Asian Currents

The Asian Studies Association of Australia

Maximising Australia's Asian knowledge

December 2013 **ISSN 1449-4418**

Myanmar's armed forces return to the barracks, for now

The Myanmar Armed Force—the *Tatmadaw*—has relinquished control of day-to-day politics but remains a powerful political force, and a future political crisis could still prompt it to resume control. *Read more*

Indonesia after Yudhoyono

As Indonesia prepares for presidential elections in July, one candidate—Joko Widodo—is increasingly being mentioned as Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's successor. *Read more*

Rethinking Indian federalism

India's constitution has been described as being federal in form but unitary in spirit. The time may have come for India to reflect on and review the federal idea, and to see how a better balance can be struck in centre–state relations. *Read more*

Shaping a new debate on Australia's Asian engagements

Within two weeks of the recent change of government, the Australia in the Asian Century White Paper website was archived, pointing to a new chapter in the long history of promoting and demoting, forgetting and remembering Australia's place in the Asia–Pacific region. *Read more*

Opiate of the masses with Chinese characteristics

It's easy to assume that the People's Republic of China would be axiomatically opposed to religion. Yet China's stance towards religion has been more practical than ideological. *Read more*

Challenge to male dominance in Southeast Asia

Freedom from male status anxiety may be giving Southeast Asian women more latitude in everyday business matters. *Read more*

Colombo II: don't ignore Asian students at home

Now it's in government, the Coalition says one of its top priorities is international education. Along with policies to encourage international students to study here, Australian students, too, will be offered the chance to go to Asia as part of the government's New Colombo Plan. *Read more*

Civilising China

China's efforts to be more like 'the West of us' are not only having impacts at home, but also abroad. *Read more*

Also in this issue

Myanmar's armed forces return to the barracks, for now

The *Tatmadaw* has relinquished control of day-to-day politics but remains a powerful political force, and a future political crisis could still prompt it to resume control.

By Morten B. Pedersen

Myanmar is in the midst of dramatic political changes. The quasi-civilian government, which took office in 2011, has greatly expanded political freedoms and made significant progress toward ending the country's longstanding civil war. Members of the new parliament are approaching their role as lawmakers with significant vigour and, along with a revitalised private media, have introduced some genuine checks and balances in the political system. Across the country, civil society is speaking up against social injustices in a way that was previously unthinkable.

The changes in civil–military relations are more ambiguous but in some respects no less striking, considering that Myanmar just a few years ago was one of the most militarised societies in the world. The Myanmar Armed Force—the *Tatmadaw*—formally maintains 'a leading role in national politics', with control of the main security ministries (Defence, Home Affairs and Border Areas) as well as 25 per cent of the seats in parliament. President Thein Sein, who himself was until recently a four-star general, refers to the armed forces as the 'fifth estate', arguing that it continues to have a 'special role' in governing the still fragile country. Yet, in practice, the military's influence on government has been sharply reduced, especially outside the security sector.

While Commander-in-Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, has significant, though vague, constitutional powers, neither the three military-appointed ministers in the cabinet, nor the military bloc in parliament, have made any apparent attempts to block the government's reform efforts. It appears that the *Tatmadaw* sees itself not so much as exercising political leadership, but rather as an arbitrator or balancer between other political groups. The military's role in the bureaucracy has also been significantly reduced, with hundreds of mid-level military officials being transferred out of government departments, either back to military units or into the police force.

President Thein Sein—until recently a four-star general.

Most surprisingly perhaps, the military has seemingly accepted a significant reduction in its economic prerogatives. Defence's part of the national budget has been cut from 22 per cent to 12 per cent, and plans are reportedly afoot to reduce the armed forces from 300 000+ to fewer than 250 000 men as part of a revamping of Myanmar's defence doctrine. Military companies, which have long been a major source of off-budget revenue for the *Tatmadaw*, as well as important investment and retirement funds for individual military personnel, have lost their monopoly in a number of lucrative sectors, from beer and tobacco to car imports, telecommunications and construction materials. Plus, they now have to pay tax.

Sceptics see the fact that most leadership positions remain in the hands of retired generals as evidence that little has changed fundamentally. Yet, it makes little sense today to consider ex-generals

like President Thein Sein and the Speaker of the Lower House, Shwe Mann, to be part of a military regime. Although they undoubtedly maintain certain loyalties to the *Tatmadaw* and share certain world views with their former colleagues, the ongoing reform program shows a genuine commitment to wider national interests, consonant with their official status as elected representatives of the people. Moreover, every indication is that these reformed generals fully intend to allow free and fair elections in 2015, which will almost certainly result in a victory by the democratic opposition and a further shift in the balance of power away from the military.

The question, of course, is: will the new generation of generals accept this?

There are some grounds for optimism. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, the *Tatmadaw* does not perceive itself as the ruling class. Rather, its self-image is that of guardian of the state who steps in, in times of crisis, to save the country. As long as there are no major threats to national security, it would therefore be difficult for any military commander to justify a coup.

Also contrary to conventional wisdom, Myanmar's military officer corps is not generally all-consumed by a quest for personal power and privilege, but includes many genuine patriots who wish to see the country safe and prosperous—and who, like President Thein Sein, understand that for this to happen, the military will have to stand back and allow coercion to be replaced by negotiation and cooperation among the country's diverse peoples.

Importantly, the post-2011 government has been remarkably successful. When it took office in early 2011, the democratic opposition had just boycotted the first national elections in 20 years, several ethnic armed groups remained in rebellion, and the country was subject to a wide array of western sanctions. Today, all of these 'enemies of the state' have laid down their arms, either literally or figuratively speaking, and are working with the government to move the reform process forward. Coupled with major economic reforms, this, in turn, has attracted a large increase in foreign aid, trade and investment, thus substantially improving Myanmar's economic outlook after decades of stagnation.

Myanmar's leaders believe that they have found a successful model of top-down democratisation that compares favourably with the bottom-up revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East. This has become a source of newfound national pride, and may well be a powerful motivation for a deeply nationalistic military to remain in the barracks.

On the negative side, there are major challenges ahead, and in the case of a serious political crisis the *Tatmadaw* may well feel compelled, and justified, to step back in to 'save' the country. The lessons of Myanmar's coup history suggest three sets of circumstances under which this might happen:

Aung San Suu Kyi: pact to share power?

First, a split in the government. In 1958, deep divisions within the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League government that threatened to paralyse the state prompted the military leadership to 'insist' that Prime Minister U Nu hand over power to a military caretaker government. This could happen again. Although President Thein Sein has successfully sidelined the main hardliners in the government party, factionalism is the bane of Myanmar politics, and a major split has emerged between the president and the Speaker of the

Lower House, Shwe Mann, both reformers, but also rivals. The latter has been working closely with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, prompting much speculation that they have made a pact to share power after the 2015 elections, and with the prospect of a highly divisive electoral contest the risk of a government split and resulting instability cannot be discounted.

Protesters in Yangon during the Saffron Revolution in 2007.

Secondly, failure of the peace process. The primary justification for the military coup in 1962—and indeed the underlying rationale for the military's perceived need for strong, centralised government across the post-independence period—were fears that ethnic minority demands for increased autonomy could threaten the country's territorial integrity and independence. Fifty years later, the 'ethnic question' remains unresolved, and with the government now moving towards national peace talks, which will bring all of the underlying issues to a head, it is not hard to imagine a scenario where the military leadership could be tempted to exercise a veto. At the very least, a resumption of major armed conflict would leave the *Tatmadaw* effectively in control of large swathes of the border areas.

Thirdly, major popular unrest. When the 1988 uprising left the country is chaos, the *Tatmadaw* reacted ruthlessly, killing thousands of protestors and reasserting direct military rule. The same ruthlessness was put on show during the Saffron Revolution in 2007, when the army did the unthinkable and violently attacked Buddhist monks. This historical record, too, is a cause of some concern. In the new and freer political environment, localised protests, mainly by farmers and industrial workers, have become commonplace. Although there have been no signs of larger unrest yet, the combination of rapidly rising popular expectations, weak state capacity and a strong culture of street activism suggests that this may just be a matter of time.

