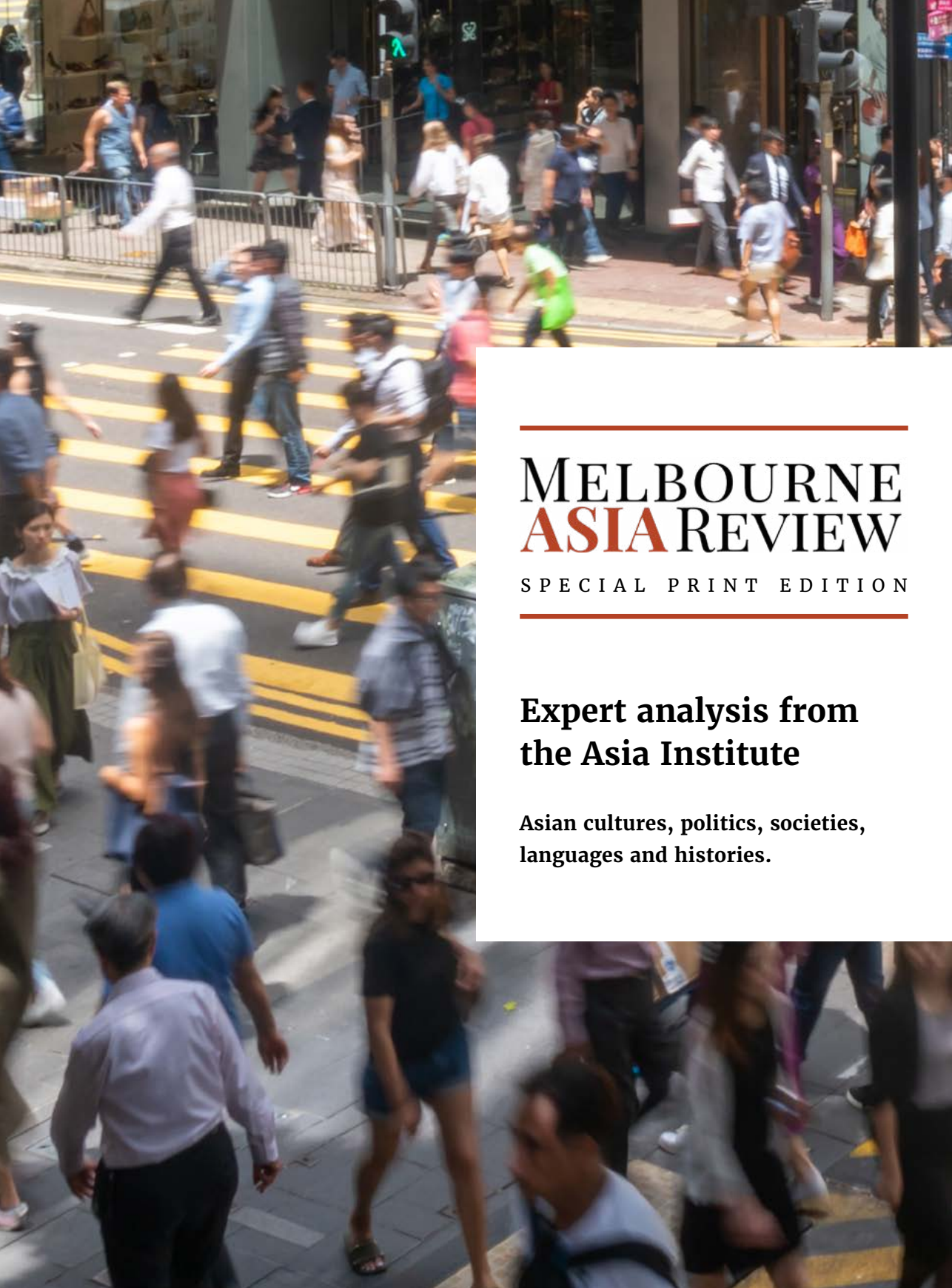

MELBOURNE ASIA REVIEW

SPECIAL PRINT EDITION

Expert analysis from the Asia Institute

Asian cultures, politics, societies, languages and histories.

Melbourne Asia Review
Special print edition

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FROM THE EDITORS IN CHIEF

Welcome to this special print edition of the *Melbourne Asia Review* (MAR), a quarterly journal-blog published by the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

Within these pages you will find articles on Asia's many societies, politics, languages, cultures and histories, selected from digital editions published since we launched in early 2020.

MAR's contributors come from within the Asia Institute (one of the world's leading sites for research and teaching on Asia) and around the world. Through the journal we are growing a community of experts who share our goal to provide in-depth analysis on topics relating to Asia in an approachable way on a public-facing platform.

Economic, political and cultural dynamics have ensured sustained scholarly attention on Asia, though perhaps not to the extent that would be expected in Australia, which is tied closely to the region in so many ways. The popular Australian press, while reporting regularly on Asia-related matters, has sometimes revealed a lack of appreciation for the complexities of Asia and the nuances in Australia's connections with the region.

MAR seeks to fill a certain lacuna, where specialist knowledge can be conveyed in ways useful to an audience not just within academia, but also within policy-making circles, industry and civil society. Our articles retain academic rigour, sharpness and originality while being written for a broad audience.

Within these pages, you will get a sense of the breadth of subject matter, disciplines and the many regions of Asia covered by our contributors across Asia.

We hope this special print edition gives you an introduction to the kind of writing and research in which the *Melbourne Asia Review* is involved and entices you to become part of our quickly growing global community of readers and contributors.

We look forward to engaging with you in the future and continuing to provide a platform for in-depth conversations and debates about topics of global importance relating to Asia.

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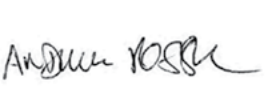
Professor Vedi Hadiz
Director of the Asia Institute



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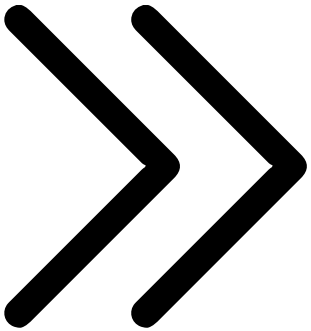

The US–China Power Transition: An assessment of China's internal view

Sungmin Cho

US–China strategic competition has intensified in recent years. China has continued to expand its military capabilities and the US has responded with increased security cooperation with allies such as Japan, Australia, the UK, and Germany. In addition, the Taiwan Strait again became a flashpoint due to concerns relating to China possibly taking actions to 'unify' with Taiwan by force. All these trends would seem to destabilise the current regional order of the Indo-Pacific.

