



Pheua Thai's election landslide delivers a delicate mandate

Maintaining stability in the face of dedicated conservative enemies will be a challenge for Thailand's new Pheua Thai government, writes MARC ASKEW.

With the exiled former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's younger sister Yingluck as its titular leader, Thailand's Pheua Thai (For Thais) Party gained a spectacular victory in the country's national election on 3 July.

The following day, the Pheua Thai Party leadership and key smaller parties brokered a new coalition government-in-waiting (including the former Democrat government ally, the Chart Thai Phatthana Party), which boosted Pheua Thai's absolute majority of 265 seats to a governing majority of 299 in the 500-seat lower house.

The return of Thaksin's party to power once again, after being toppled twice by extraparliamentary forces and court action (in 2006 and 2008), marks an interesting phase in Thailand's volatile political history. It remains to be seen how Yingluck, a neophyte in politics, will perform as national leader, and how the new government will fund its raft of populist policy commitments while keeping the economy stable.

Despite the new government's massive electoral mandate, which has helped to keep the army quiescent, maintaining stability will be a challenge in the face of dedicated conservative political enemies like the Democrat Party and the People's Alliance for Democracy.

Following the official dissolution of parliament on 10 May, which marked the beginning of a 40-day campaign period, most analysts accepted the probability that the Pheua Thai Party would gain the

highest number of seats in the contest against the incumbent Democrat-led coalition government under Abhisit Vejjajiva. But few expected the party to gain the decisive electoral majority that it eventually achieved.



Yingluck's televised victory speech.

The party's crushing electoral triumph had much to do with its (and Thaksin's) choice of Yingluck, the exiled Thaksin Shinawatra's younger sister, as party leader, six days after the parliament's dissolution.

From this time on, virtually all major political polls placed Pheua Thai in the lead. Acknowledgement of this trend led the Democrats, in the final week, to shift away from policy advocacy to a negative campaign against Thaksin as a bogeyman endangering the nation. Continued page 2 >>

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Thai election landslide

<<From page 1 Before Yingluck's appointment on 16 May, the party had long been hobbled by a lack of suitable leadership candidates (aside from Thaksin himself, its de facto leader-in-exile). Sweet-smiling, poised, intelligent and attractive, Yingluck proved herself to be a brilliant electoral asset for the party and its popular mass base of Red Shirt supporters.

As a woman, she presented voters with the electoral novelty of being the first female candidate for prime minister in the history of the country. This novelty factor should not be underestimated. Most critically, both Yingluck and her exiled brother successfully deflected the cries of panic-merchants that a Pheua Thai win would see the quick return of Thaksin and the quashing of criminal charges brought against him.



Thaksin Shinawatra—the 'bogeyman endangering the nation'.

Interviewed in Dubai by foreign journalists during the election period, Thaksin highlighted his commitment to the process of reconciliation (*prongdong*). His comments were remarkably mellow compared to his previous rantings against injustices.

For her part, Yingluck focused on regenerating the Thai Rak Thai Party's (TRT) people-oriented policies. On the matter of her brother, she pledged that she would follow a process of investigation by neutral bodies (including the Truth for Reconciliation Commission of Thailand) and abide by their findings and decisions.

There is little doubt that secret negotiations had been underway between key figures in Thailand and Thaksin to determine the stakes of the electoral competition and its aftermath. A moderate and conciliatory position by Thaksin and Pheua Thai about his future was also critical in order to keep the current military leadership at bay.

Prime Minister Abhisit's decision to announce the election six months before his administration officially expired was determined by the bloody events of mid-2010 and trends put into play even earlier.

His coalition government came to power in late 2008 on the back of the mass action of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and the destruction of the People's Power Party government by court-ordered dissolution.

The need for an electoral mandate was the constant demand of the Red Shirt movement.

Abhisit headed a Democrat-led coalition by virtue of parliamentary vote in an emasculated parliament. Its governing legitimacy was always incomplete, notwithstanding Abhisit's claim to the legality of its formation.

The need for an electoral mandate was the constant demand of the Red Shirt movement, which burgeoned during 2009 in protest against the government and the PAD Yellow Shirts. During their final mass push to destroy the Abhisit government during April–May 2010, the Red Shirt leadership demanded an immediate parliamentary dissolution and election. Though Abhisit refused to consider this immediate demand, he acceded to the need for an election (nominating November 2010) with a set of conditions, including the return of calm and the passing of constitutional amendments that were already under consideration.

The violence that exploded in mid-2010 and its suppression in the name of fighting 'terrorists' and antimonarchical plotters left the government triumphant, though the Red Shirts remained defiant, despite the imprisonment of key leaders. Though this turn of events released Abhisit from any election commitment during 2010, the process of *prongdong*, promoted by Abhisit during and after the clashes, implicitly required an election to clear the air.

Just as important were international perceptions of Thailand's political state, given the drop in international investment consequent on the country's continuing political conflict. In late January 2011, Abhisit announced to an international audience in Switzerland that a national election would be held by June. In mid-February, three constitutional amendments that had been

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<< From page 2 dragging through parliament were finally passed, paving the way for an early election. The amendments included a reversion of the voting system to single-member constituencies (returning to the system established under the 1997 constitution), the increase of elected MPs from 480 to 500, and the increase of party-list MPs (elected on a proportional nationwide basis) to 125.

The change to single-member districts had been virulently opposed by Democrat MPs, who believed that they would lose seats as a result. However, the increase of the proportionally-elected members was a move which the Democrats believed would favour their party, given past voting patterns.

Royal approval of the parliament's dissolution was announced on 10 May and the national polls were set for 3 July. At this stage, the Democrat Party leadership expressed confidence in the solidarity of its main coalition partners, Bhumjai Thai and Chart Thai Phatthana, hoping also that the Democrat Party could maintain its own popular vote solidly enough to renew the coalition. However, this faith began to erode when Sanan Kachornprasat, Chart Thai Phatthana heavyweight, came out in public to announce his party's election slogan of *prongdong*, stating that his party was open to forming government with the election victor.

Some factors certainly favoured the government. For over two years the major coalition partners had controlled key government ministries whose personnel would be used for supporting their vote, notably the Interior Ministry. Province governors and district officers (*nai amphur*) aligned with the Bhumjai Thai and Democrat parties had been strategically positioned in provinces to act as de facto vote canvassers.

Though technically illegal, this system of using bureaucrats for party-political support is well-established, and it locks into an equally long-established system of provincial political machines that connect local politicians and village headmen into patronage networks headed by prominent political families.

Despite its strong efforts, the Democrats had no chance of making inroads into the northeast and northern regions beyond a few scattered districts. To displace the strong support for their Pheu Thai opponents in these regions, the Democrats needed to rely on the Bhumjai Thai party, run by the TRT renegade Newin Chidchop. As it turned out, however, the Bhumjai Thai party was unable to expand its voting base much beyond its existing strongholds in the lower northeast.

For political survival, let alone victory, the Democrats needed to hold on to their established voting heartlands in Bangkok and the south. With the exception of the three Muslim-majority southern border provinces, the Democrats would not have any trouble. But in the border provinces the Democratic Party's hold has never been certain; here, the new Mathuphum party, led by former coup leader Sondhi Bunyaratkalin, had gathered a number of strong candidates (many of them former TRT politicians of the Muslim Wada faction) and was fuelled by considerable funds. Bangkok was to be the key battlefield for the Democrats, though the capital alone could not ensure victory.

A notable feature of the election was the weakness of the PAD as a political force. In the previous year, the New Politics Party (NPP) had emerged from the PAD as its parliamentary vehicle. However, shortly after the election date announcement, the PAD leadership, under the firebrand Sonti Limthongkul, declared opposition to the election, forcing a split in Yellow Shirt ranks. For ultranationalist PAD xenophobes, the Democrat government had performed miserably in protecting the country's interests in the case of the Phreah Vihear temple on the Thai–Cambodia border.

Then the NPP itself split. The PAD campaigned for a 'no vote', raising some concern that this would erode the Democrat's voting base in the capital. On a policy level, the major contesting parties campaigned by promoting a variety of populist measures relating to alleviation of farmers' debts and income support, education support, local development funds, raising the basic wage, and drug suppression. There were no convincing attempts to demonstrate Continued page 4>>

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<< From page 3 these programs budget viability, though some economists announced that the Democrats' programs were more sustainable. A major concern in the electorate was the steady rise in fuel and food prices. In the final weeks of the election campaigns, with the polls continuing to predict a Pheu Thai victory, the Democrats shifted their approach to raising the spectre of Thaksin and recalling the 'burning of Bangkok' in May 2010 by the Red Shirts, staging a major rally at Bangkok's Ratchaprasong intersection. This may well have been responsible for persuading 'undecided' voters in Bangkok to support the government at the final hour. However, it did not affect the outcome of the election at a national level.

After the closing of the voting booths on 3 July, the results of exit polls showed an outstanding Pheu Thai victory of 300 seats. It soon became apparent that this was an exaggeration, but it set the excited mood of the televised election coverage. By 6.45 pm tally projections showed Pheu Thai leading with 254 seats to the Democrats 164, and their Bhumjai Thai coalition partner with just 36.

Notably, the 'no vote' in Bangkok was minimal, averaging around 3 per cent only. In at least five Bangkok constituencies the race between Pheu Thai and Democrat candidates was neck-and-neck. At about 7.30 pm, Abhisit made a public announcement graciously conceding victory to Yingluck Shinawatra, but not before making a barbed parting comment that the failure of Pheu Thai to gain half the party-list votes nationally signalled popular disapproval for pardoning Thaksin.

This was a standard Democrat technique of saving face by hairsplitting—the final result showed that Pheu Thai gained 61 of a total of 125 party list seats and 48.41 per cent of all party list votes. By 10.30 pm the tally estimate showed Pheu Thai seats had increased to 262, with the Democratic Party dropping to 160 and Bhumjai Thai falling to 34. When votes were finally counted and announced two days later, Pheu Thai had emerged with 265, and the Democrats with 159 seats.

