Asian Currents
The Asian Studies Association of Australia
Maximising Australia's Asian Knowledge
February 2012 ISSN 1449–4418

Making sense of the 2011 political 'thaw' in Burma/Myanmar

Managing the 'thaw' better than they managed the 'freeze' is now the challenge for all concerned.

Trevor Wilson

Observers have been surprised by the rapid announcement of radical political reforms in Burma/Myanmar by the successor to the military regime, puzzled by the stream of high-level foreign visitors going to Burma, and unsure how to interpret the apparent decision by opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to welcome cautiously the new Burmese Government's so-far-modest reforms.

Burma's present path to political liberalisation was set out in the former military regime's 'road map' towards national reconciliation, which was announced as long ago as 2003 when a 'seven-point plan' was released by the then prime minister General Khin Nyunt. Although Khin Nyunt, along with his military intelligence apparatus, was purged in 2004, Burma's military leadership stuck with this slightly worn and discredited road map in the absence of any other viable strategy, and because it had a modicum of support from Burma's Asian neighbours. However, Burma's political fortunes were already extremely polarised and progress towards political reform did not come about quickly or smoothly.

The origins of the road map go back to the 1990 elections in which Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy

Signs of the thaw: Aung San Suu Kyi back on the front page.

(NLD) won more than 75 per cent of the seats, but was not allowed to assume the reins of government. Instead, the military regime, which had seized power after the famous 1988 uprising against the government, continued to rule under martial law while initiating a national assembly process after 1993 to draw up a

Continued page 2

Also in this issue

Burma's political 'thaw'

From page 1

new constitution. It always said it feared the ethnically diverse country would disintegrate in the face of chronic insurgencies along its borders. The only organised national institution, the Burmese army had a reputation for ruthlessness, and imposed repressive police-state controls over all aspects of people's lives.

Following the army's crackdown on its opponents in 1988 and subsequent repudiation of the 1990 election results, more than one million Burmese fled the country, providing the foundations for a vigorous and relatively well funded and well organised pro-democracy movement to flourish outside Burma. Differences over democracy generated a two-decade contest between forces inside Burma—the military rulers versus the proponents of 'democracy' headed by Aung San Suu Kyi and others—and outside Burma between the Western-supported opponents of the military regime and the non-interventionists among Burma's neighbours in Asia and the Third World.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Burma's poor record of human rights abuses meant it became the target of one of the most intensive sets of international sanction measures ever instituted outside the United Nations, beginning with the OECD-members' bans on economic assistance and on defence and political ties after 1988, and reinforced at various intervals—mostly in response to further crackdowns by the Burmese military.

Inside Burma, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and more than 2000 political prisoners were to spend many years in detention for opposing the military government whose misrule brought political, social and economic hardship to the country and injustice and worse to the people.

Mileposts in this contest and the freeze imposed on Burma included:

- 1997 US new investment bans
- 2003 (following the regime-instigated attack on Aung San Suu Kyi and her supporters at Depayin in Northern Burma), additional political bans
- 2007 (after the regime suppressed the Buddhist monk-led mass protests of the so-called 'Saffron revolution'), widespread trade, investment and financial bans by individual OECD members (including Australia) and the EU.

Cyclone Nargis in 2008 provoked further standoffs between these two sets of forces, when the military regime at first refused but later accepted international assistance, and Burmese citizens blatantly ignored their government's directives not to enter the cyclone-affected areas to help.

Burmese had not believed the army would relinquish power, but international attempts to engage with Burma's leaders, alongside sanctions, were equally unsuccessful. Desultory attempts by the United Nations since 1991 and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), which Burma joined in 1997, failed. Although Western sanctions were supposedly targeted, they were also disproportionate, aggravating Burma's overall situation and worsening its political isolation. Significantly, on becoming US Secretary of State in 2009, Hillary Clinton famously (and accurately) declared that all international policies towards Burma had failed and that US policy needed to be reassessed. Her historic visit to Burma in November 2011 was a belated US attempt to shift to a more proactive policy towards Burma.

The Burmese army had played a key role in achieving Burma's independence in

Continued page 3

Burma's political 'thaw'

From page 2

1947, had effectively functioned as the government of Burma under Burma's first dictator, General Ne Win, from 1962, and was always obsessed by national security. Although neither sanctions nor cooperation and engagement were successful, the military regime knew it had to proceed with a transfer of power. Their 'road map' strategy produced a new constitution, prepared through a National Assembly process and submitted to a dubious national referendum in 2008.

On 7 November 2010 Burma finally held general elections, the first in more than 20 years and the first multiparty elections in 40 years. The 2010 elections were condemned for the blatant vote-rigging that gave the government-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party a comfortable but implausible victory, ensuring ultimate military control continued despite the loss of legitimacy and all popular trust in Burma's military leaders. Significantly, the elections also produced an elected parliament, quasi-federal regional assemblies for the first time ever, and a new successor government under civilianised leadership that immediately espoused reform and policy change.

Nobody predicted that Burma would be undergoing a political thaw during 2011, not only because there is no spring season in Burma, but because most Burma 'watchers' and the Burmese people had tired of hoping for something better. Everyone had been conditioned to expect the worst in Burma, to treat regime promises of reform with cynicism, to expect depressing reports of civil war atrocities, continued accounts of repression and human rights abuses, and endless evidence of poverty and social decline.

Similarly, observers also did not anticipate that Thein Sein would lead the push for reform. A slightly frail, unassuming general, Thein Sein had become the regime's leading political figure as Secretary One of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 2004. Between 2005 and 2007 Thein Sein oversaw the final National Assembly process that produced a constitution with flaws but also with some significant liberal provisions. Thein Sein became prime minister in 2007, and the first president of the army's political wing, the Union Solidarity and Development Party when it was officially formed in April 2010. At the same time he and other generals took off their uniforms to contest the subsequent elections as civilians.

The first glimmer of hope was the release of and unexpected restoration of freedom to Nobel Peace Prize-winning opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi a week later. The final turning point came on 30 March 2011 when the dictatorial Senior General Than Shwe, who had headed the military regime for almost 20 years without challenge, departed the scene of his own accord and allowed his successors to assume leadership.

On becoming president, Thein Sein immediately asserted his vision of reform for Burma as his mandate, for which he gradually won support of the army leadership (some members of which are believed to hold quite conservative views). When the 'Arab Spring' occurred, the world at large realised that significant change was emerging in Burma as well, and that in Burma events were unfolding largely peacefully (although insurgency had resurfaced in the north and east of the country) and in a rare spirit of reconciliation.

Key developments during 2011, all of which have been implemented, not just promised, include:

- restoration on 31 January of elected multiparty parliamentary government for the first time since the 1960s; a bicameral national assembly with

Continued page 4

Burma's political 'thaw

From page 3

state regional assemblies as well, creating a quasi-federal system for the first time ever

- dissolution on 30 March of the emergency regime, the SPDC, and the formal transfer of power to the new government
- a new law allowing trade unions for the first time since 1962 and permitting strikes, passed by parliament and signed by the president on 11 October
- parliament passing a new law on 22 November permitting public protests in Burma for the first time ever
- holding policy workshops on poverty, economic development, monetary reform and environmental protection policy in August–September with wide participation, including by Aung San Suu Kyi
- amendment of the election law in response to NLD criticisms so that the NLD could decide to participate in by-elections now scheduled for 1 April 2012.

Another major concrete sign of progress is the release since January 2011 of more than 600 political prisoners (along with other human rights abuses, political prisoners were one of the main reasons for the imposition of Western sanctions). While the releases seemed delayed, perhaps because of differing views inside the Myanmar Government, they eventually happened in dramatic and open fashion and most of the high-profile prisoners facing extremely long sentences were released. On such matters, the full implementation of these policies will be closely watched by the Burmese people as well as the international community.

Other reforms are anticipated, but are not yet fully in effect, because, as Aung San Suu Kyi herself has acknowledged, some large changes take longer to achieve. For example, censorship has been greatly relaxed, ahead of foreshadowed changes to the media law, although even into early 2011, some committed supporters of political reform inside Burma continued to be arrested. The rule of law has not yet been restored and human rights abuses by the army have not stopped, effective peace agreements with ethnic insurgents must be negotiated, and the large state economy must be demilitarised.[1]

Now the challenge for all concerned—Burmese and non-Burmese alike—is to manage the thaw better than they managed the freeze. The West can respond by gradually easing sanctions, as Australia has already begun to do, but very few countries have so far committed to this. Easing of sanctions should be done in a positive and generous manner, rather than with a grudging distrustful mindset, and without 'moving the goalposts'. Aid donors should focus on how new international assistance can help the people of Burma make up for the years of deprivation and ensure that reforms, by virtue of their success, are irreversible.[2]

References

1. On the rule of law, see Stephen Bloom's useful article 'The "rule of law": in Burma' in *The Irrawaddy*.1 February 2012
2. See also Joshua Kurlantzick, *'How Myanmar changed and what it means'*, 1 February 2012, Council on Foreign Relations, Washington DC.

Trevor Wilson served as Australian Ambassador to Myanmar (2000–03) and is a visiting fellow on Myanmar/Burma at the Department of Political and Social Change, School of International, Political and Strategic Studies, the Australian National University, and co-convener of the ANU's Myanmar/Burma Update Conference.

Tattered US–Pakistan relationship in urgent need of mending

After a tumultuous 2011, can the United States win hearts and minds in Pakistan?

Alicia Mollaun

The Pakistan–United States bilateral relationship is characterised by mistrust, caution and has typically been transactional—adjusted to suit the foreign policy goals of the United States. Etched in the minds of Pakistanis is the complete US departure from Pakistan in 1989 following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the economic sanctions imposed throughout the 1990s in response to its nuclear program. Pakistan fears that abandonment will occur once again following the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014.

Historically, foreign aid (both civilian and military) has been a vital component of the US relationship with Pakistan. The quantum and nature of funding have oscillated depending on the strategic importance afforded to Pakistan at the time: peaking after its partition with India, during the years of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks; and plummeting in the 1990s in response to Pakistan's nuclear weapons program and weapons testing. The relationship seems destined to be tumultuous rather than fair weather, if history, and the past decade are anything to go by.

At the end of 2011, the Pakistan–US relationship arguably reached the most complex and fraught point in its history. The events of 2011 were disastrous and even the most clairvoyant of analysts would have been unable to envision what unfolded. The year 2011 was synonymous with actors, big and small: from Raymond Davis to Osama bin Laden and from Mike Mullen to the Sharif brothers. Unforeseen events played a significant role in destabilising the relationship.