It is vital, therefore, to understand how Chinese policymakers and analysts view the regional order, whether one agrees with them or not. How do they assess China's national power and its future trajectory in comparison with the United States? How do the Chinese foreign policy elites view the changing trend of regional order, and why do they see it that way?

This article aims to explain China's internal view of the regional order in the Indo-Pacific region and discuss its strategic implications. It investigates key statements of China's President Xi Jinping and explores additional insights from Chinese analysts' writings published in Chinese. Due to censorship, public discourse in China does not reflect the diversity of opinion among Chinese scholars. Its significance is that, according to Alice Miller, a renowned expert on Chinese politics, one may reason backwards by examining the content of public discourse and infer the political purposes of the regime because

It is vital, therefore, to understand how Chinese policymakers and analysts view the regional order, whether one agrees with them or not

the discourse will reflect the regime's purposes. In other words, Chinese civilian publications can serve as a window into the internal view of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), precisely because they pass censorship as consistently reflecting the party's perspectives. While this article does not claim a broad survey of diverse opinions that might exist within China, it certainly presents the mainstream view that flows from the party's perception of the world.

I find that Chinese leaders and analysts publicly express confidence about the future of China and that it will prevail in its rivalry with the United States. They express the view that American power is in decline and that this is the reason the US government, whether Republican or Democrat, is determined to contain the rise of China. The optimism about China's rise and the conviction of American decline is in stark contrast with some American scholars' recent assessment that China's power will soon be in decline and that Chinese elites are anxious about it.

The perceptional gap between Chinese and American analysts is likely to further destabilise the regional order of the Indo-Pacific. If it is true that Chinese leaders are overestimating China's national power and its future growth potential, they will be the first ones to be surprised by any crisis and it remains highly uncertain how they would react to it.

China's view of China's rise and America's decline

The notion that China is rising and the US is declining began to emerge within China when the global financial crisis in 2008 hit the US and European economies particularly hard. In the same year, Chinese citizens were ready to celebrate the long-awaited Beijing Olympics with

much excitement. What they had not expected to see was the collapse of Western financial systems. Chinese leaders such as Wen Jiabao, the former premier of China, emphasised that European leaders asked for China's help to solve Europe's debt crisis and Chinese scholars began to talk about 'power transition' theory. They expressed belief that, in combination with challenges in the Middle East such as the civil war in Syria and terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq, the global financial crisis had hastened the US' decline. Chinese analysts argued that American leaders recognised this decline and therefore began to focus efforts on undermining China's rise. Peking University professor Jia Qingguo has argued that China was merely focusing on developing its economy, but it is the American perception of China that has changed from being a business partner to a security threat. Such a belief was hardened after Donald Trump took office in 2017.

Only weeks after President Trump's inauguration, President Xi stated that China's global rise and the decline of the West were mutually reinforcing trends. In 2017 Xi stated 'this is a world of profound changes in the international balance of forces.' The more Chinese leaders observed significant change such as Brexit, the increasingly polarised politics of the US and the refugee crisis in Europe, the more they articulated belief in the West's eventual fall. They argued that the Trump administration tried to demonise China precisely because it could not acknowledge China's rise or the decline of the US. Chinese scholars call for a prudent approach to avoid the growing risk of the US unwilling to gracefully accept its decline and initiate military conflicts with China instead.

The outbreak of COVID-19 further convinced Chinese leaders and analysts of the decline of American power. The global pandemic exposed all kinds of political and socioeconomic contradictions within the US such as the rapidly widening gap between the haves and have-nots, and the national division over the issues of public health-related lockdowns and mask-wearing. Chinese experts argue that the Trump administration referred to COVID-19 as the 'China virus' or the 'Wuhan virus' to deflect the American public's attention from US policy failures, which resulted in the high-number of deaths from the pandemic. They also argued that the US failed to exercise global leadership to promote international cooperation to fight the pandemic. While quickly closing the border against European countries (and many others), Trump's unilateral 'America First' policy damaged multilateralism when it was most needed. As a result, Yang Jiemian, a senior scholar of Shanghai Institutes for International Studies argued, the chasm within the West has been widening: during the G7 meeting in March 2020, the US proposed that COVID-19 be called the Wuhan virus, but the other six countries—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the UK—quickly rejected the proposal. When the allies and partners do not listen to the US' call, the scholar argued, it means US global leadership and political influence has begun to wane.

The more the US stumbles in times of crisis, the more the CCP finds opportunities for propaganda. Domestically, Chinese media widely noted that the US is one of the nations with the highest recorded COVID-19 related deaths in the world. China's significantly low number in this regard was highlighted for comparison. Diplomatically, Xi Jinping

emphasised that China did not hesitate to provide assistance for other countries in a spirit of 'community of common destiny.' Compared to Trump's non-cooperative attitude, Chinese scholars claimed, China was improving its relationship with Europe by providing COVID-related medical materials, for which European governments expressed gratitude. Economically, China has experienced a fast recovery from the pandemic so far. Chinese analysts quote World Bank data showing China was the only country to achieve positive economic growth in 2020: China's GDP grew 2.3 percent, whereas the US's GDP fell 3.6 percent, the European Union's fell 7.4 percent and Japan's fell 5.3 percent.

The CCP associates China's successful public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its fast economic recovery with the superiority of China's political system. Yuan Peng, the president of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, argued that China's 'concentrated leadership, coherent directive, effective inter-agency coordination, public health system, and social management system' performed better than what he described as dysfunctional multiparty politics and the abuse of excessive freedom relating to the government's recommendation to wear masks or get vaccinated.

The commonly articulated Chinese perspective is that the more confident China becomes the more anxious US should become. Heavily influenced by the theory of offensive realism, Chinese scholars of international relations tend to believe that the US cannot be satisfied with the existence of a powerful China. They argue that Washington's call for democracy and human rights is a ploy to delegitimise the CCP and destabilise China's domestic politics. Many Chinese experts

therefore argue that Trump's adversarial approach to China continues under the Presidency of Joe Biden. Further, they argue that the Biden administration is rallying other nations against China. The Summit for Democracy organised by the Biden administration in December 2021, for example, was widely perceived in China to be designed to undermine the CCP's legitimacy. In the eyes of many Chinese analysts, the Biden administration also continues to strengthen US-Taiwan bilateral ties. They note that official visits between Washington and Taipei continue to expand and military cooperation has been strengthened. Observing the continuity of China policy, Chinese scholars conclude that there is a bipartisan consensus within the US to contain the rise of China, to maintain US global hegemony.

