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Australia and Japan—suffering 'Galapagos syndrome' over whaling

The resolution of the whaling dispute between Australia and Japan needs a broader perspective from both sides.

By Yoko Harada

The whaling dispute between Australia and Japan is odd. For the majority of the population of both countries, whaling is not an everyday concern. But when the issue is raised, it never fails to trigger strong emotions.

Both the Australian and Japanese governments call the dispute a 'disagreement between friends' and, on the surface, their bilateral relationship appears to be business as usual.

The most recent high-level diplomatic event, in Sydney on 14 September 2012, was the fourth '2+2' meeting—talks between foreign and defence ministers from both countries. Following the meeting a communique proudly stated:

Australia and Japan are natural strategic partners sharing common values and

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Australia, Japan suffer Galapagos syndrome

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interests, including a commitment to democracy, the rule of law, protection of human rights and open markets.

The channels for both countries to have a frank dialogue are supposed to be fully open. But when it comes to whaling there seems to be no common ground. They may be at the same negotiation table, but they are not having a productive discussion. It appears that both parties are suffering 'Galapagos syndrome'.



Japanese whaling ship. Photo: Australian Customs Service.

The term Galapagos syndrome has been circulating in Japan for the past few years to depict the Japanese

society's inward looking psyche and attitudes. It was first applied to the Japanese mobile phone sector, which had developed highly sophisticated products but became less competitive internationally as it focused heavily on its domestic market. Like species on the Galapagos Islands, the sector developed uniquely in isolation. Now some say the syndrome can be seen in wider Japanese society, as if the country is going against the current of globalisation.

This inward-looking attitude is not unique to Japan. Australia's position on the whaling dispute seems also to be an example of the syndrome. On the one hand, a sense of victimisation is driving Japan to escape into its comfort zone, claiming the uniqueness of its culture. On the other hand, Australia is too obsessed by its antiwhaling agenda and failing to look squarely at some inconvenient facts relating to Japan's whaling activities.

The Australian media often follow this trend by releasing misleading information that does not necessarily reflect the reality of whaling in Japan. For example, it was reported in November 2011 that

This inward-looking attitude is not unique to Japan. Australia's position on the whaling dispute seems also to be an example of the syndrome.

the Japanese research whaling fleet in the Antarctic had been given an extra 2.28 billion yen (AUD\$28 million) to upgrade its security measures. Because the source of the fund was Japan's Third Supplementary Budget of FY2011, which was mainly to cover the recovery cost of the Great East Japan Earthquake earlier that year, the extra fund was reported as a 'disaster relief fund'. This caused confusion and much controversy because it was reported in Australia that the fund was part of Australia's donation to Japan for earthquake recovery.

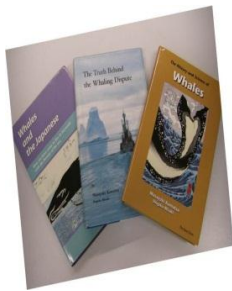
The media failed to clarify the confusion by also reporting false comments by the leader of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, Paul Watson, who described the fund as donation money. Reported comments from Australian politicians such as '[Australians would be horrified to find the funds helping to finance whale killing](#)' (former Australian Greens leader Bob Brown), or '[... the Federal Government urgently needed to ensure no donated funds had gone to support whaling](#)' (Opposition environment spokesman Greg Hunt) no doubt contributed to the negative image of Japan in Australia. Even the executive director of Greenpeace Japan, Sato Junichi, had to [tweet](#): 'I'm against scientific research whaling but this kind of lie should not be circulated'.

Although the source of the extra fund was obvious, the issue remained ambiguous and contributed to the revival of Australia's publicly popular antiwhaling stance. Australia's hardline policy on whaling, which is based on its own circumstances and beliefs, should be respected. However, it cannot avoid engaging with Japan's circumstances. At the moment, Australia's antiwhaling calls sound like a monologue.

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Some of the resources published in English by the Institute of Cetacean Research.

Japan now seems to have withdrawn into its shell on the issue. In the past, Japan tried to engage in the whaling debate outside the country to make its policy heard. The Institute of Cetacean Research in Tokyo used to publish material in both Japanese and English and successive fisheries agency officials also briefed

foreign media reporters in English. However, Japan appears to have run out of energy in the need to keep explaining. Discussions on the whaling issue now tend to occur in domestic circles where there is a sympathetic audience.

One example is a Japanese television documentary called *Kujira to ikiru* (Live with whales). The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) production was broadcast on 22 May 2011. Filmed in a small fishing town, Taiji, in western Japan, the documentary was the antithesis of the Academy Award-winning American documentary *The cove*, which documented the dolphin drive hunting in Taiji from a strong antiwhaling perspective and provoked much controversy.

With its 400-year history of whaling, Taiji suddenly found itself caught up in an international dispute, motivating NHK to produce its version of the town's story. However, the NHK documentary was not a direct 'hit-back' at *The cove*. The overall impression of *Kujira to ikiru* was that it was significantly inward looking. The film documented how the Taiji fishermen and their families endured severe harassment about killing whales and the leader of the fishermen tells his colleagues to be patient and to

What Australians who object to Japanese whaling in the Antarctic are not aware of is that their condemnation echoes that of many people in Japan.

bear the hardship. A young fisherman quietly expresses his discomfort about foreign activists saying that he and his fellow fishermen are 'killing' whales. He uses the Japanese word *itadaku*, a humble form of 'have', which contains a sense of respect and gratitude, to explain that their whaling activity is not harvesting lives in a wasteful way. The



A selection of whale meat dishes. Photo taken by the author recently in Wadaura, one of the four coastal whaling towns in Japan.

message of *Kujira to ikiru* was clearly directed to its Japanese audience and showed clear nationalistic sentiment.

As a consequence of Australia and Japan both suffering Galapagos syndrome, a productive

dialogue between them is not occurring. It appears there will be no immediate solution to the whaling dispute and it will remain a sticking point in the relationship between the two countries.

Fortunately, a thorough investigation of the whaling debate on both sides indicates a possible point of compromise. While it is understood that most Australians support their government's antiwhaling policy, what they actually object to varies. Some condemn the entire practice of whaling, some reject commercial whaling and others are particularly against Japan's 'scientific research whaling' in the Antarctic. The scientific whaling is often

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described as a disguise for commercial whaling. As Australians feel that the Antarctic is their backyard, the Japanese whaling upsets them. But what Australians who object to Japanese whaling in the Antarctic are not aware of is that their condemnation echoes that of many people in Japan.

In Japan, there is a basic understanding of and support for small-scale whaling in its own coastal area. A strong cultural tie between a few fishing towns and whaling is respected. However, several parties strongly question the tax-funded operation in the Antarctic, with some even calling for the suspension of whaling there.



Japanese whale bell.

Meanwhile, in Japan, the attention of many citizens is on attacks from foreign non-governmental environmental organisations. While the majority of

Japanese people are said to be not particularly interested in the whaling issue or whale meat consumption, they condemn what they think are the actions of 'violent and arrogant activities' by some foreign NGOs.

Although environmental activism is, generally speaking, accepted in Australia, there is similar condemnation of the extreme actions of some NGOs. When three environmental activists from Western Australia, assisted by Sea Shepherd, illegally boarded a Japanese whaling ship earlier this year, some Australians, including the Gillard government, expressed their condemnation.

Thus a point of compromise between Australia and Japan on their differences over whaling is not entirely absent. Whether both countries could achieve a breakthrough in the dispute depends on how they approach the issue. The

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whaling dispute is an international dispute and should therefore be solved by negotiation. To start the negotiation, both countries should put their default positions aside and re-examine and rethink the dispute from a wider perspective.

The [words](#) of Australian Greens leader Christine Milne, in another context—the introduction of the carbon tax last year—are appropriate to the whaling dispute:

...so there will be things that you will be delighted about, there will be things that you are disappointed about. That reflects what happens when you have a negotiated agreement. But step back and think big picture for a moment.

Achieving a negotiated settlement is highly challenging but, if they are true 'natural strategic partners', Australia and Japan should be able to do so.

Dr Yoko Harada is an independent researcher who held an Alfred Deakin Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at Deakin University between July 2010 and June 2012. Her research interest is primarily on Australian politics, history and culture. She runs a [blog](#) on whaling.

