Asian Currents

The Asian Studies Association of Australia

Maximising Australia's Asian knowledge

October 2014 **ISSN 1449-4418**

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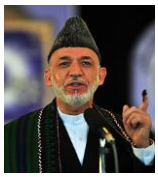

Karzai's chequered legacy

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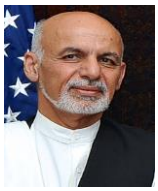

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End of innocence for Hong Kong

Even if Hong Kong returns to normal, tensions are likely to simmer.

By Kerry Brown

For a place stereotyped as apolitical and wholly business orientated, the protests convulsing Hong Kong have revealed a different face to the city.

As a place of contract and rule of law, Hong Kong has always been appreciated by Mainland companies and politicians along with the outside world. The desire to preserve this, and the business confidence it brought, lay behind the Framework Agreement with the British in 1984 and the Basic Law, drawn up later, which guided the handover process from Britain to China and acted as a de facto constitution after the reversion of sovereignty in 1997.

Ensuring Hong Kong continued to be a place of legal protection and predictability was important, as was maintaining the Special Administrative Region as a major capital and finance centre, and as the interface between the growing Chinese economy and the rest of the world.

Ironically, it is this sense of Hong Kong being a place where promises are not easily broken that has been most traumatised by Beijing's decisions on the election of a chief executive for the region in 2017. While the Basic Law is unspecific, there was a sense that universal suffrage and complete freedom over the choice of candidates was fundamental to the agreement. Beijing's recent refusal to honour this has created the depth of local response seen over the past few weeks.

Consultations locally since late 2013, and public discussions, including an unofficial online questionnaire, were all terminated when the local government declared in August that, while the five million eligible voters would get a chance to vote from 2017 for their leader, they would do so from a group of two or three preselected candidates screened by an election committee. This issue of preselection has infuriated many in the city, and been the root cause of the demonstrations.

The failure of the current chief executive, CY Leung, to sell this deal to the people is only the latest of his many political missteps. In the mere two years since his election in 2012, Leung has become the most unpopular leader Hong Kong has ever had. His blank statement to protestors at the end of September that there was no way Beijing would change its mind was no doubt true, but hardly tactful. There were a thousand-and-one other statements he could have made to show he had tried to promote Hong Kong's interests in Beijing.

The tens of thousands of demonstators who have taken to the streets of Hong Kong have revealed a different face to the city. Photo Diplomat.so.

The `one country, two systems' principle meant—in the minds of the Beijing leadership—that Hong Kong could have its own currency and economic and legal systems, but not its own political identity. The idea of a system being in place in 2017 where a region of the sovereign territory of the People's Republic might elect an opponent of Beijing through universal suffrage was evidently a step too far for the Beijing overlords. They have proposed a system that will ensure this will not happen.

The end of Hong Kong's illusions has been short and sharp. In just a few weeks, hopes for a new system from 2017 have been dashed. Protesters have admitted there is little chance Beijing will change its mind. But they have fired a tactical shot across Beijing's bow. Hong Kong might secure concessions within the framework proposed—more candidates, a larger candidate selection committee—but this time, at least, there will be no universal suffrage in the territory for 2017.

Beijing doesn't have it all its own way, however. It is likely protestors will get off the streets, or at least that their numbers will dwindle. Business might return to normal. But resentments are likely to simmer.

Trust in Beijing is low. Since 1997, three chief executives have largely failed—the first removed from power half way through his second term, the second after serving only eight of a possible 10 years, and CY Leung, who is unlikely to see a full first term, let alone get into a second.

For a place with such a high per capita GDP and world-class, modern economy, Hong Kong has proved tough to rule. Perhaps this would be solved by giving its citizens more direct choice in who runs their city so that they might feel, at least, like stakeholders with some vested interest in seeing their leaders succeed. If leadership failure continues after 2017, Beijing will have to think again.

Beijing will also pay a geopolitical price for the Hong Kong settlement it sanctioned. 'One country, two systems' has been lauded as the deal that will finally solve the Taiwan issue—though its hollowness will make the few Taiwanese who thought this could be used towards them change their mind.

Economic relations across the Taiwan Strait might be good now, but deep down there is distrust. President Xi Jinping's proposal in September to apply the 'one country, two systems' rubric to Taiwan was rejected by his Taiwanese counterpart, President Ma Ying-jeou. There is no way the `one country, two systems' solution is politically saleable in Taiwan now in view of the lack of safeguards it has delivered in Hong Kong.

The settlement has managed to politicise a generation of young in Hong Kong. The impact of this is hard to predict.

And finally, the settlement has managed to politicise a generation of young in Hong Kong. The impact of this is hard to predict. The age of innocence is over. Hong Kongese evidently feel their leaders are incapable of protecting and promoting their interests. They will be harder to convince in the future.

Perhaps in 2017 Hong Kong will have a leader who will surprise everyone. The search is on for someone who, at least, can restore faith and credibility in the leadership—something that both the people of Hong Kong and the leaders in Beijing need critically. Otherwise protests, and failed leaders like CY Leung, might become the norm in the place once branded `Asia's global city'.

Kerry brown is the Director of the China Studies Centre and Professor of Chinese Politics, University of Sydney.

This article has been posted on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

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Yudhoyono leaves Indonesia facing an uncertain future

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's place within a broader span of modern Indonesian history has yet to be determined.

By Edward Aspinall

Less than a month before his presidency came to an end, Indonesia's Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono became the subject of a trending topic on twitter worldwide. It was not, however, the sort of publicity that the social media-obsessed president liked.

The hashtag that earned the global ranking was '#ShameOnYouSBY', and it was part of a public outcry triggered by the passage on 26 September 2014 by Indonesia's parliament of a new law that cancelled the right of ordinary Indonesians to directly elect the heads of local governments (mayors in the cities, *bupati* in the rural districts, and governors in the provinces).

Direct elections had been introduced by a law passed shortly before President Yudhoyono came to power in 2004, and the subsequent flourishing of local democracy through his years in office had done much to remake the nature of Indonesian politics. It facilitated the rise to national prominence, for example, of Indonesia's newly elected president Joko Widodo (Jokowi), who was first elected as mayor of Solo, and then as governor of Jakarta, before his run for the presidency in 2014. In recent times, some of Yudhoyono's supporters had been saying that the president should be known as the *bapak demokrasi*, or 'father of democracy', in Indonesia.

The new law was passed by parties supporting Prabowo Subianto, the defeated authoritarian-inclined candidate in last July's presidential election. Critically, its passage was facilitated by a walkout from the parliament by members of President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat. Without the walkout, Prabowo's 'Red and White Coalition' would not have had the numbers to carry the vote. Moreover, the bill being deliberated by the parliament had itself been initiated by the government—it would have been easy for Yudhoyono's Minister of the Interior to withdraw it.

At the time of the parliamentary vote, Yudhoyono himself was finishing off the longest overseas trip of his presidency, a trip that, among other things, involved him receiving the latest in a long line of honorary degrees, this time from Japan's Ritsumeikan University, and addressing the UN General Assembly on matters, including world peace and interfaith dialogue.

Affronted: President Yuhoyono.

As the storm of criticism broke over subsequent days, Yudhoyono issued a series of baffling and sometimes emotional responses, promising to do what he could to restore local elections, but also taking great personal affront at the accusations made against him.

The public outcry condemning Yudhoyono, its causes, and the responses to it, capture much about the challenge we face in thinking about President Yudhoyono's years in power, and about what is shaping as his legacy. Was he, as some Indonesians and many international commentators claim, a great president and a major architect of Indonesia's democratic success? Should his years in power be viewed as a period of political stability and

democratic consolidation? Or should they be seen as years of wasted opportunity and stagnation?

Such questions were the topic of the Australian National University's annual Indonesia Update conference in September. An array of speakers from Australia, Indonesia and elsewhere addressed particular aspects of his record, ranging from foreign policy through to the security sector, human rights, the environment and economic management.

Though the views were mixed (his achievements in poverty reduction, for example, were viewed by the ANU's Chris Manning as being noteworthy), the consensus was more negative than the general approval of Yudhoyono's presidency that we have become used to hearing from the international media and foreign leaders. One common thread identified by many speakers was a tendency for Yudhoyono to emphasise grand statements and ambitious policy goals, yet for his government to fall far short when it comes to measurable achievement.

Take the environment as an example. In 2009, President Yudhoyono gained much international attention for announcing an ambitious goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26 per cent from 'business-as-usual levels' by 2020, with that goal to rise to 41 per cent should the country receive international support. In 2011, he announced that he would dedicate the last three years of his term 'to deliver enduring results that will sustain and enhance the environment and forests of Indonesia'.

Partly as a result of such commitments, Yudhoyono will take the chair of the Seoul-based Global Green Growth Institute when he retires as president. Yet in June this year, it was announced that the deforestation rate in Indonesia has overtaken Brazil's, to be the greatest in the world, with the annual rate of loss of primary forest rising as high as 840 000 hectares in 2012. Out at the forest edge in Indonesia's provinces, the goals Yudhoyono grandly announced at international conferences count for little, and it is the oil palm plantation bosses and their allies in local governments who set the pace.

We don't yet know whether the Yudhoyono years will be seen as a stepping stone on the path to democratic deepening, or as a high point of democratic achievement that precedes a slide back toward political conflict and authoritarian regression.

Participants at the Indonesia Update conference saw different sources of such disappointing outcomes. For the ANU's Greg Fealy, the origins are to be found in Yudhoyono's personality and his hunger for approval, which can ultimately be traced back to his childhood. John Sidel, of the London School of Economics and Political Science, by contrast, looked to structural factors, and compared Yudhyono to similar former military men—Prem Tinsulanonda in Thailand and Fidel Ramos in the Philippines—who came to power during similar moments of democratic transition, and produced similarly disappointing results.