In addition to these traditional flash points, the new government is facing a new phenomenon of countrywide communal conflict, possibly orchestrated in part by spoilers who seek to derail the reform process. Burman Buddhist fears and hostility towards the country's minority Muslim population run deep and have the potential not only to lead to large-scale violence, but also to attract intervention by Islamic fundamentalists from outside the country.

So far, Myanmar has largely escaped the wave of anti-state terrorism affecting the wider region, but if this were to become a threat, there is no doubt that the military leadership would take it extremely seriously. For now, the *Tatmadaw* appears to accept at least limited civilian supremacy, in line with the 2008 constitution. However, as self-appointed guardian of the state (and the new constitution), it is unlikely to simply stand by and watch if serious political instability occurs. This may be a particular concern under a future, fully civilian government which would have less trust and authority within the armed forces than the current one does.

Dr Morten B. Pedersen is Senior Lecturer in International and Political Studies at University of New South Wales/Canberra (the Australian Defence Force Academy). and former Senior Analyst for the International Crisis Group in Myanmar.

BACK TO PAGE 1

Indonesia after Yudhoyono

As Indonesia prepares for presidential elections in July, one candidate—Joko Widodo—is increasingly being mentioned as Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's successor.

By Liam Gammon

Just under a year from now, hundreds of millions of Indonesians will head to the polls in one of the largest democratic elections in the world. After legislative polls in April determine which parties are eligible to put forward candidates for the presidency, voters will vote in July for a new president, and again in September for a runoff, if necessary. They will replace a president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who leaves office with a mixed record on confronting vested interests to pursue important political and economic reforms.

One of the undeniable benefits of Yudhoyono's accommodation of entrenched anti-reformist interests, however, has been an unexpected golden era of stability. The main achievement of the Yudhoyono decade has been to prevent the occurrence of a major democratic regression or economic downturn, in turn leaving a strong institutional and economic base for any progressive successor to build upon.

Until recently though, the race for president appeared to be turning into a contest between a few dreary oligarchs who made their bones under the New Order regime, or a steady but unexciting Yudhoyono protege or family member. Most discouragingly, it looked as though voters' desire for a more decisive style of leadership would lead to the election of one candidate whose very name connoted the worst of New Order cronyism and brutality. The former special forces chief and son-in-law of Soeharto, Prabowo Subianto, had spent years building up an electoral base following his unsuccessful run as the vice-presidential candidate on Megawati Soekarnoputri's 2009 ticket. His billionaire brother's financial support allowed him to advertise heavily on national television, and his party to establish the Indonesia-wide network of branches which is a condition of its participation in national elections.

Prabowo Subianto: spent years building up an electoral base.

Prabowo is widely believed to have masterminded the abduction and disappearance of anti-Soeharto activists in the dying days of the New Order regime, as well as instigating some of the rioting which marked that period. In the years since, he has reinvented himself as an anti-establishment nationalist politician, travelling around the country dressed in his trademark safari suit, promising greater support for farmers and petty traders. His penchant for polo and private jets notwithstanding, this strategy of economic populism and a promise of *tegas* (firm) leadership endears him to many voters tired of the indecisiveness and drift of the latter years of the Yudhoyono administration.

But Prabowo himself has helped create a formidable challenge to his dominance in the polls, in the man whose candidacy he backed in last year's gubernatorial elections in Jakarta, Joko Widodo. The rise of this relative political outsider over the past year has changed everything. Known by all as Jokowi, the former furniture merchant, small-town mayor and now governor of Jakarta has captivated Indonesia's media and electorate with his carefully cultivated down-to-earth persona

and track record of improving public services.

For years, Jokowi was well known in development circles and the elite media for his successful (and spectacularly popular) tenure as mayor of the central Javanese town of Surakarta. Embracing the agenda of development agencies in streamlining bureaucratic processes and cutting down on petty corruption, Jokowi also cultivated an image as a *merakyat* (down-to-earth) leader through his administration's defence of small traders, market vendors and street food hawkers. Celebrated by national publications such as *Tempo* magazine, he was tapped by his party's leader, former president Megawati Soekarnoputri, to run for governor of Jakarta in 2012 after a coalition deal was struck with Prabowo's Gerindra party.

Jokowi's election campaign, and his subsequent efforts at reforming the city's bureaucracy as governor, have made him a national political star and sent him to the top of polls of possible presidential candidates. Prabowo clearly thought that being seen as the man behind a deal to bring Jokowi to the capital would lend him some reformist credibility, but he has now helped create his own greatest competitor.

Prabowo is now scrambling to come to terms with being overtaken in the polls by Jokowi. The talking points against him are already beginning to form: specifically, that he's a great guy, but not ready to be president. Figures from other political parties are careful to avoid strident criticism of him. Such is his popularity that some who have spoken out loudly against his candidacy have seen their intervention backfire badly. Criticism from unpopular establishment figures only serves to boost Jokowi.

Whether Jokowi does have the knowledge and skills to be a successful president is, of course, an open question. Implicit in the statement that he is not ready for

Jokowi has created an image as a down-to-earth leader.

the job is the assumption that Prabowo is. One might look at Prabowo Subianto's track record, and the sort of people he surrounds himself with, though, and wonder whether there are worse things in a presidential candidate than inexperience.

So large do these two figures loom over the political landscape these days that other contenders are relegated to the footnotes. Many, presumably, are keeping their names in contention hoping that Jokowi is somehow blocked from the Indonesian Democratic Party—Struggle (PDI-P) nomination, and that Prabowo is unable to cobble together a party coalition to nominate him.

President Yudhoyono's Democrat Party has seen its popularity decline since its 2009 legislative landslide, and plummet in the past two years after a succession of corruption cases involving some of its high officials and cabinet ministers. Some of its erstwhile rising stars have had their reputations ruined by graft scandals which have been reported gleefully in media owned by Yudhoyono's political rivals.

One of these media moguls—almost a caricature of the Southeast Asian tycoon who seeks to use wealth as an instrument of political power—is Aburizal Bakrie, former Soeharto crony and, until the global financial crisis of 2008–09, one of Indonesia's richest men.

The aloof and uncharismatic Bakrie is proof that when a candidate cannot

connect with the voters, all the money in the world cannot buy him popularity. One almost feels sympathy for the man. Having spent millions of dollars bribing delegates to Golkar's national convention to become party chairman and presidential candidate, he is now spending millions more promoting himself on television and during campaign trips around Indonesia, with little to show for it. Golkar, a well-organised political machine thanks to its heritage as the political vehicle of Soeharto, would end up as one of the biggest parties in the next parliament no matter who their candidate was. Bakrie, however, is stuck in low double digits according to most polling, while Golkar looks set to remain one of the largest parliamentary factions.

There is still charisma to be found in the Democrat Party. The articulate Trade Minister Gita Wirjawan and progressive Islamic academic Anies Baswedan feature among a host of candidates competing in a quasi-primary campaign in the lead-up to a nominating convention next year. But despite their obvious talents, they are all in the end running against a candidate in Jokowi who seems to offer most voters exactly what they want at this point in time, and who has displayed a talent for generating positive (and, most importantly, free) media coverage unsurpassed by any Indonesian politician of the democratic era. Given how little clout their party will have in forming a ticket after the legislative polls, it is likely that one of them will appear as a running mate of either Jokowi or Prabowo.