A map of Thailand's recent election results shows what appears to be a clear regional

pattern of party allegiance by region and subregion. It reinforces a well-established pattern that shows overwhelming support for Pheu Thai in the country's north and northeast, extending into the central region. Bangkok's northeastern and eastern suburbs are solidly Pheu Thai, in contrast to central and western Bangkok, which are Democrat strongholds.

The south once again returned Democrat MPs, with a few notable exceptions. This may be too stark an ideological map, however. Seats in west-central Bangkok were hard-fought battles, and substantial political support for any single party cannot be inferred from such election wins. The same applies to the southern Muslim-majority border provinces, where the Democrats gained nine out of 11 seats. At least three of these nine seats were won by the Democrats with very low victory margins: one of them by only 48 votes. This was a case where the competing parties (largely Mathuphum and Bhumjai Thai) split the non-Democrat party vote, leaving the Democratic Party's core permanent voting base intact, thus allowing the Democratic Party to win by default.

Despite this decisive victory for Yingluck and the Pheu Thai Party, huge challenges face the new government. Political animosities generated over the past five years since the 2006 coup will not dissipate or moderate easily. The press, political parties, intellectuals and NGOs are now flourishing the magic word *prongdong* more than ever before, but its meaning and implications are different for each advocate.

Abhisit's final words to the party faithful in his concession speech anticipate the Democrat Party's stance as the future opposition party—in their hands, and with the help of the PAD, Thaksin Shinawatra will surely continue to be constructed as the nation's existential bogeyman.



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Mekong mainstream dams: a revival?

PHILIP HIRSCH discusses the resource geopolitics around a dam proposed for the Mekong mainstream.

On 19 April 2011, the Joint Committee of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) met to decide the outcome of a six-month consultation on the proposal by one of the MRC member states, Lao PDR, to build a dam on the main stem of the Mekong (henceforth referred to as 'the mainstream') at Xayaburi. The only agreement the permanent secretary-level representatives from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam could reach was to elevate the decision to the Mekong Council, or ministerial level, for consideration at its annual meeting in October.

This seemingly inconsequential agreement to disagree was, in fact, one of the more significant recent events in regional geopolitics in the realm of transboundary natural resource development and management in Southeast Asia. To appreciate its significance, we need to look at the chequered and convoluted history of proposals for dams on the mainstream over the past half century.

The Mekong Committee was established in 1957 under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) and under United States funding and tutelage, with the overriding agenda of planning a cascade of dams on the Mekong. The mainstream was the focus of the committee's investigations, and by 1970 an indicative plan had proposed seven major structures that would have flooded areas currently occupied by more than one million people. If realised, these dams would have turned the lower 2000 kilometres of the Mekong River into a series of stepped lakes and flooded a significant part of the lower Mekong valley.

The Cold War was the overriding context for the committee's existence and its work. The hotter war in Indochina prevented any of the mainstream plans from being implemented, although tributary dams were built in northeastern Thailand and at Nam Ngum in Laos during the 1960s and

early 1970s. In 1975, Cambodia withdrew from the committee, which then ticked along under interim arrangements with just three members (Lao PDR, Thailand and the newly unified Vietnam). While the Interim Mekong Committee managed to provide a slightly revised plan in 1987, which lowered the size of some of the planned structures, little happened on the ground.



By the time the cooperative transboundary river basin institution was revitalised as the MRC under the 1995 *Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin*, concerns over the environmental and social impacts of large dams had captured worldwide attention. Thailand's environmental movement had grown to the point of successfully challenging, and in 1988 cancelling a major dam proposed for western Thailand. It followed this us by instituting a logging ban in 1989. Revival of plans for mainstream dams, even in a significantly toned down scheme of so-called 'run-of-river' projects,¹ proved highly controversial. At the same time, Laos and Vietnam had identified many sites for tributary dams, some of which were subject to criticism by environmental groups and other NGOs, and it seemed that the mainstream dam agenda had receded or even Continued page 6>>

Mekong mainstream dams

<<From page 5 disappeared from the planners' horizons. By the mid-2000s, however, mainstream dams were very much back on the drawing board. The World Bank and Asian Development Bank supported a Mekong Water Resources Assistance Strategy, whose hydrological analysis suggested that dams, including low-head dams on the mainstream, could be built without appreciably or unacceptably affecting the seasonal flows in the Mekong Delta or altering the flood regime of Cambodia's Tonle Sap. China, a nonmember of MRC, had by 2006 unilaterally built the first three of its eight dams on the mainstream in its own territory, and a fourth—the 300-meter tall Xiaowan megadam—was completed in 2010.

These dams had a demonstration (some would say 'envy') effect, and they also made low-head dams more economic by smoothing out the seasonal flow of the river and hence allowing more year-round electricity generation than under a natural flow regime. Furthermore, the privatising of dam financing had removed some of the levers that opponents of dams had been able to pull with the large public financial institutions—the World Bank and ADB in particular—as those agencies had increasingly come under the spotlight for their social and environmental performance.

Eleven dams have been proposed for the lower Mekong mainstream (Figure 1). Seven of these are entirely in the territory of Lao PDR, two are along the Lao–Thai border, and two are inside Cambodia. Four would be financed by private Thai companies and banks, four by Chinese, two by Vietnamese and one by a Malaysian firm.

The dam that seemed to be first off the ranks was the highly controversial Don Sahong dam at the Khone Falls immediately above the Lao–Cambodian border. The owner, Malaysian real estate company Mega-First, had close links with the former president of Lao PDR and his son, governor of the province in which the dam was to be located. The 2008 financial crisis helped provide a reprieve, and the proposal never got to the stage of formal submission through MRC procedures.

So it was the Xayaburi dam that first triggered the prior consultation required under the Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA) included under MRC arrangements. These procedures are at the core of governance arrangements based on the 1995 agreement, and they stipulate that all mainstream dams require a six-month process of consultation after the host country for the project submits it to MRC. Xayaburi was submitted in September 2010.



Mekong Dam protest by members of the Thailand's Chiang Kong Conservation Network.
Photo: [Bangkok Post](#).

The project is a 1260 megawatt structure, 800 meters wide and with a head of 32 meters. It would back up the

Mekong to 90 kilometres and flood the homes of about 2100 people.

Among its main impacts are blockage of migratory fish, in a river system whose freshwater fishery is the largest in the world and in a country where between 40 and 80 per cent of animal protein in rural diets comes from fish. The power would be almost entirely for export to Thailand and the dam would be built and owned by Ch. Karnchang, a Thai company, based on borrowings from four Thai banks.

Elsewhere, I have referred to the 'path dependency' that means that any single dam built on the lower Mekong mainstream would almost inevitably lead to the remaining structures being built and turning 55 per cent of the river length from flowing water to stillwater lakes.² It is this fact, as much as the impacts of the dam itself, which prompted the higher level of opposition to Xayaburi. Quite predictably, Thai international and regional NGOs protested vigorously over the Xayaburi proposal.

But less predictably, and leading to the 19 April impasse, has been opposition from Laos' regional neighbours, including governments of at least two of the three other riparian members of MRC. To understand the opposition, it is also necessary to refer to a report that was completed just two weeks >>> Continued page 7>>>

Mekong mainstream dams

<< From page 6 after the Xayaburi dam was notified to MRC. In October 2010, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA), commissioned by MRC the previous year, delivered its findings. These included an unequivocal recommendation to put all mainstream dams on hold for at least 10 years while their impacts were further investigated and while alternatives were actively sought.

This recommendation was based on the complexity of combined impacts, together with the indicative findings that up to 40 per cent of the three million tons per year fishery, worth up to nine billion dollars per annum to the poorest of the rural poor in the region, could be destroyed by the dams, and also that the sediment and nutrient capture of each dam could significantly undermine the integrity of agriculture in the Mekong Delta. If the Xayaburi dam were to be built on its own, the volume of trapped sediment would be such that within 30 years the reservoir would have lost 60 per cent of its capacity and the dam would be close to being nonfunctional.

As part of the PNPCA process, MRC organised for two main review processes. One was an expert review of the environmental impact assessment (EIA) submitted by the Lao Government with the dam's project documents, to try to ascertain the transboundary implications of Xayaburi.

This was made difficult by the fact that the EIA only studied impacts up to 10 kilometres downstream of the dam, hence the expert reports were highly critical.³ The other was a series of public consultations in Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam among civil society and local government groups. These revealed overwhelming concern and opposition to the dam, ranging mainly across a spectrum of outright opposition to a minimum position to follow the SEA's recommendation for a 10-year moratorium. The Lao government did not help the case by refusing to allow the EIA report to be tabled publicly at these meetings.

Perhaps the most interesting, and to many surprising, part of this process was the extent of public opposition to the dam in

Vietnam. The consultation workshops held in Can Tho and Ha Long were widely reported in the Vietnamese media, including some very critical reports in *Thanh Nien*, *Tuoi Tre* and other newspapers, and they included a statement by a deputy minister that the dam should not go ahead, for the time being at least.

The aftermath of the decision has been very messy. The Lao government was clearly infuriated.

Vietnam's science community figured prominently in the reported opposition. Given the very close relationship between the governments and ruling parties of Vietnam and Laos, this publicly condoned criticism was quite unprecedented.

Also unprecedented was the written statement issued by Vietnam, and mirrored in that of Cambodia, in the formal response for the 19 April meeting of the Joint Committee. Thailand's response was more equivocal, and merely reported the civil society concerns reflected at the consultation meetings rather than giving an official government line on the dam—which would, of course, serve a number of commercial, financial and consumer interests within Thailand.

The aftermath of the decision has been very messy. The Lao government was clearly infuriated, but indicated that it would take neighbouring countries' concerns into account by commissioning its own review of the PNPCA process. Some interpreted this—mistakenly, as it turns out—to be a commitment to review the impacts of the dam itself.

