

# ARI *news*

A newsletter of the **Asia Research Institute**, National University of Singapore

JULY 2010  
**ISSUE NO. 23**

## HIGHLIGHTS



### **SPECIAL FEATURE**

Islam and Malay  
Society: What it isn't,  
Rather than What it is



International Conference on  
Economic Stress, Human  
Capital, and Families in Asia:  
Research and Policy Challenges

FEATURE ARTICLE

# ASIA TRENDS 2010



Professor Lily Kong

## Word from the Director

*For more than two decades now, the idea of the 21<sup>st</sup> century being the “Asian century” has been circulating in academic, policy and business circles.*

Whereas one could say the 19<sup>th</sup> century was dominated by Europe and the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the U.S., Asia's steady rise as a force in the global economy, with particularly impressive growth rates registered by China and India, is causing the global balance of power to shift to Asia. “Asia rising” (sometimes replaced with “China rising” or “India rising”) is a common aphorism. It is not an empty one when one observes that the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's first overseas trip in that capacity took her to Asia. But neither is it a certain unilinear and steady trajectory to a multipolar world.

“Asia rising” must certainly be due to economic growth and political power. But a rising Asia must also be accompanied by leadership in social development and cultural richness, depth and vibrancy. Away from the arena of superpower politics and balance of power, how are we to view Asia socially and culturally?

For example, as major urban areas in Asia become saturated by businesses and people, how are urban-rural disparities being managed? How is over-crowdedness, and environmental and social malaise to be ameliorated? How are second-tier cities learning from the lessons of the megacities, what are they modelling themselves after and to what effect? What are the effects on families as rural-urban migration is exacerbated, at the same time that transnational migration adds to the overcrowdedness and social disjunctures in top-tier cities? How are family structures and demographic patterns changing? How is the physical environment of the city affected? How are historical places and cultural symbols of the past remembered and practised in the rush to modernisation?

The list of questions is long. The above are merely examples. But they are all questions that ARI researchers are working on, seriously studying in the hope of seeking answers. Hopefully, there will be insights that will be helpful not only to enrich our intellectual understanding, but that will become helpful in bettering lives.

## FEATURE ARTICLE



# ASIA TRENDS 2010

*ASIA TRENDS is an ARI flagship public outreach event. Asia Trends lectures reinforce ARI's objectives as a world-leading humanities, social sciences and interdisciplinary centre for research and education on Asia, through research, conferences, lectures, seminars and graduate study. It connects with the local Singapore community through informing and interacting with various public sectors (citizenry, government, civil society organisations, businesses, universities and colleges) on major social research issues about Asia.*

*Asia Trends 2010, jointly held by ARI and NUS in collaboration with National Library Singapore, is the eighth in the annual series with a new format. Each research cluster within ARI hosted an evening seminar on a trend within its research field. An invited overseas speaker examined the emerging trends in Asia and a Singapore-based researcher provided supplementary comments on local development. Here is an outline of the 5 seminars.*

## Charisma and Compassion: A Genealogy of NGO-ness from Taiwan to the Globe

BY **C. JULIA HUANG**

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
NATIONAL TSING HUA UNIVERSITY, TAIWAN

Since 1990 the Buddhist Compassion Relief, Tzu Chi Foundation of Taiwan has both influenced and characterised Taiwan itself. The largest philanthropic volunteer association in Taiwan, Tzu Chi claims over six million members worldwide. Its foundation controls enormous assets, operating a TV station, modern hospitals, and a secular university. It has earned the United Nations' recognition as a Non-Governmental Organisation and its leader, the Venerable Cheng Yen, has received many international awards.

Tzu Chi's success emerges amidst the socio-political transformation of post-war Taiwan, which has been marked by the expansion of the increasingly active and plural NGO sector. It should be examined both globally and against the genealogy of NGOs in Taiwan although it has practised humanitarian services as a lawful civil association in Taiwan since the 1960s—four decades before “coming out” as an NGO and before the term NGO became common in Taiwan. How Tzu Chi has been situated in the public sphere in Taiwan and globally is intertwined with the formation of a modern Taiwanese cultural identity, so much so that it has become possible to claim that



there is something intrinsically “Taiwanese” about Tzu Chi. As Taiwan modernised, Tzu Chi changed from a grassroots organisation to a global NGO; its organised charity is one of Taiwan's religious responses to capitalism. On the other hand, both government and society attempt to re-territorialise Tzu Chi, even as it expands globally. The more active Tzu Chi is on the global stage, the more it clarifies the locality of Taiwan and the more irony it casts on Taiwan's ambiguous nation-statehood.

## Lifelines: The Ethics of Blood Banking for Family and Beyond

BY **ONG AIHWA**

PROFESSOR OF SOCIO-CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

In the brave new world of blood banking, the speculative promise of future stem-cell cures, derived from publicly and privately stored tissues, is hedged against biological risks of pandemic diseases that threaten the nation and parental fears and responsibilities for children's health. Good citizenship on Singapore's biopolis has begun to entail donating cord blood as a national resource to defend against uniquely "Asian" diseases. Umbilical cord blood is also the tie that binds family and kinship lines that are tethered to an imagined racial motherland to form transnational blood communities. The banking of an infant's blood, like the collecting of ancestral ghosts, is a new practice among affluent Chinese who link the ethical decisions they make to safeguard their children's health with re-membering the umbilical cord that



connects them back to the motherland. As the popularity of public and private blood banking grows to pervade everyday life, it will increasingly shape and articulate ethical and pragmatic dispositions at the intersection of family, nation, and ethnicity.

