Collapse of six-party talks

Northeast Asia's shaky stand on North Korean nuclear threat

The collapse of the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons program underscores the crosscutting interests and rivalries of the security dilemma in Northeast Asia, writes BEN HABIB.

On 14 April 2009 the Kim Jong-il regime in North Korea announced its withdrawal from the six-party talks on its nuclear weapons program and resumption of operations at its main nuclear facility at Yongbyon. This was followed shortly afterward by its second nuclear test and further missile trials on 25 May.

North Korea's nuclear facility at Yongbyon. Photo: Wikipedia.

In 2010, North Korea pushed the barrel further, sinking the South Korean navy corvette *Cheonan* in the East China Sea and shelling South Korean-held Yeonpyeong Island, both in proximity to the disputed Northern Limit Line maritime boundary. In the wake of these provocations, the six-party talks appear to be all but finished as a vehicle for securing North Korea's denuclearisation.

The talks were the first forum in which Northeast Asian regional states worked together to address a specific security issue. They were inaugurated in 2003 when the US Bush administration enlisted Chinese assistance in attempting to corral North Korea into making concessions on its nuclear program through multilateral pressure. Despite six rounds of concerted negotiations and the occasional promise of a breakthrough, the process ultimately failed to deliver on its non-proliferation objectives. One of the primary reasons for the failure of the six-party talks ultimately stems from the disharmony of purpose that impedes the collective effort of regional states to address the North Korean nuclear problem. Regional states do not share enough common interests, nor do they harbour a common appraisal of the North Korean threat to reach agreement on a multilateral institutional response. Northeast Asia is a historically complicated strategic milieu.

The Korean peninsula is the geographic junction linking each of the regional powers within the system, and the venue for great power competition. Three countries from this group—the United States, China and Russia—are fully fledged nuclear powers that also occupy permanent seats on the UN Security Council. China, Russia, North Korea and South Korea possess four of the world's six largest armed forces. All of these states have fought

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<<From page 1 wars with one or more of the others in recent memory, leaving a heritage of suspicion that continues to influence their relations today.

Multilateral cooperation on security matters has proven difficult in this environment. In the European context, by contrast, the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allowed long-time rivals France and Germany to define mutual common interests upon which to base pacific relationships. This was not the case is East Asia, where Washington chose to pursue a series of bilateral security alliances rather than construct a multilateral security architecture. The legacy of Japanese imperialism was an important factor here, making it unlikely that other regional states would enter into an alliance with a state by which they had so recently been subjugated. In this context we can see why progress in the six-party talks has proven so elusive.

Washington chose to pursue a series of bilateral security alliances rather than construct multilateral security architecture

Making sense of the complex Northeast Asian security environment requires a high level of analytical sophistication. Although they provide important insights into regional dynamics, the three primary theories of international relations—realism, liberalism and constructivism—act like a polarising lens, leaving a view that is informative but not representative of the whole picture.

What we see in the relations of Northeast Asian states is a theoretical synthesis; realist theory provides the structural foundation of the region, constructivism the narrative and liberalism the policy options for ameliorating the negative influences of both.

It is more fruitful to consider Northeast Asian relations in terms of the *cooperation, competition and conflict* framework offered by Muthiah Alagappa, which captures the essence of the theoretical convergence.[1]

Regional economic cooperation has grown through bilateral commercial and aid relationships, and regional economic cooperation and institution-building. These arrangements are creating a framework for mutually beneficial commercial interaction.

Cooperation in the security realm is less advanced, limited to embryonic efforts to build confidence-building measures across bilateral relationships and multilaterally through the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue, the Tripartite Summit and the Shangri-La Dialogue. Many analysts hoped that successful resolution of the Korean nuclear crisis through the six-party talks would transcend these ad hoc dialogue forums and crystallise into a regional multilateral security institution.

The difficulty of security cooperation owes much to conflict dimensions across the region. Constructivists would identify conflict occurring at the level of rhetoric, manifesting as competing projections of soft power (for instance, the American liberal-democratic project versus the Chinese Confucianism-based order), and as exclusivist, ethnocentric nationalism (such as the periodic crises in Sino-Japanese relations enflamed by conflicting nationalisms).

Conflict also occurs at the level of alliance formation. Security alliances are inevitably the product of conflict because the primary purpose of an alliance is protection against an enemy external to the alliance. They differ from classic formulations of liberal internationalist cooperation in that their orientation is external, against an enemy, rather than within, for mutual advantage.

What we see in Northeast Asia is strategic competition, the foreign policy orientation of states caught between cooperation and conflict. States caught in this dilemma often choose policies of strategic hedging in order to accommodate these competing pressures, in their relationships with their allies as well as in those with their enemies. For realists, this occurs because states always act in their own self-interest, and no two states' self-interests are the same. Therefore, in relationships of interdependence, be they between allies or enemies, it is prudent for states to hedge their bets as a protection should the bonds of interdependence

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break down. In an environment where antagonism comes to outweigh interdependence, particularly where one state pursues its own self-interest too vigorously in a bid for hegemony, competing states may choose, for balance, to form a coalition against the would-be hegemon. The Northeast Asian security environment, as a bipolar system, is divisible into two competing strategic triangles: the US alliance bloc and a loose anti-US soft balancing coalition inclusive of China, Russia, and North Korea.

One cannot construct a strong building on such loose foundations

The strategic significance of the Korean peninsula varies for each of the regional players, creating substantial divergence in attitudes to North Korea's nuclear gambit and important differences that are evident in the commitment of each player to non-proliferation initiatives. China's star is rising as the United States attempts to prevent the rise of a peer competitor. Japan is edging toward normalisation while Russia is attempting to increase its role in the region. South Korea is attempting to alter economic and political conditions within the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in anticipation of future national reunification, while simultaneously navigating between the competing economic and security imperatives of its relationships with China and the United States. And within this morass, North Korea has become a nuclear power.

Indeed, this intrinsic strategic competition is the shaky footing upon which regional states have attempted to craft strategies to address the North Korean nuclear threat. As any builder will say, one cannot construct a strong building on such loose foundations.

With the failure of the talks, the raison d'être of regional security cooperation may have evaporated, leaving the underlying patchwork of crosscutting interests and rivalries of the security dilemma as the baseline for regional interaction.

Reference

1. Muthiah Alagappa, 'Asia's security environment: from subordinate to region dominant system', in *The long shadow: nuclear weapons and security in 21st century Asia*, Alagappa, M (ed.), Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2008, p. 38.

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President's prize for best thesis about Asia

The Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) is again offering its Presidents' Prize for the best doctoral thesis about Asia written at an Australian University.

For 2011, the association is planning to increase the award, which is sponsored by past presidents of the ASAA.

The writer of the best thesis will be awarded a cheque for $1500, a certificate and priority consideration for publication in one of the ASAA monograph series.

Since 2004, the prize has been augmented by the DK Award, presented by DK Agencies, the global book distributor, based in New Delhi.

The winner receives their choice of books to the value of AUD $500 from the DK website (www.dkagencies.com).

For the first time, the judging committee will recognise another outstanding thesis with an award of $500.

A letter inviting entries will be sent to vice-chancellors of all Australian universities this month (June).

The association plans to announce the recipients of the awards in October. The secretary responsible for administering the selection process is Dr Julian Millie (Julian.Millie@monash.edu).

Blogs lead the way in media coverage of Singapore's watershed election

The 2011 general election saw the awakening of political discussion across Singapore. NATASHA COWAN reports.

The 2011 general election in Singapore has been hailed by many as a watershed election. Although the incumbent People's Action Party (PAP) retained its dominance in parliament (81 of 87 seats) and continues to form the government (undefeated since 1959), the opposition Workers' Party clinched a coveted five-man group representation constituency and retained its incumbent seat of Hougang, increasing the number of opposition parliamentarians from two to six.

