* and so forth will ring true for readers familiar with Japanese society through living in Japan.

The focus of the book is masculinity—specifically corporate masculinity—in Japan through the concept and practice of 'salaryman'. As a book exploring the role of gender in corporate culture, it is the first to focus on men; many studies have focussed on women in the workplace in Japan. Given the important role of Japanese corporate culture in Japan's emergence as an industrial power, this volume therefore offers a new way of looking at Japanese business culture and at Japanese men and masculinity. More generally it reveals important recent changes in Japanese society, especially around gendered identity, so I do look forward to reading this book.



The contours of mass violence in Indonesia, 1965–1968: the destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party, edited by Kate McGregor and Doug Kammen, draws together detailed research by a collection of Indonesia scholars into this tragic, downplayed and thus still poorly understood part of Indonesia's modern political history. They explore the dynamics of the violence that swept across diverse provinces of Indonesia for three years from 1965 as the national government moved determinedly through grassroots level to thwart any prospect of the Communist uprising that it feared with dread and contempt.

The detailed examination in these chapters shines a light on the roles of perpetrators and the targets of their violence, as well as on the ongoing legacies of the socially wounding acts in which many Indonesians were forced to become complicit. More than half-a-million Indonesians died at the hands of the army and anti-Communist groups. This book argues for the need to treat all forms of violence across the archipelago as an attack against not only the Indonesian Communist Party but also against the social forces and ideas associated with President Sukarno and his Guided Democracy approach.

The authors explore four central issues: the impact and interpretations of the September 30th Movement both within and outside Indonesia; the roles of military and civilian perpetrators; short- and long-term detention; and legacies of the violent assault on the political left.

Kammen is an assistant professor in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. McGregor is a senior lecturer in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne.

More details of these books and about the ASAA series are available from the ASAA website.

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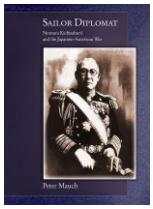
Conference launch for UWS authors

Seven new books by University of Western Sydney (UWS) authors from three of the university's academic groupings were launched at the ASAA 19th Biennial Conference by Professor Robert Lee, Convenor of History and Political Thought at the university's School of Humanities and Communication Arts.

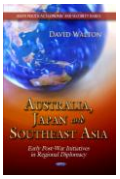
From the School of Humanities and Communication Arts

Ashgate research companion to Chinese foreign policy (Ashgate 2012), by Emilian Kavalski, a senior lecturer in International Relations and Asian Studies, provides an overview of Chinese foreign policy, drawing a vivid picture of China's international interactions. The collection provides a relevant point of departure for anyone interested in learning about Beijing's external affairs.



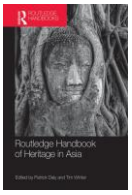
Sailor diplomat: Nomura Kichisaburo and the Japanese–American War. (Harvard East Asian Monograph Series 2011) by lecturer Peter Mauch, examines the career of Japan's pre-Pearl Harbor ambassador to the United States. It connects his experiences as a naval officer to his service as foreign minister and ambassador, and later as 'father' of Japan's Maritime Self Defence Forces and proponent of the US–Japanese alliance. Mauch draws on rarely accessed materials from Japanese archives as well as from personal papers, including Nomura's, which he discovered serendipitously in 2005 and which, through his initiative, are now housed in the National Diet Library.

Australia, Japan and Southeast Asia: early post-war initiatives in regional diplomacy (Nova 2012), by senior lecturer David Walton examines how Japan and Australia, both with pasts tainted by colonialism and emerging from wartime experiences characterised by extreme hostility and suspicion, began to cooperate diplomatically on Southeast Asia. Indonesia, and Dutch New Guinea, where so recently Australians and Japanese has been exchanging fire, became the focus of a joint search for security of the two former enemies.



From the Institute for Culture and Society

Routledge handbook of heritage in Asia (Routledge 2012), by senior research fellow Tim Winter**,** coedited with Patrick Daly, is the first major volume to examine the conservation of Asia's culture and nature in relation to the wider social, political and economic forces shaping the region today. It examines heritage, tourism, archaeology, geography and development.



Religion, politics and gender in Indonesia: disputing the Muslim body (Routledge 2012), by research fellow Sonja van Wichelen, examines the heated debates in Indonesia since 1998 about women's rights, female political participation, sexuality, pornography, veiling and polygamy. She argues that public debates on Islam and gender in contemporary Indonesia only partially concern religion, reflecting shifting moral conceptions of the masculine and feminine body in their intersection with changing class dynamics, national identity and global consumerism.