The Vietnamese and Cambodian Prime Ministers made a joint statement in Phnom Penh which reiterated the SEA position that many years of further study were required before any decision to proceed with mainstream dams should be made. But in early June, the Lao government reported that its advice from Poyry Consultants, a firm heavily involved with another dam project of which Ch. Karnchang is joint owner, had delivered its judgment that the PNPCA process was over and that Lao PDR was entitled to proceed with construction Continued page 8>>

Mekong mainstream dams

<<From page 7 under the MRC rules. The unilateralism has dismayed NGOs, many in Vietnam and Cambodian government and scientific circles, and also international financial supporters of MRC. At an Informal Donor Meeting held in Phnom Penh on 24 June, a forthright statement was issued that made the displeasure of the MRC donors over the snub to the consultative process quite clear. Australia is at the top of this list of donors, not just alphabetically, but also because AusAID financed the PNPCA process that risks falling in a heap.

At the time of writing, it is unclear whether the construction of Xayaburi will go ahead, and if so what the response of the other three countries will be, or whether a face-saving means can be reached to pull back from this momentous threat to the integrity of a great river and the wellbeing of the millions of people who depend on it.

References

1. 'Run-of-river' implies that a dam is built to contain water for a limited period of time, often mainly within the natural banks of the river. The impacts are therefore lesser than those of large storage dams whose reservoirs flood significant areas of floodplains and river valleys.
2. Philip Hirsch, 'China and the cascading geopolitics of lower Mekong dams,' *The Asia-Pacific Journal* vol. 9, issue 20 no. 2, 16 May 16, 2011.
3. See [documents](#).



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Postwar Japanese design on display

A new exhibition offering an insight into Japanese urban culture will open in Sydney this month.

'Japanese Design Today 100', presented by the Japan Foundation Sydney, will introduce a wide selection of familiar items produced during the 1990s. The exhibition is part of 'Sydney Design 2011', and will be at the Japan Foundation Gallery from 29 July to 16 September.



The exhibition includes 13 examples of objects produced from postwar Japan with timeless designs such as Isamu

Noguchi's Rocking Stool (1954).

Other highlights of the exhibition include the world's first portable transistor television (1960), Sony's first robotic pet dog, AIBO ERS-111 (1999), and a full-



size model of a Yamaha electric scooter (2003).

'When seen as a whole, the objects

featured in this exhibition are not just good examples of excellent product design, but a collection of living reference material that reveals the form of contemporary Japanese life,' said Masafumi Fukagawa, the Curator of [Kawasaki City Museum](#), and one of the selection committee members of the Japanese Design Today 100.

Photos: Rocking Stool, 1954, designer: Isamu Noguchi (c) hhstyle.com
AIBO ERS-111, 1999, designer: Hajime Sorayana (c)1999 Sony Corporation.

Indonesia's media moguls: managers or manipulators?

The ownership of newspapers by politicians and businessmen in Indonesia leads to self-censorship by journalists who write for these publications, writes ROSS TAPSELL.

Indonesian journalists have a long history of enduring pressures in their professional practice. During the New Order, the Indonesian Government and military controlled the ownership of newspapers through press permits and strict laws enforced by the Ministry of Information. Journalists and editors were forced to self-censor, and could not openly discuss topics regarded by authorities as 'taboo'.

In particular, topics such as the First Family's business interests, or military violence in the outer regions of the archipelago were not to be discussed openly in the press. With the fall of the New Order and closure of the Ministry of Information, the processes to implement press freedom began, and initially over 800 publications arose as a result.

Today, Indonesia has a more vibrant and freer press through a range of mediums, in which considerable discussion and debate occurs on most topics. Journalists who operate in Indonesia today are certainly freer from government and military controls than were their predecessors, and owning a newspaper today does not mean adhering to draconian instructions from authorities.

Yet despite 10 years of various democratic reforms, Indonesia still rates poorly in independent surveys of press freedom. Reporters Without Borders ranked Indonesia 117 out of 178 countries in their World Press Freedom Index for 2010. Columbia University-based Freedom House Institute categorises press freedom in Indonesia as only 'partly free'. While these surveys take into account a large number of factors, one concern for press freedom activists in Indonesia is that journalists continue to self-censor as they

report on their owner's business or political interests.

Indonesia's print media market continues to be dominated by daily newspapers *Kompas* and *Jawa Pos*, and the weekly newsmagazine, *Tempo*. However, since 2006 there has been an increase in newspapers that are owned by prominent businessmen and politicians.

This situation led Megawati Sukarnoputri, leader of the Democratic Party of Struggle [PDIP], to lament that her party, unlike others, did not have a major media publication through which to promote her views. She may have been alluding to some of the newspapers described below.



In 2006, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono [SBY] established *Jurnal Nasional*,

a daily Indonesian-language broadsheet published in Jakarta. He appointed his spokesperson and now Minister for Sport, Andy Mallarengang, as one of the paper's administrators, and Ramadhan Pohan as the paper's first chief editor. Pohan stressed that SBY established the newspaper because 'there should be a paper that did more than just report bad news – but good news as well'. Sceptics who saw *Jurnal Nasional* as 'SBY's party newspaper' were further vindicated when Pohan was appointed a member of parliament in SBY's 2008 cabinet.

Aburizal Bakrie is currently chief of the political party Golkar and is one of the richest and most powerful men in Indonesia. Bakrie-controlled companies cover the breadth of Indonesia's economy. They include mining, oil and gas, palm oil, property, telecommunications and finance. In 2008 Bakrie purchased the ailing newspaper, the *Surabaya Post*. This added to his portfolio of media businesses, which include stakes in television stations ANTV, TVONE, and ArekTV (Surabaya) and the online newswire service *Vivanews!* Bakrie's purchase of the *Surabaya Post* was particularly controversial because the paper had previously criticised his company, Lapindo Brantas, for its involvement

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Indonesia's media moguls

<< From page 9 in the mudflow that displaced more than 40 000 people near Surabaya. Upon purchase of the *Surabaya Post*, two Lapindo Brantas executives were appointed as directors of the newspaper. Both also held managerial positions in PT Minarak Lapindo Jaya, the Lapindo subsidiary company tasked to handle the mudflow. Reporting the details of the mudflow became a 'taboo' topic inside the *Post*, and journalists were forced to self-censor articles which were critical of Lapindo.

The *Surabaya Post* is a good case study of how the purchase of newspapers by prominent political figures leads to the promotion of their business and political interests in the news.



A well-known figure in politics and the media is Surya Paloh, who started P.T. Surya Persindo in 1985, established the newspaper

Media Indonesia in 1989, and also has a TV station, MetroTV. Surya lost his bid for the Golkar chairmanship in 2009, defeated by his media mogul rival, Aburizal Bakrie. The race for Golkar leadership saw Surya's and Bakrie's media companies lose significant credibility as they brazenly pushed their owner's interests for the position. Surya Paloh has since formed his own party, the National Democrats.

An increasingly active player in the newspaper business is James Riady, owner and Deputy Chairman of Lippo Group, which has businesses in real estate, banking and retail, amongst others. Riady owns the Indonesian business magazines *The Globe* and *Investor Daily*, and is reportedly developing a web portal and a cable TV news channel.

In 2006 Riady bought the Indonesian-language newspaper *Suara Pemanduan*, and in 2008 he established a glossy, full colour English-language daily, *The Jakarta Globe*. An ethnic Chinese Christian, Riady is unlikely to ever run for parliament, but many of the *Globe*'s journalists complained that stories involving Lippo

Group, or businessmen who were considered friends of the Riady family, had to be self-censored.

Dahlan Iskan is also another interesting example of media-man-turned-political performer. A former *Tempo* journalist, Dahlan was put in charge of the struggling Surabaya-based *Jawa Pos* in 1982. He built up the newspaper to increase its circulation from 6000 at the time, to over 300 000 copies by the year 2000. He also invested in regional newspapers, of which there are now over 140 Indonesian-language newspapers owned by Jawa Pos Group printed in the archipelago.

Despite the democratic reforms heralded in 1999, Indonesian newspaper journalists still struggle to report freely and openly.

In 2003, Dahlan entered the power industry, buying power plants in Gresik and East Kalimantan. Dahlan appointed his son, Azrul Ananda, as chief editor of *Jawa Pos* from 2005–07 and, since 2008, as managing editor. Suspicions of Jawa Pos Group support for President SBY were raised when, in late 2009, Dahlan was appointed by SBY as chief of Indonesia's power utility, PLN [Perusahaan Listrik Negara].

In their interviews with me, many journalists who report for these newspapers complained that the biggest issue affecting their freedom to write openly was that of ownership. The most common complaint they made was that they were forced to adopt the professional practice of self-censorship when it came to writing about the political or business interests of the owner of their newspaper. They argued that pressures from managers and editors inside the newsroom encouraged this practice.

The issue of media ownership is certainly not limited to Indonesia. However, this does show the recent development in political-business-press baron style of ownership in Indonesia in the past five years. Despite the democratic reforms heralded in 1999, Indonesian newspaper journalists still struggle to report freely and openly. If they are to fulfil a vital function of the Fourth Estate in a Continued page 11>>

Indonesia's media moguls

<<From page 10 democracy—to comment on and criticise the rich and powerful—they need greater autonomy to be able to do so without fear of being pressured, reprimanded or fired. Journalism should represent the interests of all those outside of power, those without a voice, rather than those who supply the capital to produce the news.



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Workshop on media freedom in Indonesia

The exact nature of Indonesia's press freedom will be examined in a workshop at the Australian National University, organised by the Island Southeast Asia Centre, on 27 October 2011.

The workshop is open to postgraduates, early career researchers and senior academics researching in the field of media freedom in Indonesia and elsewhere in Island Southeast Asia. The aim is to formulate ideas in an informal, welcoming environment. Please see the [website](#).

The workshop will be part of a two-day public event entitled 'Youth, Media and Public Tolerance', with keynote speaker Bambang Harymurti, Deputy Head of the Indonesian Press Council. Other guest speakers include Lexy Rambadeta (documentary filmmaker), Linda Christanty (poet and journalist) and Dewi Anggraeni (novelist and journalist).



Conference will look at four great Asian writers

A conference looking at the influence of four great Asian writers will be held in Singapore in November.