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Street artist arrest poses sticky challenge for Singapore Government

The Singapore Government is taking its time to decide how to deal with a street artist with a grassroots-level humour.

By Terence Lee

On 3 June 2012, a woman believed to be a young female artist, Samantha Lo, was arrested in Singapore for allegedly pasting stickers on traffic lights and stenciling roads and walls of buildings with grammatically incorrect 'Singlish' phrases like 'My grandfather road' and 'Anyhow press police catch'.

As has typically been the case in the geographically small city-state, she was eventually arraigned by the police shortly after and the state has been considering whether to lay vandalism charges on her since then. Popularly referred to as the Sticker Lady by the Singapore media, the artist, if taken to task, could be fined up to \$2 000 or jailed for up to three years. Thankfully, she's female, which means she will escape corporal punishment via the rattan. She has since been released on bail and allowed to continue her regular work.

This may seem like an insignificant news item in most parts of the world. But it is a sticky test and challenge for Singapore leaders past and present, who have painstakingly built a squeaky clean global image for the Southeast Asian city, state, country and nation all rolled into one.

The perception that Singapore is a state obsessed with order—what I have referred to in my 2012 book *The media, cultural control and government in Singapore*¹—is both deliberate as well as incidental to the broader political aims of the founding leaders (primarily, the founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew).

In the book, I argue that the government in Singapore has been

incredibly successfully in extracting broad compliance and discipline from its citizens via the application of governmentality (Foucault's 'conduct of conduct' discourse) and cultural control, most prominently exhibited in its ability to tame the mass media since the late 1960s.

This 'taming' of the media does not just occur within Singapore's borders (i.e. domestic media). It has also been successfully extended, especially during the 1990s and much of the 2000s, to the foreign press and global media. This has



Samantha Lo—
artist or
vandal?

been achieved through a series of legislative amendments that would grant Singapore regulators power to curtail circulation of printed material, ban publications, black out broadcast signals or block online access to global media sites.

Government leaders themselves have also been litigiously—and mostly successfully—protecting their turf, suing any writer, editor or publisher for libellous or defamatory comment that could be interpreted as harming Singapore's reputation or interests.

While proudly flagging their support for a free press, freedom of speech and information, and democratic values, the majority of global media owners would cave-in to the government's demands, because Singapore has become an affluent and significant global financial and business base where one has to be to tap the fast-growing greater Asian economy. While this does not mean that there are or have been no reports or writings that are critical of Singapore, it has the effect of ensuring that most Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans alike would err on the conservative side more often than otherwise.

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What has happened over the years is that Singapore has nurtured the next generation of leaders with an inability to tolerate social, cultural and political dissent. The vast majority of People's Action Party (PAP) leaders/ministers are technocrats or career bureaucrats, or are ivory-tower high academic achievers who have strong inclinations to abide strictly by rules. After all, that was—and still is to a large extent—the way they have 'succeeded' in the Singapore system.



Photo: Samantha Lo's Tumblr page.

Every now and then, someone comes along to challenge the status quo, and the response has always been 'hitting a tiny bug with a sledgehammer' with over-the-top penalties. The oft-cited example is the ongoing ban on chewing gum in Singapore (which was quietly overturned in

2004 to allow gum of therapeutic value to be sold by pharmacists in Singapore; this was done to appease the American gum giant Wrigleys as part of the US–Singapore Free Trade Agreement).

Singapore's strict vandalism laws gained notoriety in 1994 after American student Michael Fay pleaded guilty to vandalising luxury cars. His sentence of six strokes of the cane was reduced to four after President Bill Clinton intervened. Two years ago, Swiss national Oliver Fricker broke into a high-security train depot to spray-paint graffiti on subway train carriages. His case sparked a national outcry over the lack of security at train depots.

An earlier case, known as the white elephant incident, comes closer to the present Sticker Lady saga. In August 2005, during a minister's visit to the suburban precinct of Punggol South, a resident displeased with the government's decision not to open Buangkok's newly-built train station,

allegedly because it is adjacent to the opposition electorate of Hougang, erected a series of white paper cut-outs of elephants. These were drawn in a cartoon style, symbolically naming the unopened Buangkok station a white elephant.

If the Sticker Lady is charged ... it would also erase decade-long attempts by the Singapore authorities to brand Singapore as creative, fun-loving and a 24/7 global city.

Police began an investigation of the incident as a case of a public display without permit, on the grounds that a complaint was received and that the action would have violated the Public Entertainment Act, for which the maximum penalty is a fine not exceeding S\$10 000.

The police move raised controversy because many people saw the action as a harmless, trivial case not worthy of investigation; and it was also laden with humour. It highlighted public displeasure over the non-operation of the train station after it was built with public funds. It also raised questions on how much freedom of expression the government was willing to tolerate.

A month later, police closed the investigation without pressing charges, but issued a stern warning to the offender, which led the then deputy prime minister Wong Kan Seng to comment: 'We cannot apply the law to some and turn a blind eye to others. If we do, then the law becomes the real white elephant'.

The difference with the most recent Sticker Lady saga is that the current site of political annoyance—the blogosphere cum-social-media along with the arts/cultural community—have started to

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couch this as a debate over street art, vandalism and the limits of artistic licence. This is valid, but the real issue runs deeper into the newly politicised nature of contemporary Singapore society.

If the Sticker Lady is charged, it may mean a moral victory for the rule of law, which a slight majority of Singaporeans would support, but it would also erase decade-long attempts by the Singapore authorities to brand Singapore as creative, fun-loving and a 24/7 global city. One just needs to imagine what effect a negative headline would have on Singapore's economy, business and tourism, especially the much-vaunted Marina Bay 'work and play' venue, along with the integrated resorts and casinos, Formula One racing and much more.

Granted, this story is insignificant to the average person. Many may murmur briefly at the audacity of the Sticker Lady and laugh about the taglines on her stickers. But in the wake of the May 2011 general election, when the PAP recorded its worst electoral performance since it came to power in 1959, the Singapore Government is taking its time to decide how to deal with an artist who has committed an offence by vandalising Singapore's streetscapes—creatively and with strong grassroots humour.

The brief history of 'sticky' situations tells us how the Singapore Government is likely to act. A decision to let Lo off with a 'stern warning' would probably be the outcome—although it is likely to make somewhat of a mockery of how the law is selective and can turn on political whims, or perhaps on social, cultural and political expedience.

Actually, the premise of governmentality and cultural control in Singapore has always relied on expedience rather than moral or legal direction. The government would no doubt provide a terse justification based on how this episode has been an enlightening experience and

The brief history of sticky situations tells us how the Singapore Government is likely to act.

that all artists and those working in the creative industries are encouraged to learn, operate and experiment within an ever-expanding 'free' space that Singapore is fast becoming. The Singapore media will endorse this.

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Asian Studies Review

Asian Studies Review is associated with the ASAA. All research articles have undergone rigorous peer review.

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

The journal focuses on the modern histories, cultures, and societies of Asia and welcomes submissions that adopt a contemporary approach to critical studies of the Asian region.

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North Korea's new trump card

Rare earth metals could be the key to a rich and prosperous state.

By Leonid Petrov

Those who travel to North Korea regularly might have noticed that the last couple of years have brought significant improvement in the country's economic situation. Newly built high-rise apartments, modern cars on the roads and improved infrastructure come as a surprise to visitors. It begs the question, where does Pyongyang get the money from?

The ambitious rocket and nuclear programs that North Korea continues to pursue despite international condemnation are expensive and harmful to its economy. International sanctions continue to bite the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) foreign trade and investment prospects. Regular floods and droughts, animal epidemics and other natural disasters hit the fragile economy even harder. According to expert estimations, the DPRK should have ceased to exist in the mid-1990s, after the Communist bloc collapsed and Kim Il-Sung died. But North Korea has fully recovered after the famine and even shows steady signs of economic growth.

Foreign critics looked everywhere with hope of unravelling the mystery. After 2008 the stalled interKorean cooperation left North Korea without South Korean financial assistance. Western humanitarian aid has also been exhausted or reduced to a number of goods with little market value. Although the volume of North Korea's foreign trade is negligible, the domestic economic situation continues to improve. Pyongyang is routinely suspected of violating international sanctions by trading arms, smuggling drugs, counterfeiting US dollars, and other crimes. These activities would be expected to refill the impoverished state coffers with badly needed foreign exchange. However, antiproliferation operations and bank account arrests

have never disclosed anything criminal nor did they manage to answer the main question: where does the money come from?