Still, Chinese leaders seem to have confidence China will prevail in continued US-China rivalry. Indeed, the government of Xi Jinping has promoted its official 'four confidences' in China's chosen path, political system, guiding theories and culture. Likewise, Chinese analysts express optimism about the future of Chinese economy. They note awareness of structural challenges such as record high debt and China's rapidly aging society and its impact on government spending. Despite these sources of uncertainty, they argue, there are other factors that will enable the Chinese economy to keep growing. For example, Chinese analysts express belief that the Indo Pacific's Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) will significantly increase China's GDP growth up to nine percent once the agreement enters into force in 2022. They also express confidence that China's technological innovation will overcome loss of productivity from demographic change. A recent JPMorgan report

predicts that China's outperformance during the COVID-19 pandemic has shortened the time it will take for China to surpass the US as the world's largest economy.

Perceptional gap: 'Rising and confident China' vs 'peaked and anxious China'

It is striking how different a conclusion many China watchers in the US have reached about China's future prospects. There is an emerging consensus among American experts that China's post-pandemic economic momentum has already reached its peak. Some analysts even believe that Chinese leaders are anxious about the beginning of China's decline and that therefore China's foreign policy is likely to become more aggressive to maximise China's interests before it's too late. What are the grounds of such assessments and how does the evidence differ from the sources of confidence that Chinese analysts claim? What is the implication of the perceptional gap?

Many American analysts argue that there are many indicators of China's ultimate decline. First, the Chinese economy suffers from structural problems for which there is no easy solution. Since the late 2000s, China has been running out of resources such as water, energy and food. Data shows that debt in China has increased 13-fold over the past 15 years, the highest debt ratio for any developing country in history. Second, China is faced with a significant demographic challenge. Between 2020 and 2050, China will lose 200 million working age adults and gain 200 million senior citizens. Such a demographic change will surely press the government to spend more resources on medical and

social security in the future. Third, on the diplomatic side, China has been facing the biggest international backlash in decades. According to a Pew Research Center survey in 2021, almost three-quarters of respondents worldwide hold negative views of China. Fourth, while all this is happening, the Xi Jinping government seems to be unable to recalibrate its erroneous policies because its authoritarian governing style, significantly strengthened under Xi, discourages criticism against the government policies and discussion of alternative ideas.

Generally speaking, economic recession makes it hard for national leaders to keep the public happy. Authoritarian leaders then tend to exaggerate foreign threats and fan the flames of nationalism to maintain their regime's legitimacy. Likewise, China's hyper-nationalism may reflect the regime's anxiety about China's economic future. The fear of decline provides an even more powerful motive for rasher and more urgent expansion than the confidence from a rapid rise would do. Imperial Germany and Japan are textbook examples of such a dynamic. Many American scholars argue that therefore China is likely to follow the cases of the autocratic challengers threatening a liberal order. Although the negative trends are self-caused, the Xi Jinping government is highly likely to act even more aggressively in the years to come.

Some analysts counter-argue that the trade and economic interdependence between the US and China has a pacifying effect against the escalation of tension in the security arena. However, Chinese leaders have been closely following the American debate on the policy of decoupling from the Chinese economy to overcome the vulnerabilities

of China-dependent supply chains. A decrease in future US-China trade relations may increase the likelihood of conflict.

American analysts assume that Chinese officials are motivated by the spectre of decline and that, despite the appearance of confidence, the CCP is more likely to be determined to move fast while it can. Chinese leaders are trying to appear confident and strong today precisely because they are worried about tomorrow. According to Professor James Fearon's theory of war, it is rational for Chinese leaders to bluff: to pursue their interests vis-à-vis the US, they need to exaggerate China's capabilities and hide its weaknesses. For a domestic audience as well, according to this theory, Chinese leaders need to misrepresent information to maintain regime legitimacy.

The negative forecasting of China's national power and its foreign policy behaviors by many American scholars is in stark contrast with the Chinese leaders' expressed optimistic outlook and confidence. There is no way to really know whether Xi Jinping and the CCP have genuine confidence in the future of China or not. To be sure, one should not take the Chinese officials' rhetoric at face value. But that does not mean analysts should conclude that Chinese leaders are bluffing.

... one should not take the Chinese officials' rhetoric at face value. But that does not mean analysts should conclude that Chinese leaders are bluffing

Navigating through the gathering storm

Certainly, this study is not the first to explain how and why Chinese leaders appear confident about the future of China. However, through the systematic comparison between the Chinese and American perspectives, it provides two new insights.

First, in light of the evidence that American scholars present for the decline of China, this study suggests that Chinese leaders may be mistakenly overconfident. Even an American scholar who claims that Chinese confidence is real does not deny that the confidence might be self-delusion. Prominent political scientist Robert Jervis has pointed out, 'when actors do not spontaneously perceive evidence as conforming to their views, they often explicitly interpret it as compatible within their beliefs.' Jervis' observation suggests that Chinese leaders might be failing to accept evidence about the possibility of China's decline because they have already concluded China is rising and the US is declining. If this is true, Chinese leaders themselves will be the first to be surprised if and when the undeniable evidence of China's decline presents itself.

Second, such a misperception would exacerbate the security dilemma between China and the United States, which has been worsening in recent years. If the Chinese economy declines and social disorder within China spreads, Chinese leaders may be motivated to generate a foreign policy crisis. If so, it would be a classic example of the divisionary theory of war. The more unpopular Chinese leaders become, the more they would be tempted to create external crisis to divert the public's

attention away from the domestic policy failures and to pursue a rally-around-the flag effect. Indeed, research by a scholar at the University of Southern California found that the Chinese government is twice as likely to initiate disputes with the United States when the Shanghai Stock Exchange falls by 5-15 percent. However, Professor Taylor Fravel, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, argues that historical patterns show that Chinese leaders tend to compromise in external disputes when faced with internal threats to regime security. In combination, this research suggests that if faced with an internal crisis the CCP is likely to take an aggressive external stance at the operational level in the short-medium term, but would moderate its position at the strategic level in the longer term.

In conclusion, I suggest that there may be a day when Chinese leaders realise their confidence has been erroneously inflated. Washington will then be faced with a dangerous period of time in which China acts aggressively, after which its leaders become more focused on internal crises.

The views expressed in this article are the author's alone and do not reflect the official positions of his employer or the Department of Defense.

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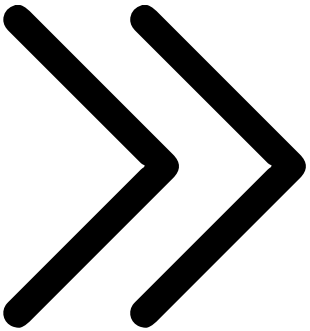

Toxic gastronationalism in India

Shakira Hussein

As historian Ian Copeland noted in 2005, 'Every Indian government of the past 200 years has had to grapple, at one point or another, with the imponderable question: what to do about cows?'