## Voices in the Gap: Media and Culture in China's Era of Transition

BY **DAVID BANDURSKI**

AWARD-WINNING FREELANCE JOURNALIST  
AND RESEARCHER  
CHINA MEDIA PROJECT (CMP), UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

International reporting on China often suggests a repressive media environment marked by crackdowns and tightening of control and only sporadically punctuated by "surprises of boldness". The full picture is of course far more complicated. China's media policy has shifted over the past 30 years, from "supervision of public opinion" to a more proactive

post-1989 "guidance of public opinion", to a recent focus on "public opinion channelling" in which resources of commercial media are used—in addition to traditional controls—to influence public opinion. Most journalism in the West do not properly engage the recent emergence of a diverse variety of "voices in the gap" that uproot the officially endorsed narrative.

The 2008 social unrests in Tibet were internally seen as media policy failure exactly because the international press continued their reporting even though local access and news coverage were strictly controlled. Learning from this experience, after the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in 2007, a consensus emerged that in order to strengthen the international influence of Chinese culture China needs to raise its communication capacity overseas. This high-budget push for cultural "soft power" has since enlarged the rift between supporters and critical "voices in the gap" who believe that soft power can or should not be created by executive order. What is crucial for China's long-term development and its image internationally is more openness in cultural policy and more freedom for professional news media in China.





## Green Urbanism: How Does Singapore Compare?

BY **PETER NEWMAN**

PROFESSOR OF SUSTAINABILITY

CURTIN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, AUSTRALIA

Green urbanism is a way to describe settlements that are smart, secure and sustainable. They are smart in that they are able to adapt to the new technologies of the 21st century, secure in that they have built-in systems that enable them to respond to extreme events as well as being built to last, and sustainable in that they are part of the solution to the big questions of sustainability, such as climate change, peak oil, and biodiversity. Globally, there are seven features of green urbanism that are emerging. These are: the renewable energy city, the carbon-neutral city, the distributed city, the biophilic city, the eco-efficient city, the place-based city and the sustainable transport city. Green urbanism for the city of the future is becoming an agenda that cannot be neglected as the global concerns accelerate over climate change, peak oil, water, waste, biodiversity and urban quality of life. Green urbanism offers ways of solving all these problems together. However, there is a need for infrastructure to support the



seven city types outlined if any city is to respond to these concerns. Examples have been provided of how each agenda is underway; however, no city has begun to work equally on all seven areas. Singapore is developing as something of a model in the Asian context and the illustrations of how it appears to be applying the principles of green urbanism have been generated from a recent study of Singapore by the author with 27 postgraduate students from the National University of Singapore. Singapore has shown leadership in the Asian region on some of these issues but for it to continue to be a 21st century model it will need to adopt some of these emerging paradigms more extensively.

## Families, Children and Domestic Workers in Contemporary Asia

BY **RAKA RAY**

PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Domestic workers are unlike any other kind of worker. If the home is the place where we expect security, affection, trust and loyalty to govern, what happens when one person's home is another person's workplace? And second, what impact does the reliance on paid domestic labour have on society? Compared with other work, the substance and texture of the relationship between domestic worker and employer are (i) shaped more by custom and ties of obligation rather than contracts, (ii) sustained by marked social

differences and (iii) it is both spatially intimate, yet socially distant. In Asian societies this relationship has been governed in the past by what may be called "the rhetoric of love", a discourse which, though hierarchical, was also familial. Today, this is partially offset, both by employers and workers, by the rhetoric of an increasingly contractual relationship. Yet we discover that what employers appear to want is a contract that stipulates loyalty but demands affection.

What effect does the institution of paid domestic work have on society? While the institution of paid domestic labour produces cleanliness, meals and childcare, it also produces class, gender and racial hierarchy. In small gestures and unspoken moments, children learn to normalise privileges and hierarchal orders in subtle ways. As domestic workers are foreign or come from another social group which, the race/group comes to be associated with this low prestige occupation, therefore socially inferior. Gender hierarchies are learned through the fact that domestic work is still seen as women's work. In this way, the maintenance of the institution of paid domestic work leads to the reproduction of hierarchies in societies. It produces a culture of servitude through which relations of domination, dependency, and hierarchy are normalised.



[www.ari.nus.edu.sg/calendarofevent.asp](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/calendarofevent.asp)

## Workshop on East Asian Perspectives on Legal Order

**26 – 28 August 2010**

Contact persons for further details:

**Prof Terry Nardin:**  
t.nardin@nus.edu.sg

**A/P Robbie Goh:**  
arigohbh@nus.edu.sg

This workshop is designed to engage political and legal philosophers in rethinking theories of law in the light of East Asian traditions and legal systems. As the second of three workshops in ARI's series on "Religion, Ethics, and Law in Asia", it will also consider the relationship between religious and legal ideas. The effort to think more broadly about law is especially urgent in the case of East Asia, a region long considered to be without law. Such judgments reinforce Western ideas of legal order while obscuring the sources of law in Asian societies. By engaging with East Asian legal ideas and practices, this workshop aims to broaden how Western-educated political and legal theorists think about law.