The conference—the third held by the Reading Asia: Forging Identities in Literature (RAFIL) consortium—is being organised by the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore, and RAFIL.

RAFIL is a consortium of universities in the Asia-Pacific region with programs and projects in the field of Asian literatures. The two previous RAFIL conferences were held in Manila (2007) and Yogyakarta (2009).

The theme of this year's conference is 'Great Asian writers and surrounding vernacular literatures in a postcolonial perspective'. The conference will examine the relevance and role of four South and Southeast Asian 'great' writers—Rabindranath Tagore, Jose Rizal, Shahnun Ahmad and Pramoedya Ananta Toer—in postcolonial literary theory.



Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Photo: Wikipedia.

The conference will take the form of a small, intensive workshop the four writers and their relationships with both vernacular and cosmopolitan South and Southeast Asian literatures. The authors will be discussed in papers presented by invited speakers.

The conference will be held at the NUS from 11 to 13 November.

Further details are available on the [web](#).

See page 12: Tagore: Travels and translations

Tagore: travels and translations

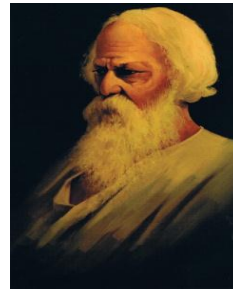
PETER FRIEDLANDER reflects on the genius of Rabindranath Tagore, whose 150th birth anniversary is being celebrated around the world this year.

There is a lot of talk nowadays about India as an emerging superpower on the global scene and how it's only now that India is engaging with the wider world. But telling the story that way overlooks the history of continuous Indian engagements with the world. It forgets the countless Indian monks and Pandits who carried the teachings of the Buddha throughout Asia for centuries. It leaves out the story of Dean Mohammed, the first Indian to write a biography in English about his life in Ireland and regency England. It forgets the hundreds of thousands of Indians who ventured out in search of work into colonies in South America, the Caribbean and the Pacific in the 19th century.

Nor does telling a story of India only now emerging onto the world stage do justice to the lives of the Sindhi merchantile settlers in Meiji Japan, or 19th century Sikh traders in outback Australia. Moreover, it forgets the role of one the most prominent figures in 20th century Indian history, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), whose 150th birth anniversary is being celebrated around the world this year.

Tagore was the first Indian, and indeed Asian, to win the Nobel Prize for literature, in 1913: the outcome not only of Tagore's genius but also his engagement with the world and his travels outside of India. Nor were his travels limited to Western Europe, for he visited over 22 countries, from Russia to the United States, and throughout Asia and Southeast Asia. Unfortunately for us, he never visited Australia.

The accounts of his travels also give a vivid insight into not only how Tagore sought to understand India's relation to the wider world, but also to how India was seen by different cultures during his lifetime.



His first experience of foreign travel was in 1878–80, when he went to England to study at the age of only 17. However, his most significant interaction with life in England came during his visit there during

1912. At this time he became, for many who came into contact with him in London, the personification of India—an embodiment of what was seen as India's mystical heart.

His host in London, the painter William Rothenstein, went so far as to write to George Bernard Shaw: 'I want you to meet Rabindra Nath Tagore, for you have not met many saints in your life'¹ Perceptions of Tagore as an Indian mystic sage can also be seen in the views of his English collaborator Evelyn Underhill with whom he worked on translations of the Indian poet-saint Kabir's verses. These, I have recently argued, were successful largely because of the way that Underhill conflated in them Tagore, Kabir and her own Christian mysticism.²

This points to a central paradox in India's relationship with the wider world, the tendency for each side to see the other through stereotypes. However, his English host's focus on Tagore as mystic India personified seems to be very one dimensional compared to Tagore's more nuanced approach to the British establishment, the movements of those interested in spirituality in the UK, and, indeed, the Irish community's struggle for independence.

The issue was, in a sense, how to translate not just from one language to another, but from one culture to another. Tagore's approach at this point was to collaborate with the Irish Poet Yeats, and to create a form of performance for his poetry at which 'Yeats would read some of the translations from *Gitanjali* while Tagore would sing the songs in the original'.³

The success of this form of presentation was clear; the English versions of his verses so inspired his audiences that he ended up winning the Nobel Prize.

However, it is interesting to [Continued page 13>>](#)

Tagore: travels and translations

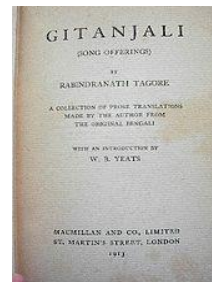
<< From page 12 consider also how the interaction allowed for both sides to see, to some extent, what they wanted in the exchange, and for Tagore's visions to have been conflated with a vision of the mystic East in the minds of his Western audience.

On his travels Tagore was also heavily involved in lecturing, and in these interactions an analogous process of conflation of ideas took place. Furthermore, this was a time when Tagore himself was involved in a conscious effort to work out how to relate ideas drawn from the Upanishads and the reformist Hindu movement, the Brahmo samaj, which he headed, to his own growing interest in the notion of religion as related to the inner life, something perhaps more influenced by the Bengali Baul tradition.

This process of re-evaluation of his traditions led him to give lectures in which tried to show how all of India's religious traditions could be seen as having taught a consistent message; and one which fitted his own ideas about what they should be saying. Thus, the same series of lectures was given in Bholpur to Indian students at his school, and then to audiences in London, and then in the US, and then published. However, what each audience would have made of the lectures would have been quite different.

For the schoolboys in India, at Bholpur, which later became the university at Shantiniketan, what he was doing was outlining an agenda for the internal realignment of Indian religious traditions within India itself. His audiences in London and the US, though, were incapable of distinguishing the different views he was presenting, and interpreted them all as a message about what India had to offer the world.

This was analogous to how Vivekananda's addresses to Western audiences had been influential in the West. In the case of these religious discourses, it is important to realise that they were also fuel for a Western internal debate about the nature of religion and spirituality. This was particularly important for those readers in



Title page of *Gitanjali*.

the audience for his works, such as *Gitanjali*, which were seen as supporting the possibility for the development of a spirituality that was not linked to church support of the state.

His spiritual lectures shared, with the translations and performances of his verses, differing perceptions by his Indian and Western audiences. Yet, despite both audiences hearing quite different things, both felt that, largely speaking, they were hearing what they wanted to hear.

Tagore's views on the nation-state were not popular with his audiences outside of India, nor with many inside India.

However, there were some subjects on which this happy concurrence of possible meanings did not take place in the same way. The most important of these were Tagore's views on the nation-state—which he came to suspect greatly—that were not popular with his audiences outside of India, nor with many inside India. During his first lecture tour of the US in 1912 this led to at least one American newspaper columnist, in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, commenting on how he was scolding his US audiences at '\$700 per scold'.⁴

A strong catalyst for Tagore's views on the nation-state were his visits to Japan, which he first visited in 1916. He came to see the country as having adopted all that was worst from Western nation-state ideologies in its modernisation program. Japanese audiences for his lectures were troubled by his views on the dangers of militarisation, and admonitions against the militant adoption of nationalism. In an analysis of Tagore's reception in Japan, Stephen Hay argued that in part he failed to sway his audiences due to his apparent opposition to modern civilisation and in part due to one of the factors that made him so popular in the West, his 'poetical manner of presenting his ideas'.⁵ Moreover, the poor reception for Tagore's ideas in Japan needs to be seen in relation to how, in that Continued page 14>>

Tagore: travels and translations

<< From page 13 country, his views were feeding into ongoing debates about the nature of modernisation and spirituality. This included both proponents of what became known as Imperial Way Buddhism, a movement that supported Japanese imperialist expansion in Asia and opposition to such movements, which, in turn, were the subject of severe repression⁶

The gap between Tagore's views and those of the debate ranging in the minds of his audiences was, however, strongest in China. There, despite some groups seeing him as an example of how a sage-like Indian figure could represent a possible path to modernity, the greater part of his audiences, and public opinion, saw him as the epitome of what made Asia weak. Here, his views on spirituality were not welcomed in the same way as they were in the West, because Chinese Buddhist reform movements were arguing for engaged Buddhist activity in the community in a way that was at odds with Tagore's vision of personal spirituality.

Views on Tagore's presence were described by one left-wing novelist, Shen Yen-Ping, who said the Chinese do not 'welcome the Tagore who creates a paradise of poetry and love, and leads our youth into it so that they may find comfort and intoxication in meditating'.⁷

Seen then through the lenses of Tagore's interaction with the Indian, British, American, Japanese and Chinese audiences, two quite distinct pictures can be seen to emerge. One dimension relates to the degree that his ideas meshed with and supported his audience's views on internal national debates. This led to corresponding levels of support from his audiences—from wild adulation in Europe, to outright condemnation in China.

The second dimension, though, related more to how his ideas were conflated with different national stereotypes of what it meant to be Indian. In Japan and China, this seems to have led to a mixed

reception for his ideas as, both in terms of spirituality and nationalism, his message was not one that was universally welcomed.

The greater part of his audiences, and public opinion, saw him as the epitome of what made Asia weak.

Indeed, his lack of familiarity with East Asian cultures may have made it harder for him to appreciate how his ideas would be received. However, Tagore's cultural contact with the West allowed him to engage much more successfully in an exchange in which the world learned from Tagore about India, and Tagore told India about the World.

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'Red love'—an intimate history of the making of North Korea

RUTH BARRACLOUGH explores the life of a woman who, in her lifetime, became Korea's greatest and most notorious communist feminist.

At a time when North Korea appears as inscrutable as ever, and the inner lives of its citizens elusive, my research for a new book *Red love and betrayal in the making of North Korea* embarks on an intimate history of the lives of key communist figures in Korea. In particular, I am interested in using history and biography to examine the lives of the first communist women in Korea, and their role in the making of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK).

North Korea is today known as a pariah state, impenetrable to outside observers. But part of the reason for this is that we focus so much on the North Korean regime, and neglect to examine the everyday life of its people. Harnessing archival sources from the period when Korea was a colony of Japan (1910–45), and the early liberation years (1945–50), this project examines the intimate lives of those who created Korea's communist state.