After Yudhoyono

The meaning of the Yudhoyono presidency will come into sharpest focus as time passes and we are able to assess his place within a broader span of modern Indonesian history. We don't yet know whether the Yudhoyono years will be seen as a stepping stone on the path to democratic deepening, or as a high point of democratic achievement that preceded a slide back toward political conflict and authoritarian regression.

The reason for this is that we face an unprecedented political situation now in Indonesia. For much of the first 16 years of Indonesia's post-Suharto democratic experience, governments were characterised by so-called 'rainbow coalitions' in which most of the major political parties are given a share of ministries. This has now changed. Joko Widodo said from the start that he was interested in a 'slim coalition'. More importantly, Prabowo Subianto has so far managed to keep the coalition that nominated him for the presidency together, and it controls a majority of seats in parliament. Potentially, the Widodo presidency will be marked by dramatic political conflict between the executive and legislature.

At this moment it is still too early to say if Prabowo's coalition will hold. It kept together in order to pull down direct elections of regional government heads (it replaced them with indirect elections via local parliaments—most of which are controlled by the coalition). It also captured all the major leadership positions in the new parliament in early October. Some leaders of Prabowo's Red and White Coalition have expressed desires to change many other laws and to frustrate the president's legislative and budgetary agenda. Some are motivated by revenge. A period of dramatic polarisation akin to that witnessed in Thailand for the first time seems imaginable.

It is, however, still possible that President Jokowi will be able to pull at least some of the parties currently supporting Prabowo away from the opposition coalition. Indeed, until recently the conventional wisdom was that most Indonesian parties are fundamentally patronage-oriented and therefore will want to gravitate toward the government.

Jokowi also has other weapons available, such as the power of government law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute corruption cases—virtually

A period of dramatic polarisation akin to that witnessed in Thailand for the first time seems imaginable.

all of his leading political foes are vulnerable on this score.

Whatever the fate of Indonesian democracy under his successor, Yudhoyono's role will be viewed unkindly by history in this critical transitional phase.

To be sure, Yudhoyono kept democracy alive during the period of his presidency, when a more hostile leader could have actively undermined democratic institutions.

In his final year, however, President Yudhoyono and his Partai Demokrat backed Prabowo Subianto, a presidential candidate with deeply authoritarian intentions. His party facilitated the repeal of direct local government head elections—one of Indonesia's signal democratic achievements. It supported Prabowo's allies in their move to take control of leadership positions in legislative bodies.

These acts make a discordant coda to the rule of a man who would be dubbed the father of democracy.

Edward Aspinall is a professor of politics in the ANU's College of Asia and the Pacific. The proceedings of the 2014 Indonesia Update on the Yudhoyono presidency will be published in 2015 by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, in a book to be edited by Edward Aspinall, Marcus Mietzner and Dirk Tomsa.

This article has been posted on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

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Oligarch puppet or people's choice? —the rise and rise of Joko Widodo

Scholars divide over whether the Jokowi 'phenomenon' represents a victory for Indonesia's media oligarchs, or a serious challenge to them.

By Ross Tapsell

This year, Indonesia elected a new president, Joko Widodo (popularly known as Jokowi). He catapulted from mayor of Solo in 2005, to Jakarta governor in 2012, to president in 2014.

Not part of the established former New Order hierarchy, Jokowi's ascendancy to the presidency undoubtedly raises questions for scholars of Indonesian politics surrounding the nature and influence of oligarchy.

The oligarchy theory has been led by Richard Robison and Vedi Hadiz, and by Jeffrey Winters, who have argued that, while an authoritarian government no longer controls power or sets the agenda, Indonesia's new era of democracy, post-1998, is dominated by many of the old faces, while new ones are drawn into the same predatory practices that have defined politics in Indonesia for decades.

The second strand of scholarship focuses on the process of Indonesia's democratic transition from below, through political agency and influence and the rise of popular forces in Indonesian politics. Is Jokowi's rise to the presidency a sign that the oligarchs are losing power? Or was Jokowi's success attributable to the influence of certain oligarchs?

One way to try to answer this question is to examine how Jokowi became a media phenomenon throughout 2012 and 2013, despite not being part of the oligarchic elite which owns and controls Indonesia's largest media conglomerates. Media ownership and control are central to the oligarch thesis.

Most of Indonesia's media owners have direct affiliations with political parties and are, in some cases, themselves presidential candidates. Does that mean Jokowi's victory in 2014 was one for individual citizens over the large oligarchical powers of Indonesia's media, or did media oligarchs play a significant role in his success?

Jokowi's rise as a media phenomenon represents a new, 'media darling' form of popular politician.

Those in favour of 'oligarchy' would emphasise that Jokowi was only allowed to campaign as a candidate for Jakarta governor in the first place due to the machinations of oligarchs Megawati Sukarnoputri (PDI-P founder) and Prabowo Subianto (Gerindra founder and presidential candidate). Jokowi and his vice-governor candidate, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, were supported by a well-funded Gerindra media team who, among other initiatives, spent significant amounts on television advertising. This money came from Prabowo and his millionaire brother, Hashim Djojohadikusumo.

It was, then, the oligarchic media (largely the two Jakarta-based 24-hour news stations TVOne and MetroTV that broadcast all around the archipelago) which, through constant coverage of his *blusukans* (impromptu visits), made Jokowi into a national figure.

This consistent coverage may have been largely profit-driven, but it still needed support from the oligarchic owners Aburizal Bakrie (TVOne) and Surya Paloh (MetroTV). Once the presidential election campaign began

and two candidates, Prabowo and Jokowi, were nominated, these media owners took sides and allied themselves to a coalition. Jokowi allied himself with various New Order oligarchs such as his vice-presidential running mate Jusuf Kalla, and media moguls Surya Paloh, Jawa Pos Group owner Dahlan Iskan, and others. Rather than a victory of individual citizens over the former New Order oligarchs allied to Prabowo's coalition, this was a victory of one set of oligarchs over another.

Presidential rival Prabowo Subianto: supported by former New Order oligarchs.

Those in favour of the oligarchy thesis might say that Jokowi's victory does not mean there is anything new in Indonesian politics, but that the old faces continue to be the drivers of political power, while new faces, like Jokowi, are drawn into the same predatory practices that have defined politics in Indonesia in the first place. In short, the political system is still dominated by oligarchy, and Jokowi's group happened to win.

Alternatively, and an argument which to me seems more compelling from researching Jokowi and the Indonesian media this past year, is that Jokowi's victory should be considered a break from the oligarchic New Order-era elite which has dominated Indonesian media and politics, despite *reformasi*, in 1998.

Jokowi's rise as a media phenomenon represents a new, 'media-darling' form of popular politician, driven by widespread coverage of a unique form of governance and increased prominence in the media of polls of presidential candidates.

Jokowi may have needed the backing of Megawati and Prabowo to become a candidate for the Jakarta governorship, but he still had to beat the well-funded and entrenched incumbent, Fauzi Bowo, to win.

In this election, as Greg Fealy wrote, 'conventional political strategies relying on big money and establishment figures were now vulnerable to independent candidates who could connect with electors and draw favourable media attention'.

Even if Jokowi and Basuki's media campaign was heavily supported by Gerindra, no serious commentator would argue that Prabowo and Megawati supported his nomination for governor because they wanted him to eventually become president. They clearly hoped for the position for themselves.

Furthermore, many Indonesians who supported Jokowi's campaign did so through grassroots campaigning and volunteer communities, which included social media platforms and the 'prod-user' (those who both produce and consume new media content).

Since Jokowi arrived in Jakarta in 2012, many Indonesian consumers of both old and new media yearned for news of a politician who represented a break from the old faces of Indonesian politics. These media owners were forced to continue to run Jokowi-stories, or risk losing profits for their companies.

During the election year, seeing power and influence become increasingly threatened, the oligarchs who dominate Indonesian television, Bakrie and Hary Tanoesoedibyo, allied with Prabowo and covered his campaign with hagiographic fervour. Meanwhile, Surya Paloh and a few other large media conglomerate owners who were allied to Jokowi covered his campaign highly favourably.

But, rather than showing the might of oligarchs, this highlights the complexities or kaleidoscopic nature of Indonesian media and politics, which are not adequately explained by the oligarchy thesis. This is not to

say that big money and political machinations from oligarchic elites are not important. Certainly, rich and powerful individuals will continue to dominate the political economy of the media industry in Indonesia, as they do in other democracies around the world, including Australia. But Jokowi's rise shows the power of non-oligarchic or counter-oligarchic actors and groups who increasingly negate the power and influence of the large media conglomerates.

Jokowi's media campaign often was dysfunctional and chaotic, as opposed to Prabowo's highly professional top-down approach to media management and campaign activities. In many ways, Jokowi's presidential campaign was saved by the collective action of individual citizens, rather than by the media owners who sided with him.

The election was a close call, but Jokowi's ascendancy from local mayor to president in only two years represents a new period of contestation. Rather than submitting to the same old predatory practices of oligarchic media ownership, new practices and initiatives to gain political momentum were forged via new forms of political campaigning, disseminated via new mediums and platforms.

The media was indeed a vehicle and venue in the creation of the Jokowi phenomenon, and the Suharto-era oligarchic power and dominance has been openly and somewhat spectacularly challenged.

Dr Ross Tapsell is a lecturer at the ANU's College of Asia and the Pacific. He researches the media in Indonesia and Malaysia.

This article has also been posted on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

The smartphone election

By Duncan Graham

Joko Widodo's (Jokowi's) inauguration as Indonesia's seventh president this month is an event of seismic significance, not just for the Republic but for all of us. It proves what's possible and gives hope to those who despair at the feudalism in other Islamic states.