In fact, North Korea is sitting on a goldmine. The northern side of the Korean peninsula is well known for its rocky terrain, with 85 per cent of the country composed of mountains. It hosts sizeable deposits of more than 200 different minerals, of coal, iron ore, magnesite, gold ore, zinc ore, copper ore, limestone, molybdenum and graphite are the largest and hold the potential for the development of large-scale mines. After China, North Korea's magnesite reserves are the second largest in the world, and its tungsten deposits are almost the sixth-largest in the world. Still the value of all these resources pales in comparison to prospects that promise the exploration and export of rare earth metals.

Rare earth metals (REMs) are a group of 17 elements found in the earth's crust. They are essential in the manufacture of high-tech products and in green technologies such as wind turbines, solar panels or hybrid cars. Known as 'the vitamins of high-tech industries', REMs are minerals necessary for making everything that we use on a daily basis, such as smartphones, LCDs and notebook computers. Some REMs, such as cerium and neodymium, are crucial elements in semiconductors, cars, computers and other forms of advanced technology. Other types can be used to build tanks and airplanes, missiles and lasers.

South Korea estimates the total value of the North's mineral deposits at more than \$USD 6 trillion. Not surprisingly, despite high political and security tensions, Seoul is showing a growing interest in developing REMs together with Pyongyang. In 2011, after receiving permission from the Ministry of Unification, officials from the Korea Resources Corp (KORES) visited North Korea twice to study the condition of a

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graphite mine. Together with their counterparts from the DPRK's National Economic Cooperation Federation they had working-level talks at the Kaesong Industrial Complex on jointly digging up REMs in North Korea. An analysis of samples obtained in North Korea showed that the type of REMs could be useful for manufacturing LCD panels and optical lenses.

The joint report also revealed that there are large deposits of high-grade REMs in the western and eastern parts of North Korea, where prospecting work and mining have already begun. It also reported that a number of the rare earth elements are being studied in scientific institutes, while some of the research findings have already been introduced in economic sectors. The North built a REM-reprocessing plant in Hamhung in the 1990s but has been unable to put the plant into full operation due to power and supply bottlenecks.

REMs are becoming increasingly expensive, as China, the world's largest rare earth supplier, puts limits on its output and exports. In February, China's exports of REMs exceeded the price of \$USD 1 million per ton, almost a 900 per cent increase in prices from the preceding year. China, which controls more than 95 per cent of global production of REMs, has an estimated 55 million tons in REM deposits. North Korea has up to 20 million tons of REM deposits, but does not have the technology to explore its reserves or produce goods for the high-tech industry. Nevertheless, in 2009 the DPRK's exports of rare metals to China stood at \$US16 million and, as long as someone invests, exports will continue to expand.

This growing rise in REM prices and strong demand gives the young leader Kim Jong-Un a good chance to improve the economic standing of North Korea without actually reforming its economy. Following the example of the Gulf States

and Russia of catching the wind of rising oil prices in their sails, Pyongyang is likely to follow suit, becoming rich and powerful through the exploration and sale of natural resources. The export of REMs will replenish the state coffers, stimulate the loyalty of the elites to Kim Jong-Un's autocratic rule and secure the growth of consumption among the ordinary people. Relations with South Korea, China and Japan are also likely to improve due to the large scale cooperation on exploring, processing and utilising REMs—the minerals of the 21st century.

Pyongyang needs international assistance through joint projects to explore its mineral resources, and mainly its rare metal and rare earth minerals. North Korean and Chinese teams have been cooperating to explore mineral resources in the DPRK for many decades. Seoul has recently expressed interest in working with Pyongyang on mining projects and technological innovations. Perhaps, Japan and Taiwan, which look for alternative REM supplies for their microprocessor and other cutting edge industries, might also decide to contribute to the development of this economically promising venture.

Paradoxically, the promise of Kim Jong-Il might soon come true and North Korea may become a 'rich and prosperous state'—rich in natural resources and empowered by nuclear technologies. In that case, North Korea might not even need to go through a painful and potentially destabilising economic reform. Although the political regime will remain dictatorial, the idea of unification with the South by war or absorption will soon become meaningless. The purges of political elites and the mass starvation of ordinary people in North Korea will cease. Gradually the level of prosperity in the two halves of the divided Korea will start equalising, opening more opportunities for greater exchange and cooperation.

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

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Finding Laos a place in the Asian Century

The rush to develop one of Asia's poorest countries is impoverishing the majority for the benefit of the few.

By Kearnin Sims

As we witness the ongoing economic crisis in Europe, China and India's growing global significance and increasing levels of interregional trade and investment across Asia, it is of little surprise that many people have begun speaking about the rise of an 'Asian Century'.

With the rapid development of transnational roads, railways and telecommunications and the spread of regional trade agreements, such as the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, Asia is tying itself together in increasingly complex ways.

While Asia's rise and its growing interconnections have seen a wealth of scholarly inquiry, the vast majority of this research has focused on the more spectacular examples of Asia's rise—on Singapore, Shanghai, Seoul and Taipei.

But how is one of the region's less globally significant countries, Laos, being positioned—and positioning itself—within an increasingly interconnected Asia?

Representations of Laos as an isolated and unconnected backwater in need of regional connectivity have been a part of the country's history since at least the French colonial era. In colonial Indochina, as in Laos today, the development of regional transport infrastructures such as roads and railways were considered crucial to the promotion of economic growth (or economic extraction) and France's desires to engage in trade relations with southern China.

Although such aspirations for regional connectivity were to an extent put on hold during the Cold War era, over the past three decades the perceived need for Laos to become regionally integrated has grown exponentially.

It was in the early 1980s that the Lao Government began taking the first steps towards liberalising its economy and opening its borders to foreign trade flows. Since then, transforming Laos from a 'landlocked' to a 'landlinked' country has been a key component of the government's efforts to promote foreign investment and provide improved transportation networks for the country's exports.



New developments converge on old markets in Vientiane.

Driven increasingly by private investment and by Official Development Assistance (ODA) that has prioritised infrastructure-led economic growth, regional connectivity in Laos is being pursued in accordance with a technocratic and neoliberal approach to development—an

approach that has shown only a marginal interest in education, healthcare or environmental degradation.

Current connectivity projects underway (or in the pipeline) in Laos include the North-South and East-West economic corridors (transnational highways), the development of Special Economic Zones, numerous airport upgrades, hydropower projects to provide electricity to neighbouring Thailand and ongoing plans to develop a regional railway network linking China to Singapore.

Since 1992, the supposed need for Laos to become increasingly interconnected with wider Asia has seen growing financial (and powerful discursive) support from the Asian Development

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Bank (ADB) through its Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) program, as well as a growth in ODA and foreign direct investment (FDI) from interregional Asian sources. This shift away from traditional Western donors has also seen a growth in private investment and an increase in infrastructure and urban development.

Perhaps the most significant change in Laos' development landscape over the past five years has been the growing interests of China. In 2010 China surpassed both Vietnam and Thailand as Laos' largest source of FDI. Chinese firms are undertaking projects all over northern Laos, from small-scale entrepreneurs selling cheap commodities, to rubber fields, banana plantations, hydropower projects and casino complexes.

In Vientiane, the much talked-about Vientiane New World, World Trade Centre and the That Luang Marshland developments are all contracted to Chinese firms, while in southern Laos the country's largest gold and copper mine is also Chinese-owned. Although not as significant as Japanese aid, Chinese aid has come to play an increasingly influential role in Laos and is now around three times that of US assistance.

Chinese financial assistance is responsible for the current upgrades of Luang Prabang and Vientiane airports, and for the ongoing work to complete the development of the Bangkok–Kunming North–South Economic Corridor. Chinese aid is expected to grow substantially in the next few years and cover as much as 75 per cent of the costs for the Singapore–Kunming high-speed rail project through Laos.

Aside from financial aid and private investment, there has been a growth in both Chinese migrants and Chinese tourists into Laos, and in the number of Lao students and government staff travelling to China.