Most importantly, this project, also, is a history that attempts to be relevant to the present. In researching the lives of early communist women, and the legacy they created in both the north and the south of Korea, we become reacquainted with the terrible contingency of division. Looking back and looking ahead to the future of North Korea, this project restores individuals' own acts of faith, betrayal and complicity that are part of the foundational history of the creation of North Korea.

Despite what the censorship regime in North Korea might have us believe, people in the early socialist movement in the 1920s, 30s and 40s led very interesting and varied lives. Given Korean radicals' propensity for international travel

(otherwise known as exile), and their fondness for the written word, sources on the early life of key figures in the communist movement are plentiful.

In investigating what happened to leading communist women after 1945 we find that some succeeded in North Korea while others were purged, or bailed altogether from the communist experiment. Of the four women whose lives I explore in this book, only one had a successful political career in the DPRK. She is Hô Jông-suk (1902–91), who would in her lifetime become Korea's greatest and most notorious communist feminist.



Hô Jông-suk—as famous for her promiscuity as for her politics.

Hô Jông-suk's story is a tale of how one becomes complicit with a murdering state. And her intimate life is essential to understanding her for she was as famous for her promiscuity as for her politics. Her love

affairs and elopements that thrilled and horrified colonial Korea in the 1920s and 30s culminated in 1957–8 in the denunciation of her former husband, Choe Chang-k, an indictment that completed his purge.

To some, Hô Jông-suk displayed throughout her life a consistent ruthlessness. In all of her intimate relationships, she always managed to shuck off an old allegiance in time to embrace the winning faction/partner. To these observers she is the very model of a treacherous and self-serving flunkey who thrives in dictatorships. To feminists, she is a powerful and troubling figure. Because she left a literary trail—she wrote, gave interviews, and inspired fictional accounts—she is available to historians in a way that others of her contemporaries are not. She lived through colonial Korea's garrulous 1920s and 30s and her age, the very longevity of her career, allows us to read, through her life story, an intimate tale of the making of North Korea.

Korea became a colony of Japan in 1910 and seven years later the Bolsheviks in neighbouring Russia *Continued page 16>>*

'Red love': an intimate history

<< From page 15 pulled off a successful socialist revolution. After Korea's nationalist uprising against Japan failed in 1919, young people flocked to the socialists, seeking a comprehensive solution to the nation's problems of colonialism, poverty and what was commonly disparaged as 'feudalism'.

Socialist groups also actively recruited women to their ranks, and by the mid-1920s female socialists such as the journalist Hô Jông-suk were setting out their ideas in the popular press. Yet despite the fertile environment for radical ideas, socialism had difficulty reaching large swathes of the population. Isolated by its reading groups and the intellectualism of its adherents, historians argue that it was not until the work of Alexandra Kollontai, the Russian novelist, was first translated into Korean (in abridged form) and discussed that socialism began to gain traction in the popular press.¹

For those intrigued by Kollontai and her stories on 'Red love', a spate of Korean short stories on the same theme was published in the late 1920s and early 1930s, soon joined by real-life romances covered in the daily press and women's magazines. With the arrests and trials of socialists from the mid-1920s, and the close media coverage of these court cases, the details of socialists' intimate lives were suddenly brought into the open. The colonial police and judiciary's obsession with 'socialists' infected the press, which gave space in its court reports even to the intimate details of socialists' lives. And it was thanks to these police cases that people could see for themselves what 'Red love' was all about.

The love stories of these revolutionaries that took place in Pyongyang, Moscow, Shanghai and the Soviet Far East, before ending up in the prisons of the Korean colony, tell us how people sought to relate the immense political and social changes of this period to intimate relationships between men and women. They experimented with establishing a new erotic sensibility that would extend the political ideals of socialism to heterosexual partnerships. These partnerships are an

expression of the heterodoxy of socialism that is a feature of their time and place, when socialism as a set of ideas was not yet contained by the party or the party state. These stories of love, sacrifice, childbirth, abandonment and betrayal crossed genres from journalism to fiction as the public evinced an avid interest in 'Red love'.

Even amongst the many famous heroines of 'Red love' in Korea, Hô Jông-suk stands out. Her love affairs sent tremors through Korea's transnational socialist networks. In 1925, while her first, husband Im Won-geun, was in prison, Hô Jông-suk had an affair with a leading figure of the rival socialist organisation, the North Wind Association.

The affair, when it became known, laid bare the vulnerability of (male) comrades serving long sentences in prison while their wives and consorts remained outside. The wretched conditions in the colonial prisons meant that it was very important individuals free from suspicion remained on the outside to provide food packages, warm clothes and medicine to inmates.

Hô Jông-suk's affair exposed the vulnerability of these men, and while the Comintern was informed, a period of soul-searching ensued within Korean communist circles on the role of women, and the meaning of the term comrade.

Fidelity replaced revolutionary fervour as the most desirable attribute of women.

Although Hô mounted a strong justification for her actions several years later, when she questioned the sole focus on men suffering in prison and explained that women left alone on the outside for many years face their own hazards of poverty and isolation,² her actions would change the function of love in the party, and the meaning of the term 'comrade'.³ Fidelity replaced revolutionary fervour as the most desirable attribute of women, and 'Red love' lost its feminist potential.

For historians of the feminist movement in Korea, socialist women of this era present a challenge. Some insist on seeing female socialists as derivative of their male partners, as people who

Continued page 17>>

'Red love': an intimate history

<< From page 16 came to socialism as part of their submission to their husband's ideas.⁴ For others, the record of women's political leadership in Korea is so impoverished that even a figure as controversial as Hô Jông-suk can be celebrated as an important pioneer in the struggle for women's rights.⁵

One solution to the difficulty has been to separate the life of Hô Jông-suk into two distinct periods: before North Korea and after, and concentrate on the colonial period where the sources are most plentiful and her life appears to be more her own.

The difficulty comes in trying to connect the young woman creatively navigating life underground and on the run from the colonial police, with the bland bureaucrat who survived and thrived in the same system in which so many of her friends and peers perished. Here is the central conundrum for those who would try to study North Korea, a society that has been so easy to despise in our own press because we have so little access to the complexity of people's lives there.

To guide me in an historical examination of North Korea, I rely on the works of [Suk-Young Kim](#), [Tatiana Gabroussenko](#) and [Tessa Morris-Suzuki](#), among others.⁶

Reading through literature and cultural production sanctioned in the north, these scholars caution against over-reading on the one hand and simplifying on the other. North Korea is neither a void waiting to be filled with interpretative meaning, nor a society enthralled to its own ideological pronouncements.

Hô Jông-suk may seem to be a poor choice here: she was attached to the regime; she succeeded in a political system that flattened out conflict. But she is interesting, I think, as a betrayer; as someone whose own life story connects the early experiments in socialist modernity with the communist culture of post-liberation North Korea. So I examine her and her peers not to endorse communist North Korea, far from it, but rather to uncover the lost histories of those who experimented with revolutionary ideas

and practices in the colonial period and whose success and failure would shape the political culture of the DPRK.

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Faltering resolve: the early release of Japan's 'ordinary' war criminals

The reasons for the early release of many 'ordinary' Japanese war criminals in the 1950s were complex and often pragmatic, writes BEATRICE TREFALT.

Class B and C¹ war crimes trials in Asia after World War II prosecuted 'ordinary' Japanese war criminals, rather than the high-profile leaders brought before the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, better known as the Tokyo War Crimes Trial.²

'Lesser' war crimes trials were conducted by seven Allied nations in about 50 courtrooms around Asia and the Pacific between 1946 and 1951. While these trials have received some scholarly attention,³ little is known about their aftermath, and the processes by which convicted Japanese war criminals served out their sentences, either in prisons throughout the Southeast Asian region or in Sugamo Prison in Tokyo.

The imprisonment, repatriation and eventual release of war criminals was an issue that preoccupied governments in Japan and the former wartime Allies in several emerging independent countries of Southeast Asia between the Japanese surrender in 1945 and the release of the last war criminals were released from Sugamo in 1958.

This period was a formative one in the international relations of the region: Japan was gradually rehabilitated, many of the countries previously occupied by Japan reached independence from their European overlords as well as the Japanese, and the Cold War shaped new sets of alliances in the region.

The treatment of Japanese war criminals, once they had been convicted, varied dramatically according to whether the prosecuting country was the United States, Australia, Great Britain, the Netherlands, the Chinese Republic, France or the Philippines.⁴

In the wake of the war, class B and C war crimes trials were convened either by one of the wartime Allies—often also the colonial master of the territory in which the war crimes had occurred—or, in the case of the Philippines, by a newly independent nation. Of 5700 defendants, 984 were sentenced to death, 475 to life imprisonment and 2944 to various prison terms.

The last trials were conducted by Australia on Manus Island in 1951. Australia and the Philippines were also the last, in July 1953, to repatriate war criminals, many of whom continued their sentences in Sugamo prison in Tokyo. By 1958, all war criminals convicted under the BC trial system had been released from Sugamo.

In Japan war criminals, their families and supporters applied considerable political pressure on the Japanese Government to work for their release.

The release of war criminals was not something that the Japanese government could effect unilaterally. Despite the steady dilution of the Allied Occupation's early determination to punish Japan, the country displayed gradual economic and political rehabilitation from 1947 onwards, and returned to sovereignty on 28 April 1952.

As Sandra Wilson has shown, in Japan war criminals, their families and supporters applied considerable political pressure on the Japanese Government to work for their release,⁵ but the government was limited to making representations on behalf of the prisoner to the nation in which, or on whose behalf, he was jailed. Repatriation and release of war criminals marked, in many cases, one of the first major areas of negotiation in new postwar relationships between Japan and the countries of the region, and, and between Japan and the imperialist powers that had formerly ruled in Asia. Continued page 19>>

Early release of Japan's war criminals

<< From page 18 The treatment of Japanese war criminals post-conviction varied considerably depending on the nation that had conducted the trials. In all cases, however, the decision to retain, repatriate or release war criminals was affected by consideration of the past, and of a future in which Japan would once more be an important economic and political player in regional affairs.