The election has shown that democracy is not incompatible with Islam, that Javanese values of moderation, consensus and reason can trump bombast, threats and smear campaigns. Jokowi's win came because the unpaid *wong kecil* (ordinary folk) showed they are smartphone-smarter than professional campaign strategists in social media messaging to muster the masses and alert the electorate. It has also demonstrated that most Indonesians don't want a return to authoritarian rule and will chance their future in the hands of a cleanskin from outside the sleazy, sclerotic and incestuous Jakarta elite.

A few of these axis-shifting developments were given glancing recognition by Professor Ariel Heryanto in his 'Indonesia's democratic moments' essay (*Asian Currents,* August 2014). However these mighty events have been smothered by his mutterings about Western commentators and electoral systems. Why no examples of the 'familiar smugness' he claimed to find in the international media's reporting of the election? He must have done a lot of scratching in the musty litter of shredded newsprint to form that opinion; during the campaign the mainstream Western media's Jakarta-based journalists have reported factually, extensively, impartially and professionally.

Indonesia is a young democracy and the chances of it fracturing and failing have been great because the Establishment feared people power; the New Order's old general, Prabowo, wanted to turn the nation

back to the original Constitution, though it's likely not all voters understood this meant the death of democracy.

Professor Heryanto alleges the 'legacies of colonialism linger on'. The only people who still raise the spectre of this long-spent system are incompetent bureaucrats seeking to flick away their own failures to meet the challenges of today. It's a timeworn excuse beloved by Suharto, and belongs to the last century.

Professor Heryanto mocks the two major party system that's evolved in the West. Yet this is the practical way for serious candidates wanting the right to implement policy for all rather than seek power for self. During the 2009 legislative elections in Indonesia there were 38 parties in the race, though only nine won seats. This year there were just 12 parties. In last year's Australian election nine parties (grouping independents as one) offered themselves to the electorate.

In a democracy, politicians learn that compromise and cooperation are essential to survival and that electorates have little abiding interest in narrow-base groups splintering on esoteric ideology. Indonesia is clearly heading in this direction and if the new parliament can develop a constructive opposition then Indonesian democracy will be the richer. Where are Professor Heryanto's reasons for opposing mandatory voting, a system operating in 21 countries apart from Australia, even if not all enforce the law? There's been widespread applause for the 70 per cent turn out in the presidential poll. Stand that statistic on its head—30 per cent were indifferent, indicating there's an urgent need for education in democracy so all citizens recognise their rights and exercise their responsibilities.

Mandatory attendance at the booth goes some way to ensuring the elected government properly reflects the wishes of the people, rather than just those with the energy, time and interest to exercise their civic duties.

Indonesia's president-elect faces mammoth problems in implementing reform. It would be naive to assume his supporters will keep singing from his song sheet, or will stay in the choir should the conductor drop his baton. There may well be a massive campaign to destabilise his administration or undermine his authority.

These are issues worthy of Professor Heryanto's attention. Instead he heads off at a tangent by writing of the 'contempt of envy' of those analysing Indonesia's so-called middle class. The World Bank defines this group as earning the equivalent of more than US$4.50 a day. They may have a motorbike on time payment and flash a fancy cellphone, but they still survive hand-to-mouth and rent or live with relatives. The promotion of the middle class has been by manufacturers promoting higher consumption, shifting attention away from the estimated 100 million still living on less than US$2 a day. Where's the evidence that Professor Heryanto's 'instant observers' have been writing, that 'Indonesia can never get anything right'?

Mainstream media has commended the way the election was conducted and the restraint shown by the winner when assaulted by a litany of lies and an arrogant opponent with limitless funds. The proof can be seen not just in the coverage by the ABC and SBS, News Limited and the Fairfax Press but also in the brilliant (because it illuminated the issues) *New Mandala* website, published by his own university.

Duncan Graham is an Australian journalist living in Malang, East Java, and publishes a blog.

This response has been posted on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

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Karzai's chequered legacy

After two terms in power, Afghanistan's first elected president has left behind a profoundly transformed country.

By Ali Reza Yunespour

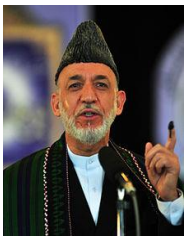
When Hamid Karzai was announced as the chairman of the Interim Authority at the Bonn Conference on Afghanistan in 2001, he was given responsibility for leading a country ruined by decades of war and poverty.

Karzai became Afghanistan's first elected president in 2004, and served for two consecutive terms, before relinquishing power after a long and disputed election earlier this year. Karzai's transfer of power to his successor last month marked the first democratic and relatively peaceful transition of power in Afghanistan's history.

Although it is premature to assess Karzai's legacy fully, it will be assessed differently—against the expectations and aspirations of the Afghan people on the one hand, and the international community on the other. For the people of Afghanistan, however, he is most likely to be judged against previous governments—particularly the Taliban in the 1990s, and what they experience after him.

What is certain is that, during his term in office, Afghanistan experienced social, political and economic changes. Karzai tolerated his opponents to a degree unprecedented in Afghanistan's political history, and handed over a country with a constitution, an increasingly vocal civil society, and a security force.

Except for Pakistan, Karzai developed and maintained healthy relations with most other countries, including important rivals such as Iran and the United States. But under his leadership, Afghanistan also failed in other important fronts, most notably in quelling the Taliban insurgency, ensuring the rule of law and reducing the country's dependency on foreign aid.



President Karzai: pursued a divide-and-rule policy.

Karzai discouraged the formation of modern political parties and pursued a policy of divide-and-rule through the distribution of state patronage, which brought short-term political gain at the expense of the developing of political institutions. His focus on the immediate task of keeping the peace also meant that he did not show any political courage, or interest, in addressing the more difficult, but highly important, issues such as transitional justice. Transitional justice became—and is likely to remain—a forgotten reality for the victims in Afghanistan.

From the early days of his political career, Karzai was well-known for changing his political allegiances. In the 1980s, he worked closely with the anti-Soviet movements and was an important point of contact between the various Mujahidin factions and the CIA in Pakistan. He served as deputy foreign minister in the Mujahidin government that came to power in 1992.

With the outbreak of the civil war in Kabul and the emergence of the Taliban regime in the mid-1990s, Karzai initially supported the Taliban. At one point, he was keen to take a role with the Taliban, as their UN representative. Unlike Karzai's own initial account of his refusal of the UN role, Bette Dam, the author of the recent Karzai biography, *A man and a motorcycle*, has shown that the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, did not offer Karzai the role because he did not trust him. What is certain is that Karzai, with the help of the CIA, led

some of the initial revolts against the Taliban in Uruzgan province, gaining him greater acceptance among members of the anti-Taliban alliance that dominated the post-Taliban Interim Authority.

Time in office

Karzai has left behind a profoundly transformed country. Afghanistan has embraced a relatively democratic constitution that combines modern human rights and the country's traditional and Islamic values. The Afghan national security forces have grown significantly in number and capability, and provided the necessary security during the recent presidential election. More importantly, they remained unified during the period of political uncertainty following the disputed election.

The Taliban and other insurgents remain a threat to Afghanistan.

Under Karzai, Afghanistan also made significant progress in key areas of the UN Millennium Development Goals—for example, around 9 million students now attend schools and around 150 000 students are enrolled in public and private universities.

In addition, the media and civil society groups have thrived in the past decade. According to Amirzai Sangin, Afghanistan's former Telecommunications Minister, as of mid-2014, the country had 35 television and 62 radio stations in Kabul, and 54 television and 160 radio stations in other provinces.

Moreover, Karzai tolerated criticism of himself and his government by political opponents, satirists, television commentators and individuals. His approach created a political culture in which various ideas and groups have flourished. The downside of a free media in a polarised society is that, potentially, it can aggravate social divisions.

Karzai, however, failed in peace negotiations with the Taliban. While he always blamed Pakistan and the United States for this, the truth is that he also pursued mixed policies towards the Taliban. The Taliban distrusted him, seeing him as a puppet of the West, and corruption and mismanagement in his government did not place him in a position to speak from the moral or political high ground. Afghanistan still faces serious threats from the Taliban and other insurgents, and will remain heavily dependent on outside assistance for the foreseeable future.

Karzai's decision to surrender power constitutionally surprised many of his critics.

Karzai was also influenced by a close circle of acquaintances. That, combined with a divided political culture, meant in recent years he acted more as an elder of a particular ethnic group rather than the elected president of a country of diverse peoples and cultures. His refusal to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement with the United States, against the wishes of the majority of the Afghan people, saw his relationship with the West, particularly with the United States, reach its nadir by the end of his presidency.

But it is also important to remember that Karzai led a country in which various local, regional and international actors were present. Each of those actors has had an interest and a role to play in some of the achievements and failures of his presidency.

Until the last days of his presidency there were doubts about whether Karzai would try to remain in power. Suspicions of his intentions heightened during the post-election crisis that significantly hampered

confidence in the country's electoral institutions and further crippled an already poor economy.

Karzai's decision to surrender power constitutionally surprised many of his critics. The peaceful transfer of power—10 transfers of power over the past four decades were all violent and mostly bloody—sets an important precedent for the future course of politics in Afghanistan: Karzai should, rightly, be remembered for his courageous decision.

It is now up to the new national unity government to maintain its delicate unity and institutionalise the peaceful transfer of power. It must also work to restore confidence in Afghanistan's relationship with the West, restart the peace dialogue with armed opposition groups, and address the country's enduring social and economic challenges.

Ali Reza Yunespour is a former People of Australia Ambassador, and PhD candidate at the University of New South Wales, Canberra.

This article has been posted on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

Afghans pin new hopes on national unity government

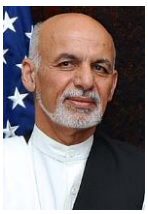
Keeping together a fragile alliance will be a challenge for Afghanistan's new national government.