In Pakistan, the name Raymond Davis will forever be tantamount to the United States getting away with murder, exposing the limits of the Pakistani judicial system against the strength of the US Government. Davis, a CIA contractor, shot and killed two Pakistanis in Lahore on 27 January, allegedly in self-defence. The diplomatic circus that followed the deaths of three Pakistanis (a third was killed by a US consulate vehicle dispatched to collect Davis) was immense. Davis eventually was released following the payment of 'blood money' to the victims' families, and after a diplomatic tussle over immunity played out in the Pakistani media 24/7.

Thousands attend anti-US rally in Karachi, 12 February . Photo: Press TV

While this was damaging, the nature of the relationship ultimately changed forever on 2 May when Osama bin Laden was killed in a US raid in Abbottabad. Pakistan struggled to explain to the public either its complicity in hiding bin Laden and allowing the raid or its gross incompetence in sheltering the world's most wanted terrorist and allowing a foreign military to penetrate its air space undetected. Either way, the Pakistani Government and military lost face domestically and internationally. For the first time, the Pakistani public doubted the competence of their highly revered military. Following the bin Laden raid, the Punjab Government in May decided to reject all US aid, claiming that it under-

Continued page 6

US–Pakistan relationship

From page 5

undermined sovereignty of the country. The provincial government, led by Shahbaz Sharif (brother of federal opposition leader Nawaz Sharif), cancelled all existing aid agreements, while a minister in his government said, 'this is our protest against the Abbottabad incident'. Shahbaz reportedly declared all other non-US aid 'kosher', further highlighting the immense discord and malaise with the United States.

Just as things were starting to get back on track, former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, caused consternation in September by publicly accusing the Pakistani military and intelligence services of being in cahoots with terrorist groups: 'in choosing to use violent extremism as an instrument of policy, the Government of Pakistan—and most especially the Pakistani Army and ISI—jeopardises not only the prospect of our strategic partnership, but also Pakistan's opportunity to be a respected nation with legitimate regional influence'. The furore following these remarks has still not dissipated in Pakistan.

When foreign policy watchers thought the relationship could not get any worse, NATO forces killed 24 Pakistani soldiers on 26 November in Pakistani territory bordering Afghanistan. Pakistan erupted with anger at the attack and suspended all counterterrorism cooperation pending a parliamentary review of its entire relationship with the United States, which is still yet to be conducted.

With the relationship in tatters, what can the United States do to get the relationship back on track? It will need to continue to try to win over win hearts and minds, not only of ordinary Pakistanis, but also of the elite, with whom the United States must reconnect. The most effective way of doing this will be through its aid program.

The key component of the US–Pakistan relationship that still works is development assistance. However, the aid program is not without its problems. The Center for Global Development (CGD) convincingly lays out key challenges to the current aid policy in Pakistan in its June 2011 report *Beyond bullets and bombs: fixing the US approach to development in Pakistan*. The report calls for a number of big changes to the way in which the United States conceives and delivers its aid program to Pakistan.

CGD argues that there are a number of key priorities for the US Government: clarify the mission; name a leader of the US aid program in Islamabad and Washington; tell people what the United States is doing; staff the USAID mission for success; and more effectively measure Pakistan's overall development program.

To a foreigner researching this issue and living in Islamabad, the major issue the CGD raises that is glaringly obvious to success is to tell people what the United States is doing. In order to win hearts and minds, Pakistanis need to know two key things: why the United States is giving Pakistan aid, and what it is spending its aid funding on. Addressing these issues will go a long way toward improving perceptions of the United States in Pakistan.

This seems like a simple enough idea, but the virulent anti-Americanism that pervades the majority of Pakistani media and society makes it extremely difficult for the United States to get any kind of positive traction. The most common complaints Pakistanis have about US aid, both at the elite and at the grassroots level, are two-fold. Firstly, that the United States is not spending enough to compensate Pakistan for its cooperation in the war on terror and secondly, that there is little visible evidence that aid is being delivered.

On the amount the United States is

Continued page 7

US–Pakistan relationship

From page 6

spending, if one views aid merely as compensation, perhaps the Pakistanis have a point. In Pakistan in the decade following 9/11, there were 21 672 civilian deaths, 3486 bomb blasts, and a $68 billion cost to the economy. But aid shouldn't be viewed as compensation for economic losses sustained in war, and the United States needs to make this clear. This is especially true in Pakistan's case where the government has undoubtedly contributed to economic losses through poor economic management. One of the most obvious reform problems is on the revenue side. It has made little effort and no inroad into increasing its revenue base through an overhaul of its tax system.

Pakistan's tax collection to GDP ratio is dismal at 9 per cent, the lowest rate in South Asia, and almost half that of India's. Only 1 per cent of the population is registered to pay tax. It is little wonder that public amenities and services are almost none existent. For instance, in Islamabad, residents have to privately arrange to have their garbage collected, street lights and traffic lights frequently do not work because of load shedding and government-run public transport is non-existent.

The second criticism, that US aid is invisible, has some merit. Despite the announcement in 2009 of the Kerry Lugar Berman Bill, which earmarked $1.5 billion a year for civilian aid to Pakistan, the slow disbursement of funds has meant aid on the whole has been perceived negatively. The United States has had some great aid successes and is doing some excellent work in Pakistan, like constructing schools in earthquake-ravaged Azad Jammu and Kashmir, or undertaking projects to increase the supply of megawatts to the main power grid. But the problem is that few Pakistanis know about these projects.

The United States needs to develop a mechanism to effectively communicate the key messages about its aid program to the Pakistani elite and public. The best way to do this is through a comprehensive public diplomacy campaign. This will be a tough ask, but an important one. Effective public diplomacy relies on a government's credibility to get its message across and the United States is in short supply of credibility in Pakistan. A recent Pew Survey highlighted how difficult a task it will be to get Pakistan to recognise US aid, let alone appreciate it. Only 12 per cent of Pakistani's surveyed by Pew in 2011 had a favourable view of the United States. Eighteen per cent believed that the United States provided little or no foreign aid to Pakistan, while around one-quarter of those surveyed had no idea if or how much aid the United States provides. These statistics must be alarming for the United States, which pledged $7.5 billion (2009–14) in civilian aid to Pakistan.

As Pakistanis are increasingly drawn towards conservative Islamic values, and their ire increases over drone attacks, anti-Americanism will continue to be a popular ideal to cling to. Anti-Americanism is increasingly being promoted and propagated by the Islamic political parties and the enigmatic cricketer-turned-politician, Imran Khan. This sentiment will need to be managed if both parties are to work together to bring about a peaceful end to the American war in Afghanistan. While the United States is unlikely to win Pakistani hearts or minds in the short-term, it needs to start using its aid program and engagement with Pakistan as a means to sustain long-term engagement with a country that is vital to stability in the region.

Alicia Mollaun is a PhD candidate at the Crawford School, the Australian National University, and is based in Islamabad, Pakistan

Earthquake disaster could be catalyst for regional restructure

Local government in northern Japan: one year on from the Great East Japan Earthquake

Joel Rheuben

Almost one year has passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake and the tsunami and nuclear crisis that followed in its wake devastated much of the Tohoku region of northern Japan. In this time local governments in the area have seen to immediate disaster relief needs, and are now slowly rebuilding their fractured communities.[1]

From 10 February a new reconstruction agency has replaced the ad hoc body which has advised the prime minister on reconstruction to date, with a 10-year mandate to work directly with local governments in providing funding for projects and coordinating the provision of services by central government agencies.[2] In the long term, however, the human cost of the disaster and the need for robust local infrastructure to deal with the challenges of reconstruction could have significant implications for the shape of local governments in Tohoku.

Japan's local governments are divided into a two-tier structure of 47 prefectures and, below these, just over 1700 municipalities. As Japan is a unitary country, the local governments do not have inherent law-making powers, and are regarded as regulatory agents of the national government. Indeed, while the Constitution makes reference to 'local public entities', it does not mandate the shape that these entities take. Instead, the prefectures and municipalities are creatures of Japan's Local Autonomy Law.

Since the 1980s, and in particular since amendments to the Local Autonomy Law in 1999, central government powers and revenue-raising functions have been gradually devolved (at least formally) to local governments. However, in practice central government agencies are perceived to continue to exercise an inordinate influence over local policy-making, largely as a result of the fiscal imbalance between the two and the reliance of local governments on the central government for funding.[3]

Map of the Tōhoku earthquake and aftershocks on 11–14 March. (Wikipedia)

The Reconstruction Agency was established pursuant to the Great East Japan Earthquake Reconstruction Basic Law, passed by the Diet in June of 2011. The law's objects clause anticipates a local government-led reconstruction effort reflecting the will of local residents, and emphasises that the purpose of reconstruction is not merely to restore the Tohoku region to its pre-disaster status, but to 'bring about the sort of country that Japan should be in the mid-21st century'.

To this end, the Basic Law and subsequent legislation also provide for the establishment of a Special Reconstruction Zone, to be overseen by the Reconstruction Agency. The Special Reconstruction Zone will comprise the entirety of Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, together with the worst hit towns and cities in neighbouring prefectures.

Somewhat similar to the Special Economic Zone system established under the Koizumi government,[4] designated local

Continued page 9

Earthquake disaster could be catalyst for regional restructure

From page 8

governments within the Special Reconstruction Zone will be able to separately and jointly seek exemption from the application of national regulations in their local areas, as well as reductions and outright moratoriums on certain taxes and social security contributions for local businesses and residents. Significantly, local governments will be responsible for drawing up their own recovery plans, to be negotiated with the Reconstruction Agency through a special national/local consultation council.

The purpose of these new institutions is to facilitate on the one hand a more streamlined approach and on the other a more participatory approach to reconstruction. Yet if central government agencies continue to exercise influence over budgets and service delivery, these may yet amount to little more than additional layers of bureaucracy, dragging on decisive decision-making. A new national bureaucracy is no substitute for genuine regional autonomy.

The creation of a Special Reconstruction Zone was proposed by a report of the ruling Democratic Party's Reconstruction Vision Team in April 2011, soon after the disaster.[5] The report linked the creation of a Special Reconstruction Zone with a new shape for the nation more broadly, arguing for 'keeping in sight a future state' for the region. This led me to speculate that the disaster could be the catalyst for Japan's first-ever prefectural merger.[6]

As noted at the time, the significance of the word 'state' relates to a relatively long-standing proposal to merge Japan's 47 prefectures into a dozen or so larger, semi-autonomous blocs. Support for a state system has risen since the 1990s (the proposal has been firmly supported by the peak business organisation, the *Keidanren*, since this time) and has been coupled with decentralisation reforms. As the vast majority of devolved powers have been shifted to municipal rather than prefectural governments, the prefectures have struggled to define their ongoing role. Moreover, due to population shifts since the current prefectures were established in 1888, several prefectures have populations considerably smaller than some Japanese cities.[7]

There seems to be little enthusiasm among local policymakers for a prefectural consolidation.

