Asian Currents
The Asian Studies Association of Australia
Maximising Australia's Asian Knowledge
March 2011 ISSN 1449–4418

New ASAA survey of Asian language enrolments

Chinese 'ghetto' language warning

Despite China's growing importance to Australia as a trading partner Chinese risks becoming perceived as a 'ghetto' language, to be taken only by students of Chinese background, a new survey of Asian languages enrolments in Australian higher education has found.

And the situation with Indonesian—described in the survey report as a language of crucial significance for Australia—is dire, with a continued marked deterioration in the numbers enrolling in the language.

'The need for the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) to continue to lobby government and media to make the case for the promotion of Asian languages in Australian higher education is more urgent than ever,' the report said.

Report highlights

- New programs have opened up in Chinese, and enrolments are up by about one-third since 2001, but most new learners are of Asian background
- Numbers in Indonesian have fallen dramatically since the early 200s and a number of providers have terminated programs in Indonesian
- Japanese has seen a modest increase in enrolments since 2001 and continues to have by far the largest number of enrolments of any Asian language
- Enrolments of Arabic have more than doubled since 2001 from a small base
- Korean and Vietnamese enrolments have grown quite strongly since the early 200s, but are offered in very few institutions.

'With Indonesian programs in crisis around the country a national effort is needed to ensure their ongoing survival. In Chinese, encouragement for the enrolment of more non-background speakers is of critical importance. Without proactive measures, Chinese is in danger of becoming a 'ghetto' language from which people of non-Chinese background feel excluded.

The survey, conducted over 2008–09 by Associate Professor Anne McLaren, University of Melbourne, for the ASAA, covered 24 Australian institutions of higher learning. It was the latest survey on enrolments in Asian language programs commissioned biennially by the ASAA since 2001.

The survey found that Chinese language enrolments have enjoyed a growth spurt in many institutions since the early to mid-2000s, due to the addition of new providers at tertiary level and also the growth in international students, many of them from Chinese-speaking regions of Asia.

'This latter group has become an increasingly important source of student numbers for Chinese programs,' the report said. 'In addition, Australians of Chinese background seek to enhance skills in their heritage language (or learn Mandarin if they are non-Mandarin speakers), and international students Continued page 2>>

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Chinese 'ghetto' language warning

<< From page 1 from Japan to pursue a course in Mandarin Chinese to complement their major course of study.

Although Chinese has seen significant growth in recent years, the report warned that, if this enrolment trend continued, Chinese risked becoming perceived as a 'ghetto' language to be taken only by students of Chinese background.

'This has unfortunate implications for the Australian community at large, given the rise of China to become Australia's most important trading partner. China offers important opportunities for Australia, and the nation needs to engagement of broad sectors of the community to make the most of these opportunities,' the report said.

Indonesian is a language of crucial national significance for Australia. However, one can only describe the picture for Indonesian as dire.

With Indonesian, the report noted that the language was taught in 18 institutions of higher education in 2009, two less than listed in the previous report in April 2008, and that a number of institutions had ceased teaching it since the 2000s.

Among the 24 institutions responding to the 2009 survey, total enrolments in Indonesian declined from 324 equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL) in 2001 to 220 in 2009, a fall of 32 per cent. Many major players have seen enrolments fall by half or more over a nine-year period.

The severe decline in Indonesian enrolments at school level and the tiny numbers of students who study Indonesian at Year 12 (1311 nationally in 2008) has had severe consequences for higher education, as far fewer domestic students enrol in post-Year 12 level Indonesian, the report said.

'Indonesian is a language of crucial national significance for Australia. However, one can only describe the picture for Indonesian as dire, with enrolments in Australia's largest programs declining year by year since the mid-2000s.'

However, the report noted some initial encouraging signs, with the Brisbane Universities Language Hub, a federally funded collaborative venture to integrate the teaching of languages across the three Brisbane universities—the University of Queensland (UQ), the Queensland University of Technology and Griffith—showing some increase in enrolments in 2009.

Although UQ and Griffith reported tiny enrolments (less than 10 EFTSU each) for Indonesian, UQ reported a doubling of enrolments in the first semester of 2010. The report cautioned, however, that it remained to be seen whether the hub arrangement would foster the growth of Indonesian enrolments, but it was a strategy for Brisbane universities to continue to offer otherwise non-viable language programs.

Japanese saw a 9.2 per cent rise in enrolments in 2009, and the general pattern is of a more or less 'steady state' situation, with either a slight decline or slight decrease in the 27 institutions offering the language.

The five institutions in Australia offering Arabic have enjoyed a strong enrolment growth through the 21st century, the report found, with the Australian National University enrolments increasing six-fold from a very small base. Enrolments at the University of Melbourne and the University of Sydney have come close to doubling between 2001 and 2009.

The survey also covered Indian languages (Hindi-Urdu, Sanskrit and Pali), Javanese, Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese. The report warned that the languages of smaller enrolment need further assistance if they were to survive—especially Indian languages, Thai and Vietnamese.

The full report *Asian languages enrolments in Australian higher education 2008–09* is available from the ASAA website.

Why teaching about Asia matters in higher education

DEBORAH HENDERSON reflects on the teaching of Asian languages and cultures in Australia since the 1970 Auchmuty report—and concludes that not much has changed.

On 27 January 2011, the Prime Minister announced that funding for the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) would cease from 1 January 2012, as part of the government's effort to find budget savings to support reconstruction after January's devastating floods.

Apparently savings of $22 million a year—or 0.1 per cent of gross revenues—will be achieved from this decision. Some of the 'spin' accompanying the announcement of the ALTC's demise was the claim that the government remains 'committed to raising the standard of learning and teaching, including through the work of the new Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the My University website'.

The Prime Minister assured that, as quality teaching has always been an important part of universities' missions, 'it will be important for all universities to embed quality teaching as the higher education sector moves towards the new demand-driven system in which students are making choices about where to study'.

However, the assumption that a regulatory body, such as TEQSA, will encourage the sort of rich innovation that characterised the ALTC's work begs many questions. Moreover, if there is not an independent body advocating and supporting risk-taking and innovative experimentation for teaching in the higher education sector, will universities really push to embed quality teaching while also pursuing the high stakes national research performance rankings?

As a Queenslander, I experienced first-hand the impact of the flood in Brisbane, and like many of those who have posted comments on the GetUp site, I will happily pay a levy to help with the reconstruction effort. However, I share the frustration of my colleagues that the government's short-term decision will have a much longer-term impact. It could be argued that this decision will undermine efforts to enhance and promote learning and teaching in Australian higher education. I think we need an independent body in Australia, like the ALTC, that value adds: one that is dedicated to evolving and improving approaches to learning and teaching that focus on student engagement and improving the student learning experience.

Why does teaching about Asia matter in higher education? Teaching is a complex activity, and it has been theorised extensively. It could be argued that quality teaching involves more than mastering a repertoire of 'recipe' skills that align with one's discipline area. For teaching involves knowing your students, their aspirations and backgrounds, and assisting them to achieve their goals.

Learning about the histories and cultures of several Asian nations was exciting and enlightening.

Effective teaching also involves scholarly engagement and reflection, while being caring and responsive to student learning needs, designing engaging and stimulating learning activities and providing worthwhile and timely feedback.

Put simply, teaching is a vehicle for increasing the life opportunities of students, and it requires continual commitment and critical reflection. My teaching approach centres on being respectful with my students while purposefully challenging them through inquiry-based learning.

I owe my own awakening to Asia to some of my outstanding university lecturers. For many students of my generation a Eurocentric education was the norm: cities like Hong Kong and Singapore were often viewed as mere stopovers <<Continued page 4

Why teaching about Asia matters

<<From page 3 to the 'real' action in Europe. Our own education at school could best be described as Anglocentric, and I am so grateful that some inspirational lecturers at university challenged my undergraduate view of the world and narrow notion of what it meant to be Australian. Their passion and enthusiasm inspired me to learn more about the region in which we are located.

These academics were lucid, informative and thought provoking, as they both inspired and guided me into new world views. Learning about the histories and cultures of several Asian nations was exciting and enlightening. This education has had a long-term impact on my own development as a teacher and academic.

As a teacher educator, my transdisciplinary research in education focuses on the development of intercultural understanding in the social sciences via history and social education, and recently, the values dimensions of this for schooling and higher education.
I explore the ways in which Asia literacy can be achieved in the curriculum through intercultural understanding, for I believe that young Australians require the capacity to develop cultural awareness and competency so they can navigate the cultural diversity they will encounter within Australia and throughout the region.

Furthermore, as the PriceWaterhouseCoopers Melbourne Institute Asialink Index of 2010 attests, Australia's engagement with Asia in trade, tourism, migration, investment, humanitarian assistance and education is growing faster than our engagement with the rest of the world combined.

Teaching about Asia matters at universities, and its impact makes a difference in the lives of students. However, despite the excellent work of organisations such as the Asia Education Foundation, and the fact that the latest statement on the national goals for schooling in Australia, the Melbourne Declaration, identifies Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia as a priority across the curriculum, much needs to be done. Too many school and university students complete their education without acquiring Asia knowledge, skills and understandings.