By Niamatullah Ibrahimi

On 29 September, to the relief of Afghans and the international community, Afghanistan's national unity government was sworn in after a prolonged and disputed presidential runoff.

This was the first peaceful transfer of power from one elected president to another in the country's history. The dispute had led to fears that Afghanistan could again relapse into civil war.

After weeks of intense negotiations, the two contenders of the 14 June disputed runoff—Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah—agreed to divide power and set up a government of national unity. Ghani was announced president and Abdullah was given the newly created post of chief executive officer.



President Ghani: accepted a power-sharing agreement after controversial runoff.

Ghani, a former World Bank technocrat and Minister of Finance under President Hamid Karzai, accepted the power-sharing agreement after the highly controversial runoff put him ahead of Abdullah. In the first round, Abdullah topped the list with 45 per cent of the vote, while Ghani, his closest rival, received 31 per cent. The outcome of the second round became intensely controversial after preliminary results put Ghani ahead of Abdullah, 56 per cent to 44 per cent. Abdullah accused the

rival team, and the Afghanistan Independent Election Commission, of orchestrating fraud on a massive scale. A risk of relapse into civil violence was averted with intensive diplomatic efforts, including two visits by the US Secretary of State John Kerry.

CEO Abdullah Abdullah: won the first round.

While most Afghans were relieved that a new government had been formed, many were disappointed that the popular vote did not result in a direct electoral outcome and concerned that the settlement could jeopardise the democratic process that began with the international intervention in 2001. Had Afghanistan managed the transition to a new leadership through a credible electoral process, they believed, then domestic and international confidence could grow in the durability of the political process.

The formation of a national unity government to resolve an electoral crisis like Afghanistan's is, however, not unprecedented. Kenya, in 2007, and Zimbabwe, in 2008, offer the most similar examples, where the need for stability outweighed the desire for a clear election outcome. Thomas Ruttig, from the Afghanistan Analysts Network, who has looked at the possible lessons of these examples for Afghanistan, noted that, for national unity governments to succeed, 'political will of the elites and international attention are key factors'.

The new national unity government has the opportunity to work together to meet some of the expectations of the Afghan people, and to gain political legitimacy through effective policy implementation. Since his inauguration, President Ghani has signed the long-overdue bilateral security agreement with the United States and has shown willingness to address corruption and improve governance.

Realising Afghanistan's need for continued foreign assistance, Ghani seems to be targeting most of his early efforts towards his external audience, particularly the donor countries. Some of his measures, especially his order to fight high-profile corruption, represent a departure from the government of his predecessor, which could pit him against some powerful political players within Afghanistan.

While success in these early efforts has the potential to set the tone for the rest of Ghani's term in office, any failure could put the trembling legitimacy of the unity government at risk.

Afghanistan remains a highly fragile state, and the risks facing the power arrangement cannot be underestimated. The country faces a resilient insurgency and a struggling economy that is heavily dependent on foreign aid. Corruption and mismanagement in state institutions in recent years have threatened popular support as well as future international donor funding.

Hence, the new government needs to take immediate measures to restore confidence in state institutions and revive the economy, which has received significant blows over the past year as a result of the international military withdrawal and the prolonged electoral crisis.

It is also likely that the power-sharing deal perpetuates some of the flaws of the political dispensation that has taken shape in past years. Since the Interim Authority that was agreed at the Bonn Conference in 2001, Afghanistan has had an oversized government, with many ministries created to accommodate various political factions rather than to discharge the functions of government.

A major challenge for the national unity agreement is that pressure to

accommodate all factions of the two electoral teams could result in big government at a time when the country is predicted to see a significant reduction in foreign budgetary assistance.

The key to addressing and managing these challenges lies in the two leaders establishing a firm working relationship. A divided government would risk paralysis in devising and implementing important policies at a time when the Afghan government is expected to take greater responsibility for the country's economy and security.

In addition, factions and groups in both electoral coalitions dissatisfied with the distribution of power could become spoilers. The only way to avoid this is for Ghani and Abdullah to move beyond factional politics and put the country's national interests ahead of group politics.

President Ghani, however, is no stranger to the challenges of governing a country like Afghanistan. He is one of those rare academics who get the opportunity to put their ideas for governing fragile states into practice. As co-author of *Fixing failed states*, he knows he has to deliver practical results in key areas, ranging from improving governance and the rule of law, to reviving the country, to fighting, and to negotiating an end to the insurgency.

National unity governments are short-term arrangements for more long-term and complex problems. The Afghan political elites, and the international community, need to engage in serious debate to explore and tackle the underlying institutional and political dynamics that turned what began as a democratic exercise into a disastrous crisis that pushed the country to the brink of full civil war.

Under the power-sharing agreement, a constitutional Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) will be convened within two years to revise the 2004 constitution and create a prime

President Ghani is one of those rare academics who get the opportunity to put their ideas for governing fragile states into practice.

ministerial position. During this period, sustained international attention will be required to ensure that the current temporary arrangement is used to address some of the structural and institutional factors that contributed to the intensity of the presidential contest and turned it into a zero-sum game.

The failure of Afghanistan's electoral institutions to administer a transparent and credible election should be at the centre of the lesson-learning exercise. For example, the concentration of powers in the president's office in the 2004 constitution has created one of the most centralised presidential systems in the world. This concentration of power in a single office in a divided society in the midst of conflict was an important factor in making the crisis resistant to resolution.

Furthermore, Afghanistan's single non-transferable voting system has discouraged political parties and promoted the person-centred politics that is central to the patronage-based and volatile political alignments of recent years.

If the experience of democracies around the world can serve as a guide for Afghanistan, it is that the endurance of any form of democracy requires intricate and complex checks and balances of power, and organised political parties.

Niamatullah Ibrahimi is an Endeavour Scholar at the Australian National University.

This article has been posted on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

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Thailand's simmering security crisis gathers steam

A quiet but increasingly deadly struggle is taking place in Thailand's deep south.

By John Blaxland

Why has the security crisis in southern Thailand's three southernmost insurgency-affected provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat proved to be so intractable and drawn out? And why have the Thai authorities struggled with finding a viable solution to the problem? What is it that makes the situation there so hard to understand and so long-lasting?

Numerous scholars have attempted to dissect the problem, identifying a wide range of often conflicting factors as the root causes. But they can't all be right, or can they? The problem is so intractable, it seems, because of the confluence of factors.

Thailand, like its mainland Southeast Asian neighbours, is an overwhelmingly Theravada Buddhist country. Superficially, there is a veneer of being Western in parts, but the culture and the beliefs are not like those in postmodern, liberal, agnostic and multicultural countries in the West. In Thailand, one's karma matters enormously, delineating one's inherent merit and place in the social order. The predominantly ethnically Malay, religiously Muslim and linguistically Yawi-oriented people of the so-called 'deep south' don't fit readily in this model—except as a group considered with pity, if not disdain, by the Bangkok elite.

The Thailand that the vast majority of this constitutional monarchy's subjects feel proud of is a land that has a history of having been encroached upon by external powers in the past two centuries. The country has grappled with insurgencies in its peripheries over the years. Consequently, the Thai people of the central plains, who dominate the central government in Bangkok, have been loath to see the unitary power of the state diffused in some federated model akin to that found in neighbouring Malaysia.

For most of Thailand, the unitary approach has proved workable—although Red Shirt leaders in north and northeast Thailand may beg to differ. In southern Thailand, however, the unitary model has failed to resonate with an ethnic and religious minority who share little in common with their Thai Buddhist counterparts.

Since before the Anglo-Siam Agreement of 1909, which saw the Sultanate of Patani remain on the Siamese (later Thai) side of the demarcation line with British Malaya (now Malaysia), the people of Thailand's deep south have chafed at rule from Bangkok.

Violent clashes left dozens of police killed, along with several hundred local Muslims.

In 1948, as the Malayan Emergency was unfolding, local Patani leader Haji Sulong launched a campaign for autonomy and respect for language and cultural rights and the recognition of Sharia law.

Violent clashes that followed left dozens of police killed, along with several hundred local Muslims. A state of emergency was declared and 5000 or so fled to Malaya. Haji Sulong was killed by police in 1954, but the conflict simmered for decades with the National Revolutionary Front (*Barisan Revolusi Nasional,* or BRN) formed in 1960.

A generation of separatist fighters also emerged under various banners,

including the Pattani United Liberation Organisation (PULO) in 1968. By 1975, PULO was able to muster 100 000 people in Pattani to protest against central misrule. The clash in December 1975 saw 11 Muslims killed, heightening distrust between Buddhists and Muslims.

The 1970s and 1980s also saw Thailand plunge into a communist-linked insurgency. The Communist Party of Thailand, with ties primarily to China but also with its Malayan counterparts, flourished in the deep south until 1976 when the effective implementation of Thai counter-insurgency methods suppressed most of the unrest. PULO still managed to carry out a series of actions that saw several killed at their hands in the 1980s and 1990s. But by the time of the implementation of Thailand's 1997 'people's' constitution, the deep south was considered pacified.

In reality, however, the sine waves of repression and liberalisation, of deals and broken promises, and of confidences built and breached, meant that the insurgents appeared to have been suppressed, but they had learnt an important lesson. They recognised that to succeed, they needed to avoid providing obviously identifiable targets for the security forces to destroy—as PULO and BRN had done in earlier years. No longer would the separatist insurgents provide convenient and easy-to-target leadership structures for security forces to focus resources on and eliminate. From this point on, it appears, the insurgent network would be diffuse, obviating the need for hierarchy or significant infrastructure.

Thaksin Shinawatra—his election helped alter the equilibrium.