## Global Urban Frontiers: Asian Cities in Theory, Practice and Imagination

**8 – 9 September 2010**

Contact person for further details:

**A/P Tim Bunnell:**  
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Framing Asia as a global urban frontier means thinking critically about the impulse to refer back to imagined antecedents in Europe or North America. Often the high-rise skyline of Hong Kong makes it "the Manhattan of Asia", while urban sprawl in Kuala Lumpur or Jakarta sees those cities likened to Los Angeles. This workshop will foreground ways in which Asian urbanisms "travel" as part of the wider diffusion of urban typologies, aspirations and strategies that have conventionally been transfixed by western models and origins. As such, it will consider ways in which cities in Asia shape – while also being shaped by – other cities "within" and beyond the region.

## Workshop on Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in the Era of Globalization

**16 – 17 September 2010**

Contact persons for further details:

**Dr Juliana Finucane:**  
arijfkf@nus.edu.sg

**A/P Michael Feener:**  
arifm@nus.edu.sg

Processes of globalization have posed new challenges and offered new opportunities for religious groups to propagate their faiths. Proselytizing—or, the attempts by a group or individual to encourage the conversion of others—tests the limits of religious pluralism, as it is a practice that exists on the border of tolerance and intolerance. The practice of proselytizing presupposes not only that people are freely choosing agents and that religion itself is an issue of individual preference, but also that the choice one makes to adhere to a particular religion is one that can be clearly evaluated as being "right" or "wrong." This workshop proposes to explore this grey area through a consideration of proselytizing in the global era.

## Forcing Issues: Re-thinking and Re-scaling Human Trafficking in the Asia-Pacific Region

**4 – 5 October 2010**

Contact persons for further details:

**Dr Sallie Yea:**  
geosyw@nus.edu.sg

**Dr Pattana Kitiarsa:**  
seapk@nus.edu.sg

**Dr Mika Toyota:**  
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This conference aims to explore the ways social science researchers and some NGO actors have begun to make more critical contributions to understanding human trafficking and the anti-human trafficking framework through in-depth engagements with localized sites within the Asia-Pacific region. Discussion in the conference will be based on, but is not restricted to, the following questions:

- 1) How, and how effectively, has the anti-trafficking framework impacted on "victims" and non-trafficked migrants experiences of mobility, support and justice?
- 2) What methodological and conceptual lenses, including ethnography, have been adopted with some measure of success in researching human trafficking issues?
- 3) What issues have been relatively neglected in research on human trafficking to date? What contributions to our understandings – including unsettling received assumptions – can these other issues make?

## Domestic Violence in Asia: The Ambiguity of Family as Private-Public Domain

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**7 – 8 October 2010**

Contact person for  
further details:

**Dr Maznah Mohamad:**  
arimm@nus.edu.sg

This workshop revisits studies and existing legislations on domestic violence in Asia. It starts with the premise that the family is not only a site of production and reproduction but also of tension and conflicts, with violence among intimate partners as one of its manifestations. By conceptualising this issue as stemming from the ambiguity of family as private-public domain, this workshop and its ensuing publication attempt to uncover some of the sources of the difficulties and paradoxes in understanding domestic violence as a legal as well as a cultural conundrum.

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## International Conference on Transacted Intimacy: Political Economy of International Marriages in Asia

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**14 – 15 October 2010**

Contact persons for  
further details:

**Dr Lu Melody Chia-Wen:**  
arilcw@nus.edu.sg

**Prof Brenda Yeoh:**  
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**Dr Chee Heng Leng:**  
arichl@nus.edu.sg

The rapid increase in international marriage across several countries within Asia in recent decades has led to vigorous scholarship on cross-border marriage migration and the formation of transnational families in Asia. By focusing on the political economy of international marriages, this conference not only interrogates the political, economic and social structures in which love and intimacy are embodied, but also links intimacy with other domains of experiences such as work, gender relations and transnational family. Topics include commercially arranged marriage; marriage migrants' access to paid work and informal economy; work, family and social support; remittances and social remittances.

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## How Safe is Safe? Evaluating Migration Channels for Women Migrants

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**25 – 26 November 2010**

Contact persons for  
further details:

**Dr Theresa W. Devasahayam:**  
theresa@iseas.edu.sg

**Dr Lu Melody Chia-Wen:**  
arilcw@nus.edu.sg

The workshop aims to chart and deepen our understanding of the expression "safe migration channels" by critically assessing the supposition that documented channels of migration provide unsurpassed legal protection to migrants and migrant workers. Specifically, it aims to discuss how the effects of women's labour mobility can be coordinated, using different means to maximise the potential of transnational movements, and to alleviate less desirable outcomes for migrants. The objective is to bring together researchers, civil society organisations, faith-based groups and others working on international mobility and to interrogate the contextualised relationships between these movements and the human rights of migrants. The workshop's focus is on women migrants since women experience greater vulnerability in the migration process.