As Copeland's paper outlines, communal violence between Hindu nationalists and other communities (in particular Muslims) over the slaughter of cows has a very long history in India. And the Australian government, too, found itself facing the question of 'what to do about cows' when negotiating the recent Australia India Economic Cooperation and Free Trade Agreement. As then Australian Trade Minister Dan Tehan stated 'Obviously there are sensitivities around anything to do with cows in India, so that's obviously something we had to take account of.' While the agreement offers new opportunities to the textiles, pharmaceutical, hospitality, gems and jewellery sectors, 'given the sacred status of the cow in India, we left beef and dairy out of this interim agreement'.

For the government of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, communal tensions about cows represent not so much a problem to be grappled with as a political opportunity to be seized. As outlined in a 2019 Human Rights Watch report, since the 2014 election victory of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), 23 out of 29 states across India have passed 'cow protection laws' prohibiting the production, sale and consumption of beef, with penalties ranging from fines to life sentences.

More dangerous still has been the rise of so-called *gau rakshas*, or cow-protection brigades, who undertake vigilante attacks upon those suspected of producing or consuming beef. Far from being spontaneous expressions of outrage, these lynchings are highly coordinated

exercises, often undertaken with the cooperation of the police and the tacit or explicit approval of powerful politicians. As has become commonplace with hate crimes around the globe, the perpetrators often film their crimes and post the footage to social media as a means of both generating terror among targeted communities and gaining celebrity status among those who share their ideology. In many cases, the perpetrators of the attacks have escaped punishment, while family members of the victims have been prosecuted for collusion in their loved ones' alleged crimes against cows. Although the number of lynchings declined during the COVID-19 pandemic, they have continued in high enough numbers to maintain fear among potential victims. While the majority of the victims have been Muslim, Dalit and Adivasi communities have also been subjected to threats, abuse and violent attacks in the name of cow protection.

The definition of 'sacred cows' is usefully flexible. Only the Indian native cow is regarded as sacred, with other bovines such as buffalo considered legitimate sources of food. Scholar Yamani Narayan refers to this hierarchy as 'casteised speciesism' with native Indian cows representing Hindu purity while buffalo, crossbred and Jersey cows occupy a similar status to Dalits. This explains the apparently contradictory situation in which a nation with stringent cow protection laws is also one of the world's largest exporters of beef—sourced of course from buffalo rather than from sacred Indian native cows. However, any meat may be considered 'potential beef' when the mob or the authorities need a pretext to attack members of targeted communities.

Cow protection is far from the only issue deployed by Hindu nationalists against minoritised communities in India. Other examples include the so-called 'love jihad' conspiracy theory which alleges that Muslim men are seducing and/or abducting Hindu women and girls as a form of demographic conquest, as well as the 'corona jihad' theory which blamed the spread of COVID-19 on Muslims intent on infecting the Hindu nation. However, it is perhaps unsurprising that beef has played such a prominent role in the current wave of Islamophobia fermented by the BJP and other Hindutva organisations such as the RSS and the Shiv Sena. They can, after all, point to Article 48 of the Indian Constitution, which does not prohibit cow slaughter but does provide a 'directive principle' under which the state shall 'take steps for improving the breeds and prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves'. Cow protection laws in various forms were in place in several states even before Modi's election promise to turn back what he called a 'pink revolution' (pink referring to the colour of freshly-slaughtered meat). And food in general has a well-established role in establishing caste hierarchy. As anthropologist Dolly Kikon has noted, '[a]n integral part Brahminical power is based on regulating and upholding dietary taboos based on caste ideology', with 'outsiders' such as Dalits and tribal migrants from Nagaland mocked for their consumption of 'shit', smelly food, which renders their bodies abhorrent to higher-ranking caste Hindus.

The consequences of the cow protection campaign extend well beyond arrests and physical attacks. Low-income Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim communities have suffered the loss of livelihoods in the

... it is perhaps unsurprising that beef has played such a prominent role in the current wave of Islamophobia fermented by the BJP

herding, slaughtering and tanning industries, as well as the loss of the affordable source of protein that beef has long provided to those Indians willing to consume it. And while India's so-called 'wandering cows'—male calves and adult cows that have reached the end of their milk-producing lives—are spared the slaughterhouse, they are instead condemned to die long, slow deaths from neglect and starvation. Gaushalas (cow rescue shelters) provide photo opportunities in which Hindu nationalist politicians garland retired cows with flowers. However, they do not have the capacity to house more than a small proportion of India's abandoned cattle. As *Wired* magazine reports, farmers engaged in other forms of agriculture are reluctant to fence off their fields of grain and legumes with barbed wire, for fear of retribution for any accidental injury to a cow. Anger about the damage caused by stray cattle has become a major issue even among the BJP's own supporters. During the 2022 election campaign in Utter Pradesh, protests by farmers prompted the BJP Chief Minister to promise compensation to those who had lost crops to stray cows, while Modi claimed to be establishing a scheme which would make cow dung financially lucrative.

Like their Salafi Muslim counterparts, Hindu nationalists see themselves as reviving a glorious historical past while simultaneously claiming to be at the cutting edge of contemporary scientific methods.

Their claim that the consumption of beef was unknown in India prior to its conquest by Muslim invaders has been contested by academics such as Wendy Doniger, as well as by Dalit advocates, most notably B.R Ambedkar, the jurist and social reformer best known for his role in drafting the Indian Constitution. Doniger notes that Vedic texts instruct followers to slaughter a bull or cow to celebrate the arrival of guests. For his part, Dr Ambedkar wrote that in ancient India, '[f]or the Brahmin, every day was beef-steak day', since Brahmins during that era had ready access to beef from cows sacrificed in the temple.

But while BJP politicians claim that abstinence from beef consumption is rooted in age-old tradition, they also boast about their use of innovative technology in enforcing the ban on beef. As A. Parikh and Clara Miller have documented, these technological methods include installing cameras in slaughterhouses to monitor for any covert beef production, Unique Cattle Identifier numbers, which track cows throughout their life cycle, geotagging livestock farmers' homes and 'beef detection kits' deployed in Maharastra state, which supposedly allow police to immediately distinguish between beef and permissible meats such as lamb. These innovations provide Hindu nationalists with images of clean efficiency and modernity to contrast against the brutal images of the gau raskak vigilante attacks. These measures are said to provide protection both for cows and for those humans wrongly accused of harming them. However, for minoritised communities, the price of this unreliable defence against false accusations is being ensnared in an ever-expanding system of surveillance and control.