While former prime minister Shinzô Abe took some legislative steps towards implementing a state system, the concept is unlikely to gain further traction under the Democratic Party government, which prefers the abolition of the prefectures altogether in favour of larger, more functionally enabled municipalities. However, whether or not regional blocs ultimately replace the prefectures in the future, there is nothing to prevent ad hoc mergers between prefectures in the meantime. Even before the disaster, the Tohoku prefectures had long been the most likely candidates for such a merger due to the gradual depopulation and economic stagnation afflicting most towns and cities in the region. The creation of a Tohoku 'super-prefecture' had been the stated goal of a number of local politicians for several years.

To be sure, in the months immediately after the disaster, a bipartisan State System Discussion Group was formed in the Diet (May 2011) with around 130 members. It considered the viability of a Tohoku state. The Association of Corporate Executives also called for the creation of an autonomous Tohoku (as opposed to national) reconstruction agency as a forerunner to a governing apparatus for a future Tohoku state.

However, with the exception of Miyagi

Continued page 10

Earthquake disaster could be catalyst for regional restructure

From page 9

Governor Yoshihiro Murai, there seems to be little enthusiasm among local policy-makers for a prefectural consolidation. Indeed, later reports of the Reconstruction Vision Team and of the Prime Minister's reconstruction headquarters make no mention of the state system issue. The incorporation of the Special Reconstruction Zone into an independent Tohoku state is therefore unlikely to be realised soon.

A more palatable option for achieving greater regional autonomy in the meantime may be the formation of a Tohoku regional association (*koiki rengô*). The Local Autonomy Law allows local governments to form quasi-federal associations with separate legal status and additional regulatory powers for dealing with issues extending beyond the boundaries of any one local government, although few currently exist at the prefectural level. Governors of the six Tohoku prefectures have been considering the creation of a regional association, and are generally positive, several preferring to pursue this route rather than a formal merger.[8] Indeed, the Kansai Regional Association, the members of which are experienced in reconstruction following the 1995 Kobe earthquake, has been instrumental in providing aid and assistance in Tohuku.

An arguably safer bet than a prefectural merger is mergers at the municipal level. Following on from an initiative of the Koizumi government to reduce the number of Japan's towns and villages, a new Municipal Mergers Law was introduced in 2004, allowing mergers to be initiated by citizens via referendums in addition to municipal assemblies. In the space of a decade, the total number of municipalities has been reduced from more than 3200 to 1719 as at 1 January. Many of the merged entities are in the Tohoku region, where the number of municipalities has been halved.

It seems plausible that financial conditions will ultimately force further municipal mergers among those towns and villages with the greatest population losses, or in the evacuation zone surrounding the Fukushima nuclear plant, where entire populations have been evacuated for up to the next 30 years.

At the same time, the experience of the disaster could forestall municipal consolidation in the near term. Many felt that past mergers were responsible for hindering disaster relief by placing residents in outlying areas further away from local government and emergency relief centres.

Thinking in Tohoku will no doubt be influenced by developments elsewhere in Japan. Simultaneous with, but unrelated to, the Tohoku reconstruction, Toru Hashimoto, immediate former governor of Osaka Prefecture and current mayor of Osaka City (as well as a vocal supporter of a state system) is pursuing an apparently quixotic mission to merge the Osaka prefectural and city governments into a single Osaka Metropolis. If successful, Hashimoto and his successor as governor will bring about for the first time in postwar history a form of local entity that currently only exists in Tokyo: a hybrid city-prefecture with a single bureaucracy (albeit divided into administrative wards) exercising the devolved powers of both levels of local government.

Whereas the motivation for a merger in the case of Osaka is its crippling public debt, equally valid justifications may exist for similar arrangements in Tohoku. The towns and villages falling within the Fukushima evacuation zone could, for example, merge with Fukushima Prefecture, allowing the prefectural government to directly oversee the cleanup together with the national

Continued page 11

Earthquake disaster could be catalyst for regional restructure

From page 10

government. While these towns and villages have set up makeshift facilities in neighbouring municipalities for civil registration purposes, for all intents and purposes they exist on paper only, and former residents are gradually re-registering their residency in other municipalities as they re-settle elsewhere.

Such a merger would be unusual, and is not anticipated by the Local Autonomy Law, but would not be impossible. Without a critical mass of support, mergers at either level of local government are ultimately unlikely in the immediate term: notwithstanding the long-term efficiencies to be achieved by merging, the political capital and resources that would need to be expended in order to realise a merger would no doubt distract from the main priority of reconstruction.

But, as the potential frustration of dealing with a central government-focused reconstruction bureaucracy slows down regional initiatives and hollowed-out local governments assess their long-term viability, a very different type of regional governance could rise from the ashes of northern Japan.

References

1. For a detailed analysis of reconstruction from a local government perspective, including how local governments from around Japan are cooperating in the reconstruction effort, see Richard Samuels, 'The rhetoric of crisis: Japan's policy choices after 3.11' (forthcoming).
2. For more information see, www.reconstruction.go.jp/english
3. Nishio Masaru, *Chihō bunken kaikaku [*Regional decentralisation reforms*]* (Tokyo University Press, 2007).
4. See, e.g., Naohiro Yashiro, 'Japan's new special zones for regulatory reform', *International Tax and Public Finance,* 12 (2005).
5. Available at www.dpj.or.jp/news/files/110430fukko_mousiire.pdf
6. Joel Rheuben, 'Could the Tohoku earthquake lead to local government reform?', in Shiro Armstrong and Peter Drysdale (eds), *East Asia Forum* (2012, 2011).
7. By way of example, Yokohama City, Japan's largest city outside of the Tokyo Metropolis, has a population (3.7 million) more than six times larger than Japan's least populous prefecture, Tottori (585 000).
8. Anonymous, 'Tôhôku 6-ken chiji kauntapaato maemuki kôiki rengô wa ondosa' ['6 Tohoku governors positive on counterpart arrangements, but differing attitudes to regional sssociation'], *Yahoo Japan News,* 6 February 2012.
9. Hidetomo Arata, 'Higashi-nihon dai-shinsai 100-nichi no wadai ni tsuite—Fukkô wo kidô ni noseru tame no mitsu no torikumi [One hundred days on from the Great East Japan Earthquake—Three approaches to getting reconstruction on track]', *PHP Policy Review,* 5/44 (17 June 2011). From this perspective, a regional association may again be preferable to full mergers. See AJ Jacobs, 'Federations of municipalities: a practical alternative to local government consolidations in Japan?', *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration,* 17/2 (2004), in respect of municipalities which have chosen to form regional associations rather than merging.

See Diary Notes, page 34

10th Australian Network for Japanese Law (ANJeL) International Conference, 'Socio-legal norms in preventing and managing disasters in Japan: Asia–Pacific and interdisciplinary perspectives'.

Joel Rheuben is a solicitor with Herbert Smith Tokyo and a LLM candidate at the University of Tokyo.

Ecotourism offers hope to threatened Balinese villages

A remote coastal community in Bali faces conservation challenges.

Carol Warren

The village of Perancak on the far west coast of Bali occupies a thin strip of land between the Perancak River and the Bali Strait. It faces the dilemmas of combined livelihood and conservation pressures confronting many coastal communities in Indonesia.

I went to Perancak for the first time in 2001 to research the turtle conservation project initiated by a group of former turtle hunters, a project that has since become the most successful effort on the island to safeguard turtle nesting sites along its beaches. The lucrative turtle trade had, by the 1990s, almost completely wiped out local populations. By then it was drawing in sea turtles from as far as Sulawesi and Papua to meet the demand for turtle meat, a delicacy particularly popular in the wealthy urban, tourist centres of southern Bali.

Members of *Kurma Asih*, the 'sea turtle carers' group, hope that ecotourism will develop in the area in order to support their turtle conservation activities. Income from tourists would give local communities an incentive to enforce the law and protect turtles and the increasing numbers of eggs they lay during nesting season along the beaches of Perancak and adjacent communities. Indeed, it was the threats of tourist boycotts that initially pressured the provincial government to support efforts to end the trade.

The turtle trade is not the only conservation issue affecting Perancak. Declining fish stocks and erosion along the Perancak coastal strip pose serious problems for the lives and livelihoods of local people. The Perancak coast is eroding at the rate of several metres each year, and locals have felt pressed to sell land along the beach to outside investors before they lose their assets to rising seas, and in the hope of gaining more secure employment for their children. Most villagers depend on small-scale line and net fishing from a traditional Balinese outrigger jukung, or work as labourers for a share of the catch on the large fishing fleet moored in the Perancak River. Over 100 *perahu Madura* (named for the origin place of these impressive, brightly decorated boats), are moored in the river and ply the coast to supply the dozen canning and feed factories on the other side of the river. Each pair of these large purse seine fishing boats employs 20 to 35 crew and can haul as much as 30 tons of fish worth 80 to 300 million rupiah (US$9000–$35 000) on a good day in high season. But both options in the fishing industry are in decline as seasonal weather patterns become more extreme and less predictable, and because over-fishing threatens the resource base.

Madurese fishing boats.

In 2010–11, fishers of both types complained of the long season of scarcity (*paceklik panjang*), when catches didn't even cover costs. For some years now, the *perahu Madura* have become a source of tension in the village, despite the fact that many traditional fishers also earn incomes from part-time work on the larger commercial boats. At issue is the use by these large boat owners of purse seine nets with illegal net hole sizes (*mata jaring*) of only one centimetre, when national regulations set a minimum of one

Continued page 13

Ecotourism hope for Bali villages

From page 12

inch. The failure of government to enforce regulations controlling net types, zones for different boat sizes and fishing technologies, or to limit the size and number of boats chasing declining fish numbers troubled the traditional fishers, faced with this long 'season of scarcity' in what should have been high fishing season.

Turtle hatchling.