## ARI SPECIAL FEATURE



*Women and children dominate the Real Space*

# Islam and Malay Society: What it isn't, Rather than What it is

Most students of Islam try to construct the religion as an edifice of distinctive and multifarious essences. Lately, I have been more preoccupied with unmasking it, stripping it down to something it isn't, even **peeling off its thinnest layer to uncover a wisp of the unseen or forgotten**. What I mean by this is that my research for the last few years had been to try to find similarities, rather than the differences between religious systems and other social formations. Taking off from Fatima Mernissi<sup>1</sup>, Talal Asad<sup>2</sup> and Said Amir Arjomand<sup>3</sup>, Islam is just another expression, according to these authors, of modern patriarchy, secularism and constitutionalism, respectively.

As I recall, in the three-decade long research in which I had been involved, the focal point of the Malay village was always the *madrasah* (as Malay villagers would call it). In the first village in which I worked, this was a two-storey wooden house in a centralised location of the *kampung*, donated by one of the wealthier families. It served as a social, rather than a worship or religious learning centre. The upstairs was used for communal prayers performed only by men. The downstairs was where all the life was. **Women and children dominated this space**. In the day, the ground floor was used as a kindergarten for the village kids. During special occasions or thanksgiving feasts, the cooking would be done in the grounds around the *madrasah*. The downstairs was a place

for exchanging gossips and bawdy banter, a sort of "chill-out" place to break away from the drudgery of backbreaking field work (real work, not the ethnographer's!). Religious life was interwoven within these social interludes. It wasn't religion but the development dream which drove many young villagers in their pursuits. Newly-married couples eagerly waited for their time to be resettled at a new land scheme somewhere else, where there was commercial cultivation of palm oil. This was their ticket to social mobility, not a passport to heaven.

By 1979 the Iranian Revolution had sparked a movement among Muslims (from Pakistan to Malaysia), to also execute their own violent, or velvet revolution as the case may be, to Islamize state and society. The route taken was of constitutionalism and legalism. This seemed to be the most preferred mode, since, it is only in the image of the modern nation state, that Islam would be legitimized, as a social system, and ironically, as a past civilization. It is thus untrue that secularization as a process of modernization (through functional differentiation and temporalization) was shunned by religious legal-bureaucratic elites. It was necessary.



**Maznah Mohamad**  
Visiting Senior Research Fellow  
ARI



*Social Panopticonism: "Every move you make, you belong to me"*



*Islamization is still about how to join the big league of modern nation-states. Religious life is being interwoven within the tapestry of secular systems, rather than replacing the secular state.*

The construction of a new "Muslimness" could only take shape not by dipping into a past but by inventing a present, and a presence. Before the rise of legalism, Islamization was mainly effected through a form of social panopticonism, such as "voluntary" veiling and an altered lifestyling (to the trope of Sting's, every breath you take, every move you make, I'll be watching you...can't you see you belong to me?).

This worked, but it may not be enough, at least to the executors. Hence law comes into the picture, and legal-bureaucrats take centre-stage. The bureaucracy is part of governance, has a legal status, is invested with salaries, is empowered to dictate what is right Islam, yet in all these, never needed to be accountable to voters, nor the tax payers.

Today, Islam dominates the everyday lives of Malays, not as culture, but as law and order. Religiosity is achieved by the extensive tentacles of the legal-bureaucracy, reaching out into every aspect of Muslim life, from sex to schooling, and out of the incorporation of the subjectivity of the Muslim as a jurisdiction of the Sharia. But there are ironies.

In one of my most recent field work forays, I met up with the Administrative Director of an Islamic Religious Department in a northern state in peninsular Malaysia. So modern is the set-up of

this office and its personnel. She herself wasn't even a graduate in Islamic Studies, but in Business Administration. She prided herself in being a "professional civil servant" and could be transferred to any government department, be it defence, finance or welfare.

Islamization is still about how to join the big league of modern nation-states. Religious life is being interwoven within the tapestry of secular systems, rather than replacing the secular state.

As my hunch tells me, unmasking and peeling off the layers of organized Islam reveals something which it isn't, rather than what it is.

<sup>1</sup>Mernissi, Fatima (2003) *Beyond the veil : male-female dynamics in modern Muslim society*, London : Saqi Books

<sup>2</sup>Asad, Talal (2003) *Formations of the secular : Christianity, Islam, modernity*, Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press

<sup>3</sup>Arjomand, Said Amir (ed) (2008) *Constitutional politics in the Middle East : with special reference to Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan*, Oxford, [England] ; Portland, Or. : Hart Publishing



*Tentacles of Islamic legal-bureaucracy*



*Two generations of Muslim women*

## CLUSTER NEWS

# The Asian Urbanisms Cluster

The Asian Urbanisms cluster provides space for investigation of urban forms and ways of life across the region. Our work examines regional urban diversity empirically while also drawing upon this diversity as a resource for wider theorisation. The Cluster seeks to contribute to urban theory in two main ways: (1) by speaking to urban and regional studies debates beyond Asia; and (2) by resisting the ingrained Anglophone social science impulse to refer back to supposed antecedents in North America or Western Europe. The wide range of research activities in the Cluster have a common commitment to advancing understanding of the global implications of urban transformation in Asia.