In an electoral culture that is still very much focused on the personal appeal of individual candidates, there is not much serious discussion of policy going on. To be sure, an incoming administration faces serious policy challenges to address from day one. Indonesia's national social security officially begins operations in 2014, a welcome development for millions of Indonesians who still struggle to survive in the absence of a comprehensive social safety net. But the scheme's success depends on its being sufficiently resourced and competently administered. Ensuring that it can operate with enough money will require tough fiscal planning on the part of the next government in an environment where Indonesia cannot afford to return to running high levels of public debt. Part of this fiscal reform will include phasing out the extraordinarily wasteful and regressive fuel subsidies, which cost the budget over $20 billion a year but remain politically sensitive.

Prabowo Subianto has maintained a rhetorical commitment to stamping out corruption, ending the fuel subsidy and promoting redistributive economic policies. It's difficult to get Joko Widodo to speak on any national policy issue, such is his commitment to a pretence of 'just being interested in being governor at the moment'.

The next president, if he's lucky to be elected to a second term in 2019, will oversee a decade in which Indonesia will become one of the largest economies in the world. Keeping the maturation of Indonesian democracy going, making the reforms to the economy that will ensure more jobs and investment, and negotiating a place for Indonesia in a strategic context marked by competition between the United States and China, will keep the next president busy until we in Australia are three federal elections from now and Americans are replacing Barack Obama's successor.

The character of Indonesian politics and foreign policy has undoubtedly been shaped by the idiosyncrasies of President Yudhoyono, as the same will be true of the person who will take over from him.

Liam Gammon is a PhD Candidate at the College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University.

BACK TO PAGE 1

Rethinking Indian federalism

The controversial creation of the new state of Telangana has again put the spotlight on Indian federalism.

By Amitabh Mattoo

Indian federalism has always been contested by those who view, with understandable scepticism, the overarching constitutional powers that are given to the federal parliament and to the federal government in New Delhi. One great political scientist described India's constitution as being 'federal in form but unitary in spirit', and another critic described India as being only 'quasi-federal'.

The time may have come for India, and Indians, to reflect on and review the federal idea, and to see how a better balance can be struck in centre–state relations.

The messy politics of Indian federalism was in full flow last month as the Indian cabinet hurriedly decided to approve the creation of a new state, Telangana, by dividing the state of Andhra Pradesh. Although the demand for a separate state had been longstanding, there was political uproar from opponents of the partition. Protests against the decision have continued in Hyderabad—which will be the shared capital of the two states for 10 years, and then become, exclusively, Telangana's capital.

The problem was compounded by the fact that, after sitting on the demand for years, the cabinet took the decision for what seemed to be purely tactical electoral considerations dictated by the political interests of the ruling Congress Party. The manner in which the decision was made also demonstrated a gross lack of sensitivity to those who had opposed the division of Andhra Pradesh. In many ways, the Telangana case reflects the ad hoc way that states have been created in India over the past four decades, and is symptomatic of the lack of a federal balance.

Undoubtedly, a strong case can be made for more states in India and for a further decentralisation of political power. A country of over one billion people has only 29 states and a few federally governed territories; Australia with a population of 22 million has six states and several territories. That smaller states are easier to govern well, and that their residents are likely to be more satisfied with public services, is intuitively obvious—although there are notable exceptions. In India, however, almost every creation of a new state has been mired in controversy. In part, this is a function of what I consider to be the three contradictions of Indian federalism vis-a-vis-the redrawing of internal boundaries.

In India, almost every creation of a new state has been mired in controversy.

First, India is inarguably the most diverse country among all the federations in the world, yet states have virtually no role to play in the creation of new states or, indeed, even in their own division were that to happen. The Constitution has given supreme powers to the Indian parliament to create new states and change the borders of states by enlarging or decreasing their area. The view of the affected state is considered, but there is no obligation to act on it.

The reason the Indian parliament was given such carte blanche is clear. In 1947, independent India inherited from the British the untidiest arrangements of governance. The British ruled parts of India directly through the provinces that recognised the sovereignty of the

Crown and, indirectly, through more than 500 autonomous princely states that accepted only the suzerainty of the British monarch. Integrating these princely states—led by many idiosyncratic, capricious and authoritarian rulers, often with separatist tendencies—required a strong federal government, and the constitution provided these sweeping powers.

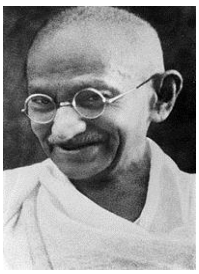
Hyderabad: shared capital for next 10 years.

Second, there has always been tension over the criteria that should determine the creation of a new state. In the early years after independence, and even in the initial discussions within the State Reorganisation Committee (whose recommendations helped to create the first 16 states in 1956), there was a strong view that states should be organised on the principle of administrative efficiency and after consideration of what would be best for their economic development. These principles were, however, sidestepped and a linguistic criterion that gave preference to a common language as being the basis for statehood was adopted.

Instead of settling issues, the reorganisation on the basis of language strengthened linguistic chauvinism. Given that India has more than 400 living languages, the linguistic criterion opened a Pandora's box which was reflected within a few years—for instance, in the division, in 1960, of Bombay into Gujarati-speaking Gujarat and Marathi-speaking Maharashtra, and, in 1966, of Punjab into Punjabi-speaking Punjab and Hindi-speaking Haryana.

This linguistic criterion continued until the creation of Telangana as the 29th state. The irony is that, when the Telengana region was merged with the Telegu-speaking areas to create Andhra Pradesh in 1956, the criterion was a common language. But last month the decision to separate it from Andhra was ostensibly taken on grounds of history, a distinct identity and economic needs.

Third, because there is neither closure on the number of states, nor even a linguistic criterion now, there is a perverse incentive for nearly every distinct linguistic, religious and ethnic identity to demand statehood. For instance, Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir wants to separate because its residents are Buddhist and speak a different language. Gorkhaland wants to separate from West Bengal because the population speaks Nepali and not Bengali and has its own distinct ethnic identity. Indeed, there are more than 20 serious campaigns for creating new states.



Mahatma Gandhi had a vision for India's villages.

What is the way forward?

Clearly, many states in India would be better governed if more manageable administrative units were carved out of them and fashioned into new states. Decentralisation and devolution make people more connected with the structures of power and public institutions more accountable. Separatism grows when people feel alienated from the policies and the instruments of these policies, which they can neither easily influence nor change.

But what should the criterion be for the creation of new states?

The time is ripe for a new state reorganisation commission which identifies a set of criteria based on best practices across the world and

consults deeply and widely within India to determine the basis on which new states should be created.

Decentralisation would extend to India's millions of villages. Photo: indianetzone.com

In India, the federal principle would work best when there is real devolution of power, not just to the states but also to the villages, as Mohandas Gandhi had envisioned and which has only been achieved, so far, in very small measure. Here, each state would become the facilitator of political decentralisation to the grassroots.

And while each state would ultimately enjoy autonomy within its administrative space to articulate macro policies aligned with the priorities of its residents, and to secure their distinct cultural identity, there would be no economic firewalls between states.

An India that is economically integrated as one great free market and politically decentralised as millions of empowered villages in several facilitating states would be a formidable country in every sense of the word.

Amitabh Mattoo is Director, Australia India Institute and Professor of International Relations at the University of Melbourne.

Sri Lanka announces census to determine civil war death toll

The government of Sri Lanka will conduct a census over the next six months to assess the cost in lives and damage to property inflicted during the nearly three-decade long civil war.

The government announced the census on 26 November amid growing international pressure for Sri Lanka to hold an inquiry into allegations of war abuse against government soldiers and defeated Tamil Tiger rebels.

The nationwide survey is a key recommendation of Sri Lanka's Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission.

The census will involve a household survey of all affected families in all parts of the island to ascertain the scale and circumstances of death and injury to civilians, as well as damage to property during the conflict.

The census will involve a household survey of all affected families in all parts of the island.

Sixteen thousand officials will be deployed to collect detailed information on deaths and those missing, injured or disabled, and on property damage.