Robert Cribb

For example, as Robert Cribb shows, when the Netherlands Government repatriated Japanese war criminals to continue their sentences in Sugamo prison in 1949, it did so

because it believed that if responsibility for them

were transferred to the Indonesian Republic upon its imminent independence, the Indonesians would simply release them. According to Dutch assessments, early release was likely under Indonesian rule partly because Indonesians did not share, to the same extent, the bitterness of the Dutch regarding the Japanese occupation, and also because the release of war criminals was likely to play a part in the negotiation of Indonesian–Japanese postwar economic ties.⁶

In the Philippines, the resumption of trade with Japan, premised on the satisfactory negotiation of reparations, was also a core issue in the treatment of war criminals. The Philippines, because it had gained independence less than a year after the Japanese surrender, had held its own trials and condemned 79 individuals to death as well as 58 to a variety of sentences.

Although the government of the Philippines was vociferous in its demands that Japan be punished for its wartime actions (for example by insisting that Japan's responsibility to provide reparations be written into the Peace Treaty), by December 1953 all war criminals had been repatriated and even those on death row in Sugamo had been pardoned as the last act of the outgoing

The decision to retain, repatriate or release war criminals was affected by consideration of the future as well as of the past.

President of the Philippines, Elpidio Quirino. As I argue elsewhere, both in Japan and in the Philippines, the repatriation and release of Japanese war criminals was understood—albeit not unanimously—to be a measure of improved diplomatic relations, illustrated by progress in the bilateral negotiations surrounding reparations.⁷

In Australia—the last of the Allied countries to complete war crimes trials and to cease to execute war criminals—the management of their sentences similarly highlighted tensions between the need to pursue justice and the need to fit in with new developments in the region.

Dean Aszkielowicz shows that the Australian Government negotiated a fine line between acknowledging the public's apparently unforgiving attitudes towards Japanese war criminals, which would discourage any move towards their repatriation and early release, and presenting itself as a cooperative international partner at a time when its relationship with the United States, and therefore also Japan as a key US ally in the Cold War, was in a crucial phase of development.⁸

As Barak Kushner has shown, the case of BC war criminals tried by the Republic of China echoes some of these issues. There, in addition, the prosecution of Japanese war criminals was complicated by the civil war with the Communists and by the pursuit of wartime collaborators, both of which dwarfed the prosecution of Japanese war criminals.

As was the case for the Netherlands, Philippines and Australian governments, the government of Chiang Kaishek also had an eye on the emerging power of Japan when dealing with the repatriation and release of war criminals.⁹ As the examples above demonstrate, the BC war crimes trials should be understood in ways that transcend the courtroom itself. Without losing sight of the atrocities that prompted the prosecution of war

Continued page 20>>

Early release of Japan's war criminals

<<From page 19 criminals in the first place, it is enlightening to consider the aftermath of the trials, and the way in which the lives of individual Japanese war criminals were entwined with the politics of decolonisation, economic competition and jostling for influence in the international arena.

The repatriation and release of war criminals was a matter that tied the wartime past into the imagined future of relationships between Japan, its Asian neighbours and the former imperial powers. How these matters were resolved, and with what compromises, provides a fascinating lens through which to study the emerging postwar power relations in the region.

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Final call for AEF 2011 Asia study tours

The [Asia Education Foundation](#) has made a final call for registrations for its 2011 study tours involving tailored trips to China, Vietnam and Japan.

The China tour, of the Shanxi district, is a Chinese language 'immersion tour' that will follow 'in the footsteps of Chairman Mao'. Registrations close **31 July**.

The Vietnam tour will look at environmental activity in that country, as farms and fields give way to industry and infrastructure. Registrations close **22 July**.



The 10-day Japan tour, for art educators, captures and will study Japanese treasures of the past and the potential of the future. Registrations close **31 July**.

See [website](#) for registration forms and tour itineraries.

Confucius institutes in Germany and the limits of debate

Confucius institutes in Germany are dealing with topical Chinese issues—but some subjects are off limits. FALK HARTIG reports.

Since 2004 China has established more than 700 Confucius Institutes and Confucius classrooms around the world to promote its language and culture, and thereby shape its image. While Chinese officials identify the institutes as an important tool of China's international exchange and image-shaping program, western academic interest in them remains surprisingly small.

Besides the theoretical confusion about what Confucius institutes are (a propaganda tool, an instrument of soft power, of public diplomacy or cultural diplomacy), the lack of knowledge about their activities is striking.

By providing some insights into the operation of Confucius institutes in Germany, I want to shed more light on their activities around the world. This analysis is based on interviews with managers of German Confucius Institutes and an evaluation of the institutes' programs and annual working reports.

The first Confucius institute in Germany was established in 2006, at the Free University of Berlin. Currently there are 11 Confucius institutes and one Confucius classroom in Germany. All have been organised through cooperation between Chinese and German partner institutions. Nearly all of the institutions are hosted in universities with a department of Sinology or China studies, and which have worked closely with Chinese universities for a long time. This cooperation has usually been the basis for the establishment of a Confucius institute.

Another organisational component worth noting is that Confucius institutes in Germany are formally German-registered associations. This might seem rather unimportant, but is significant when you consider that the Chinese Government restricts the establishment of foreign cultural institutions in China. There are still only a few foreign cultural institutions in Beijing; Germany's Goethe Institute, present since 1988, is the oldest, followed by the French, in 2004 and the Spanish, in 2005.



China's official policy is 'one country, one cultural institute'. In the case of Confucius institutes, however, it avoids this restriction because in Germany the institutes are

formally registered associations, rather than Chinese institutions. This means China can easily establish more than one cultural institute, without impinging on official cultural treaties and agreements that concern the so-called Chinese Culture Centre in Berlin.

Chinese culture centres—there are only two others in Europe, in Malta and Paris—also provide language and culture courses and are similar to Confucius institutes in the type of content they provide. However, the centres are organised, operated and financed solely by the Chinese Ministry of Culture, without an international partner.

With Confucius Institutes, the cooperative model for their establishment also applies to their funding. The average annual subsidy paid by Hanban (the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language) to each German Confucius Institute is about US\$100 000, with the German partner contributing about the same amount through facilities and, sometimes, payment for local staff.

Institutes can apply for further funding from Hanban for specific projects. When the first German institutes were established in 2006–07, Hanban's policy of signing contracts for only three years led to some insecurity about financial support at the end of the contract period. This policy now seems to have been relaxed, and the managing

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Confucius institutes in Germany

<< From page 21 director of one institute has assumed that funding is safe at least until 2020. But in 2011, one managing director told me, Hanban, for the first time, has not approved all requests for project money. Confucius institutes in Germany are targeting the 'mainstream' public that mostly does not have any special China knowledge. The institutes' main activities include language courses and cultural events such as exhibitions, film screenings and talks. While programs differ from institute to institute, the institutes generally offer similar content.

The emphasis on language and culture, however, varies among institutions, with some focusing more on language courses and others more on cultural events. One reason for the focus on cultural events—for example, lectures—is that they are free of charge. 'Many people can't or don't want to learn Chinese (and spend money to do so), but many people want to know more about various China topics,' said the manager of one institute.¹

Lectures by distinguished China scholars are another important aspect of the institutes' programs. Most of these scholars are well known in their field in Germany and speak on topics related to their research such as traditional Chinese medicine, the Silk Road or Chinese literature. While some critics might write-off such topics as a rehash of cultural stereotypes and a distraction from more pressing issues, talks about the role of non-government organisations in China and Germany, or debates about whether China is developing a civil society, are also occurring at Confucius institutes in Germany.

Nevertheless, there are limitations for the institutes when it comes to topics regarded as sensitive for 'official China', such as the 'T' words—Taiwan, Tibet and Tian'an'men. Those in charge of the institutes are fully aware of the problem. As one managing director said in 2007: 'If you sign such a contract, you know where the limits are'.²

This seems to be the general understanding throughout the institutes. 'The independence is limited regarding precarious topics in the People's

Republic,' said one manager.³ 'If topics like Tibet or Taiwan were handled too critically, this could be difficult'.

'If you sign such a contract, you know where the limits are.'

Another manager commented that, even though 'circumstances have changed in China' and there is more openness in the cultural sphere, nonetheless, Confucius institute staff 'know, of course, in which context we act'.⁴

But it seems Hanban doesn't really trust its international partners. According to one participant at the Third Confucius Institutes Conference, in Beijing, in 2008, there were 'no direct content-related precepts', but it came up 'that the following topics are not very welcome: Tibet, Falun Gong and Taiwan'.⁵

Therefore, it partly depends on local German staff what happens and what does not. 'I didn't ask anyone what we can do or not ... I square it with my conscience or with what I know about China as to what we can do and what we cannot do'.⁶

Another point of criticism concerns the materials used for language teaching, which are seen as a means for the Chinese Communist Party to spread its ideology. However, according to one manager, this accusation doesn't hold true in Germany because 'most of the text books are only in Chinese and English and many people coming to our institute are not that good in English—so we have to use German books, too'.⁷

But language is not the only problem. 'Many of the Chinese teaching materials,' said another manager, 'miss the point regarding habits and taste of German learners'.⁸

In general, the Confucius institutes in Germany confirm that they are 'very autonomous' in their use of teaching materials. Most of the institutes combine the Hanban teaching materials offered with German books and resources, and are even starting to design their own materials. These remarks illustrate that Confucius institutes are an interesting tool of China's cultural diplomacy, or of cultural diplomacy with Chinese

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Confucius institutes in Germany

<< From page 22 characteristics—and that, in the field of cultural and language promotion, China is becoming a leading player in the world, whether the world likes it or not.

In this context, it seems critics exaggerate when they suggest that China is using Confucius institutes in its 'drive for global dominance'. On the other hand, China's supporters are stretching the point when they assume that the institutes are 'purely academic and cultural'.

As is often the case with developments in China, the truth might be somewhere in between.