Perhaps this is illustrated with reference to a significant policy document released in 1970.The Auchmuty report (1970) *The teaching of Asian languages and cultures in Australia*, was the result of the work of a government advisory committee, headed by Professor JJ Auchmuty. It was set up by the Gorton Government in 1969, in response to an initiative from (then) Minister for Education Malcolm Fraser. Chapter two of the report dealt with the rationale for Australian interest in Asia and noted the political, economic, trade, business, cultural and social reasons why Australia needed to reappraise its traditional attitudes towards Asia (see Auchmuty 1970:11–20).

There remains enormous resistance to teaching and learning about Asia in this nation.

With reference to schooling, the Auchmuty committee recommended that attention focus on the core studies area, for 'more than half the population can go through secondary school without any systematic study of Asian affairs' (Auchmuty 1970:89).

In terms of Asian languages, the committee observed that 'Asian languages are not sufficiently widely available at secondary level' (ibid: 90). The Auchmuty report also noted that knowledge about Asia in primary and secondary schools depended upon good teaching and sound teaching materials. The report harnessed the argument that it was in Australia's national interest to challenge the prevailing Eurocentric traditions that dominated Australian intellectual and cultural life.

One might reflect that not much has changed since 1970. Forty years on the challenge of educating about Asia and its languages continues, as the debates about the place of Asia in the first national curriculum in Australia, known as the Australian curriculum, testify. Sadly, these debates indicate that there remains enormous resistance to teaching and learning about Asia in this nation.
World views are powerful things.
Continued page 5>>

Why teaching about Asia matters

<<From page 4. Through effective teaching academics can make their scholarship and ideas matter, and this can have an enormous impact on how their students view the world and what they can achieve. Much remains to be done though quality university teaching to enrich Australia's understanding of Asia and our place in the world.

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Dr Deborah Henderson is a senior lecturer in the School of Cultural and Language Studies, in the Faculty of Education at Queensland University of Technology. In November 2010, she received an ALTC Teaching Excellence Award in the category of Social Sciences (including Education).

Awards offer opportunities for Asian studies

Asian studies scholars in Australia wishing to study abroad, or Australian executives wishing to gain further professional experience in Asia, in 2012 may be eligible to apply for an Australian Government Endeavour Research Fellowship or Endeavour Executive Award for 2012.

Applications for 2012 open next month (April).

Nadine Chapman used her Endeavour Research Fellowship to extend her honeybees research Thailand.

The Endeavour Awards are the government's internationally competitive, merit-based scholarship program providing opportunities for citizens of the Asia–Pacific, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas to undertake study, research and professional development in Australia.

Awards are also available for Australians to do the same abroad.

The awards are part of the Australia Awards initiative, which was announced by the government in 2009 to maximise the benefit to Australia of its extensive scholarship programs, and to support ties between Australia and its neighbours.

Citizens and permanent residents of Australia who are currently living here can apply for an Endeavour Executive Award or Endeavour Research Fellowship for research or professional development activities, including in over 60 participating Asia–Pacific and Middle East countries.

The Endeavour Research Fellowships provide financial support (up to AUD$23 500) for postgraduate students to undertake short-term research—four to six months—towards a Masters degree, PhD or postdoctoral research in Australia, in any field of study, in participating countries. The Endeavour Eexecutive Awards provide financial support (up to AUD$18 500) for professionals wishing to develop their professional skills through an overseas experience of one to four months in duration.

Dr Greg Mc Millan, Director of Skills Tech Partners, used his Endeavour Executive Award to gain further insight into and knowledge of of India's emerging technical education system and to explore partnership opportunities on behalf of Queensland's Department of Education and Training.

The Endeavour Research Fellowships and the Endeavour Executive Awards aim to enable high-achieving scholars and executives to further develop their knowledge and skills in their field of research or business, strengthen bilateral ties between Australia and the participating countries, showcase Australia's educational sector, strengthen mutual understanding between Australia and the award holders' home countries, and build international linkages and networks.

Further information on the full range of Endeavour Awards is available from www.AustraliaAwards.gov.au.

Industry call to make Australia Asia-ready

Australia's leading industry organisation and Asialink have recommended the development of a new strategy for developing Asia-readiness in the workforce.

The strategy would include a renewed focus and effort on integrating Asian studies and languages into school curriculum as a long-term investment for future business engagement in Asia.

The recommendation follows a major new survey by the Australian Industry Group (AI) and Asialink to better understand Australian business engagement with Asia.

The survey found that more than half of Australian businesses surveyed and currently operating in Asia had little board and senior executive experience of Asia or Asian language skills.

Asia was considered important to overall business success, with 74 per cent of the businesses indicating interest in expanding into Asia. Overall, China was rated as the Asian economy that played the biggest role in business success, closely followed by business operations in Japan and Thailand.

Businesses saw the future in Asia as positive, with 49 per cent planning to start or expand their businesses in Asia within 12 months.

About 54 per cent of companies reported that at least some senior executives have board or senior executive experience of Asia and/or Asia skills. In contrast, 32 per cent with Asian dealings said that none of their Australian-based board members or senior executives had any of the listed Asian skills or experiences. Sixty-five per cent reported that none of their board members had worked in Asia.

Seventy-three cent of businesses said they did not have any senior executives who spoke an Asian language and 84 per cent said that no board member spoke an Asian language.

Businesses that reported having senior staff with some Asian experience or skills rated the importance of local knowledge to their business in Asia significantly higher than those that did not report having senior staff fitting this criterion. Similarly, they rated the importance of having cultural understanding and an understanding of local management practices significantly higher than businesses that did not report having staff with Asian skills and experience.

Large businesses were more likely to have staff who had lived and worked in Asia, had cultural or pre-departure training, or who spoke an Asian language. This suggested these businesses were also more likely to have the skills and expertise necessary to prepare them for expanding business dealings in or with Asia.

In the light of the survey, AI and Asialink have recommended the development of an Asia-ready workforce strategy. Central to the strategy would be the appointment of an Asia-ready workforce advisory panel, reporting to the Prime Minister, and chaired by Asialink. The panel would leverage key partners in the Business Alliance for Asia Literacy to develop, guide and implement the strategy.

Schools and tertiary education would be a critical part of the strategy. To this end, the report recommended that the federal and state governments invest in a national Asia literacy action plan to ensure that the delivery of Asian skills and Asian languages in the Australian Curriculum is adequately funded in Australian schools. It also recommended providing incentives for school and tertiary students to study Asian languages and Asian studies; equipping new and current school teachers and academic staff and making them available to teach Asia skills and Asian languages; and supporting universities to establish Asian regional networks.

See full report *Engaging Asia: getting it right for Australian business.*

Post-war prospects for Sri Lanka's Tamils remain uncertain

The Rajapakse government may have won Sri Lanka's brutal civil war but, asks DAVID FEITH, can it maintain peace?

The war in Sri Lanka ended in May 2009, when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were defeated by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces. This military victory by the Sri Lankan army brought an end to an armed conflict that had lasted some 26 years.

The conflict caused the deaths of approximately 100 000 people, led to widespread suffering for thousands more, and resulted in widespread destruction of physical and social infrastructure, particularly in the north and east of the island.[1]

During the decades of armed conflict many observers thought that it would not be possible to defeat the LTTE militarily. The Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE entered into peace negotiations on at least three occasions (1990, 1995, and 2002–05) in attempts to find a political solution. However, a political settlement was not agreed to, and the war ended with a very bloody final phase.

President Rajapakse—determined to pursue a military solution.

The beginning of the final phase of the war can be traced to 2005, when it became clear that the recently elected government, led by President Mahinda Rajapakse, was determined to pursue a military solution. It abandoned peace negotiations, increased military expenditure and was able to secure both military and diplomatic support from China (in strategically playing off India against China it was also able to secure support from India).[2]

In 2008, it demanded that all foreign observers leave the north of Sri Lanka, so no-one would witness the final assault, and embarked on a determined effort to wipe out the LTTE militarily.[3] During 2008–09 the Sri Lankan Government and Armed Forces waged a ruthless and bloody war against the LTTE. Thousands of civilians were killed and displaced by the conflict. The UN estimates suggest 7000 people were killed in first four months of 2009—other estimates are of up to 40 000 deaths.

In this final phase of the war no journalists were allowed in to the war zone, but significant and credible reports have emerged to confirm that it was a brutal, bloody battle, in which thousands of civilians were killed.[4]

Now that the Rajapakse government has won the war, will it be able to maintain peace in Sri Lanka, and if so, what kind of peace?

A window on one of the remaining walls of a church. This particular site was used as a shelling base by the Sri Lankan military. Photo: Shelley Morris.