The death toll of civilians during the 30-year conflict has been disputed. A United Nations panel estimated that about 40 000 died during the last phase of the war, but other independent reports have put the civilian death toll at more than 100 000.

See *Asian Currents*, October 2013, 'The numbers game: counting civilian deaths in Sri Lanka's war'.

BACK TO PAGE 1

Shaping a new debate on Australia's Asian engagements

Australia must look to the past as well as to the future in its engagements with Asia.

By David Walker
and Agnieszka Sobocinska

There has been a great deal of discussion recently about the Asian Century, much, but not all of it, generated by the Gillard government's White Paper. Then, within two weeks of the recent change of government, the White Paper website was archived. That does not mean that 'Asia' has been archived as a policy focus or national concern, but it points to a new chapter in the long history of promoting and demoting, forgetting and remembering Australia's place in the Asia–Pacific region.

One of the objectives of our edited collection, *Australia's Asia: from Yellow Peril to Asian Century* (UWA Publishing, 2012) is to provide a fresh reading of the role that generic 'Asia' has played in shaping the Australian nation. Where Asia has so often been framed as the future, this book also makes the case that we must attend to the history of our multiple and sometimes contradictory Asian engagements, a topic overlooked by the White Paper. It is a history-free zone.

For scholars, 'Asia' is a very problematic category, something we certainly recognise as editors. A great deal of scholarly effort has gone into submitting generic Asia to more complex and nuanced analysis. But this, too, has created some structural difficulties in the way we examine Australia's history of Asian engagement.

Typically, scholars investigating Australia's relations with its region have specialised in a particular nation. There are specialists on bilateral relations between Australia and Indonesia, China, Japan and so on. For the most part, this is sensible, and partly due to the language requirements. It would take an extraordinary Australian to be comfortable working in Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian and Hindi, not to mention Thai, Vietnamese and Tagalog and the hundreds of languages and dialects spoken throughout this diverse region. Should such a prodigy ever arrive it is unlikely that they would confine their attention to Australian themes.

'There's one section in Australia that can't quite understand "Society's" Jap-worship', cartoon in *The Bulletin*, 20 June 1903, *Australia's Asia*, p. 18

The bilateral focus is also an outcome of institutional politics. Research funding comes through the Australia–China Council or Australia India Institute, for example. Academic structures also support this bilateral framing. We have both been to numerous conferences focused on Australia's relations with, for example, China, India, Japan or Indonesia.

The recent trend for specialist research centres has also perpetuated the bilateral bias. The Australian National University hosts a Centre for China in the World, and Monash University has just announced that it will establish an Australia–Indonesia Centre. The University of Melbourne hosts an India Institute and so on.

Yet, where scholarly analysis is confined to a single relationship, academics may miss what is arguably the most common framing of Asia. While Australians have recognised, if sometimes unevenly, that Asia is made up of individual

nations, they have, nonetheless, persistently referred to a generic Asia for well over a century. It might be a loose concept with no referents, but the notion of a generic Asia 'out there' has shaped the Australian imaginary. It is also a tenacious concept, affecting contemporary politics and shaping popular opinion today, just as it did 50 or even 100 years ago. It's hard to imagine this changing in the immediate future.

The other point to be made is that what Australians may think of particular Asian nations at any one point in our history is likely to be influenced by their understanding of developments elsewhere in the region. The reputation and standing of particular nations in our region, and how they interact, form part of a constantly shifting pattern of responses that the bilateral frame may miss or misinterpret. *Australia's Asia* seeks to draw out such connections and interlinked identities.

Above all perhaps, *Australia's Asia* offers the first comprehensive survey of the Australia–Asia relationship in over a decade. Its publication coincided with the release of the *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper—a fortuitous piece of timing. We maintain that one of the strengths of the book is that it creates a new transnational mix of Asianist and Australian expertise from within and outside of Australia. The book invites a new discussion. Our contributors include academics working outside the Australian academic context—from Europe and America as well as India, China and Indonesia—who reflect on the Australian situation.

Our intention is to mainstream the Asian dimension of Australian history; rather than a marginal interest for Asianists it becomes embedded as part of the Australian narrative. This is important, particularly in the context of the National Curriculum, which includes a focus on Australia's engagement with Asia as a cross-curriculum priority area. Australian politicians continue to speak of confronting Asia as if it were something that will occur in the future, but the fact is that Australia has been engaging with Asia in one way or another for much of its history. As *Australia's Asia* shows, an awareness of Asia has been at or near the centre of Australian thinking for well over 100 years, shaping ideas about what it means to be both Australian and part of the Asia–Pacific region.

Volunteer Graduate Scheme pioneer Herb Feith in Indonesia, 1952. This is the most famous image of Feith, appearing on the cover of his recent biography.

For many, this was a negative framing, with Asia acting as the Other against which Australianness was defined. But others pursued a much more positive engagement. One of the most fascinating elements of the book is that it draws together a number of chapters about Australians' fascination with Asian cultures, and engaging with the region through travel, people-to-people contacts, or simply by falling in love with Asian peoples, histories, cultures and cuisines. There is a much bigger story to be told of the many contacts with Asia throughout our history. It is a hidden history, largely because it occurred beneath the level of diplomacy, which continues to be the dominant lens through which the question of Australian–Asian relations has been viewed.

The initial response to the book has been encouraging. In an early review, Peter Cochrane wrote that 'every now and then a book comes

along that forces us to reconceptualise our national history', and that '*Australia's Asia* should be credited as one of those landmark collections'. Academic and writer Nicholas Jose noted that, 'as the best history does, *Australia's Asia* makes the link between past and present in ways that move us forward in the work of replacing emptiness with intellectual plenty'.

While such responses are obviously pleasing, a critical test will lie in whether it is picked by teachers, academics, policy makers and the reading public. There is a resistance to the mainstreaming of Asia. Survey histories of Australia still quarantine Asia rather than integrating it—considering Asia as playing a peripheral role rather than recognising its place, somewhere near the core of the Australian world view.

A further test will lie in the extent to which it is picked up by readers abroad. *Australia's Asia* is being translated into Mandarin by Beijing Foreign Studies University, and will be released in China in 2014.

Making Asian audiences aware of the extent to which Australia has been integrated with Asia at every level, from the intimate to the strategic, will go some way to overcoming the continuing sense that Australians are cultural and racial outsiders, without a claim to full participation in regional matters.

There may be no more important outcome as Australia enters the Asian Century.

Professor David Walker is BHP Billiton Chair of Australian Studies, Peking University.

Dr Agnieszka Sobocinska is Deputy Director and lecturer, National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University.

2015 start for New Colombo Plan

The Coalition government is establishing a New Colombo Plan to foster closer ties between Australia and the region.

The program will start by 2015. The government hopes to have a pilot program in place next year that will include Indonesia, Singapore, Japan and Hong Kong. There will be scope for students to undertake internships with businesses or non-government organisations in host countries.

Under the original Colombo Plan, some 40 000 future leaders from the Asia–Pacific region came to Australia from the 1950s to the mid-1980s.

The New Colombo Plan will add an outward-bound component to the original one-way street and, once operative, willprovide financial support for up to 300 young Australians to study in the Asia–Pacific region every year.

Financial support for up to 300 young Australians to study in the Asia–Pacific region every year.

Scholarships will be awarded to undergraduate applicants under 22 years of age, who are enrolled in an Australian university, to undertake one or two semesters of study toward their degree at an accredited university within the region.

The Coalition will commit $100 million over five years to implement the New Colombo Plan and will work in close partnership with governments, universities and business on the initiative.

See Colombo II: send students to Asia.

BACK TO PAGE 1

Opiate of the masses with Chinese characteristics

China's stance towards religion has been—and is increasingly—more practical than ideological.

By Thomas DuBois

It is easy to assume that the People's Republic of China would be axiomatically opposed to religion. Given Marx's famous characterisation that religion is the 'opium of the people', one could certainly be forgiven for thinking of socialism and religion as oil and water.