Ketut Sudiarna, head of one of the local fishers' groups, complained: 'The government doesn't put any limits on the size or number of boats, or the nets used. One person, for example, can own 15 boats with a capacity of 40 to 70 tons, and use nets with holes as small as one centimetre. Imagine when they all go out to sea, all the fish are dredged. Fish as thin as a pen are taken; how is it possible for the fish to become large? How can we small *jukung* fishers make a living when the fish are all gone? If the large boats were regulated and everyone stuck to the zoning rules, and the net sizes were seven to 10 centimetres, then the large and small fishers could both make a living. If the Fisheries Department doesn't do something about regulating this, the next generation won't even know the names of these fish, because there won't be any left.' (Interview 26 August 2010)

Wayan Tirtha was similarly critical. 'The regulations are there but the sanctions aren't. They tell us not to use bombs for fishing. But what's the difference if they don't prevent the use of nets like this? It's suicide. And here's the proof—the fish aren't there! If I were the minister, I wouldn't give permits to sell nets that size, I'd enforce the rules on trawling, and put a no-take zone just off the coast. We are conscious that what there is in the sea, we have to protect for the future.' (Interview 28 August 2010)

Not only has there been no heed from the government of these wise words from the small-scale fishers of Perancak, the Minister of Oceans and Fisheries is planning instead a 'blue revolution' to raise Indonesia's production from 12 to 22 million tons by 2014 (*Bali Post* 28 February 2011). Meanwhile, the prolonged periods of scarcity continue, compounded by increasingly wild and unpredictable weather patterns. More and more west Bali fishers are unable to go to sea and are desperately seeking other sources of livelihood.

The turtle conservation efforts at Perancak have experienced a quite different set of pressures. The *Kurma Asih* Turtle Conservation Group was founded in 1997 by Wayan Tirtha, a village customary adat leader, and members of his extended family, who had traditionally been turtle hunters. Influenced by a WWF campaign to halt the trade in endangered and threatened sea turtles, illegal in Indonesia since a government ban in 1990, they approached the conservation organisation to establish a protection program.

Kurma Asih has succeeded in steadily raising the number of protected nests from four in 1997, their first year of operation, to more than 450 in 2010. Members of *Kurma Asih* patrol the Perancak beach during the six months of the nesting season and transfer the nests they find to safe enclosures, where each is marked with a sign indicating species, date of laying, number of eggs and expected hatching date.

But the turtle project at Perancak has the opposite problem of the Perancak village fishers. While the fishers face too few fish, the conservation group is struggling to manage too many turtles. *Kurma Asih* now has more turtle nests than the small number of nest adoptions and donations from the few passing tourists can support. Meanwhile, investors' plans to buy up beachfront property for exclusive hotel for private villa developments threaten

Continued page 14

Ecotourism hope for Bali villages

From page 13

the nesting sites along the beach of this still quiet fishing village.

The turtle conservation group struggles with the problem of how to bring more sensitive ecotourists to Bali's coastal communities, instead of the mass tourists who flock to the island for sunbathing and night life. They hope that a new program intended to boost village-based, ecologically oriented tourism will help bring the combination of conservation and livelihood needs in Balinese communities like Perancak to fruition.

Perancak villagers can and do want to protect the environment and the endangered species that inhabit it. New approaches to tourism could help them do so, but they must work against the tide of mass tourism and real estate development, industrial scale fisheries and the other forms of unregulated commercialisation sweeping the island to do so.

Carol Warren is Associate Professor in the Asia Research Centre at Murdoch University.

NOTE : Readers interested to visit Perancak to release a hatchling and enjoy the charms of this interesting community, can contact the Jaringan Ekowisata Bali*, an NGO operating on ethical community-based principles, to organise a trip that includes contributions to the* Kurma Asih *project and the local community. For more information visit www.jed.or.id*

Donations to the Kurma Asih *project can be made through the Enviro-Friends Network at Murdoch University.*

Keynote speakers confirmed for ASAA conference

Three leading Asian scholars have been confirmed as keynote speakers for the Asian Studies Association of Australia's 19th Biennial Conference in July.

They are:

- **Professor Lily Kong, Vice-President (University and Global Relations), and Acting Executive Vice-President (Academic Affairs), Yale–NUS College, National University of Singapore**
- **Professor Ji-Hyun Lim, Professor of History, Director of the Research Institute of Comparative History and Culture, Hanyang University, Seoul**
- **Professor Prasenjit Duara, Raffles Professor of Humanities, Director, Asia Research Institute, and Director of Research, Humanities & Social Sciences, National University of Singapore.**

The conference organisers are also calling for submissions of abstracts for the conference by 28 February 2012

The conference will be held at the University of Western Sydney (Parramatta South Campus), 11–13 July, 2012.

The theme of the conference is 'Knowing Asia: Asian studies in an Asian century'.

Further information is available from the conference website.

Yingluck and labour: business as usual

Thailand's long history of government keeping organised labour weak and marginalised looks set to continue.

Andrew Brown

Yingluck Shinawatra and her Phua Thai Party are dead unlucky. Following their decisive election victory in early July 2011, the new administration barely had time to settle into their parliamentary and cabinet seats before being confronted with the task of dealing with a flood of truly biblical proportions.

The monumental scale of the disaster, and the logistics involved in attempting to develop a coordinated and effective national response, would have tested the mettle of even the best-prepared and most experienced government. As the death toll rose, and the projected cost of the floods was expected to run into the tens of billions of dollars, it was unclear what impact the floods would have on forcing alterations to the Phua Thai policy agenda, which Yingluck presented to parliament in early last August.

However, even before the floods hit there were indications that, at least as far as organised labour was concerned, the government had begun to backtrack on some its pre-election promises and formal policy commitments.

Just prior to the July elections, representatives from organised labour met with officials from Yingluck Shinawatra's Phua Thai party to seek clarification of the party's position in relation to a host of labour-related issues. Labour activists came away from the meeting cautiously optimistic that, if elected, the Phua Thai party would address itself to a number of long-running workplace, livelihood, as well as basic labour-rights problems.

Less than four months into the Phua Thai government's tenure, there were signs of significant disappointment among labour activists with a party that promised much but had as yet delivered little. To be fair, despite considerable opposition from business, the Phua Thai government had pushed ahead with its big pre-election promise—to immediately raise the minimum daily wage to 300 baht throughout the country—although, as noted below, the implementation of the promised wage rise has been delayed.

Yingluck Shinawatra

On other key undertakings, such as ratification of International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions 87 and 98, as well as reform of the 1975 Labour Relations Act, the government has been deafeningly silent. Symbolic of the Phua Thai Government's lack of real commitment to fully engage with organised labour's agenda was the appointment of Phadoemchai Sasomsaph—a *caopho*-style businessman from Nakhon Pathom—as Minister of Labour over the much favoured and respected former labour permanent secretary Jarupong Ruangsuwan. Like many of his labour ministerial predecessors, Sasomsaph had no demonstrated interest or experience in managing labour affairs.

When presenting her government's policies to parliament in late August, Yingluck stated that in a context of continuing global economic certainty, structural imbalances within the Thai economy, legacies of political conflict, and rapidly changing society, the aim of Phua Thai policies was to create a more balanced economy that was globally

Continued page 16

Yingluck and labour

From page 15

competitive but less vulnerable to international uncertainties and fluctuations, which would be able to generate the capacity to sustain significant government interventions in the field of health, education, welfare and energy security.

Jarupong Ruangsuwan: overlooked.

Within these broad ideological commitments, the formal labour policies were surprisingly brief and general. The thrust of the policy was largely economic—to provide improved labour market information for those seeking employment; to tackle issues of workplace safety and employment security; to promote a more efficient labour relations system; expand coverage and increase the benefits available under the national social insurance system; promote skill upgrading, and prepare a framework that would govern the free flow of skilled labour that will occur following the formation of the ASEAN Community in 2015.

There was also a policy commitment to alter the system of migrant labour control that would better reflect the needs of business as well as meet the demands of national security and stability. None of these policy statements contained much detail and sources report that they were cobbled together in haste, and that even party members were largely unaware of the content of the policy prior to its presentation to parliament.

Phua Thai's major pre-election policy commitment was to 'increase the daily minimum wage to 300 baht throughout the country immediately' and to ensure that those graduating with a Bachelor's degree would earn a minimum of 15 000 baht a month. For organised labour, the implementation of the 300 baht minimum wage promise was viewed as a litmus test of the new government's willingness to restore a bit of human dignity and justice to workers who, on any number of indicators, had not received adequate compensation for their contributions to development and national wealth creation over recent decades.

Immediately after the July election, organised labour began pressing the government to implement the promised rise. Not surprisingly, business and its allies in the media and academia quickly mobilised against the government's plans and there were howls of protests that the promised rise would increase the price of exports, destroy Thailand's competitive advantage, lead to capital flight, and create massive unemployment.

Peak business bodies, the Industry Federation of Thailand, the Employers' Confederation of Thailand, and the Federation of Thai Industries led the offensive. They argued that the 300 baht minimum, if it was to be introduced at all, should rather be implemented gradually over a four-year period. The electronic industry's peak body, in particular, remained especially vocal in its opposition, claiming its members might have to resort to illegal tactics should the 300 baht minimum come into effect.

After weeks of national debate, the central wages committee proposed on 18 October 2011 that the promised wage rise should be granted, although this would now occur in stages. The proposal has been approved by Cabinet so workers will receive an across-the-board wage rise of 40 per cent as from 1 April 2012. This will mean that workers in Bangkok and six other key provinces will be the first to receive the 300 baht daily minimum. Workers in other provinces will receive an additional increase in 2013 that will bring them up to the 300 baht minimum.

The sting in the tail is that minimum wage

Continued page 17

Yingluck and labour

From page 16

rates will most likely remain frozen until 2015. As compensation for business, there will be a progressive reduction in corporate tax rates while small and medium enterprises will also be able to claim additional tax deductions of one-and-half times the amount between wage rates already being paid and the new daily minimum. There is also some suggestion that employer contributions to the social insurance fund will be lowered and that business will also be granted an additional extension to fund contribution collection deadlines.

Almost immediately, business decried the decision, arguing that the rise should be delayed for another year. Despite these latest business appeals, the government is determined that the rise will go ahead.

Organised labour was disappointed with the delay in the implementation of the wage rise, and was especially opposed to the proposal that there should be a freeze on any further wage increases until 2015. However, activists called off planned organised protests, recognising that to go ahead at that point would be politically counterproductive when so many were suffering from the floods.

It is likely that labour is in line for further disappointment as well, especially in the areas of labour rights. For over two decades, labour has been arguing for the reform of the 1975 *Labour Relation Act* (LRA), which, while granting basic rights, does not provide effective coverage against the arbitrary dismissal of workers involved in collective bargaining or those involved in processes of establishing and registering trade unions. Employers have been able to exploit loopholes in the law and thousands of union promoters have been sacked with impunity.

The business offensive against unions has been especially virulent since the 1997 Asian crisis, with a consistent pattern in evidence of employers using the law to undermine already existing unions and thwart the formation of new ones. Part of the campaign for seeking legal reform has been to pressure successive governments to ratify ILO conventions 87 and 98.