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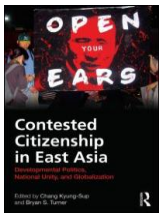
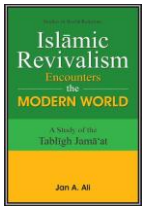
From the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies



Contested citizenship in East Asia: developmental politics, national unity, and globalization (Routledge 2011) by Bryan Turner, Director of the UWS Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies and Presidential Professor of Sociology at the City University of New York, coedited with Kyung-Sap Chang of Seoul National University, argues that theories of citizenship from the West rarely have been systematically incorporated into the political ideology and administrative framework of Asian governments.

Development has always taken precedence. These essays discuss the tensions between rapid economic growth and citizenship.



Islamic revivalism encounters the modern world: a study of Tabligh Jama'at (Sterling 2012), by Jan Ali, a sociologist of religion and lecturer in Islam and Modernity, argues that contemporary Islamic revivalism is a defensive reaction to modernity. Contrary to popular belief, it does not seek to destroy modernity. Jan argues that contemporary Islamic revivalism is an attempt to rescue Muslims from their modern malaise through selective use of modern ideological and technical means.

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Symposium: Labour Migration in the Asia–Pacific

Papers are being called for a research symposium on the history of labour migration in the Asia–Pacific region.

The symposium—'Labour migration in the Asia–Pacific: race, history and heritage'—will be held at the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra from **14–15 February 2013**. The symposium is being organised by the ANU's Institute for Professional Practice in Heritage and the Arts.

In recent times, temporary migrant labour has been on the agenda of many of the countries of the Asia–Pacific, with governments of both sending and receiving countries interested in understanding, controlling and improving labour migration.

The history of labour migration in the Asia–Pacific region has been extremely rich and its impact on peoples, places and things profound. Examples include Indian plantation workers in Malaysia and Fiji; Indonesian pearl divers, Afghan cameleers and Chinese gold miners in Australia; and Mexican workers in California's agriculture sector.

Besides examining questions of race, ethnicity and cultural history, the symposium aims to examine a wide range of tangible and intangible heritage forms, including monuments, tales, traditions, commemorative events, festivals, artworks, photography, performance art, cinema and literature.

The focus of the event will be interdisciplinary, comparative and regional in focus. The symposium will provide an innovative opportunity for a broad range of people working in government, cultural institutions and academia to hear from leading experts on this topic which, given the ongoing debate on the national and global politics of labour migration, is becoming increasingly important.

Further details of this event will be available soon on the IPPHA website.The call for papers deadline is **1 November 2012**. Abstracts of 200 word with title and author biodata should be sent to the convenor, Dr Marshall Clark or to ippha@anu-edu.au.

Asian artists strong show at Sydney Biennale

By Annette Van den Bosch

'Human beings are highly dependent upon our often overlooked relationships with others and with our common world.'—Catherine de Zegher and Gerald McMaster, Artistic Directors.

The 2012 Biennale of Sydney includes a strong showing of Asian artists and the Asian diaspora. This is significant as the Sydney Biennale, the third longest-running biennale after Venice and Sao Paolo is showcasing the vitality and globalisation of Asia.

The theme at the Art Gallery of New South Wales was 'In finite blue planet'. Subhankar Banerjee, whose artwork and writing have focused on the fragility of the North American Arctic environment exhibited stunning large photographic works with high horizon, subtle colours and textures and aerial perspectives. *Caribou tracks on the tundra* was a haunting image of countless migrations across familiar territory. He shifted the viewers' perspective to be inclusive of the caribou and to dispel human perceptions of frozen wasteland.

Bannerjee's work was exhibited in a room whose dominant image was an enormous video image by Guido Van den Werve of an icebreaker ship looming out of focus and fog but preceded by a solitary human figure walking across the ice. The low point of view meant that the ship dominated the image and the room, the soundtrack was subdued and the overall effect was magnetic. The title, *Everything is good*, is ambivalent but suggests the interaction between the sea ice, the ship and the human can by positive, when all cooperate, a maxim for the survival and achievements of The Netherlands, and Arctic cultures over centuries. Subhankar Banerjee's book, *Arctic voices: resistance at the tipping point*, showing the extent of his research and field work, was available in the room, as well.

Yun-Fe Ji's seminar session at the gallery was called Utopia. He was personally exiled from China following 4 June 1989, living for 20 years in the United States. He posed the question: how does managing the future and history affect us? He referred to the Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square, exile and Chinese history. Of the three works he exhibited, *The Three Gorges Dam migration* was the longest scroll showing his central notion of displacement and rural migration.

Subhankar Banerjee' s photo of migrating caribou.

To make these works, Ji returned to Beijing in 2009 to work with 20 woodcarvers who had been displaced to the city. He used traditional Chinese ink to print the woodblock scrolls in the subdued colours of the migrants' clothes. The watercolour ink was printed on Xuan Zhi paper then mounted on silk. Ji said that the layering of time in ink painting referred to past painters and the vernacular, but was an important part of contemporary art.