The underlying grievances that led young Tamils to take up arms and join several militant organisations in the 70s and 80s have still not been addressed. Tamils in Sri Lanka have been systematically discriminated against by successive governments since Independence in 1948. The majority Sinhalese community makes up approximately 74 per cent of the population, and Sinhalese political parties have dominated government since Independence. Both major Sinhalese parties have played on anti-Tamil sentiments for political purposes and to strengthen their own political position.

Since Independence the minority Tamil community has been in an insecure position, and Tamils have been treated as second-class citizens. During the 26-year conflict the LTTE defended and fought for Tamils, both militarily and in several series of political negotiations, but they have now been defeated. However, the reasons why Tamils took up arms and Continued page 8>>

Tamil prospects remain uncertain

<< From page 7 joined the LTTE and other militant Tamil groups have not been adequately addressed.[5]
Since the end of the war in 2009 many parts of northern and eastern Sri Lanka— the areas that were traditionally inhabited by the Tamils as their homeland and where they formed a majority for many centuries— are under military occupation. Despite the end of the war and the defeat of the LTTE, the government has increased military spending. Will the government address the Tamil grievances, which have been articulated repeatedly over the decades since the 1950s, or will they, in their triumphalism over the military defeat of the LTTE, ignore them?

Since the war ended, independent journalists have not been able to travel to northern Sri Lanka. However, a small number of independent witnesses have managed to go there, and on return convey their impressions. An Australian photographer, Shelley Morris, travelled for two weeks in northern Sri Lanka, in Jaffna and the Vanni region, in September 2010.

After returning she mounted an exhibition of her photographs at the Off the Kerb gallery in Melbourne. She saw a devastated landscape, and reports that on either side of the A9 highway, the main road between Jaffna and Vavuniya, a wide strip of land had been bulldozed and military bunkers and watchtowers lined the road. Everywhere in the north she was aware of the army presence— she saw soldiers walking along the road, soldiers in trucks, soldiers manning check posts, soldiers in bunkers and watch towers.[6]

Ruined landscape, Jaffna. Photo: Shelley Morris.

Morris and other witnesses describe the widespread destruction in the north— all the buildings have been bombed or bulldozed. In the Jaffna peninsula the destruction is older, and although many buildings show signs of having been bombed or shelled, or damaged in the war, there are still houses standing, with people living in them.

However, in the Vanni region, where the last months of the war were fought, there are no houses remaining. Some people, released from internment camps, where they were detained for many months after the war ended, have been allowed to return to their land, but their houses have been destroyed. They are living in temporary housing or makeshift tents. The population is predominantly women and children— few men are seen. They do not

Tamil people living in the north are intimidated by the overpowering military presence, and many feel threatened and at risk.

have housing and most sources of income have been destroyed. All the farming equipment has been burned, so they do not have the means to resume farming.[7]Tamil people living in the north are intimidated by the overpowering military presence, and many feel threatened and at risk. The soldiers are all Sinhalese, and hardly speak any Tamil. As most Tamils living in the north do not speak Sinhalese, it is difficult for the Tamil civilians to communicate with the Sinhalese soldiers.

The pervasive army presence is an army of occupation—Tamils feel that their land has been taken over by Sinhalese, and fear that the Sinhalese want to take and colonise their land. Their fears are confirmed by the construction of large army camps (on confiscated Tamil land), including housing for soldiers' families: it looks as if the Sinhalese army is in the north to stay.

From the government perspective, it is necessary to maintain a large army in the north indefinitely, to prevent any re-emergence of militancy by the LTTE or another militant group. It is easier to flood the north with soldiers than to properly address Tamil grievances.

Although access to northern Sri Lanka for foreign observers or journalists is restricted, Sinhalese from the south can travel to some areas. Sinhalese have established large coffee shops and restaurants along Continued page 9>>

Tamil prospects remain uncertain

>> From page 8 the A9 highway, catering for the busloads of Sinhalese tourists. These tourists might simply want to see Jaffna, a city that for decades they felt they could not visit. However, Tamils feel as if they are in a tightly controlled zoo—second-class citizens.[8]

It is not only the Tamil community in Sri Lanka that is threatened and intimidated by the current Rajapakse Government. There has been a history of intimidation of journalists and anyone critical of the government.

The recent controversy regarding the Galle Literary Festival highlighted the risks to journalists and free speech in Sri Lanka. Two organisations, Reporters without Borders and Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka (JDS), announced in January 2011 the launch of an international appeal, asking writers and intellectuals to endorse a campaign for more freedom of expression in Sri Lanka. They asked writers who had been invited to the Galle Literary Festival to consider boycotting the festival in protest against 'Sri Lanka's appalling human rights record and targeting of journalists.

These children at a displaced people's camp have been here since the previous war—so these families have been in the camp for around 10–15 yrs. Photo: Shelley Morris.

Murders, physical attacks, kidnappings, threats and censorship continue in Sri Lanka despite the end of the civil war. The most senior government officials, including the defence secretary (the president's brother), are directly implicated in serious press freedom violations affecting both Tamil and Sinhalese journalists'.[9]

The assassination of newspaper editor Lasanthe Wickrematunga in Colombo in January 2009 was well-publicised, particularly because the *Sunday Leader* published an editorial that he wrote, predicting his murder and implying that the Rajapakse Government was responsible for it. This is one of numerous examples of journalists being harassed in Sri Lanka. Many Sinhalese and Tamil journalists have 'disappeared'—taken away in an unmarked white van and never seen again. Anyone publicly critical of the government is at risk of harassment and persecution, if not death.[10]

Paralleling the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, there was also a propaganda war in which the two main protagonists—the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE—presented to the international community very different versions of what was going on. There have been other versions, but they were marginalised, ignored or silenced. So it has been difficult to know the truth about Sri Lanka.

Now that the war has ended, it is important to try and understand the political situation in Sri Lanka today and what happened over the last three decades and to challenge and investigate critically the propaganda versions, past and present. However, this is very difficult in a political environment where government critics and journalists are harassed, and access to parts of the country restricted.

Independent observers, UN officials, human rights workers, humanitarian organisations and journalists should visit northern and eastern Sri Lanka to see and investigate the situation there, but the government is so far restricting all such access.

Fisherman who no longer own their own fishing nets find it hard to make a living. Photo: Shelley Morris.

From the 1980s to 2009 the Sri Lankan army and LTTE were at war, with intermittent periods of ceasefire. During these decades both parties, the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, ignored International Humanitarian Law as established by the Geneva Conventions for treatment of non-combatants and civilians.[11]

In May 2010, the International Crisis Group issued a report *War crimes in Sri Lanka*, which found that both the Sri Lankan Armed Forces and the LTTE committed atrocities and Continued page 10>>

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<< From page 9 and violated international humanitarian law during the conflict, particularly during the last five months of the war in 2009.

The International Crisis Group report calls for an international inquiry into alleged war crimes, and significantly states that such an inquiry 'is essential given the absence of political will or capacity for genuine domestic investigations, the need for an accounting to address the grievances that drive conflict in Sri Lanka, and the potential of other governments adopting the Sri Lankan model of counterinsurgency in their own internal conflicts.'[12]

The remnants of a school.
Photo: Shelley Morris.

The position for Tamils in Sri Lanka, particularly in the north, is precarious and threatened, and there are no prospects for improvement in the future.

Considering this, it is likely that Tamils will continue to try and leave Sri Lanka, and make their lives elsewhere, as they have since 1983. The large Tamil Diaspora (close to one million people) around the world is made up of Tamils who have left Sri Lanka, most of them since 1983, because they saw that the situation for Tamils in Sri Lanka is unfairly restricted, they did not want to live as second-class citizens—or to escape the war.

Until the longstanding Tamil grievances are adequately addressed, Tamils will continue to want to leave. Perhaps this is what the Sri Lankan government, or some elements in the government, intends.

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David Feith has been involved observing, researching and writing about the conflict in Sri Lanka since 1983. He lived in Tamil Nadu (India) for three years, including 1983 when the anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka erupted. In the 1990s he worked at Australian Volunteers International, and, as manager of the South Asia program, travelled several times to Sri Lanka, including areas under the control of the LTTE. Since 2003 he has taught at Monash College, Melbourne.

Delicate women's fancies

The number of Japanese women authors writing on sensual and violent narratives is rising steadily, says EMERALD KING

Imagine a woman kneeling, trembling in excitement as she waits for her boyfriend to strike her back with a strand of pearls; imagine a woman who longs for her lover so much that her whole body feels like a river overflowing with desire; imagine a young girl who drinks her days away and dreams only of designer goods and luxury items.

Any of these scenarios could appear in the hedonistic and masochistic literature written by Japanese women authors. Without doubt Japanese authors have been writing sensual and violent narratives since the earliest times—think of the exploits of Murasaki Shikibu's lusty hero Genji in *The tale of Genji* (circa 1000).

Since the post-Pacific War 'boom' of women's writing that took place in the 1960s and '70s the number of Japanese women writers has risen steadily, culminating in the recent flood of young female recipients of the Akutagawa prize in the early 2000s.