Additionally, three more opposition politicians joined them as non-constituency MPs, and the PAP's total of the popular vote decreased from 66 per cent to 60 per cent as more opposition parties contested strongly in this election. The election also reinforced the eminent role of the internet as a crucial strategic platform for campaigning and information dissemination, particularly the leading role played by independent sociopolitical commentators in shaping the election coverage and discussion.

Of specific interest is The Online Citizen (TOC), a volunteer-run and self-funded sociopolitical blog that has, in the past 18 months, become more widely recognisable online for its leadership in social and political commentary and been officially recognised by mainstream media journalists as a growing, credible competitor in investigative reporting, quality control and political analysis.

TOC set the benchmark for reporting the 2011 general election, supplying coverage that rivalled the cashed-up mainstream media. TOC is also of significance as a sociopolitical commentator that has negotiated the regulatory gauntlet of Singapore's public political discourse sphere, which has been regarded as dampening civil society, circumscribing criticism and breeding self-censorship on social and political issues.

Under the auspices of maintaining interracial harmony between the multiethnic segments of society; of limiting frivolous and damaging non-constructive criticism of the government and its systems; and of picking up those who would be seditious, libellous or invoke criminal acts, the government has put in place regulatory norms to censor and encourage self-censorship.

Workers' Party supporters.

The mainstream media duopoly of MediaCorp and Singapore Press Holdings is government-linked and regulated through annual licences and subject to funding cuts (MediaCorp) or fines (Singapore Press Holdings) for 'irresponsible journalism'.

The mainstream media's role is to uphold the government's nation-building projects to inform the populace of policy as it affects them and to present the view of a united, happy and prosperous Singapore under the long-term PAP leadership. Additionally, public speech is heavily licensed, and protesting, rallying or holding a public display without a licence is a criminal act punishable with jail terms and fines.

To mitigate the difficulties of directly censoring the internet (or' new media' as it is often referred to), the Singapore Government has attempted to 'normalise' the internet as another broadcast sphere where existing 'offline' regulations may apply. Since the mid-1990s, these regulations have included automatic licensing of internet content providers, therefore making website managers responsible for the content on their sites, such as defamatory, illegal, racist or potentially disruptive content (including that posted by third parties). This leads to cautious moderation of content by website managers, caveats and disclaimers of responsibility and

Blogs lead way in Singapore's election

<< From page 4 self-censorship. At its extreme, the most noted case of intimidation-driven self-censorship is that of Sintercom, a sociopolitical website that eventually closed when its operator, Tan Chong Kee, felt he would not be able to adequately monitor the third-party content (including comments on posts) to meet the requirements of the then Singapore Broadcasting Authority —what he termed the 'sword of Damocles'.[1]

TOC was established after the 2006 general election to counter the often one-sided reporting of social and political issues in the mainstream media and to fill 'omissions' in coverage of significant but controversial social issues such as homelessness and the mandatory death penalty.

The gazetting of TOC as a political association regulated political donations to the site and required it to be non-partisan in political reporting

It also reposted content from other sociopolitical commentators to serve as a portal for sociopolitical news across the Singapore blogosphere and posted letters edited by *The Straits Times* Forum (letters to the editor) to highlight the newspaper's censorious editorial policy.

In late 2010, TOC was gazetted as a political association at the insistence of the prime minister's office. In the 12-month lead-up to the gazetting, TOC had pursued investigative reporting on the homeless issue, for which it was rebuked in parliament (and dutifully reported in the mainstream press) for being 'irresponsible'; had provided coverage of the trials of Malaysian Yong Vui Kong, convicted of drug smuggling and sentenced to death; and joined calls for the abolition of the mandatory death penalty.

Further to this, it had posted articles reporting the details of the trial of British author Alan Shadrake, charged with

bringing the Singapore judiciary into disrepute and, in an act of 'crossing over' from online commentator to offline social activist group, had organised a panel of opposition politicians (the PAP was invited but declined to attend), a TOC face-to-face forum, to address a public crowd.

Picture from the Sintercom site. The site closed when its operator felt he could not moderate third-party content.

The gazetting of TOC as a political association regulated political donations to the site and required it to be non-partisan in political reporting. Rival blog Temasek Review felt that these restrictions would see the end of TOC, but TOC regrouped, celebrated its newfound legitimacy with a party and began soliciting donations to enable it to continue operating.

Unlike Sintercom, where the 'sword of Damocles' saw Tan shut up shop, four volunteers stepped forward to take official responsibility for TOC's operation and content. As the general election seemed to draw closer, TOC put itself in a stronger position to serve as a credible and legitimate online source.

The 2011 general election saw the awakening of political discussion across Singapore. The *Straits Times* and *Today* newspapers boasted considerable increases in political news due to the election, and the letters pages (usually apolitical) were overwhelmingly filled with election and politics-related discussions. Commentators across the Singapore blogosphere were providing their opinions on the political happenings, and some grappled with how to deal with the election bandwagon.

Some commentators returned to their political roots, such as mrbrown, who had for months been posting on his travels abroad rather than sociopolitical news. Commentaries were offered by veteran sociopolitical blogger Alex Au (Yawning Bread), and the new commentator site New Asia Republic struggled with how much election news to post against its usual commentaries on economic policy.

Blogs lead way in Singapore's election

TOC was the first of the online spheres to launch a specific general election portal (The Online Citizen GE2011) featuring news from all political parties (including the PAP) and coverage on rallies and policies. It was soon emulated by the *Straits Times* (Straits Times GE2011), which also featured a summary of the candidates standing from each party, and later accompanied by videos and photos from the election campaign and addresses.

Soon after the election was announced and campaigning began properly, MediaCorp launched its Vote2011 portal, which also featured an interactive map of the electorates, collated Channel News Asia and *Today* stories and linked videos and photos.[2] Rival Temasek Review attempted to compete with TOC's election-specific site with its own (Singapore Election 2011), but it lacked the professional style of the TOC and mainstream media portals.

Hougang Workers' Party rally.

As interest in the election and the campaign intensified and videos and photos of the party rallies increased, the mainstream media attempted to repent its 2006 biased blackout of the attendance at opposition rallies. More effort was put into fielding journalists to cover the political happenings.

TOC also outstripped Temasek Review's efforts by sending volunteers to each rally across the island (sometimes 15 in a night) to take photos and videos, post articles discussing the events and to update the Facebook and Twitter feeds with 'live' updates—something usually only the resourceful mainstream media could manage and a testament to the dedication of TOC's volunteers.

The fact that the mainstream media followed the establishment of the TOC GE2011 portal with its own and was on the back foot to provide quality election coverage of both the PAP *and* the opposition—the latter which they had been hesitant to do previously—indicates the benchmark that this online site has set for a professional media to be regarded as credible by the savvy 'netizens' of Singapore.

References
1. CK Tan, 'The canary and the crow: Sintercom and the state tolerability index', KP Tan (ed.), *Renaissance Singapore? Economy, culture, and politics*, National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2007, p. 169.
2. It is difficult to tell whether similar portals were in operation in 2006 as content from these sources is deleted from their servers after seven days. Even with Internet Archive, which is of limited help here, it would more adequately require the research of someone who was monitoring these sites during the 2006 general election, before the research career of this author.

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Inaugural languages and cultures colloquium

Abstracts are invited for the inaugural colloquium of the Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU) in September.

The colloquium will be held at the University of Melbourne from 26 to 28 September.

This will be a landmark opportunity for language educators from across the country to meet and discuss topics of critical importance and mutual interest, and to participate in LCNAU's creation of a new national agenda for university language through the network itself.

