



Redefining its role: the Chinese Communist Party turns 90

The Chinese Communist Party shows no signs of going the way of its Soviet predecessor. HANS HENDRISCHKE reports.

The 90th anniversary of the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in July 2011 has passed quietly. If it had not been for the nostalgic attempts of various cities in Western China to re-enact the events of the civil war and the Cultural Revolution for those generations who missed the party's glory days, the 90th anniversary of the world's largest and arguably most successful political party would have attracted only a few pre-emptive obituaries in the Western press and the usual celebratory speeches in China.

Commentators were divided along well-drawn lines, most Western analysts predicting the CCP's inevitable demise, and reports from China celebrating its historic achievements and continuing rise. The latter have figures on their side; in 2010 the CCP had 80 million members, 15 million up from 2000 and now amounting to 6 per cent of the population. Sceptics point to lack of purpose, signs of power struggle and problems ranging from economic bubbles to growing civil unrest and general political disenchantment.

The fact that these views don't match at all is cause for some concern. China is Australia's most importing trading partner. Trade with China has brought continuous economic development and unprecedented wealth at a time of



The 90th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party in Chongqing. According to *Xinhua*, approximately 10 000 people came dressed in red to celebrate the momentous occasion. Photos by *Xinhua/ChinaDaily* via [Sina](#).

significant global challenges. This could become the longest and largest growth period in recent Australian history. Yet, one wonders, is our historically most important trading partner run by an organisation on the verge of collapse or are our analytical abilities in understanding China simply not up to scratch. Chinese propaganda does not facilitate an understanding of how the CCP works, largely for two reasons. One is
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that everything surrounding the party is covered in a veil of secrecy, in China as abroad. The other is that, at the same time, the CCP claims to be in absolute control. Combined, these two points make it hard to understand the role of the party and open up room for endless speculation.

One misconception is that of a monolithic, totalitarian party increasingly distanced from the population and relying on manipulation and coercion to remain in power. This perception is influenced by attitudes towards the former Soviet Union and its demise following the dissolution of its communist party. But the Chinese Communist Party is different from its Soviet predecessor. It went through at least three historical incarnations and might be on the way to a new role.

The 90 years of claimed historical continuity disguise the fact that the party keeps changing. It has redefined its role over the reform decades since 1978 while nevertheless maintaining its legacies from previous periods. The civil war legacy of its first three decades explains the secrecy, the obsession with social control and the emphasis on propaganda. The Soviet legacy of state control over the economy and trust in central planning established over the next three decades continues to justify the concentration of power in Beijing and the centralised organisational apparatus.

But over the past three decades, the party has also revived an older tradition of Chinese statecraft that links it to the imperial more than to its socialist past. Since the 1980s, the party has given a role to its local cadres in a way that is unprecedented and little documented, because it is part of China's informal governance and therefore not part of official propaganda. At the level of subprovincial government local party cadres have conducted the largest

corporate privatisation program in history. For an evaluation of the party's role and political stability in China this is more important than ideological speculation and guesswork about leadership changes.

The CCP is running a country with twice the population of Europe and with about the same number of provinces as the European Union has member states. Cultural differences and gaps in economic development and living standards are comparable. China's 31 mainland provinces with 1340 million people stack up against 27 states of the EU with 500 million people.

Governing such an empire is all the more difficult because China operates without a unified and hierarchical legal system. The CCP, from its centre in Beijing, unifies this empire through ideological and political



consensus, but underneath this ideological unification lies a highly decentralised

economy and administration controlled by local party organisations. At this level, ideology has given way to a government tradition of public-private networks that show far more flexibility and local autonomy than political systems inspired by the European tradition of rule of law.

At the beginning of the reform period there was no private enterprise in China. Today there are several million registered companies and tens of millions of small private enterprises. The non-state sector of the economy accounts for over two-thirds of China's GDP. This entrepreneurial revolution was not instituted by law or by central reform as in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union where central governments established a legal and financial framework to enable privatisation. Indeed, by many standards, what has occurred is not even so much privatisation as marketisation. As soon as local markets were allowed to operate,

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people in control of resources formed public-private networks to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities with little initial concern for their formal legal status.

In China, enterprise reform started bottom up in response to political signals from above, but in the absence of regulatory frameworks for ownership and operation. These had to be developed for each locality in line with local market environments. This process was driven by local party secretaries at every township and county who had to decide on how to set up local collectives and gradually convert them to private enterprises. The slogan of Chinese reform being like crossing a river by groping the stones finds its practical explanation here. This has produced very different local trajectories of corporate growth and wealth and explains many local differences. Legislation followed only later.

For Chinese living in second- and third-tier cities and in the growing industrial regions, the contribution of the Communist Party to economic wellbeing lies in their neighbourhood, not in Beijing. The legal reforms and commercial and government regulations that were implemented from the mid-1990s and again from around 2005, have increased legal and regulatory security, but they have not made the party secretaries superfluous. Local party leaders still serve as industrial planners and arbiters for economic conflicts. Local government officials beholden to formal rules are subordinate to party secretaries in all important matters of local governance ranging from infrastructure planning, major developments, legal issues and intricate issues such as support for the stock market listings of local corporations.

Local party cadres therefore spend little time on political propaganda, but they

have considerable power to attract investors and decide about local welfare. Therein lies the explanation of a paradox noted by Chinese and foreign observers alike. Disenchantment with politics can be as obvious in China as in many Western societies. But disillusionment with grand party politics in China does not preclude active engagement with the local party state and local economic issues.

It is not the party of 80 million members that leads the country. The number of party members who drive local economies and enterprises is much smaller, but importantly, these party cadres are indispensable for the 40 000 townships and 2800 county-level administrations in China. If they work well and attract investors and local employment, their localities have a chance to prosper. If they abuse their power, they risk civil unrest.

Are these cadres committed to communism? That depends on what is meant by communism. The practical answer is that they are committed to the CCP organisation because the party hierarchy gives them access to power and the ability to coordinate their activities with other localities.

Party networks have practical functions for securing economic growth, local employment, infrastructure, environment and social peace. In pursuit of social stability, these networks also extend to local entrepreneurs and give them an informal voice in local affairs. In fact, there is an increasing interchange between political and business elites. The reforms overseen by local party cadres are by no means complete. In areas where privatisation started early, such as along the Eastern seaboard, party cadres have turned their attention to social and environmental issues years before these are by no means complete. In areas where privatisation started early, such as along the eastern seaboard, party cadres have turned their attention to social and environmental issues years before these

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made it into the latest five-year plan. In the less developed western areas, the central leadership faces problems with party cadres who try to rely Soviet-inspired central state support and have to be convinced to promote market-driven economic growth at their local level. For the CCP, its 90th anniversary is therefore not only an opportunity for retrospection and self-congratulation, it is a ritual to emphasise continuity. It is also a signal for change for those regions lagging behind in economic development to reduce their reliance on ideological prescriptions and central state support.

The CCP is not a monolithic Soviet-style party. It is a traditional communist party led by central state planners, propagandists, technocrats and military leaders on the one hand; but it is also socially embedded through tens of thousands of local cadres whose role is changing from state administrators to economic planners faced with entrepreneurial risk and social responsibility. In short, China's social and political stability rests on many legs of various strength and not all make it onto the official agenda for the birthday celebrations.



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New Mongolian Studies Centre for ANU

The Australian National University (ANU) has established a [Mongolian Studies Centre](#) to provide a focus for the growing interest in Mongolia at the ANU and in Australia generally.

The head of the school, [Dr Li Narangoa](#), specialises in modern Japanese and Mongolian history, culture and politics.



Dr Narangoa

Historical relations between Australia and Mongolia have been sparse, but in recent

years links between the two countries have grown in

importance. Australia has significant involvement in the *Mongolian mining and energy* sectors, both countries have been involved in seeking solutions to security problems in North-East Asia, and an increasing number of young Mongolians obtain secondary and university education in Australia.

Australia and Mongolia have expertise to share in handling climatic extremes, in animal husbandry and in heritage archaeology. The expansion of the Mongol empire under Chinggis Khan in the 13th century remains a pivotal event in world history which continues to catch the imagination of Australians.

