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China's leadership change



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(NPC) will convene in Beijing from 5 March 2013 to complete the 'once-in-a-decade leadership change' by appointing a new group of state leaders. Like the 18th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, this first session of the 12th NPC will disappoint those political commentators who were hoping for dramatic leadership changes and upheavals in China's political universe. [Read more](#)

Japan's LDP sets course for the past



Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is in government again, and Abe Shinzo is prime minister again. With confidence that can come only from

being the leader of a political party that governed Japan for almost all of the postwar period, Abe has promised to 'restore Japan'. Such aspirations, however, must be tempered with a sense of humility and a willingness to learn from past mistakes—things that seem lacking in the LDP's current approach to governing. [Read more](#)



'Woman power' in South Korea

Ms Park Geun-Hye's recent stunning victory in South Korea's presidential election made history. She became the first-ever female politician, not only in Korea but also in north-east Asia, to take a nation's top post. [Read more](#)

Kim Jong-Un's search for shortcuts

When the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il breathed his last in December 2011, his youngest son Kim Jong-Un was catapulted to the country's leadership. This permitted him to meet the people and play the role of populist and reformer. [Read more](#)

Extremism in Pakistan



The shooting of schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai is symptomatic of the violence and death that are becoming

the daily norm in Pakistan.

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It's the economy—China's 'once-in-a-decade leadership change'

The recent transition to a new leadership group shows how much the Chinese Communist Party values continuity.

By Hans Hendrischke

Following China's Party Congress in November 2012, China's National People's Congress (NPC) will convene in Beijing from 5 March 2013 to complete the 'once-in-a-decade leadership change' by appointing a new group of state leaders, including a new president and a new head of government.

Like the 18th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), this first session of the 12th NPC will disappoint those political commentators who were hoping for dramatic leadership changes and upheavals in China's political universe, while for observers of the parallel economic universe change has been steady and continuous.

Continuity is important in the current situation where China's handling of territorial disputes is causing international concern, and analysts have claimed that the new Chinese leadership is overwhelmed by its domestic tasks and has lost the initiative. Evidence of the new leadership's commitment to long-term economic planning gives hope that, underneath the news hype, China's actions in current maritime territorial disputes are based on a commitment to long-term stability and continuity.

Political reporting on China thrives on the unpredictable. On 15 November 2012, minutes before the new Party leaders marched on the stage, journalists were still counting flower pots in search for clues about their final number. Once the seven members of the new Standing Committee of the Politburo stood on stage, interest started to fade as the new leaders were the most predictable core group that could have been selected from the range of

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18th Party Congress—outcome disappointed many observers.

possible candidates. Interest in Chinese politics will heat up again once the National People's Congress

convenes next month to form the new government. Predictably, expectations again will outrun results.

The real news emerging from this two-step leadership change is the prioritising of the economy. The long-term economic agenda of the new leadership consists of a nation-building and an economic reform agenda. This economic agenda requires a degree of political reform in the form of institutional change to the current system of governance, which entails reforms to the legal system and the role of the central state.

The nation-building agenda extends the current 12th Five-Year Plan (2011–15) by anticipating China's future needs in terms of knowledge and physical infrastructure. This process has been going on during the course of 2012 and early into this year, as additional plans have been released for the period up to 2020 and beyond. Planning comprises policies for research and development, environment, energy, transport and infrastructure and includes on-going approvals of major investment projects.

At the core of the economic reform agenda is the shift towards

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increasing domestic consumption, with the promise of doubling the 2010 GDP per person by 2020. Considering that China's GDP has already grown by about 30 per cent since 2010, this promise looks achievable. However, the shift in economic orientation towards consumption remains a stretched goal, as deep structural reforms are required to overcome the institutional flaws of China's existing market economy.

China's shift from investment-driven growth towards consumption-driven growth will depend on standard economic policies. These include transition from investment in economic infrastructure to more investment in social infrastructure and measures to reduce social inequality such as increased welfare spending, including for health; extension of social services to the countryside; improvement of education; and higher labour standards. If successful, China would be rewriting its social contract.

The problem is that most of these policies have been announced before and are regarded as aspirational because of the lack of progress in implementing them. A measure of the new leadership's commitment to these reforms will be its willingness to put in place the required structural reforms. There are signs of this happening in policy speeches and recent measures announced by the State Council in February 2013. These latest measures explicitly address the need for reforms of local taxation, central welfare funding, state-owned enterprises and the finance system where little progress has been made over the last decade as they impinge on established governance structures.

Public finance is one of the burning issues of China's local governance. Local governments are responsible for 80 per cent of government



China's new Head of State, Xi Jinping

expenditure, but only about half of their budget revenue is allocated through formal government channels. The other half has to come from

extrabudgetary revenue which relies on entrepreneurial activities; for example local real estate development, and varies widely from one location to another. This makes China a highly decentralised country, a fact that is little emphasised by a central government keen on asserting its political authority.

Underfunding provides a powerful incentive for local governments to develop the local enterprise sector as their main revenue source. This is one of the reasons for the strong growth of China's small and medium enterprise sector. The drawback is collusion between local governments and private enterprises, which invites real estate speculation and other forms of corruption, and explains the many cases of civil unrest. In this situation, legal measures alone will not work to contain the corruption and civil disturbances that afflict local governments.

The last 10 years since 2002 are often presented as a lost decade without any spectacular reform projects. But one could argue that the little-publicised growth of the private enterprise sector across China's eastern and more-developed provinces was a spectacular achievement of this decade. A decade ago, economically advanced provinces started to abolish local-level, state-owned enterprise across the board and enabled private entrepreneurship to flourish by tolerating all kinds of informal mechanisms in support of what in other countries would be called a shadow economy. As a result, China's small and medium enterprise sector accounts for approximately

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two-thirds of GDP. The new leadership's commitment to maintaining a role for the state-owned sector has to be seen against this background. 'Bringing the state back in' has different meanings in this context. It means formalising a framework for cooperation as well as competition between the private and the state-owned sector that is based on reducing state monopolies and expanding market access for the private sector. It means transferring market-based profit from the state-owned sector to feed into the state-run welfare sector. It means opening up the hitherto state-controlled finance and banking sector to service the private sector

In China's institutional and legal environment these seemingly technocratic reforms require political determination and resolve by the central leadership. Local tax reform will not work without legal reforms that redefine the relationship between local, provincial and central governments to reduce the scope of local tax farming. Central welfare funding going to local government budgets will have to be quarantined against absorption into local consolidated revenue. Expanding market access and more competition between the private and state-owned sector will require better legal protection. Reforms in enterprise finance will depend on better legal and professional procedures and enforcement. These reforms are long-term projects because of the need to build an institutional infrastructure.

The political risks created by unresolved institutional and legal issues were dramatically illustrated by the Bo Xilai case. No doubt, Bo Xilai was a charismatic leader, came from a 'noble' family and had the personal charisma to create a nostalgic revolutionary mystique harking back to the days of Chairman

Bo Xilai's rise and fall as mayor of Chongqing is often presented as a political struggle for leadership positions reminiscent of traditional Chinese novels.

Mao. But underlying the colourful details is the institutional weakness of the Chinese state.



Bo Xilai—
downfall a
limited victory
for institutional
rule.

From an institutional perspective, Bo Xilai was sent to Chongqing to bring a wayward, newly established province under central control. The administrative powers at Bo Xilai's disposal enabled him to arrest thousands of businessmen and public

servants and execute a few. But his formal powers were not enough to direct confiscated assets into proper legal channels. Instead he relied on personal relations and personal charisma to legitimise his actions and, by this, undermined the limited institutional powers of the central government. His eventual demise can be seen as a victory for institutional rule. To this end, he was up against a leadership consensus backed by the self-interest of the ruling elite increasingly reliant on predictable institutions.

In view of the legal and institutional dilemmas faced by the new leadership, there is little chance for spectacular political or economic reforms. The new leadership has embarked on a gradual reform project driven by the need to reduce the incentives for corruption and local civil unrest as a precondition for reducing social inequality and social tension. The appointment of the new state and government leaders next month will mark the midpoint of the current 12th Five-Year Plan, which will continue to define national

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policies for another two-and-a-half years, until the end of 2016. In this set-up, new leaders make their mark, not by announcing new policies, but by adding nuances and changing the emphasis of existing policies.

At closer scrutiny, the 'once-in-a-decade leadership change' is part of a decade-long gradual leadership transition that has started five years ago and will be concluded five years hence, when five of the seven new members of the 2012 Politburo Standing Committee will reach retirement age. The seven men who now form the powerful Standing Committee have long been groomed for their positions. They all have served at least one five-year term on the 25-member Politburo and were selected for their ability to represent a united group of leaders to a domestic audience concerned about continuity and economic stability.

It is a popular pastime to divide these leaders up into factions and label them as conservatives, reformers, princelings, youth league upstarts or otherwise in order to predict alliances and future policies. However, collective decision-making is deeply embedded in the tradition of the CCP and overrides individual preferences. The leadership operates more like a corporate board where decisions are prepared in the background through extensive consultation and then presented in a nuanced show of unity.

However, one reform item before the new leaders that has the potential to immediately impact international relations is China's globalisation of business investment. China's foreign economic relations have always proceeded at a much faster pace than domestic reforms. Accumulated Chinese outbound direct investment in Australia from 2007 to the end of 2012 has passed the \$US50 billion mark at the end of last year, ahead

The shift in China's foreign economic relations from trade-based links to foreign investment is one of the areas of spectacular growth, with Australia so far the main beneficiary.

of the United States and Canada as the closest competitors.

These reforms could open up a new chapter in international cooperation with China, provided that domestic reforms proceed on an even keel and that peaceful neighbourly relations prevail.

Hans Hendrichske is Professor of Chinese Business and Management at the University of Sydney Business School.

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Japan's LDP sets course for the past

Re-elected in a landslide, the Liberal Democratic Party appears to be taking little account of the country's enormous social shifts since it was last in power.

By Emma Dalton

Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is in government again, and Abe Shinzo is prime minister again. With confidence that can only come from being the leader of a political party that governed Japan for almost all of the postwar period, Abe has promised to 'restore Japan'. He and his fellow leaders are confident they can guide Japan to prosperity and power. Such aspirations, however, must be tempered with a sense of humility and a willingness to learn from past mistakes—things that seem lacking in the LDP's current approach to governing.