Organised labour has stated it will closely monitor the Yingluck government's response to ratification of ILO conventions 97 and 89 as an indicator of Phua Thai's stated commitment to the construction of a more efficient industrial relations system that would allow for and promote collective bargaining and trade union formation and put a stop to the practice of union busting.

However, to date, following several discussions with the new minister, it is clear that the ratification of the ILO conventions is not going to happen anytime soon, nor is there any sign of a commitment to meeting labour demands to initiate reform of the 1975 LRA. Sources say that in other areas, such as health and safety, expanding coverage and developing a more efficient accountable and transparent social security system, reforming the wage-fixing system and providing better protection for migrant workers, to name but a few, there are very few hopeful signs of rapid progress.

The worst floods in over half a century are likely to consume the government's focus and energies for the foreseeable future. However, a familiar pattern appears to be emerging in the way that the Phua Thai government is responding to labour issues, as pre-election undertakings are being largely forgotten or are only being partially implemented.

It is likely that labour is in line for further disappointment, especially in the areas of labour rights.

To be sure the government appears, for the moment at least, likely to deliver on its promise to raise the minim wage to

Continued page 18

Yingluck and labour

From page 17

300 baht, seeing this as a key to its broader plan to stimulate growth in the domestic economy. It is also perhaps indicative of the party's recognition of the importance of working class electoral support.

However, the lack of any sign of movement, on a number of other key labour demands, especially issues of basic labour rights, seems set to continue a long history of government acting to ensure that organised labour remains weak and marginalised from processes of decision-making in workplaces as well as broader industrial and political arenas.

For all the government's stated policy commitment to address human rights, advance process of national reconciliation, and create greater social equality, the reality is that it appears that it is going to be business pretty much as usual on the labour front as the economic and political interests of labour seem likely to continue to run a poor second to those of capital and the state.

Dr Andrew Brown is a lecturer in Political and International Studies, University of New England, Armidale, NSW.

Thai studies field research grants

Seventeen students from across Australia have received a funding boost for their research projects in the first round of the Thai Studies Field Research Grants, which were awarded for the first time, in 2011.

The grants, awarded through the Royal Thai Embassy and administered by the Asia Institute, were for topics covering subjects such as human trafficking and displaced populations on the Thai–Burma border, the construction of modern Thai identity and the environmental impact of British businesses on Thailand's teak forests.

The purpose of the grants is to reinvigorate Thai Studies in Australia and to increase Australia's engagement with Thailand. In particular, the Thai Research Studies Grant is intended to provide promising scholars with funding to pursue field research in support of their postgraduate and/or postdoctoral studies.

An independent panel, of senior academic staff from a number of Australian universities, chaired by Professor Pookong Kee, Director of the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne, assessed the applications.

The grants were open to postgraduate and honours level students currently enrolled at any Australian university.

Professor Kee said the grants provided a unique opportunity for promising scholars of Thailand across many different disciplines to conduct in-depth field research.

'We are grateful for the opportunity to reinvigorate Thai Studies in Australia,' he said.

China's 'tiger girls' come down from the hills

Women entrepreneurs reflect wider trends of China's social change.

Minglu Chen

In Chinese, capable—especially shrewd—women have long been compared to tigers, but often negatively, because the image contradicts the ideals of gentle and obedient women. In China, for example, in the famous story of *Shuihu zhuan* (The outlaws of the marsh), one of the rare female characters, Gu Dasao, was nicknamed 'The Tigress', because of her hot temper and leading position at home.

In 2003—on my first fieldwork trip to Jiaocheng County in North China for the book *Tiger girls: women and enterprises in the People's Republic of China*—sitting at the dinner table among a group of female officials, I was told the story of how girls from the poor mountain areas of the county went down to the better-off county town with the hope of finding a husband who could give them a better life. However, instead of marrying a rich husband, these girls set up their own businesses and became entrepreneurs.

The officials referred to these girls as 'the tiger girls who had come down from the hills'. As the conversation flowed, the officials then talked about themselves. Being government cadres, and also wives and mothers, they not only had to tend to government businesses but also to take care of their families and do household work. They started to joke with each other by calling themselves 'tiger girls' as well. Here, women entrepreneurs are referred to as 'tiger girls' because of their outstanding ability, as well as their great individual courage.

In the two years between October 2003 and October 2005, I conducted a series of interviews with women entrepreneurs in the provinces of Shanxi, Hainan and Sichuan. Some of these women ran businesses on their own and some jointly with their husbands. Most of them were engaged in retail and service industries, which are commonly regarded as 'women's business'.

However, some of them were enterprise owners in the traditionally male-dominated business sectors of manufacturing and real estate development. These women's businesses varied from shops with capital of several thousand Australian dollars and two or three employees to larger enterprises with millions of Australian dollars in capital and 2 000 employees.

Training classes for domestic workers at a vocational school.

Most of these women were born in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s—in other words, this is a generation that has experienced the early socialist construction of the People's Republic of China, the Cultural Revolution and China's reform and opening. They have lived both in a highly centralised system and in an era when privatisation is becoming more common.

On the one hand, these women entrepreneurs were a literate group, as 90 per cent of them had received primary and junior middle school education (which is much better than the general situation for the female population in China). On the other hand, tertiary education does not seem to be an important element in the making of these women's careers, as only one-third of them had been to university. On a closer look, the higher

Continued page 20

China's 'tiger girls

From page 19

education they had received was not necessarily of the best quality. None had been to any of the top universities in China. Some had received higher education through radio and TV universities, by correspondences, at employees universities, cadres schools colleagues or by self-teaching courses. Most of these forms of adult education were introduced in China in the 1980s as supplements to general higher education and to provide opportunities for those in employment to continue their study in their off-hours.

The owner and manager of an electronics factory.

The experiences of these women entrepreneurs in starting their businesses also reflect the wider trends of China's social change. One such experience is *xiahai* (jumping into the sea), meaning to leave their permanent positions in the work unit to take up a private occupation. Inspired by the economic reforms, some of the women interviewed had become daring 'jumpers' in the early 1990s, who quit their more secure jobs as factory workers, technicians, schoolteachers, doctors and government officials to engage in business.

Another type of experience is *xiagang*—being-laid off as a result of the Chinese Government's reform on small and medium-sized, state-owned enterprises. For most workers, being laid off puts them in a serious economic situation. However, for some of these tiger girls, *xiagang* offered opportunities in the private sector, since the market rewarded individual efforts and capability.

Despite their business success, these tiger girls still have to face gender inequality in contemporary Chinese society. Like their sisters in China's past, they are subject to the gendered labour division of 'men outside, women inside' of the traditional Chinese agrarian economy, in which men went out to work in the fields and women stayed at home to look after the family. Domestic work (for example cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and childcare) still largely remains the responsibility of these women. These tiger girls commonly regard this as a disadvantage for women in business. Moreover, for those who are running their enterprises jointly with their husbands, more often than not their husband represents the business to the outside world. In other words, the enterprise is often registered under the husband's name.

However, women being subordinate to men and having to shoulder domestic responsibilities is not happening in China only. Then what is so unique about these tiger girls? After all, they have been empowered by their role as entrepreneurs. They are playing a much more active part than their husband in the development and operation of their business. Even for those who must have their husbands as the legal representative of the enterprise, they are often the ones to make executive decisions. Equally important, these tiger girls have given the concept of 'inside' a new meaning. Business responsibilities such as production, personnel, finance and sales are all regarded by them as 'inside' work to be taken care of by women. This has largely expanded women's area of operation.

Secondly, research on the tiger girls shows that political capital is important in the business world in China. These women's connections with the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese Government are nothing but remarkable. Many are members of the Party or are previous government officials or hold different honourable titles given by the government. At the same time, research

Continued page 21

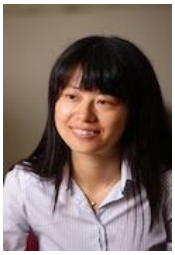
China's 'tiger girls

From page 20

indicates that they are also well connected, and perhaps even better connected to the Party–state through their families. Many are wives, daughters and daughters-in-law of party members and government officials. Imaginably, such individual and familial political capital has brought them substantial opportunities in business.

Moreover, for those interested in the development of a private economy in China, the experiences of the tiger girls also tell us how the Chinese Government effectively incorporates and mobilises those in the private economic sector so as to maintain economic growth.

Understandably, attention from the government often comes hand in hand with business success. In many cases, these women reported themselves, or their family members, to have received offers from the Party–state to join the Communist Party, government-led congresses, or mass organisations. Some have received awards from the Party–state or to act as 'observers' of government departments. These entrepreneurs also regard such offers as political honours.



Dr Minglu Chen is a postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney, and the author of Tiger girls: women and enterprises in the People's Republic of China*, Routledge, 2011.*

Asialink hosts ASEAN regional dialogue in Yangon, Myanmar

Australian-based Asialink hosted a first-of-its-kind dialogue in Yangon, Myanmar from 2– 4 February 2012. The Conversations are Asialink's signature Track II diplomacy initiative.

More than 40 delegates from 12 countries attended. Visiting nations are Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Delegates came from a range of different sectors, including business, government, academia and the media.

'The Conversations are designed to facilitate a relaxed and very frank exchange of ideas,' said Asialink International Director Professor Tony Milner.

'The event brings together key Australians and ASEAN representatives to discuss the changing dynamics of this region,' he said. 'In the past we've met in Malaysia, Cambodia and Vietnam as well as Australia. We're delighted again to be able to help Australians engage with some of the most influential people in the region.'

Foreign Minister for the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Chair of the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Myanmar ISIS), H.E. U Wunna Maung Lwin, delivered the keynote address to launch The Conversations.

The talks came in the context of a wave of democratic reform in Myanmar. In the midst of these developments, ASEAN members have approved the country's bid for ASEAN chair in 2014.

AP Writers seeks Hong Kong shelter

An initiative to support Asia–Pacific writers fails to find a suitable home in an Australian institution.

Jane Camens

When I started the Asia–Pacific Writing Partnership (AP Writers) at Griffith University in Queensland, I imagined, naively, that an organisation bringing together writers from around our region would be welcomed and supported by Australian university writing programs and backed by the nation's literary arts funding bodies.

The initiative would be seen as a way to make fruitful connections between people who shape our perceptions. It would be a vehicle for Australian universities, literary organisations and, perhaps, Australian publishers to engage with established and emerging writers in Asia. It would be a way to introduce more Australian literature to regional and global readerships, and would position Australian literature as part of the region's literature. It would bring more literature from Asia to Australians.

While writers from Australia and Asia have indeed made useful international connections at AP Writers gatherings (in India, Hong Kong, Indonesia and, recently, in Perth), the initiative has not, to date, secured ongoing institutional support. This is partly a problem of falling into funding gaps, being outside existing funding models and running events in countries that are not this year's funding priorities.