The Mongolian Studies Centre hosts guest researchers working on Mongolia,



organises occasional seminars on Mongolian topics, provides a support network for Australian

researchers on Mongolia and promotes Mongolian studies in Australia in general. It promotes active participation by government, business and the public in the centre's activities.

India's anti-corruption movement

India's 'usually apathetic and complicit-in-corruption urban middle class' has thrown its support behind anti-graft corruption campaigner Anna Hazare. PRADEEP TANEJA looks at a phenomenon that has baffled Indian politicians and intellectuals alike.

August is usually a month of celebration in India. It is a time for rejoicing in national pride and patriotism as the country celebrates its independence from British rule on 15 August each year.

This year, however, the nationalist sentiment was mixed with a strong sense of indignation and revulsion against widespread corruption in the country. The public mood against corruption was catalysed by revelations of major corruption cases involving the awarding of large contracts for the Commonwealth Games and telecommunication licences. A number of high-profile politicians have been arrested on suspicion of corruption in both these cases and are awaiting trial. The relentless media coverage of these scandals had already prepared the ground for a grassroots campaign against corruption.

In April this year, a 74-year-old ex-soldier and social activist, Anna Hazare, emerged as the unlikely leader of a largely middle-class popular movement demanding the enactment of a new law to establish a powerful anti-corruption agency—the Lokpal (ombudsman). The proposal for the establishment of a Lokpal has been debated in India since the 1960s but nothing has come of it.

Hazare, who has in the past run successful anti-corruption campaigns in his home state of Maharashtra, says that he had written a number of letters to the prime minister demanding the passage of a strong Lokpal bill by the parliament but did not get a satisfactory response. Frustrated by government inaction, he went on a hunger strike in the heart of

New Delhi in April this year. That hunger strike ended when the government agreed to set up a joint drafting committee, which included Hazare and his key supporters (known as the Team Anna) alongside senior government ministers.



Anna Hazare

Despite early indications that the work of the joint committee was going well, serious differences emerged

between the two sides over the reach of the Lokpal's powers and the appointment of Lokayuktas (anti-corruption commissioners) in every state. The Team Anna demanded that the Lokpal bill should cover everyone from village officials to the prime minister and every public official in between, including the members of the judiciary at every level. They also demanded that the legislation should include the appointment of an equally powerful Lokayukta in each state.

The government argued that it should be up to the states to pass the relevant legislation to appoint a Lokayukta; the national parliament did not have the powers to legislate on behalf of the states. The government representatives on the joint drafting committee also maintained that the Lokpal should not be vested with powers to investigate a serving prime minister; although he or she can be investigated once they leave office. As for the inclusion of the judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court within the purview of the Lokpal, the government favoured setting up a separate body to investigate complaints

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of irregularities against the judiciary. In the end, the differences proved insurmountable and the two sides issued separate versions of the Lokpal bill. Anna Hazare announced that he would begin a hunger strike after the Independence Day to press for his version of the bill to be passed by the parliament without delay. The local police denied him permission to use the venue of his choice and arrested him on 16 August as he was preparing to embark on the hunger strike in defiance of police orders.

Backed into a corner by the public outrage at his arrest, the authorities quickly ordered his release with conditions. He refused to leave the prison until he was allowed to go unconditionally. Ironically, it is the same prison where most of the corrupt politicians are also being held.

Anna Hazare eventually left the prison on 18 August to continue his hunger strike at the city's Ramlila Grounds. After nearly two weeks of loud but orderly protests in support of his demands, which received continuous coverage by India's numerous 24-hour television news channels, Anna Hazare agreed to 'suspend' his hunger strike on 28 August, following a vote in the parliament endorsing most of his key demands.

The 'sense of the house' resolution passed by the parliament with a voice vote cleared the way for a standing committee of the parliament to redraft the bill incorporating Anna Hazare's central demands. But Team Anna remains distrustful of all sides of politics in India and is vowing to continue the campaign against corruption to make sure parliament passes a powerful Lokpal bill.

The Anna Hazare phenomenon has baffled Indian politicians and intellectuals alike. It has also raised a number of questions that will continue to be debated for a long time and may have a lasting impact on Indian politics. The role of the

Indian middle class in this campaign has been compared with the 'Arab spring' but such comparison does not merit serious consideration.

Indians have been able to democratically elect their governments since independence and the Manmohan Singh government was returned to power with an increased mandate only two years ago. The role of the middle class in this movement does, however, raise an important question: Why did the usually apathetic and complicit-in-corruption urban middle class lend its overwhelming support to the Anna Hazare anti-graft movement?

To answer this question, we have to look at the process of economic reforms in India that began in 1991 when Manmohan Singh was finance minister. The market-friendly liberal economic policies introduced as an integral part of these reforms have transformed the Indian economy and society. India is one of the world's fastest growing major economies and Indians now enjoy access to local and international products and services that they never had before. Gone are the days of Ambassador cars, economic shortages and smuggled consumer goods.

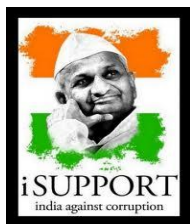
The Indian consumer today enjoys unprecedented access to the same kind of choices that consumers in more developed economies have for long taken for granted. Whereas 10 or 15 years ago, there were no modern shopping malls in any Indian city, today even the usually dull provincial towns boast a number of flashy shopping centres. Millions of middle-class Indians walk through the portals of these ubiquitous symbols of modernity each day to enjoy an international shopping experience. Indian consumers today expect an abundance of choice and hassle-free service in their market transactions. But life in India still requires frequent encounters with the equally ubiquitous government bureaucracy.

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Here the experience is totally different. From getting a driver's licence to obtaining a passport without having to wait for months, the average Indian might still have to jump many bureaucratic hurdles and deal with demands for bribes at multiple stages.



Although it must be said that economic reforms have reduced the incidence of bribery by removing or cutting down many of the taxes (e.g. customs duties)

that gave lower-level bureaucrats the incentive to seek bribes in return for accepting lower tax payments, most Indians still find it difficult to navigate their way through bureaucracy without paying bribes.

While wealthy middle-class Indians are sometimes able to use their influence to avoid paying bribes for government services, their poorer compatriots end up bearing the bigger share of the burden of corruption. This difference in transactional experiences between a marketised economy and an insensitive and largely unreformed bureaucracy might help explain the middle-class support for the Anna Hazare anti-corruption crusade.

There may be yet another reason for the enthusiastic support of the middle class for this campaign. It has to do with the economic resurgence of India. As India's economy has scaled new heights, the country's international standing has also risen. The amazing global success of the country's software industry, the high international profile of some of its corporate tycoons and the achievements of many expatriate Indians have instilled a new sense of confidence and pride among young and upwardly mobile Indians. This positive narrative of India as a future superpower does not sit comfortably with

the other older and darker narrative that projects India as a corruption-ridden Third World nation.

The latter narrative was abundantly on display before last year's Commonwealth Games when both the local and international media repeatedly portrayed New Delhi's preparations for the games as an abject failure marked by incompetence and corruption. It was particularly galling when contrasted with China's faultless infrastructure for the Beijing Olympics and its preparations for the Asian Games in Guangzhou.

The Indian middle class is tired of the clichéd representations of India as the land of contrasts. It is eager to see India take its justified place alongside other great powers of the modern era—prosperous, confident, strong and respected.

Corruption has always been a blot on the country's self-image. But now it stands in the way of a shining new India. The country's politicians are the new villains. While Prime Minister Manmohan Singh enjoys an enviable reputation as an honest and clean politician, the same cannot be said of his government.

Anna Hazare and his anti-corruption campaigners have thrown down the gauntlet to all politicians in India—clean up your act or else! But can they sustain the attention and support of the middle class?



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New Nalanda struggles to realise its dream

An 'Asian perspective' is central to the dream of India's new Nalanda University. FAZAL RIZVI writes about the move to recover the glory of what many historians now regard as the world's first university.

In the Indian state of Bihar, there once existed a highly prestigious Buddhist centre of learning, from about 400 BC to 1200 AD. At one stage, the centre enrolled over 10 000 students and employed over 2000 teachers, researching a whole range of topics, all from a distinctively Nalandian Buddhist perspective.