Abe Shinzo—has promise to restore Japan.

On 16 December, 2012, after three years in opposition, the LDP and its coalition partner, the New Komeito, regained control of the Lower House of Japan's national legislative assembly, the Diet.

The two parties combined now have 325 of the 480 seats of the Lower House. Meanwhile, the number of seats held by the former governing party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), has dropped spectacularly from 230 to 57. The landslide victory for the LDP and crushing defeat of the DPJ was a complete reversal of what happened in the 2009 general election when the LDP lost control of the Lower House for only the second time since the party formed in 1955.

There were a record number of candidates fielded in this election. Twelve political parties fielded a total of 1486 candidates—1282 in the

single-member districts and 204 in the proportional representation seats. The official election campaign started on 4 December. Television news coverage showed stoic party leaders talking into microphones as snow fell on and around them. Snow that wasn't quite white and fluffy enough to be beautiful but was rather wet and drizzly, perhaps symbolic of the general mood in Japan as voters looked desperately for a way to heal what many see as a country in strife.



Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster: questions about Japan's future energy supply.

The party leaders gave their first campaign speeches in Fukushima, the region still recovering from the

March 2011 triple disaster (earthquake, tsunami and nuclear plant meltdown). 3/11 triggered a period of deep reflection and questioning of the status quo for many in Japan. In particular, the obvious question of Japan's future energy supply became central to political and public debates. The antinuclear movement was vindicated and gained more support. Nuclear power plants were closed and the general public was encouraged to preserve electricity.

Aside from the issue of nuclear energy, the other main concerns that political parties seemed to focus on during the campaign were the economy, social welfare and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Other issues hovering ominously in the background were related to land disputes with China and Korea, and the revision of the constitution to allow Japan the right to collective self-defence—issues that are

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uncomfortably related to each other. The election result should not be read as a restoration in voters' faith in the LDP. Rather the result is a combination of backlash against the DPJ (for its failure to heal the economy and its poor response to 3/11) and a feeling among voters that there was little alternative. LDP leader and Prime Minister Abe himself acknowledged this in the wake of the election.

Despite 12 parties fielding candidates, many felt there were no viable alternatives to the LDP or the DPJ and only diehard DPJ supporters continued to support that party. The LDP received 43 per cent of the votes for the single-member districts and 27.6 per cent of votes in the proportional representation districts. A total of 59.3 per cent of eligible voters cast their vote, which is the lowest voter turnout in the postwar era. This does not reflect voter apathy; it reflects voter disgust. Japanese citizens are sick of politicians who cannot lead, are elitist and seem removed from the general population. This sentiment has intensified since 3/11.

Another reason that this election result cannot be taken as an accurate reflection of voter sentiment is the unequal distribution of votes in the single-member districts. In fact, the Lower House was declared unconstitutional in 2011 because of the disparity in vote value. This, combined with the above statistics, raises serious questions about the possibility of representative democracy under the current electoral system in Japan.

Nevertheless, the LDP is back in power. What now? After the LDP victory, one of Abe's first comments to the media was that Japan would not back down on the Senkaku islands dispute with China, an issue

Japanese citizens are sick of politicians who cannot lead, are elitist and seem removed from the general population.

taken up in December's *Asian Currents*. Abe's hawkish stance on relations with neighbouring countries China and Korea is cause for concern. His desire to revise the current interpretation of the Constitution to allow Japan the right to collective self-defence in certain emergencies is also worrying for many. It is worrying particularly because of Abe's apparent desire to revise history. He has suggested that the 1993 and 1995 Kono and Murayama apologies for the 'comfort women' system and for past colonial aggression be revised.

On the issue of nuclear power, the LDP is virtually alone in not aiming to phase it out (together only with the Japan Restoration Party). Instead, the LDP is considering approving the construction of more nuclear reactors. This ignores the plan set out by the previous DPJ government to gradually close down all reactors and end the country's reliance on nuclear energy by the 2030s, and also flies in the face of public opinion.

On the issue of the economy, Abe has declared the government will invest in public works projects in order to boost the national economy as well as to prepare for natural disasters, and accelerate Fukushima reconstruction. The plan for a consumption tax rise to 10 per cent, to combat deflation, will go ahead, and Japan will enter talks with the United States about joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a free-trade pact which involves all members dropping all tariffs. Finally, for the first time in 11 years, the government will also increase its spending on the military. However,

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without control of the Upper House, the LDP can do little to pursue its nationalist ambitions, such as revising the Constitution and turning the Japan Self-Defense Force into the *kokubōgun* (national defence force). Furthermore, the LDP's coalition partner, the New Komeito, opposes revision of the Constitution.

The Upper House election is scheduled to take place in summer 2013. Japanese voters have been quite capricious in recent years—it is entirely possible that voters will swing back to the DPJ for the Upper House election and reinstate DPJ majority.

Finally, this election was disastrous for women. Only 14 per cent of candidates were women, and their success rate was low. The Lower House now has 38 women, down from 54, or, put more bleakly, a mere 8 per cent of Lower House seats are occupied by women. Apart from the scarcity of women in the Lower House and the Diet as a whole, when women are promoted in the LDP, it is rarely cause for celebration.



Inada Tomomi

One of the two women in Abe's cabinet (he initially promised there would be five) is Inada Tomomi, former lawyer and far right-wing nationalist who opposes most gender equality-related policy suggestions, including allowing married couples to retain separate surnames. Takaichi Sanae was appointed to policy chief. Takaichi is known for her right-wing nationalistic views and also generally opposes gender equality policies.

Both Takaichi and Inada joined Abe and some other LDP and DPJ Diet

The LDP's catchphrase during the election campaign was Nippon o Torimodosu, which can be vaguely translated as, 'We will restore Japan'.

members in signing the Committee for Historical Facts (*Rekishihi Jijitsu Inkai*) advertisement, published in the *Star Ledger* (New Jersey) last November, denying the 'comfort women' were forcibly recruited. Noda Seiko, chair of the LDP's General Council, is one powerful LDP woman who might actually achieve something beneficial for women. Noda advocates implementing legally binding gender quotas to address the dearth of women in decision-making roles, something she and Takaichi recently publicly disagreed on.

More broadly, the LDP's approach to gender equality to date has been economy and productivity focused. Its main goal has been to address the declining fertility rate by creating policies that enable women to combine work and family. Improving social and employment conditions so that couples can have more children is an important task for the government.

But the conflation of gender equality with improving social conditions so that women can have more children is a serious barrier to women's empowerment in Japanese society. The [2012 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Survey](#), which measures the gender gap within 135 countries according to economic, political, education and health-based criteria, ranked Japan 101.

Encouraging women to have more children is not the answer. A broader approach is needed. With the conservative LDP at the helm and with so few women in the Diet to reflect Japanese women's concerns, gender equality in Japan will remain of scant concern to political

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authorities and Japanese society will continue to be one where women have great difficulty in achieving autonomy and empowerment. The LDP's catchphrase during the election campaign was *Nippon o torimodosu*, which can be vaguely translated as, 'We will restore Japan'. The LDP did not make it entirely clear what part of Japan they planned to restore, but it is probably safe to assume that restoring Japan's position as an economic superpower was central to this pledge.

Restoring Japan to economic glory is an attractive promise, but the LDP appears to be attempting to achieve this without taking into account the country's enormous social shifts. A rise in insecure employment, increased disillusionment among youth and the continuing disempowerment of women are all by-products of the LDP's past failure to adapt to economic and social change. Reinstating Abe, who has already been prime minister; looking to economic revitalisation through public works expansion; rejecting the possibility of a nuclear-free Japan; and taking a historical revisionist stance on foreign policy issues appears to demonstrate a refusal to learn from past mistakes.

Dr Emma Dalton is a visiting professor in the Department of Intercultural Studies at Nagoya City University. Her research is concerned with gender inequality in Japan generally, and within parliamentary politics more specifically.

Japan in stereo

The Japan Foundation is presenting a music listening series, *Japan in stereo*, designed for people who are interested in knowing more about Japanese music but aren't quite sure where to start.

Presented by Sydney arts writer and radio producer [Zacha Rosen](#), the series invites five music aficionados of Japanese music to introduce their favourite genres through conversation, music, video and live performance.

Japan in stereo showcases a wide variety of music, from traditional genres such as Imperial court music and the music of the *koto* (Japanese harp), to contemporary genres such as minimalist improvisation, Japanese classic rock and sentimental postwar pop.

The first program, on Japanese rock, will be presented on Friday, 22 February by [Professor Carolyn Stevens](#) of the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, Monash University.

Professor Stevens spent several years in Japan in the 1990s, working as a consultant to an entertainment management agency and rubbing shoulders with some of the nation's biggest names in rock music.

Other programs in the series will be on minimalist electro-acoustic improvisation, presented by musician [Oren Ambarchi](#) (1 March); *Enka*: postwar pop, presented by RMIT University lecturer [Dr Shelley Brunt](#), (8 March); *Koto*: traditional Japanese harp, presented by musician [Satsuki Odamura](#) and guests (15 March); and *Gagaku*: Imperial court music, presented by [Lewis Cornwell](#), Sydney Conservatorium of Music (22 March).

Further information available from the Japan Foundation [website](#).

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South Korea breaks new ground with 'woman leadership'

The election of Park Geun-Hye's to the nation's top post signals a big step forward by ordinary working people in today's Korea.

By Hyung-A Kim

Ms Park Geun-Hye's stunning victory in South Korea's 19 December 2012 presidential election aroused huge interest among the Korean people and internationally. As the candidate of the ruling conservative New Frontier Party, she beat her progressive rival Moon Jae-in, of the Democratic United Party, by more than 3 percentage points, with 51.6 percent of the vote compared with 48 per cent for Moon. She made history by becoming the first-ever female politician, not only in Korea but also in north-east Asia, to take a nation's top post.