The election of Thaksin Shinawatra and the onset of the so-called global war on terror in 2001 altered the equilibrium. It was at this time that the search for international terrorist links surged. To the surprise of those looking for signs of a global conspiracy, the local dynamics didn't readily fit in the Salafist Sunni extremist mould of Al Qaeda. Instead, the sense of identity and grievance in Thailand's deep south had its own unique characteristics.

The lack of restraint by government security forces was appalling.

In 2001 Thaksin became Thailand's prime minister. He was a former policeman whose party failed to gain parliamentary seats in the deep south. Not being beholden to the established powerbrokers there, Thaksin decided, in 2002, to abolish the Army-dominated Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre as well as the civil-militarypolice unit known as CPM 43 and hand over security responsibility to the local police.

The handover from the military to the police saw the abandonment and subsequent destruction of the Army's circle of informants—a network of contacts that had enabled the central authorities to remain abreast of issues of concern before they got out of hand. With the Army's informant network gone, the authorities were effectively blind to what was going on behind the scenes.

An Army unit armoury was broken into by separatist insurgents in Narathiwat on 4 January 2004, and this was a key turning point. With 400 military weapons and stocks of ammunition taken, the insurgents escalated the simmering conflict dramatically. But what happened next would set off an even more spiteful and ugly fight across the three provinces of the deep south for the next decade and beyond.

In late April 2004, soldiers attacked and killed a group that had chosen to make a stand from inside the historic Krue Sae Mosque. By the end of the encounter, 32 had been killed. The lack of restraint by government security forces was appalling.

Then to make matters worse, in October, 1500 unarmed Muslim protesters were beaten, detained and transported to a military facility near Tak Bai. In the process, 85 died at the hands of government troops, with seven shot and 78 suffocated after being piled on top of each other, hands tied, and transported in the back of trucks. With Thai commanders feeling honour-bound to shield their subordinates from external judicial scrutiny over misdeeds, there was little prospect of those directly responsible being held to account. The sense of injustice festered further.

The decade since has seen organised crime proliferate in the area, with people smuggling, drug trafficking and other crime expanding. Added to the mix is the rivalry between the police and the military and their paramilitary spin-offs, each with reputations to be made and maintained. But to dismiss the conflict as principally about organised crime or inter-agency rivalry is to misread a vastly more complicated story.

The historic Krue Sae Mosque was the scene of an attack by soldiers in 2004.

Thanks to information freely available through the internet and the diffusion of insurgent training and expertise with explosives and weapons, Thailand's insurgents have learnt to master the art of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), adapting and improving as they go.

Avoiding set patterns that would be readily discernible, the insurgents have alternated their preferred techniques and targets from among schoolteachers, Buddhist monks, military, police, paramilitary, shopkeepers, students, accomplices and government collaborators.

The separatists' military wing has proved to be innovative, adaptive and lethally unpredictable.

While there have been plenty of Muslims killed in tit-for-tat exchanges, the intimidation of Buddhists has, it seems, been the principal driver for the insurgents. Retaliations have perpetuated the resentment and the violence. The end result has been the virtual cantonment of Buddhists in armed and patrolled villages and major towns. Despite government efforts to encourage Buddhist Thais to live there, in effect they are being slowly squeezed out from many parts of the south.

While earlier generations of insurgents have elicited substantial demands, the current crop of insurgents has studiously avoided declaring a manifesto—to the enduring frustration of the government security forces eager for some clarity as to its objectives and benchmarks. With little in terms of a political agenda to negotiate over and, in the absence of a readily identifiable and genuine leadership to engage with or target, the government's efforts have continued to be frustrated.

The May 2014 military coup, one would have thought, might have led to a renewed and perhaps more efficient and effective counterinsurgency campaign. But negotiations with the BRN initiated by Malaysia have broken down—in part, it seems, because of the BRN's lack of genuine influence. Insurgents have returned to targeting women and Buddhist priests and the vehicle-

borne IEDs have grown from 5 kg to 50 kg of explosives.

This stepped-up violence has seen up to 50 deaths a month by mid-2014. The separatists' military wing has proved to be innovative, adaptive and lethally unpredictable. Yet politically they have continued to be strategically cautious, conservative and ideologically anchored—and also not driven by the harshest of ideological spin-offs witnessed in places like Iraq and Syria.

Today, the Thai authorities have a great challenge on their hands to resolve their Bangkok-centred political crisis, while finding a way through the morass which is the deep south. Some additional concessions from the central authorities appear to be the only way of breaking the political impasse. Yet the measures most likely to satisfy the separatists' demands are the ones the central authorities are least willing to concede.

Dr John Blaxland is a senior fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University. He is the author of the Australian Army from Whitlam to Howard *(CUP 2014). Twitter:@JohnBlaxland1*

This article has also been posted on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

Understanding Thailand

The serious study of Thailand remains a marginal concern in Australia.

By Nicholas Farrelly

On 22 May 2014, Thai society was shunted by yet another military coup. The country's political order is now being reshaped by an ambitious cohort of army leaders seeking to finally stamp out the influence of deposed former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his allies in the Red Shirt movement.

The generals also claim to defend the monarchy against perceived threats to its survival. With King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who has been on the throne since 1946, once again in hospital, it is inevitable that speculation about future conflict is rife. It is a troubling situation and one that has the potential to end very badly.

Red Shirt rally in Pattaya in March 2014.

How well prepared are Australians to understand Thailand at this time? In this country, the serious study of Thailand has remained a marginal concern. Even though Thailand is Australia's eighth largest trading partner, and was a destination for almost one million Australian travellers in 2013, academic interest remains shallow.

Most of Australia's other major trading partners, places like China, Korea, the United States and Japan, have generated a number of major academic programs, with ample and consistent resourcing, to support the development of Australian knowledge. Thailand, for various reasons, has never received such priority. This hasn't usually mattered a great deal. Thailand and Australia

still enjoy warm relations, based on long-term affection and the hard-headed calculation of mutual economic and political advantage. These ties haven't been tested by significant disagreements in living memory. Even since the coup, Australia has maintained a relatively gentle tone in official statements. For now, there is no indication that Thailand's current episode of military rule will unravel any aspect of the bilateral relationship. Under these conditions, we are complacent.

In 2011, the Lowy Institute produced a major report, commissioned by the Australian government, on the state of Thailand-related teaching, research and outreach activities in Australia. Since then it is fair to say that nothing has changed. The suggestions of that report have faded from view and little of substance has emerged to replace them.

Much-vaunted investments by the Thai government in Thai Studies in Australia have yet to materialise and in the higher education sector it is only at the Australian National University that a small group of specialist scholars maintain what amounts to the country's last Thai Studies program. The Thai language major at the ANU still receives a respectable annual enrolment. But it is now an aberration in an academic political economy that has not found ways of supporting 'small language' teaching without aggressive cross-subsidy.

It doesn't look likely that major new investments in Australia's Thailand expertise will emerge in the near term, although I expect the ANU and the Thai government remain committed, in their own ways, to keeping certain efforts alive. In this context, we must ask: are there new ideas for developing Thai Studies around Australia? Can the academic community come up with better ways of building long-term knowledge about this important country?

Even since the coup, Australia has maintained a relatively gentle tone in official statements.

To share your thoughts, you may want to contribute to a recent *New Mandala* discussion that seeks new ideas about the future of Thai Studies in Australia.

Dr Nicholas Farrelly is a research fellow in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. As an undergraduate, he benefited from the ANU's Thai Studies program. More recently, in 2006, he co-founded New Mandala**,** *a leading forum in Southeast Asian Studies.*

This article has been posted on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

New Australia–Japan Studies chair at Tokyo University

The Australia–Japan Foundation and the University of Tokyo will collaborate to establish an endowed Chair of Australia–Japan Studies at the University of Tokyo.

Rio Tinto Limited, one of Australia's premier companies, will provide funding for an initial three-year period.

The Rio Tinto Chair of Australia–Japan Studies will raise the profile of Australia and Japan, and further promote mutual understanding and strengthen ties between the two countries.

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The democratic deficit of collective self-defence in Japan

The manner in which Shinzo Abe's cabinet has reinterpreted the pacifist clause of Japan's constitution invokes unsettling shadows from former, darker days.

By Rikki Kersten

When Abe Shinzo's cabinet decided on 1 July 2014 to revise the interpretation of the pacifist clause of Japan's constitution, commentators in Japan and around the world took notice. Those who argued the move was long overdue called it 'historic'. Others who found the move disturbing employed the language of alarm, calling it 'extremely controversial and a massive shift'.

Certainly the symbolism surrounding this change in official government thinking on pacifism in Japan is striking. Predictably, Abe's dogged determination to air his personal revisionist views on Second World War history and Japanese atrocities has clouded analysis of Japan's emerging defence posture.

But when we interrogate the institutional underpinnings of this political move, are we seeing something more than incremental change? Have the normative goalposts moved, or has Japan strayed so far from passive pacifism with this latest development that the trajectory can only lead to a 'normal' defence capability?

Incremental change?

Ostensibly, the new interpretation of the constitution involves turning away from a doctrine of exclusive self-defence to a hybrid position of embracing collective self-defence in situations that affect Japan's own security—i.e. 'when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan's survival and poses a clear danger'. This reflects the political reality that the Liberal Democratic Party needs the support of its pro-pacifist coalition partner, the Komeito, to get ancillary legislative changes through parliament to support any reinterpretation of the constitution.

Indeed, seemingly conscious of massive popular distrust of any tinkering with the pacifist clause Article 9, the drafters of the cabinet decision have gone to some lengths to convey a sense of continuity with previous thinking. For instance, they have retained the notion of the obligation to 'use force to the minimum extent necessary', and there are also clear statements that civilian control of the military will be preserved. This is an element of pacifist practice that is part of postwar Japan's democratic DNA.