Korean aid and investment are also coming to play an increasingly influential role. As Laos' fourth-biggest source of FDI, Korean investment has seen ventures into the country's banking sector through the creation of the Indochina Bank, the development of the Korean–Lao Kolao motorcycle company and one of Vientiane's largest apartment complexes.



Resettlement site, Vientiane.

Korean aid has increased by more than 1500 per cent since 1991 and has been responsible for a \$34 million facelift to public space on Vientiane's

riverfront, as well as for hydropower dam construction and the development of a children's hospital.

Future plans for a US\$2 billion urban development near Luang Prabang's heritage core are also being implemented by 10 Korean companies. Other large-scale private investments include the development of a Taiwanese Specific Economic Zone and a Singaporean, Chinese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese megamall that are both under construction in the capital of Vientiane.

Such private sector investments are a growing component of the government's strategy to overcome the country's Least Developed Country status by 2020 and to develop Laos into more than just a 'corridor country' for regional exchange. Unfortunately, the implications of these projects for those adjacent communities have often been a story of poverty creation rather than poverty alleviation.

In order to bring Laos into the region as more than just a crossroads, the government and the ADB have sought to turn its major cities into regional nodes. This has not been a people-focused process; rather it has been concerned with infrastructure and industrial development and the creation of a

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modern urban aesthetic. The result of this postKeynesian spatialisation has been not only to further marginalise the parts of the country that are not within these nodes or corridor sites, but also the growing displacement of the local communities within these key development sites—communities that are 'in the way' of progress and development.

Rather than 'uplifting' the poor, as so much of the rhetoric around these developments suggests, what has often occurred has been their marginalisation (both economically and spatially) to allow modern privatised developments to take place. In Vientiane, for example, the That Luang marshland, Don Chan Island and Nong Chan Lake have all been allocated to Chinese investment projects even though organisations such as the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#) have argued that this will have a negative impact on the prefecture's hydrology, lead to increased flooding and a decrease in the food security of those who fish or grow vegetables in and around these sites.

Both the That Luang and Don Chan Island developments have seen hundreds of families displaced to a relocation site more with extremely poor soil more than 25 km from the city centre. Meanwhile, local markets are being torn down all over the city to make way for 'modern' shopping malls where many of the former small business owners in the area cannot afford to operate. In Luang Prabang, a Korean-owned golf course has seen a whole community displaced (and the imprisonment of villagers who protested against their relocation). The ongoing airport upgrade in the same province has resulted in more than 400 households being displaced, some of which were still living in tents without access to drinking water or electricity more than a year later. At the Chinese-owned casinos in northern Laos, displacement, prostitution, destitution-

inducing gambling debts and reports of murder and torture have been a feature of these developments.

It is clear that a growth in Asian-led FDI and ODA has produced some impressive economic growth figures and brought connectivity to Laos at an increasingly rapid rate. Yet while both private investors and the ADB are quick to tell the 'success stories' of increasing interconnectivity, regional integration has never been the all-inclusive process that these actors like to suggest. As Laos continues to become drawn into the new spatial networks that are constantly emerging across Asia, the story on the ground is one of both increased and decreased mobility, integration and marginalisation, opportunity and disadvantage and inclusion and exclusion. This is not to try to suggest that there are not many people in Laos who do not want to see their country modernised and throw off the shame of Least Developed Country status to become a more prominent player in the Asian Century.

Many people do want to experience the opportunities that, they have been told, regionalism will bring them: greater employment opportunities, improvements in health and education facilities and greater access to the cheap commodities flooding in from China.

The concern is that, under current processes of regionalism in Laos (with their infrastructure obsession, private sector-led wealth accumulation for the non-poor and the linkage of key regional nodes that are located outside of Laos), the desire for modernity and development are, in too many cases, being met with new forms of poverty, marginalisation and disadvantage.

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Delhi's 'exotic' migrants

Migrants from India's northeast put focus on the dynamics of urban change.

By Duncan McDuie-Ra

Neoliberalism takes on a variety of national and subnational forms. In the case of India this has necessitated a shift from the role of the state as provider under Nehruvian socialism, to the role of the state as a champion for private investment and market penetration.

The role of the state in this process is varied at the federal and local levels, and in different sectors of the economy and society. Attempts to transform Delhi are driven by the desire to fashion a 'global city', set out explicitly in the Delhi Development Authority's *Master plan for Delhi 2021*, released in 2007.

The global city aspiration has necessitated a shift in urban logic resulting in the privileging of planned and profit making uses of space and the vilification of informality. The poor, including the working poor, are seen as threats to the sanitised spaces of the global city.

Urban transformation is certainly creating new exclusions, yet scholars and activists have rarely asked how these transformations can include groups that have been historically marginalised or had little engagement with large cities. Northeast migrants are one such group.

The Northeast refers to the territory between Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, which contains eight federal states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

The region is almost completely cut off from the rest of India, joined only by a narrow corridor of land. A large proportion of the population traces their linguistic heritage to Mon-Khmer, Tai, and Tibeto-Burman peoples. Much of the region has been characterised by armed insurgency and counter-insurgency for

the last six decades in the pursuit of separatist demands and for ethnically-based autonomy.

While India contains diverse regions and peoples and a coherent national society is not always identifiable, there is a distance between the Northeast and the rest of India that is qualitatively different to that between other regions and peoples in India. There is a strong belief in both the Indian 'mainland' and in the Northeast that the different states, autonomous units, and peoples grouped together as 'the Northeast' will never be able to be accommodated as part of India in the same ways as other diverse groups of peoples.



Naga migrants practising dance in Deer Park, Delhi.

Historically, those migrating from the Northeast to Delhi went to learn the tools of the Indian bureaucracy and for tertiary education;

Delhi attracted the wealthy, connected and educated from the Northeast. This group of migrants continues to come, but the dramatic growth of migrants from other backgrounds in the last decade is most relevant to this article.

As migration to Delhi is internal and as most tribal migrants don't own property, businesses or vote in Delhi, their population is not accurately recorded. Recent survey data from the North East Support Centre and Helpline puts the number of Northeast migrants in Delhi at approximately 200 000 people accounting for 48.21 per cent of the total population of Northeast migrants in Indian cities—a 12-fold increase since 2005.¹ However this data is limited and is likely to be an underestimate.

Most migrants come to Delhi in their 20s and migrate without their parents;

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though from fieldwork it is clear there is an increase in families migrating to Delhi together, especially from areas affected by armed conflict, such as Manipur.

During fieldwork, migrants gave a number of reasons for leaving the Northeast including seeking refuge from conflict, changing attitudes towards India, and increased connectivity between the frontier and the city. However, most migrants gave the availability of work in retail, hospitality and call centres as the primary reason.

Job opportunities in the Northeast are limited by insurgency and by a number of associated difficulties such as corruption, low levels of investment, capital flight and the proliferation of illegal and semilegal economies. Alongside work, the opportunity to study outside the region is a major impetus for migration.



An example of the growing presence of Northeast shops and food outlets in Delhi.

The availability of work means that migrants from the Northeast can support themselves during study, or support family members to study. Education is sought to gain an edge in labour markets back in the Northeast, especially in the public sector, and to meet changing aspirations and consumer desires.

Furthermore, as Northeast migrants have begun to create a niche in certain labour markets in cities, labour recruiters are travelling to the Northeast to offer jobs in call centres, restaurants, hotels and spas.

Northeast migrants are highly visible (and audible) in call centres and upscale retail. In Indian call centres, workers are trained to 'neutralise' their accents, and call monitoring, scripting, and 'locational masking' are all crucial components of call centre work. This has advantages for Northeast migrants.

For many Northeast migrants, racism characterises their experience of Delhi.

Most Northeasterners from the hill areas attend English medium schooling and literacy rates in hill areas are very high. English is the lingua franca between different ethnic groups. There are other factors affecting language in different parts of the Northeast: for example, Hindi is banned as Manipur domination. As a result most Northeasterners do not have typically Indian-accented English.

Like most junior call centre workers, the bulk of Northeast migrants are unmarried and in their 20s. Most do not have children or have left their children with relatives back home. This makes them able to work shifts timed to serve Australian, European, and North American business hours. As such Northeast migrants have become desirable as a 'flexible' and well-qualified workforce for the burgeoning call centre industry.