References

1. Interview conducted 9 September 2010.
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3. Interview conducted 9 September 2009.
4. Interview conducted 7 September 2009.
5. A Weigl, 'Auswärtige Kulturpolitik der Volksrepublik China—Eine Untersuchung kultureller Programme der Konfuzius-Institute in Berlin, Hamburg und Hannover [Foreign cultural politics of the People's Republic of China—an analysis of cultural programs of the Confucius Institutes in Berlin, Hamburg and Hannover]'. Master thesis, University Hildesheim, 2009.
6. Interview conducted 30 September 2009.
7. Interview conducted 3 December 2009.
8. Interview conducted 9 September 2009.

Further reading

'Confucius institutes adopt a sage approach to cultural understanding', *Asian Currents*, May 2010.



Falk Hartig is a PhD student at the Queensland University of Technology and is doing comparative research on Confucius institutes in Australia and Germany.

Australia, Thailand to celebrate diplomatic ties

Australia and Thailand will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2012.

Writing in the July 2011 newsletter of the Australia–Thailand Association (Canberra), Kitirat Panupong, First Secretary, Royal Thai Embassy, Canberra, said an exchange of high-level visits by the prime ministers could be expected.



The Royal Thai Embassy in Canberra has also been planning and working closely with the Asia Institute to establish a Thai Studies Centre at the University of Melbourne as part of the commemoration of the special relationship.



'The centre is expected to become a centre of academic excellence in terms of both research and teaching, disseminating the body of knowledge about Thailand, especially its contemporary political, economic, business, cultural and social issues, to the Australian public at large,' he said.

'Australian students will be encouraged to study more about Thailand and spend some time in Thailand undertaking field research. Eventually, a pool of experts on Thailand, and hopefully a network of "friends of Thailand", will be enlarged across Australia.

'The Thai and Australian governments still need to discuss further how to cooperate and make the celebration a successful one. But at least we can expect lots of special festivities next year both in Thailand and Australia to celebrate this special occasion.'

Reggae strikes a chord with Indonesia's 'disillusioned' youth

Indonesians are borrowing the music of reggae to shed light on the modern Indonesian condition, writes LISA COLQUHOUN.

From Aceh to Ambon, dreadlocked Indonesian musicians are laying claim to reggae. They are hybridising the Jamaican musical genre, fertilising the imported musical code with local particularities and definitions and instilling it with characteristics and meanings unique to Indonesia and its various regional cultures.

By gesturing to Jamaica as a source of cultural influence—borrowing not only the music of reggae but also its associated Rastafarian discourses—Indonesian reggae musicians are demonstrating that the increasing interconnectivity of cultures that characterises globalisation, rather than fulfilling prophecies of standardised Western blandness is, instead, equipping local actors worldwide with a broad repertoire of cultural forms ripe for appropriation and reinterpretation. This is giving rise to new fashions, patterns and hybrids.

Whatever path reggae travelled along on its journey to Indonesian shores, by all accounts it was initially most popular in the tourist resorts of Bali and Lombok, particularly in the late 1980s and 1990s. It was here, within the borders of Indonesia's tourism industry, that reggae was disconnected from its roots as a purveyor of Rastafarian resistance to colonial exploitation and, instead was performed as a commodity of the tourism industry.

Local musicians who visited the bars that had become known for live reggae, including Bruna Bar on Bali's Kuta Beach and Pondok Senggigi on Lombok's west coast, were gripped by reggae's gentle rhythm and its invitation to sway. Despite having no understanding of what reggae was really all about, and unable to comprehend the Jamaican-accented English of the lyrics, many turned to the genre as a ticket to a regular hotel gig, playing covers of Bob Marley classics for tipsy tourists on holiday in paradise.

When the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis, followed by the 2002 terrorist bombings in Kuta, devastated the tourism industries in both Bali and Lombok, reggae was robbed of its primary audience in Indonesia. The main venues for live reggae music closed down and, for a while, the reggae musicians in Bali and Lombok were out of work. Unemployed, and some fearing for their lives, reggae musicians fled to Jakarta and other Indonesian cities, leaving the fate of reggae music in Indonesia doubtful.

However, the migration of reggae music to beyond the borders of Indonesia's tourism industry spawned a new enthusiasm for the genre. Reggae found an eager audience in Indonesia's urban youth who, according to Javanese reggae legend, Tony Q, were growing increasingly 'bored with the American style pop on MTV that [had] ruled the music industry for the past decade'.



Tony Q Rastafara performing at BB's in Jakarta.

In Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Medan and Makassar, for example, a host of new reggae bands were formed, including Tuff Gong, Souljah, Gangstarasta and Marapu. Tpenk, former frontman of Indonesia's most commercially successful reggae band, Steven and CoconuTTreez, and current frontman of Steven Jam, proposed: 'Even though reggae was popular in Bali in the 1990s, it wasn't until the 2000s that it became popular elsewhere and Indonesians really started to make reggae for Indonesians, not just sing Bob Marley and UB40 for tourists'.

While Tony Q, with his band Rastafara, was already experimenting with the localisation of reggae music in the 1990s, it was not until the early-to mid-2000s, that other reggae musicians in the nation's cities began actively and increasingly fusing local musical and linguistic elements with reggae. The increased accessibility of the internet in the country's urban areas made it

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Reggae in Indonesia

<< From page 24 possible for Indonesian reggae enthusiasts to broaden their knowledge of reggae music, its history and its message, and to become acquainted with a larger variety of reggae artists. This encouraged Indonesian reggae musicians to construct their own distinctive sound and also to relate reggae's themes of sweeping corruption, colonialism and the disparity between rich and poor to their own lived experiences.

The popularity of reggae music in Indonesia, and of Indonesianised reggae in particular, grew with the 2005 release of Jakarta-based Steven and CoconuTTreez's debut album *The other side*. This appropriated Jamaican styles discovered through internet resources, uniquely configured to appeal to local tastes. The album's most revered song, 'Welcome to my paradise', which celebrated freedom from the drudgery of modern living, struck a chord with disillusioned Indonesian youth and also brought reggae music back to Indonesia's tourism industry.

Tourist numbers had bounced back from post-bombing lows, and *The other side* was played on high rotation throughout Bali and the Lombok island of Gili Trawangan, often at the request of those tourists. Pirated copies of the album were sold by hawkers on the streets and taken home by foreign visitors. Reggae was being re-exported as an Indonesian product.

The album found commercial success and thrust localised reggae into the consciousness of Indonesians from across the archipelago, spawning what is locally known as the Indonesian reggae revolution. Reggae music scenes proliferated throughout the archipelago. Seemingly overnight, every major town had its resident reggae band or artist who was seen to actively and consciously engage in the hybridisation of reggae music.

This process of hybridisation entailed the juxtaposition of Indonesian or regional languages with the original English patois of Jamaican reggae. The lyrics to Indonesian reggae tracks such as 'Woman' by Tony Q and 'Long time no see' by Steven and CoconuTTreez, for instance, incorporate both Indonesian and English languages, at times in the same

sentence, while 'Tak gendong' by Mbah Surip mixes English with Javanese and 'Lombok holiday' by Mellow Mood juxtaposes English with Sasak and Indonesian.

Indeed, the original English vernacular of Jamaican reggae is not just an element that has been entirely abandoned as part of reggae's development in Indonesia. Rather, in fusing or alternating between regional and Indonesian languages and English, as the de facto universal language, Indonesian reggae musicians seek to broaden their market and to facilitate the transnationalisation of Indonesian reggae music. Thus, for Ras Muhamad, the self-professed Indonesian reggae ambassador to the world, incorporating English phrases into his lyrics affords him the opportunity to 'go international and make Indonesian reggae known globally'.

'You can change the style of reggae, but the message must be the same: oppression, justice, inequality, social things like that.'

Just as Indonesian reggae has hybridised local and international languages, it has also fused traditional instruments and melodies from the country's various regional musical cultures with the imported stylistic features of Jamaican reggae. Marapu, for example, incorporate instruments and melodies from their native Sumba in a number of their reggae songs, even reworking a Sumbanese folk song in the reggae genre. Jakarta's Tony Q uses Javanese gamelan and Sundanese kendang and frequently adopts 'Eastern-sounding melodies' in his reggae tunes. Similarly, Joni Agung incorporates Balinese gamelan in his original songs to give his music 'the Balinese flavour... to make reggae feel comfortable for [Balinese people]'.

By infusing reggae music with local musical elements that their respective audiences are familiar with, Indonesian reggae musicians demonstrate the ways that imported genres like reggae are presented to local audiences with musical variations that play to the

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Reggae in Indonesia

<< From page 25 audience's sense of self. As Indonesian reggae has developed as a hybrid music, Rastafarian-inspired themes of oppression, inequality, poverty and political opposition have echoed on.

Certainly, as Indonesian reggae grows in popularity, there has been a marked tendency for Indonesian reggae musicians to appropriate Rastafarian discourses to shed light on the modern Indonesian condition and to articulate opposition to both local and global politics. According to Ras Muhamad, owing to Indonesian reggae's expanding audience, there is now a greater sense of obligation for the producers of Indonesian reggae to serve as 'messengers' to consumers.



Yanto—lead singer of Marapu.

For Bali's Joni Agung, Indonesian reggae artists have a responsibility to honour the music's origins as Rastafari's chief form of social protest, highlighting the experiences of hardship of poor, marginalised

Jamaicans, and their struggle for equality and social wellbeing. 'You can change the style of reggae, but the message must be the same: oppression, justice, inequality, social things like that. Those issues relate to us too,' he argued.

Indonesian reggae has accordingly been deployed to speak out about such locally specific issues and phenomena as youth unemployment in Lombok (Joe and Mellow Mood's 'Lombok holiday') and the destruction of Indonesia's rice paddies in the wake of increasing urbanisation (Tony Q's 'Anak kampung').