The deadline for abstracts is Friday, 1 July. For further information is, visit their website.

Abstracts should be no longer than 200 words and can be submitted electronically.

The ongoing impacts of Japan's Tohoku tsunami

Scholars at the ANU look at the longer term consequences for Japan following the March disaster TREVOR WILSON reports.

Graphic and widespread media reporting of the Tohoku tsunami in March 2011 and the consequent nuclear crisis in Fukushima prefecture meant that Australians focused on Japan's desperate situation as they have rarely done before.

While the many intersecting adverse impacts of the disaster were reasonably well covered, the longer term enormity of the damage and many of the human aspects of the devastation did not necessarily sink in.

Scholars from the Australian National University (ANU) presented their analysis of some of the other implications of the crisis for the Australian Institute of International Affairs (ACT Branch) and the ANU's Japan Institute early in May.

Professor Kent Anderson, Director of the School of Culture, Languages and History, drew attention to the demographic and geographic implications. He suggested that, like the obvious economic impacts, the demographic impact was particular and more contained than might appear by the sheer numbers alone. The elderly (and women) were disproportionately affected, and this needed to be considered in reflections on responding to the disasters, such as infrastructure rebuilding. 'What effect would high levels of radiation have on future birth rates?' Professor Tessa Morris-Suzuki asked.

Using the 1995 Kobe earthquake as a reference point, Professor Anderson cautioned against reading too much into the random natural events of last March. To some extent, the direct impacts of such disasters were geographically localised, but indirect effects were more difficult to calculate. Generally speaking, he expected Japan would rebound more quickly than anticipated, and while there were undoubted psychological effects, the shifts in social plates would be less than the shifts in tectonic plates. Moreover, reading greater significance into the events could sometimes be dangerous in creating space for extremist narratives.

Professor Aiden Byrne, Dean of Science, ANU, underlined the need to see the scientific and technical impacts of the nuclear disaster clearly. For Japan, nuclear power dependence had been driven by a perceived need to increase the country's self-reliance in energy sources. The result—30 per cent reliance on nuclear power, with 51 reactors in 16 sites, the greatest concentration of which was in Fukushima—would not easily be replaced and would leave Japan's electric power industry facing problems for some time.

Professor Aiden Byrne

Despite the criticism levelled at the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), Professor Byrne considered that, technically, TEPCO's responses had been commendable. Unfortunately, very high levels of radiation had nevertheless resulted, although much less than at Chernobyl. Serious radiation leaks were confined to areas close to the plants and had generally been well publicised. Most forms of such radiation would decay fairly rapidly, and various mitigation efforts could be considered.

To what extent Japan, or other countries, would reconsider their commitment to nuclear power was unclear. Japan had been relatively open about the specific problems it faced, and had welcomed advice from nuclear scientists

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and engineers from other countries. The head of the Japan Centre, Shun Ikeda, emphasised the psychological and spiritual implications. He suggested that the initial calm acceptance of the disasters reflected Japanese Buddhist values where everything was relative and the interdependence of people and things was important.

He noted the instances where Japanese citizens had drawn encouragement and inspiration from small signs and symbolic events: carnations that regrew through mud and silt; unexpected evidence that people in other countries cared, with the visits of President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Gillard to the affected area; and the local professional soccer team and baseball team surprisingly winning their first hometown victories.

Shun Ikeda also drew attention to the commitment shown by local authorities in restoring important local services and 'comforts'. Always highly valued in Japan, schools quickly resumed basic operations in some form or other, sharing facilities and putting up with inconvenience and discomfort if necessary.

Restoring rail services had also proved important at the community level. Those who relied on their pets were allowed to take them into refuges and other places. Local services were significantly assisted by the large number of volunteers who spontaneously travelled to the Tohoku region in their holidays, or who seized other opportunities to help in the massive clean-up operations and provide temporary shelters. Their cheerful determination helped restore communities psychologically as well as materially.

Professor Morris-Suzuki speculated about the nature of the disaster and what it meant in terms of possible long-term changes in Japanese attitudes. The impact of the crisis on Japan's political system has already attracted considerable comment. While some of this comment was directed at the management of the crisis by the Democratic Party of Japan government, other comment has examined the broader significance for Japanese people's attitudes to government (See Rikki Kersten, *Asian Currents*, April 2011).

Professor Morris-Suzuki

Professor Morris-Suzuki suggested the disaster had led to a loss of trust by the Japanese people in their government, which had, in the postwar period, at times mishandled industrial development at the expense of the health and welfare of the people, and in Japan's major corporations.

In this case, many people felt that the government was not only unable to protect them but was also not about to provide reliable information about what was going on. For example, it was widely believed that TEPCO was not disclosing all the information it had (something confirmed only recently by the announcement that all three nuclear reactors had reached meltdown in the days after the tsunami). Generally, Professor Morris Suzuki noted, the Fukushima nuclear power station problems were 'creating enormous uncertainly and considerable anger and in the people.

The psychological impacts of the crisis were also profound, notwithstanding widespread media tributes to the 'stoical' popular response

Long-lasting impacts on the Japanese economy and society were also anticipated. In relation to the Japanese Government's ongoing fiscal difficulties, it seemed inevitable that the nuclear crisis would add significantly to Japan's indebtedness, perhaps leading to a long-debated rise in the consumption tax to 15 per cent , if the government was

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forced to find ways to increase revenue. The reduced power generation capacity has affected production and, if the method had to be replaced, this could require considerable additional government and private sector investment.

The potential for powerful forces for wider change to develop should not be under-estimated

Professor Morris-Suzuki also noted the unforeseen impact on Japan's labour market. Some Japanese industries, such as the food production and food retail sectors, had become quite reliant on foreign labour, but these workers had tended to return to their own countries when the nuclear emergency developed. This was complicating recovery and any return to 'normal'.

There were also considerable effects on tourism as tourists stayed away, often discouraged by travel advisories urging people not to travel to Japan. International and domestic tourism have become major sources of revenue and employment in many areas of Japan, and the Tohoku region was no different.

The psychological impacts of the crisis were also profound, notwithstanding widespread media tributes to the 'stoical' popular response. Professor Morris-Suzuki believed anecdotal accounts were testimony to the profound trauma and distress being felt by many individuals and families who had lost homes, livelihoods, belongings—and sometimes their whole communities.

Professor Morris-Suzuki said yearnings for rebuilding and revival were certainly strong, as witnessed by the government committee set up to gather ideas and reports on proposals, and the issuing of suggestions from prominent commentators such as Kenichi Ohmae and others. But she saw much of this as a fairly conventional response, which left some doubts about how much could really be achieved. There was a definite sense of 'reform fatigue' as well.

Yet, she said, perhaps the potential for powerful forces for wider change to develop should not be under-estimated. For example, there was a new sense that people needed to depend more on their own resources and capacities, and many grassroots groups were generating new ideas and exchanging information about the situation. It was not yet clear whether such forces would develop greater momentum or find some new form of political expression in the future.

Professor Morris-Suzuki suggested that new levels of international cooperation on disaster relief and planning could emerge, as Japan's neighbours sought to offer genuine help to the economic superpower brought to its knees by an unimaginable crisis. In this context, the 21–22 May summit between the leaders of China, South Korea and Japan gives some grounds for hope of future regional collaboration on responses to disasters as well as on nuclear safety issues.

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JG Crawford Award

The JG Crawford Award will be presented in 2011 to the author of an unpublished research paper seen by the selection panel as making a substantial and original contribution to scholarship on Japan of Australia–Japan relations. The deadline for applications is 30 September 2011.To be eligible for consideration, the paper should address some aspect of the operation of the Japanese economy or economic policy, or Japan's international relations or relations with Australia, or the political environment affecting these affairs. See website for details.