In retail, Northeast migrants find work in clothing stores, sports stores, spas and cosmetic stores. They are especially well represented in stores and restaurants that project a global brand image. Women in particular are cast in highly sexualised roles, particularly in fashion stores, restaurants and spas. Many of these women are not from the Himalayas but from Manipur and Nagaland. The highly orientalist labour force constructs a space that is in Delhi but not of Delhi; perfect for 'world-class' aspirants of the middle classes.

Outside the enclosed spaces of malls and call centres Northeast migrants face a number of challenges in their everyday lives in the city. For many Northeast migrants, racism characterises their experience of Delhi. Northeast migrants, particularly those with Mon-Khmer, Tai, or Tibeto-Burman roots, are judged based on ascriptive notions derived from

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their physical features. Northeast migrants look different to the other peoples inhabiting Delhi, and while India contains many communities earmarked as 'others' based on religion, caste and even ethnicity, the nationality of these communities is not under continued suspicion.

For most respondents, racism in Delhi is reflected in the epithet 'chinky'. Respondents found this term integral in their everyday engagement with the city's inhabitants. Respondents reported hearing the term called out in public places, in negotiations in shops and for transport, and used by colleagues or classmates. Most respondents found the term to be deeply racist and hostile.

Epithets matter because they reflect deeply embedded stereotypes about Northeast women and men. Stereotypes are not always negative and have enabled the growth of the labour niche for Northeasterners, yet Northeast women and men have very little control over the ways they are perceived, whether the impacts of these perceptions are positive or negative. Northeasterners are cast as backward and exotic, antinational rebels and as immoral and sexually promiscuous.

Finally, Northeast migrants experience harassment and violence in Delhi. Respondents were adamant that the day-to-day violence that characterises their time in Delhi is continually downplayed in the media, by the authorities and by non-Northeasterners.

Northeasterners feel they are targeted because of their race, they have virtually no recourse to justice and are blamed for the violence they experience. In the pamphlet *Security tips for North East students/visitors in Delhi* issued by the Delhi Police, Northeast women are advised to act and dress more conservatively. The pamphlet reads: 'Revealing dress to be avoided. Avoid lonely road/bylane when dressed scantily. Dress according to sensitivity of the local populace.'² Respondents found this pamphlet and its sentiments

amusing but also instructive of the ways in which they are viewed. Northeast women are held responsible for the sexual harassment they have to endure and the perpetrators are often ignored.

The case of Northeast migrants in Delhi complicates the exclusionary narrative and forces sharper focus on the intricate dynamics of urban change. It also shows the ways in which the city and the periphery are connected through the neoliberal transformation of urban India, as well as the limits of this connectivity.

Northeast migrants are not the only beneficiaries of these changes, yet their prominence in the consumer and service industries and the impact this has had on the flows and profile of migrants from the frontier to urban India make them the ideal case for analysing these changes.

In the case of Northeast migrants in Delhi, their economic inclusion in the city appears to have had little effect in spaces farther afield. Yet Northeast migrants are not simply 'victims of the city' and have created their own places, networks, and neighbourhoods. As these communities continue to grow, and as migrants return to the Northeast after time spent in the city, the interconnectedness of frontier and heartland in rapidly changing India is thickening.

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Duncan McDuie-Ra is Associate Professor in Development Studies at the School of Social Sciences and International Studies at the University of New South Wales. His most recent books are *The politics of collective advocacy in India: tools and trap* (Sterling Va: Kumarian, 2011) coauthored with Nandini Deo, and *Northeast migrants in Delhi: race, refuge and retail*, University of Amsterdam Press/ IIAS Monograph Series, 2012.

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Beyond cricket, curry and Commonwealth.

Macquarie University develops a brand for India

By John Simons

By 2009 Macquarie University had a strong international strategy which, over the years, had been exceptionally successful in attracting students from over 100 different countries—the majority from China and then from other east and southeast Asian countries.

It was notable, however, that the number of students from India was quite low, and this seemed to me to reflect a bigger pattern in Australia–India relations. There were plenty of business links and other partnerships, but at the highest level relationships were not strong. In addition, the rise of India and the geopolitical shift that this entails seemed not well understood.

When I arrived at the university in late 2009 as executive dean of the Faculty of Arts, I determined to do something about this problem both for Macquarie and, in a small way, for the larger benefit of Australia. And so I developed a concept called 'Ektaal—The Great India Project'.

Initially, *Ektaal* was an Arts project, but it subsequently became the university's strategy and brand for India. Its components are:

- an India research centre bringing together colleagues from across the Faculty of Arts and beyond and with three main themes—health, music and performance, and migration. This was supported early on by a Macquarie University scholarship for a doctoral project on the demography of the Indian community in Australia since 1960 and the grant of an Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) chair, which will commence in mid-2013
- an 'Indianising' of the curriculum, especially through the strengthening of existing provision in Sanskrit and the development of a Hindi program. A longer-term intention is to develop

a joint MA program with an Indian university

- the use of local Indian communities for support and networking, and the hosting of cultural events (one pleasing outcome is a donation from the Bengali Association of New South Wales to develop an Indian garden as a landscape for a bust of Rabindranath Tagore—a gift to the university from the government and people of India)
- the development of a volunteering program (*Hath Milao*). All Macquarie students must complete some form of volunteering activity as part of their degree and we work with a charity in India to deliver *Hath Milao*.

These are the operational elements of the strategy—but they were formed from a number of higher level strategic considerations. For example:

- India is not China. While this sounds glib, it seems many Australian approaches to India founder on the failure to recognise the crucial differences between China and India. Recently the vice-chancellor of another Australian university, referring to his university's new venture in India, began his remarks by saying 'India is like China'. This is not a good start. The question of 'Chindia' is another matter, and as *Ektaal* has developed we have built another project, SPARC (the Soft Power Advocacy and Research Centre), to look specifically at the Chindia space.
- *Ektaal* is about partnership, not about recruiting students. Of course, the university wishes to recruit students from India, but it has well-established mechanisms for international recruitment and *Ektaal* is not formally part of those. *Ektaal* is concerned with building research links, student exchange and joint ventures. For example, in November 2013 the final memorandum of understanding will be signed with the

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Confederation of Indian Industry linking their part in the [india @ 75](#) project with an \$11.4 million *Ektaal* scholarship fund designed to support the delivery of the india @ 75 objectives through PhD study at Macquarie. The university was also the founding sponsor of the Australia India Youth Dialogue.



Ektaal would go beyond cricket, curries and Commonwealth.

We decided that *Ektaal* would go beyond cricket, curry and the Commonwealth to concentrate on the interwoven future of two changing nations of very different scales and characters travelling together into the Asian Century. While it is true that the

Australian cricketer Brett Lee generously acted pro bono as a brand ambassador in *Ektaal* publicity, this was designed to give the brand some instant recognition and status and not to characterise its main thrust.

The future of Australia is intimately connected with the future of India—but India's future of India depends rather less on what happens in Australia. This asymmetry and its potential consequences is something that *Ektaal* seeks to address by developing a mature and functional dialogue with Indian partners.

Another strategic consideration was that funding for *Ektaal* projects would come from private and corporate sponsors and that, in explaining the project, we would develop a 'value proposition' around partnership and association, to attract industry and business support. We were fortunate in attracting a \$1 million private donation to launch SPARC early in the campaign.

Launched in early 2010, *Ektaal* is now about two-and-half-years old. How has it

travelled and what have been its successes and failures?

The first year was about building a network and partnership base. We recognised the need for a team of opinion formers who had influence within the Australian Indian community and in India, and we spent a lot of time developing this before we addressed India itself. A number of Indian professionals and business people gave their time to form a steering and advisory group and a sponsorship group, and many meetings were held with business organisations and individuals. At these meetings, a professionally produced *Ektaal* film was shown and I gave a presentation setting out the *Ektaal* value proposition.

The formal launch of the project, at a cocktail party on a cruise ship on Sydney Harbour, was entirely funded by a

It seems many Australian approaches to India founder on the failure to recognise the crucial differences between China and India.

sponsor. The meetings universally attracted positive interest and, in some cases, promises of sponsorship—but as yet we have not secured a major donation. Although the climate for fundraising is not propitious, I expect the pledges we have received will be honoured eventually.