Her rise to the presidency comes at a time when the political divide is deepening and Korea's export-driven economy is slowing. Security tensions in North Asia are also alarmingly high, amid territorial disputes and North Korea's recent launching of a long-range rocket that many believe to be a precursor to a ballistic missile for a nuclear bomb.

What does Park's presidency mean in this context? And how can we understand her rise to the presidency in a country previously ruled by her authoritarian father, President Park Chung-Hee, for nearly 18 years (1961-79), until he was assassinated?

Two major factors that led to Park's victory help to answer these questions. One is the massive turnout of older voters in their 50s and 60s and over, of 89.9 percent and 78.8 percent respectively, who overwhelmingly voted for Park. This phenomenon, according to the progressive *Kyunghyang Daily's*

random interview of voters aged in their 50s, was a spontaneous response by this generation of South Korea's baby boomers, born between 1955 and 1963, to the uncertainty of their livelihoods.



Park Geun-Hye: made history.

conservatives, Moon was too unprepared, too far left and too pro-North to bring the economic democratisation needed to recover the livelihoods of the Korean middle and working classes, the youth and the elderly. In fact, economic democratisation and a welfare state were the major campaign issues of both Park and Moon in their all-out showdown, which essentially boiled down to a war between conservatives and progressives.

The other major factor is Park's newly articulated leadership approach, which she promoted as 'mother leadership', or 'woman leadership'. Mother leadership, according to Park, is akin to a mother's devotion and caring for her family. Throughout her campaign, she repeatedly claimed that the Korean people were her 'only family', as she had no family of her own. Thus she claimed to be in politics to make the Korean people happy.

Park's portrayal of her motherly

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leadership, with an emphasis on womanly attentiveness and preparedness, was very effective in building her appeal to women voters.

By pledging to provide greater opportunities for women to return to work by establishing career coaching centres, and to nurture 100 000 female leaders in both the government and private sectors by 2017, Park encouraged many women to envision a more gender-balanced workplace in Korean society, where the gender pay gap would no longer be the worst among OECD members. She also pledged to increase in stages the ratio of females in government posts by changing male-oriented power structures. The resultant increase in her share of the female vote to 51.1 per cent, according to an exit poll survey by three television networks, compared to Moon's (47.9 per cent), clearly helped her to victory.

To a large extent, Park's rise to the presidency can also be seen as the result of the failure by the opposition progressive side to build trust among the people with their propositions to ease the people's economic difficulties. The changing circumstances of those in their 50s who, in the 2002 presidential election, played a key role in bringing victory to the then progressive party candidate, Roh Moo-hyun, saw them turn to conservatism 10 years later to vote for Park.

Overall, Park's rise to the presidency primarily means the Korean people's reaffirmation of conservative change, especially in handling their growing economic inequality and social polarisation, without putting the country's economic miracle at risk. Concerning North Korea, Park's rise to the presidency means that Korea will pursue a trust-building process or 'trustpolitik', which would indicate a dual approach of greater

Park's rise to the presidency primarily means the Korean people's reaffirmation of conservative change.

engagement' on the one hand, and robust deterrence capabilities through a stronger defence posture and age-old alliance with the United States on the other.

How this will work out is a difficult question considering that North Korea is determined to boost its nuclear capability, especially after the United Nations Security Council, including China, imposed new sanctions against North Korea in response to its recent rocket launch. Indeed, the North appears to be annoyed with China, which voted against its long-term ally for the first time in four years. Moreover, on 23 January the North Korean Foreign Ministry announced an end to the six-nation talks which were aimed at finding a peaceful resolution to the security concerns about the North Korean nuclear weapons program. The Ministry said, 'While there will be dialogue in the future for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and the region, there will not be dialogue on denuclearisation'.

In this context, Park Geun Hye has declared that a nuclear North Korea is unacceptable under any circumstances and that she would respond firmly to any future provocations by the North. Yet she repeatedly promised to leave doors open for talks and creative engagement.

Overall, Park's trustpolitik is significantly different from the isolationist approach of President Lee Myung-Bak who, most Koreans believe, has mismanaged the inter-Korea relationship. Most of all, Park believes that a strong US security alliance is vital to Korea's own

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national security. This is a good sign for the Australia–Korea relationship.

Regarding China, Park sent a team of her special envoys to meet with the incoming Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, on 23 January, giving a clear indication of the priority she gives to South Korea's relations with China. China, like the United States Obama Administration, appears to be happy with Park, although concerning North Korea, China emphasises that quiet diplomacy would be more effective in getting cooperation from North Korea, and that action by the UN Security Council should be prudent, measured and proportionate.

The Korea–Japan relationship under Park, however, may require considerably more cautious and measured steps, especially concerning the ongoing territorial issue of [Dokdo](#) (*Takeshima* in Japanese), as well as the comfort women issue for which Park has already indicated Japan must apologise.

Initially, Park, 60, an engineering graduate, did not embark on a political career after losing both her parents, first her mother who was killed by a Communist agent in 1974 when she was 22, and then her father, President Park Chung Hee, who was assassinated in 1979 by the chief of the Korean CIA.

Park, who has never married, entered politics in 1998 with a public vow to 'save the country', which was then struggling with the Asian financial crisis. At that time, she rode in on the populist surge of national nostalgia towards her father for his leadership in constructing Korea's economic miracle.

Park has proven to be a focused politician who has rapidly built a strong record of harnessing the conservative political forces in South

Korea. By saving her party from being almost wiped out, to winning victory twice, including the National Assembly elections in April 2012, she cemented not only her position as the frontrunner to win the conservative nomination for the presidency, but, using that momentum, consolidated her base. She used that to unite the once-fractured conservative party, and delivered a groundbreaking presidential victory.

Park's victory, however, will not necessarily calm the collective frustration among the 48 per cent of voters who supported Moon. In particular, the younger generation in their 20s and 30s is convinced that Park, the daughter of a dictator, is fundamentally an impediment to South Korea's democratic future. On the other hand, the fact that Park received a majority of the vote is an indication that her father's legacy, particularly his leadership behind Korea's economic development, is what encouraged many Koreans to turn to Park. As President-Elect, Park repeatedly emphasises the need for national unity and economic democratisation as her top priority in state affairs.

To what extent Park's emphasis on motherly leadership will be effective in achieving her presidential goal of opening a new era based on national unity and economic democratisation, we will have to wait to see, as she is facing huge challenges over the next five years. Yet, her rise to the presidency clearly signals a big step forward by ordinary working people in today's Korea.

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Kim Jong-Un's search for shortcuts to North Korean prosperity

The New Year speech by North Korea's new leader signals there will be little change.

By Leonid Petrov

When the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-Il, breathed his last in December 2011, his youngest son Kim Jong-Un was catapulted to the country's leadership. This permitted him to meet the people and play the role of populist and reformer.

Kim Jong-Un looked and behaved like his grandfather, Kim Il-Sung, the founder of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, who ruled for 46 years. His succession looked like a perfectly planned and well-orchestrated scenario, and no observers doubted the similarity was part of the transition plan.

On the first day of 2013, Kim Jong-Un addressed the nation from the state television, just like his grandfather used to until his demise in 1994. Kim Jong-Il, on the other hand, avoided making public speeches and never gave a television address during his 17-year-rule, publishing his New Year's messages as joint editorials in North Korea's three major newspapers. Obviously, the youthful new ruler was trying to appeal to North Koreans' fondest memories of his grandfather, and to signal that his leadership style would be more in line with that of Kim Il-Sung.

The speech was an acknowledgement of the poor state of the country's economy. Kim promised that 2013 would be 'a year of great creations and changes in which a radical turnabout will be effected in the building of a thriving socialist country'. The speech was full of rhetoric calling on his countrymen to

make tireless efforts to 'rid themselves of the old way of thinking and attitude and make ceaseless innovations in all work'. Kim advocated boosting the economy and the military's capability by making the science and technology sector world class, and argued that 'the industrial revolution in the new century is, in essence, a scientific and technological revolution', and 'breaking through the cutting edge is a shortcut to the building of an economic giant'.



Kim Jong-Un looked and behaved like his grandfather.

Like his grandfather, who tried to instantly turn war-torn North Korea into a communist paradise, Kim Jong-Un also looks for shortcuts. The problem with his plan is that he suggested nothing new, but encouraged his countrymen to stick to the old values and principles formulated by his late grandfather and father. Kim claimed that the 'road of *chuch'e* [national self-reliance] is the only path for the Party and people to invariably follow'.

Despite North Korea's history of defeats, failures, famines and disappointments, Kim Jong-Un persisted in lauding 'the great achievements the president made while leading the Fatherland Liberation War to brilliant victory' and praised 'the strength of his outstanding strategy and tactics and wise leadership'. He also urged the people to 'carry out the cause of reunifying the country', describing reunification as the greatest national task that 'brooks no further delay'.

The theme of turning North Korea

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into an economic giant was the most recurring in the speech. The ostensible purpose of his plan was to make the people of Korea well-off with nothing to envy in the world. For this, the people should wage an 'all-out struggle this year to effect a turnaround in building an economic giant and improving the people's standard of living'. By calling on all sectors and units of the national economy to boost production, Kim Jong-Un again simply repeated the style and rhetoric of his father and grandfather.

Instead of offering a meaningful formula for economic development, Kim simply recommended improved economic guidance and management: 'Party organisations should embrace all the people, take warm care of them and lead them forward to ensure that they share the same destiny with the Party to the end.' That meant North Koreans should carry on 'the tradition of single-hearted unity' wherein 'the Party believes in the people and the latter absolutely trust and follow the former'. In other words, Kim had no other prescription than adhering to the old military-first (*son'gun*) politics of his father and the centrally planned economic system of his grandfather.

The single-hearted unity of the Army and the people around the Party was the 'strongest weapon and a powerful propellant for the building of a thriving socialist country'.

His speech avoided direct criticism of the United States and its allies. Nor did he mention nuclear weapons, but indicated that if aggressors dared launch a pre-emptive attack against the DPRK, 'the People's Army should mercilessly annihilate them and win victory in the war for the country's reunification'. Boosting defence industry was another priority that could contribute to implementing the

Kim Jong-Un looked confident when he claimed that the military might of a country represents its national strength.

Party's military strategy, and Kim urged developing more 'sophisticated military hardware of our own style'.