Yu-Fe Ji's scroll of *The Three Gorges Dam migration*.

The narrative was depicted in many scenes and through very individualised characters and events so close looking was part of its fascination. Ji included the story of a particular village, in another scroll, *The move of the village Wen*. All the women and old farmers were packed and ready to move their few belongings the next morning, when a great wind arose and lifted everything into the sky before dumping it back on the ground.

In his scrolls, Ji depicts the archetypal character of flooding along the Yangzte, and many earlier attempts at water management in China under Soviet influence, some with disastrous consequences because of silt deposits. But the major displacement was for the Three Gorges Dam. His figures are arranged together, drawn from every age group, but looking anxiously in every direction, not sure of what to expect. The faces of the aged are shown etched with past cares and memories of similar events. I was

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Asian artists strong show at Sydney Biennale

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struck by the work's relevance to the anxieties of people in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam that China will dam the upper reaches of the Mekong River, which is so essential to their economies and ecosystems.

Pinaree Sanpitak's *Anything can break*.

At the Museum of Contemporary Art, the largest, most sophisticated installation was done by Pinaree Sanpitak and her technical team. Pinaree's sculptures, previously shown at the Asia–Pacific Triennial (APT), were large human-scale woven shapes. In the current exhibit, handmade paper shapes and blown glass breast forms are suspended from a vast grid which activates sound as the audience moves underneath. My first thought was of some of the installations by Susan Hiller, the established artist whose work is shown at the Tate in London. Pinaree's exquisite paper parcels are distinctively Asian, the glass breasts echo her earlier forms, the title *Anything can break* (2011) suggests breaking rain and the letting down of breast milk. This work is an outstanding achievement and a crowd pleaser.

Another Thai artist, Kamin Lertchaiprasert, whose work (2004–06) has also been shown at the APT presents 365 miniature figures made from bank notes, titled *The bird has feathers, the man has friends.* The individual forms remind the viewer of votive Buddhas left at temples, except for their ingenuity and diversity of form. Kamin calls his sculptures 'Vipassana meditation, a form of life-learning and living in the present'. The viewer must take the time to look at these delightfully various sculptures in a form of meditation similar to the artist. The maturity and confidence of Thai artists is the result of sustained support for university art schools, collectors and museums, as well as sophisticated art criticism published in newspapers and magazines.

Phatawan Suwannakudt's work, *Not for sure* (2012) is a play on her Thai heritage and Australian citizenship. Typical images of elephants and lotus are drawn in pink ink outlines on suspended scrolls covered in brown Thai script. Other hangings are transparent paper with coloured ink dragged the length of the scroll, a quite abstract Wwestern image, similar for example to Gerhardt Richter. She has also made fabric and paper collage hangings on flattened cardboard boxes so the whole installation suggests Thai Western hybridity. Another of her paintings, a typical Australian suburban house drawn in ink and watercolour in Thai decorative style was presented recently to the Thai Prime Minister, by the Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard.

There are many other important and interesting artists exhibited at the current Sydney Biennale whose work I will review in the October edition of *Asian Currents*.

Dr Annette Van den Bosche is an adjunct research fellow at Monash Asia Institute.

4A presentation at Shanghai biennale

Sydney's 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art has been selected to present the Sydney pavilion at the 9th Shanghai Biennale, which will run from 1 October at the new Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art.

The theme of the biennale, 'Reactivation', looks at the vitality of contemporary art, but also focuses on the topics of art, urban space, communities, daily life and cultural exchange.

4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art has been invited by the Shanghai Biennale to develop the Sydney pavilion to explore the dynamic relationships and histories shared between Sydney and Shanghai, and the role that cities play within global cultural exchanges.

The Shanghai Biennale is the premier arts event in Shanghai and the largest international arts event of its kind in mainland China. Further information: Yu Ye Wu or call 0432 810 388.

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Japanese Film Festival dates announced

The 16th Japanese Film Festival dates have been announced for the two flagship cities of the festival, Sydney and Melbourne.

The festival will be held in Sydney from 14 to 25 November at Event Cinemas George Street, and in Melbourne from 29 November to 9 December in two locations, Hoyts Melbourne Central and ACMI Cinemas, Australian Centre for the Moving Image.

Within the programs of these two cities, award-winning manga turned live-action, *Space brothers* will be featured in this year's line-up, along with Japanese Academy Award-winning director Takashi Yamazaki's (*Always 1, 2 and 3*) newly animated feature *Friends: Naki on the Monster Island*.

The Japanese Film Festival will also travel with free abridged programs to two new Australian cities, Darwin and Cairns with dates to be confirmed. This is in addition to the already touring cities of Perth, Hobart and Canberra. Films travelling to these cities are the popular teenage romance, *Hanamizuki* and the tear-jerker, *Star Watching Dog*.