Also important was the support of the Indian High Commissioner, Her Excellency Mrs Sujatha Singh, and the Indian Consul-General, Mr Amit Das Gupta, who understood immediately what we were trying to achieve. Both helped us to find potential partners and in-kind support such as the ICCR chair and two large donations of India-related books to the university library.

Visits to India began at the end of the first year and continued through the second to develop links with selected

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John Simons—
proud of
achievements.

universities and contacts with individuals and organisations in India that might help with sponsorship or partnerships of other kinds. Progress with links with Indian universities has been slow insofar as specific projects are concerned, but not in terms of more general agreement around the

desirability of working together in the future.

It took me time to understand the extremely hierarchical nature of the Indian university system and the relatively small amount of autonomy that vice-chancellors appear to devolve to senior managers. So meetings with colleagues that did not include the vice-chancellor, or someone who could influence the vice chancellor, were—if not a waste of time—unlikely to be as productive as meetings directly with decision-makers.

Communication could often be very slow. But out of these meetings came the *Ektaal* scholarship package—perhaps the most significant commitment to India made by any Australian university to date. The meetings also resulted in promises of funded scholarships from a multinational doing business in India and links with Indian NGOs and multi-nationals involved in corporate social responsibility projects in India that are still being developed.

Everything is now in place for the first students to participate in *Hath Milao*, the India Research Centre is thriving and we have completed the first iteration of an extended Sanskrit course. Indian cultural and community groups regularly hold events on the Macquarie campus and the

The biggest achievement has perhaps been the establishment of Macquarie as a serious player in the Indian field

Indian garden is blooming around the bust of Tagore.

The biggest achievement has perhaps been the establishment of Macquarie as a serious player in the Indian field and as a university that has adopted a very distinctive long-term approach.

The delivery of every *Ektaal* objective is to some extent dependent on the future of sponsorship offers and a firm partnership in curriculum development with an Indian university—but this was always a three-to-five-year plan, so there is no reason to think that these things won't eventuate.

I feel proud of what has already been achieved and how quickly many of the components have come together. Even if nothing more happens we have step changed the university's approach to India with sustainable structures and processes. And, perhaps, most importantly, we have made a host of new friends.

Professor John Simons is Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts, at Macquarie University.

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Network expanding tertiary language and culture programs

The teaching of Asian languages and cultures in universities will benefit from the legal incorporation of peak networking body.

By Anya Woods, Colin Nettelbeck, John Hajek

The teaching of Asian languages and cultures will be strengthened when the [Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities](#) (LCNAU) becomes a legal entity soon.

LCNAU has continued to strengthen its structures and expand its activities in 2012 and expects to complete the process of becoming a legal entity by the end of the year.

Incorporation as a legal entity is one of several significant developments undertaken by LCNAU this year. Incorporation will ensure LCNAU's longevity and underpin its position as the peak body for languages and cultures in the university sector. It will enable LCNAU to engage more effectively and clearly with universities, government and the media and to gather and distribute funding to facilitate research projects and collaborative activities for the benefit of all language professionals.

International recognition

LCNAU's status as the peak body for all languages in the sector has been recognised nationally and internationally. Over 2012, LCNAU has been regularly consulted by [local media](#) when language matters were discussed. Its developing profile overseas has been noted by well-known international education expert Elspeth Jones, whose article for *The chronicle of higher education* (9 February 2012), entitled '[In praise of languages for internationalisation](#)', mentions the LCNAU's role in the tertiary languages sector in Australia as being parallel or similar to much larger and better-funded bodies in the United Kingdom and the United States.

A second significant structural development in 2012 has been the establishment of a number of working parties or network clusters to share information and methodologies and stimulate collaborative research across the university sector. These [clusters](#) (so called because they gather colleagues who share similar interests) focus on such areas as Technology Enhanced Language Learning, language policy and student pathways, indigenous languages, and leadership and professionalisation.

The engagement of Asian-languages academics in this process has been strong, showing the value of collaboration across all languages, which LCNAU believes to be of benefit to the sector as a whole.

LCNAU's role is parallel or similar to much larger and better-funded bodies in the United Kingdom and the United States.

A third vital mechanism for building the network has been the ongoing development of its website, enhanced over recent months through greater connectivity with social media such as Facebook and Twitter, the addition of more extensive resources and information and a more dynamic, user-friendly layout. Visitors to the site can sign-up to the LCNAU mailing list from the site in order to stay connected with the latest news and developments.

Following LCNAU's 2011's Colloquium, the network has been preparing the best papers for publication. All submissions were subjected to rigorous refereeing to ensure the highest possible quality. The published volume will contain a number of probing studies by Asian languages and cultures specialists, once again

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Language and culture network expanding

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underscoring the strong participation of Asianists in the LCNAU process. Among significant contributions will be:

- a paper by Anne McLaren examining the role of literature in Chinese language teaching
- a discussion of ways to increase the humanistic dimensions of Japanese language education, by Jun Ohashi and Hiroko Ohashi
- a study of the use of web diaries in Chinese language teaching, by Wenying Jiang
- an exploration of the teaching-research nexus through a bilingual Indonesian-English anthology of poems, by Richard Curtis
- an evaluation of a 'scaffolded language curriculum' designed to enhance language-specific and research-specific skills in Japanese, by Kayoko Enomoto.

The volume will soon be available for download from the website and will be officially launched at the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia conference in Perth next month.

LCNAU seeks to initiate and facilitate innovative research on and through languages other than English as well as research that will enhance the professionalisation of tertiary languages educators across the country.

In addition to engaging in its own research on languages of small enrolment and the issue of casualisation in the sector, in 2012 LCNAU offered seed funding to five important projects. One, led by Scott Grant of Monash University, looks at foreign-language anxiety and technological anxiety among Chinese and Spanish students. The project will contribute significantly to the development of positive learning environments across both European and Asian languages. Reports from these projects will be available on the website later this year.

LCNAU has continued to develop its advocacy role, preparing a [submission](#) to the [White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century](#) and offering support to tertiary language academics whose programs have been threatened with closure— notably Indonesian at La Trobe and Japanese at the University of Canberra. This extensive independent advice and support has been given as direct contact with academics involved as well as submissions to consultation processes (where there has indeed been one) and the provision of alternative strategies to closure.

Next year and beyond will see LCNAU becoming further embedded in Australia's languages education landscape, with the range of activities and projects it hopes to establish and support flourishing in the context of the network's legal institutionalisation. Planning and organising of the next colloquium—to be held at the Australian National University in next July—are already underway. The colloquium is timed to adjoin the conferences of the [Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations](#) and the [Japanese Studies Association of Australia](#), which will provide an excellent opportunity for cross-sector networking. A call for papers will be issued soon; the latest information will be available from the LCNAU website.

As LCNAU moves towards the end of 2012, it would like to acknowledge the invaluable participation and input of colleagues from Asian languages and cultures programs across the country. We look forward to working alongside you into 2013 and beyond.

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NLA marks 60 years of Australia–Thai relations

From cigarette cards to cremation volumes—treasures from the National Library’s Thai collection.

By Saowapha Viravong

In 2012, to mark the 60th Anniversary of Australia’s bilateral relations with Thailand, the National Library of Australia in Canberra is displaying two items from its [Thai collection](#) in the library’s prestigious [Treasures Gallery](#)—the *Phra Malai* and two Thai cigarette cards from the 1920s featuring the battles of the *Ramayana*.



Phra Malai [manuscript]. 19th century (THRB 2)

Written in Thai in Khmer script, the *Phra Malai* is an illuminated 19th century manuscript

which tells the story of the Buddhist saint Phra Malai. Tales of Phra Malai’s journeys to heaven and hell are used to preach Buddhism and are well known in Southeast Asia. They remain especially popular in Thailand. The manuscript would have been copied by Buddhist monks and is made from the bark of the khoi tree, which grows in northern Thailand.



The battles of the Ramayana: Thai cigarette cards from the 1920s (THRB 6)

Cigarette cards

The two cigarette cards on display are examples of collector cards used by tobacco companies of the early 20th century to market cigarettes. They are part of a complete set of 50 depicting the battles of The *Ramayana*, an ancient allegory of

love and loss that has permeated Hindu and Buddhist cultures for centuries. The cards feature monkey and human characters from the popular epic. They were designed in Thailand for a local



audience and printed in the United States.