His invitation to 'spur the building of a civilised socialist nation to usher in a new era of cultural efflorescence in the 21st century' was in sharp contrast to his recommendations to 'conduct Party work in the same way as it was done on the battleline in the 1970s, and put a focus of the work on thoroughly applying Kim Jong Il's patriotism in all activities'.

In cultural construction as well, all sectors were advised 'to implement to the letter the ideas, lines and policies set forth by the general'. In this context, it remains debatable how North Korea can develop education, public health, literature and the arts, physical culture, public morals and all other branches to the level 'appropriate to an advanced civilised nation'.

In order to effect a radical change in this year's campaign to build a thriving socialist country, 'officials should make a fundamental turnabout in their ideological viewpoint, work style and attitude'. But will the Party bureaucrats voluntarily uphold the slogan 'Everything for the people and everything by relying on them!' set for them by their youthful and idealistic leader? No safeguards are suggested by Kim Jong-Un, who only asked them to 'work to the best of their abilities with a high sense of responsibility, eagerness and an enterprising approach'. His conclusion is built on the premise that the nation can achieve prosperity only if 'firmly rallied behind the Party under the banner of 'Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism'.

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The New Year speech tells much about Kim Jong-Un, the succession process, and the future of North Korea. It becomes clear that Kim's ultimate goal is to avoid any change, because it threatens the very existence of the North Korean state. If anything like what happened to the Soviet Union when Gorbachev started *perestroika* happens in North Korea, the leadership would not be able to control the situation. And as North Korea's elites are equally reluctant to consider any idea of change, the mood to maintain stability and continue as Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il did over the past half a century prevails.

The recent leadership succession is definitely a case of like father, like son. Kim Jong-Un is the legitimate successor and perfect choice to continue the Kim dynasty; he is of 'revolutionary blood' and widely recognised as such. He is eulogised and worshipped as the *Generalissimo* by the Korean People's Army and as the Dear Leader by the Korean Workers' Party. Common people link their expectations of socioeconomic improvement to him, and he is a token of stability for the Kim family. Everyone in North Korea seems to have great hopes for him.

The North Korean leadership genuinely wants to modernise the country's economy but hates the idea of changes in social and political life. Like his father and grandfather, Kim Jong-Un constantly searches for shortcuts to boost the dysfunctional economy without having to build new social and political institutions. Achieving technological breakthrough without systemic reform is a preferred way forward. As a result of this half-hearted policy, ordinary North Koreans will probably eat and dress better; they might even own PCs and mobile phones, but they will

If everything goes according to his father's plan, Kim Jong-Un will be in power for a long time.

continue to live in the same paranoid state of fear and dependency on the Great Leader's decisions.

Beijing would love to see Pyongyang follow its example by introducing market-oriented reforms, but North Korea simply cannot come to terms with granting its population the many freedoms necessary to make such a reform successful. This is simply impossible in the conditions of an ongoing Korean War, in which North Korean society is continuously fed lies by the regime and denied contacts and interaction with the rest of the world, particularly with South Korea. Given the circumstances of the ongoing inter-Korean conflict, the sustainable development of the North Korean economy is impossible. The country is locked in a security dilemma and reluctant to open up.

If Kim Jong-Un did decide to initiate reform he would first need to persuade his family and other elite groups to forfeit their significant privileges, because reform of any type would inevitably and quickly lead to the collapse of the political regime. Not surprisingly, therefore, the very word 'reform' remains a taboo in Kim Jong-Un's North Korea.

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Pakistan's extremism problem— it's not going away

The shooting of schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai is symptomatic of the violence and death that are becoming the everyday norm in Pakistan.

by Alicia Mollaun

Terrorism and extremism in Pakistan have become an intractable problem. The horrific shooting of Pakistani schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai in October 2012, targeted for her advocacy of female education, brought international attention to the extent of extremism in Pakistan. Unfortunately, this tragic event has failed to galvanise civil society or the government towards encouraging a national dialogue on extremism or creating policies to help temper Pakistan's extremism problem.

Terrorist attacks are on the rise in Pakistan. In 2012, 3007 civilians were killed in terrorist attacks, a 40 per cent increase from 2010 and a 95 per cent increase from 2003. In January 2013 alone, 55 bomb blasts have occurred.

The [South Asia Terrorism Portal](#) began collecting data on terror attacks in Pakistan in 2003. In the last 10 years over 45 000 people have been killed in terrorist-related violence in Pakistan, including 15 155 civilians, 4760 security personnel and 25 160 terrorists. It is painfully obvious that Pakistan is both a victim of terrorism and has a massive indigenous terrorism problem.

The scourge of extremism affects everyday life in every Pakistani city. In every city there are numerous security checkpoints to navigate through; hotels have explosive sniffer dogs; educational testing centres have blast walls encircling their perimeters; fast food restaurants have security screening;

and VIP motorcades paralyse traffic movement, deploying police armed with automatic weapons and hi-res vests to line roads. The threat of extremism never feels too far away.

The Taliban targeted Malala Yousafzai because she advocated a girl's right to education. From the Swat district, a conservative area in Pakistan's tribal belt, Malala encouraged girls and their families to resist the Taliban, who were intimidating girls into not going to school. Malala's dogged quest for equal rights for girls and the Taliban attack on her have not struck a chord with everyone in Pakistan.

Some Pakistanis doubt that the Taliban even shot Malala in the first place, with conspiracy theories being bandied about, even in political circles. The leader of Pakistan's biggest Islamist party, Fazl-ur Rehman, reportedly said he was sceptical the attack even happened: 'There was no sign of injury after the dressing was removed ... It shows that the bullet did not hit her in the head.'¹ Some media outlets have even reported that it was not the Taliban who shot Malala, but that the United States was behind the attack.² Misconceptions and false reporting on extremism and terrorist attacks make it difficult for any kind of narrative against extremist groups, the Taliban in particular, to gain traction with Pakistan's uneducated masses.

Education is not the only sector impacted adversely by extremism. Vaccination drives delivered by health workers in Pakistan targeting early childhood immunisations,



Malala Yousafzai: targeted for her advocacy of female education.

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including polio, have become a deadly mission. Nine polio workers were killed in attacks across Pakistan in December 2012. This month, a district in Punjab, the most populous province in Pakistan, has deputed 800 policemen to guard 800 two-person polio teams who are administering vaccinations to children under five in the district.

Polio rates have soared over the past few years as campaigns have been suspended and restarted due to threats from militant organisations. Extremist groups accuse polio workers of using vaccination campaigns as a cover for espionage conducted by the United States. This belief gained traction following the revelation that the CIA used a vaccination drive to obtain DNA in the hunt for Osama bin Laden. Pakistan, Nigeria and Afghanistan are the only countries in the world where polio remains endemic. It beggars belief that Pakistan has been able to develop a nuclear weapons capability, but has not been able to eradicate polio.

The Pakistani Government and military are struggling to deal with extremism, particularly in the tribal areas that border Afghanistan. Many recent large-scale terrorist attacks have been against military installations. For example, on 2 February, the Taliban attacked a military base in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, killing 12 soldiers. The Taliban said the attack was to 'avenge the death of two Taliban commanders killed in American drone strikes'.³ In May 2011 the Taliban seized control of a Karachi naval base killing 10 security personnel and claimed the attack was retaliation for the killing of Osama bin Laden.⁴

The military is trying to reclaim Taliban strongholds in the tribal areas through a strategy called

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In South Waziristan, an extremist stronghold, the highest ranked political officer doesn't even live in the village for fear of being killed by the Taliban.

WHAM or 'winning hearts and minds'. A senior military officer said the plan is to 'turn militant sanctuaries into safe havens for the people'. The strategy includes winning over the region's ethnic Pashtun tribes through dialogue, creating commercial opportunities and providing education in new schools and colleges. Army officials have said that they have reopened 33 schools and have 4000 students enrolled, 200 of them girls, but it is difficult to verify such data. The Army will have a tough job ahead of it given most in the area, scarred by too many years of violence, believe that militants and the military are one and the same.⁵

The province of Balochistan, bordering Iran in Pakistan's west, suffers from a permanent state of insecurity. Frequent terrorist attacks target the Shia population, in particular the Hazara community. In January, twin blasts targeted an area dominated by the Hazara community in the province's capital Quetta, killing 102 people and wounding over 200. In response to mass protests against the attacks, including the refusal by the families of those killed to bury their loved ones, the prime minister sacked the provincial government and placed the Governor of Balochistan in charge of the province.⁶

The events of the past couple of months in Pakistan are indicative of a growing trend of violence and extremism. Every day the newspapers carry a story of extremist-related violence, perpetrated somewhere in the country. For example, in February 2013, 18 people were killed in

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separate targeted killings in a single day in Karachi. That violence and death is the norm rather than the exception in Pakistan is very worrying.

Recently, a father of three told me he was worried for his children's future in Pakistan, explaining that when his two-year-old son heard any loud noises he asked if it was a bomb blast. What kind of future will today's children of Pakistan have if they can't go to school or play outside for fear of terrorism? And what kind of quality of life can children possibly have when they worry about bomb blasts and suicide attacks?

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Chaos by committee

Significant decisions in the Indonesian Parliament are being made in an undemocratic, disorganised and ill-disciplined way, according to a new study from the [ANU College of Asia and the Pacific](#).



Dr Stephen Sherlock of the Centre for Democratic Institutions in the College's Crawford School of

Public Policy, says that the public perception of Indonesia's political parties ruling with an iron hand over party members couldn't be further from the truth.

In fact, he says it is the Indonesian parliament's committees that are making the big decisions and doing so without proper debate and with a lack of transparency.

His paper, 'Made by committee and consensus: parties and policy in the Indonesian parliament', is published in the latest issue of [South East Asia Research](#).

'There's a common misconception about the role of political parties in the Indonesian parliament,' said Sherlock.

'There's an idea that there is a very powerful discipline exercised by the central leadership of the political parties over their members in parliament.

'But my findings show that when we're talking about the nitty gritty of policy discussion—the details of legislation, for example—then largely there's a free-for-all.

'There is very little discipline exercised by the central party machine over their representatives in parliament.'