Since starting in 1997 with three free film screenings by festival director Masafumi Konomi, the festival has grown to become one of the largest Japanese film festivals outside Japan.

The festival is presented and run by the Japan Foundation, Sydney. For more information, contact: Evon Fung, 02 8239 0058 or Amanda Thompson, 02 8239 0079.

Photos: Left: ©2012 Space Brothers Production Committee; right: ©2011 Friends: Naki on the Monster Island Production Committee

Coming events

Living Histories 3 interview series. Organised by the Japan Foundation, Sydney, the series explores the lives and work of extraordinary people whose stories link Australia and Japan. Now in its third year, the series is presented by Dr Ian McArthur, a writer, academic and former Tokyo correspondent. Forthcoming interviews are**: 31 August**, fashion designer Akira Isogawa; **14 September**, children's book artist Junko Morimoto and writer **Teruko Blair.** Further information: Elicia O'Reilly, 02 8239 0060, or elicia_oreilly@jpf.org.au.

Indonesia Update, Conference 2012, 'The state of education', 21–22 September 2012, Coombs Lecture Theatre, HC Coombs Building no. 9, corner Fellows Road and Garran Road, Australian National University, Canberra. The conference is free of charge. See website for the full program and to register**.**

The OzAsia Festival, Adelaide Festival Centre, 14–30 September. The festival will feature a range of performances, events and exhibitions showcasing Asian artists and Australian artists who identify with an Asian heritage. See website for further information.

Conference: 'The dimensions of the Indian Ocean world past: sources and opportunities for interdisciplinary work in Indian Ocean world history, 9th–19th centuries', the Western Australian Maritime Museum, Victoria Quay, Fremantle, 12–14 November 2012 . The conference will provide a forum for a rare interdisciplinary discussion between archaeologists, historians, ethnographers and geographers about the materials, problems and opportunities for interdisciplinary work on the Indian Ocean world from the 9th to the 19th century. See website for further information.

Fellowships and grants

Australia-Netherlands Research Collaboration

The Australia–Netherlands Research Collaboration would like to announce that the guidelines and selection criteria for the 2012 round of Overseas PhD Travel Fellowship Funding are now available, and have been posted at www.aust-neth.net.

If you are currently enrolled in a PhD program at an Australian university, and are researching Southeast Asia you are eligible to apply. Funding is available to conduct specific, defined tasks in The Netherlands related to your PhD. These tasks could

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Fellowships and grants

Australia-Netherlands Research Collaboration

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include fieldwork, consulting an archive or library, engaging in language or disciplinary study, or consulting academic experts. PhD projects should address topics related to the humanities or social sciences.

Funds will cover economy class return travel between Australia and The Netherlands plus a living allowance for a period of between one and six months.

The research must occur within the term of the PhD enrolment, and take place in the period October, 2012–December, 2013. Up to four fellowships will be offered in this round.

Closing date is **Friday, 31 August 2012**. For further information contact Helen.McMartin@anu.edu.au, or on 02 6125 0693.

Japan Study Grants

The annual Japan Study Grants are now open at National Library of Australia (NLA).

The NLA offers the annual grants under the auspices of the Harold S. Williams Trust Fund. The grants were established to support interstate scholars and researchers whose work would benefit from access to the Japan-related collections of the library.

Grants are offered for periods of up to four weeks commencing in January each year. **The closing date for applications is 30 September 2012.**

Who can apply?

Japan Study Grants are open to postgraduate students, academic researchers, teaching staff and independent scholars in any discipline, based outside the Australian Capital Territory or Queanbeyan who can demonstrate a need to use the National Library's Japanese or Japan-related collections for their research. Priority consideration will be given to applicants from centres where there are few or no library resources in the Japanese language. Japan Study Grants are open to adults of any age and citizenship but applicants must be resident in Australia.

Grant holders will receive an honorarium of $1000 a week to cover accommodation and living costs in Canberra, together with a return economy class air fare or equivalent for travel between the grant holder's home within Australia, to Canberra.

They will be provided with a desk in the Asian Collections reading room, access to the book stacks and free photocopying. International travel will not be funded.

The principal selection criteria are:

- academic record of the applicant as shown in application
- referee reports

Priority consideration will be given to candidates:

- who are based in centres where there are few or no library resources in the Japanese language
- who can demonstrate a need to use the National Library's Japanese or Japan-related collections for their research
- whose proposed study is best able to be supported by the National Library's Japanese and Japan-related collections.

Application form

For further information, contact:

Mayumi Shinozaki
Head, Japanese Collections
National Library of Australia
Canberra ACT 2600

Tel: +61 2 6262 1615

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