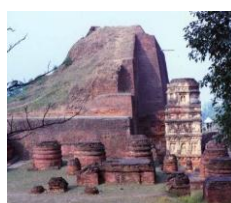
The Nalandian perspective was based on liberal cultural traditions inherited from the Gupta age in India, open to intercultural exchange and dissemination of knowledge.

Many historians now regard Nalanda as the world's first university, where communities of scholars lived and learned together in buildings designed specifically for knowledge creation and instruction. These buildings were built of red bricks, which in itself demonstrated the importance the ancient Indian communities attached to institutions of learning.

According to historical records, the ancient Nalanda University attracted scholars and students from as far away as China, Greece, Indonesia and Persia. Over the more than 1500 years of its existence, the university's buildings were repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt, but finally abandoned around the time Oxford and Cambridge were established. The Nalanda ruins still occupy an area of about 14 hectares, about 80 kilometres southeast of Patna, the capital of Bihar.

Over the past five years, a group of scholars and educational entrepreneurs

have been working assiduously to resurrect the ancient Nalanda University. The new Nalanda University now has a board of governors which has begun detailed planning, and which meets regularly to develop its academic vision, based on a dream to revive the traditions of ancient India, articulating them in terms that are more relevant to the contemporary conditions. This is not an easy task, as it requires a commitment



Ruins of Nalanda University.

both to a Buddhist orientation to knowledge and to a range of cosmopolitan ideals.

The task of translating this complex dream into practice has been given to Gopa Sabharwal, a sociology professor at the prestigious Lady Shri Ram College. As its interim vice-chancellor, she has the responsibility not only of developing the university's administrative structure but also its academic culture. She has to raise a large sum of private money and appoint suitable academics to its faculties. And she has to do all this in a hurry, for the university has already announced its intention to take its first cohort of students of more than 800 in 2013.



Amartya Sen chairs a meeting of the Nalanda University mentor group, 2009. Photo: [YouBihar](#).

The plans to revive Nalanda University are clearly ambitious. They have been developed by a group of

mentors appointed by the Indian Government and drawn from around Asia—a group that is chaired by the Nobel Prize winner, Amartya Sen, and includes

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significant academic figures such as Lord Meghnad Desai, a former director of the London School of Economics, and George Yeo, a former foreign minister of Singapore. While the Central Government of India, which rushed through a Bill to establish the university, and the State Government of Bihar, which has donated its land, are highly supportive of the Nalanda project, they are contributing very little to its finances; less than \$25 million. Instead, a consortium led by Singapore Buddhist groups is attempting to raise \$500 million to build the new university and another \$500 million to develop necessary infrastructure.

The academic focus of Nalanda University has been identified, with plans to promote research and teach postgraduate courses in the schools: of Buddhist studies, Philosophy, and Comparative Religion; Historical Studies; International Relations and Peace; Business Management and Development; Languages and Literature; and Ecology and Environmental Studies. The focus is clearly on the humanities and the social sciences, with a commitment to attract students from around the world, modelling cross-cultural cooperation in education. The students will be encouraged to work on solutions to both local and global problems, but from a distinctively Asian perspective.

The notion of an 'Asian perspective' is central to the Nalanda dream: the new university is expected to embody and promote intellectual work that seeks to rediscover the cultural links that once existed across Asia. In this sense, the curriculum of the new Nalanda will be designed to problematise Eurocentric notions of knowledge inherited through various colonialisms.

According to Amartya Sen: 'As the project recaptures its past glory and élan, it will boost Asia's confidence in its intellectual

and academic capacities and dent the heavy reliance that exists today on Western universities like Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard for Asian scholars' professional credibility and recognition'. Its research programs will explore the ways in which Asia has contributed to the sum of human knowledge, and how it stands at the cusp of a new Asian century.



The significance of the Nalanda dream to India is enormous. India views the initiative as an expression of

its growing power within Asia and globally. Wishing to reassert its role as an intellectual leader within the region, India has convinced its neighbours, including China, of the importance of the Nalanda project for ushering in the new Asian century, and for defining Asia's emerging role in the world, and for imagining the revolutionary impact Asia could make on the shifting architecture of global higher education.

The Nalanda dream could thus be regarded as an experiment in regional cooperation—as a test in the ability of Asian countries to have constructive relationships with each other, to pool their individual strengths for the betterment of Asia as a whole and perhaps even the world beyond it.

India also views the possibilities of Nalanda as a strategy for energising reforms to its own vast and largely dysfunctional system of higher education. India is in the midst of a comprehensive program of reform of its universities, but has so far had little success.

The systemic problems are too entrenched, and there is little evidence that Indian universities are ready to rethink their curricular and pedagogic traditions to meet the requirements of

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the new global economy and the knowledge industries that are a major source of India's recent economic growth. Many of its academic structures remain unchanged from the days of the British colonialism, and even the new practices are largely a poor imitation of developments in the United States and Europe. The Nalanda dream is to challenge these traditions and forge an alternative vision of higher education that consists in a new postcolonial approach to the governance of Indian universities.

While Nalanda has received a great deal of international attention, in India itself, it has generated little enthusiasm within higher education circles and perhaps even among potential students.

The Nalanda dream is clearly ambitious. So what are its chances of success? The evidence so far suggests a poor prognosis. The university has been unable to attract outstanding academics, and while Nalanda has received a great deal of international attention, in India itself, it has generated little enthusiasm within higher education circles and perhaps even among potential students.



The location of the university in one of poorest parts of the country has made it unattractive to India's growing

cosmopolitan class. The appointment of the interim vice-chancellor has been politically controversial, with both her academic and administrative qualifications for the position questioned. The global financial crisis has hit the university's ability to raise the money it needs to build the campus and its academic infrastructure.

It is clear then that, while Nalanda is a dream worth having, as a breakaway from the Anglo-European models of higher education and as an expression of a confident new regionalism in Asia it is likely to represent at best a small boutique experiment, which is neither able to define a new kind of Asian modernity nor steer reforms to the Indian system of higher education. For that more radical ideas are needed.



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Beyond strategic rivalry: India and China's increasingly complex relationship

Setting India and China up as great power rivals ignores the increasingly complex relationship developing between the two countries, writes LOUISE MERRINGTON.

It has lately become increasingly popular to set China and India up as 'great power rivals', taking strategic posturing in the Indian Ocean and continuing friction over relations with Pakistan and Burma as evidence that rivalry remains the driving force in the Sino-Indian relationship.

This characterisation, of course, is not new—ever since the 1962 Sino-Indian War, rivalry and conflict have been the major prisms through which the relationship has been viewed, and the continuing border dispute remains a bone of contention between the two.

Yet although strategic rivalry—whether political, economic or military—remains an important factor in China-India relations, the danger of focusing on this aspect to the exclusion of all else is that it ignores the increasingly complex relationship developing between the two countries, particularly in a global governance context, where elements of cooperation and collaboration are beginning to reshape the way international organisations conduct themselves.

At present this cooperation appears to be on a purely ad hoc basis, and is generally only occurring in organisations associated with less controversial issues, such as trade, development or climate change, as opposed to those dealing with more realpolitik issues, such as the Nuclear Suppliers' Group. However, its affect both on the Sino-Indian relationship and wider global governance should not be underestimated.

The most prominent episode of Sino-Indian cooperation in recent years occurred at the 2009 United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen. The Copenhagen summit facilitated a level of cooperation between China and India similar to that seen in the 2008 World Trade Organization Doha Development Round of trade talks, yet paradoxically it occurred when tensions between the two countries along the disputed border were particularly high.

In Copenhagen both countries were adamant that they would not agree to talks continuing outside the UN and Kyoto Protocol framework—for example, in the G20 as proposed by the United States—and at one stage, along with Brazil and South Africa, walked out of the summit's ministerial-level negotiations for an accord, causing formal talks to be put on hold for a time.