Sherlock added that this lack of control had potentially significant implications for Indonesian democracy.

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Violence against women: India's winding road ahead

The rape and death of a student have raised probing questions among Indians about their society, culture and polity.

By Swati Parashar

The gang rape of a 23-year-old Indian woman in Delhi last December sparked angry protests and outrage throughout the country, and in some places abroad.

Amanat (named by the media and meaning 'treasure') died in a Singapore hospital two weeks after her brutal rape, leaving behind her serious questions about women's place in the Indian polity and society. The horrific incident has brought two things into international focus: first, the misogyny of Indian society and the patriarchal norms that continue to govern women's lives as they embrace opportunities and change; second, people's unwillingness to be lulled into silence and their anger against the continued apathy of government and law enforcement towards the 'almost normalised' violence against women.

This is an image of India that the world finds difficult to grasp: it belies the reports and statistics about India's economic rise and the prosperity of its middle classes; about India as a rising world power; and about India as the regional hegemon, the stable, vibrant, world's largest democracy.

The story of violence against women in India is not new, and we have witnessed protests earlier against the violence during the Gujarat riots of 2002, and against the rape and violence by the armed forces in Kashmir and in Manipur. But the protests and outrage after the Amanat incident have been unprecedented. For the first time in years people across the political divide have taken to the streets over

an issue that concerns gender justice and women's rights. Initial comments by leftist activists like Arundhati Roy that this protest was spurred because the girl was from the middle class were rejected by her own staunch followers. Arguments that India never erupted in protests when *dalit* and minority women were raped were lost in the sea of humanity that took to the streets against all odds. Women and men from all castes, creeds and class braved water cannons and *lathis* to protest the rampant misogyny. Placards and slogans demonstrated a young India that was willing to ask probing questions of its own society, culture and polity.

The protests need to be seen in the context of recent developments. With the launch of the India Against Corruption campaign, led by social activist, Anna Hazare, in April 2011, Indians demonstrated that middle-class apathy in particular was a thing of the past. People have come out since, in large numbers, protesting against corruption, and the Amanat protests are further evidence that failed governance and societal norms that legitimise anti-people policies will not be tolerated.

The crime against Amanat touched a raw nerve with most people in that it showed this could happen to anyone at any time, even to a woman travelling with a male companion at a reasonable hour in a posh, well-frequented urban area like the nation's capital. The manner in which Amanat and her companion were dumped on the highway after the rape further cemented the view that the perpetrators expected to get away with it. While the episode provided the much-needed catalyst for protests, it must be noted that the anger against law enforcement

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apathy and the way victims of sexual and domestic violence are treated had been growing for a while. Delhi has been noted as the 'rape capital', but rape and violence are an everyday occurrence in both rural and urban parts of India. The conviction rate for rape is very low because of patriarchal societal norms that stigmatise rape victims and prevent them from taking legal action.

As well as seeing the protests in the context of rising anger and resentment against government apathy and the normalisation of violence against women, there is also merit in the argument that the more assertive and independent women become, the more they are the target of violence. In many high profile rape cases, revenge against assertive women has been the chief motivator.

The Indian Government responded to the protests by setting up a three-member independent commission led by the former Chief Justice, JS Verma, to suggest changes to the laws on sexual violence. The commission pointed to the 'failure of governance' as a major reason for sexual crimes in the country. It criticised the government, the police, and even the public for their apathy, and recommended drastic changes. These included a review of the *Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958* and the immunity enjoyed by military personnel under the Act; the registration of marriages and recognition of marital rape; the recognition of all kinds of sexual offences, and not just penetrative rape; support for rape survivors; and appropriate and dignified medical procedures. The government hurriedly promulgated a Presidential Ordinance on rape that has ignored many provisions of the Verma Commission's report, especially the recommendation to bring sexual

violence crimes committed by the armed forces under the purview of criminal procedures. Women's rights groups and feminist activists have protested against the government's short-term solutions to assuage the anger and outrage resulting from the Amanat case, and its failure so far to come up with a comprehensive and enduring response to the issue of sexual violence against women. Misogynistic comments from government ministers, political party leaders, spiritual gurus and other celebrities have not helped either. The lack of faith in the government has only strengthened since the Amanat case.

That there is a misogynistic culture in India that normalises rape and every other crime against women is indisputable. Even if one argues that most countries are unsafe for women and violence against them happens everywhere, the marked difference between countries is how society and the law respond. In India, many women find it difficult to even register cases of sexual assault with the police, as they are advised to protect their 'honour'. Sexual assault is seen as the ultimate 'dishonouring' of a woman, resulting in victim-blaming and stigmatisation. The onus is never on the perpetrator. Women are silenced, conviction rates for sexual assault are low and rape survivors receive no support from society, and sometimes not even from their families. Law enforcement machinery upholds patriarchal norms and society complies by seeing rape only in terms of 'honour'. Unless this mindset changes and law enforcement is made accountable, the situation will not dramatically improve.

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A light on the dark side

A decaying building in the centre of the Cambodian capital houses an extraordinary community.

By Martin Potter

With the recent passing of Norodom Sihanouk, former King of Cambodia, it seems timely to reflect on the current situation of some of the more ambitious development projects of Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum (a loose translation would be the People's Socialist Community) government of 1954–1970.

Recently I was able to return to Cambodia as [Asialink's Dunlop Fellow](#) to undertake a series of participatory media and art projects. One of these projects was located in what is known as the White Building, a decrepit apartment block built in the 1960s and home to almost 3000 people.



The White Building, 2012. Photo by Chhon Pisal.

In the centre of Phnom Penh, the White Building, or *Boudeng* to the locals, is a decaying symbol of the hopes of a postindependence era so brutally shattered by years of war and the trauma of the Khmer Rouge.

Inside the building, however, lives an extraordinary community of artists, musicians, teachers and performers—some the last remaining masters of traditional and classical Cambodian art forms. Many of them have been there at the government's behest for over 30 years. There are also schools and businesses and social service organisations. Amongst

the decay and grime, the drugs and prostitution there's a vibrant community.

The building itself is also historically important—one of the last remaining projects of Sihanouk's ambitious postcolonial nation-building projects of the 1960s, led by the Le Corbusier of Asia, the king's architect, Vann Molyvann.

Sihanouk, for all his follies, had a keen eye for the development of Phnom Penh, known in the 1960s as the Pearl of Asia. In moving from a low to a high city, and in making the city appealing and accessible for rural migrants (over 70 per cent of Cambodians still live outside cities) Sihanouk observed:

...our capital must deal with the problem of the urban population, i.e. the modernisation of housing ... We must begin the construction of low-cost apartment buildings that can be rented or sold to average and small income families. This will no doubt take some time and requires progressive planning and investment.

Vann Molyvann, along with Lu Ban Hap, Director of Municipal Town Planning, and Russian engineer Vladimir Bodiansky, designed the ambitious master plan for the Bassac riverfront development. The development was spread over 24 hectares and included multilevel, low-cost housing and public buildings such as the Chaktomouk Exhibition Hall and the Bassac National Theatre (subject of Rithy Panh's beautiful docu-drama film *The burnt theatre*). A centerpiece of the development were the Municipal Apartments and the Olympic village housing, constructed for the 1966 Ganefo Games, a shortlived Asian alternative to the Olympic Games, which were nicknamed the White and Grey buildings, respectively. The White Building (the Municipal Apartments)

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was a unique social housing development in that it was one of the first multistorey social housing developments created by an independent Asian government.

Inspired by Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse*, the architects surrounded the complex of apartment buildings with generous open space. Both buildings shared key design elements. They were oriented parallel to the river, and with their enormous size could have become solid walls cutting off the city from the riverfront. Thus open terraces, each located adjacent to the kitchen,



The White Building soon after completion 1965. Photo: [Bophana Centre](#).

were used to break down the volume of the complexes. The White Building was inaugurated in 1963 and consisted of 468 apartments for municipal staff, teachers and other public servants. Designed not only to provide basic shelter, the development adapted a modern architectural vocabulary to Cambodia's culture and climate.

After the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, and as people moved back to the abandoned Phnom Penh, the few surviving artists (mostly performing artists) were called to gather and live in the White Building due to its proximity to the National Theatre. Over three decades, the residing community has grown and diversified, but it is still a mostly low-income urban population.

Now developers are circling, and recently neighbouring communities (such as Dey Krahom) have been brutally evicted. The residents of the building know their time there is coming to an end, but many want to preserve their home, or at least their foothold in the booming inner-city, as

well as their community connections and social infrastructure. At the very least they are hoping to have a voice in the future development of their city.

With such a strong creative community and its history as a site of social inclusion, it's unsurprising that artistic expression would form a part of the gentle activism that appears to pervade many contemporary art movements of Southeast Asia (or an 'art of empathy rather than direct activism', to paraphrase the director of the Singapore Art Museum, Tan Bun Hui).



Aziza film students writing scripts.

As a site for renewal, the building has seen a number of responses from local organisations and artists. In 2010 the Cambodian art collective Stiev Selapak (Art Rebels) set up a community arts space ([Sa Sa Art Projects](#)) to do workshops, put on exhibitions created by the building community and to try to engage people outside to address the perception of the community as 'nothing but a group of criminals and squatters' (according to a local developer).



Postcard of *Snit saal* exhibition.

As one of the founders of Stiev Selapak and director and curator of Sa Sa Art Projects, Vuth Lyno observed that the building is 'a miniature of a city, it's quite self-functional and self-sufficient'. Stiev Selapak also established the independent [Sa Sa Bassac Gallery](#) and some of the Sa Sa artists, including Khvay Samnang, Vandy Rattana and Lim Sokchanlina, are building international profiles—

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mostly on the back of their photography work.

Sa Sa's workshops have resulted in a series of exhibitions in the building, including the audio-installation works of *The sounding room*, a photo and art-based exhibition *The white night*, and an extraordinary, multisite, multiform exhibition, *Snit snaal* (Intimacy), featuring video, installations, art and photos across the local [Aziza school](#) (also based in the White Building), in the Sa Sa Art Projects gallery space, and in local cafes and businesses.



Café converted to cinema.