Australian businesses risk missing out on Asian boom

An Asian business expert says most Australian businesses are not well equipped to take advantage of growing opportunities in Asia. ALLAN SHARP reports.

Australian businesses risk losing out to international competitors in rapidly growing Asian markets unless they become better equipped to engage with Asia culturally, says an Asian business expert.

The Director of the University of South Australia's (UniSA) Centre for Asian Business, Professor Ying Zhu, told *Asian Currents* that most Australian businesses were not well equipped to take advantage of business opportunities in Asia and most expatriates working in Asia did not receive adequate cross-cultural management training before being sent overseas.

'Asia's rapid economic growth not only provides business opportunities for Australian companies, but also adds additional challenges, given business environments and activities have become more complex and uncertain,' said Professor Zhu, who was appointed Director of the Centre in February this year.

'This new complexity requires more appropriate research and study programs in the field of Asian business and management. Without adequate cross-cultural management training before being sent overseas, Australian business managers face many difficulties, generally related to ethical issues or cross-cultural management problems.

'In fact, many businesses experience a loss in both productivity and revenue because of the inadequate capability of foreign managers to successfully run business and manage staff in Asia,' he said.

Professor Zhu said institutions like the Centre for Asian Business, which has just entered its second year of operation and was officially launched last month, could play a crucial role in developing the skills of Australian businesses to engage more effectively with Asia.

'The Australian business and academic communities need to engage in regular roundtable discussions, which would include government representatives, to share views and experience about the nature of the Asian business environment and debate best practice policy and strategies for business engagement with Asia,' he said.

'We also need to be sensitive to the dynamic changes that are

Professor Ying Zhu

Centre for Asian Business Director Professor Ying Zhu was born in Beijing and graduated from Peking University with a Bachelor of International Economics. He then worked as an economist in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone for four years.

He did his PhD thesis at Melbourne University on the role of export processing zones in East Asian development, focusing on South Korea, Taiwan, China and Thailand. After completing his PhD he worked at Victoria University and Melbourne University for 17 years. He was associate professor and Director of the Masters of Human Resource Management at Melbourne University before joining UniSA this year as Centre for Asian Business director, on 1 February.

He has been a visiting scholar at the International Labour Organization, the University of Cambridge and the World Bank. His research interests include international human resource management, employment relations in Asia, labour law and regulations in Asia, and economic development in Asia.

Australia risks missing out on Asian boom

constantly occurring in Asia. Ensuring that industry-relevant information is kept constantly up to date and that Australian companies have a sound understanding of the new way of doing business in Asia are crucial for business success.'

Professor Zhu said it was vital for Australian business leaders to be able to understand and communicate with Asian business partners in their native languages.

'Language is the pre-eminent medium through which one is able to better understand a foreign culture. We can no longer expect that all business can, or should, be conducted in English. In fact, we're at a severe disadvantage if we do not understand our business partners, but they understand us,' he said.

'Some large Australian companies are beginning to build on their talent pool by employing and training executives who demonstrate the ability to develop their foreign-language capacity, as well as their cross-cultural managerial skills. However, these companies are generally large organisations with the resources to do so, which the majority of Australian businesses are lacking.'

Professor Zhu said the Centre for Asian Business, within UniSA's International Graduate School of Business, sought, through dynamic, high-quality research to contribute to Australia's understanding of the nature of Asian business and encourage valuable collaborative partnerships between regional business and academic institutions.

'We strive to advance the regional economy and Australia's regional engagement by assisting businesses, particularly Australian companies, in their Asian ventures and partnerships,' he said.

'Our long-term goal is to develop into an influential think-tank—a leading contributor to Australia's academic and policy life, known for the high-quality and relevance of our research to contemporary issues and challenges in the Asian business environment.'

Professor Zhu said he saw dedication to thorough engagement with, and immersion in, the Australian and international business communities as the centre's defining attribute.

'We're not solely an academic research centre, but are committed to ensuring that our research outcomes and findings are made available to a wide scope of Australian companies and industries, to guarantee that our research is as influential and beneficial to Australian regional economic engagement as possible,' he said.

Since beginning operations last year the centre has, among other things, developed and supported 22 multidisciplinary research projects across the UniSA's Division of Business and coordinated two international symposia, bringing together leading academics from across Asia, the United States and Australia.

It has also hosted international scholars and business leaders, who worked with centre members to expand the knowledge, research capacity and networks of the centre's research community.

In July this year the centre will co-host an international symposium with the Asian Development Bank Institute, focusing on monetary, financial and trade Issues and challenges in Asia. The centre is establishing links with local business communities and has initiated joint activities with South Australian business councils, including the Australia–China Business Council and Australia–Indonesia Business Council.

'We foresee the expansion of such relationships and the subsequent practical application of our research findings as integral to our ability to remain grounded and relevant to Australian business and industry,' Professor Zhu said.

*Allan Sharp is editor of* Asian Currents.

Soeharto's legacy: Indonesia's 'entitled' bureaucracy resists reform

Radical reform of the bureaucracy, the state enterprises, the judiciary and other law enforcement agencies is needed before Indonesia can achieve its full economic potential, writes ROSS McLEOD.

The utopian view of democratic government is 'of the people, by the people and for the people'. To understand how Soeharto's Indonesia worked it is helpful to adopt a quite different view: 'government of the people, by the elite and for the elite'.

In the analysis that follows, the central idea is of government captured by an elite that then sets about using the coercive powers of government to transfer income to itself from the general public, by way of 'private tax' transfers.[1] I find it helpful to portray government as a franchise under the control of Soeharto as the franchisor.

This franchise consisted of five main branches of the public sector (Figure 1): the bureaucracy, the state owned enterprises (SOEs), the judiciary and associated legal bureaucracy, the military and the police, and the legislature and the associated political parties. Each branch had its own role to play in generating private taxes and protecting the franchise as a whole from attack.

Figure 1: The Soeharto Franchise
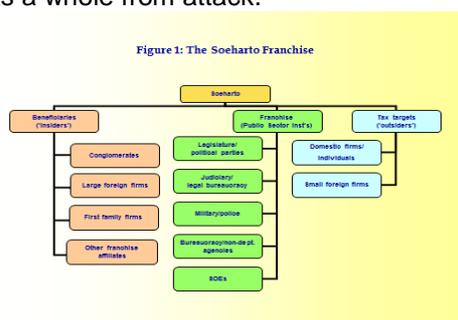
Private taxes were of two kinds. The first were generated by a symbiotic relationship between the franchise and 'insider' firms. The bureaucracy and the SOEs were used to implement policies that created excess profits for these insider firms, which were then shared with the franchise as a whole. These policies included government procurement on the basis of kickbacks; the granting of access to natural resources, especially through logging and mining concessions; the granting of monopolies on other kinds of business; and non-arm's-length deals with SOEs, including state banks.

The second were generated through a predatory relationship between the franchise and 'outsider' firms and individuals. Again the bureaucracy was heavily involved, in this case using its powers to extort payments from the private sector in myriad ways, including the payment of bribes for the issue of permits, licences, ID cards, passports and the like; for actual delivery of public services to which citizens and firms were entitled; for facilitating access to public sector employment; and for favourable decisions by the courts. Extortion was also undertaken by the military and the police, relying on the threat or actual use of violence—sometimes directly, and sometimes through 'outsourcing' to criminal gangs.

Soeharto's New Order is an exception to the often voiced perception that a high level of corruption holds back economic development

The Soeharto franchise was spectacularly successful in generating wealth for its members and cronies. But it needs to be emphasised that it also maintained very high average economic growth—in excess of 7 per cent annually—over some three decades. This is a development record that is matched by very few other countries.