Recent and upcoming cluster events reflect our interest in relational and comparative urban research. Three workshops held in February – two of which were co-sponsored by the Cities cluster in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences – provided comparative perspectives on urban sustainability, the privatisation of urban space and the role of the rural in urban dynamics. “Global Urban Frontiers”,

an upcoming workshop co-sponsored by the Global Asia Institute, will foreground ways in which Asian urban forms and imaginings “travel” as part of the wider diffusion of urban typologies, strategies and aspirations that have conventionally been transfixed by Western models and origins.

The cluster’s two new Research Fellows, Dr Peter Marolt and Dr Michelle Miller, are respectively developing comparative urban research projects on “CybUrban” activism and the urban impacts of processes of decentralisation, while Postdoctoral Fellow Dr Wang Shuyi is comparing urban conservation strategies in World Heritage sites in urban China. In 2010, the Cluster is hosting five eminent urbanists as Visiting Senior Research Fellows – A/P Ng Zhiru (Pomona College), Professor Nihal Perera (Ball State University), A/P Gavin Shatkin (University of Michigan), A/P Abidin Kusno (University of British Columbia) and Professor Michael Douglass (University of Hawai’i) – all of whom bring rich comparative insights and collaborative possibilities to Asian Urbanisms.

## NOTICE OF NEW APPOINTMENT

# PhD Research Scholarships, NUS

The Asia Research Institute is pleased to offer PhD research scholarships from August 2011 in the following interdisciplinary areas:

- **Asian Migration**
- **The Changing Family in Asia**
- **Cultural Studies in Asia**
- **Religion & Globalisation in Asian Contexts**
- **Science, Technology, and Society**
- **Asian Urbanisms**

The PhD scholarship is to be taken up jointly with the appropriate discipline-based department. This would normally be with a department of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, but where appropriate could also be with the Faculty of Law, School of Business or School of Design & Environment at the National University of Singapore. Please note that some departments/Programmes only have one intake per year in August (Semester 1).

Interested applicants are required to submit their applications by 15<sup>th</sup> November 2010, indicating clearly both which ARI interdisciplinary area they wish to

join and which department they would be attached to. Application procedures and forms can be obtained from the NUS website via <http://www.nus.edu.sg/admission/graduate-studies/scholarships-nrs.php>

Applicants must use the application forms in the respective Faculty websites depending on the Faculty to which they wish to seek admission. They should send their applications directly to their respective faculties, indicating their interest to be attached to ARI. Applicants should not send a duplicate copy to ARI.

For the description of interdisciplinary areas offering scholarships, please visit ARI website [www.ari.nus.edu.sg](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg).

For enquiries, please contact:

Ms Kristy Won  
Asia Research Institute  
email: [arisec@nus.edu.sg](mailto:arisec@nus.edu.sg)  
Tel: (65) 6516 3810 Fax: (65) 6779 1428



## **PROF MELANI BUDIANTA**

has commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Open Category with effect from 19 July 2010.

Prof Budianta is a Professor of literary and cultural studies at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia, teaching multiculturalism, literary theory and cultural studies at the Literary Studies Graduate Program, and at the Department of English. She has done research and published some work on Indonesian literature, gender and cultural identity.



## **A/P ANNE BLACKBURN**

has commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster with effect from 9 June 2010.

A/P Blackburn is Associate Professor of South Asia Studies and Buddhist Studies in the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University. She studies Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia, with a special interest in Buddhist monastic culture and Buddhist participation in networks linking Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia before and during colonial presence in the region. She is working on a new project, "Monks, Texts, and Relics: A History of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia".



## **MS NGUYEN THI THANH TAM**

has commenced an 8-month appointment as a Research Assistant with effect from 1 April 2010. Ms Tam received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from the National University of Singapore. She will be supporting two ARI research projects

titled "State Boundaries, Cultural Politics, and Gender Negotiation in Commercially Arranged International Marriages in Singapore and Malaysia" and "Transnational Migration in Southeast Asia and the Health of Children Left Behind" concurrently until the end of November 2010.



## **DR MICHELLE MILLER**

has commenced a 2-year appointment as Research Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms cluster with effect from 1 April 2010. Before rejoining ARI, Dr Miller held a Research Fellowship in Deakin University's Institute of Citizenship and Globalisation (ICG)

and taught in Deakin's Master of International and Community Development (MICD) program. At ARI, Dr Miller will be working on several projects dealing with autonomy/decentralisation, democratisation and conflict management in Indonesian cities.



## **PROF MICHAEL DOUGLASS**

has commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Research Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms cluster with effect from 18 May 2010. Prof Douglass is Professor and former Chair of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning and the Executive

Director of the Globalization Research Center at the University of Hawai'i. He is also Co-Editor of the journal, *International Development Planning Review*. At ARI, he will be focusing on "Livable Cities – from Globopolis to Cosmopolis in Pacific Asia".