The four BASIC countries—
Brazil, South

Africa, India and China—prepared a draft of proposals for the conference to counter those put forward by the developed nations, which they felt were trying to take over the conference agenda. Although these moves were made under the banner of developing nations as a whole, the cooperation between India and China in particular signalled a change in the way international multilateral negotiations are likely to play out in the future. The next major test in this context will likely come at the next UN Climate Change Conference, scheduled for 28 November–9 December 2011. This summit will be particularly important as it is tasked with securing an international climate change

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agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol, the first commitment period of which is due to expire in 2012. It will be interesting to see whether China and India again decide to join together as developing nations or whether they will see it as more advantageous to pursue their own agendas.



Although China and India are increasingly cooperating in certain areas, such as occurred at Copenhagen, this

goodwill has not yet extended into the realpolitik sphere, meaning that there is still considerable tension between the two on issues such as UN Security Council reform and nuclear non-proliferation. This can be seen in the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG), where India's trading exemption to allow the Indo-US nuclear deal to proceed significantly ruffled Chinese feathers.

Chinese and Indian wrangling in the NSG looks set to continue, with India applying for membership at the most recent meeting in June 2011. China has made it clear that it will not support India's bid, and has further complicated matters by announcing its sale of two civilian nuclear reactors to Pakistan, outside the auspices of the NSG.

This indirect but important Sino-Indian rivalry can be seen to have its roots in the same issues as the direct rivalry in South Asia and along the disputed border—namely the problematic relationships between India, Pakistan and China (and to a certain extent the US). It is also an example of how, although China and India are able to cooperate in certain international institutions and have convergent interests on 'softer' issues such as trade and climate change, when it comes to strategic interests rivalry is still the main form of interaction.

Because of their sheer size and potential power, having China and India too closely united could spell trouble for the US-led international order.

The interesting question will be whether the growing complexity and interconnectedness of the two countries' interests will lead to greater cooperation, or conversely erode their fragile common ground and lead them back into conflict.

On the one hand, the fact that China and India are able to work well together in global governance institutions and forums is very positive, as conflict would be problematic for all concerned. On the other, however, the roots of this cooperation can often be found in their common ground as developing nations and a desire to stand up for developing countries against the West; this is particularly true on issues such as climate change and trade.

Because of their sheer size and potential power, which is growing ever stronger, having China and India too closely united could spell trouble for the US-led international order, or at least make pushing a particular Western agenda more difficult; though whether this will lead to the fulfilment of China and India's aim of greater equality for developing countries in global governance or just destabilise the international system is difficult to predict.

At this stage, however, China and India's cooperation is still confined to a specific set of interests, and inevitably requires compromise by one or both parties; it is still a long way from the 'harmony' evident in other international relationships such as between the US and Britain. The fact that Sino-Indian cooperation in global governance is based to a certain extent on developing-world unity against the West makes it weak. If

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the common enemy is removed there will be little to hold it together, and their differences at local and regional levels may begin to bleed over into the international arena.

The other issue is one of asymmetrical development—if China continues to develop faster than India it is likely their interests, even in global governance institutions, will begin to diverge significantly. At present Sino-Indian cooperation remains ad hoc, relatively weak and limited to issues that do not have a strong military or traditional security dimension.

The interesting question will be whether the growing complexity and interconnectedness of the two countries' interests will lead to greater cooperation, or conversely erode their fragile common ground and lead them back into conflict. What is certain, however, is that to reduce the Sino-Indian relationship to one of simple rivalry is to ignore many of the subtleties and potential pitfalls that will have a profound effect on the international system over the coming decades.



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Preparing for the caliphate

A marginal Islamic party in Indonesia is exerting political influence disproportionate to its size.

MOHAMED NAWAB BIN MOHAMED OSMAN reports.

On 12 August, one of the largest Muslim congregations was held in Indonesia. An estimated 80 000 to 100 000 Muslims convened in Jakarta to pledge their support for the revival of the Islamic caliphate, a superstate encompassing all Muslim countries, and for the implementation of Islamic laws in Indonesia.

The event was addressed by prominent Indonesian leaders, including Kiyai Abdullah Gymnastier, a popular Islamic preacher, and Professor Din Syamsuddin, leader of *Muhammadiyah*, and was organised by Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI).

HTI is the Indonesian chapter of Hizbut Tahrir (HT), a global party whose primary aim is to revive the Islamic caliphate. HT was founded in Jerusalem in early 1953 by the Palestinian intellectual and jurist Taqiuddin an-Nabhani.

Before becoming a judge in Jordan, an-Nabhani trained in law at Al-Azhar University, Cairo. A sympathiser of the Muslim Brotherhood, An-Nabhani was influenced by its thinking on the completeness of Islam as a sociopolitical and economic system. He was also a profound thinker who developed practical blueprints for social, political and economic systems of Islam.

An-Nabhani rejected many Western-inspired political concepts such as secularism, democracy and capitalism, identifying them as the cause of the decline of the Muslim world. Despite being a political party, HT often refrains

from contesting elections so as not to give legitimacy to democracy. After An-Nabhani's death in 1977, the party's leadership shifted to Abdul Qadim Zalloum, and later to Ata Khalil Abu-Rashta (in 1994), both of Palestinian origin.

Today, HT is believed to have branches in more than 53 countries and is banned in many Muslim countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia. In recent years, its chapters in the Asia-Pacific have become increasingly prominent.¹ Of these, HTI is one of the most important.

HT has been active in Indonesia since 1982, when an Australian HT activist of Lebanese descent, Abdurrahman Al-Baghdadi, decided to follow Abdullah bin Nuh, a popular Islamic scholar of Arab descent, back to Indonesia to propagate HT's teachings. Using Nuh's Islamic school in Bogor as his centre, Baghdadi began to spread HT's teachings at campuses and mosques in Bogor, and subsequently to the rest of Indonesia.

At this stage the movement operated clandestinely because of the authoritarian nature of the Suharto regime. Only after Suharto's downfall in 1998 did HTI begin operating publicly. In May 2000, the party held an international conference in Jakarta under the HT banner.

Since 2000, HTI's membership and profile have grown rapidly. It has branches in all Indonesian provinces and prints one million copies weekly of its bulletin *Al-Islam*. A former party leader confirmed that in 2008 membership reached 30 000, with 150 000 supporters.

HTI should be examined for several reasons. First, the movement seems to have grown rapidly in numbers and influence over a short period. At the party's launch in 2000, only 5000 people attended but between 80 000 and 100 000 people attended the caliphate conference organised by the party

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in 2007. the party's launch in 2000, only 5000 people attended but between 80 000 and 100 000 people attended the caliphate conference organised by the party in 2007. While most of the conference attendees were not party members, it demonstrated HTI's ability to galvanise support among Indonesian Muslims.

Since its emergence, HTI's political influence has also increased progressively. Its lobbying is over the issue of the banning of *Ahmadiyahs*. It has also manipulated not only the government but other Islamic groups such as the Indonesian Ulama Council (Majlis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) and the Badan Koordinasi Penganut Aliran Kepercayaan Masyarakat (Bakorpakem, Coordinating Agency For the Overseeing of People's Beliefs) to push for the banning of the *Ahmadiyahs*.

Yet, despite HTI having the image of a radical Islamist group, prominent national and military leaders are willing to attend and participate in its events. Speakers at party events include former Health Minister Siti Fadilah Supari, former Youth and Sports Minister, Adyaksa Dault and Ryamizard Ryacudu, former army chief of staff.²

Second, HTI is perhaps one of the few, if not the only, Islamist groups in Indonesia that is transnational and controlled by a leadership based in the Middle East. The party takes direct orders from this leadership, and even HTI's local leaders must be approved by HT, which can also sack HTI members and leaders if it deems them to have gone against HT's procedures and regulations.

A representative of the HT leadership is sent to Indonesia every three months to assess HTI's growth and ensure that its activities and policies are in line with HT's larger goals. HTI has stated categorically that it seeks to overthrow the

government through a 'peaceful' coup in order to establish a caliphate state in Indonesia. That the Indonesian Government tolerates such a group is perhaps an indication of the HTI's political positioning and strong relationships with powerbrokers in the country.