Soeharto's New Order is an exception to the often voiced perception that a high level of corruption holds back economic development, demonstrating that corruption and rapid growth are not necessarily incompatible. Soeharto's franchise succeeded in both respects because of his appreciation that rapid growth was in the interests of the franchise and the elite, because faster growth implied more rapid

Indonesia's bureaucracy resists reform

expansion of the tax base for the all-important private tax transfers.[2]

Effectiveness of a franchise depends crucially on the creation of appropriate incentives for franchisees. Soeharto's system provided opportunities for those who were willing to play by the franchise rules. This explains the prevalence of under-the-counter payments in the public sector by individuals wanting to secure positions, promotions and transfers to more lucrative postings. In turn, this provides a clear indication that corruption was endemic, rather than being restricted to a few 'bad apples', and therefore hints at the difficulty of its eradication. But by no means all individuals who joined the public sector did so with a view to enriching themselves by way of participation in corrupt behaviour. It was therefore necessary also to create negative incentives to deter opposition from within, so there were severe penalties for those who did not play by the rules.

These negative incentives were created by setting formal remuneration levels far below those for comparable positions in the private sector—which still remains the case (Figure 2). At first glance this would seem to create a disincentive to seeking public sector employment, but in fact it was well understood that potential remuneration from off-budget sources far exceeded formal entitlements if one accepted the franchise rules—especially for those in high-level positions. In turn, promotion to these high-level positions was dependent on each individual's contribution to the prosperity and stability of the franchise.

Those who might have considered rebelling against the system could expect neither promotion nor access to supplementary remuneration of any kind: in other words they would condemn themselves to a life of penury. It was therefore in the interest of all to support the system—even if only passively—including those who wished only for fair remuneration relative to their skills and experience.

Figure 2: Private and Public Sector Remuneration in Indonesia
(Rp million/month)

Note: 'Echelon' refers to managerial positions in the public sector.
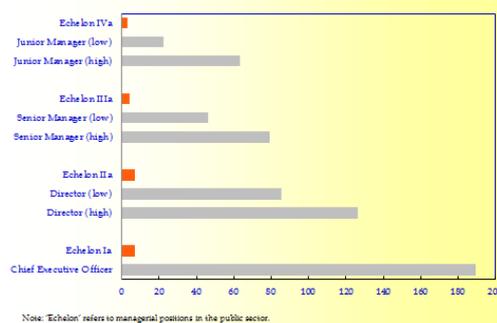
This suggests that trying to get rid of corruption by punishing those who could be proven to be involved in it is doomed to failure. Almost everybody was involved in some way, and it is unrealistic to expect law enforcement officials to act against corrupt individuals if they and their colleagues are corrupt themselves.

Although Indonesia is now growing moderately fast, its growth falls well short of its potential, largely because of a public sector that is Soeharto's legacy

From this perspective on Soeharto era governance, bureaucratic extortion was not only acceptable to the regime, but was in fact expected behaviour on the part of its officials, many of whom would excuse such behaviour on their own part on the grounds that they had no other choice if they were to have a standard of living comparable to that of their private sector peers.

But of course this bureaucratic extortion—typically referred to as excessive red tape—is one of the things that has given Indonesia such a bad name in relation to corruption. The feature that distinguishes Soeharto's Indonesia from many other corrupt regimes, however, is that this red tape did not seriously hinder the insider firms, which, as part of the elite, were largely immune to it. And, although those firms prospered mightily as a result of their privileged positions, they could do so only by investing heavily in their own expansion, which contributed strongly to Indonesia's economic growth.

Although Indonesia is now growing moderately fast, its growth

Indonesia's bureaucracy resists reform

<<From page 13 falls well short of its potential, largely because of a public sector that is Soeharto's legacy. Improved performance in the future awaits radical reform of the bureaucracy, the state enterprises, the judiciary and other law enforcement agencies.

The key to such reform, which remains largely ignored, is radical change to public sector human resources management. This needs a thoroughgoing overhaul, focusing on the objective of getting the best available people into each position—just as is the case with successful professional sporting teams and private companies—for which strong performance is crucial.

This will require recruitment to be opened up to outsiders so as to create strong competition for positions, especially at the higher levels. Current practice is for such positions to be filled only from inside the organisation in question and for promotion to be based very largely on seniority rather than demonstrated competence. In addition, the salary structure needs to be altered radically to bring it much more closely into line with that in the private sector.

There has already been some experimentation along these lines in pilot programs, but it has been unbalanced. Almost all the focus has been on increasing remuneration; by contrast, there is enormous resistance to overturning a culture in which individuals feel themselves entitled to promotions provided that they have 'served their time' at lower levels in the organisations in question.

The idea of recruitment from outside appears still to be anathema to policymakers and public sector officials at all levels. It needs to be clearly understood, however, that higher salaries are a necessary, but by no means sufficient, condition for significantly improved public sector performance.

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Ross McLeod is Associate Professor, Indonesia Project, at the Crawford School of Economics & Government, at the Australian National University.

Conference will examine Indonesia's place in the world

Indonesia's place in the world will be the focus of this year's Indonesia Update at the Australian National University.

The two-day conference, from 30 September–1 October, will look at the 'reinvention' of Indonesia as a 'stable and reasonably successful democracy (and G20 member) at a time when the international game has changed'.

Indonesia has often been seen as punching below its weight in world affairs, and as a consumer rather than a producer of global trends and ideas.

Underperformance of the education and legal systems makes it difficult for Indonesia to act on the world stage as its size merits. Yet the globalising influences are as strong there as anywhere.

The 2011 Indonesia Update aims to consider Indonesia's place as both consumer and producer of global trends in this newly interconnected world.

Life outside marriage—Japan's increasing 'singles' population

Low fertility rates and an ageing population have made 'singlehood' in Japan an issue of significance in popular media and public discourse, writes LAURA DALES.

In Japan in 2005, more than 7 per cent of women and nearly 16 per cent of men remained unmarried at age 50.[1] The median age of first marriage is now 28.5 years for women and 30.2 years for men, and one-person households have increased, both numerically and as a proportion of the total population.[2]

As Japanese women and men marry later or not at all, spending more of their lives outside of marriage (divorced, as yet unmarried, never married or widowed), the image of the reproductive family may no longer accurately represent the fundamental social unit of Japan. Low fertility rates and an ageing population have drawn the individual into focus, and singlehood has become an issue of significance in popular media and public discourse.

While the majority of Japanese women and men do still marry, singlehood has been described as an inevitable and universal experience for Japanese women and men.[3] Ueno Chizuko refers particularly to singlehood at the end of life, following widowhood or divorce. Her discussion of mid–to old-age singlehood in her 2007 book *Ohitorisama no rôgo* (Old age for the singleton) brought the term *ohitorisama* to popular use.

The term *ohitorisama*, coined in 1999 by the late journalist Iwashita Kumiko,[4] is one of the more recent additions to the popular lexicon of (often disparaging) words used to describe singles—including 'Christmas cake' for unmarried women over the age of 25 (as diminished in value as a Christmas cake after 25 December), *dokushin kizoku* (single aristocracy) and 'parasite singles' (who live with their parents and spend their disposable income on luxury items).

The term *ohitorisama* is less pejorative. It is variously translated as 'single' or 'singleton' (in the manner of Helen Fields' popular fictional character, Bridget Jones). On her website, 'The association for the promotion of the single' (*Ohitorisama no kôjô inkai*), and later in her book, Iwashita defined *ohitorisama* as 'an adult woman with an established individual identity'.