Shinzo Abe was determined to air his revisionist views.

We can see evidence here, too, of ongoing incremental institutionalisation of a more active and integrated security posture on Japan's part. The establishment of the National Security Council (NSC) in November 2013 was followed by the passing of the controversial *Act on the Protection of Designated Secrets* on 5 December, which was criticised as much for its process (debate stifled, legislation forced through parliament) as for its impact on civil liberties and transparency in Japan.

In December, the Abe government also released a revised *National Defense Program guidelines* document reflecting Japan's prioritisation of remote island defence, and responding to 'grey zone' contingencies. Then, with the release of the final report of his

expert Panel on the Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security in May 2014, Abe seized the opportunity to take the momentous step, at least in symbolic terms, of declaring his intention to revise the interpretation of Japan's 1947 constitution to allow Japan the right to engage in collective self-defence (CSD).

Yet even here, despite the hue and cry surrounding this move, we can find evidence of a persistent incrementalist dynamic and recourse to a culture of self-constraint in Japan's security policy. The embrace of CSD is effectively limited in that it is packaged as an evolution or expansion of exclusive self-defence, and is tied to particular situations. The conditions under which Japan could or would consider employing arms in peacekeeping settings have been specified, as have the circumstances under which Japan would support its ally the United States with armed force.

Most telling of all, despite his evident commitment to normalising Japan as a security actor, Abe did not opt to go down the route of constitutional revision, but instead settled for the expedient path of revision by reinterpretation. He knew he did not have the numbers, or the popular support, to change the letter of the law.

Radical normalisation?

But the signalling of incrementalism conveyed here is challenged in the logic that ties the document together. The cabinet decision is based on the idea of 'seamlessness', and throughout the document this is made tangible in several ways. Seamlessness commences with the centralisation of decision-making on security in the prime minister's office, notably through the National Security Council and the National Security Strategy. This has already been institutionalised, in November 2013, through the passing of legislation establishing the new NSC.

Abe settled for the expedient path of revision by reinterpretation.

It continues with the explicit aim to enhance interoperability between Japanese paramilitary (coast guard, police etc.) and military entities. This effectively means that the protections offered by the buffer of paramilitary as opposed to direct military engagement with hostile forces—for instance in the East China Sea—will be weakened. This is significant, because while paramilitary clashes do not invoke alliance obligations, military confrontations potentially do just that.

In addition, the cabinet decision determines that coordination between military, paramilitary, and US forces must be improved and, moreover, that enhanced coordination between these entities ought to be extended to include the private sector and civil society in Japan. Even if this is mainly for the sake of enhanced humanitarian assistance and disaster relief responses (a powerful lesson learned in the response to the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami disaster), it represents a watershed development in the post-Second World War era in Japan.

Until now, the primary lesson drawn by wider civil society of its experience in the Second World War was the imperative to preserve democratic distance between state and society, and between the state and the military.

The test of this democratic distance was value-based in that it rested on preserving the capacity of society to autonomously create norms. This was especially important because under the fascist regime of the 1930s, norms had become the

exclusive preserve of an authoritarian, militaristic state.

In his quest to legitimise CSD in postwar Japanese thinking, Prime Minister Abe has deliberately appropriated the emerging norm of 'proactive pacifism' to underpin this next step towards normalisation. Proactive pacifism has evolved naturally in the aftermath of Japan's abortive contribution to the first Gulf War, to such a degree that majority public opinion in Japan today favours Japan's active participation in peace-building around the world. But to apply this ethos to force projection in conflict settings is a deliberate misrepresentation of popular feeling in contemporary Japan.

It is this non-representative aspect of contemporary Japanese security policy development that is disturbing, rather than the idea of Japan contributing to global and regional security. In lifting the pace of institutionalisation of a 'normal' defence posture, Abe is moving too far ahead of his countrymen, and he is manipulating the normative foundations of postwar Japanese political culture in the process. While policy development continues to be delivered in incremental stages, it is producing a normative and operational environment that invokes unsettling shadows from former, darker days.

Japan's transition to becoming a balanced as opposed to a lopsided, power must be a democratic event, reflecting and incorporating normative legitimacy in its very core, if it is to acquire genuine legitimacy at home and abroad.

Professor Rikki Kersten is Dean, School of Arts, Murdoch University, Western Australia. This article was also published on the China Policy Institute Blog.

This article has also been posted on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

Tracking Northeast Asia

A new atlas, just published, tracks the political and social changes affecting the Northeast Asia region since 1590.

The Historical atlas of Northeast Asia —1590 to 2010, by ANU professors Li Narangoa and Robert Cribb, was compiled from detailed research in English, Chinese, Japanese, French, Dutch, German, Mongolian, and Russian sources.

The atlas incorporates information made public with the fall of the Soviet Union, and includes 55 specially drawn maps and 20 historical maps contrasting local and outsider perspectives.

The core of the atlas is a single, relief-shaded map of the region, created by the ANU College of Asia & the Pacific's CartoGIS team.

The authors have added intricate detail, creating a map for each decade from 1590 to 1890, and from 1960 to 2010. For the years 1890 to 1960, when things got very busy in Northeast Asia, there is a map for every five years.

Many of the maps are accompanied by several pages of text that detail changing boundaries, the movement of armies and location of battles, and changing patterns of settlement. Others illustrate geography, climate, vegetation, population densities and mineral resources.

The atlas includes idiosyncratic details such as the crash site of the plane carrying China's military leader Lin Biao over Mongolia in 1971, and the still-mysterious Tunguska Event of 1908 in Siberia—probably a massive meteor strike, and the largest impact event in Earth's recorded history.

See the full report on the ANU College of Asia & the Pacific website and New books on Asia.

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Between a crocodile and a tiger: Australia's refugee deal with Cambodia

Australia's much-criticised deal to resettle refugees in Cambodia could help raise awareness of international norms relating to refugee protection in a country where it is sorely required.

By Melissa Curley

Australia's decision to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Cambodian government on the resettlement of refugees in Cambodia—ostensibly as part of a wider 'regional burden-sharing solution'—has drawn harsh criticism from human rights activists, refugee advocates and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Signed in Phnom Penh on 26 September, the agreement allows for the voluntary resettlement of up to 1000 refugees in Cambodia, from the Nauru facility, once refugee status has been officially granted.

Cambodia is only one of two Southeast Asian countries party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol *(*the other being the Philippines) and with this deal, Australia seemingly has addressed the major hurdle that scuppered the ill-fated Australia–Malaysia refugee swap agreement in 2011.

Critics have highlighted two common themes regarding the deal. The first relates to the myriad of problems facing resettled refugees in post-conflict Cambodian society, including serious human rights abuses by government-sanctioned actors, a criminal justice system where executive and judicial powers are not separate (in practice or in perception), and the well-publicised treatment in recent years of asylum seeker groups from the ethnic Uyghur minority in China and ethnic minorities from Vietnam.

Critics also note the limitations in Cambodia's domestic law regarding refugee rights and protections, the fact that Cambodia's Immigration Minister retains absolute discretion in granting and cancelling refugee status, and that there are limited resources available to resettle refugees in a country which clearly has numerous development and societal challenges of its own.

The second problem relates to the perceived hypocrisy of the Australian government in resettling refugees seeking asylum in Australia in a country with a population suffering from high levels of poverty, child exploitation, and lack of access to adequate housing, sanitation, health and educational facilities, particularly in rural areas. While media reports quote assurances from Cambodian prime minister Hun Sen that those who are resettled 'will have the same opportunities to study and work like the locals, without discrimination', many are sceptical. Such scepticism relates, in part, to worries about the deteriorating quality of democracy in Cambodia, which has implications for the way in which Australia determines whether Cambodian can be considered a 'safe third country'.

The domestic reaction in Cambodia to the deal mirrors sentiments expressed about Australian agreements on refugee resettlement and processing on Nauru and Manus Island. As Virak Ou, head of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights expressed it, 'The Australian government...is sending a very strong message that you are either going to be eaten by a crocodile or eaten by a tiger. You're either going to be placed in an island where your life is going to be pretty much like hell, or you're going to be sent to a country like Cambodia. So it's the same kind of punishment'.

In doing this deal with the Cambodian government, the Australian authorities are entrusting the resettlement of refugees to a country where arguably the democratisation process is stalling. Despite the cordial diplomatic relationship between Australia and Cambodia, and leverage from Australian overseas development aid, the process of resettling refugees in Cambodia will move out of the control of Australian authorities. How Australian authorities monitor the resettlement process, and what degree of input they will have, may well prove problematic.

A deterioration of the rule of law is occurring in Cambodia, and is a serious negative development for further democratic consolidation. The judicial system continues to be influenced by the ruling political elite, which uses its powers to support a range of politically motivated decisions. The Cambodian criminal justice system therefore is faced with—and poses—a number of serious challenges to the promotion and consolidation of democracy.

Some specific challenges include the limited availability of resources in policing and legal arenas, lack of capacity and adequate training, lack of legal representation for victims as well as other pressing crime issues such as drug trafficking, and youth violence. Nevertheless, the presence of opposition figures in Cambodia willing to speak out, and strong opposition to the government's attempt to further 'regulate' non-government organisations are positive points.

If there is a positive side to be found in the Australia–Cambodia refugee resettlement deal, it may be the opportunity to raise the capacity and awareness of the Cambodian bureaucracy that manages refugee determination status and resettlement—which is no doubt lacking in funds, human resources, and technical expertise. It is hoped that some of the slated additional

Attempts to reconfigure democratic institutions in a war-ravaged country with a communist bureaucratic system were always going to be difficult.

$40 million in Australian aid money allocated for the arrangement will be directed to capacity building and training for these officials.