Indonesian reggae artists have also localised Rastafari's anticolonial sentiments in their resistance to Westernisation and also in the articulation of regional separatist movements. Ambonese reggae band, D'Embalz, for example, is increasingly using its hybrid reggae music as a voice for South Moluccan independence, while other Indonesian reggae musicians appropriate the rhetoric of Rastafari, including the

Rastafarian concept of Babylon, to express opposition to what they see as the neocolonialist agendas of Western cultural powers. As reggae music is subjected to the processes of hybridisation in Indonesia, creatively reinterpreted to speak to Indonesian audiences about issues and phenomena that affect them, in the languages and styles that they can understand, it is becoming an increasingly cosmopolitan phenomenon where reggae fans from all corners of the world encounter Indonesia.

Indonesian reggae artists are now performing their hybrid reggae music all over the world and having their tunes included in international reggae compilation albums. On 21 May 2011, the first Indonesian reggae festival was held in Jakarta, featuring over 50 reggae acts from across Indonesia together with guest international artists, and attracting festival attendees from Europe, Japan, North America, Russia and Australia.

Indonesian reggae stands as a counterexample to notions of Western cultural imperialism, as testimony to the cultural influence that non-Western cultures have long been exerting on one another.

Through their vibrant and self-conscious mixing of Jamaican and indigenous cultural forms and through their purposeful internationalisation of Indonesian reggae as a hybrid music, Indonesian reggae musicians are representing a sense of global connectedness, a desire to be part of something larger than the nation-state of Indonesia.

For them, globalisation is not the story of cultural homogenisation, but rather one of hybridity and cultural interplay, where new fashions, confluences and mixtures are formulated through a creative relationship with (non-Western) global influences.



Lisa Colquhoun wrote an Honours thesis about Indonesian reggae at the University of Sydney in 2010. She currently lives in Bali.

Asian Studies in an Asian century

Preparations have begun for the 19th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA), in Sydney in 2012.

The theme of the conference will be 'Knowing Asia: Asian Studies in an Asian Century'. The conference will be hosted by the Institute for Culture and Society, the School of Humanities and Communications, and the Centre for Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies, at the Parramatta campus of the University of Western, and will be held from 11 to 14 July.

As the 21st century marches on, what we call 'Asian studies' is no longer an easily demarcated field. The area studies model of Asian Studies, with its focus on particular areas within Asia (China, Indonesia, Japan and so on) as bounded objects of Western knowledge, has come under sustained criticism. In the past few decades massive economic, political, social and cultural transformations have taken place in the region known as Asia. In the process, it has acquired an increasingly prominent place in the world. Whether or not this 'rise of Asia' merits talk about a coming 'Asian century', it is clear that the historical context for the study of Asia has irrevocably changed.

Four major considerations are at play here. First, increasing globalisation has led to growing interpenetration and interdependence between different parts of the world. This problematises prevailing boundaries, not least those between 'Asia' and 'the West'. Cross-border interactions and transnational connections across and beyond the region are now vital determinants of local and national conditions in all parts of Asia. As a consequence, now more than ever, such local and national situations cannot be meaningfully studied without consideration of the constitutive role of the broader regional and global context. At the same time, studies of global significance must increasingly include studies of what is occurring in Asia.

Second, economic development throughout the region has given rise to the emergence of complex and vibrant new societies for which descriptors as 'traditional' or 'postcolonial' are inadequate, and whose understanding can no longer be pursued through using Western modernity as a benchmark.

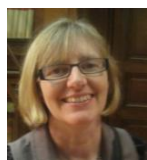
These societies are becoming modern in their own ways, requiring new concepts and tools for analysis. Third, these recent transformations have led to a burgeoning interest in studying Asia among scholars who do not call themselves 'Asianists', for example in cultural and media studies, gender and sexuality studies, and human and urban geography.

Thus, intellectual engagement with Asia has widened considerably beyond the area studies template and its disciplinary core of political science, history and languages. Fourth, and crucially, as modern Asian societies mature there are new generations of Asian scholars who conduct research and scholarship on and within their own societies, establishing their own, intraregional scholarly networks. For these scholars, Asia is not 'other', as is still often the case for Western scholars. In short, as Asia becomes an increasingly prominent, complex and self-confident region in the world, the meanings and potentials of 'knowing Asia' require fundamental rethinking at multiple levels.

'The conference will encourage reflection on the implications of these shifts on the field of Asian studies, both in Australia and internationally,' said co-convenors: [Professor Ien Ang](#), Professor of Cultural Studies and the founding Director of the Centre of Cultural Research (CCR) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS), and [Associate Professor Judith Snodgrass](#), UWS Centre of Cultural Research.

The website is currently under construction and will open soon with news of keynotes, panel themes, and events. There will be a link from the [ASAA homepage](#).

National Library's Asian treasures celebrated in book form



By Sally Burdon
Asia Bookroom

I would hazard a guess that if a group of educated Australians were surveyed as to the ethnic origin of the oldest book in the National Library of Australia most would presume the work to be of European origin. They would not guess that the oldest printed book in the NLA, published in 1162, is a Chinese volume from a very large set of Buddhist scriptures. Nor would they suspect how influential this work, published nearly 800 years ago is, and not just in Buddhist circles.

It was from these scriptures that *Monkey*, of fictional book and television series fame, had its origins. Such is the cross-cultural reach of just this work, which is only one of the treasures described in *Asian treasures: gems of the written word*.

Asian treasures: gems of the written word is the aptly titled new publication from the NLA. Engagingly written and beautifully illustrated, this introduction to the depth, diversity and beauty of the Asian collections held at the library is an elegant and inspiring book. Written for the intelligent general reader, author Andrew Gosling assumes no prior knowledge of the items described or of the history of Asia. He discusses the treasures in their historical, literary and artistic context, while not oversimplifying their content. This is not an easy task but one he performs with aplomb.



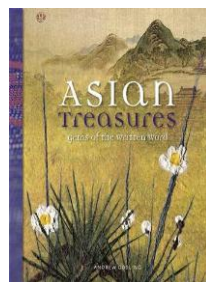
Map of Nagasaki.

Choosing what to include in *Asian treasures* from the enormous and important Asian collections that

the NLA holds must have been a near impossible mission. Andrew Gosling, who spent 30 years on the NLA staff and who was Chief Librarian, Asian Collections for

18 of those years, would have been cognisant of the daunting nature of this task, but thankfully he persevered and a fascinating and useful book has come out of it.

Anyone who has had the good fortune to use these collections can attest to how truly wonderful they are. In fact, so important are the NLA's Asian holdings that frequently scholars from across the world travel to Canberra to work at the library because there is nowhere else worldwide with quite the NLA's scope.



Asian treasures: gems of the written word is divided into seven parts and includes descriptions of stunning books, maps, manuscripts on paper and palm leaf, letters and scrolls. With

origins ranging from Northeast Asia, through the writing traditions of the Indonesian islands, South Asia and the Middle East, this book serves as a window into the extraordinary cultural and historic depth of our neighbours.



Old Javanese *Ramayana*.

There are so many items of intellectual and artistic beauty described in this book that I am sure it will inspire many readers to want to view the physical objects. The popularity of the 'Treasures'

exhibitions at the NLA some years ago demonstrated the public's appetite for such celebrations.

Wouldn't the 21st century—the Asian century—be the perfect time for an 'Asian treasures' exhibition at the NLA?

In the meantime, I highly recommend this treasure of a book, both for personal libraries and as a wonderful present to give when travelling in Asia. Andrew Gosling is to be congratulated for this demonstration that Australia is very serious about our relationship with Asia.

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

'Japan Design Today 100', 29 July–16 September 2011, Sydney. An exhibition on the evolution of Japanese design on everyday products, at the Japan Foundation Gallery, Level 1, Chifley Plaza, Chifley Square, Sydney, Monday–Friday, 11am–4pm, Wednesday until 8pm. www.jpf.org.au.

TAASA Asian Arts Essay Prize, extension of deadline. To celebrate its 20th Anniversary in 2011, the Asian Arts Society of Australia is offering a \$2000 prize for the winning essay on an Asian arts topic. The final submission date is now 1 August 2011, with the award announcement on 31 October 2011. Inquiries to Dr Ann Proctor at a proctor@bigpong.net.au.

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.

'Living Histories' 2011 interview series, the Japan Foundation of Sydney. Interviews include Sayuki, the Australian-born geisha, and Tetsu Kariya, Sydney-based author of the *Oishinbow* manga series. Attendance is free. Interviews will be held in the Multipurpose Room, the Japan Foundation, Shop 23, level 1, Chifley Plaza, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney, on the following dates: **3 August:** Christina Wilcox and Peter Rushforth; **17 August,** Sayuki; **31 August,** Tetsu Kariya; **7 September,** Dr Christine de Matos and Kathy Wray; **14 September,** Walter Hamilton and Alan Stokes; **28 September,** Father Paul Glynn.

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](#).

Asian Art Institute of Australia (AIAA) exhibitions, Sydney exhibitions and presentations: Sunday, 2pm, 7 August 2011, 'Collectors and collecting', presentation and exhibition by Allan Rae and some collectors of Asian art on what they collect and why. 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. More Diary notes [page 29](#)>>

Diary notes

Thai Studies Conference, Melbourne, 11–12 August 2011. Professor Pasuk Phongpaichit will be the keynote speaker for this conference. She is one of the most outstanding economists, authors and anticorruption campaigners currently working in the Faculty of Economics at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. See [website](#) for details.

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. Further information from the [website](#).

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 is 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.

Great Asian Writers and Surrounding Vernacular Literatures in a Postcolonial Perspective', National University of Singapore, 11–13 November 2011, organised by Reading Asia: Forging Identities in Literature (RAFIL) consortium and the Department of Malay Studies, NUS. Further details on the [web](#). See *story page 11*.

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.

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](#).

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](#).

ASAA Biennial Conference 2012 will be held 11–12 July 2012 at the Parramatta Campus of the University of Western Sydney. More details soon.

Malaysia, Singapore and the region

Call for papers—17th Colloquium of the Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia, Melbourne, 8–9 December 2011. Those interested in presenting a paper or organising a panel are invited 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](#).

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](#).