Although Iwashita explicitly noted that even married women could be *ohitorisama*—and she herself was married—in popular discourse the term is used to refer to unmarried women who dine alone, go on holidays alone or otherwise act independently. While the *ohitorisama* discussion is often tied to materialism or consumption, the model *ohitorisama* is primarily characterised by her independence. She may also challenge popular feminine ideals, by being career-focused rather than domestically inclined, or by actively pursuing romance.

The lead female character in the 2009 TBS drama *Ohitorisama*[5] (played by Mizuki Arisa) embodies this ideal. Akiyama Satomi is a 30-something high school teacher too committed to her work to have time to cook or clean. The program follows Satomi's travails at work and in love as she develops romantic feelings for a much younger, delicate-natured male colleague (Kamisaka Shinitchi, played by Koike Teppei) whom she is supervising.

For both women and men, singlehood is presented as a stage where gender role transgression is permissible, even if it is not ideal

The model of the independent minded *ohitorisama* woman is thus sometimes paired with the similarly gender-transgressive *sôshoku danshi*, or herbivore male, a shy or unassertive alternative to the alpha male.

Japan's increasing 'singles' population

For both women and men, singlehood is presented as a stage where gender role transgression is permissible, even if it is not ideal. While *ohitorisama* represents one of the more positive models of singlehood for women, life beyond marriage remains marginal for many women. In recent research conducted with Dr Beverley Yamamoto, of Osaka University, we have found that singlehood is a complicated category for analysis.

In our project we interviewed 32 women, aged 30 to 49 years, most of whom are divorced or never married, while others are married in unusual circumstances (e.g. late marriage). In our semi-structured interviews, we asked them about their upbringing, family relationships, friendships, work and romantic lives, as well as what it means to be unmarried. As scholars have noted in other contexts, we found that the experience of being single is inflected by a range of factors, including class, education and family background, and mental and physical health.[6]

For some of the unmarried women interviewed, singlehood was not seen as their chosen or ultimate destination—marriage remained the idealised romantic relationship, valued for the emotional and financial security and the potential for child-rearing that it offered.

For other women, marriage implied sacrifice or compromise that they were unwilling or unable to make. And for yet others in our study, worry about their unmarried status was overshadowed by more significant concerns relating to economic independence, job security, family responsibilities and personal health. Life outside marriage is evidently shaped by multiple factors that make generalisation about unmarried individuals difficult. Family remains relevant as the legally and socially sanctioned basic unit of Japanese society, and as the primary legitimate space for reproduction. The low incidence of extramarital births (2 per cent of all births) in Japan means that marriage remains tied to reproductivity. For this reason the marital contract is unlikely to be replaced or undercut by non-marital romantic relationships.

However, the centrality of the reproductive family is challenged by shifts in residential patterns, increased economic insecurity and the ageing of the population. Friendships and romantic relationships that do not lead to marriage may provide different ways of thinking about social connections, and ideals of femininity and masculinity.

Relationships outside marriage have the potential to mould new understandings of intimacy and a meaningful life

Where company and kinship relations previously typified Japanese men and women's intimate relationships, friendship may offer new form of supports, or different options in relation to housing, work and childrearing practices. Relationships built before or outside marriage may offer different experiences of intimacy that may in turn shape paths to (and from) marriage. And relationships outside marriage have the potential to mould new understandings of intimacy and a meaningful life.

Of course, Japan is not alone in experiencing changes in marital patterns, ageing or declining fertility. These shifts are occurring in many countries and to varying extents at all socioeconomic levels (Jones 2007).[7] For social scientists and scholars interested in human relationships, there is much to explore in this changing landscape.

To understand Japanese society as it changes, we need to examine the ways that relationships of intimacy outside the family, as well as within the family, shape individuals' lives. The prosperity and vitality of the shrinking population will surely be influenced by such relationships and the extent to which

Japan's increasing 'singles' population

they are recognised and fostered as a sign of healthy social diversity.

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Digital theme for literatures and cultures symposium

Asia-Pacific literature and culture in the era of the digital revolution will be the theme of the 14th Biennial Symposium on Literatures and Cultures of the Asia Pacific Region, to be held at the University of Western Australia in December.

The four-day symposium, from 4–7 December, is being hosted by the Westerly Centre at UWA in conjunction with the Asia–Pacific Writing Partnership (APWriting).

The symposium will include roundtables in which APWriting members from the region will present short 'provocations' for general discussion on issues affecting the teaching and production of creative writing in the speaker's own country, and writing master classes with leading writers from the region.

The symposium will explore the implications of new communication technologies, specifically for the literatures and cultures of the Asia–Pacific region.

Some of the papers, provocations and presentations delivered at the Asia-Pacific Writing Partnership's 2010 symposium 'Writing Across Cultures' are now available online in a special issue of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*.

Participants from 19 countries took part in the symposium, hosted by the City University of Hong Kong.

The everyman as hero: cinema and identity in Singapore

Cinema is providing an avenue for contemporary Singaporeans to express their identity and sense of belonging in their culturally diverse nation, writes CATHERINE GOMES.

Singapore cinema can be read as providing a site for discussion of identity in Singapore. The richness of the identity in Singapore is linked to the unconventionally quick development of the nation, first as a British colony and then as an independent nation-state, as well as to the multiethnic makeup of its people that favours the ethnic Chinese.

Travelling through a short history of Singapore cinema and examining certain filmmakers and their productions reveals a tapestry of films that unpack the complexities of identity in Singapore.

Singapore is a fairly young nation. Like other former Western colonies in Asia and Africa, it achieved independence from its colonial master in the 1960s. In 1963 the British declared Singapore and Malaysia independent from colonial rule. Independence resulted in these former colonies forming a federation. However, 23 months later the federation with Malaysia dissolved acrimoniously and Singapore became a sovereign nation.

Unlike other postcolonial nations at the time, Singapore lacked a strong precolonial history other than its links to Malay culture and, specifically, to the Sultanate of Johore. These links, however, are not rooted firmly enough to give Singaporeans an effective precolonial national identity because of the migration of different Asian and European peoples into Singapore during the colonial period.

The immigration patterns favoured the Chinese who emigrated from southern China and whose descendants then went on to populate the island, emerging as the most dominant ethnic demographic in Singapore.

The ethnic Chinese and ethnic Malays, however, have very little in common culturally and socially, as both come from different regions in Asia with differing histories. Prior to migrating to Singapore in the 1800s and 1900s, both the Chinese and Malays from the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago had very limited precolonial contact, with the exception of the relationship Imperial China had with the Sultanate of Kedah.[1] This lack of a strong common cultural identity between the ethnic Chinese and the ethnic Malays posed challenges for a postcolonial Singapore government determined to create a unified national identity. It is against this background that cinema can be read as contributing to an ongoing yet unofficial project of providing a space for discussion of identity in Singapore.

'Local' or national cinema reveals countries attempting to understand themselves through visual and popular creativity. Countries (and cultures) attempting to deal with sociocultural issues such as trauma, confusion of identity and commemoration have turned to cinema to confront, dissect and create ideas of self, community and culture.

DVD cover for *Money no enough.*

Early Singapore cinema, for instance, really reflects the many layers of the diasporic identity of Singaporean people as a settler society. The 1920s to 1960s were dominated by locally made Malay films. Malay films were produced by such studio heavyweights as the Cathay Organisation and very much reflected the Malay community and culture in both Singapore and Malaysia at the time.

While there were different kinds of genres, such as melodramas, also known as *sandiwara,* and horror films, most Malay language films were musical pieces styled after what is now known as Bollywood cinema. This is because of the presence of Indian directors in the Malay cinematic world who, not surprisingly, used Bollywood musicals as useful templates. Perhaps the most famous

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films in the 1950s and 1960s from the Malay musical genre were the films of P Ramlee. Ramlee was an entertainer extraordinaire. Among other things, he was an actor, comedian, musician, director, scriptwriter, conductor, dancer, choreographer and composer. His films such as *The legend of Hang Tuah* (1957) and *Ahmad Albab (*1968), which he both directed and starred in, were formulaic musical comedies with him as the romantic lead.