While this cannot be expected to trump or address the wider challenges facing the quality of Cambodian democracy, it can at least make a start in improving the Cambodian government's capacity to implement its obligations under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

Cambodia suffered enormously under the Khmer Rouge, and attempts to reconfigure democratic institutions in a war-ravaged country with a communist bureaucratic system were always going to be difficult. Recognition of what is a realistic expectation for Cambodian democracy two decades after the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia-supervised elections is now being debated more openly. This has, in part, been prompted by research into the difficulties of building western institutions of rule of law and governance upon a system where patron–client relations play an ongoing role within state-society relations.

It remains to be seen whether Australia's deal to resettle refugees in Cambodia will form part of an actual regional burden-sharing solution for asylum seeker and refugee populations, or will merely be another addition to the growing suite of policies to deter illegal maritime arrivals and turn back boats. The Abbot government needs to make a better case in the public arena for how and whether the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related

Transnational Crime is actually progressing regional burden-sharing solutions. Better quality public debate on this and what our East Asian neighbours' views are is crucial for such a claim to be credible—not least to counter the view that Australia is selfishly offloading its asylum seekers to be processed and resettled in poor countries in the region.

The Regional Cooperation Framework, endorsed by the Bali Process in 2011, and the Indonesian led Jakarta Dialogue have called for a 'protection-sensitive regional approach'. In partnering with the Cambodian government, the Australian government now has an obligation, to the Australian public at least, to be transparent about how the money is being spent to implement the agreement, and to report on the process and progress related to such protection norms in its implementation.

The optimist hopes the agreement thus will provide an opportunity, albeit limited, to further advocate for the rights of asylum seeker and refugee populations, and to promote international norms relating to their protection within a country where this is sorely required.

While this may be a good thing, the Australian government should be under no illusions about the domestic challenges facing Cambodia's democratisation process, and how it will affect resettled refugees.

Melissa Curley is a lecturer in International Relations in the School of Political Science and International Studies, University of Queensland.

This article has been posted on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

Xi walks tightrope on Xinjiang policy

Beijing signals a change in tack in dealing with its intractable far-western province.

By Brett Elmer

Eid al-Fitr—the festival where Muslims celebrate the end of Ramadan—was marked in Xinjiang this year by bloody clashes between Chinese police and Uyghurs.

On 28 July, violence broke out in Shache (in Uyghur, Yarkand) county, Kashgar province, in southern Xinjiang. Uyghurs, apparently angry over the killing of a family of five by authorities, and by government-imposed restrictions during Ramadan, took to the streets in protest. Chinese state media put the death toll at 96, while Rebiya Kadeer, president of the World Uyghur Congress, claimed it was closer to 2000. Such a toll—whatever the numbers—had not been seen since 2009, when 200 were killed in riots in the provincial capital of Urumqi.

Comprising 18 per cent of China's land mass, Xinjiang has abundant reserves of oil and natural gas.

The violence of 28 July was the latest in a series of incidents, including a car bombing in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on 31 October, attributed to Xinjiang and its native Uyghur population. Other incidents have included a mass stabbing at Kunming train station that left 29 people dead, double suicide bombings at Urumqi train station that killed three and injured 79, and car bombings in a central Urumqi market that killed 31 people and injured 94.

Prominent local figures in Xinjiang have also been targeted. In separate incidents in July, the wife of a Chinese government official was assassinated and the official himself severely wounded, and the state-approved imam of Kashgar's Id Kah Mosque was also assassinated.

In addition, Chinese police have been guilty of using extreme force to break up Uyghur gatherings and protests. Officials shot dead at least two Uyghurs during a protest over the alleged harassment by officials of women wearing headscarves. In another incident, police shot and killed a Uyghur teenager who ran a red light on his motorcycle. Authorities later arrested and sentenced 17 Uyghurs to between six months and seven years in prison for protesting the killing.

President Xi Jinping may have other long-term plans.

The rapid escalation of violence most likely points to two factors: the role of, what authorities term, 'hostile external forces' in Xinjiang, and the perception among Uyghurs that they have been marginalised by domestic policy orchestrated from Beijing. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has long ascribed all Xinjiang and Uyghur-related violence to hostile external forces, but many outside observers blame Beijing's domestic policy. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that the violence in Xinjiang is escalating to unprecedented levels.

The CCP's central aim has always been the total economic, political and cultural integration of Xinjiang into China. Comprising 18 per cent of China's land mass, the giant western border province has abundant reserves of oil and natural gas, and is becoming an increasingly important channel for business and political relations between China and Central Asia and Europe. Xinjiang's vastness is also considered ideal for alleviating overcrowding in the eastern coastal provinces.

During Ramadan, antiterrorism measures preventing fasting and requiring Uyghur restaurants to remain open were even more strictly enforced.

Xinjiang's value to Beijing underpins the CCP's unwillingness to acknowledge any adverse effects of its policy on the local population. Immediately after the bomb attack at the Urumqi South railway station in May, Chinese president Xi Jinping vociferously blamed hostile external forces and pledged that the government would deal terrorists a crushing blow and deploy a strike-first strategy.

Xi reiterated that the party's strategy in Xinjiang was correct and 'must be maintained in the long run'. Rebiya Kadeer and outspoken exiled Uyghur commentator Mehmet Tohti, however, blamed the continuation of the government's hardline policies in the region for the upturn in violence.

Beijing has since intensified its efforts to integrate Xinjiang, instituting economic reforms, public security measures and bilingual education initiatives. During Ramadan this year, antiterrorism measures preventing fasting and requiring Uyghur restaurants to remain open were even more strictly enforced.

In August, it was announced that extra teachers of Mandarin would be transferred to schools in Xinjiang, women would be banned from wearing veils in public, and men would be made to shave their beards. Authorities in the north-western city of Karamay even went so far as to ban men with long beards and women wearing veils, head scarves, jilbabs (a long, loose-fitting garment worn by Muslim

women) and clothing that displayed the crescent moon and star from boarding public buses.

Beijing's favoured policy approach—the 'carrot' of economic development and the 'stick' of oppression—for boosting the economic integration of Xinjiang with the greater Chinese state and closing the cultural gap between Uyghurs and Han Chinese has largely failed. It has only further alienated Uyghurs from mainstream society and fostered ethnic tensions—and done nothing to solve the roots of Uyghur unrest. More radical ideas, such as a scheme to promote interracial marriages between Han Chinese and Uyghur by promising eligible couples an annual payment of 10 000 yuan (US $1630) for five years, have also failed.

Beijing's policies have further alienated Uyghurs from mainstream society and fostered ethnic tensions.

Xi Jinping may, however, have other long-term plans. The second Central Work Forum in Xinjiang in May, attended by the entire Politburo and more than 300 of the CPP's most senior Beijing officials, suggested that a change in approach to ethnic policy in the region might be in the offing.

In a major departure from the pronouncements of the first Forum, held in 2010, which stressed 'development in Xinjiang by leaps and bounds', the second Forum acknowledged the complex and protracted nature of the Xinjiang problem, and the need to subtly recalibrate policy towards safeguarding social stability and achieving an enduring peace.

Such a change in rhetoric—to the extent that it is genuine—signals a movement towards inter-ethnic unity. Beijing will attempt to balance the building of a more ethnically diverse labour market by allowing Uyghurs to migrate in search of work with tightening its grip on Xinjiang through stronger security procedures.

In the ongoing absence of any new policy, Xi continues to practise statesmanship. At the Forum, he urged all ethnic groups to show mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and appreciation, and to learn and help one another, so they were 'tightly bound together like the seeds of a pomegranate'. While the analogy may be original, the message is not. Chinese leaders have long used such platitudes, based on the assertion that strong bonds of mutual affection, class and patriotism exist between Hans and Uyghurs, to promote the idea of *minzu* (ethnic solidarity).

Although considered a true reformer by some, Xi Jinping knows that any steps—however tentative—towards a policy change for Xinjiang must be taken while reassuring both the Party and the public that he will maintain a zero-tolerance approach to ethnic unrest.

Implementing new policy initiatives will be extremely difficult. Governance in Xinjiang remains poor and beset by vested interests, the current *hukou* (household system) prevents large-scale migration of ethnic groups, and an increase in competition between Uyghur and Han workers for jobs could further inflame tensions between the two groups.

Brett Elmer is a PhD candidate at Murdoch University. His thesis topic is the Uyghur issue in China's International Relations from 2001–2012.

This article has been published on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

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China’s growing cuppa culture

The growth of the slow tea movement is another sign of China’s reviving nationalism.

By Gary Sigley

Those of you of a certain vintage may remember the days when afternoon tea actually meant stopping what you were doing, and with family, friends or colleagues enjoying a pot of freshly brewed tea.

Tea in those days was the loose-leaf variety and the rule of thumb was one teaspoon for each drinker and one for the pot. How things change. In the 1960s, tea bags made up less than 3 per cent of the British tea market. Now, in the second decade of the 21st century, tea bags account for a whopping 90 per cent. We can safely say that Australia has followed this tea bag trend.

In an age of constantly looming deadlines and the pressures of multitasking, who has the time to engage in the luxury of an afternoon tea? The tea bag, along with the rise and rise of fast foods, epitomises our descent into the mire of convenience. Yes, tea bags certainly are convenient. But what have we lost along the way?

Think about it like this. What does the tea bag represent beyond convenience? It is the material representation of the atomisation of the workplace in which individuals no longer have time to partake in what was once an important national pastime. Go to the kitchen. Put tea bag in cup. Add hot water, milk and sugar (in whatever order you so desire). Return to work station. Dear tea drinkers, where is the sociability?

I’ve been researching Chinese tea culture for years. I’ve come to the firm conclusion that among the many treasures that Chinese civilisation has given to humanity, tea has to rank up there alongside the compass, gunpowder, papermaking and printing.