Cow protection for the most part has been a domestic issue in Indian politics, with Hindu nationalists seeking only to ban beef within India and to a lesser extent its global diaspora. Loyalty to the Mother Cow therefore does not prevent India from engaging in diplomatic relationships with nations where beef-eating is common practice, nor does it hinder warm exchanges between Modi and beef-eating heads of state such as [former US President] Donald Trump and [former] Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison. Shared economic and security interests and as political anthropologist Irfan Ahmed illustrates, shared Islamophobia are much more important than differing dietary regimes.

Loyalty to the Mother Cow therefore does not prevent India from engaging in diplomatic relationships with nations where beef-eating is common practice, nor does it hinder warm exchanges between Modi and beef-eating heads of state

However, as the exclusion of beef and dairy from the Australia-India Economic and Free Trade Agreement illustrates, governments and corporations outside India cannot afford to ignore Hindu sensibilities in regard to food. In 2017, the Indian government lodged an official diplomatic protest in response to an advertisement by Meat and Livestock Australia not for beef, but for lamb. The advertisement in question depicted figures from major world religions including Jesus, L.

Ron Hubbard, and Zeus enjoying a roast lamb dinner under the slogan 'You'll Never Lamb Alone'. Among the dinner guests joining the toast to lamb as 'the meat we can all eat' was the Hindu deity Ganesh–and Lord Ganesh of course is vegetarian. After initially finding that the advertisement did not breach the advertising standards code, the Advertising Standards Board eventually found that it was offensive to those of the Hindu faith, and the advertisement was withdrawn.

At the other end of the ideological spectrum, Dr Ambedkar's great-grandson Rajratna Ambedkar posted a video to his Facebook page titled 'Cow is India's Mother. Look who's eating it now'. Rajnatna Ambedkar claimed that Brahmins were guilty of hypocrisy, attacking Muslims in India in the name of protecting the Mother Cow, but establishing 'Brahman pies', a franchise of beef pie outlets in faraway Australia. Those responsible for Brahman pies were forced to clarify that their company was a '100% Australian owned company (not Indian)' and that their product was named after Brahman cattle, not after the Brahmin caste.

It is important to note that India is far from the only society to experience the effects of toxic gastronationalism. In Australia, a moral panic over halal certification led to a Senate inquiry into the third-party certification of food in 2015. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic saw a wave of hate attacks against Chinese restaurants across Australia, Europe and North America, while kosher food has been the target of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories for centuries. And South Asian communities in Australia, Europe and North America have themselves been targeted by toxic gastronationalism, with Indian-

looking immigrants reviled as ‘curry-munchers’ who are considered to be as smelly and repulsive as the food they consume. In India itself, however, the list of Hindutva-imposed restrictions has expanded in some locations to include not only beef but also other types of meat and fish and eggs. A country which ranks at 101 of 116 on the Global Hunger Index cannot afford these types of limitations to the diets of its poorest and most vulnerable citizens.

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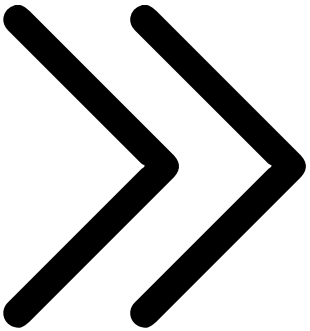

English language education in China is being challenged as against Chinese culture

Delia Lin

During China's annual parliamentary meetings last year involving the two key political bodies in China—the National People's Congress (NPC) and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)—a CPPCC representative proposed removing English as a core subject in primary and secondary schools.

Some regard English language education as the linguistic corollary of the rise of deep-seated cultural nationalism and xenophobia

This is not the first proposal to downgrade the teaching of English in Chinese schools, but it was reported on the central government's official media outlet *China Youth Daily* and triggered heated discussion. Some regard English language education as the linguistic corollary of the rise of deep-seated cultural nationalism and xenophobia; others emphasise the on-going instrumentalist ideology of English language education in China since revolution in 1949.

There are two main arguments for removing English as a core subject. The first is that English language learning poses the threat of cultural colonialisation (*wenhua zhimin* 文化殖民). As a prominent Shanghai-based blogger on zhihu (China's largest 'online question and answer' platform), argues: placing too much emphasis on learning English results in students being subliminally influenced by Western culture, and even culturally worshipping anything foreign, exceeding the level of cultural influence (*wenhua shentou* 文化渗透) the Chinese

Community Party tries to exert on its own people. This view holds that English represents the discursive power of the West and China should not accept English-dominated discourse.

The second argument regards English language learning as an obstacle to creative thinking which has negatively impacted China's urgent need for innovative technology to better compete with the US. Those holding this view argue that learning English requires students to spend too much time rote-learning to pass university entrance examinations (*gaokao* 高考). As a result, according to this logic, students do not have sufficient time to cultivate their creativity in mathematics and physics to enhance China's technological capabilities. In this context, English is even seen as hinderance to students' wellbeing (*xingfu gan* 幸福感). In line with the CPPCC representative's view, proponents of omitting English as a core subject believe that the advancement of artificial intelligence and digital translation can well serve the communicative purposes of English and it should, therefore, only be an elective. According to an online survey, when it was proposed in 2017 that English testing be removed from the National College Entrance Examination, *gaokao*, the proposal received over 80 percent support. The argument at the time centred on English adding to the academic burden on the students.

The increasing cultural colonisation argument echoes an age-old Chinese endogenous idea of culture, *wenhua* 文化, that is intrinsically linked to politics and the conquest of states. The Chinese term for culture, *wenhua*, was originally the abbreviation of the verb phrase

yi wen hua ren 以文化人: *wen* refers to *wende* (文德), that is, decorum, rituals and education; and *hua ren* means changing and transforming the subjects. The phrase *yi wen hua ren* therefore means transforming subjects through decorum, rituals and education. Historian, poet and politician Liu Xiang 刘向 (77–6 BCE) of the Western Han Dynasty explains the importance of *wenhua* to ruling a conquered nation, in a chapter 'On the Military (Zhi Wu 指武)' of his seminal text *The Garden Stories* (*Shuo Yuan* 说苑): 圣人之治天下也，先文德而后武力。凡武之兴，为不服也，文化不改，然后加诛。

'The Saints rule the world by moral transformation prior to the act of aggression. People rebel where aggression is prevalent. Eliminate those who are unable to be transformed through the teaching of language, decorum and rituals.'