Innovation around programs, process and exhibitions has now extended to funding. A recent successful



Residents on the stairs of the White Building, 1991 (Serge Corrieras).

[Pozible](#) crowdfunding campaign has resulted in Sa Sa being able to stage [Pisaot](#), an experimental artist-in-residence program in the building. Lyno hopes that the Pisaot program will 'encourage artists to think critically about their practice, while contributing to the archive of

contemporary Cambodian art'.

Sa Sa, the Aziza School and a number of other residents, artists and collaborators are part of a drive to create an archive of memory and experience of the White Building with a local story-mapping project that will result in a web documentary (whitebuilding.org—to be launched in

April, 2013). This in-depth story map of the community, unfolding over time and from the residents' own perspective, is a way to present this community to the world—in a way that they can moderate and define on their own terms. The aspiration appears to present an evolving mosaic of a complex community. Lyno says: 'I know there is a dark side, but we should also recognise the bright side and try to see the community as a whole'.

In the ghostly ruins of Sihanouk's fantasy it seems a more pragmatic and compassionate creative *sangkum* (organisation) is emerging from the White Building and seeking to re-imagine the contemporary Khmer community in order to address the most pressing issues of rights to home and land, so often flouted in Cambodia's recent development.

[Martin Potter](#) creates participatory media projects and has been working with emerging young filmmakers and artists in Cambodia. He was the 2012 Dunlop Asialink Fellow and is a PhD candidate at Flinders University.

Ela Gandhi visit

Ela Gandhi, granddaughter of Mohandas Gandhi, will visit Melbourne from 23 to 26 February to interact with people and organisations aligned with her beliefs of peace and nonviolence.

A peace activist and member of parliament in South Africa from 1994–2004, she will visit an early learning centre to discuss her belief that nonviolence should be instilled in children from a very young age, and the Victorian Women's Domestic Violence Centre where she will speak to victims of domestic abuse.

She will also give a public lecture at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne. For further enquiries contact [Christopher Kremmer](#).

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The end of the Japanese salaryman?

Despite significant economic and cultural change over the past two decades, the notion of masculinity in Japan still hangs on productive work.

By Romit Dasgupta

Contemporary public discourse on Japan often focuses on the country's post Second World War experience—first, on its astounding economic transformation from a war-devastated, barely functioning economy in the early 1950s to a major global industrial power by the 1980s, followed by a (seemingly) abrupt reversal in direction in the early 1990s and over two decades of socioeconomic stagnation since.

The mid to late 1990s and early 2000s—the 'Lost Decade' (*ushinawareta jūnen*)—have come to represent something of a watershed in narratives of postwar Japan, between the heady socioeconomic and cultural optimism bordering on arrogance during the 1980s 'bubble economy' and the apparent sense of economic and psychocultural despondency marking the postbubble years.

What comes through in many cases in the emerging body of academic literature in both English and Japanese addressing the significance of these years is that the dynamics and cross-currents at work were far more nuanced and complex than the more simplistic media assessments of the period would suggest.

One way of getting a sense of these socioeconomic and cultural complexities is to examine how discourses and articulations of gender and sexuality were shifting and reshaping during these years. For much of the postwar era the predominant imagining of gender was embodied in the interrelated figures of the *sengyō shufu* (full-time housewife) in relation to femininity

and the white-collar *sararīman* (salaryman) in relation to masculinity.

The figure of the white-collar, middle-class salaryman occupies a prominent place in sociocultural and economic narratives of Japanese modernity and postmodernity. The discourse built up around the salaryman began taking shape in the prewar era but did not emerge as the blueprint for Japanese masculinity until the postwar decades.

Socioeconomic and demographic changes from the 1950s, including the expansion of the white-collar sector, rapid urbanisation, the standardisation of nuclear families, and the entry of the postwar baby boom generation into the workforce worked in concert to foreground the emergence of the salaryman as a sort of everyman of Japan over the high economic growth decades of the 1960s through until the early 1990s.



Sararīman take their train daily to work in the Tokyo metropolitan area. Photo: Wikipedia.

This was despite the reality that, even at the height of Japan's economic ascendancy in the 1970s, only a minority of Japanese

men would have fallen within the strict definition of 'salaryman'—full-time, white-collar, permanent employees of organisations offering benefits such as lifetime employment, salaries and promotions tied to length of service, and an ideology of corporate paternalism. Rather, it was more a case that the discourse surrounding the middle-class salaryman—indeed the ideology associated with the discourse—was far more extensive and pervasive in its reach, making it the socioculturally hegemonic model

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of masculinity in those years.

Importantly, this discourse of the salaryman was embedded within both corporate ideology and the sociopolitical and economic ideology of the postwar Japanese state—specifically the Japan Inc. partnership between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, private industry and the bureaucracy.

Despite ongoing interrogations and contestations in public culture through the high-growth decades, it was not until after the collapse of the 1980s bubble economy in the early 1990s and the subsequent economic stagnation of the 'Lost Decade' that the salaryman discourse started coming under major pressure. The immediate postbubble years were characterised by corporate downsizings and a string of bankruptcies, one fallout of which was increasing unemployment. Two demographics were particularly hard hit—youth and middle-aged men. As companies drastically reduced their intake of new recruits, for increasing numbers of younger Japanese the only work available was in the casual/temporary *freeter* (*furîtâ*) sector, with numbers reaching over two million by the mid 2000s.

The other group particularly hard hit was middle-aged male corporate employees. The very men who had previously embodied the corporate (and societal) ideal were now equated with a lack of efficiency and seen as a burden. In the increasingly globalised economic rationalist environment of the postbubble era, company priorities shifted from generalist skills nurtured over the long term to individuals possessing very specific skills that could be of immediate measurable benefit to the organisation. The new corporate ideal was no longer the *kaisha ningen* (company person) salaryman of the pre-1990s. Rather, in the new domestic and global economic reality

For many middle-aged salarymen, the implications of this shift were particularly acute.

it was a new generation of more individualistic, entrepreneurial corporate executives who started being projected as the new hegemonic ideal. Not only did these men have to contend with the ever-present possibility of retrenchment, but given the centrality of the husband/father/breadwinner identity in their lives, their very *masculinity* was compromised.

The fragmentations in relation to expectations of salaryman masculinity occurring in these years were set against a backdrop of broader sociocultural, economic and demographic shifts that had been in the offing over much of the postwar period, but which now became far more publicly visible. At one level, these shifts and fragmentations were linked with a growing sense of collective psychocultural anxiety expressed through moral panics centred around events like the 1995 Tokyo subway gas attack by the doomsday religious cult *Aum Shinrikyô*, or around the succession of sensational youth crime incidents that punctuated the late 1990s and early 2000s.

On the other hand, these shifts during the 'Lost Decade' provided the crucible for a growing recognition far more than had been the case in the past of social and cultural diversity. One example was the emergence in both academic and mainstream discourse of a growing attention to masculinity as a gendered construct. This was manifested, for instance, in the growth of *danseigaku* (men's/masculinities studies) courses and programs being offered at a (number of universities, or the establishment of men's groups and

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men's centres in various cities across Japan. Thus the growing interrogation and problematisation of the salaryman as a gendered construct was an aspect of both the wider collective sociocultural anxiety and of collective sociocultural reflection and reassessment.

My research¹ drew upon intensive interviews and interaction with young male, private-sector employees who were entering the workforce in the closing years of the 20th century and negotiating with the expectations of salaryman masculinity. The expectations themselves were also shifting, from earlier 'pre-Lost Decade' attributes and assumptions to the new realities of the leaner neoliberal corporate framework of postbubble Japan. The experiences of these young men at that particular historical moment provide a valuable insight, both to the shifting cross-currents in relation to expectations of hegemonic masculinity in those years and to the broader social, cultural and economics shifts against which they were occurring.

Today, a decade down the track, the legacy of these complex interweavings and collisions of the late 1990s and early 2000s continues to have a bearing. At one level, the hegemonic grip of the salaryman may appear to have been seriously destabilised. Contemporary imaginings of Japanese masculinity are increasingly dominated by tropes such as the *otaku* 'techno-geek' or the asexual/feminised *sôshokukei danshi* (herbivorous men), or even the kind of masculinity embodied in the figure of the *freeter*. All of these discourses of masculinity come across as the complete antitheses of the salaryman and may well appear to be displacing him as the dominant discourse of Japanese masculinity. Yet, while there is no denying the increasing visibility of these newer, 'antisalaryman' tropes, we need to

be careful about reading too much into practices and styles of subcultural masculinities like the *otaku* or the herbivore whose sociocultural impact is often disproportionately magnified as a result of media commodification. If anything, despite all the socioeconomic and corporate culture upheavals of the postbubble era, the discourse of the salaryman has continued to be remarkably tenacious. This is brought out, for instance, in the ongoing presence in popular culture spaces of the salaryman, such as the continued popularity of pop culture icons like the salaryman 'hero' *Salaryman Kintarô*.

There is no denying that the on-ground reality of being a salaryman in the neoliberal, economically downbeat Japan of the 2010s is vastly different from what was entailed through the 1960s to the, 1980s, and even into the 1990s. However, certain core underpinnings of masculinity—specifically the notion of masculinity hinging on productive work—have not radically shifted. In fact, as reflected in such phenomena as the difficulty faced by men in the non-permanent sector compared with their peers in permanent employment, in finding a partner willing to marry them, the sociocultural appeal of the salaryman discourse (albeit its 2010s version) may actually be getting stronger in contemporary Japan. To fully appreciate this paradox, it is necessarily to reflect back on the significance of the 1990s in the overall narrative of Japan's modernity and late modernity.

Reference

1. Romit Dasgupta *Re-reading the salaryman in Japan: crafting masculinities*, Routledge/ASAA East Asian series, 2012.

Romit Dasgupta is an assistant professor of Asian Studies at the University of Western Australia.

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Lightening the burden of history

The NSW town of Cowra is the 'spiritual home of Australia–Japan relations'.

By Elizabeth Rechniewski

Cowra in inland New South Wales was the scene of the 'Cowra breakout' on 5 August 1944, when Japanese POWs attempted a mass escape from Compound B of the prison camp. Of the approximately 1000 prisoners involved, 231 were killed and 334 escaped into the Australian countryside, although all were either recaptured, surrendered or committed suicide. Although no violence was inflicted on the local community, four Australian guards were killed; two of them were awarded the posthumous George Cross for their efforts to stop the Japanese getting hold of a machine gun.