Tea has literally changed the course of world history. Its popularisation during the 19th century in many rapidly urbanising Western societies is credited with increased life expectancy due to the simple act of boiling water, which in turn reduced the impact of water-borne diseases such as cholera.

A village leader in Menghai Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, pours a brew of fresh tea leaf tea. Photo: Gary Sigley.

Any society that has encountered the humble leaf of the *Camellia sinensis* plant soon succumbs to its intoxicating alchemy. In short, it gets hooked and just can’t get enough! Chinese dynastic governments realised this early on and attempted to use the tea trade as a way of controlling the barbarians.

This worked for many centuries until they encountered the British, a different kind of barbarian. The old bag of tricks didn’t work. The British East India Company got its tea through the nefarious trade in opium. And when it lost its monopoly on trade with China it literally stole tea plants and tea production knowledge to establish the first industrial scale tea plantations in India. The Chinese tea monopoly was broken and has never fully recovered.

The great irony is that, 170 years after the Opium War (1840), the company with the largest market share of tea in China is Lipton. This is a slap in the face for the tea industry, which is struggling to find the scale to match the might of foreign companies such as Lipton. What makes it more painful is that Lipton is only a small part of a much bigger multinational corporation, Unilever. This truly is a lesson for the Chinese tea industry in the sheer power of contemporary consumer capitalism.

However, with China's rise and growing confidence—China has a strong sense that anything is possible, the kind of attitude that comes with rapid economic growth and optimism such as was evident in the 1950s and 1960s in the postwar United States—a new generation of Chinese tea entrepreneurs and tea scholars is raising the flag of Chinese tea nationalism in an effort to fend off the current wave of foreign penetration into the Chinese tea market.

Zhou Chonglin—rising star of the slow tea movement.

Part of my current research involves working with these tea activists, some of whom have joined ranks to set up a 'Revise China through Tea' (茶叶复兴) movement, a new branch—excuse the pun—of Chinese tea/product nationalism. I have transcribed an interview with one of the rising stars of this movement, Dr Zhou Chonglin, on my blogsite. Dr Zhou rose to public fame in China after the publication of his first book, *The tea war,* which was a reassessment of the Opium War through the lens of tea.

One of the trends that Zhou and his tea comrades attack is the growing pressures of modern life, in which the drinking of tea in the traditional leisurely fashion is seen as a luxury rather than as part of everyday life. The critique of this modern affliction of being time poor is highly reminiscent of the slow food movement that has developed in Italy and spread to many corners of the globe. The slow tea movement is now taking shape in China and I was honoured to be invited to draft a kind of manifesto.

A new generation of Chinese tea entrepreneurs and tea scholars is raising the flag of Chinese tea nationalism in an effort to fend off the current wave of foreign penetration into the Chinese tea market.

An elderly caretaker at a Daoist temple in Weibaoshan, Yunnan, greets a visitor with a brew of salted tea. Photo: Gary Sigley.

We should all make slow tea a part of our daily routine. Indeed, the research on the health benefits of green tea, for example, conducted at the University of Western Australia, seem to implore us to do so.

Most importantly, I believe that tea is one of the best windows into Chinese culture and forms of sociability. Now excuse me while I go and put the kettle on ….

Gary Sigley is Professor in Asian Studies at the University of Western Australia.

This article has been published on the Asian Currents *Tumblr.*

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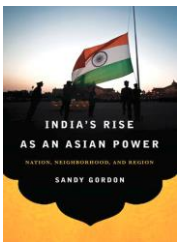
New books on Asia



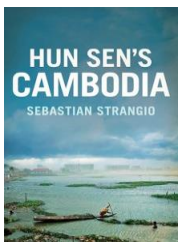
India's rise as an Asian power. By Sandy Gordon. Georgetown University Press 2014. Available in hardcover, paperback and from select e-book retailers

This book examines India's rise to power and the obstacles it faces in the context of domestic governance and security, relationships and security issues with its South Asian neighbours, and international relations in the wider Asian region.

Terrorism, insurgency, border disputes, and water conflict and shortages are examples of some of India's domestic and regional challenges.

Gordon argues that before it can assume the mantle of a genuine Asian power or world power, India must improve its governance and security; otherwise, its economic growth and human development will continue to be hindered and its vulnerabilities may be exploited by competitors in its South Asian neighbourhood or the wider region.

Gordon has previously worked in Australia's Office of National Assessments and at AusAID. He was also executive director of the Asian Studies Council; and head of intelligence, Australian Federal Police.



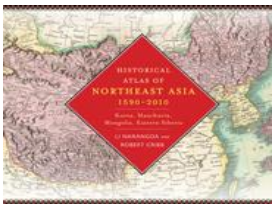
Hun Sen's Cambodia. By Sebastian Strangio. Yale University Press. Available 25 Nov. 2014.

To many in the West, the name Cambodia still conjures up indelible images of destruction and death, the legacy of the brutal Khmer Rouge regime and the terror it inflicted in its attempt to create a communist utopia in the 1970s.

Sebastian Strangio, a journalist based in Phnom Penh, offers an appraisal of modern-day Cambodia in the years following its emergence from bitter conflict and bloody upheaval.

Since the UN-supervised elections in 1993, the nation has slipped steadily backward into neo-authoritarian rule under Prime Minister Hun Sen. Behind a mirage of democracy, ordinary people have few rights and corruption infuses virtually every facet of everyday life.

Strangio explores the present state of Cambodian society under Hun Sen's leadership, portraying a nation struggling to reconcile the promise of peace and democracy with a violent and tumultuous past.



Historical atlas of Northeast Asia, 1590–2010: Korea, Manchuria, Mongolia, Eastern Siberia. By Li Narangoa and Robert Cribb. Columbia University Press.

Four hundred years ago, indigenous peoples occupied the vast region that today encompasses Korea, Manchuria, the Mongolian Plateau, and Eastern Siberia. Over time, these populations struggled to maintain autonomy as Russia, China, and Japan sought hegemony over the region.

Especially from the turn of the 20th century, indigenous peoples pursued self-determination in a number of ways, and new states, many of them now largely forgotten, rose and fell as great power imperialism, indigenous nationalism, and modern ideologies competed for dominance.

This atlas tracks the political configuration of Northeast Asia in 10-year segments from 1590 to 1890, in five-year segments from 1890 to 1960, and in 10-year

segments from 1960 to 2010, delineating the distinct history and importance of the region.

The text follows the rise and fall of the Qing dynasty in China, founded by the semi-nomadic Manchus; the Russian colonisation of Siberia; the growth of Japanese influence; the movements of peoples, armies, and borders; and political, social, and economic developments—reflecting the turbulence of the land that was once the world's 'cradle of conflict'.

Compiled by ANU professors Li Narangoa and Robert Cribb from detailed research in English, Chinese, Japanese, French, Dutch, German, Mongolian, and Russian sources, the *Historical atlas of Northeast Asia* incorporates information made public with the fall of the Soviet Union.

It includes 55 specially drawn maps, as well as 20 historical maps contrasting local and outsider perspectives. Four introductory maps survey the region's diverse topography, climate, vegetation, and ethnicity.

Website changes

The ASAA is developing a new website. In coming months, you can expect a new and more interactive site featuring *Asian Currents* on its front page, and an expanded social media presence. For now, our current website cannot incorporate any new changes, although it remains a source of information on the ASAA and its activities.

Please bear with us for now, as the current website will be decommissioned when we activate our new arrangements. which will better serve members' changing professional needs. In the meantime, *Asian Currents* is already available as a Tumblr.

Amrita Malhi
ASAA Secretary

Asian Currents is edited by Allan Sharp. Unsolicited articles of between 850–1200 words on any field of Asian studies are welcome and will be considered for publication. *Asian Currents* is published six times a year (February, April, June, August, October, December).

Coming events

2nd Thai Studies Conference, *Regionalisation and Thailand* 23–24 October 2014, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology See conference website for details.

Japanese Film Festival. The 18th Japanese Film Festival will begin its national tour starting mid-October in Adelaide, and will continue to other major Australian cities until its final stop in Melbourne in December. The festival is presented and run by The Japan Foundation, Sydney. See the website for the program and further details.

***Asian cultural and media studies now* international conference, hosted by Monash Asia Institute, 6–7 November 2014.** The conference aims to critically revisit some of the key issues in the study of Asian culture, media and communications that have been developed rapidly over the past 20 years. See conference website for details.

***Interactive futures: young people's mediated lives in the Asia Pacific and beyond*—conference, Monash University Caulfield Campus, Melbourne, 1–2 December 2014.** The conference will explore young people's engagement with new modes of mediated communication, self- expression and culture- making across the Asia Pacific and beyond. See website for details.

***Activated borders: re-openings, ruptures and relationships,* 4th Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network, Hong Kong,** 8–10 December 2014. See conference website for details.

International conference, *Latent histories, manifest impacts: interplay between Korea and Southeast Asia,* 26–27 February 2015, Canberra. An interdisciplinary, interregional conference, co-sponsored by the ANU Southeast Asia Institute and the Academy of Korean Studies. See conference website for details.

4th International Conference Buddhism & Australia, 26–28 February, 2015, Perth. The conference will investigate the history, current and future directions of Buddhism in Australasia region. Proposal for abstracts for panel sessions and individual papers should be submitted by 25 November 2014. See conference website for details.

The 8th Indonesia Council Open Conference (ICOC), 2–3 July 2015, Deakin University, Waterfront campus, Geelong. Registration details and call for papers to follow. Join the ICOC 2015 (Indonesia Council Open Conference) Facebook Group and stay updated. For information contact Jemma Purdey.

International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS 9), 5–9 July 2015. Adelaide Convention Centre. See website for further information, or contact the convenor, Dr Gerry Groot.