From around the late 19th century foreign cigarettes were imported into Thailand, and with this came the marketing gimmicks and fads that accompanied the

cigarette trade everywhere. Competition was strong among the scores of suppliers promoting their brands.

Although manufactured overseas, the cards were designed in Thailand for a local audience. Appealing in part to the rising nationalism and modernisation ethos of the time, cards often included representations of characteristically Thai figures and cultural images, as well as international and even technical and scientific themes.

These trading cards declined from 1941 when the government of Thailand introduced its monopoly over tobacco, but such had been their popularity that many were kept and are still available and can be traded and purchased today. A short article about Thai cigarette cards can be found on the [New Mandala blog](#).

The NLA has obtained and digitised 14 sets of cigarette cards and the images are now freely available through our catalogue. Low-resolution images can be downloaded directly from our site, and using the Copies Direct service high-resolution images can also be obtained.

Given the age of the cards, the images are out of copyright, and can be reproduced for research or other reasonable purposes, with appropriate acknowledgment.

Research value

The Thai Collection overall has been steadily growing and serving the needs of its diverse users for five decades now, since the first shipment of materials arrived from Thailand in 1958. The collection covers all subject areas, and is

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especially strong in the fields of humanities and social sciences with a special focus on materials with research value/interest.

We also have a good range of popular publications of general interest, and materials in diverse media and formats. In recent years great advances have been made in improving accessibility to the collection, such as the use of Thai script in cataloguing.

The collection is one of the most important outside of Thailand, not just in absolute size (with tens of thousands of monographs and serials) but in its remarkable scope. We hold historical volumes and items that include many 'firsts' that document important moments of historical transition and reflect the tremendous ethnic and social diversity of the kingdom.

We also strive to keep the collection up to date, and in recent years this has seen special attention to the colour-coded political movements within Thailand and their production of not just



Thai political ephemera.



conventional political materials but their highly innovative use of new media, digital media, and ephemera.

The current generation of political activity in Thailand has been marked by the industrial production of campaign ephemera of the type used in massed rallies and displayed prominently—if temporarily—at times of action. Since the military coup of 2006 we have made special efforts to collect such items and preserve them for posterity. Examples collected and displayed include flags, posters, pamphlets, clappers, shirts, bandanas,

DVDs/CD of speeches etc. from both Red and Yellow Shirt demonstrations.

Cremation volumes



A particular feature of Thai society is the production of a special kind of memorial volume after a person's death; the so-called 'Cremation volume'. These are not sold in book stores but

are printed in limited releases and distributed to mourning family and friends; they are not only about the deceased but may contain extensive reproductions of topical or other publications that were of interest to the departed. The Thai cremation volume collection is one of great significance. It has been developed over many decades, and is now well established. Associate Professor Craig Reynolds, Harold White Fellow in 2012, reported:

These volumes contain a wealth of social, economic and political information. Each book usually has a biography of the deceased, some Buddhist verses or sermons, eulogies by relatives and friends, and works of fiction or nonfiction by or about the deceased. If the deceased is a noted public figure or comes from an elite family, rare or out-of-print historical documents may be included in the cremation book, and the book may be handsomely illustrated. Poorer families can sometimes afford only a CD of memories and tributes to their loved one.

Many researchers have come to the library specifically for this collection. The NLA's collection of cremation volumes is one of only two such large collections outside of Thailand. Information as contained in them is invaluable to researchers, who are often unlikely to find it anywhere else.

Religion

A significant proportion of the collection includes religious-themed materials. Conventionally this includes official Buddhist items, such various editions of the *Tripitaka* (one a special gift from the Thai King) and a substantial number of

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works by Buddha disciples, such as Phutthathat Phikkhu, the famous advocate of Dhammic Socialism in the latter 20th century. Reflecting the daily concerns of the Thai people—including a strong interface with contemporary politics, we also have a wide range of popular religious publications concerning amulets, mantras, almanacs, monks with supernatural powers and so forth.

The Thai collection is serviced from the Asian Collections Reading Room on the 3rd floor and is open 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday. Staff with expertise in the Thai language are available to assist readers. Thai language items are being catalogued in Thai script in addition to Romanisation, although older material is only catalogued in Roman script. In addition to searching the catalogue, passes can be arranged to allow users to browse the shelving stacks. An increasing proportion of materials is also available digitally. Usually these will be accessible through the catalogue entries (such as the cigarette cards). In many cases it is possible to ask that items be scanned for digital delivery through the Library's online [Copies Direct service](#).

Fellowship support

Researchers wanting to use the Thai collection can apply for fellowships that provide access to facilities and/or financial support to help them stay in Canberra and work with the library's collections. [Harold White Fellowship](#) applications are received until April each year. Researchers wanting to use the Thai collection can apply for fellowships that provide access to facilities and/or financial support to help them stay in Canberra and work with the library's collections. [Harold White Fellowships](#) are received until April each year.

Saowapha (Sophie) Viravong is the Thai collection librarian in Asian Collections at the National Library of Australia. For any enquiries about the collection or services please contact [email](#) or call her 02 6262 1288.

AIIA forum on Australia in the Asian Century

By Melissa Conley Tyler and Simon Speldewinde

The Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) National President's Forum on Australia in the Asian Century was held in Sydney on 24 August 2012 at NSW Parliament House. The forum focused on the key issues for Australia's engagement with Asia to coincide with the final stages of preparation of the Australian Government White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century.

The AIIA has been involved in the White Paper consultation process as part of its ongoing mission to promote understanding of international issues across Australia and was funded to engage two target audiences—youth and the general public—through online activities. The aim of activities was to involve youth in the discussion about what the Asian Century means for Australia and to facilitate communication between government and the general public.

The forum's main objective was to bring together a select group of experts from Australia and Asia, along with leading diplomatic, government, academic and business figures to discuss Australia's engagement with Asia in The Asian Century. ASAA president Professor Purnendra Jain was among the participants, who included five ambassadors, eight government departments, five academic institutions and business, media and community representatives.

The forum was divided into four sessions: Australia in the Asian Century; economics, strategic and political issues; education; and culture and society. Footage of the forum and other AIIA events associated with Australia in the Asian Century is available on the AIIA's [YouTube channel](#). The outcomes report and a transcript of the closing summary is also [available](#).

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Asian artists: speaking for the voiceless

By Annette Van den Bosch

'Art practice in postcolonial societies, for example, Southeast Asia, is based on training in western-type art schools. Artists use their knowledge of the local context, and use local content in their artwork. Art speaks with empathy for the voiceless, rather than direct social activism.'—Tan Bun Hui, Director of Singapore Art Museum (18th Sydney Biennale Symposium 29 June 2012).

Social media captures its audience and many artists are working more collaboratively with their audience in the exhibition space, or initiating community-based projects. Asian artists whose exhibiting opportunities are diverse are in the forefront of these interactive approaches. Arin Rungjang is a Thai artist who explores life experiences and memories with his participants in work he has completed all over the world. In the Rwandan capital Kigali he organised workshops with 13 children born after the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.



Arin Rungjang, *The living are few but the dead are many*, 2011

His work *The living are few but the dead are many* 2012 was exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney as part of the [18th Biennale of Sydney](#). He stated that he aimed to reconnect all with the earth and the senses through the production of earthenware pots. Arin's installation showed videos of Rwandan youngsters throwing large earthenware pots on a potter's wheel or on a simple stone, as well as hand building pots. Some of the pots were exhibited in the space. A bank of screens on a continuous loop showed interviews with older teenagers and adults describing how they lost family members. Other screens showed history texts with a soundtrack of singing. One Rwandan teenager says 'I would like to

become a doctor so I could heal people'. The audience's first impression of the installation was its order and almost clinical neatness, typical of the contemporary gallery space. Once the viewer looked at the screens and listened to the interviews the full horror of the events in Rwanda were conveyed by the people who experienced it. The involvement of the children in making pottery and their pride in their achievement gave them, and the audience, hope for a better future. Arin's concept in this artwork was clear. He added to his many site-specific collaborations and explorations of migration and loss an understanding of genocide.