Consequently, at AP Writers most recent board meeting, it was decided to re-form the organisation independent of Australian institutions and register as a society in Asia. In April this year AP Writers will be registered in Hong Kong as a society for authors from the region.[1]

As an Australian who lived and worked in Asia for some 20 years, I have been disappointed and somewhat disillusioned by not gaining more Australian institutional support for this initiative. So much for talk about the desire and need to engage with Asia.

For the past six years, AP Writers has been sheltered within Australian universities. Seed-funded out of the vice-chancellor's discretionary funds at Griffith University, AP Writers was originally housed in the Griffith Asia Institute. It relocated when the University of Adelaide's writing program offered to host the initiative, but once there it was not granted any funding to operate.

Although AP Writers was now receiving no operational funding from the university that housed it, I could not apply either for core funding from arts bodies (because we operated under the auspices of a university), nor for Australian Research Council (ARC) funding. To apply for ARC funding, AP Writers needed a postdoctoral champion prepared to act as the lead applicant. Our potential champion was involved with a competing ARC funding application.

Participants at the recent AP Writers' 'Writing Out of Asia' event in Perth.

AP Writers was stuck in no-man's land, dependent on me working. We had either to find another champion *pro bono* institution or become an independent organisation. I approached several universities but found each either stretched with other priorities or now doing for themselves some of the things that AP Writers had initiated. It became clear that Australian universities were no

Continued page 23

AP Writers seeks Hong Kong shelter

From page 22

longer a suitable home. On 2 December 2011, when the AP Writers board met in Perth, it voted to register the organisation as an independent entity in Asia for several reasons, one of which was that the forums we held in Asia were better attended than our Australian event. Even Australian writers leading writing programs made a greater effort to attend our events held outside Australia. Asia was also more appealing to participants from the West—chiefly the UK and USA. Asian countries therefore were the preferred networking venues. But perhaps most importantly, in Asia we helped provide some of the infrastructure that is already available for writers in Australia.

AP Writers was formed to support writers from Asia and the Pacific by building relationships that introduce authors from the region into worldwide literary conversations. It works with partner organisations—to date, universities and other literary festivals—which provide the venues and some of the funding for forums, workshops, readings and so on. The AP Writers website received more than two million hits in 2011 from 47 251 unique visitors. As of early February 2012, it had 1140 confirmed subscribers from around the world.

In 2007 AP Writers secured funding from the International Centre of Excellence in Asia–Pacific Studies, a research initiative supported by the Australian Government, but since abandoned.[3] The then Director of the Griffith Asia Institute, Michael Wesley, now head of the Lowy Institute, aligned AP Writers' mission with an Australian Research Council priority 'to enhance Australia's capacity to interpret and engage with its regional and global environment through a greater understanding of languages, societies, politics and cultures'. The funding application cited former prime minister Kevin Rudd's call for greater cultural engagement with Asia.[4] The grant enabled the AP Writers board to meet for the first time at a proposed 'Asia–Pacific New Writing Summit on National Identity & Globalisation'. The meeting was held in Bali, hosted by our Indonesia partner at Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, at the same time as the Ubud Readers and Writers Festival.

The APWP (Asia-Pacific Writing Partnership) has been one of the great organisations in not only promoting writing from Asia and the Pacific, but in bringing together a network of possibilities hitherto untapped. It is already the single most valuable creative and cultural resource for anyone interested in writing in the region. I wholeheartedly support its future directions and urge other institutions to do likewise. The APWP's support for translation—an example of just one of its activities and one of my abiding interests—has been worthy of note.
—Professor Brian Castro, Chair, Creative Writing Discipline of English & Creative Writing, Co-Director, JM Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice, the University of Adelaide.

In 2008 AP Writers met in New Delhi where it co-organised workshops on literary translation and a symposium, 'Asia Pacific Writing the Future', hosted by the Indian Institute of Technology and other local institutional partners.[5] Its Hong Kong symposium 'Writing Across Cultures', in 2010, was held in conjunction with the Man Hong Kong International Literary Festival.

The focus of the conference was on teaching creative writing in the region, an issue which is problematic in many ways, not least because it is perceived as belonging to the English-language discipline and therefore carries Western imperialist/globalisation baggage. Some of the 'provocations' are available online in a special issue of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*.[6] Writing

Continued page 24

AP Writers seeks Hong Kong shelter

From page 23

Programs, which, until late 2010, was called the Australian Association of Writing Programs.

In December 2011, at the University of Western Australia, AP Writers held 'Writing Out of Asia', a series of workshops and roundtables led by short provocations. The event was organised in conjunction with the 14th Biennial Symposium on Literatures and Cultures of the Asia–Pacific Region, 'Asia–Pacific Literature and Culture in the Era of the Digital Revolution', hosted by Dennis Haskell, Chair of the Literature Board of the Australia Council for the Arts. Participants came from 14 countries.

References

1. Emerging writers and others can join as associates or in other categories (such as patron). AP Writers next gathering will be in November 2012 in Thailand, hosted by the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.
2. A lengthy description of how AP Writers was formed and what it has achieved to date was published late last year in *New Writing: the International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, (Vol. 8. No 3. Nov 2011), published by Taylor & Francis, Graeme Harper (ed.).
3. The International Centre of Excellence in Asia–Pacific Studies at the Australian National University was an Australian Government initiative which aimed to 'raise the profile of Asia-Pacific Studies in Australia through a program of new, sustainable and collaborative activities'. The centre operated from 2005 to 2007, but was abandoned by an incoming Labor government. Other possible sources of funding for AP Writers have since been abandoned, including the Asia–Pacific Futures Research Network.
4. AAP/*Herald Sun*. 2008, 'Kevin Rudd calls for greater engagement with Asia'.
5. Other partners for the New Delhi meeting were the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, the Sanskriti Foundation, the Indian Institute for Advanced Studies, Delhi University**,** Jawaharlal Nehru University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Osian's Literary Agency, and *Biblio*, a referred literary studies journal from New Dehli.
6. *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses,* special issue no. 10. April 2011.

Jane Camens co-founded the Hong Kong International Literary Festival, the first of the writers' festivals in Asia to showcase writing from the region. She formed the AP Writers in 2005 and continues to work for the organisation pro bono*. She now runs Literary Events Asia-Pacific Plus (LEAP+), a literary events management consultancy registered in Australia.*

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.

Not just a joking matter: humour in Chinese life and letters

A new book finds Chinese humour is not unique.

Jocelyn Chey

A pottery figure of a storyteller from a Han dynasty tomb shows a cheerful man reciting, perhaps singing, keeping the rhythm with his drum and the beat of a foot. His stories have been lost but the humour has been preserved in his animated expression, reminding us of the thousands of years of humour in Chinese culture.

It is this tradition and its contemporary expression that I and my co-editor Jessica Milner Davis have been researching, resulting in a two-volume work entitled *Humour in Chinese life and letters*.[1] Chapters from invited Australian and overseas scholars cover humour in literature, media, film, cartoons, advertising, education, personality, psychology, popular culture, propaganda and politics.

Pottery figure of story teller, from Han dynasty tomb.

Humour studies is an emerging transdisciplinary field of scholarship and comparative studies are yielding interesting results, but Chinese humour has been little studied, still less from the comparative point of view. An exception is recent comparative studies of humour in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Canada and Switzerland that show students' attitudes to the personal use of humour and to humour in the classroom varies significantly between cultures. These studies will be published in the second volume of our book.

Humour is not simply a list of jokes but something basic to human emotion. It is found in every society. Norbert Elias commented that societies progressed from aggressive confrontation to civility, just as they developing table manners and eating with forks—or chopsticks—rather than knives.[2] He saw laughter as a behaviour that forestalled biting. In Chinese culture, standards for the use of humour depend on social norms for particular circumstances, and these standards change over time and place, as do notions of when humour is appropriate. Australians can make jokes about almost anything or anyone at any time, but China has many more rules and restrictions.

To understand traditional approaches to humour, we must first consider its roots in classical philosophy. Confucius spent much time discussing the importance of proper behaviour and believed that humour was natural but should be kept within bounds. In the *Analects* he gave examples of places and times when humour was appropriate or inappropriate. Daoist sages used humour as a tool to highlight the faults and foibles of contemporary society. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) theory has also influenced how people think about health, emotions and behaviour. TCM teaches that *qi* 氣 circulates in the body just as blood does and governs health and emotions.

Humour can help unblock *qi* and has great seasonal variation. Some of the earliest written records of Chinese humour concern the professional humorists known *as huaji* 滑稽 or 'wits' in the imperial courts' who used clever humorous repartee to admonish rulers much as the court jesters did in medieval Europe. China has the world's longest tradition of documented literary humour,

Continued page 26

Humour in Chinese life and letters

From page 25

with collections such as *Xiao lin* 笑林 or 'Forest of jokes', ascribed to Handan Chun 邯鄲淳 of the 2nd century. Only a few *Xiao lin* jokes have been preserved. Here is one:

> Two men were fighting and one bit off the other's nose. The case came to court and the one claimed that the other had bitten off his own nose. The magistrate asked how that could have happened since the nose is higher than the mouth. 'Simple', the man replied, 'He climbed on his bed to do it.[3]

In later centuries, and particularly after the invention of printing made the circulation of ideas quicker and cheaper, literary humour flourished. Examples can be found in comic drama from the Yuan dynasty, comedy in Ming novels or joke collections from the Ming and Qing dynasties. It is important to note that these do not represent all traditions of humour. Oral jokes and quips were largely unrecorded. Humour of ethnic minorities and in dialects, likewise.

Theories of humour have only a history of a hundred years or so in China. They were developed at the same time as other social theories that were imported from Japan and the West. Possibly the most famous and influential 'humour specialist' was Lin Yutang 林語堂 and two chapters of our book deal with him and his important journal article *Lun youmo* 論幽默 (On humour).

Lin was inspired by the British writer George Meredith and his essay 'Comedy'. Meredith proposed that humour promoted civilisation and values such as tolerance and democracy. Henri Bergson, on the other hand, was concerned that the mechanisation of society was imprisoning the *élan vital* or human spirit. Laughing at the mechanical could provide a moment of free choice, he thought. His Chinese disciple Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書, notably in his novel *Fortress besieged* (*Weicheng* 圍城), wrestled with the concept and application of humour in daily life, using the metaphor of the clock to represent social conventions. The humour theories of Lin Yutang and Qian Zhongshu were influential in 20th-century China.

Humour studies are not only concerned with social attitudes to humour but also with its various topics and means of communication. Language is the vehicle of culture, so if there is a particular Chinese kind of humour, it must be related somehow to Chinese language. Even cursory examination shows that Chinese language is frequently manipulated for humorous effect.