Sharalyn Orbaugh and Julia Bullock both delineate the years between 1960 and 1973 as a key moment in Japanese women's writing.[1] The period begins with author Yumiko Kurahashi's (1935–2005) wickedly satirical *Partei* which exposed the hypocrisy present in student movements of the time and ends with the close of the period of economic growth that took place between 1955 and 1973.

Kurahashi's debut was quickly followed by those of authors such as Kôno Taeko (1923–), Ôba Minako (1930–2007), Ariyoshi Sawako (1931–84), Takahashi Takako (1932–), Tomioka Taeko (1935–), Tsushima Yûko (1947–) and Kanai Mieko (1947). The period was further enriched by the work of already established authors, including Amino Kiku (1900–78), Uno Chiyo (1897–1996), Sata Ineko (1904–98), Enchi Fumiko (1905–86) and Hirabayashi Taiko (1905–72).

Japan in the 1960s saw explosive growth in the wake of the withdrawal of the Allied Occupation forces in 1952 that was showcased in events such as the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the birth of the Shinkansen high-speed railway network, culminating in the Osaka World Expo of 1970.

At the same time the renewal of the ANPO treaty with the United States that allowed for, among other things, the United States to maintain military bases in Japan saw widespread student protests that ravaged Tokyo and disrupted universities.

These are not simple tales of men hurting or killing women...most of the violence depicted is performed by, either in actuality or in fantasy, by women on themselves.

It was against this background that many of these emerging authors were writing on themes including incest, masochism, infanticide, cannibalism, murder, dismemberment and disfiguration. Understandably, these were themes that many readers found, and continue to find, disturbing or offensive.

However, these are not simple tales of men hurting or killing women. As Orbaugh points out, most of the violence depicted in these stories is performed by, either in actuality or in fantasy, by women on themselves (and by extension the bodies of their family members).[2] For example, many of Kôno Taeko's short stories from this period, *Toddler hunting* (1965) and *Crabs* (1963), to name but two, feature female protagonists who enjoy taking part in masochistic and violent sex.

The sex in these stories takes place wholly according to the desires of the women who, although they take the submissive role, remain in control of the situation. Takahashi Takako's works feature a curious blend of, among other themes, infanticide, masturbation and Catholicism.

In delineating the 15-year period from 1960–1975, both Orbaugh and Bullock point out that it is a purely arbitrary selection on their parts as there are no social or economic Continued page 12>>

Delicate women's fancies

<< From page 11 upheavals that mark it as a 'period', such as the Occupation period or the Shôwa, Meiji or Heisei periods. Many of the women writers mentioned above continued writing well into the next decades including the 'Bubble' years in the late 1980s and the so-called 'Lost decade' of the 1990s.

The Bubble years, also known as the Bubble period, were a time of great prosperity and heady consumerism on the of inflated property prices on the back of inflated property and stock prices. Rumours of gold-plated toilet seats, bouquets of flowers wrapped in uncut sheets of currency and gold-flecked toothpaste still linger.

Kurahashi's short story *The vampire club* (1985) sums up the decade with its description of bored housewives who turn to cannibalism in order to add excitement to their consumerist lifestyle.

Yoshimoto Banana

Young authors such as Yoshimoto Banana (1964–) and Yamada Eimi (1959–) reflected the fleshy, luxurious excess of the decade in their prose. Yamada has been hailed as the oneer of a generation of young women who write frankly about sex and the lives of modern women. This is especially evident in her 1985 debut *Bedtime eyes,* which tells of the turbulent relationship between a lounge singer and an American GI gone AWOL.

Yamada claimed that her narratives should be viewed as a guide to sex for her male readers and lamented that her African–American lovers were unable to read them. Yoshimoto's delicate descriptions of food were seen as replacing the bedroom with the kitchen, placing her works in polar opposite to those of Yamada.

After the bubble burst Japan plunged into a decade-long recession, known as the Lost decade (chiefly 1990–2000, but more recently the years up to and including 2010 have also been included in what is now referred to as the Lost years).

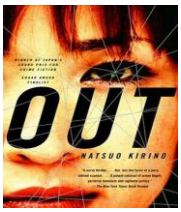
In March 2004 the Akutagawa prize, Japan's most distinguished literary prize awarded to promising young authors, was presented to the two youngest-ever recipients in a joint award. Kanehara Hitomi (1983–) and Wayata Risa (1984–), were followed by two more young women, Aoyama Nanae (1983–)and Kawakami Mieko (1976–) in 2006 and 2008 respectively. Much was made of their youth and gender.

Yamada claimed that her narratives should be viewed as a guide to sex for her male readers and lamented that her African–American lovers were unable to read them.

Kanehara observed that her generation had never known the wealth of the Bubble years, and thus did not expect anything from society.

Akutagawa prizewinner Kanehara Hitomi.

Her narratives often feature young itinerant workers or unemployed 20-somethings and focus on their complicated love lives. *Snakes and earrings*, Kanehara's Akutagawa prizewinning novel, tells the story of a young girl who dabbles in body modification, tattooing and piercing, while indulging in quasi-masochistic sex.



References to hedonism and masochism are abundant in the works of Japanese women writers especially those writing after the end of the Pacific War.

Although only literary works have been looked at in this brief introduction to hedonism and masochism in the work of Japanese women writers, these two themes are present across a broad range of media. These include, but are not limited to, manga (comics), crime fiction such as Natsuo Kirino's *Out* (1997), film, anime (cartoons) and pornographic ladies' comics that are, as the name suggests, written by and for women.

Scholars have examined Continued page 13 >>

Delicate women's fancies

<<From page 12 the works of the authors discussed above in terms of their references to motherhood, feminism, the role of women in society, race and gender. While this research is extensive it is by no means exhaustive and there is much more that needs to be explored in the work of these authors.

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Further reading

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For more on the work of Kôno Taeko, Takahashi Takako and Kurahashi Yumiko see Julia C. Bullock's The other women's lib: gender and dody in *Japanese women's fiction* (2009).

For more on the work of Kanehara Hitomi, Wataya Risa, Aoyama Nanae and Kawakami Mieko see Emerald King's Hot young things: rewriting young Japanese women for the new century' in *Proceedings of the 17th biennial conference of the ASAA*, Melbourne (2008).

Emerald King is a PhD candidate in the School of Asian Languages and Studies at the University of Tasmania

Fantasy and imagination in Japanese creative writing

The Japan Foundation is organising a series of seminars in Sydney, Canbera and Brisbane this month on 'fantasy' novels in Japan.

The panel discussions will introduce the Australian public to an array of Japanese literature, with a special focus on 'fantasy' novels. Japan has a rich tradition of literature, with early folklore dating back to the 6–7th century and the famous *Tale of Genji* written in the 11th century. But apart from prominent authors such as Murakami Haruki, Japanese literature and its vibrant contemporary scene remain largely unexplored outside Japan.

Sharing their own personal experiences of how they became fans of Japanese literature, panellists Dr Carol Hayes, Edward Lipsett and Roger Pulvers will discuss whether Japanese fantasy is different from the likes of *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*, and if so, how?

Admission is free, but bookings are essential. The seminar will be held on the following dates:

Sydney, Tuesday 22 March, 6.30pm–8.30pm, ;lecture theatre 351, Education Building, Manning Rd, University of Sydney. RSVP reception@jpf.org.au or phone (02) 8239 0055

Canberra, Wednesday, 23 March, 5.30pm–7.30pm, Sparkes Helmore lecture theatre 1, ANU College of Law, Fellows Road, Australian National University. RSVP Christina.Gee@anu.edu.au or phone (02) 6125 3165

Brisbane, Friday 25 March, 4pm–6pm, Abel Smith lecture theatre (TBC), University of Queensland, St Lucia Campus, Brisbane, RSVP e.shedden@uq.edu.au or phone (07) 3365 6311.

Full details at www.jpf.org.au/jpfevents/11-fantasynovels.

Media stereotyping hides extent of suicide in India

India is failing to recognise the seriousness of its high suicide rate, writes PETER MAYER.

A recent article in *The Weekend Australian Magazine*[1], reported that 'suicide kills more Australians than die in road accidents'.

Author Kate Legge suggested that the facts about the high number of suicide deaths are not widely known because of stigma, prejudice, ignorance and a centuries-old taboo that once barred those who'd taken their own lives from burial in the local cemetery'.

I read Legge's article with interest and profit, but found I couldn't accept the argument that Australia has found it difficult to discuss suicide. In my view, Australia responded to the male youth suicide crisis of the 1990s (rates rose from 16.3 per 100 000 in 1964 to 36.1 in 1990) with openness, energy and innovation.

At least in part this determined response assisted the sharp fall in young male suicides since 1997. In 2008, the rate for males 15–19 was 9/100 000; for males 20–24 it was 19/100 000—still a high rate.