Despite these tragic wartime events, this small community sought to re-establish relations with Japan at a time when much of the rest of the country had not moved beyond anger and suspicion. Prime Minister Paul Keating said in 1994: 'At a time when many other Australians were not ready to do so, the people of Cowra chose to pursue reconciliation and healing'. The residents of Cowra undertook a series of initiatives over the years that resulted in an accretion of memorial places, symbols and ceremonies designed to promote mutual respect and understanding. By 2001, Cowra had moved so far along the path of reconciliation that the then Japanese Ambassador, Atsushi Hatakenaka, described it as the 'spiritual home of Australia–Japan relations'.

The first steps towards reconciliation were taken at the local cemetery where, in the late 1940s, members of the Returned and Services League (RSL) who were caring for the graves of Australian soldiers began to tend also those of the Japanese prisoners

killed in the breakout. A short report in 'Column 8' in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 25 January 1950 describes the 300 or so graves as being kept 'in splendid order' by members of the former diggers, some of whom had been prisoners of the Japanese.



The Cowra POW camp shortly before the breakout.

reminded of the war, but it was also a reminder that the Japanese too were victims—victims of the rigid code of honour, the code of *senjinkun*, issued with imperial sanction, that decreed the status of POW to be shameful. They had sought through the mass breakout to redeem their honour, and although the actions they took suggest a form of suicide, it is nevertheless a common thread in Australian and Japanese ideals of military conduct that it is honourable to try to escape from captivity. Indeed, at the trial of the alleged leader of the breakout, Kanazawa, his defence counsel made precisely this point.

The Japanese authorities were so impressed with the way the Japanese graves were tended at Cowra that they agreed to rebury there all the Japanese killed on Australian soil during the war: the graves of some 526 POWs, pilots and internees were eventually located in Cowra in the early 1960s. The town thus became the site of the only Japanese war cemetery on foreign soil anywhere in the world. The story of Cowra is henceforth that of the interaction of a range of agencies and individuals, community organisations and institutions, schools, Rotary and RSL, united in a common endeavour to

The material presence in the town of the graves of the Japanese POWs was a constant

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turn this small country town into a symbol of hope for peace and reconciliation.



The Japanese garden at Cowra.

No doubt the best-known initiative is the Japanese garden, a project proposed in the early 1970s by tourism officers who hoped to offer additional sites for Japanese visitors coming to Cowra. Funded at first from local sources, the completion of the second stage of the garden was made possible by the support of external agencies: Japanese firms and wealthy individuals, the Japanese ambassador, and the NSW Government, which was at that time seeking a sister relationship with Tokyo.

While each contributor to this and other initiatives had their own reasons and motives for involvement, the cumulative effect of their interventions was to create in Cowra a 'virtuous circle' of the signs and symbols of reconciliation that attracted new funds and projects as the reputation of Cowra grew. Thus in 1992 Cowra was chosen as the site for the Australian World Peace Bell. Although the bell is usually reserved for capital cities, the Australian Government decided that it should be sited in Cowra rather than in Canberra or Sydney because of the special role Cowra had played in reconciliation. Cowra became a convenient 'field' for the exercise of symbolic gestures of reconciliation; for example for visits by Japanese royalty that would probably not have been tolerated elsewhere in Australia.

It is worth reflecting on the factors which may have made it possible for

this small town of fewer than 10 000 people to conceive and realise a swathe of projects that were in advance of the attitudes of the rest of society. Perhaps the small size, stability and generational continuity of the community in and around Cowra contributed to the success of their project of reconciliation. This was a stable population where policy and commitment could be handed down to new generations and where personal relationships could be called on to find the skills necessary to complete projects. Moreover, as a wool town it had long experience, dating back to the 19th century, of positive contacts with the Japanese traders who came to buy wool.

There has been a tendency to overlook the existence of extensive commercial and other links between Australia and Japan in the pre-World War I and interwar periods. Peter Stanley and others have drawn attention to the flood of alarmist fiction and non-fiction relating to the 'yellow peril' in the years before World War II. There were, however, countervailing, positive forms of contact which perhaps allowed certain communities, such as Cowra, to remember the longer term, mutually beneficial relationships, rather than the few years of conflict.

The period from 1924–35 that Henry Frei refers to as 'the golden years' saw a dramatic increase in Japan/Australia trade relations, particularly in wool: Japan's imports of raw wool more than doubled between 1929 and 1933. Cowra, as a wool-growing region, must have had regular and mutually beneficial contacts with the Japanese buyers whose presence at auctions is recorded in newspaper records of sales of the time. Cowra re-established postwar ties with Japanese businessmen and businesses; a factory was built there by Japanese to scour wool that provided jobs for hundreds of local residents until it closed in 2004.

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Another form of positive pre-war contact was provided by tourism. There were regular tourist excursions from Australia to Japan before the First World War to see the attractions of the country—these trips were regularly advertised in the Sydney papers. In the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 18 July 1914, for example, there is an advertisement for berths on the *Tango Maru* of the NYK to see the ‘flowering of the magnificent chrysanthemums’ in “beautiful Japan”. It is fascinating to note, anecdotally, that the family of one of the prime movers in the development of commemoration in Cowra, the councillor and mayor Barbara Bennett, had visited Japan in 1911. In an interview, Bennett recounts her family’s impressions of the visit and recalls: ‘how much they enjoyed Japan, how well they got on with the Japanese and how they admired the country’.

Official moves towards reconciliation at the level of nation-states follow the rhythm of national interest and geopolitical necessities; these ‘top-down’ initiatives may have little impact at local level where they may meet with a range of responses and possible resistance. It is all the more interesting and relevant, therefore, to explore what forms of reconciliation may be effective at community level.

Cowra offers an illustration of ‘bottom-up’ diplomacy and an example of what local initiatives can achieve in the community and beyond. Both materialistic and altruistic motives can be seen at work: it was tourism officers who proposed the idea of a garden, knowing that a garden could be publicised in the way a cemetery could not, and that it would have broad appeal to both Japanese and Australian visitors.

Cowra offers an illustration of ‘bottom-up’ diplomacy and an example of what local initiatives can achieve.

But it is essential not to overlook the role of the altruistic dedication of a few individuals who pursued indefatigably the goal of reconciliation, sometimes at great personal cost (in the early years they had to raise, for example, their own fares to visit Japan). And also the broad support of the community who worked together to keep the projects alive: during a drought that hit the early stages of the Japanese garden, the local residents watered the plants by hand.¹ Moreover, this small community, going beyond its initial commitment to reconciliation with Japan, has embraced an international responsibility as an ambassador for peace, tolerance and mutual understanding across the world, in ‘a conscious effort to lighten the burden of history’.²

References

1. Much of the information about the role of individuals and the community is drawn from the interviews by Terry Calhoun transcribed at <http://ajrp.awm.gov.au/ajrp>
2. Yoichi Funabashi (2003) Why reconciliation? in Yoichi Funabashi (ed.) *Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific*, Institute of Peace Press, Washington DC, 3-18, 4.

Dr Elizabeth Rezniewski has a long-standing research interest in nationalism and nation-building in France that includes studies of the symbolic construction and discursive representation of the nation and national identity and, more recently, has extended to the role of war remembrance in the national imagination.

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China's netizens rail against western media 'bias'

China's new generation is not opposed to criticising its own government—but it's a different story when the western media does so.

By Ying Jiang

Criticising the government is not rare in China's cyberspace today, particularly with the popularity of *weibo*—a Chinese hybrid of Twitter and Facebook. But when it comes to critical coverage of China by western media, we often witness the anger of Chinese 'netizens' towards alleged western media bias.

In 2009, a new book called *Unhappy China* drew attention to an issue that something surprised the authors and China's old generations: China's young generation—a generation often labelled as being addicted to the internet, addicted to capitalism, or apathetic about politics—reacted promptly to the western media's 'biased' representations of China during the Olympic torch relay in 2008.

China's suspicion about western media bias during the London Olympics last year brought this anger to the world's attention again. A *weibo* post condemned the suspicions expressed by Australian Broadcasting Corporation journalist Ben Knight about Chinese swimmer Ye Shiwen after she broke the world record in the 400-metre individual medley. The condemnation of Knight by Chinese netizens was retweeted and relayed 107 490 times in 3 months. Some commentators claimed they would use the 'human flesh search engine' to find out who Ben Knight was and disclose his private information to the public.

Although not expressed by all generations in China, such anger is a phenomenon among China's

Generation Y, which has access to the internet. Most Chinese netizens were born after 1980, and although younger generations everywhere use the internet to a greater extent, in China its use by young Chinese is extreme. Nearly 70 per cent of China's netizens are under the age of 30, compared with the United States where under-30s account for only 40 per cent of internet users. What is even more special in China's case are the social characteristics of the more than 200 million Chinese born after 1980.



A *weibo* post condemning Ben Knight, retweeted 107 490 times.

Generation Y is the first generation in China to grow up under the consumerist ideology. It is also the first generation in the world where the

majority of its members are an only child. These children have been brought up in a mixed atmosphere where they are required to achieve higher grades at school while being given unprecedented physical comforts at home. Being an only child and growing up under Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms and opening up to the West, this generation has been labelled 'over-protected' and 'well-fed'.

Compared to previous generations, Generation Y has been further encouraged in the consumerist ideology because it grew up with the internet and better living standards. For them, 'living easily and happily' is what they pursue. The expansion of China's college enrolment quota provided them with the best opportunities to get a higher education—something once reserved

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only for elites. Before 1999, only one in 20 high school graduates had the opportunity to go to college. When most of the new generation began taking the annual university entrance examination in 1999, the Chinese Government expanded the enrolment quota significantly. China's opening up to the West has also given Generation Y much more chance to explore the world than previous generations, and many of them studied overseas after graduating from college or high school.

However, while more and more young Chinese are consuming western products, getting western degrees and even becoming permanent residents of western countries, their love for the 'motherland' is also getting stronger.