Since the communist revolution of 1949, China has run strikingly vindictive campaigns against such revered figures as the Dalai Lama, has sent students to destroy religious artifacts, and has repressed the Catholic Church, Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong, and Christian house churches, as well as lesser-known groups such as Eastern Lightning.

Yet China's stance towards religion has been more practical than ideological. Early campaigns, such as the 1951 suppression of the Catholic Church, were directed against specific groups that the state found dangerous, and the cadres who carried out religious policy were instructed to ensure that a movement against one group was not perceived as a purge of religion in general. Often this was achieved by recruiting other religious organisations to join in the recriminations. Even during the 1960s, when churches, monasteries and mosques were looted and vandalised in the campaign to Destroy the Four Olds, religion as a whole was not formally banned.

Like much of China's cultural policy, attitudes towards religion have loosened considerably since the end of the Maoist era. The new line, put forward personally by Deng Xiaoping and enshrined in the 1982 Central Committee document *Basic ideas and policies concerning our country's religious question in the socialist era*, insists that religion neither can nor should be destroyed by fiat, and that it can even be a socially progressive force.

Moreover, conflict with the West over religion is much older than the People's Republic. Imperial China was on the whole quite tolerant of religious beliefs. The cosmopolitan Qing Empire embraced not only Chinese traditions, but also Islam, the distinct Tibetan and Mongolian forms of Buddhism, and even Orthodox Christianity, practised by Russians living in the capital. Early Catholic missionaries were initially welcomed, but soon wore out their welcome—in 1746, the Yongzheng Emperor decided to ban the propagation of Christianity altogether.

The problem was not Western belief as such, but rather a clash with a Catholic Church that sought to replicate in Asia the political pre-eminence that it enjoyed in Europe. The last straw was a papal decision that defined practices of Confucian reverence as idolatrous, thus forcing Chinese Christians to choose between their faith and the ritual duties that were legally required of every Qing subject.

How relevant is this incident, known to historians as the Rites Controversy, for understanding the place of religion in China today? Both the Catholic Church and the Chinese state have come very far from what they had been in the early 18th century. The Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s categorically abandoned Catholic pretensions both to political power and to cultural

universalism. The Chinese imperial system has, of course, ceased to exist at all. With the 1911 Revolution, China abandoned the rituals of empire, and inaugurated a complete transformation in the relationship between state and society.

Yet certain similarities remained. Although the Qing was gone, the new Republic of China still saw itself as the foundation of a moral order. Organised religions could contribute, but were ultimately superfluous to the state's moral charge. The Republican government continued to regard religious movements with deep suspicion, and made sure that Christian and Buddhist revivals remained under close scrutiny.

In many ways, China was not so different from Japan. During the early 1930s, Catholic students at Tokyo's Sophia University refused to bow at the imperial shrine, prompting a crisis that was almost identical to the Rites Controversy. The only difference was the response of the Church, which quickly sided with public authorities and insisted that the bow was an act of civic reverence and thus entirely compatible with the practices of Christianity. In pre-Communist China, religion accommodated itself to the state, not the reverse.

Although China today remains extremely brutal in its suppression of certain types of religion, human rights discourses that are critical of China often hold the state to a caricature of western standards that are not strictly maintained even in western democracies. The Chinese model purges public space of religious symbols and discourse. While an affront to Anglo-American sensibilities, these same policies would look very familiar in France. Even within Western Europe, there is no standard on practices such as granting special tax status to religious groups, or encouraging religious participation in the provision of education and medicine.

The Soviet experience has taught that religion cannot be destroyed by central command.

Moreover, most of the religious freedom and human rights advocacy is focused on the two issues of underground Christianity and the place of the Dalai Lama in an autonomous Tibet. These issues are without question important, but we must also admit that they fall outside the experience of religion for most people in China and that they may well not be representative of where the state's own concerns about religion lie.

Sacred Heart Cathedral (Seksat Church) in Guangzhou.

While its many market, social, and political reforms are making the country more familiar and understandable to foreign observers, China is highly unlikely to uncritically accept a package of Western standards regarding religion. Since Deng Xiaoping announced the change of direction in the early 1980s, Chinese political thought on religion has advanced systematically into a coherent policy that is distinct both from classical Marxism and from the expectations of human rights advocates and religious communities overseas.

On the one hand, the Soviet experience has taught that religion cannot be destroyed by central command. Influential scholars such as Gong Xuezeng and Ye Xiaowen took the lead in portraying religion as a socially progressive force, even employing linguistic gymnastics to explain that Marx's original allusion to religion as an opiate actually referred to something more akin to a

medical anaesthetic used to help people through traumatic injuries.

On the other hand, the Party has come to view religion as a potentially progressive force, and even an ally in the pursuit of public order and morality. However, religious leaders must remain clearly subordinate to the leadership of the Party and to the non-negotiable condition of national integrity.

Since 2004, the official policy is not to destroy religion, but to find ways to make religion 'adapt itself to socialist society' (*yu shehuizhuyi shehui xiang shiying*). In recent years, China has developed its own theory of religion in society, one that has moved no closer to the Western understanding of religion as a right of the individual conscience. Each generation of leaders since Deng Xiaoping has added to this evolving complex of ideas. We ignore or trivialise them at our peril.

At the same time, religious freedom is currently far less prominent an obstacle in China's foreign relations than it was a decade *ago.* This is in part because the repression of groups like Falun Gong has receded from public view, in part because trade and security have come to the fore, and in part because China is increasingly able to project its own social models and parameters onto international discourse.

China has invested heavily in a new crop of institutions, including the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA, of which Ye Xiaowen served as director), as well as Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist theological training programs, and academic religious studies departments, to explore new avenues for the practice of religion in public life.

With increasing clout on the world stage, and a greater interest in exporting cultural influence, China has been less inclined to respond to Western criticism and more willing to advance its own political and social development as an alternative model. With respect to human rights, it has met calls for political openness with the case that genuine human rights consist not in free speech but in economic security, arguing that the Chinese people are in fact far better off than people in putatively free societies such as India, Russia, or even the United States.

The Party has come to view religion as a potentially progressive force, and even an ally in the pursuit of public order and morality.

In the same way, China will increasingly defend itself against charges of religious repression by promoting its own model of religion in society. Just as Chinese economic models have inspired development in Asia and Africa, we may soon hear echoes of what Zhu Xiaoming, past Director of the Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs, and current Standing Director of the Chinese Society for the Study of Human Rights, has called the 'socialist view of religion, with Chinese characteristics'.

Associate Professor Thomas DuBois is Senior Research Fellow in Chinese Studies, Australian National University College of Asia and the Pacific.

ANU honour for Aung San Suu Kyi

The Australian National University has bestowed its highest honour on Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, conferring on her a Doctor of Letters*, honoris causa*, for her outstanding contributions in the service of society.

The award was presented to her at a ceremony in Canberra on 29 November, during her visit to Australia as a guest of the Australian government.

BACK TO PAGE 1

The challenge to male dominance in Southeast Asia

Freedom from male status anxiety may be giving Southeast Asian women more latitude in everyday business matters.

By Anthony Reid

Until the late 19th century the majority of Southeast Asian women had much more freedom and economic agency than their European (or Chinese or Indian) counterparts, and played economic roles equivalent to (though different from) those of men. Free of the status preoccupations of men, women in Southeast Asia generally managed the money of the household, and engaged in business such as marketing, buying and selling.

The earliest large-scale manufactures in Southeast Asia had relied on the productive tradition of its women. But with the substitution of European manufactured imports during the high colonial era (roughly 1870–1940), women ceased to be independent producers. Everywhere the modern economy of mass production displaced women from their traditional roles, and sought male employees on the model of Europe. The specifically female commercialised productions for the market—cloth, ceramics, basketwork and medicinal herbs—were replaced by imported manufactures. When women did join the European-managed modern economy they were invariably paid less than men on the European model—on average only 60 per cent in agriculture and 40 per cent or less in factories and offices.