## **A/P DINAH ROMA SIANTURI**

has commenced a 2-year appointment as Research Fellow in the Cultural Studies cluster with effect from 7 June 2010. A/P Sianturi is currently an Associate Professor at the De La Salle University, Manila. Her geographic area of interest includes

Japan—particularly, the discursive practices by which travel writers throughout the ages have depicted its folklore, landscape and aesthetics. While at ARI, A/P Sianturi will rework her dissertation into a book manuscript. She also plans to write articles as she extends her inquiry into the contemporary debates in travel theory and criticism.



## **DR PETER MAROLT**

has commenced a 2-year appointment as Research Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms cluster with effect from 17 May 2010. His research interests include urban and cultural-political geographies and related trans-disciplinary studies pertaining to

social activism, the Internet, and Asia. Dr Marolt is currently working, among other things, on a new project titled "Environmental Activism and the Internet in Asia."

**Prof Ong Aihwa** was appointed as Chair of the US National Committee for the Pacific Science Association and President-Elect for the Society for East Asian Anthropology, American Anthropological Association.

**Dr Maznah Mohamad** was appointed to be a Member of the Academic Advisory Committee for the Asian University of Women based in Chittagong, Bangladesh.

**Dr Lai Ah Eng** was appointed Consultant, HDB Advisory Panel for the year 2010 to 2012 and a member of the Community Engagement Programme (CEP) Arts and Media Cluster, Ministry of Information and the Arts for 2008 – 2010.

**Prof Lily Kong** gave a plenary address on "Religion in Geography's Subdisciplines: Exploring New Frontiers in Health and Medical Geography" at Newcastle University, UK, on 8 March 2010 at the *Geographies of Religion: A New Dialogue* conference. She also gave a plenary address on "Transnational Mobilities and the Making of Creative Cities" at the *Pacific Worlds in Motion: Mobile Identities* conference on 2 June 2010 at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

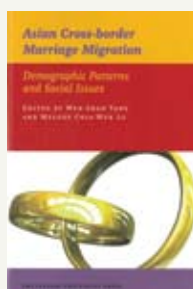
**Prof Brenda Yeoh** gave a plenary speech on "Globalization, Transnationalism and Families/Household in Motion in Asia" for the conference on *Contextualising Geographical Approaches in Studying Gender in Asia*, jointly organised by the Department of Geography, University of Delhi and the College of Asia and the Pacific, ANU with support from the International Geographical Union (IGU), 3 – 5 March 2010, University of Delhi, India. She also gave a keynote speech titled "Transnationalism Studies, their Perspectives and Blindspots: The View from Asia" for the conference on *Transpacific Studies: Homelands, Diasporas, and the Movement of Populations*, 2 – 3 April 2010, University of Southern California, USA.

## New Books



*Media and Modernity: Communications, Women and the State in India*

**Robin Jeffrey**  
New Delhi,  
Permanent Black,  
2010



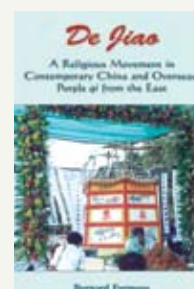
*Asian Cross-Border Marriage Migration: Demographic Patterns and Social Issues*

**Melody Chia-Wen Lu and Wen-Shan Yang (editors)**  
Amsterdam  
University Press,  
2010



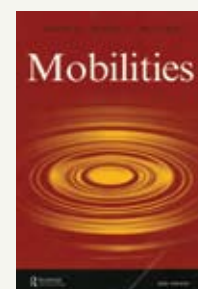
*Special Issue on Transnational Families in the South, Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 41 (2), Spring 2010*

**Melody Chia-Wen Lu, Lorena Núñez Carrasco and André van Dokkum (guest editors)**



*De Jiao, a Religious Movement in Contemporary China and Overseas: Purple qi from the East*

**Bernard Formoso**  
NUS Press, 2010



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# International Conference on Economic Stress, Human Capital, and Families in Asia: Research and Policy Challenges

*The Changing Family in Asia Cluster of ARI and NUS hosted this conference on 3 – 4 June 2010 which brought together some 200 eminent policy-makers, practitioners and researchers from 18 countries to exchange insights on challenges that Asian families face today under the changing family institution, financial crises, natural disasters and the revamping of social safety nets in the past few decades.*

*The guest-of-honour was Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister of Community Development, Youth, and Sports. Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Minister of State, MCYS, and Prof Tan Chorh Chuan, the President of NUS, also graced the event. The first plenary speaker was Dr Noeleen Heyzer, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). The conference was convened by Prof Jean Yeung, Prof Gavin Jones, A/P Angelique Chan, and Dr Yap Mui Teng. Below are excerpts from the welcome speech by Professor Jean Yeung, the lead convenor of the event, and the keynote speech by Dr Heyzer.*

When the idea of this conference was conceived in February last year, I had just moved from New York University to NUS, and the world was hit by a financial tsunami. I was struck by how diverse the experiences in different parts of the world were, the specific challenges each region faced, and the wide array of solutions different countries were proposing to cope with these challenges.

My colleagues and I wanted to know how economic stress impacts human lives in this part of the world, where many countries still have a lower income, the public safety nets are more tenuous than many American or European countries, and family ties are weakening with low marriage and fertility rates and populations ageing more rapidly than in many Western countries.