So, what are the underlying elements that have fostered the political passions of members of this generation who are otherwise apathetic towards politics—as exemplified by their reaction to what they saw as unwarranted, negative coverage of China by the western media? Why are they not opposed to the occasional cyberspace political satire on the government, but resent western media criticism of China? And what are the political implications of this generation's use of the internet?

It is apparent that the anger of China's netizens' is often caused by the alleged western media bias. This 'bias'—in their eyes—can be classified into two categories. First, there are complaints on blogs about 'bias by censorship', as in the case of a BBC interview about the 'great Chinese censorship hoax' in 2006, when two Chinese bloggers, by suddenly shutting down their websites, 'fooled' some western media into thinking their postings

While more and more young Chinese are consuming western products, getting western degrees and even becoming permanent residents of western countries, their love for the 'motherland' is also getting stronger.

were being censored by the Chinese Government. Second, there are complaints about what is seen as bias against China's 'national image', exemplified by coverage on Tibet in 2008 by CNN's Jack Cafferty and by the suspicions of swimmer Ye Shiwen expressed by the BBC's Clare Balding and the ABC's Ben Knight.



The BBC's Clare Balding: suspicious of swimmer Ye Shiwen.

My recent book, *Cyber-nationalism in China: challenging western media portrayals of internet censorship in China*, attempts to dissect the anger over perceived bias by censorship—and particularly, the

contradictions between Generation Y's embrace of western culture and its dislike of the western ideology, as well as the contradiction between its political apathy in general and its passion for patriotic politics in particular.

The book is set against the background of China's embrace of both the market, characterised by 'liberalisation', and the internet, characterised by 'control'. It is in this context that I examine Generation Y's anger towards the western media, and the dominant perceptions of the Chinese Government's role in shaping the new generation's anti-western sentiments.

The book argues that, while the seeming liberalisation of the political spaces of China's cyberspace displays signs of 'political liberalism' in its early stage, it is unlikely to

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bring 'political democratisation. Where the government's role in the formation of the new generation's antiwestern sentiments is concerned, the book claims that the anger of China's Generation Y towards the Western media is formed through what Foucault calls the 'technologies of the self'.

It is shaped by the Communist Party's strategy of developing a penetrating nationalist narrative through the promotion of consumerist culture, with the aim of empowering 'personal freedom' and forming a core 'consumer' identity.

By positing these claims, the book both illuminates the intricacy of the paradoxical feelings of the new generation towards the West and the intricacy of the Chinese Government's tactics of liberalisation and control in shaping the generation's engagement with the West. I was also interested in how Chinese netizens generate their criteria of perceived bias in western media, and conducted a pilot study. Over the period of a month in 2008, I collected posts from an anti-CNN blog about western media coverage of Tibetan issues and compared them with reports from Chinese CCTV news and other media in China.

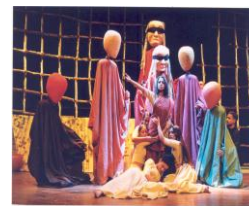
The Chinese bloggers identified three types of western media coverage that they perceived as biased. First, if news reported by the western media is not reported in the Chinese media, then the western media is 'biased' because the news stories are 'fake' and the western media is 'racist'. Second, if negative news reported by the western media is also reported by the Chinese media, the western media is biased because it focused on 'inevitable flaws'. Third, if positive news reported by the Chinese media is not reported by the

western media, then the western media is again biased.

My preliminary research into the criteria used by Chinese netizens to assess western media bias indicates the need for further study into the conflicting concepts of media and communication in China and the West. As William A. Hachten writes in *The world news prism* '... despite our impressive technological expertise, political differences and cultural conflicts prevent the international news process from working smoothly and harmoniously'.

Dr Ying Jiang is a lecturer in media studies at the University of Adelaide.

Mahabharata of women



An adaptation of the *Mahabharata* will be staged in Melbourne in April, using a local cast in a production

linking the Indian epic to contemporary times.

Written and directed by Professor K Madavane, *The Mahabharata of women* (MOW) is being staged by the Australia India Institute from 12–14 April.

The play weaves the pan-Indian epic with a local legend in South India. Three contemporary characters, Mother, Son and Sister, interact with characters from the epic *Mahabharata*, question their acts and sometimes identify with their angst. Mother narrates stories from the epic to Son and Sister and while doing so, the characters from the epic come alive and tell their tales.

The play has been produced in India, Canada, France and Germany, in English, French and German, also with local actors.

For further details, see the [website](#).

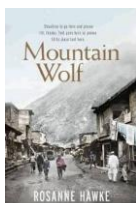
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New young adult fiction with Asian themes



Earth dragon, fire hare. By Ken Catran, HarperCollins, New Zealand. \$19.99.

The conflict in Malaysia during and after the Second World War, as seen from the perspectives of a Kiwi soldier and a Chinese Malay freedom fighter. Against a background of culture clash and political and individual conflicts, two young men are drawn inexorably together as victims and products of the Malay conflict.



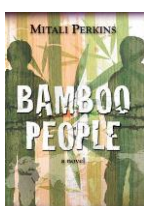
Mountain wolf. By Rosanne Hawke. Paperback, 214 pp. HarperCollins, Australia. \$19.99.

A powerful and confronting book set in Pakistan that deals with social justice for disenfranchised young people who have no voice or power as they are sold into slavery.



Lord Oda's revenge. By Nick Lake. Atlantic Books, UK. \$24.99.

Taro, a Japanese fisherman's son and silent assassin trained in the arts of death, returns in this sequel to *Blood ninja*, in a second novel of ancient curses, epic battles, scheming warlords, and blood-sucking ninjas.



Bamboo people. By Mitali Perkins. Paperback. Charlesbridge Publishing, US. \$14.95.

A coming-of-age story narrated by two 14-year-old boys on opposing sides of the conflict

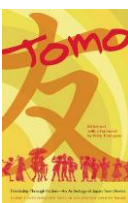
between the Burmese Government and the Karenni, one of the many ethnic minorities in Burma.

Orchards. By Holly Thompson. Random House, UK. \$17.95.



The story of a mixed-heritage girl, Kana, struggling to come to terms with a classmate's suicide. During a summer spent at her mother's ancestral home in Japan, Kana gets to know her relatives, Japan, and village culture.

Tomo. Friendship through fiction: an anthology of Japan teen stories. By Holly Thompson.



Stone Bridge Press, US. \$18.99.

A year after the tsunami, this fiction anthology helps teens learn about Japan and contributes to long-term relief efforts for teens in Japan.

Information provided by [Asia Bookroom](#).

ASAA series

Southeast Asia Series: research on countries and peoples of Southeast Asia.

Women in Asia Series: promotes scholarship for women in Asia.

East Asia Series: principally concerned with the East Asian region (China, Japan, North and South Korea and Taiwan).

South Asia Series: research on the countries and peoples of South Asia across a wide range of disciplines.

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Coming events

Conferences

18th Biennial Conference of the Japanese Studies Association of Australia, Canberra, 8–11 July 2013, at the Australian National University, hosted by the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific. The conference theme of, 'Cities, nature and landscapes: from Nara to the networked city' focuses not only on the social impact of disaster, but on learning from the past experiences as we move towards the future of living spaces and human communities and on the 'networked' cities of the future. Further information from the [conference website](#).

Asia Education Foundation first national conference, Melbourne, 12–14 August 2013: See [website](#) for details.

12th international conference on Thai studies, Sydney, 22–24 April 2014. The triennial conference will be held at the University of Sydney and will adopt the theme *Thailand in the world*. Further details from the [conference website](#).

ASAA 2014 Biennial Conference, 8–10 July 2014. The 20th ASAA biennial conference, *Asiascapes: contesting borders*, will be held at the University of Western Australia, Perth. The conference invites presentations addressing shifts, continuities, innovations and tensions in Asia and welcomes engagement from scholars and practitioners in the humanities, social sciences and other sciences, as well as interdisciplinary explorations of Asia and Asia–Australia relations. Further details and a call for papers will follow.

Public lectures

HW Arndt Memorial Lecture. China and the world economy: past, present and future, Canberra, 25 February 2013. [Professor David Greenaway](#), Vice-Chancellor, University of Nottingham, will review the economic progress made in China, the impact of its re-emergence on global growth and how slowing growth will affect the world economy. Venue: Hedley Bull Lecture Theatre 1, Ground Floor, Hedley Bull Centre (Building 130), Corner of Garran Road and Liversidge Street, Australian National University. Time: 5.30pm–7.30pm. See [website](#) for further details.

Art and culture



Japan in stereo, Sydney, Fridays, 22 February to 22 March 2013. A music-listening series designed for people who are interested in knowing more about Japanese music. The series will showcase a wide variety of music, from traditional genres

such as Imperial court music and the music of the *koto* (Japanese harp), to contemporary genres such as minimalist improvisation, Japanese classic rock and sentimental postwar pop. Venue: Japan Foundation Gallery, Japan Foundation, Sydney L1 Chifley Plaza, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney. See [website](#) for details and story, page 9.

Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Gallery of Modern Art and Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, until 14 April 2013, at Gallery of Modern Art and Queensland Art Gallery, Stanley Place, South Bank. See [website](#) for further details.



Mahabharata of women, Melbourne, 12–14 April. Staged by the Australia India Institute, the play weaves the pan-Indian epic *the Mahabharata* with a local legend in South India. See story, page 32 and [website](#) for further details.

About the ASAA

The [ASAA](#) was founded in 1976 to promote and support the study of Asia in Australia. Its membership is drawn mainly from academic staff and students at Australian universities, but it also takes a strong interest in Asian Studies and the use of Asia-related materials in schools and in Australian attitudes to and policies towards Asia.

The association supports two refereed journals, the *Asian Studies Review* and the *e-Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*. It holds a biennial academic conference which offers members and other scholars the opportunity to hear the latest in research and to develop contacts with other scholars.

The association sponsors four book series, covering Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia and Women in Asia and makes regular submissions to governments and universities on issues of importance in Asian studies. [JOIN NOW](#).

Asian Currents is edited by [Allan Sharp](#). Unsolicited articles of between 1000–1500 words on any field of Asian studies are welcome for consideration.

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