The contrast to the situation in India is especially stark. In absolute terms, roughly 123 000 individuals take their own lives in India each year. That number is second only to the total in China. But since China and India are the two most populous nations in the world, it is more useful to compare *rates* of suicide per 100 000 people. In those terms, India is a middle-ranking nation (11.2/100 000), somewhat below China (14/100 000) and Australia (13.3), and a little higher than the USA (10.4) and the United Kingdom (6.8).

As in Australia, suicide is a major cause of death in India. Seven Indian states and territories—mainly in southern India—have suicide rates that are as high or higher than those of the 20 nations or states in the world with the highest suicide rates. For example, the 1999 suicide rate in Pondicherry (58.3/100 000), the former state, was one-and-a-half times higher than that of Lithuania (38.4/100 000), the nation with the highest rate in that year. Youth suicide is also a very serious problem in India. India's Registrar General reported that for rural Indians (who are still the largest segment of the population) in 1998 suicide was the leading cause of death for those aged between 15 and 34; they are almost five times more likely to take their own lives as to die from TB, the next most serious killer. Suicide is the second most common cause of death—after TB—for those between 35 and 44.

Despite these extremely high youth suicide rates, virtually no action is being taken in India.

For women in their reproductive years (15–44) suicide is the 'top killer in India'. In 11 of the Indian states, young male suicide rates are over 15/100 000. Even more astonishing, in 13 Indian states young female suicide rates are over 15/100 000 and 15 states all have young female suicide rates higher than in Estonia, which had the highest national rate.

What is paradoxical and deeply puzzling is that, despite these extremely high youth suicide rates, virtually no action is being taken in India. Except for the voices of a few remarkable psychiatrists and the work of a handful of small but heroic NGOs, there is neither agitation nor action taken on suicide in India. Yet if one tells an average educated Indian that one is studying Indian suicide, virtually all will say that the most serious problem is *farmer* suicides.

The reason for this is very clear: over the past decade the print media in India have returned again and again to the issue of suicides among India's farmers. Depending on weather patterns and prices, the focus of these reports is sometimes on one part of central India, sometimes on another.

Implicitly and explicitly, farmer suicides are attributed to adverse weather, low prices, debt, genetically modified Continued page 15>>

Suicide in India

<<From page 14 crops, Indian Government policy or the requirements of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The possible role of untreated mental illness—which is often reported as a major cause in psychological autopsies of suicide in India and elsewhere—is usually absent from these reports.

These media reports have found overseas echoes. A very forceful example is the 2005 report *The damage done,* issued by the UK charity Action Aid, which stated:

> The number of farmers taking their own lives in Andhra Pradesh is shocking and indicates that something has gone terribly wrong with the agricultural sector. These are not deaths from just one area or from just one type of farming. This is suicide on a scale that is surely unique in modern times.
>
> The immediate cause of these deaths is debt. This debt was brought on by a number of factors, all of which, except for the weather, can be ascribed to liberalisation. These liberalising factors at both national and state level, were the results of policies made by India's central government, the Andhra Pradesh state government of Chandrababu Naidu, the IMF, the World Bank and [UK development agency] DFID…[H]ow many more years will it take for the world to wake up to the fact that wholesale liberalisation of agriculture and the privatisation of the support mechanisms that sustain it are killing farmers? (Christian Aid 2005, pp. 29–30).

While I do not in any way wish to dismiss the seriousness of rural distress in central India, it seems clear to me that India's press coverage of farmer suicides is highly stereotyped and that this largely explains why only farmer suicides receive significant media attention.

Two contrasting statistics may serve to illustrate this point. My research shows that the national suicide rate for farmers is around 10/100 000, about the same as the national average but lower than the suicide rate of India's housewives: 13.3/100 000. A particularly striking contrast is with the rate for India's registered unemployed (73/100 000). Though higher than for farmers, neither unemployed nor housewife suicides receives regular media coverage.

India's press coverage of farmer suicides is highly stereotyped and that this largely explains why only farmer suicides receive significant media attention.

While it would be naive to expect a scholarly publication to have significant impact on the recognition of the seriousness of suicide in a country as huge as India, I do hope that my study will play a part in drawing attention in India to the seriousness of the incidence of suicide—above all of youth suicide—and thus of influencing both the focus of public discussion and the thrust of public policy.

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Associate Professor Peter Mayer *is a Visiting Research Fellow, School of History and Politics, The University of Adelaide. His book* Suicide and society in India *has recently been published by Routledge.*

Gender dimensions in post-conflict Timor–Leste

Twelve years after the end of the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, the marks of post-conflict society are still clear, particularly in the treatment of women, writes SARA NINER.

One of the newest nations in the world, Timor–Leste (also known as East Timor) is also one of the poorest. Despite income from substantial oil and gas reserves and the best attempts of the current government to share-out this largesse, most Timorese still live a life rural poverty devoted to subsistence farming.

It has been nearly 12 years since the conclusion of the long and brutal Indonesian occupation (1975–99), and the observation that such violence and war have profound social and psychological impacts on the survivors and the society that emerges is now seldom made in relation to Timor–Leste. Yet the marks of a post-conflict society are clear.

As in all conflict and post-conflict situations, women and children physically suffer the most, and the health indicators for Timor still show this. Women also face extra problems: they have an average of eight children, but only one-fifth of those births are attended by a skilled health worker, meaning infant and maternal mortality is high[1]—although this situation is improving.[2]

The tragic impacts of this are compounded by considerable child-rearing and domestic duties, which limit women's educational and economic opportunities and political participation. A substantial gender inequity is illustrated by the fact that two-thirds of adult women (15–60) are illiterate compared to half of men,[3] and women earn one-eighth the income of men[4]. Women have less participation in the work force overall, usually in lower-level positions, meaning fewer benefits and prospects.

This was reflected in Timor–Leste's 2010 *Gender Equity Index* rating of 55, although it hopefully showed an improvement in education for females. Disparity between men and women exists across the domains of land ownership, political participation, access to education and economic activities, and domestically, including reproductive decision making.

For 24 years the struggle for women's rights was subsumed by the broader national struggle for independence.

Indigenous societies in Timor–Leste are culturally predominant. Here women are traditionally accorded a sacred status within Timorese cosmology and the divine female element is prominent in much indigenous belief. However, the secular world is dominated by men, and while women may hold power in a ritual context, they generally do not have a strong public or political voice.

Women with guns during the war.

According to this indigenous logic, women and girls are consigned to the internal or domestic sphere. Consequently domestic duties and care of children are the sole domain of women. This may explain the formidable positions some women hold within households, but the full burden of domestic chores and childrearing often excludes women from a place in the wider society and in leadership roles (although senior or elite women are powerful and any gender analysis in Timor must be modified with some class awareness).

While these gender roles are understood by anthropologists as complementary and interdependent, it cannot be concluded that they are equitable from a modern gender perspective. As a Portuguese colony for most of the 20th century, East Timor was ruled directly by the fascist dictatorship of Salazar and remained closeted from any modern liberalising trends such as democracy or feminism.After the Indonesian invasion of 1975 the military and police Continued page 17>>

Gender in Timor-Leste

<<From page 16 deliberately used violence, including the rape and torture of women and girls, to win the war. If the more benign Indonesian civilian administration began to offer opportunities to women that had never existed under the Portuguese, these human rights abuses overshadowed any such development.

As women lost husbands to the war they were forced to head up households, and they also took up new roles in the resistance structures, with one reliable source quoting a figure as high as 60 per cent women among resistance cadres[5]. Women were combatants, couriers and intelligence operatives, and participated in clandestine and public campaigns—and this has been well-documented by women.[6] Women are proud of their role in the resistance, but for 24 years the struggle for women's rights was subsumed by the broader national struggle for independence, and the crucial role of women in the resistance has not yet been fully acknowledged in Timor–Leste.

It is clear from studies of post-conflict environments that violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, does not conform to 'the timelines of peace treaties and ceasefires but endures past them'. Those who have fought and committed violence are rarely formally counseled, and nor are 'the deep imprinting of violent masculinities… and the effects of militarism on the society overall' charted or addressed'.[7]

The violence and militarisation of society during the Indonesian occupation also correspondingly shaped the nature of the armed and clandestine resistance fronts, and it is predominantly male elites from this resistance struggle who now run the government, military and police.

Most of this male leadership have been engaged in a brutal and bloody war for most of their adult life, and suffered tragically. A national crisis in 2006 shattered the process of national reconstruction in a bitter internal conflict between this predominantly male political leadership.

Modern violent manifestations of masculinity were displayed by the members of militias and gangs that came to the forefront in 1999 and 2006 and remain in Timorese society. The hyper-militarised masculinity displayed by rebel leader Alfredo Reinado was extraordinarily popular with the youth and many young men, including police and military, aped his style.


Timorese resistance fighters.

The post-conflict cycle of trauma, violence and further conflict appeared never-ending. A further significant attribute of such post-conflict societies is a persistent militarisation, which this event illustrated.[8] However these gender dynamics, both masculinity and femininity, are little-monitored or addressed in contemporary gender programs.
It was estimated in 2004 that domestic violence accounted for 40 per cent of all reported crime, yet formal justice systems dismally failed women attempting to pursue justice for such crimes.[9] Mild forms of domestic violence are viewed as normal and even as an educative tool in families.