The exclusively male character of the model of the modern economy on offer in colonial Southeast Asia had much to do with the absence of any entrepreneurial middle class among indigenous Southeast Asians at the end of the high colonial era, and their perceived failure to respond to the profit motive of liberal economic theory. Dutch economist J.H. Boeke labelled this a 'dual economy', whereby a huge sociocultural gap divided the traditional rural economy from the modern one.

With the work of Clifford Geertz on the absent indigenous middle class in Indonesia, the debate shifted to how specific colonial policies favouring population growth within static and hierarchic social structures may have created this pattern. The gender factor never entered this debate, so natural did male modernity seem to its principals, yet it is clear that Southeast Asian males were poorly prepared to adopt roles which had long been dominated by women.

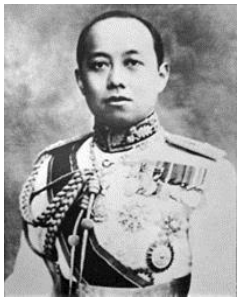
It is clear that Southeast Asian males were poorly prepared to adopt roles which had long been dominated by women.

Socially, the fashions were set by Europeans in this high colonial period. Upward mobility in the modern lifestyle, even more than in Victorian England and Holland, was seen to involve female withdrawal from the public and commercial spheres, to play a decorous role as upholders of an imagined pure 'national' essence of impractical modest dress, large hierarchic families, handicraft and domesticity.

Some of the modernising legislation on names, marriage and inheritance explicitly required a shift to patriarchy, notably where Asian men themselves were in a position to impose it—in Japan and Siam. Meiji Japan appears to have perceived male control of property as intrinsic

to the European model of modernity,and so narrowed inheritance to this same male surname line.

In 1913 King Vajiravudh also imposed surnames in Siam, claiming that this would make Thais 'civilised', and promote 'the maintenance of family tradition… as an incentive to everyone to uphold not only personal honour but the honour of the family as well'.



King Vajiravdudh: imposed surnames in Siam.

Men readily embraced not only the government positions made available only to them, but also the modern spheres of journalism and political association. Women appear to have conceded these to have been part of a male sphere of public discourse, status and hierarchy. Formal ideology, especially as associated with the male-centric scriptural religions, was itself in the male domain, so that women tended to evade ideology rather than contest it.

It was not so much that modernity usurped their roles in the economy, as that industrialisation, bureaucratisation and the spread of foreign ideologies expanded the 'male' spheres of life in unprecedented ways. Foreign models of religion (first and foremost), healing and medicine, production, the organisation of knowledge and even business were conceded to men because they resembled the hierarchic and status-filled world of male politics.

The vernacular model of the upwardly mobile family being presented in the 1920s and 30s was one in which the wife and mother was not in the workforce at all. The radical transformation of the family required by urban modernity proved a great opportunity for puritanical religious reformers to emphasise female pre-marital virginity, submissiveness and domesticity as if they were normative.

Men readily embraced not only the government positions made available only to them, but also the modern spheres of journalism and political association.

The real and imagined dangers of urban anonymity and industrial mixing required strict new codes for separating upwardly mobile respectability from the urban flotsam. Salvation depended now on individual morality, which showed itself in frugal habits, hard work, and the exaltation of the nuclear family over which a breadwinner father presided. 'Respectable' women were unprecedentedly constrained in dress, deportment and domesticity.

The women's movements of the colonial era, particularly as reconstructed in the subsequent official nationalist narrative, appear a disappointing handmaid of male initiatives. The realm of modern political associations had already been conceded to men, as an extension of their traditional preoccupations with status and public talking. In the 1920s such movements aligned themselves generally with the nationalist trend, to the point of muting their pursuit of specific advances for women.

This record could be read to mean that Southeast Asia's historic gender balance was forgotten in the rush to embrace a pre-1914 western image of modernity with all its profound patriarchy, so that a return to greater balance in a modern urban context had to play catch-up with post-modern progress in the West. Neo-traditional religious reformers, and at times even authoritarian post-war governments, were ready enough to condemn sexual liberation as an unwanted western import.

Does the region's remarkable heritage of relative gender balance and flexibility suggest anything by way of a less patriarchal model of modernity? If so, neither well-meaning reformers nor the ever more influential religious neo-traditionalists seem inclined to celebrate it.

Nevertheless there do appear to be some positive ways in which the Southeast Asian pattern has been differently gendered.

Firstly, despite a century of tutelage in modern western ideas of fixed and binary sexuality, the new anthropology of gender recognises the widespread survival in Southeast Asia of flexible and heterogeneous gender and sexual identities strikingly at odds with western norms. Colonial regimes criminalised homosexuality, but could never enforce this in indigenous societies which continued to accommodate European and Chinese refugees from sterner systems.

Wazir Jahan Karim is one of the new anthropologists insisting that Southeast Asian bilaterality still means, as it always has, a preference for kinship terminology based on age rather than gender in everyday social relations. Male and female are free to explore and exploit their complementary sexuality, but also to transgress these through 'the fluidity of sexual boundaries' and the acceptance of an 'intersexual third dimension of behaviour'.[1]

While gender theorists describe the readiness of Southeast Asian women to concede status superiority to men, especially in the realms of formal religion and politics, this relative freedom from status concerns still allows women more latitude in everyday business matters.

Secondly, Southeast Asian women did make the transition to industrial wage labour more willingly and successfully than European women, or Southeast Asian men, even if

Southeast Asian women did make the transition to industrial wage labour more willingly and successfully than European women, or Southeast Asian men.

colonial capitalism insisted on paying them much less than men. The most 'indigenous' manufactures of the colonial era, in cigarettes and textiles, overwhelmingly employed women, and even European-run enterprises did so on a much larger scale than in Europe. When large-scale manufacture for the world market did become a major feature of Southeast Asian economies, in the 1970s, it was a largely female work force that made this possible in electronics, textiles and food processing.

Thirdly, the gender pattern also permitted women more labour mobility than was the case in other industrialising situations, even if this was concentrated in the informal sector and largely invisible to governments. The huge male domination among Chinese, Indian and European migrants to the cities created a demand for sexual and domestic services, covering the whole range from prostitution to stable marriage.

From the 1970s, a willingness of women to migrate in order to provide for families was again shown in the massive international movement of female migrant workers out of the Philippines (the world leader), Thailand, Indonesia and Burma, serving Asia and the world in the domestic, health, tourist and entertainment sectors.

Even politically, the election of Philippines presidents Cory Aquino (1986) and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2004) and Indonesian Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001), and the anti-establishment election victories of Aung San Syu Kyi in Burma (1990) and Yingluck Shinawatra in Thailand

(2011) all owed something to a more aggressive male relative being hors de combat, but undoubtedly something also to a particular style of female charisma attractive to the region's voters.

Cory Aquino: a particular style of female charisma.

The confident male ideology of puritanical piety, rationality, and suspicion of women outside the home that accompanied the transition in England, France and Holland (but largely died there after 1914) is again an aspect of modernity in rapidly urbanising Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, Southeast Asians have so far managed the transition from rural peasant poverty to urban modernity with many fewer constraints on female employment and economic autonomy than in 19th century Europe or other such transitions.

This is an edited version of a presentation given as part of the Asian History Seminar Series organised by the Australian National University's College of Asia and the Pacific, on 14 October 2013.

References

1. Wazir Jahan Karim, 1995. 'Bilateralism and gender in Southeast Asia,' in '*Male' and 'female' in developing Southeast Asia*, Wazir Jahan Karim (ed.), Berg Publishers, Oxford, pp.35-74.

Anthony Reid is Emeritus Professor and Visiting Fellow, School of International, Political & Strategic Studies, Australian National University College of Asia and the Pacific.