Poster for *Singapore GaGa*.

Audiences, regardless of ethnic persuasion, were generally attracted to P Ramlee films, also for the characters he played: the everyman.[2] Ramlee's films were popular among the Malay community in Singapore and Malaysia, in all probability because they reflected Malay *kampong* (village) life and tradition. Doing so presented not only a cinematic escape for audiences but these films more importantly provided the Malay community with a common cultural, uniquely Malay identity in an ever-increasingly multicultural, economically progressive and cosmopolitan Singapore and Malaysia.

Ramlee's films, after all, were screened during the unsettling times of postwar colonial Singapore and Malaysia, when racial unrest and communist uprisings were not uncommon. His films were also popular throughout the period of political uncertainty during the height of tensions between Malaysia and Singapore as they attempted unity through federation, and after Singapore's 1965 expulsion.

Through all the political, economic and social unrest and uncertainty, Ramlee's formulaic films provided a form of unified identity for Malays and non-Malays alike. Anecdotally, older Singaporeans from the different ethnic backgrounds outside the Malay community, such as the Eurasians and Indians, as well as Chinese, still reminisce fondly about the P Ramlee films they used to watch in the cinema and on television in their youth.

Singapore cinema was mostly dormant in the 1970s and 1980s, with the exception of very few productions. These included the 1981 English-language, Bobby A Suarez-directed film *They call her Cleopatra Wong*, which was a joint production between Singapore and the Philippines and had only minor commercial success. It was not until the late 1990s and beyond that Singapore cinema started to flourish in popularity and find critical success. The past decade-and-a-half has seen the Singapore film industry coming into its own, with locally made productions becoming as popular with Singaporeans as the usual Hollywood fare.

Cinema provides an avenue for contemporary Singaporeans to artistically articulate, spread and consume locally made films that narrate Singaporean issues and concerns, particularly about identity, in addition to creating a sense of belonging in this culturally diverse nation. Some films, such as those by Jack Neo (including *Money no enough* (1998) and *I not stupid* (2002)) have found commercially success. Neo's films, and similar commercial productions, appeal to local audiences because they inject a quintessentially Singaporean flavour through language, such as Singlish (Singapore English), and Chinese dialects, such as Hokkien, as well as likeable everyman characters that most Singaporeans can identify with.

These everyman characters, or 'heartlanders' as they are popularly known, take on the roles of the heroes and heroines of these films, which deal with contemporary issues and concerns affecting Singaporeans, such as education and financial struggles.[3] However, commercial Singapore films are not the only genre of cinema that has attracted local audience attention through their ability to present and represent Singaporean identity. Art house films are equally capable of doing so.

Art house productions are able to capture the complex, ubiquitous nature of identity in Singapore by the sheer nature of their experimentation in style and format. Some Singaporean films such as

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Djinn's *Perth* (2004) and Eric Khoo's *Be with me* (2005) come across as anticommercial productions with disjointed narratives, unclear plots and aesthetically challenging cinematography.

A Singaporean filmmaker of particular note whose films clearly portray Singaporean identity as complex is documentary specialist Tan Pin Pin. Tan's best-known works include *Moving house* (2001), *Singapore GaGa* (2005) and *Invisible city* (2008) which have played to limited but packed audiences locally and at film festivals.

Tan's work attempts to make sense of Singapore's multilayered identity by engaging in the unconventional and non-mainstream. Her work provides avenues for those on the fringe to voice their contributions on the complex layers of identity in Singapore. Tan's opus *Singapore GaGa*, for example, features individuals who are faceless, forgotten or eccentric because of their inability to fit into the everyday Singaporean societal and cultural landscapes forged by government projects that emphasise wealth and popular consumerism. These individuals include buskers at train stations, who are seen by hundreds of people but largely ignored, and acclaimed musicians, who are under-appreciated and misunderstood because of the esoteric nature of their work (for example, internationally renowned toy pianist Margaret Leng Tan).

Singapore GaGa also features students from a *madrasa* (Islamic school) enthusiastically and happily belting out patriotic tunes, and a former communist engaging in propaganda songs. *Madrasas* in Singapore are few and far between, as is the existence of former communists, since most have passed away, migrated, reformed or have been muted in some way. *Singapore GaGa*, in other words, reveals that identity in Singapore is not simply a one-dimensional government project, but one that is highly complex and quotidian.

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Dr Catherine Gomes is a lecturer at the School of Media and Communication, RMIT University.

13th century Japanese soft power

By Sally Burdon
Asia Bookroom

The influence of literature on popular culture is always intriguing—what it says about society at the time of crossover and beyond can be quite revealing.

I am always fascinated by the way books move beyond their bindings and into 'ordinary' life. Film is, of course, the most

19th century volume of Hyakunin Isshu.

obvious medium for literature to escape into broad popular appeal these days, but there are, and have been, other avenues.

The Japanese poetry anthology, *Hyakunin isshu*, 100 poems by 100 poets compiled in the 13th century by poet and literary scholar Fujiwara no Teika is a fascinating case in point. The poems included were written between the 7th and the 13th centuries and this anthology is one of Japan's most popular and reprinted literary works.

Hyakunin isshu is both the name of the poetry anthology and also the name by which a very popular card game is known. This, most famous example of *uta karuta*, or poem cards, rose to great popularity in the later Edo period when multicoloured woodblock printing made possible mass production of these beautiful cards.

Prior to this the cards had been printed in black and white and then hand coloured, confining the audience to only those in society who could afford these luxurious little artworks.

However, with larger-scale production, the game of Hyakunin isshu became a favourite family game at New Year, and has stayed so to this day.
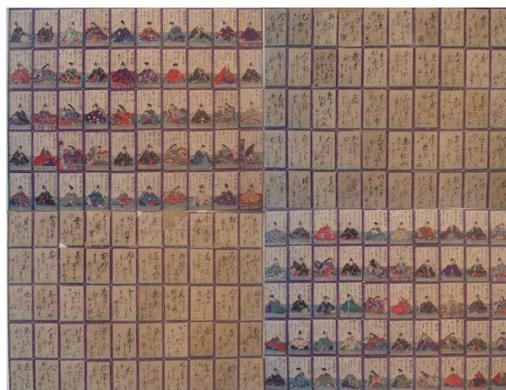
Example of a late 19th century set of Hyakunin isshu comprising two hundred colour woodblock cards**.**

As this game requires an intimate knowledge of the poems, the popularity of the collection has not been overtaken by the game, with many beautifully illustrated editions of the book published. Given the important place *Hyakunin isshu* holds in Japanese literature, not surprisingly, many people know many or all of the poems by heart.
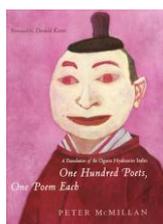
Recent translation by Peter McMillan— *One hundred poets, one poem each,* a translation of the *Ogura hyakunin isshu*. This translation won both the 2008 Donald Keene Center Special Prize for Special Prize for the Translation of Japanese Literature and Special Cultural Translation Prize from the Japan Society of Translators in Japan in the same year.

A quick search of YouTube brings up a number of matches for *Hyakunin isshu*, including a demonstration of the game being played and, an example of the continuing evolution of this concept, a Nintendo version.

It is certainly fun, and encouraging, to consider that a collection of poems compiled at a mountain retreat near Kyoto in 1235 is 'cool' on You Tube The power of literature!

Books on Asia

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 for women in Asia.