The meaning of *wenhua* has evolved over time. In *The Draft History of Qing* (1928) *wenhua* is linked to education and schooling, and such usage continues today. If someone wants to say they are illiterate, they may say in Chinese '*wo mei wenhua*', which literally means 'I have no culture', meaning 'I don't know how to read or write', or 'I've never been to school'. The original word *wenhua* in Chinese therefore has an intrinsic meaning of cultivation, education, and moulding/transforming the people in a conquered land. *Wenhua* became the Chinese translation of the English word 'culture' in the 19th to the 20th century. In Wilhelm Lobscheid's *English and Chinese Dictionary* (1883), culture is translated into *xiu de zhe* 修德者, *xiu li zhe* 修理者, *xiu wen zhe* 修文者 (those of virtue, righteous principles and letters). In Hui-Ch'ing Yen's *English and Chinese*

Standard Dictionary (1908) *wenhua* is listed as one of the translations of 'culture' and the phrase 'a man of culture' is translated into '*wenhua zhi ren* 文化之人'.

Although in contemporary usage, *wenhua* indeed means 'culture', the age-old idea of *yi wen hua zhi* has shaped a deep-seated political anxiety which sees education in humanities, including language, as an ideological battlefield where anything foreign or different is perceived to potentially contaminate nationalist orthodoxy. The ancient verb phrase '*yi wen hua ren*' is enjoying a revival and is frequently quoted by Chinese Communist Party official media emphasising the importance of ideology in education to cultivate and transform the young generation.

This political anxiety has led to a recurring instrumentalist discourse in foreign language education planning in China since 1949, that amounts to 'Chinese learning/values for foundational principles'; Western learning for practical uses' (*zhongxue weiti*, *xixue weiyong* 中学为体,西学为用) , which was proposed by the late Qing reformist, Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909). A lack of cultural representation in foreign language teaching is not unique to China and has been widely criticised by educators around the world. In the Chinese context, the instrumentalist approach to foreign language education is overwhelming government driven.

In 1964, the first national foreign language education policy, *Seven-Year Plan for Foreign Language Education* (hereinafter 'the Plan'), officially designating English as the most important foreign language in Chinese schools. The Plan states two reasons for promoting foreign language education: pushing forward revolutionary movements around the globe

through external work; and catching up with advanced technology in the world. The rationale is that, through foreign language education, China will be able to produce more personnel for external or foreign affairs work to promote 'the revolutionary mission to the world'. The Plan stresses that students learning foreign languages are prone to be influenced by capitalist ideas, and therefore need a strong ideological and political education.

In 1979 the Ministry of Education issued a four-year English major syllabus for each of the three types of universities—universities specialising in foreign languages, general universities and teaching colleges. From 1978 to the early 1980s, hundreds of Chinese universities set up English majors called 'English for Science and Technology' or 'English for Special Purposes'. By 2013, English majors became the most prevalent major across all universities within China—77.4 percent (903) of universities in China offered English majors. They were even more popular than computer science, which was offered by 869 universities within China in 2013.

In 1998, the Ministry of Education issued a policy titled *Opinions on Undergraduate Foreign Language Major Education Reform for the 21st Century*, stipulating the need for foreign language graduates to have a broader scope of employability, practical skills and inter-disciplinary talent

The Plan stresses that students learning foreign languages are prone to be influenced by capitalist ideas, and therefore need a strong ideological and political education

(宽口径、应用型、复合型人才). Twenty years later, the Ministry of Education issued another policy titled *National Standard for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Tertiary Institutions* which proposed that English majors be offered with another disciplinary major to produce graduates with more practical and inter-disciplinary skills to better serve economic development.

The instrumentalist approach to English language education has made English as a Second Language (ESL) a large market. It was estimated that in 2013 the ESL market for children in China alone was worth 20 billion RMB (approximately 4.1 billion Australian dollars). Motivations for learning English vary from higher social status and more employment opportunities to travelling overseas and attaining good grades.

In the current era of President Xi Jinping, heightened cultural nationalism has encouraged the paradigmatic thinking that places the Party's and national interests first. The anxiety over values influence through English language teaching extends to translating from and into English and other foreign languages. In the field of translation studies, scholars have proposed that translators apply cultural filtering to remove any part in the source text which violates socialist ideologies. An emerging translation theory in China called National Translation Program (NTP) suggests that patriotism be the fundamental principle of translation; and that translators should refrain from being influenced by other countries' values and ideologies (be they source culture or target culture) during the translation process.

The long-standing dilemma of the instrumental necessity of teaching a foreign language for nation-building while also protecting 'Chinese values' culminates in the increasing concerns regarding cultural colonialisation through English language education. So far, the Ministry of Education has not acted on the CPPCC representative's proposal to remove English as a core subject in schools or to exclude English from *gaokao*. However, English language education is getting increasingly political within China. As US–China rivalry intensifies and China's Communist Party identifies education as a site of ideological security, it remains to be seen how the learning and teaching of English will be impacted.

The author wishes to thank Børge Bakken for his reminder of the culture/change concept.

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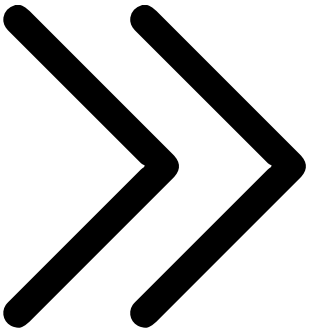

Reimagining human mobility in Asia Pacific after COVID-19: the challenge of expanding human rights-based entry and stay pathways

Pia Oberoi

'We will strengthen our efforts to enhance and diversify the availability of pathways for safe, orderly and regular migration, including in response to demographic and labour market realities, and for migrants in vulnerable situations.' (Paragraph 59, Progress Declaration of the International Migration Review Forum)

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted migration and mobility in the Asia Pacific region in multiple and complex ways. Over the course of 2020-2021, various restrictions on public health grounds to halt the spread of the virus were placed on many of the available pathways for mobility. Such pathways included visas for the temporary entry of non-citizens, labour migration programmes, humanitarian entry schemes as well as refugee resettlement programmes, family unification mechanisms and other measures by which states manage the entry and stay of people in their territories. Across the region, borders were closed, often abruptly, and lockdowns in urban and rural centres confined millions to their homes for indefinite lengths of time. Forced into unemployment by business closures and contracting economies, and usually unable to carry out their jobs remotely, many migrants were forced to return to countries which struggled to reintegrate them and to include them in fragile health systems. Many faced stigma and even violence having been portrayed as 'disease carriers' in the countries in which they lived and worked, as well as when they returned home. This picture is rendered bleaker by the harsh fact that for many people on the move, the pandemic only exacerbated the exclusion and discrimination they routinely faced before.