PM launches Australia–Indonesia Centre

Prime Minister Tony Abbott and the Vice-President of Indonesia, Professor Dr Boediono, launched the new Australia–Indonesia Centre in Canberra last month.

To be based at Monash University, the centre will have nodes at the University of Melbourne, the Australian National University and Australia's peak scientific and research agency, CSIRO.

The Federal government will provide $15 million in funding over four years for the centre, which will foster Australia's business, cultural, education, research and community links with Indonesia.

The new centre will encourage research in a number of areas, including health and primary care, resources and energy, food and agriculture, infrastructure, education, and regional security.

Monash's Executive Director of Global Initiatives, Paul Ramadge, said the centre would help build 'mutual respect and understanding to address the challenges and opportunities in the region' by bringing together leading public and private sector organisations from both nations to collaborate.

BACK TO PAGE 1

THE CONVERSATION

Colombo II: send students to Asia but don't ignore Asian students at home

Engaging more effectively with Asia means acknowledging the needs of Asian students already in Australia.

By Jan Gothard

Now it's in government, the Coalition says one of its top priorities is international education. Along with policies to encourage international students to study here, Australian students, too, will be offered the chance to go to Asia as part of the government's New Colombo Plan.

It's been termed the 'New' Colombo Plan because it takes its name from the original Colombo Plan of the 1950s. Unlike the new policy, the aim of the previous plan, launched in the chill of the Cold War, was not to 'engage with Asia' but instead to keep Communist Asia far from Australia's doorstep.

Ironically, that meant bringing some Asians—non-communists—closer. Participating students would then return home, western-educated, and promote a sympathetic vision of Australian and western values in the newly decolonised nations of the region.

On this basis, the scheme was highly successful, particularly for the students themselves, many of whom went on to become leaders in their home countries.

There is no reason to think the New Colombo Plan will not be as successful as the original, though its intentions are different. But more could be borrowed than simply the name. Taking on board the hallmark of the original plan and focusing more deliberately on Asian students already coming to Australia might bring 'engaging with Asia' a significant step closer.

Appropriating the Colombo label means the Abbott government's new scheme inherits the favourable brand recognition of its predecessor. But the two Colombo plans are very different, the former with its emphasis on bringing Asian students in, the other on sending Australians 'Asia-bound' (as the previous government's very similar plan put it).

What seems most lacking from the Coalition's plan is a strongly focused attempt to acknowledge the needs of the international, particularly Asian, students we already have in this country. Their numbers now far outstrip the thousands who came earlier as part of the Colombo Plan or as privately-funded international students.

The Chaney report into international education released in February this year recommended promoting a 'positive experience' for international students, by maintaining 'an open and friendly learning environment where international students are valued members of the community and are supported to achieve their goals'.

From ambassadors to trade statistics

But unfortunately, we have seen the morphing of the international student from regional ambassador into little more than a figure on our balance of trade. As ANU associate professor Nicholas Brown has pointed out, international students are now more likely to be viewed as 'human capital'.

Their value is measured in terms of university statistics to quantify 'campus internationalisation'. They are seen as a solution to higher education funding problems and, at a

national level, a contribution to our significant trade in international education.

The social experiences of earlier waves of international students were not universally positive; but research suggests that current international students are even less likely to be successfully integrated into Australian university culture.

As the value of the sector declines by up to 25 per cent, we have seen new education minister Christopher Pyne promising to tackle the 'international education' market. Those interested in issues of international education beyond the financial, though, can only hope his government will recognise and facilitate the two-way benefits of enhanced social and cultural integration.

Global 30

Australia is not alone in facing this problem, which is shared by the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as non-western countries such as China, Japan and Korea.

Recognising the historical difficulty of getting its own students to go abroad, the Japanese government is now promoting its own ambitious policy, similar to the first Colombo plan, called the Global 30 project. Designed to bring 300 000 international students to study in Japan, the hallmark of the scheme is for students to study in English at handpicked Japanese universities, but they will do so alongside Japanese students.

The government wants the program to 'create an academic environment where international and Japanese students can learn from one another and build lasting international bonds'.

Cross-cultural benefits should be immediate and two way, but the overarching intention is less soft power diplomacy through education, as we saw in Australia in the 1950s, but 'propelling' Japanese students into the international scene.

While the success of the scheme has not yet been assessed, the coalition could learn from its vision and commendable approach.

Engaging with Asia at home

Higher educational institutions should do more to assist in the educational and social integration of Asian students, if only because we take their money and educational integration ought to be part of the package. Indeed, many Australian educators are presently working on this. But educational institutions are largely failing to capitalise on the resources already in their classrooms.

The Abbott government has produced an exciting agenda for engagement in the region. Getting domestic students to talk to the international students sitting on the other side of the classroom, though, could be a half-way decent alternative. They might all appreciate it. And it's much cheaper than going to Singapore.

By taking a retro-view of the original plan, the drivers of the New Colombo Plan have an opportunity to re-figure the Asian students who feature so prominently in our universities as cultural, educational and even regional assets for Australia. Simultaneously, we can offer them more positive engagement with Australia.

For Australian students who are not —as well as those who are—Asia-bound, in 21st century Australia, engagement with Asia can surely begin at home.

This article is republished from The Conversation*, 26 September 2013.*

Jan Gothard is Associate Professor in in History at Murdoch University.

BACK TO PAGE 1

Civilising China

China's efforts to be more like 'the West of us' are not only having impacts at home but also abroad.

By Geremie R. Barmé

Since the late 19th century, efforts to create modern societies in East Asia have involved redefining ancient civilisations and integrating new ideas into old cultures.

This is the challenge faced today by the Chinese Communist Party, which uses the expression *wenming* or 'civilisation' within China to improve civic standards, promote patriotism, evoke flexible cultural and political traditions and limit dissent.

And as China becomes wealthier and more confident on the global stage, it also expects to be respected and accommodated as a major global force and a formidable civilisation.

But how does one go about 'civilising' (read here modernising in the image of the West) one of the world's most ancient civilisations? And can 'the West of us' fairly expect China to be and behave like the 'rest of us'?

A recent spat over graffiti proves illuminating. In May this year, a *Sina Weibo* (a Chinese microblogging website) user named 'Independent Sky Traveller' uploaded an image he said made him feel shame and a loss of face. The image was of a graffito reading 'Din Jinhao was here' defacing an ancient frieze at the Luxor Temple complex in Egypt.

An animated discussion on social media ensued about this vandalism, which many felt had caused all of China to lose face. Within a day angry internet users discovered that Ding Jinhao was a 14-year-old boy living in Nanjing. Ding's parents apologised on his behalf and asked for forgiveness from the public. But the debate raged on; within a week the original post was forwarded almost 100 000 times and generated close to 20 000 comments expressing anger, embarrassment and deep sadness.

This furore came amid an explosion of Chinese outbound tourism. But it's not all one-way traffic.

China's growing wealth is having a profound impact on the world. This takes many forms, from large-scale investment in Africa and Latin America to the conspicuous consumption of wealthy Chinese who are becoming world leaders in the market for luxury goods.

And a recent Australian documentary, *Red obsession,* shows how increasing demand in China for Bordeaux wines is influencing the fate of the famous French winegrowing region.

At home, the Chinese Communist Party describes its transformation of society in the language of Marxism–Leninism: a socialist values system, nationwide civilised city campaigns and the new socialist village movement that would transform the rural environment along urban lines. It also promotes usefully rejigged elements of China's political, historical and cultural heritage.

As Chinese consumers acquire global tastes, they will potentially fashion and change what those tastes are.

Internationally, it insists on global acceptance of its particular interpretation of China's ancient culture as well as the historical narrative that the Communist Party rescued China from a political and economic decline that began in the

19th century and for which both western, and later, Japanese imperialism must take a significant share of the responsibility.