Third, HTI's existence and growth might seem odd given that the party opposes many aspects of Indonesian political culture. The party rejects democracy and capitalism as concepts contravening Islamic laws. Several surveys conducted in Indonesia have shown that, in general, Indonesians believe in the ideals of democracy and capitalism.³

To add to the confusion, HTI seems to be attracting large numbers of Muslim professionals who work in multinational companies and are part of Indonesian capitalism. Many of HTI's activities are held in the 'golden triangle' area of Jakarta, which houses most of the global financial institutions and is seen as the epicentre of Indonesian capitalism. In general, Indonesians are not known to identify closely with transnational Islamic objectives such as the revival of the Islamic caliphate. This makes for an interesting enquiry into HTI's existence and growth.

Several factors could explain HTI's growth, which is part of the proliferation of Islamist groups that has followed the collapse of the Suharto's New Order regime. During the New Order, Islamist groups were suppressed and could not openly recruit, declare their objectives or organise activities. Many of them, including HTI, operated clandestinely.

With the collapse of the regime, these Islamist groups used the new, open political system to launch collective action against the state. Similarly, HTI emerged in 2000, after the 1999 elections, when the party's leadership in Indonesia and the Middle East became convinced that the open political system was likely to be

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permanent. The party has also been adept at recruitment and mobilisation. Beyond publications, seminars and talks, it has used formal organisations such as its student wing, *Gema Pembebasan* (Cry of Freedom) and its women's wing to target specific constituents for its cause. Party leaders and members have also involved themselves in mosques committees and have joined more established Islamic organisations such as MUI.

HTI has also established networks comprising Islamist organisations such as the Forum Ummat Islam (Muslim Community Forum, FUI), an umbrella organisation encompassing most of the main Islamist movements in Indonesia. Until 2008, the FUI was led by an HTI leader. So the party is not only able to recruit new members but also exert political influence disproportionate to its size.

The last, and perhaps most important, reason for HTI's growth is the popularity of its version of the Islamist ideology. Ideology has played a major role in retaining members and differentiating the party from other Islamist movements. Members are often indoctrinated with the beliefs that it is their religious obligation to re-establish the caliphate and implement Islamic laws in Indonesia.

From the perspective of its ideology, a failure to re-establish the caliphate would result in members sinning in the eyes of God. Members have noted that, unlike mainstream Islamic organisations such as NU and *Muhammadiyah*, which lack a clear ideology, HTI not only offers a clear ideology, but also a detailed plan on how it can be implemented when the caliphate state is established. The party seems to have also benefited from divisions within mainstream Islamic political parties, such as the Prosperity Justice Party, whose conservative members are joining HTI because they perceive it as having a more

pristine Islamist ideology, untainted by the realities of electoral politics.

HTI is likely to grow in strength in the short term. In the long run, however, its fate will depend on whether it will compromise its ideals while jockeying for political power in a country where political compromises are the rule. Such a scenario would have severe ramifications for HTI and may result in fractures within its ranks.

On the other hand, HTI's success would be a catalyst for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, which would then cease to be merely a romantic idea of a marginal Islamic party.

References

1. For details of its HTI's chapters in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, see Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, 'Reviving the Caliphate in Malaysia', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 32, 7 (July 2009): pp. 646–663; 'Transnational network of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia', in *Southeast Asia Research*, 18, 4 (Dec 2010): 735–755 and 'Reviving the caliphate in the Nusantara: Hizbut Tahrir and its mobilization strategy in Indonesia', in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22, 4 (Oct 2010): 601–622
2. See International Crisis Group, *Implications of the Ahmadiyah decree*, ICG Asia Briefing No.78 Jakarta/Brussels, 7 July 2008.
3. An example of this is the survey conducted by the Indonesian Survey Bureau in May 2006, which saw 72 per cent of correspondents agreeing that democracy is the best way of governance.



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Re-reading the *Mahābhārata*

South Asia's most successful cultural product, the Mahābhārata, may provide a model for an incipient South Asia 'community', writes ADAM BOWLES.

Some years ago when working on a section in the *Mahābhārata's* 12th book (the *Śāntiparvan*), I came across one of the epic's many minor stories which, as is often the case with such tales, has received little scholarly attention.

This particular tale concerns an individual named Kāpavya, who is described as a *dasyu* and a *niṣāda* living in the forests of the Pāriyātra ranges, situated at the southern margins of the 'civilised' realms of the events depicted in the *Mahābhārata*, which centre on the Gaṅgā/Yamunā *doab* (tract of land lying between two confluent rivers).

This triumvirate of designations establishes that Kāpavya is a marginal figure—geographically, occupationally and in terms of lawful lifestyle (*dasyus* are frequently depicted as marauding bandits)—in respect of the values typically expressed in the *Mahābhārata* and related Sanskrit literatures.

Yet, the tale takes an unusual turn. Kāpavya, as it turns out, is a noble figure, certainly by the standards of the criminal (*nirmaryāda*—law and boundary defining) *dasyus* who elect him as their leader. Kāpavya is a model, of sorts, of *dharmic* behaviour. Indeed, towards the end of the tale, its central moral is epitomised with the remark that even *dasyus* can obtain 'perfection' (*siddhi*) if they live by the law books (*dharmasāstra*).

A more typical depiction of the *dasyu* is found only two chapters earlier in the same section of the *Mahābhārata*. In this case, the lawless *dasyus* create for the king both a political opportunity and an

administrative problem. The *dasyu*, being prone to marauding debauchery and capable of 'fearsome deeds', is particularly useful to the king who, when in crisis, seeks refuge in the forest. The



Mahabharata sculpture on Vira-Nazrayam temple at Belul.

fact that ordinary people tremble before the 'lawless' *dasyus* makes them valuable mercenaries for the king who wants to resume his political office. Yet, once the king has succeeded in recovering his position, the *dasyu* must once again be controlled, and the 'law' (*maryādā*) must once again be applied to the bandits. A king, indeed, is measured by his ability to keep such people in check.

The *dasyu* clearly remains a marginal figure in each of these tales. Yet, in each the *dasyu* is also integrated, to a greater or lesser degree, into the sociocultural matrix of the brahmanic civilisation imagined within the *Mahābhārata*. If, in the second tale, this is merely expressed through the realpolitisch manipulations of the politically astute (but weakened) king, in the first a potentially more radical proposition is posed: the geographically and culturally marginal figure is accommodated within the customary codes (*dharma*) promoted by the political and cultural elite; and, concomitantly, the codes themselves are opened and expanded to enable the accommodation to take place at all.

The two tales are marked by a suggestive distinction in their lexical registers. In the former, the *dasyu* is imagined (somewhat radically) as capable of following *dharma*, and thereby participating in the sociocultural codes emanating out of the cultural heartland. In the second the *dasyu* has no *dharma*, but is nevertheless subject to law as indicated by another term, *maryādā*. The full significance of these lexical registers has yet to be explained. Nor is the precise set of cultural and social values evoked by

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the term *dasyu* entirely evident. Yet, these interpretive problems aside, the tales provoke much else to think about, too.

Scholarly work on the *Mahābhārata* has often observed that the epic projects a broad ideological argument for particular civilisational values. Broadly speaking, these values on the one hand sanction the stratified and Brahmin-centric model of society reflected in texts like the *Laws of Manu*, and on the other hand absorb and modify ideologies that emerged out of what are broadly termed the 'ascetic traditions'. (Indeed, one of the many achievements of the *Mahābhārata* is that it articulates a number of ways of accommodating these often contradictory ideological streams.)

However, it has been less well recognised that—as with the tales introduced above—the *Mahābhārata* frequently couples its ideological aspirations with narratives depicting a vibrant cultural matrix incorporating participants plumbing the depths and spanning the breadth of the 'South Asian' region of its time.

The conundrum of these two countervailing aspects of the model of society imagined within the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* underpins a research project that I am developing. The project sets out to analyse the tropes of domination and inclusion woven through the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in order to dissect its representation of two broad tendencies:

1. The social and political domination reflected implicitly in the hegemonic project of the Brahminic ideology of the *Mahābhārata* and explicitly in the narrative of the great war of the Bhāratas that forms the heart of the *Mahābhārata's* narrative.

2. The inclusiveness implicit and explicit in the networks of alliances between the geographically diverse participants in the war, and the role played by minor characters and marginal social groups, in particular their interactions with the geopolitical 'centre' as articulated through the key feuding Bhārata clans of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas.