The Asia Pacific region hosts and is home to a significant proportion of the world's international migrants. According to official data, roughly one in three of the 282 million international migrants in the world originated from the region and one in seven are living in the region. To these numbers must be added a sizeable but usually uncounted population of migrants with irregular status. The region is also the world's most populous (home to 60 percent of the global population) and among the most rapidly developing, yet it has some of the highest levels of wealth and income inequality within and between countries, some of the largest and fastest ageing populations per country, and sizeable youth populations. It is highly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters – half of the region's people live in low-lying coastal areas.

Migration is therefore an inevitable reality for the Asia Pacific, embedded in livelihood and risk-reduction strategies and part of the day-to-day life of millions of people who have moved in different ways and with varying motivations, as well as for the families and communities that they leave behind. Entrenched patterns of discrimination and inequality, conflict and violence, as well as poverty, socio-economic distress, family separation, and environmental degradation and climate change have long driven mobility within and from the region. Building inclusive societies, and in some cases rebuilding them, is a key post-COVID challenge; and in the landscape of Asia and the Pacific migrants are vital members of the societies in which they live. Societies and economies across Asia have been built by migrant workers, and it has been well recognised that many were essential to the COVID-19 response in the region and beyond.

Building inclusive societies, and in some cases rebuilding them, is a key post-COVID challenge

Yet, international migration governance has largely been inconsistent and often fragmented, particularly in relation to protection and promotion of the human rights of migrants in situations of vulnerability. In general, regional discussions of mobility have been slow to consider the need for regular migration pathways, with some exception being made for temporary low-wage labour migration programs.

Within the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, specifically within its Objective 5, States have recognised that pathways for regular migration, including new and expanded regular pathways to admission and stay, can be an effective tool to protect migrants' human rights. A 'pathway' in this context has been understood as a legal, policy and/or administrative mechanism that enables regular travel, admission and/or stay in the territory of a State. Migrants may access such pathways by obtaining the required documentation on or before arrival in a country. For those already in the territory, regular status may be secured or maintained by adjusting migration status (for example, where a status is expiring or a different suitable status is available), or by granting or regularising stay permits for migrants in an irregular situation.

Under Objective 7, the Global Compact for Migration further commits States to respond to the needs of migrants who face situations of vulnerability. The concept of migrants in vulnerable situations

recognises that structural factors create precarity for some migrants, who accordingly need specific protection even if they have been compelled to leave their homes for reasons that do not fall within the international law definition of a refugee. The vulnerable situations that migrants face can arise from a range of situational and personal factors that may intersect or coexist simultaneously, influencing and exacerbating each other and evolving or changing over time as circumstances change. Migrants may find themselves in vulnerable situations because of the situations compelling them to leave their country of origin, the circumstances in which they travel or the conditions they face on arrival; or because of personal characteristics such as their age, gender identity, race, disability or health status.

In a recent report which maps national practices on entry and stay pathways in 17 countries of the Asia Pacific region, the UN Human Rights Office contends that the region needs to devise and implement pathways that respond to a range of protection-sensitive imperatives. These include the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change; health status and lack of access to health care (including the effects of pollution and other environmental threats to health); protection of the right to family life; the occurrence of torture and failure to provide rehabilitation after torture; protection from gender-based violence; situations in which migrants are witnesses to or victims of trafficking or of other crimes; and in the context of statelessness.

Common forms of protective pathways available in the region include discretionary humanitarian entry based on conditions in the country

of origin or the specific circumstances of the individual migrant, temporary residence permits on medical grounds or for study (often including visas for accompanying parents or guardians); family union mechanisms; interventions to protect the rights of trafficked persons; special permits for migrants who have been victims of domestic violence; periodic or case-by-case regularisation mechanisms; and legislation enabling access to birth registration. Some countries also grant residence permits based on factors such as a migrant's length of residence, employment, children's school attendance, and other enduring local social ties and evidence of integration. There are, however, gaps in their implementation such as practical barriers related to cost or administrative hurdles particularly for those migrants who are structurally disadvantaged due to their gender, nationality, ethnicity or socio-economic status.

Despite protection-sensitive pathways being relatively nascent in the region, particularly those that are adjacent to or entirely outside the asylum space, it is interesting to note that of the 17 states that were covered in the study:

- 11 provide pathways that are explicitly based on human rights/ humanitarian grounds.
- 16 have a form of family unification in their laws.
- 10 have comprehensive anti-human trafficking laws.
- 17 offer visas for education purposes.
- 13 provided visa amnesties to foreign nationals due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, every state included in this study granted wide-ranging residual discretionary powers to government authorities to authorise the entry and stay into the country of certain migrants or groups of migrants. Such discretionary mechanisms can be an expression of compassion or international cooperation and solidarity and are able to render flexible responses to entry and stay needs. In some jurisdictions these kinds of mechanisms currently provide the only possible pathway for migrants in vulnerable situations. However, from the perspective of international human rights best practice, systems that concentrate discretionary, often unreviewable, power in the government broadly or in the hands of the relevant Minister more narrowly, should ideally be reformed to ensure transparency, predictability and accountability. Further, the use of such discretionary power should in principle be minimal and meet a high threshold. The UN Migration Network has recommended that the decision to grant admission and stay should be based on clear and transparent criteria and not be taken solely at the discretion of the official in charge of the case to avoid discrimination and abuses of power. It is important to recall that 'discretionary' interventions may and often do establish grounds of admission and stay that are rooted in international human rights law and associated obligations, such as the right to family life.

Pathways that enable entry for medical treatment or to study, which are also available in many countries in the region, may in a similar vein permit migrants to realise human rights, such as the right to education or the right to health, particularly where the treatment or study is unavailable in the country of origin or where removal from the host country would cause a breach of these rights.

To make a meaningful difference to the human rights protection landscape, pathways for entry and stay need to be sufficient, accessible, and tailored to meet the needs of the region's migrants. Where they are not, the many forces that drive migration, the high costs of regular migration, and restrictive and complex migration policies combine to create conditions of uncertainty for states and human rights risks for migrants. This mix makes the migration cycle more dangerous for migrants because they may be forced to rely on unscrupulous facilitators, or face discrimination, violence or abuse at borders; and the circumstances of individuals who are already in a vulnerable situation become more precarious.

As the study shows, the COVID-19 pandemic both reinforced the focus of states in the region on international borders as a site of visible control (including through border closures, enforced returns, quarantine policies and enhanced methods of surveillance and scrutiny) but it also provided an opportunity for governments to understand and demonstrate the flexibility and the tools that are available to them to provide regular status to migrants, particularly those who are in vulnerable situations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many states in the region put in place innovative measures to ensure continued stay and to respond to individual situations of vulnerability, and they should seize the opportunity to embed the practices and lessons learned in this turbulent period. Indeed, the United Nations Secretary General has suggested that the pandemic offers an opportunity to reimagine human mobility for the benefit of all while advancing the central commitment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to 'leave no one behind'.