The truth is economic stress exists not only during financial crisis but also during economic good times, although it does not usually receive its due attention unless we are hit by a financial crisis. Economic deprivation as a result of job instability, rising cost of living, illness, death, or absence of adult family members, low-wage jobs, or natural calamities affects a large proportion of the population at all times. Research has shown that economic stress is linked

to poor human capital development, emotional distress, health problems, unstable marriages, curtailed family consumption, changing union formation and fertility patterns, and harsher parenting behaviour. The ability of families and governments to adapt to changes in the economy has long lasting implications for human capital development, intergenerational mobility, and future economic growth of a society.

We seek answers to questions such as:

- How effective are the Singapore Work Support programmes for families under stress?
- What is the aftermath of tsunamis and earthquakes in Indonesia and China?
- How has the birth rate been affected in Korea or other countries that are also struggling with an ultra-low fertility rate?
- How will China care for its elderly who are under economic stress given her sharply plunged age structure and a highly skewed sex ratio as a result of the one child policy?
- How are the working poor such as Bangladeshi immigrants in India coping with economic stress related challenges such as domestic violence and child abuse?

It should come as no surprise that these questions defy simple answers. What we do know from previous experience is that if we ignore the potential consequences, the cost is high.

This is why we are here today: to share findings about 14 different countries from multidisciplinary perspectives – economics, sociology, social work, public policy, medical and business field, and more, and to engage policy makers so that research can have a greater impact, and policies can be made based on evidence.

*Professor Jean Yeung*

In recent years, the global financial crisis, volatile food and energy prices, and climate related disasters have increased risks, vulnerabilities, and stress on families and on people beyond the existing pressures of living.

By the third quarter of 2008, what started as a housing crisis in the US had turned into a global financial



*Prof Jean Yeung and Dr Noeleen Heyzer*

crisis affecting the real economy everywhere. This crisis presented Asia with its most difficult economic challenge in recent times. There is no way for Asia to “export” out of this crisis, unlike in the 1997 crisis.

Severe economic recessions often lead to irreversible changes in the labour market and permanent job losses. Poorer people are affected more because they have fewer buffers. Families may react to the declining income of primary wage earners, and overall decline in a family’s purchasing power by taking measures that continue to keep them poor. This includes reducing the number and quality of meals, reducing health and education expenditure, pushing more family members out to work in difficult and often dangerous situations. Typically this involves more vulnerable family members, particularly young women, children and sometimes the elderly. Children who cease schooling may never return. Girls who are trafficked to help their families survive may never recover from the social fall out. Women who are required to work longer hours are further relied on to provide care for the sick, elderly and extended family, increasing their burden and their “crisis of time”. Unemployed or under-employed youth quickly turn to petty crime resulting in increased criminality often linked to violence against women.

If Asia cannot “trade” itself out of the crisis, Asia has “spent” itself out of the crisis. The good news is that Asia is experiencing a V-shaped recovery supported by massive fiscal stimulus packages. However, the recovery is fragile besides further uncertainties created by the European debt crisis.

The solution for the region lies in addressing its own macroeconomic, social, ecological, and development imbalances and development gaps. This can be done by empowering the poor and making growth “greener”. We know from the 1997 Asian financial crisis that social recovery takes twice as long as economic recovery and cannot be taken for granted.

We can no longer expect families to be the shock absorbers of risks and vulnerabilities that we face. Risks and vulnerabilities are no longer sporadic. We now have to build new resilience in a constant climate

of shocks from weather-related disasters to volatility in commodity prices, to global economic crises, to sudden illnesses or disabilities. Family structures have been stretched to the breaking point. They are already changing due to several factors such as delayed age of marriage, declining fertility, disruption of marriages, a rapidly ageing population, international migration, rise in female-headed households, family members being dispersed and living apart due to global employment patterns, and displacement due to conflict and political unrest. With urbanisation and urban housing patterns, there is also a shift from the extended family to the nuclear family.

The region’s most important asset is its peoples, and human capital is embodied in the quality of our future development. At the same time, the crisis exposed the need to create a new paradigm for inclusive economic growth within the Asia region – a paradigm that accelerates economic growth and sustains recovery by investing in people. It is built on the premise that there can be no economic transformation without social transformation.

Rising economic stresses and large scale and persistent poverty in the region call for more resilient and inclusive social protection systems. This agenda must include four equally important policy goals:

- (a) Reduce entrenched poverty and protect the population at large from the risk of falling into poverty as a result of not only economic crisis, but also life changing exogenous shocks such as disasters, illness and disability
- (b) Social inclusion for inclusive growth and political stability
- (c) Human security as a basic right
- (d) Achievement of Millenium Developmental Goals

The opportunity is now for Asia to emerge as a leader in the global economy, in the realm of social progress, and in safeguarding our global environment. Asia’s development relies on our ability to achieve three balances on our shared development journey:

*First*, balance between our economic growth, our social needs and the limits of the earth, which are the three interconnected pillars of development;

*Second*, balance between the individual and the collective, focusing on how to transform the initiative of each into the common good for all; and

*Third*, balance between the power of the market and the power of the state. The global financial crisis of the past two years underscores the limits of relying solely on the market to correct itself and the dangers of over-regulation by the state.