The analysis will focus on three dimensions. The first will explore the portrayal of individuals and groups in relation to those considered to be at the cultural core of the *Mahābhārata* to better understand how it represents collective identities cutting across geographic, social and cultural divides. Included in this analysis will be cultural 'outsiders', such as the *dasyus* discussed above, but also those depicted as barbarians (*mleccha*) and of low status (e.g. *caṇḍālas*), and their relationships to cultural 'insiders' and the normative ideas (such as *dharma*) with which these insiders are closely identified.

Other analyses will take in geographically remote peoples (often depicted as 'nations' recruited to fight in the *Mahābhārata* war), and the alliances forged through marriages in the central families, which often establish connections between the centre and the peripheries of the Brahminically conceived world. How are such groups incorporated or excluded from broader political and cultural configurations? What conditions their inclusion or exclusion?

The second dimension will analyse key terms that suggest political notions of empire—such as *samrāj*, *cakravartin*, *adhirājya*—and compare them to their use in other contemporary literary contexts, such as the *Arthasāstra* (a political treatise dating from approx. 150BCE), the *dharma* literature containing authoritative norms for sociocultural behaviour), Buddhist literature and

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epigraphy. It is often assumed or argued that the *Mahābhārata* was composed as a response to imperial formations of one kind or another, yet this has not led to a thorough comparative analysis of the key terms at stake. However, as others have noted, it is of unquestionable interest that ideas implying and narratives depicting heavily centralised political structures developed in historical contexts generally regarded as being politically fractured.

Finally, a comparative analysis will be undertaken of two distinct ways of depicting geographic space, each of which implies a different conception of pan-regionalism. The first of these are the pilgrimage routes (*tīrthayātrās*) represented in the *Mahābhārata*, which make of the earth a series of interconnected sacred sites that together structure the sacred territory of Bhārata.

In India and in Southeast Asia, no one ever reads the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* for the first time.

The second are the narratives of conquest (*digvijayas*), undertaken by triumphant rulers, which conceive the earth as a collection of geopolitical spaces to be conquered and subsequently controlled for resources (military forces, tribute, prestige).

What does a comparison of these two notions reveal of an incipient South Asian pan-regionalism? How does the cultural continuity implied in a series of connected pilgrimage sites relate to the ruptures implied in geographic conquest? And how do both these ways of imagining territory relate to other culturally significant ideas and cultural movements, such as the geopolitical notions of *āryāvarta*, *brahmāvarta* and *Bhāratavarṣa*, the

historical movement of peoples propagating Sanskritic culture and the growth of alternative and overlapping sacred centres of other contemporary South Asian religions?

Arguably, the *Mahābhārata* has been South Asia's most successful cultural product. AK Ramanujan has famously remarked, 'in India and in Southeast Asia, no one ever reads the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* for the first time'.¹

An explanation of the *Mahābhārata*'s remarkable success must surely have many facets—not the least of its achievements being its projection of a discourse that has had pan-South Asian appeal, despite its narrative plot being primarily located on the northern plains of India, and despite its discourse being overtly brahminical and elitist in origin and aspiration.

In reflecting on the ways in which the *Mahābhārata* cuts through and overlays its elitism with narratives suggesting a broader corporate agenda, ways open up to think of it as a setting for articulations of an incipient 'South Asian community'.

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Getting in tune with Western musical influences

After spending some years in Thailand, mostly as a performing musician in hotels, JOHN GARZOLI returns to Bangkok to take a more serious look at Western influences on Thai music.

Ethnomusicology is the study of music in culture, or as one theoretician observed, ‘the study of music and culture’. Another theoretician termed ethnomusicology as ‘music as culture’.

Whatever the definition, the general aims of ethnomusicology are to study the theoretical trinity: musical content, musical behaviour and musical context. This theoretical orientation is attractive because of its potential to provide a comprehensive suite of tools to study the major features, characteristics and elements of music, and because it gives researchers the means to inquire into the objective, subjective and intersubjective aspects of musical performance and consumption.

The objective elements of music can include pitch frequencies and intervallic ratios of tuning systems, instrument materials and construction, general principles of musical organisation, and some musical analysis. The subjective aspects can include the personal history and aesthetic orientations of individual performers, while the intersubjective perspective—the most favoured by ethnomusicologists in recent years—includes the functions of music in a community or society, such as rites of passage or other rituals, worship or community bonding.

Despite the apparent strengths, and perhaps even the obvious simplicity of using these three perspectives, ethnomusicologists cannot agree on how



John Garzoli with renowned Isaan musician Thongsai Thapthanon (middle), and founding member of the Isaan jazz band 'Boonhugsa' Warong Boonaree.

music can or should be understood. This, to me, indicates the depth and richness of musical meanings and that the many ways that we attach ourselves to these meanings are extremely illusory and difficult to understand clearly or objectively.

My research, into musical hybridity and, in particular, improvisation in the contemporary Thai musical landscape, has identified three types of new hybrid subgenres. The first combines elements and practices of Thai classical music with elements of jazz; the second combines musical elements and practices of Isaan—the northeastern region of Thailand, which has an indigenous type of folk music (*mor lam*)—with jazz; and the third incorporates the jazz concept of improvisation as a personally expressive medium into the context of a Thai classical ensemble, where improvisation already occurs but its practice is governed by strict conditions.

One aspect of my research relates to how musicians participating in these projects overcome apparent obstacles to combining dissimilar musical elements. Thai classical music, for example, has a scale based on a different set of theoretical proportions to a Western scale. How, for example, do musicians deal with the ‘out-of-tuneness’ that arises when a traditional Thai instrument like the *ranad* (xylophone) is combined with a Western-tuned keyboard? The standard solution has been to retune the *ranad* to

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the Western scale. This, however, carries a cost, and the practice is regarded by some as an unsatisfactory compromise. Some Thai musicians have indicated that they wish to preserve the Thai identity of their instruments, and believe that this identity is potentially undermined when changes are made to instrument tuning. When a *ranad* is tuned to a Western scale it sounds very similar to—and for many listeners, indistinguishable from—a Western xylophone, and loses its Thai-ness, according to musicians I have spoken to.

My research is looking at the particular musical features that distinguish the musical traditions participating in or contributing to this new music. It is also exploring the motives of Thai musicians who become involved in these musical developments, and the range of musical and cultural obstacles to musical hybridity in Thailand.

Musical hybridity has been a feature of Thai music for many years. Early musical fusions involved Thai military bands adapting Thai melodies to Western musical instruments and harmonic contexts. Early Thai pop music—a musical style called *luk krung*, or child of the city—contains musical elements of Thai classical and folk music, and Western popular and classical music, including Latin-based rhythms.

Contemporary Thai musicians from a variety of musical backgrounds are collaborating in fusion music projects and experimenting with new ways of combining musical elements from different sources. My research has revealed an active culture of musical experimentation of this type, and I have encountered musicians from most of the major musical traditions who are

interested or active in a fusion project. Thai television programs regularly feature musical fusion performances and some Thai universities are also involved in musical fusion.

Because of my background and interest in jazz and improvisation, I have limited my study to include only musicians and music that feature improvisation as an important expressive feature of the musical activity.

My own musical background and interests had provided me with a unique preparation to undertake such a research project.

Between 1996 and 2006 I worked for some years in Thailand as a musician in hotels and gave the occasional guitar concert or workshop for the Australian Embassy or other institutions. I played classical and baroque music, jazz, Bossa Nova, songs composed by the King of Thailand, and various other works. I performed as a soloist and with my own bands. I also taught guitar for three years at the International School of Bangkok.

While there I met and developed musical relationships and friendships with many Thai musicians, some of whom have since achieved commercial success, but it did not occur to me at the time that these musicians might be involved in my future academic work. It was only after I returned to Australia that I found, to my surprise, that some of my former musical colleagues were active in fusion music.