In response, a concerted national campaign against domestic violence is well underway. It includes appearances by national leaders, suggestive of a countrywide dialogue on this serious issue. This campaign has been driven by strong pressure from the Timorese women's movement, many of whom are ex-resistance veterans. Rede Feto Timor–Leste, the current women's national umbrella network, leads such campaigns by virtue of its membership, which includes the oldest and largest women's groups, the Organização Popular Mulher Timorense begun in 1975 and the Organização Mulher Timorense begun in 1998. Both of these groups are nationally aligned to different political factions signalling that the women's movement is still significantly affected by national-level male-dominated politics.

The conflict in Timor–Leste changed women's economic, social and political roles, similar to the situations in many post-war societies. Gender roles are now being renegotiated, Continued page 18>>

Gender in Timor-Leste

<<From page 17 leading to tensions between what is characterised as the 'traditional' or pre-war role for women in Timorese society with more modern or dynamic ideas for how women should behave.

'Culture' is offered as the reason why women cannot participate in politics, or why it is difficult to introduce women's rights in Timor–Leste. Yet cultures transform in response to new pressures, such as colonialism, religion, war and also new ideas—such as those about gender equity. But it does not mean that this happens easily and that those in the more favourable position will admit to or relinquish their power and status freely.

Allowing that cultural practices evolve and transform over time, a more fruitful approach may be to work with customary authorities to improve how women are regarded and treated within those systems. Deep-seated cultural change and transformation must be part of a fairer deal for women, especially a reversal of the more destructive gender dynamics played out in both national and domestic level violence.

Timorese society has shown a great resilience and ability to absorb and incorporate foreign elements such as Portuguese culture, Catholicism, new modern political forms introduced through war and resistance during the Indonesian occupation, and since then, by more benign international influences.

The indigenous and contemporary culture in Timor–Leste is perpetuated as much by women as men. How they define their roles and responsibilities in their new nation is a deeply significant process for gender equality and the health and future of the new nation.

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Dr Sara Niner is a researcher in the Arts faculty at Monash University. She is the editor of To resist is to win: the autobiography of Xanana Gusmão, with selected letters and speeches, *Aurora Books, Melbourne, 2000 and author of* Xanana: leader of the struggle for independent Timor–Leste, *Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2009. She has worked in solidarity with the Timorese community in Melbourne since 1991 and as a volunteer and consultant in Timor–Leste since 2000. This article is a result of a 2010 Endeavour Fellowship in Timor–Leste with a research focus on customary practices and contemporary gender roles.* See *http://saraniner.blogspot.com for more information.*

Piety through painting: Indonesia's new generation of Islamic calligraphers

Young Muslims are being offered the chance to express their individual creativity and deepen their understanding of Islam through calligraphy, writes VIRGINIA HOOKER.

One of the events to mark the beginning of this Muslim new year in Indonesia is an exhibition in Jakarta of Islamic art entitled 'From writing to painting'.[1]

The exhibition, at the Bayt al-Qur'an & Istiqlal Museum (House of the Qur'an and Independence Museum), is organised and sponsored by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, which has responsibility for the authenticity and accuracy of all copies of the Qur'an printed in Indonesia. The accompanying catalogue is in Indonesian, with an excellent introductory essay by prize-winning calligrapher and Qur'anic scholar Ali Akbar. As he explains, the rules of traditional Islamic calligraphy are extremely strict and take years to learn from master calligraphers.

In Indonesia, calligraphy was traditionally practised in religious schools and in royal courts to prepare copies of the Holy Qur'an. The Bayt al-Quran also houses examples of beautifully illuminated Qur'ans, some several centuries old, copied in Southeast Asia by local calligraphers.

Ali Akbar identifies the 1970s as a transition period for Islamic art in Indonesia, when a group of talented Indonesian artists at the Bandung Institute of Technology began integrating Arabic words into their paintings. For these artists, trained as painters not calligraphers, painting was their primary concern, not calligraphy.

Their works were criticised by traditional religious scholars, who argued that by using words from the Qur'an in this way, the painters were not showing respect for Allah's holy book. Their mistakes in forming the letters and in grammar were regarded as particularly serious because it opened the way for misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the true meaning of the Qur'an. Public debates between the groups continued through the 1970s and created an ongoing tension between artists and 'pure' calligraphers.

In his classic work *Islamic art and spirituality*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr describes the sacred art of Islam as 'a descent of heavenly reality upon the earth'.[2] This 'heavenly reality' is accessible to humankind through the Qur'an, a series of divine revelations to the Prophet Muhammad between 610 and 632 CE. The Qur'an records Allah's command to Muhammad: 'Read! In the name of your Lord who created: He created man from a clinging form. Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One who taught by means of the pen, who taught man what he did not know' (Qur'an Chapter 96: 1–5). In Islam, the pen and ink symbolise the physical manifestation of divine revelation.

Students at Didin Sirojuddin's calligraphy school practising for competitions.

For over 14 centuries, calligraphy has been regarded as the noblest of the Islamic arts. Bearing this in mind it is easier to understand the anxiety of the traditional religious teachers in 1970s Indonesia when the Bandung group of artists began experimenting with words from the Qur'an as part of their paintings.

The first letter of the Arabic alphabet, the upright stroke called *alif* is believed to have been created by a divine pen activated by mystical light.Continued page 20>>

Piety through painting

<< From page 19 The other 27 letters of the alphabet developed from that first letter. The sizes and proportions of each letter are based on a strict code of geometric rules devised by the 10th century master calligrapher, Ibn Muqla. The size of the dot made by the point of the calligraphic stylus is used as the essential measure to calculate the height and width of each letter. For example, in the classical and very beautiful style of script called *thuluth* the basic measure is based on an *alif* which is the height of nine dots and this measure determines the proportions of all other letters.

Basic calligraphy is currently taught to students in Indonesian religious schools as part of their study of the Qur'an. But specialist training in the detailed rules devised by Ibn Muqla and the great classical styles of calligraphy was not widely available until the mid-1980s. It was then that Didin Sirojuddin AR, a young lecturer in the State Institute of Islamic Studies in Jakarta, established LEMKA (Lembaga Kaligrafi al-Qur'an, Qur'anic Calligraphy Institute).

It was Didin's ambition to advance the study of calligraphy in Indonesia and develop the talents of young Indonesians so that they could participate in national Islamic calligraphic competitions which began to be held in Indonesia in the early 1980s. If successful at the national level, young calligraphers could then proceed to international competitions held in the Middle East and in Southeast Asia. In this way, he believed they could learn from the greatest living calligraphers and raise the standard of calligraphy in Indonesia. He also hoped that talented Indonesian calligraphers could practise as professionals and make a living based on their calligraphic skills.

Didin Sirojuddin AR, *Qur'an 32:19*, 2007, ink on paper, 550 x 810 cm.1

Didin's devotion to spreading knowledge about calligraphy is inspired by Islam, not by interest in material gain. He quotes sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad himself such as, 'Whoever writes the words *Bismillahir–Rahmani–Rahim* in beautiful calligraphy has the right to freely enter heaven' and 'Allah will bestow a celestial tree in heaven on any who take up their pens to inscribe knowledge.' It is clear, Didin says, that the art of calligraphy bestows spiritual rewards on those who practise it.

As Ali Akbar notes in his catalogue essay, Didin is the most influential figure in the development of calligraphy in Indonesia.[3] Didin's own development as a calligrapher began in one of Indonesia's most respected religious schools, Pondok Moderen Gontor, which he attended between 1969 and 1975. He went on to tertiary studies at Jakarta's Syarif Hidayatullah State Institute of Islamic Studies, working as a cartoonist and reporter in his spare time.

Didin Sirojuddin AR, *Kuasa Sang Maha Raja* (*The might of the greatest sovereign*), 2001, mixed media on paper, 30 x 30 cm.

Didin appreciated both sides of the polemic between the artists of the Bandung school and the traditional calligraphers. In the introduction he wrote to his translation of an Arabic textbook on calligraphy, he describes how each 'camp' grew to accept a spirit of compromise—the painters acknowledged their lack of training in Arabic language and classical calligraphic styles and the religious scholars accepted that a greater degree of individual creativity might be allowed.[4]

The courses that Didin and his colleagues gave at LEMKA between 1986–89, both in Jakarta and at 52 other centres in Indonesia, reflected this new spirit and were enthusiastically received by students. Didin observed that the compromise gave birth to renewed vigour in Islamic art in Indonesia as the painters improved their knowledge of calligraphy and the calligraphers became more flexible and creative. The resulting variety of styles of expression has continued to enrich Indonesian Islamic art to the present and is apparent in the works exhibited in 'From writing to painting'. Many of the works in the exhibition are by staff and students working with Didin.