Both at home and abroad, its outlook is informed by a combination of insistence on the legitimacy of its one-party system, hybrid economic practices and the ethos of state-directed wealth creation.

And here lies the paradox at the heart of China's renewed interest in civilisation; a revitalised enthusiasm for Chinese culture and civilisation and enhanced nationalism versus appeals to rediscover the ideals of shared universal values held at a global level.

The government of the People's Republic of China reasonably believes that the norms and behaviours of the dominant economic powers should not be regarded as the sole global standard; it argues that those of emerging (or in its case re-emerging) nations like itself are equally important.

Accommodating to (official) Chinese views, standards and interpretations, therefore, broadens and enriches the existing global order and challenges it at the same time.

The old order, as represented by such western capitalist democracies as the US, Canada, the UK, Europe and Australia, may stand in awe of China's economic prowess. Yet state socialism and its authoritarian politics are anathema to its own concepts of civilisation.

The Communist Party's ongoing efforts to redefine and refine Chinese civilisation, to promote *wenming Zhonghua*, literally 'a civilised China', and the notion of sagacious one-party rule as an integral part of this civilising process is thus of great importance and interest to the world at large—not to mention other parts of the Sinosphere, such as Taiwan, which holds competing notions of Chinese civilisation and the role of the Communist Party in its promotion.

This is an edited extract from the China Story Yearbook 2013 'Civilising China', *launched by the Australian Centre on China in the World at the Australian National University College of Asia and the Pacific recently, and available online. This extract was published on the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific website,* and also in *The Canberra Times.*

Professor Geremie R. Barmé is Director of the Australian Centre on China in the World at the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific.

First Murdoch Commission report launched

The First Murdoch Commission, an independent inquiry on Western Australia in the evolving regional order, has tabled its *Final report.*

The report was officially launched on 19 November.

An initiative of Murdoch University, the commission was established as an independent international inquiry into the growing economic interdependency of Western Australia, Australia and the Asian region.

It has examined development potentials in the region through a set of interrelated themes—Asia's rise, regional economic dynamics, trade integration, resources security, engagement and diplomacy, and Western Australia's place in the emerging regional order.

A core task of the inquiry was to evaluate the importance of regional engagement in advancing growth and development, with a view to enhancing mutual benefit and long-term resilience for the Asian region, including Australia and Western Australia.

BACK TO PAGE 1

Bulletin board

Abstract submissions for ASAA 14

Abstract submissions for the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) 20th biennial conference (ASAA 14) are due by 7 February 2014.

The conference will be held at the University of Western Australia, 8–10 July in 2014.

The conference theme—'Asiascapes: contesting borders'—will seek to emphasise the involvement of Asia as a region of origin, transmission and reception of peoples, technologies, money, images, ideals and ideologies throughout the world.

See conference website for further information.

Postgraduate conference awards

The ASAA is offering 10 awards for postgraduate students to attend its 20th biennial conference. Each award is valued at $1100 and provides registration for the workshop and conference, accommodation for five nights in a university college, and attendance at the conference dinner.

Applicants must be ASAA members who, at the time of application, are enrolled at an Australian university in a postgraduate program with a thesis component. They must attend the postgraduate workshop on 7 July and the conference from 8–10 July, and present a paper to the conference.

Further details on how to apply are available on the ASAA website.

Applications should be emailed to the ASAA Secretary, Dr Amrita Malhi, secretary@asaa.asn.au, by 14 March. 2014. Awards will be decided by early April.

Sponsorship Opportunities

ASAA 2014 is seeking to partner with a range of sponsors in creating a world-class event for Western Australia. A range of individually tailored sponsorship opportunities will be made available to interested parties.

Major partnerships are strictly limited and will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. In addition to the chief partnership categories, some specific individual partnerships are available, including advertising and satchel inserts. If your organisation has special needs, the organisers would be pleased to tailor a suitable package.

For further information on sponsorship and trade opportunities contact:
ASAA 2014 Conference Secretariat
EECW Pty Ltd
T: +61 8 9389 1488
F: +61 8 9389 1499
E: info@eecw.com.au

ENITAS Scholarships

Applications are now open for ENITAS (Empowering for International Thai and ASEAN Studies) project scholarships in 2014. The scholarships are offered by the Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University, with support from the Thailand Research Fund.

The scholarships are open to Thai and non-Thai scholars, researchers or graduates doing in-depth study on any one country in the ASEAN community or a comparative study of countries within ASEAN in the field of Arts and Humanities. See website for further details.

Coming events

***Tale of the southern winds*, Sydney, 14 December, and Melbourne, 17 December**. The Japan Foundation, Sydney, and Okinawa Prefecture present the Australian debut of this dance theatre work by the Okinawa Song & Dance Theatre Ensemble, Chura. Bookings and details online.

***Non-Han Chinese diasporic communities beyond China*, Canberra, 4–5 April 2014**.Organised and sponsored by the College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University, and the Center for International Migration Studies, Jinan University, Guangzhou, , the conference will examine aspects of the Chinese diaspora.

Further information: Li Tana, Nicholas Farrelly, Zhang Zhenjiang, or Geoff Wade (conference secretary).

12th International Conference on Thai Studies, Sydney, 22–24 April 2014. The triennial conference will be held at the University of Sydney and will adopt the theme 'Thailand in the world'. Further details from the conference website.

Excellence in Professional Practice Conference: 'Teachers driving school improvement'. Melbourne, 16–17 May 2014, organised by the ACER Institute. See website.

***'Fighting women' during and after the Second World War in Asia and Europe,* conference, The Netherlands, 12–13 June, 2014**, The Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Amsterdam.

***New world. New thinking.* Asia Education Foundation National Conference, Sydney, 16–18 June 2014.** See website for details.

EduTECH National Conference and Expo, Brisbane, 3–4 June 2014. See website.

ASAA 2014 Biennial Conference, 8–10 July 2014. The 20th ASAA biennial conference, *Asiascapes: contesting borders*, will be held at the University of Western Australia, Perth. See conference website

Inaugural AAS-in-Asia conference, *Asia in motion: heritage and transformation*, National University of Singapore, 17–19 July 2014. Further information available from conference website.

***Activated borders: re-openings, ruptures and relationships,* 4th Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network, Hong Kong,** 8–10 December 2014. Deadline for papers: 1 February 2014. See website for further details.

International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS 9), 5–9 July 2015. Adelaide Convention Centre. See website for further information, or contact the convenor, Dr Gerry Groot.

About the ASAA

The ASAA 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.

The association supports two refereed journals, the *Asian Studies Review* and the *e-Journal of foreign language teaching.* It holds a biennial academic conference which offers members and other scholars the opportunity to hear the latest in research and to develop contacts with other scholars.

It also sponsors four book series, covering Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia, and Women in Asia, and makes regular submissions to governments and universities on issues of importance to Asian studies. JOIN NOW.

Asian Studies Review

Asian Studies Review is a multidisciplinary journal of contemporary and modern Asia. The journal sets out to showcase high-quality scholarship on the modern histories, cultures, societies, languages, politics and religions of Asia through the publication of research articles, book reviews and review articles.

It welcomes the submission of research articles from across the broad spectrum of the social sciences and humanities on all the regions of Asia and on international and transnational issues in which Asia is the major point of focus.

Asian Studies Review sets out to publish a balanced mixture of articles in both traditional and emerging disciplines. The invited review articles and book reviews published in *Asian Studies Review* provide a vital point of articulation between the scholarship on display in the research articles and the broader world of Asian Studies.

Asian Studies Review is associated with the Asian Studies Association of Australia. All research articles in this journal have undergone rigorous peer review, based on initial editor screening and refereeing by two anonymous referees.

Asian Currents is edited by Allan Sharp. Unsolicited articles of between 850–1000 words on any field of Asian studies are welcome and will be considered.

BACK TO PAGE 1