My interest in Thai fusion music evolved slowly and took shape as I realised that my experiences in Thailand and my own musical background and interests had provided me with a unique preparation to undertake such a research project. With the assistance of a Prime Minister's Asia Endeavour Award, I returned to Thailand

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in July this year as a visiting researcher in the Music and Culture Research Unit at Chulalongkorn University. My research has taken me to Chiang Mai, and to Ubon Ratchathani, in the north-east, to conduct interviews and attend and record musical performances.

I have been invited to participate in a number of musical projects, including a TV show. I attended the 11th International Conference on Thai Studies and I have contributed to a paper on southern Thai *Sila*—the music played during *silat* martial arts performances. My earlier contact with Thai musicians has also given me access to new musicians and places that might otherwise have been difficult to obtain. Since returning to Thailand I have gathered a large amount of information, and have been delighted to corroborate some of my earlier hypotheses and speculations about music in Thailand.

Combining dissimilar tuning systems, while contentious among Thai musicians, is not such a problem when instrumental music from Isaan is combined with Western music. Early data suggests that musicians consider the expressive opportunities available in these fusions are an important factor in their ongoing participation in such music.



John Garzoli is a PhD candidate at Monash University, where he is completing his degree in ethnomusicology with the assistance of a Prime Minister's Asia Endeavour Award.

PhD scholarship: political representation in Southeast Asia

A fully funded three-year PhD scholarship is available to work under the supervision of Australian Professorial Fellow Garry Rodan, who is undertaking a five-year project entitled 'Representation and Political Regimes in Southeast Asia,' funded by the Australian Research Council.



Applications are invited for candidates with similar or complementary

research interests. These interests can be pursued through study of one or more political regime in Southeast Asia. Projects may be dedicated to the study of formal or informal political institutions of political representation; and can be focused on democratic and/or non-democratic ideologies of political representation.

The successful candidate will be based at Murdoch University's Asia Research Centre in Perth, Australia. The three-year scholarship carries an annual stipend of \$27 222 plus fieldwork and conference attendance support.

Please forward expressions of interest or enquiries to Professor Garry Rodan G.Rodan@murdoch.edu.au. Expressions of interest should include completion of the Asia Research Centre's thesis proposal form and a current curriculum vita. These can be submitted up to 15 October 2011.

The successful candidate can take up the scholarship from as early as late 2011 and would be expected to start no later than May 2012.

The musical arts of Sumatra in their historical and cultural contexts'

MARGARET KARTOMI discusses her forthcoming book, and why she was compelled to write it

Despite Sumatra being the sixth largest island in the world and home to an estimated 44 million Indonesians, its musical arts and cultures have not been the subject of a book-length study until now.

My prime motivation for writing *Musical Journeys in Sumatra* was to document the Sumatran musical arts for its young people and for scholars present and future, and for all those interested in Indonesia and Asia more generally. In the 21st century many young Sumatrans have grown up in a different milieu from their parents, and a very different world from their grandparents.

In Sumatra, the musical arts, or performing arts containing music, include vocal, instrumental and body percussive music, the dance and other body movement, the art of self-defence, the bardic arts and the musical theatre. They also include the artistic genres performed during religious rituals and processions, and the adaptations of traditional genres performed on government and commercial occasions, during artistic tours and missions, and on the media.

I began my musical journeys in Sumatra with my husband, Hidris Kartomi, in 1971. Since then we have undertaken 30 more field trips throughout Sumatra's 10 provinces and some of its offshore islands. I wrote the book out of gratitude and responsibility to the thousands of artists and art administrators who allowed me to record or video their beautiful performances and explained the intricacies of their music to me.

While the book aims to document and explain the ethnographic, cultural and historical contexts of Sumatra's performing arts, it also traces some of the changes in their style, content and reception from the early 1970s. Beginning in the province of West Sumatra, the book discusses the performing arts of the



A troupe of male *rapa'i geleng* performers at a tourist promotion performance in Meulaboh, Aceh, 2010.

Minangkabau hinterland and coastal areas. It then moves to the Indragiri Hilir and Suku Mamak Malay subgroups in the province of Riau,

south to some upstream and downstream Malay and Komerling subgroups in South Sumatra and three Malay and two Chinese Indonesian subgroups on the offshore island of Bangka, which has been part of a separate province since 2000.

The chapters then move north to the Mandailing Bataks and west coast Malays in the province of North Sumatra, and finally to the western and northern Acehese in the province of Aceh, on Sumatra's northernmost tip. Various themes run through the chapters, including identity, rituals and ceremonies, religion, the impact of foreign contact on the performing arts, musical instruments, variability of musical pitch, tempo and rhythm, dances and music-dance relationships, social class, gender issues and arts education.

The historical approach is influenced by Leonard Andaya's 2008 theory of the early nascent ethnicisation of the Malays,

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Minangkabau, Acehnese and Batak peoples, and the economic and political advantages flowing between Sumatra's coastal kingdoms and Arabia, India, China and Europe over the centuries. For example, the musical identity of various provinces and some musicolingual groups within them are analysed, including in the period since Indonesia declared its Independence in 1945, and especially since the implementation of its decentralisation policy after Suharto's downfall in 1998.

The book also deals extensively with rituals and ceremonies within rituals, both in traditional celebrations such as weddings and boys' circumcision ceremonies, and performances at national, regional or local events, including election campaigns and other occasions that require displays of local identity. The role of dress, musical instruments and traditional customs (*adat*) form part of the analysis.

Religion is also central, including indigenous religions or cosmologies, (*kepercayaan asli* 'traditional beliefs,' *animisme* 'animism') and Islam, which are intimately related to many of the performing arts practised by members of Sumatra's musicolingual groups. The book deals mainly with indigenous religious and Muslim communities, referring briefly to a few Christian villages in upstream South Sumatra and to some Confucian communities belonging to the Peranakan Chinese minorities on the island of Bangka.

The book investigates some of the results of foreign contact, including contact with China, Persia and Arabia, India, Java, the Malay world (including the Malay Peninsula and west Kalimantan), mainland Southeast Asia, Europe, and in recent decades America, all of which has impacted significantly on the music, dance

and theatre of various parts of the island. Chinese contact is probably the oldest, and although most of the specific artistic influences have long since been absorbed into indigenous culture, some clear signs remain—for example, many Sumatran



A variant of *Ratèb meuseukat* dance performed in the Rumoh Puteh (built 1924) in Desa Gelanggang Gajah, Kecamatan Kuala Batee, ABDYA, Aceh, in 2007. Leader: Ibu Nurhayati.

myths and legends mention links with Chinese emperors and princesses, and Chinese musical instruments are included in the Palembang Palace's ensembles.

Some instances of artistic Perso–Arabic and Indian contact are detailed, for example, the transplantation of *zapin* dance and music from the Hadhramaut/Yemen, the adoption of the *tabut* arts and the *Dul Muluk* theatre from North India, Iran and Iraq, and contact with Europe and America as documented in the Malay-Riau *mendu* and the formerly popular *bangsawan* and *Dulmuluk* theatre forms along the east coast.

Sumatra's wealth of musical instruments and ensembles played by men and women are also described in relation to the ideologies behind particular performance practices and traditions. Most traditional Sumatran–Malay instrumental ensembles consist of drums, a vocal and/or melodic instrument (a flute, oboe or bowed string instrument), and an optional pair of thick-rimmed gongs, which are played to accompany a vocalist, and social dancing at rituals and celebrations. The further north one goes, the fewer gongs one finds, but even in Aceh the main drum and oboe ensemble may include a small gong. Since dance performances in

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Sumatra are normally accompanied by music, dance is discussed at length. However, the analysis of the dances focuses on their relationships with the music, myths, legends, and performance contexts rather than the syntactic details of dance design, floor plans and movements, for which specialist choreological research is needed.

Some dances that are performed to welcome guests or facilitate the social mixing of the sexes are associated with indigenous religious rituals, while others express an Islamic (*Islami*) devotional content or are perceived as having an Islamic musical flavour (*yang bernafaskan Islam*). A few other forms of music and dance were introduced by colonial European powers and adapted to local conditions, while, from the late 1960s, many traditional forms have been affected stylistically by other Southeast Asian, European and American genres shown on the media.

The music and dance of the various social classes and their changing status from the early first millennium CE to the present are discussed in the context of foreign contact but also as affected by politics in the 20th century, including under Sukarno, when leftist art organisations promoted some of the performing art forms of the working class and peasantry.