Didin was able to establish Continued page 21>>

Piety through painting

<< From page 20 a special pesantren (religious school) devoted entirely to teaching calligraphy through courses accredited by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The aim of the calligraphy school is, in his words, 'to improve the welfare of society through general education as well as Islamically inspired education and to develop and preserve Islamic culture in Indonesia especially in the field of Qur'anic calligraphy'.

Students are encouraged to go out into the rice fields and countryside so that the beauty that Allah has created will inspire them and be reflected in their work.

Didin teaches the new generation of calligraphers that the source of all their inspiration and the source of their creativity is the holy Qur'an. He deliberately chose a very beautiful site for his school in the mountains of West Java. Students are encouraged to go out into the rice fields and countryside so that the beauty that Allah has created will inspire them and be reflected in their work.

Didin's students are taught that calligraphy is more than a technical exercise. It is the opportunity to be mindful of Allah's presence and to create works that will help their fellow Muslims to be mindful of Him.

Didin offers young Muslims the chance to express their individual creativity as well as deepen their understanding of Islam. As their appreciation of Islam grows, Didin hopes, so will their concern for the well-being and happiness of their fellow Muslims.

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1. The exhibition runs until the end of March 2011.
2. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic art and spirituality*, State University of New York Press, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1987, p.195.
3. See also Virginia Hooker, 'Art for Allah' sake', *Inside Indonesia Online*, *Inside Indonesia* 101: Jul–Sept 2010.
4. Drs D Sirojuddin AR, (translator) of Kamil al-Baba's *Dinamika kaligrafi Islam*, Darul Ulum Press, Jakarta, 1992, pp.viii–ix

Virginia Hooker gratefully acknowledges Didin Sirojuddin AR for permission to reproduce his work. She also thanks Ali Akbar for invaluable advice and Annabel Teh Gallop and Kenneth M. George for ongoing support.

Virginia Hooker is Professor Emeritus and Visiting Fellow in the Department of Political & Social Change, College of Asia and the Pacific, at The Australian National University. She

retired as Professor of Indonesian and Malay in the Faculty of Asian Studies, ANU, in 2007. Her research has focussed on Islam in Southeast Asia, social change in Malaysia and Indonesia, and Indonesian political culture. Her most recent book, co-edited with Dr Greg Fealy, is an award-winning sourcebook on contemporary Islam in Southeast Asia.

Travel literature—an entertaining window into another world

By Sally Burdon, Asia Bookroom

What is your favourite work of travel literature? It is a genre crowded with so many choices, ranging from good enjoyable books to others that are quite simply classic works of literature.

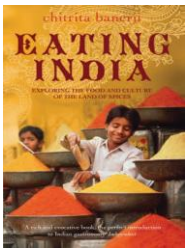
A lasting work of travel literature is so much more than a report by an outsider looking in. Great works in this genre are wonderful mixtures of opinion, insights, observations—often very acute—psychology and, of course, information. The appeal is both broad and long lasting. Top-class travel literature spans cultures and time in a way that is impossible to experience one's self.

Frequently digging deeper than a documentary, a fine work of travel literature is an experience you can get no other way—and you can't afford to miss. In this month's Asian book selection I have included a few classics and some modern works that have much to offer.

Choosing only a small number of works in this genre is a difficult task. Those chosen are just a small taste of this large genre.

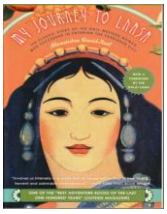
So, what is your favourite work of travel literature? Readers of *Asian Currents* are invited to let us know of travel works that have particularly impressed them and why—maybe one was the catalyst for a trip you later made, helped with background for teaching or simply inspired you to start reading more about the region.

Please email books@AsiaBookroom.com with your suggestions and we will share them with other subscribers to Asian Currents in a future issue.



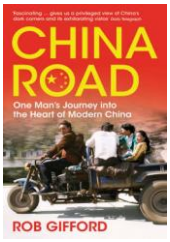
Eating India. Exploring the food and culture of the land of spices. By Chitrita Banerji, 265pp, paperback, Bloomsbury Publishing, $24.99.

Award-winning writer Chitrita Banerji takes us on a thrilling journey through a national food formed by generations of arrivals, assimilations and conquests. Banerji explores how each wave of newcomers brought innovative ways to combine the subcontinent's rich native spices, poppy seeds, saffron and mustard with the vegetables, fish, grains and pulses that are the staples of the Indian kitchen. Along the way, she visits traditional weddings, tiffin rooms, city markets, roadside cafes and tribal villages to find out how India's turbulent history has shaped its people and its cuisine. Eating India is a lovely example of theme-based travel writing.



My journey to Lhasa. By Alexandra David-Neel, paperback,317pp, Harper Perennial, $27.95**.**

In 1923 a stout 55-year-old Frenchwoman, Madame Alexandra David-Neel, a former opera singer and a dedicated student of the East, disguised herself as a male pilgrim and ascended to the ancient Tibetan city of Lhasa. Her classic account of her adventure—one of the epic journeys of our time— was first published in 1927, and has, very fortunately, recently been reprinted.

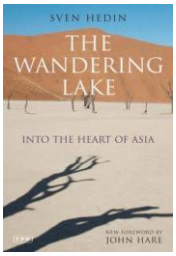


China Road. One man's journey into the heart of modern China. By Rob Gifford, paperback, 326pp, Bloombury, $24.95**.**

Running 3000 miles from the east coast boomtown of Shanghai to the border of Kazakhstan in the north-west, Route 312—China's Route 66—is a road that Rob Gifford has always wanted to travel. Gifford's journey and his desire to get to the heart Continued page 23>>

New books on Asia

<<From page 22 of this country make *China Road* an outstanding and funny travel narrative–part pilgrimage, part reportage—that illuminates a country on the move. This is a truly compelling insight into modern China and one that at Asia Bookroom we regularly recommend.

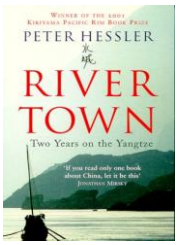


The wandering lake. Into the heart of Asia. By Sven Hedin, paperback, 295pp,Tauris Parke Paperbacks, $23**.**

This classic travel account by Swedish explorer Sven Hedin takes you to the lake of Lop-nor, the 'heart of the heart of Asia', one of the world's strangest phenomena. Situated in the wild Chinese province of Xinjiang, Lop-nor—the wandering lake—has for millennia been in a state of flux, drifting north to south, often tens of kilometres in as many years. It was once the lifeblood of the great Silk Road kingdom of Lou-lan, which flourished in this otherwise barren region 2000 years ago, and its peculiar movements confused even Ptolemy, who marked the lake twice on his map of Asia.

Following 'the pulse-beats of Lop-nor as a doctor examines a patient's heart', Hedin became captivated by its peripatetic movements, and for 40 years his destiny was inextricably linked with that of this mysterious lake and the region surrounding it. His last journey to Lop-nor, in 1934, began just days after he was released as a prisoner of General Ma Chung-yin (the rebel leader of Xinjiang). Travelling the length of the Konche-daria and Kum-daria rivers by canoe, Hedin embarked on his last Central Asian expedition and proved what he had always suspected, that Lop-nor did indeed shift position—and why.

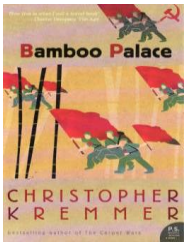
Today, Lop-nor is nothing but a windblown sand and salty marsh. The third in Hedin's Central Asia trilogy, *The wandering lake* is arguably his most famous work, a gripping story of adventure and discovery, but also a rare account of a now-vanished world.



River town. By Peter Hessler, paperback, 402pp, John Murray, $32.99**.**

When Peter Hessler went to China in the late 1990s, he expected to spend a couple of peaceful years teaching English to university students in the town of Fuling, on the Yangtze River. But what he experienced—the natural beauty, cultural tension, and complex process of understanding that takes place when one is thrust into a radically different society—surpassed anything he could have imagined.

Hessler observes first hand how major events, such as the death of Deng Xiaoping, the return of Hong Kong to the mainland, and the controversial construction of the Three Gorges Dam, have affected even the people of a remote town like Fuling. A wonderful book filled with insight and humanity.

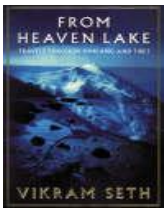


Bamboo palace. By Christopher Kremmer, paperback, 368pp, Harper Perennial, $24.99.

What became of the Lao Royal Family? In the dying days of the Vietnam War, a royal family is rounded up and flown by helicopter to a remote prison camp. Behind the bamboo curtain erected by victorious communist guerillas, the tragic final days of an Asian king and his dynasty will play out. Australian author Christopher Kremmer takes readers on a gripping odyssey to Indochina's heart of darkness, the remote prison camp where the Kingdom of the Million Elephants and the White Parasol finally ends. Part travelogue, part mystery, *Bamboo Palace* reveals the only known eye-witness account of the final solution carried out in the jungles of northern Laos.