Junling Yang *Class in a class* 2011

A Chinese artist, Junling Yang, who first came to prominence in the Beijing Art Fair 2009 is now based in California at the Global Technology Network Corporation. Junling Yang's installation was sited in a room of a heritage house on Cockatoo Island, a former industrial precinct in Sydney Harbour. Junling Yang's installation took the form of a primary-school classroom in China. The physical detail of the children's environment—coloured and decorated bags, pencil cases etc.—was only the exterior of *Class in the class* 2011. The work consisted of a soundscape of children's voices, laughter and singing, with a projection of animated children's line drawings on to some of the white-topped desks in the room. The pale green transparent background created a surface for imaginative outline narratives of children's activity—helicopters, space ships and imaginary machinery. *Class in a class* was an absorbing and delightful

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Speaking for the voiceless

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experience connecting the audience and artist, who was in situ, with their shared experiences of childhood and children's wonder in their world. It showed how technology can be used to connect people rather than divide them.



Lee Mingwei, *The mending project*, 2009

Lee Mingwei, born in Taiwan, now living in New York, presented his installation, *The mending project*. Lee's artworks have touched on gender issues, such as *The pregnant man*, or migration and displacement, as in *The travellers* 2010. *The mending project*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, was another participatory installation where strangers could explore issues of trust, intimacy and self-awareness. Seated at a long table in the front of the installation space, Lee was present during gallery hours. On the walls of the space were hundreds of spools of coloured thread. He asked people to bring in damaged textiles to be mended, to choose the colour thread and to engage in conversation. His interactive, conceptual installation used simple elements—thread, colour and sewing as points of departure for relationships. When the garment had strong personal values conversations could involve emotional sharing. Visitors, too, were encouraged to stop and chat. Lee's artwork evoked many historical and personal associations. Hand sewing and tailoring were common among older generations. They also provided an occupation for migrants to urban areas or other countries. In a globalised world Lee made us aware of our common human experiences.

One of the art installations at Cockatoo Island occupied almost all the floor space in a large building, so that the audience was admitted in



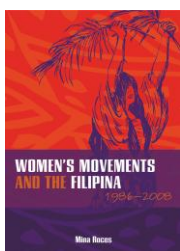
Li Hongbo, *Ocean of flowers*, 2012

small groups. Li Hongbo's *Ocean of flowers* 2012 was made of paper in bright colours, in different shapes and sizes. Li was born in Jilin, China, in 1974 and he loves paper. After he brought one of the honeycomb paper balls that are used for festive celebrations he took it apart, realising the flexibility it offered for creating shapes that evoke innocent fun and pleasure. However, this artwork offered a more serious and philosophical view, as the shapes were in the form of gun muzzles and Buddhist pagodas. Li said: 'We all lose when a gun takes the life of any person'. At the back of the room was a large table with paper shapes, scissors, cardboard and glue so that children and adults could make their own shapes. The crowds attracted to this installation, especially the children with parents who participated in making paper shapes and balls, showed that Li's message of peace not war, was a practice and not just a concept.

The 18th Biennale of Sydney, called 'all our relations', promoted an inclusive and participatory environment for the artists—many of whom will be online—and its wide audience. In the global village, artists live in a locality that may not be their place of birth, study and practise in different places, and create their own subjective personal vision or concept of the world we all live in. We are all the richer for this cultural diversity which shifts 20th-century concepts of nation, language and culture into a wider sphere of communication and experience.

Dr Annette Van den Bosch is an adjunct research fellow at the Monash Asia Institute. Her first article on Asian artists at the 18th Biennale of Sydney appeared in the August 2012 issue of [Asian Currents](#) and is also available on her [website](#).

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Women's movements and the Filipina 1986–2008. By Mina Roces. Cloth, 55\$. 288 pp.

This book is about a fundamental aspect of the feminist project in the Philippines: rethinking the Filipino woman. It focuses on how contemporary women's organisations have represented and refashioned the Filipina in their campaigns to improve women's status by locating her in history, society and politics; imagining her past, present and future; representing her in advocacy; and identifying strategies to transform her.

The drive to alter the situation of women included a political aspect (lobbying and changing legislation) and a cultural one (modifying social attitudes and women's own assessments of themselves).

Mina Roces examines the cultural side of the feminist agenda: how activists have critiqued Filipino womanhood and engaged in fashioning an alternative woman. How did activists theorise the Filipina and how did they use this analysis to lobby for pro-women's legislation or alter social attitudes? What sort of Filipina role models did women's organisations propose, and how were these new ideas disseminated to the general public? What cultural strategies did activists deploy in order to gain a mass following?

Analysing data from over 75 interviews with feminist activists, radio and television shows, romance novels, periodicals and books published by women's organisations and feminist nuns, comics, newsletters, and personal papers, Roces shows how representations of the Filipino woman have been central to debates about women's empowerment.

Learning about Asia without really trying!

By Sally Burdon

For many years our bookshop, [Asia Bookroom](#), has run an Asian book group. Every six weeks between 15 and 25 people get together to read a selected book about Asia or by an Asian author. The books range from quite 'heavy' classics, to biography, literary fiction, detective fiction—and even graphics.

Sometimes we have been fortunate to have authors, translators and editors come to speak to the group—usually it is the first time they have spoken to a group who have all read and thought carefully about their book.

Most meetings are led by a volunteer within the group who has researched the book or author enough to give the rest of us an introduction and to kick off the discussion.

The group is made up of some people who are very knowledgeable about Asia and others who are not—and it works! Everyone has contributions to make and we learn new things together and have many fascinating discussions stemming from the ideas, cultural differences and aspects of human behaviour we come across in our reading.

The books are all suggested by group members or if there are not enough suggestions we pick from some forthcoming titles or some classics—but it has been many years since we did not have enough suggestions to cover the eight books we read each year.

I urge anyone thinking about starting a book group to consider the theme of Asian literature and books on Asia for their group. You will not run out of great books and you will gain much pleasure and knowledge from the experience.

I have chosen six books I have enjoyed from our book group reading over the

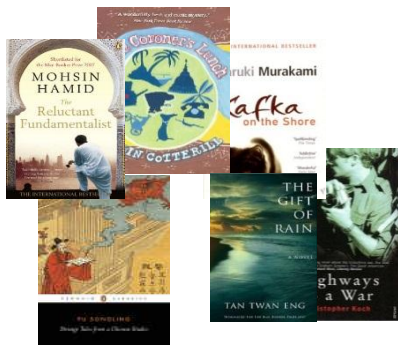
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Learning about Asia without really trying!

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years to give you an idea of what has been popular:

- *Highways to a war*, by Christopher Koch
- *Strange tales from a Chinese studio*, by John Minford
- *Kafka on the shore*, by Haruki Murakami
- *The reluctant fundamentalist*, by Mohsin Hamid
- *The gift of rain*, by Tan Twan Eng
- *The coroner's lunch*, by Colin Cotteril.



To see the full list of what we have read visit the book group page on our [website](#).

Sally Burdon is the owner/manager of the Asia Bookroom and a member of the ASAA Council. She is currently President of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Antiquarian Booksellers.

ASAA series

For the latest books from the ASAA series visit the following websites:

[Southeast Asia Series](#)

[Women in Asia Series](#)

[The East Asia Series](#)

[South Asia Series](#)

Coming events

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. For more information, contact: [Evon Fung](#), 02 8239 0058 or [Amanda Thompson](#), 02 8239 0079.

The dream of Lafcadio Hearn—A life lived in defiance of the season, Sydney 7pm, Friday, 2 November. A talk by writer Roger Pulvers, with readings by actor Elaine Hudson, about a writer who, over a century since his death, is loved in Japan but largely forgotten in the West. Venue: The Japan Foundation, Sydney, L1 Chifley Plaza, 2 Chifley Square. Admission free but bookings essential. Contact reception@jpf.org.au or 02 8239 0055. Website: www.jpf.org.au.

Conference: 'The dimensions of the Indian Ocean world past: sources and opportunities for interdisciplinary work in Indian Ocean world history, 9th–19th centuries', Western Australian Maritime Museum, Victoria Quay, Fremantle, **12–14 November 2012**. See [website](#) for further information.

About the ASAA

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](#).

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