In colonial times a racially-based class structure prevailed, with the highest echelon comprising Europeans, the second rung 'foreign Orientals' consisting mainly of Indonesian Chinese, and the bottom rung reserved for the 'natives' (*pribumi*), who ranged from aristocrats through the peasantry and working class (plantation and mining

From the late 1960s, many traditional forms have been affected stylistically by other Southeast Asian, European and American genres shown on the media.

workers) to the forest- and sea-dwelling groups. The artistic implications of the changing class structures are, of course, distinct from those of the divisions between the musico-lingual groups and subgroups, even in the Suharto and post-Suharto years.

The book explores the roles of women and men in rituals and artistic creativity, including the social rules, customs and breaks from tradition governing their interaction, which vary from subgroup to subgroup. In some communities, for example, the Lahat area of South Sumatra, mixed couples are allowed to dance together at chaperoned celebrations if they are still single.

In the former east and west coast kingdoms, male and female artists are not normally allowed to mix, though the young unmarried women may sing and dance together while men of any age play the musical instruments. In some parts of Minangkabau, groups of married and single women traditionally play the *talempong* gong-chime ensembles, either in sitting position or standing position in processions, while in other areas only groups of men play.

Finally, the book addresses some aspects of performing arts education, which is a largely unresearched area. Traditionally children learned to sing, dance and play instruments informally by observing adult artists as they rehearsed and performed at ceremonies, while children who showed special talent were usually given special teaching and opportunities to perform in the group.

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The musical arts of Sumatra

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I have begun to document the recent changes in meaning and significance of music and dance teaching and the repertory of semi-professional and professional music and dance troupes, and the pioneering and continuing contributions of Sumatra's tertiary educational arts institutions.

Possibly many will not recognise all of the performing arts described and interpreted in this book. Yet I hope it will provide this and future generations with a heightened awareness and knowledge of their great artistic heritage.

If the book is followed up by their critical comments on my understandings of its topics, and by publication of other detailed studies of Sumatra's musical arts, then I shall feel that my field trips spanning nearly 40 years and the archiving and interpreting of the resulting corpus of materials will have been entirely worthwhile.

Reference

Leonard V Andaya 2008, *Leaves of the same tree: trade and ethnicity in the Straits of Malacca*, OUP.



Margaret Kartomi is a specialist on the ethnomusicology of Indonesia and Southeast Asia and the world authority on the music of Sumatra. Her new book

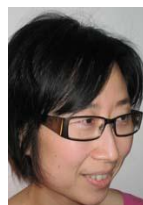
Musical journeys in Sumatra is forthcoming from the University of Illinois Press.



Yellow future: oriental style in Hollywood cinema. . By Jane Park, 255 pages, University of Minnesota Press, 2010, US\$25.

Yellow Future examines the emergence and popularity of techno-oriental representations in Hollywood cinema since the 1980s, focusing on the ways East Asian peoples and places have become linked with technology to produce a collective fantasy of East Asia as the future. Jane Chi Hyun Park, from the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies, University of Sydney, demonstrates how this fantasy is sustained through imagery, iconography, and performance that conflate East Asia with technology, constituting what Park calls oriental style. (See [Asian Currents](#), November 2010: From Charlie Chan to the Karate Kid—changing perceptions of oriental style).

Park provides a genealogy of oriental style through contextualised readings of popular films—from the multicultural city



in Blade runner and the Japanese American mentor in *The Karate Kid* to the Afro-Asian reworking of the buddy genre in *Rush hour* and the mixed-race hero in *The Matrix*.

Throughout these analyses she shows how references to the Orient have marked important changes in American popular attitudes toward East Asia in the past 30 years, from abjection to celebration, invisibility to hypervisibility.

The book will be launched by Professor Meghan Morris at [Gleebooks](#), Sydney, on 7 October 2011.

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Contributions, commentary and responses on any area of Asian Studies are welcome and should be emailed to asiancurrents@gmail.com. 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. Contributions, commentary and responses on any area of Asian Studies are welcome and should be emailed to asiancurrents@gmail.com.

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.comminet.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

'Sixty years of Anthropology at ANU: contesting Anthropology's Futures', international conference, 26–28 September 2011, Coombs precinct, Australian National University. See [website](#).

'Living histories' 2011 interview series, Japan Foundation of Sydney, Multipurpose Room, Shop 23, level 1, Chifley Plaza, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney. 28 September, Father Paul Glynn.

Asian Art Institute of Australia exhibitions, Sydney exhibitions and presentations, 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.

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Diary notes

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](#).

'Traditional values and Chinese foreign policy', public lecture, 3 October 2011, 6.30pm–8pm, with Professor Daniel Bell, the Zhiyuan Chair Professor of Arts and Humanities at Shanghai



Jiaotong University and professor of political theory and director of the Centre for International and Comparative Political Philosophy at Tsinghua University in Beijing. Organised by Asialink and the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre. Venue: the Carrillo Gantner Theatre, Sidney Myer Asia Centre, University of Melbourne (Cnr Swanston Street and Monash Road), free, [register online](#).

Indonesia Update Conference 2011, ANU, Canberra, 30 September–1 October 2011 on 'Indonesia's place in the world'. The conference is free of charge, and being convened by Anthony Reid and Michael O'Shannassy. For more information, please visit the [website](#).

'Inertia or ignorance: the challenge of dismantling Malaysia's race-based politics'. Free public lecture with Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, 11 October 2011, 6:30pm–7:30pm, Yasuko Hiraoka Myer Room, Level 1, Sidney Myer Asia Centre ([view map](#)). [Register online](#) to attend. Co-presented with [Asialink](#) and the Asia Society AustralAsia. Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad was elected as a State Assemblyman for Selangor, is from *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (People's Justice Party/PKR), part of the Opposition People's Alliance. PKR and the People's Alliance are led by former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

Conferences on Asian 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](#).



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.

'Voices of diversity', seminar, workshop and concert, Australian National University, 4–6 October 2011, organised by Island Southeast Asia Centre, School of Culture, History and Language, ANU's College of Asia &



Pacific. Seminar, **4 October 2011, 12.30pm–2pm.** Theatre 1, Law Sparke Helmore, building 6A; workshop, **5 October 2011, 11am–1pm,** Rehearsal Room 2, School of Music, Building 100; concert, **6 November** Indonesian National Orchestra 6 October, 7.30pm–9.30pm, Llewellyn Hall, School of Music, Building 100, 45 piece indigenous orchestra playing modern music composed and directed by Frank Raden. www.ticketek.com.au.

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Diary notes

Inaugural Mongolian Studies Open Conference, Australian National University, Canberra, 25 November 2011.



The conference will take place under the auspices of the new ANU Mongolian Studies Centre. For further details, including the call for papers, see or contact [Professor Li Narangoo](#) by 27 September 2011. See web for further details.

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](#).

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

Asia–Pacific Economic and Business History Conference 2012, 16–18 February, Australian National University, Canberra. Papers and proposals for sessions are invited. The main conference theme is 'Economic integration: historical perspectives from Europe and Asia–Pacific, but the organisers are open to proposals for contributions on other topics in economic, social and business history, as well as to proposals for sessions on particular themes. Further details about the conference and call for papers are available on the [website](#).

'Intercity networks and urban governance in Asia', conference, Singapore, 8–9 March 2012. This multidisciplinary conference will examine urban governance in Asia from the perspective of intercity networks will be held in Singapore early next year. The conference is being organised by the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. Further information is available from the [conference website](#).

'Reading Dutch for historical research', intensive residential course, to be held at South Durras (near Batemans Bay), New South Wales, 18 June–5 July 2012. The course is intended for those needing a working knowledge of written Dutch for professional purposes, including the study of Asian history. The course is open to academics, professionals and current and intending postgraduate students. **Call for applications closes 31 January 2012.** See [webpage](#).

Asian Studies Association of Australia 19th Biennial Conference, Parramatta campus of the University of Western Sydney, 11–14 July 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. 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](#).

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. *Asian Currents* is published by the ASAA and edited by [Allan Sharp](#).