The East Asia Series

The series welcomes proposals on subjects principally concerned with any part of the East Asian region (China, Japan, North and South Korea and Taiwan).

South Asia Series

The series publishes outstanding research on the countries and peoples of South Asia across a wide range of disciplines.

Job websites

www.jobs.ac.uk advertises worldwide academic posts.

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

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

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

http://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.

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

http://www.comminit.com/global/spaces-frontpage is the site of The Communication Initiative Network.

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

Diary notes

2011 K R Narayanan Oration 'India and the global financial crisis—what have we learnt? ANU, Canberra, 23 June 2011, 5:20 pm–6:40 pm. A public lecture delivered by Dr D Subbarao, 22nd Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. Enquiries: Prof. Raghbendra on 6125 2683, Stephanie Hancock on 6125 4482

Emerging projects, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, 181–187 Hay Street, Sydney, 14 May–25 June 2011. Three solo exhibitions by emerging artists Shalini Jardin, Tracy Luft and Cyrus Tang who explore the transformative potential of diverse materials, including human hair, cardboard and living protozoa. Open 11am–6pm, Tuesday–Saturday.

Timor-Leste Studies Association (TLSA) conference, Timor-Leste, 30 June–1 July 2011. A two-day conference, 'Communicating New Research on Timor-Leste', 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.

9th New Zealand Asian Studies Society International Conference, 2–4 July 2011**.** This major conference for NZ Asianists will look at the rise of Asia and the shift of emphasis to Asia as the site of emerging power. See website for further information.

National language teachers conference in Darwin, Darwin, 6–9 July 2011. The 18th Biennial Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, at the Darwin Convention Centre, will include papers and workshops on the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program languages; the Australian Curriculum; Australian Aboriginal languages; and using new technology in languages learning and teaching. See website for more information.

AMUNC conference, Canberra, 9–15 July 2011. One of the most renowned and prestigious Model UN conferences for university students in the world, the Asia-Pacific model United Nations Conference, or AMUNC, will be held this year in Canberra in July. The conference will bring together, at the ANU, over 600 of the brightest minds from the Asia–Pacific region and beyond to grapple with the intricacies of international law, economics, security, human rights and culture in a week of intense debate. For further information, see the conference website.

Diary notes

Book launch, *From Vienna to Yogyakarta: the life of Herb Feith,* by Jemma Purdey, Parliament House, Canberra, 6–7pm, 6 July 2011*,* RSVP, Wednesday 29 June, 2011, Nik Feith Tan, 02 6261 2081 or nik.feith.tan@gmail.com (RSVP compulsory for visitor passes to Parliament House).

ANU Asia–Pacific Week, Canberra, 10–14 July, 2011. ANU Asia Pacific Week will bring together 100 of the top graduate and undergraduate students from around Australia and the world for a series of innovative Asia–Pacific focused events at the Australian National University. Events held during the week include **The China Update**, a Q&A style forum on the future of the Asia–Pacific between students and academics and a flagship panel on the transformation of political and economic power in Asia. Further information from the website.

The Chinese Studies Association of Australia (CSAA)—12th Biennial Conference, Canberra, 13–15 July 2011. A postgraduate workshop will be held on Wednesday, 13 July. For details and application procedure, please click here.

2011 Melbourne Conference on China, 'The city, the countryside and the world—China's urban and rural transformations and their global connections', 6-7 August 2011, the University of Melbourne. Further information, Dr Gao Jia or Dr Lewis Mayo, or from the conference website.

The 2011 Herb Feith Memorial Lecture, Monash University Melbourne, 2 August 2011, by HE. Kirsty Sword Gusmão, 6 pm for 6.30 pm–8 pm, RSVP Monday 25 July, 2011,Eric Cheng, 03 9903 4616 or at eric.cheng@monash.edu.

Asian Art Institute of Australia (AAIA) exhibitions, Sydney exhibitions and presentations: Sunday, 2pm, 7 August 2011, 'Collectors and collecting', presentation and small exhibition by Allan Rae and some collectors of Asian Art on what they collect and why it interests them., phone 02 9660 0199. **Weekend, 1–2 October 2011, 10am–5pm**, Blue and white Chinese ceramics from the Ming and Qing dynasties, a collection of high quality blue and white Chinese ceramics. Venue: 459 Harris Street, Ultimo, RSVP by email or phone Larry Lucas mobile 0411 156 720 or AIAA 02 9660 199.Admission free.

The World and World-Making in Art: Connectivities and Differences conference, ANU, Canberra, 11–13 August 2011. This international conference coincides with the ANU's Humanities Research Centre 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.

The inaugural colloquium of the Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities, Melbourne, 26–28 September 2011. The colloquium will be held at the University of Melbourne. The deadline for abstracts is Friday, 1 July. For further information, visit the website. Abstracts should be no longer than 200 words and can be submitted electronically.

Indonesia Update Conference 2011, ANU, Canberra, 30 September–1 October 2011 on 'Indonesia's place in the world'. The conference is free of charge, and being convened by Anthony Reid and Michael O'Shannassy.

Upcoming conferences on Asia literacy in Singapore and Malaysia. The 2011 Asian Literacy Conference in Penang, Malaysia, **11–13 October 2011** provides a space for interested groups and individuals to explore and share success stories and unfolding narratives on their experiences and journeys in language and literacy education.

Cambodia: Angkor Wat and Beyond, 30 October–16 November 2011. A travel program organised by the Asian Arts Society of Australia for enthusiasts and experts, led by Daryl Collins (co-author *Building Cambodia: new Khmer architecture 1953–70*) and TAASA president and Cambodian textile expert Gill Green. Further information, Ray Boniface, Heritage Destinations, PO Box U237 University of Wollongong, NSW, 2500, or heritagedest@bigpond.com.

The 14th Biennial Symposium on Literatures and Cultures of the Asia Pacific Region, 4–7 December, 2011.The symposium on 'Asia-Pacific literature and culture in the era of the digital revolution' is being hosted by the Westerly Centre at the University of Western Australia, in conjunction with the Asia–Pacific Writing Partnership. See website for further information.

History as Controversy: Writing and Teaching Contentious Topics in Asian Histories, the University of Singapore, **14–15 December 2011**. Further details from the Asia Education Foundation web page.

Diary notes

Dragon Tails Conference 2011. The second Australasian conference on overseas Chinese history and heritage takes place at the Museum of Chinese Australian History, Melbourne from **11 to 13 November 2011**. See the Dragontails website for further information.

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 between 1000 and 1500 words. Citations should be kept to a minimum and follow the documentary–note system. Citations should appear at the end of the article rather than at the bottom of each page.

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 *Maximizing Australia's Asia knowledge: repositioning and renewal of a national asset*.

Asian Currents is published by the ASAA and edited by Allan Sharp.

Malaysia, Singapore and the region

Call for papers—17th Colloquium of the Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia, Melbourne, 8–9 December 2011.

Supported by Deakin University and La Trobe University.

The theme of the colloquium is 'Malaysia, Singapore and the region'.

'The region' encompasses the Asia–Pacific rim in general and Southeast Asia in particular; Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam; 'the Malay world,' including Brunei and Southern Thailand; and, of course, Australia, China and the United States. Sub-themes include, but are not limited to:

- government, politics and international relations
- ASEAN, ARF, APEC and so on
- economic relations
- social and economic development
- the arts, literature and culture
- religious ideas and communities.

Proposals for panels are welcomed. We invite those interested in presenting a paper or organising a panel to submit a paper or panel title, an abstract (max. 250 words) and a biographical note (200 words) before 30 August 2011 to the secretary of the society, Dr Marshall Clark .

Convenors: Dr Marshall Clark (Deakin University) and Dr Sven Schottmann (La Trobe University).