*Dr Noeleen Heyzer*

## International Workshop on Modern Sports in Asia: Cultural Perspectives

**29 – 30 April 2010**

This workshop was convened by Dr Cho Younghun (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies) and Dr Charles Leary (ARI) as part of the work of the Cultural Studies in Asia research cluster. More than 25 prominent local and international scholars gathered to discuss the role of modern sports in Asian cultures, presenting original historical research as

well as perspectives on the globalising dimensions of sports cultures. For example, topics included the sporting life and physical education of colonial Singapore, the transformation of traditional sports in Japan, New Zealand and Myanmar, and the impact of sports on physical culture in Asian locales such as China and Taiwan. All concerned found the workshop to be a lively discussion offering a special contribution to the field of Asian studies, and to the history of sport as a whole. The proceedings of the workshop will be published in a special issue of a journal.

## Marital Dissolution in Asia

**6 – 7 May 2010**

The key objective of this workshop was to bring together evidence on recent trends in the incidence and differentials in divorce in different regions and countries of Asia, and to understand what is driving these trends. In total, 15 papers that covered 8 countries (Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan, Philippines, India

and China) were presented. We also had two papers that presented data from multiple countries: one on West Asia and the other on East Asia. For all these countries and regions, up-to-date data on divorce trends were presented. The papers also examined the factors driving the trends in divorce rates in the region. These factors include changing attitudes and notions towards marriage, changing laws and gendered ideologies and religion. The workshop also had two papers that examined the consequences of divorce on women and children.

## Singapore Cinemas: The Locations of Film Exhibition

**22 May 2010**

This one-day workshop, convened by the Cultural Studies in Asia research cluster, was a collaborative effort supported by the National Library Board, the Singapore Heritage Society, the Singapore Art Museum, and the Asian Film Archive. The workshop was held at the National Library, with a direct view of the site of

current and former landmarks of Singapore's cinema along Beach Road. Participants presented research on the diverse cinema spaces and filmgoing practices in Singapore, from the earliest screenings in Singapore to more recent cinemas of note. The workshop considered Singapore's cinema heritage while also looking to the future of filmgoing in Singapore. An engaged audience exchanged memories and ideas with presenters, making the event a workshop in the truest sense. The papers will be published as an anthology, while it is hoped that the workshop also serves as a beginning to further research.

## International Conference on Fatherhood in 21st Century Asia: Research, Interventions, and Policies

**17 – 18 June 2010**

This conference was organised by Professor Jean Yeung of ARI in collaboration with NUS FASS Gender Studies Minor Program and the national Dads for Life movement, an initiative of the National Family Council, and spearheaded by the Fathers Action Network (FAN). The

conference brought together researchers, policy-makers and practitioners to discuss fathers' diverse roles, and the challenges and opportunities they encounter when involved in their children's lives; and to address a range of policies and practice-based interventions related to fatherhood in Asian countries. Presenters discussed on fathers in 10 different countries, focusing on fathering across diversity, father-child relationship, father aspirations and motivations, and fatherhood in the context of migration. Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of National Development was the Guest of Honour for the conference.

Visit [www.ari.nus.edu.sg/ARI-Events.htm](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/ARI-Events.htm) for more details.

# Teaching Professional Skills to a Community of Scholars-in-Training



**Dr Kay Mohlman**  
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The Programme in Academic Writing and Communication that I run every May–July for the Asian Graduate Student Fellows has changed over its four-year lifespan. Originally it was a workshop and lecture series based on group sessions only, highlighting aspects of research writing, scholarly creativity, and professional socialisation. As the 30 or more participants come from diverse backgrounds from around Asia, the Programme centres on strengthening their ability to write for English-speaking academic audiences.

In response to ongoing feedback, the revamped 2010 Programme has a broader, more individualised and flexible format. It includes cross-cutting affiliations for each participant based on common English ability and research focus; a modular approach to writing that includes full-group, small group, and one-to-one sessions; more attention to presentations and professional publication; a larger component of self-study with resources on

Academic English; and more planned sessions with invited scholars.

Overall, the 2010 experience has been intensive, exciting, and highly rewarding. The fine-tuning goes on, but the vision of what the Writing Programme can achieve—in conjunction with the Graduate Fellowships—remains constant:

Past participants' voices:

*"After the three months' programme in ARI, I know how to:*

- *Write an academic working paper*
- *Develop ideas and construct the outline of a working paper*
- *Write an effective email regarding our work with mentors, advisors, donors, etc.*
- *Present a paper in a conference, know how to discuss or deal with questions from audiences*
- *Learn the teaching method of Dr Kay and collect all her documents from the academic writing workshop so that I can transfer/train my colleagues as well as our students in my university where academic training in English is inadequate"*

*"I always believe that if I had had this training back in college in the Philippines, I would have been a more effective writer and researcher. It is interesting to note that, despite my conversant capacity in English, I discovered more basics which are essential in writing academically in the language my country venerates."*

*"...the in-depth guidance in research and academic English, the seminar series on Asian issues, and the incredible availability of online and library resources have made us all better graduate students and promising scholars of Asia."*