For instance, the following character is a nonsensical construction of three parts: the top means 'grass' and is pronounced *cao*, the right side has no particular meaning but is pronounced *ni* and the left side means 'horse' and is pronounced *ma*. The reader will deconstruct the character in his or her mind and arrive at a potential pronunciation of *Cao-ni-ma* (Fuck your mother). This kind of humour is unique to the Chinese written language and is also an in-joke, only to be understood by literate people. The use of humour to reinforce in-group bonds is characteristic of humour in all societies. There are many examples in Chinese language. Lily Lee discusses humour in the 5th-century work, *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (A new account of the tales of the world). This knitted together the literati through references to history and notable persons understood only by educated people.

Puns, found in all languages, abound in Chinese because of the monosyllabic nature of the language. For instance, after the suppression of student occupation of

Continued page 27

Humour in Chinese life and letters

From page 26

Tian'anmen Square in Beijing in 1989, many small bottles *xiao ping* 小瓶 were smashed on university campuses, punning on the name of Communist Party leader Deng Xiaoping.

Chinese is a tonal language and the tones themselves can be used for humorous effect. One example is the use of rising syllables, *rushing,* 入聲 in Cantonese pop songs of the 1960s. This is a special characteristic of Cantonese dialect. When English words first became fashionable in Shanghai or Hong Kong, they prompted many jokes. For instance, English 'dear' sounded like *di-er* 低耳 (ears hanging down). China abounds in dialects and different accents. Many jokes focus on the funny way that other people talk. *Xiangsheng* 相聲, a kind of stage comic dialogue often called cross-talk, has many plots based on these themes.

Yue Minjun's statues of laughing men. Photo by kind permission of the artist.

Not all humour is dependent on verbal expression. China has visual jokes, as do other cultures. The work of contemporary artist Yue Minjun 越民君 shows figures whose unrestrained laughter is a comment both on expectations of formal stature in public and on resort to laughter as a rare opportunity to express free choice.

Forms and expressions of humour have multiplied in the last 100 years as modern media forms have developed. The Chinese Communist Party keeps tight control over the media. Humour in newspapers, television and in films is even today subject to strict censorship. In spite of this, cheerful and even funny programs are promoted for the health and wellbeing of the people. The Party has also used humour for its own ends in political propaganda, and corporations and commercial enterprises have learned to use it in advertising. The irrepressible spirit of the Chinese people has found new ways to express itself on the internet. Jokes, spoofs and send-ups abound. In the absence of officially sanctioned ways of expressing dissatisfaction with the government, political humour has found a home particularly in internet blogs.

To summarise, multiple strands of Chinese humour can be identified: it may be used as a social and educational tool, in the Daoist tradition; or it may be created to free the spirit, a natural emotion as defined and circumscribed by TCM and Confucianism. Overriding these, we see that even though in the 20th century humour was shaped, harnessed and redefined by the Chinese Communist Party, the dynamism and optimism of the Chinese people has persisted and is now more than ever finding expression in the same way as elsewhere in the world.

There is no doubt that there is a Chinese sense of humour, but it is not unique. The more we look into it, the more we see there is little difference between what Chinese and other people of the world have in common, particularly humour.

References

1. 'Humour in Chinese life and letters: classical and traditional approaches', Hong Kong University Press, 2011, is vol.1. Vol.2, covering the modern and contemporary periods, is due for publication late 2012 or early 2013.
2. Elias Norbert, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation,* translated by Edmund Jephcott as *The civilizing process: the history of manners,* Urizen Books, New York, 1978, pp. 120–123.
3. J. Kowallis, trans. *Wit and humor in old Cathay,* Panda, Beijing, 1986, p. 7

Jocelyn Chey is a former diplomat and visiting professor of Chinese Studies at the University of Sydney.

India's rise: changing the mental map of the Asia–Pacific

The changes wrought by India's rise and engagement with East Asia will be profound.

David Brewster

In April 1942 an apparently invincible Japanese army stood at India's eastern border after having conquered the whole of Southeast Asia in the space of weeks. The Royal Navy had fled to Africa, leaving India's coast virtually undefended. The gates to British India lay open. But the Japanese Army basically stopped where it was and never seriously tried to overthrow the British Raj. There were several reasons why, but underlying it all was the simple fact that India did not then form part of Japan's 'mental map' of Asia. Tokyo's idea of Asia stopped at Burma.

What is our mental map of the Asia Pacific and how is that likely to change in coming years? The new book, *India as an Asia Pacific power*, examines India's strategic engagement with the Asia Pacific over the last several decades and asks whether India will join the ranks of its great powers. It is the story of the rise of India as a major economic, political and military force and the natural expansion of its area of influence beyond its traditional confines of South Asia into Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

It is also the story of how India is positioning itself with the existing major powers of the Asia Pacific, the United States, China and Japan, as well as with key middle powers in the region. What strategic compulsions will India be facing in coming decades? To what extent will India be forced to make common cause with the United States and its allies in the Pacific in order to balance the rising power of China? Is India really the 'swing state' of Asia, as some have claimed?

Underlying this story of the rising power of India is the story of the changing mental map of the Asia Pacific. Mental maps matter. We all use them to divide the world up into chunks that we are better able to understand and deal with. One of the most important mental maps for Australia over the last several decades has been the idea of the 'Asia Pacific'.

Map: Wikipedia

Although the Asia Pacific is now an ubiquitous part of our geographic and economic landscape it is sometimes hard to remember that it is a political construct. But its shape is set to change substantially in coming years. It is something that we need to be prepared for.

The idea of the Asia Pacific is a recent one. It was pushed during the 1970s and 1980s by countries such as Japan and Australia that wanted to better bind the United States with the economically vibrant East Asia. Although primarily driven by economics, the idea of the Asia Pacific has always had a strong underlying security element: keeping the United States as a benign offshore balancer and the main security provider to the region. It also gave Australia an opportunity to bind itself closer to East Asia as a Pacific nation, if not an Asian one.

But our mental map of the Asia Pacific never extended to South Asia. Asia–Pacific institutions such as ASEAN and APEC were built without India. Many decision-makers regarded India as simply too far and too hard to deal with. Nor did India see itself as part of the Asia Pacific. In the decades following its independence India saw itself

Continued page 29

India and Asia–Pacific power

From page 28

as a champion of colonised peoples throughout Asia and elsewhere.

But while New Delhi produced plenty of rhetoric, there was little practical engagement with the newly independent states of East Asia in dealing with their immediate economic or security needs. India was focused on its own economic development, based on autarchy and state ownership, and its security preoccupations in South Asia. Some might argue that through the Cold War India's main contribution to Asia–Pacific security was to complain about the role of the United States in providing security to the region. But the astounding economic growth of China, and now India, changes these assumptions.

The rise of China is unsettling the security of the region and forcing East Asian states to look for new partners. The opening of the Indian economy is also arguably pulling the centre of economic gravity in Asia westwards. India's trade and investment relationships in East Asia are growing dramatically.

The 'Indo-Pacific' is still little more than a concept and there are many questions as to how this idea can be put into practice.

India is now developing security relationships throughout the region—primarily with the United States, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore and Australia, but also with others. India is now welcomed by many countries in East Asia as an important economic and strategic balance to the growing power of China. The growing presence of the Indian Navy in the South China Sea, in partnership with Vietnam and Singapore, is just one manifestation of India's security ambitions in the region.

Although China now downplays any Indian role in the Pacific, it may have little choice but to accept a growing Indian security presence, just as India may have little choice but to accept a growing Chinese security presence in the Indian Ocean.

In dealing with this changing reality, it won't be enough just to bring India into existing Asia–Pacific institutions, such as APEC, and then carry on business as usual. We need to consider some of the more fundamental consequences of including the Indian subcontinent in our mental map of Asia. The changes wrought by India's rise and its engagement with East Asia will be profound and not always smooth—as India finds its voice and as powerful states in northeast Asia see a relative loss of influence in shaping the regional agenda.

Many strategic thinkers in the United States, India and Australia are already talking about the idea of the Indo-Pacific. They increasingly see the Indian and Pacific Oceans as an interdependent—or even single—strategic and economic space stretching from Vladivostok to the shores of Somalia. But the Indo-Pacific is still little more than a concept and there are many questions as to how this can be put into practice. As US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently commented, 'How we translate the growing connection into an operational concept is a question that we need to answer if we are to adapt to new challenges in the region'.

What does this mean for Australia? Australia is uniquely placed to take advantage of this shift. While Australia lies at the extreme southern end of East Asia, it lies close to the centre of the Indo-Pacific region. We are a major resources and energy exporter to the whole of the Indo-Pacific. Despite our small population, we are potentially also a significant military force of the Indo– Pacific. This is why the US–Australia alliance is being expanded from essentially a Pacific partnership into an Indo–Pacific one.

While Australia has been keen in theory to

Continued page 30

India and Asia–Pacific power

From page 31

engage with India as a new economic and strategic partner, it has had a great deal of trouble in giving substance to a security relationship. How exactly can we contribute to India's security and how would we expect India to contribute to ours? These are not easy questions to answer, especially when we also need to manage our close economic relationship with China.

More broadly, Australia needs to think about how we can take a key role in helping to build and shape an Indo-Pacific community, just as we took a leading role in building the idea of the Asia Pacific. Moving our strategic focus westwards to include the Indian Ocean will place us in unfamiliar territory. But these tectonic changes in our region represent a major opportunity for Australia.

David Brewster is with the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University. He is the author of India as an Asia Pacific Power, *published by Routledge as part of its Security in the Asia Pacific Series.*

Asian Studies Review

Asian Studies Review is multidisciplinary and welcomes contributions in the fields of anthropology, modern history, politics, international relations, sociology, modern Asian languages and literature, contemporary philosophy, religion, human geography, health sciences, and the environment.

The journal focuses on the modern histories, cultures, and societies of Asia and welcomes submissions that adopt a contemporary approach to critical studies of the Asian region. *Asian Studies Review* welcomes research in new fields and emerging disciplines, including cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, film and media studies, popular and youth cultures, queer studies, diasporic studies, transnational and globalisation studies. *Asian Studies Review* also includes review articles and book reviews.

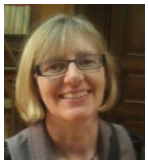
Asian Studies Review is associated with the Asian Studies Association of Australia. All research articles in this journal have undergone rigorous peer review.

Join the ASAA or renew your membership

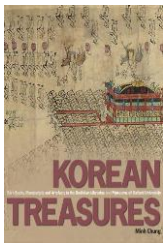
Members of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) receive various benefits, including four issues a year of the *Asian Studies Review,* book discounts from selected publishers and opportunities to network with researchers and practitioners in Asian Studies.