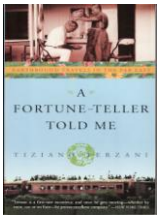
More new books on page 24>>

New books on Asia



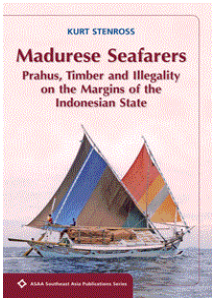
From Heaven Lake. Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet. By Vikram Seth, paperback, 178pp, Phoenix, $24.99**.**

'The perfect travel book,' says the *New Statesman*. Hitch-hiking, walking, slogging through rivers and across leech-ridden hills, Vikram Seth travelled through Sinkiang and Tibet to Nepal: from Heaven Lake to the Himalayas. By breaking away from the reliable routes of organised travel, he transformed his journey into an unusual and intriguing exploration of one of the world's least known areas. Beautifully written—highly recommended.



A fortune-teller told me. Earthbound travels in the Far East. By Tiziano Terzani, paperback, 371pp, Three Rivers Press, $24.95.

Travelling by foot, boat, bus, car and train, the author visited Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Mongolia, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. Along the way he consulted soothsayers, sorcerers and shamans and received much advice some wise, some otherwise about his future. With time to think, he learned to understand, respect, and fear for older ways of life and beliefs now threatened by the crasser forms of Western modernity. He rediscovered a place he had been reporting on for decades, and reinvigorated himself in the process.



Madurese seafarers. Prahus, timber and illegality on the margins of the Indonesian state. By Kurt Stenross, 280pp, ASAA Southeast Asia Publications Series, NUS, $US32, S$38.

The Madurese are one of the great maritime and trading peoples of the Indonesian Archipelago. This study takes readers into the coastal villages of Madura, where the distinctive traditional vessels were powered by sail until the late 20th century. It examines informal sector economic niches, notably the cattle, salt and timber trades and the carriage of people. The author argues that the ecology and demography of Madura, the nature of village society, cultural traditions of frugality and self-reliance, and an appetite for risk all contributed to the success of the Madurese as maritime entrepreneurs. During Suharto's New Order, Madurese seafarers prospered through their role in the booming timber trade between Kalimantan and Java, adopting quasi-legal methods and exercising great ingenuity to circumvent state-imposed laws and regulations.

Based on data collected during visits to remote ports and unlicensed sawmills in Kalimantan, prahu harbours in Java, and 'wild' beach ports in Madura, *Madurese seafarers* explores the inner workings of Madurese maritime trade during a critical period of change that brought these village-based maritime transporters and traders into conflict with the modern Indonesian state.

Dual disasters. Humanitarian aid after the 2004 tsunami, by Jennifer Hyndman, cloth, 192pp, Kumaria Press, $US 75, paper $US24.95.

The 2004 tsunami was massive in every respect. The earthquake that preceded it was one of the largest ever recorded, the number of people killed or displaced is estimated at well over a million, and the international community donated billions of dollars to the relief effort. In some cases the tsunami struck regions already embroiled in other kinds of catastrophes—violent conflict and poverty. The tsunami's presence not only wreaked havoc as a natural disaster, but it left an enduring mark on the political dynamics and power struggles of these places.

Dual Disasters describes what happens when 'man-made' and 'natural disasters' meet. Focusing specifically on Indonesia and Sri Lanka—countries that had complex emergencies long before the tsunami arrived, Hyndman Hyndman shows how the storm's arrival shifted the goals of international Continued page 25>>

New books on Asia

<<From page 24 aid, altered relations between and within states and accelerated or slowed peacebuilding efforts. With updated comments on the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the book guides readers deftly through the multifaceted forces at work in modern humanitarian disasters.

ASAA news

South Asia Publication Series revitalised

The South Asian Publication Series (SAPS) was established by the South Asian Studies Association (SASA) in 1986 to publish outstanding work in the social sciences and humanities.

Under the editorial leadership of Peter Reeves and Robin Jeffrey, the volumes in the foundation series were published by Sterling Publishers of New Delhi
The first volume, Carl Bridge's *Holding India to the Empire* (1986), a study of the 1935 *Government of India Act*, set the tone for many of the succeeding publications in at least two ways.

Authors and editors published in the series were some of the most distinguished Australian scholars working on South Asia and many volumes, though not all, examined aspects of Indian colonial history.

In the early years the series published about one title each year but over the years the intervals between volumes gradually increased. In the first decade of the 21st century only two books were published.

To revitalise SAPS, the series has been re-launched in 2011 with a new editor and a distinguished editorial board. The new series is published by Routledge of London and New York. In addition to the London/New York editions, Routledge will also bring out an Indian edition. The first volume of the new series is Peter Mayer's *Suicide and society in India*.

It is hoped in time to issue three volumes each year and for that reason the SAPS is actively seeking manuscripts which present cutting-edge research on the countries and peoples of South Asia across a wide range of disciplines including history, politics and political economy, anthropology, geography, literature, sociology and the fields of cultural studies, communication studies and gender studies. Interdisciplinary and comparative research is encouraged.

For information on how to submit a publication proposal, please go the Asian Studies Association of Australia website.

New books from the ASAA series

Southeast Asia Series

The series seeks to publish cutting-edge research on all countries and peoples of Southeast Asia.

Women in Asia Series

The Women's Caucus of the ASAA operates a publication series in conjunction with Routledge that focuses on promoting scholarship on women in Asia.

ASAA conference proceedings now online

Proceedings from the 18th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA), held at the University of Adelaide in July 2010, are now online on the ASAA website. Participants were invited to submit written papers based on their presentation for inclusion in the refereed online conference proceedings.Papers were peer-reviewed and accepted for publication by an editorial board.

About the ASAA

The Asian Studies Association of Australia promotes the study of Asian languages, societies, cultures, and politics in Australia, supports teaching and research in Asian studies and works towards an understanding of Asia in the community at large. The ASAA believes there is an urgent need to develop a strategy to preserve, renew and extend Australian expertise about Asia. See *Maximising Australia's Asia knowledge: repositioning and renewal of a national asset*. *Asian Currents* is published by the ASAA and edited by Allan Sharp.

Job websites

www.jobs.ac.uk advertises worldwide academic posts

www.reliefweb.int is a free service run by the United Nations to recruit for NGO jobs.

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

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

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

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

www.comminit.com is the site of The Communication Initiative Network. It includes listings of jobs, consultants, requests for proposals, events, training, and books, journals, and videos for sale related to all development issues and strategies.

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

Diary notes

Timor–Leste Studies Association (TLSA) conference, Timor–Leste, 30 June–1 July 2011. This two-day conference for researchers is organised by the TLSA, an interdisciplinary, international research network focused on all aspects of research into East Timorese society, including politics and history, economics, communications, health, language and agriculture. The 2011 conference, 'Communicating new research on Timor-Leste', will be co-hosted by the National University of Timor-Lorosa'e, Swinburne University of Technology, and the Technical University of Lisbon. See conference website for details.

The world and world-making in art: connectivities and differences, conference, Australian National University, Canberra, 11–13 August 2011. This international conference coincides with the ANU's Humanities Research Centre's theme for 2011 on 'The world and world-making in the humanities and the arts. Venue: Sir Roland Wilson Building, ANU. Further information: Dr Michelle Antoinette.

Media, Cultural and Area Studies series

The Island Southeast Asia Centre at the Australian National University presents the following events as part of the annual Intersections of Media, Cultural and Area Studies series:

Lola Amaria

Lola Amaria is an actor and director. She made her directorial debut with *Betina* (2006). *Sunday morning in Victoria Park* (2010), a film about Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong that features women in all the principal roles, is her second film.

Wednesday, 13 April 2011, 6pm, National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA), panel discussion with Lola Amaria and Philippines director Brillante Mendoza, hosted by Dr Gaik Cheng Khoo Thu,

Thursday, 14 April, 6pm, NFSA, *Sunday morning in Victoria Park*.

Distinguished Professor John Hartley

Distinguished Professor John Hartley is an ARC Federation Fellow, and Research Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, Queensland University of Technology.

Thursday 14 April, 9am, Asia Pacific Centre for Diplomacy Theatre (Hedley Bull Building), public lecture, 'The urgency of interdisciplinarity: sooner, not later, we're going to need a cultural science.'

Mohamad Marzuki

Mohamad Marzuki is the founder and leader of Jogya Hiphop Foundation (JHF), the most prominent forum of communication and activism among several hip hop groups in Jogyakarta. A documentary about JHF, *HipHopDiningrat*, will be followed by a performance and artist's talk by Mohamad Marzuki, **Friday, 15 April, 8pm,** NFSA.

Also supported by the Gender and Cultural Studies Unit at ANU, the Ford Foundation and the NFSA, Mohamad Marzuki and Lola Amaria appear as part of the NFSA's Southeast Asia Film Week. See www.nfsa.gov.au for details.

Contributing to Asian Currents

Contributions, commentary and responses on any area of Asian Studies are welcome and should be emailed to the editor. The general length of contributions is 1000–1500 words.