To join or renew your current membership logon to our secure site and pay by credit card. Or download the membership form and return it to the ASAA.

From the Asia Bookroom

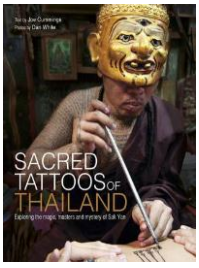


SALLY BURDON, Asia Bookroom, previews a selection of recent books.



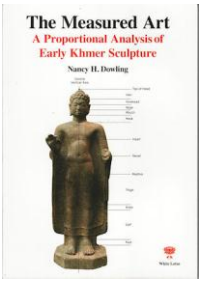
Korean treasures: rare books, manuscripts and artefacts in the Bodleian libraries and museums of Oxford University. By Minh Chung, the Bodleian Library, UK. $89.95.

Many important and valuable manuscripts, rare books, and artefacts related to Korea have been acquired by donations throughout the long history of the Bodleian Library and the museums of the University of Oxford. However, due to an early lack of specialist knowledge in this area, many of these Korean items were largely neglected. This publication uncovers these treasures and presents them together in a single volume for the first time. In addition, the book gives a general overview of the extent of the Korean book collections in Oxford and locations where some of these treasures can be seen.



Sacred tattoos of Thailand. Exploring the magic, power and mystery of *sak yan*. By Joe Cummings and Dan White, 200 pp, Marshall Cavendish, Singapore. $45.

This book explores the fascinating centuries old tradition of *sak yan* tattoos, tracing the spiritual art form from Thailand back to its roots in Cambodia and India. The tattoos are believed to imbue the wearer with special powers and protection to help them in their everyday lives, but the tradition is also deeply entwined in the Buddhist moral code and the designs can lose their powers if a wearer errs from their spiritual path.



The measured art: a proportional analysis of early Khmer sculpture. By Nancy H Dowling, paperback, 159 pp, White Lotus, Thailand. $62.45.

This work offers an innovative approach to interpreting early Khmer sculpture. It presents a proportional analysis in which measurements are taken directly from the images. In the absence of historical evidence about artistic practices in early Cambodia, this provides us with a new understanding of how the early Khmer sculptor calculated and manipulated the composition of his imagery. It further makes it possible to establish the first objective database for comparing the measurements of one form or image with another. Of special interest to scholars, curators, collectors and dealers is the practical application of proportional analysis in dating and authenticating early Khmer sculpture.

Reading in Asian languages. Making sense of written texts in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. By Kenneth S Goodman et al (eds), paperback, 279 pp. Taylor & Francis, UK. $67.

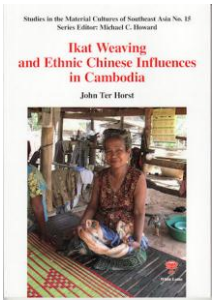
Reading in Asian languages is rich with information about how literacy works in the non-alphabetic writing systems (Chinese, Japanese, Korean) used by hundreds of millions of

Continued page 32

Books on Asia

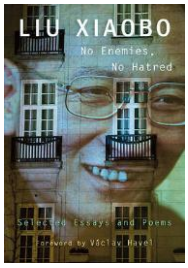
(From page 31)

people and refutes the common Western belief that such systems are hard to learn or to use. The book explains how and why non-alphabetic writing works well for its users; provides explanations for why it is no more difficult for children to learn than alphabetic writing systems. and demonstrates that there is a single process of making sense of written language regardless of the orthography. The book offers practical theory-based methodology for the teaching of literacy in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean to first and second language learners and is a useful resource for teachers and researchers in Asia.



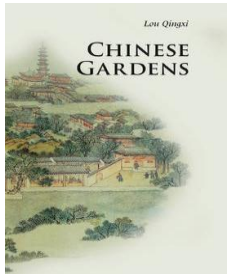
Ikat weaving and the ethnic Chinese influence in Cambodia. By John Ter Horst, paperback, 101 pp, White Lotus, Thailand. $55.95.

It is said that the contemporary Cambodian silk industry is centuries old and can be traced back to the 12th-century courts of Angkor. The hand-woven ceremonial dress, the *sampot hol*, is even considered a national costume and provides the war-stricken Cambodians great pride. However, little is known about how the *ikat* weaving industry is economically organised, how many silk weavers produce *ikat* woven ceremonial dresses, where the silk yarn comes from, and who the main customers are. The ethnic identity of the silk weavers and traders is also something of a mystery. Although Khmer and Cham involvement in the Cambodian *ikat*-weaving industry has been documented, the ethnic Chinese dominance of both the production and trade of silks has been neglected so far. Making use of French colonial archives, the author fills this gap. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Cambodia, he also describes under what economic, political, and cultural conditions the once humble rural silk industry grew into a global network.



No enemies, no hatred. Selected essays and poems. By Liu Xiaobo, 366 pp, Harvard UP. $44.95.

When the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded on December 10, 2010, its recipient, Liu Xiaobo, was in Jinzhou Prison, serving an 11-year sentence for what Beijing called 'incitement to subvert state power'. This book includes writings spanning two decades, providing insight into all aspects of Chinese life. The works not only chronicle a leading dissident's struggle against tyranny but enrich the record of universal longing for freedom and dignity. Also presented are poems written for his wife, Liu Xia, public documents and a foreword by Vaclav Havel.



Chinese gardens. By Lou Qingxi, paperback, 168 pp, Cambridge University Press. UK, $24.95.

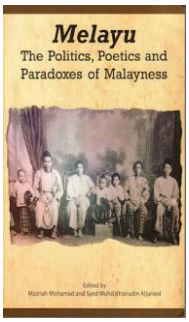
China is renowned for its enchanting, tranquil gardens, designed to reflect both the charm of nature and the ancient Chinese view of life. *Chinese gardens* explores the creation of classical gardens through history, discussing the theories and artistic conception behind them and the development of diverse regional styles. Lou Qingxi provides a comprehensive introduction to the distinctive combination of nature, philosophy and art that is unique to Chinese gardens.

Continued page 33

Books on Asia

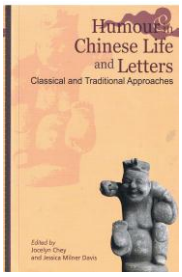
From page 32

Melayu. The politics, poetics and paradoxes of Malayness.



By Maznah Mohamad and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (eds), paperback, 370 pp, NUS Press, Singapore. $49.95.

People within the Malay world hold strong but diverse opinions about the meaning of the word *Melayu*, which can be loosely translated as Malayness. Questions of whether the Filipinos are properly called 'Malay', or the Mon-Khmer-speaking Orang Asli in Malaysia, can generate heated debates. So too can the question of whether it is appropriate to speak of a *kebangsaan Melayu* (Malay as nationality) as the basis of membership within an aspiring postcolonial nation-state, a political rather than a cultural community embracing all residents of the Malay states, including the immigrant Chinese and Indian population. Contributors in this book examine the checkered, wavering and changeable understanding of the word *Melayu* by considering hitherto unexplored case studies dealing with use of the term in connection with origins, nations, minority–majority politics, Filipino Malays, Riau Malays, Orang Asli, Straits Chinese literature, women's veiling, vernacular television, social dissent, literary women, and modern Sufism.

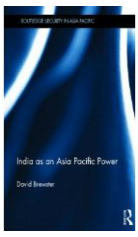


Humour in Chinese life and letters. Classical and traditional approaches. By Jocelyn Chey and Jessica Milner Davis (eds), paperback, 312 pp, Hong Kong University Press. $25**.**

How do Chinese societies approach humour in personal life and in the public sphere? This book addresses the etymological difficulties of humour as a concept in Chinese language and explores connections and contrasts with Western styles of humour. Periods discussed range from earliest times to the beginning of the 20th century, covering many different forms of humour—verbal, visual and behavioural.

The book brings together internationally respected scholars in Chinese studies with other specialists to explore humour through modes of enquiry in cultural and political history, linguistics, literature, drama and the history and philosophy of science.

See 'Not just a joking matter: humour in Chinese life and letters', page 25



India as an Asia Pacific power. By David Brewster, hardback, 228pp, Routledge**.**

The emergence of India as a regional and potential global power is forcing us to rethink our mental map of the Asia Pacific. We are only just beginning to discern how India may alter the global economic landscape. How will the rise of India change the strategic landscape of Asia and beyond?

This book provides a comprehensive assessment of India's international relations in the Asia Pacific, a region which has not traditionally been

Continued page 34

New books on Asia

Continued from page 33

understood to include India. It examines India's strategic thinking about the Asia Pacific, its relationships with China and the United States, and India's increasingly close security ties with other major countries in the region. It considers the consequences of India's rise on the Asia–Pacific strategic order and asks whether India is likely to join the ranks of the major powers of the Asia Pacific in coming years.

Japanese hybrid factories in Australia: the Japanese system transferred. By Celal Bayari, 208 pp, paperback, Lit Verlag, Berlin.

This is a study of Japanese management and production system in Australia. It draws on the work of John H. Dunning, and Tetsuo Abo's 'hybrid factory' paradigm.

There are several hybrid factory variations globally. The book compares data from studies of Japanese hybrid factories in the UK, and the US with the Australian data, and concludes that the labour relations element of the Japanese system displays similar tendencies in all three cases.

The book argues that this is an outcome of the labour market deregulation under neo-liberal governance (i.e. the Anglo-Saxon economic model) in these three countries.

Diary notes

10th Australian Network for Japanese Law (ANJeL) International Conference, 'Socio-legal norms in preventing and managing disasters in Japan: Asia–Pacific and interdisciplinary perspectives', University of Sydney Law School (Camperdown Campus), **1–2 March 2012.** This anniversary conference will commemorate Japan's '3-11' disaster in 2011, as well as ANJeL's decade-long efforts to compare Japanese Law in broad context. See website for further information.

'Intercity networks and urban governance in Asia' conference, Singapore, 8–9 March 2012. A multidisciplinary conference that will examine urban governance in Asia from the perspective of intercity networks. See website for further information.

'Reading Dutch for historical research', intensive residential course, to be held at South Durras, NSW, 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. Open to academics, professionals and current and intending postgraduate students. See website for further information.

Asian Studies Association of Australia's 19th Biennial Conference, 'Knowing Asia: Asian studies in an Asian century', 11–13 July, 2012, University of Western Sydney (Parramatta South Campus). The organisers are also calling for submission of abstracts by 28 February 2012. For further information, visit the conference website.

See page 14. Keynote speakers confirmed for ASAA conference.

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