Migration policy is often made not primarily with a view to improving migration governance, but rather to influence domestic political narratives

Returning to the Progress Declaration of the Global Compact for Migration, which was recently endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly, Member States of the United Nations have agreed on the need to protect the rights, safety and dignity of migrants while promoting the security, well-being and prosperity of communities (Paragraph 5). Where policy is being made in good faith, where the primary intent of migration policy making is to address governance challenges in line with the vision of the Global Compact for Migration, then making available more and better pathways is an inevitable response.

However, the unfortunate reality in the Asia Pacific, as in other regions, is that migration policy is often made not primarily with a view to improving migration governance, but rather to influence domestic political narratives. Migrants and migration have long been held up as scapegoats in times of uncertainty and societal stress, and the COVID-19 pandemic has been no exception. Yet, the call to expand and diversify such pathways is not an argument for 'open borders', but rather that such pathways are a concrete demonstration of every state's sovereign responsibility to manage their borders in a way that upholds legal obligations and principles of solidarity. Expanding and diversifying regular pathways for the entry and stay of migrants in vulnerable situations on the one hand and upholding the security and well-being

of communities on the other is not a zero-sum game: enhancing the former will not lead to a diminution of the latter.

Evidence-based arguments for better migration governance will only lead to concrete and sustainable policy change if we are willing to reimagine the ways in which we speak of migration. Can we replace narratives of fear and exclusion with those of hopefulness and inclusion? Is there place in these narratives to imagine a more inclusive and resilient future for our communities? In the spirit of 'building back better' in the aftermath of COVID-19, governments in the Asia Pacific region must reflect on the lessons learned from the pandemic and commit to a rights-based reimagination of human mobility.

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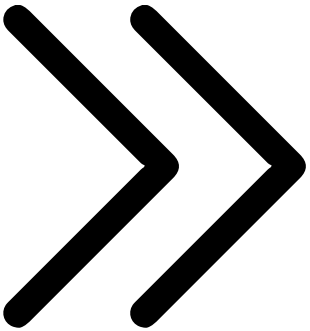

Representing Asian Australianness in 2020 … one soap opera at a time

Mridula Nath Chakraborty

What did one traffic light say to another? 'Don't look, I'm changing.' Blink and you miss it. This cheesy one-liner could be accused of referring to the transforming face of Australian-produced TV soap operas, the genre that Professor Lesleyanne Hawthorne identifies as 'a modern version of the morality play' that 'implicitly and explicitly' transmits messages about 'the nature of Australian society, including the acceptability of ethnic diversity'.

Ask most people about the television series most identifiable with Australia, the chances are that they will mention *Home and Away*, Australia's most successful popular culture export (next only to its predecessor, *Neighbours*), marketed in at least 80 countries, and currently broadcast in nine. Set in a fictional town called Summer Bay, the land of eternal sunshine and nary a bush fire, the location is just far away enough from the chaotic confusion and confronting foreignness of capital cities like Sydney and Melbourne, a factor used to explain (or 'excuse') its lack of 'even an Italian Pizza Parlour, a Chinese restaurant, a Greek or a Lebanese milk bar'. Running since 1988, the soap opera's motley collection of fostered children, 'abandoned by [their] natural family, leaving [them] free to identify as 100 percent Australian in terms of language, culture and personal style' is a snapshot of the imagined community of 'pre-mass migration vision of Australia, peopled with unassailably Anglo citizens'. So much so that more than quarter of a century later, in 2015, writer Benjamin Law (*The Family Law* and *Waltzing the Dragon*), in an article titled 'When Asians attack' in *The Monthly*, remarks that 'despite the fact that by 1990 roughly a third of all new immigrants were Asian' and by 2010, 'even though just over 10 percent

of Australians identify as having Asian ancestry, all-white main casts are still common' in this colonial settler nation's cultural imagination and mediascape.

If the trans-millennial years between 1990 and 2010 were diagnosed by Professor Michael Wesley in *There Goes the Neighbourhood: Australia and the Rise of Asia* as 'a charmed double-decade of riches, openness and increasing safety' for Australians, they also paradoxically witnessed its peoples 'so complacent about how their country relates to the world, so incurious about how the world is changing, and so unprepared to think about how all of this will affect them'. Ten years later, nowhere is this baffling want of interest, in the wider world in which Australia has a stake, witnessed more than in the lack of awareness of Asian Australian presence and portrayal in mainstream media and the arts sphere. Note that I do not say that Asian Australianness is not available on our airwaves, galleries, screens or theatres; rather, in an age of hyper-connectivity and availability of global cultural material, the neglect of home-grown Asian Australian content and talent becomes markedly acute. One could evoke the infamous and age-old cultural cringe factor to explain the roots of such oversight, but to continue to do so at a time when Asia is constantly, definitely, and for all foreseeable futurity, on the horizon as well as within our borders, this obliviousness should be cause for concern with regards to Australia's self-positioning in the region.

On the one hand, Bali is commonplace in the Australian imagination as a backyard for consumer tourism; on the other, the multifarious histories of Asian settlement in Australia, as depicted in its popular

cultures, remain obscure to all but those who seek it strenuously and determinedly. The last decade, in particular, has witnessed a burgeoning of Asian Australian storytelling in our mediascapes, specifically about our histories of arrival on this unceded Aboriginal land, that provide the all-important caveat and corrective to hegemonic white-settler nationalism. As Senator Penny Wong remarked to former Race Discrimination Commissioner Tim Soutphommasane in *Mongrel Nation*:

The last decade, in particular, has witnessed a burgeoning of Asian Australian storytelling in our mediascapes

The first thing is probably to recognise that Asia is part of our history and who we are. So I think the construction of who we are, if we think of ourselves as just some sort of outpost of British colonialism, we're always going to be in a bit of trouble, aren't we, in terms of engaging with our region?

In the last decade, as the influence of Asia has announced itself in every possible way in Australia, from inbound migration (international students, temporary skilled workers, economic migrants) to outbound markets (Australia's coal, agricultural and aquatic produce, cultural products), Asian Australian storytelling has come to occupy an integral space at least in the imaginaries of *our* (i.e. in Asian Australian) communities. But its uptake, both lay and critical, in the mainstream and dominant space of institutionalised 'whiteness' has remained scant.

Such a negligent response of 'sanctioned ignorance' to the presence of Asia-in-Australia has immediate and long-term repercussions

for Australia-in-Asia. At one time, Asian Studies was the preferred academic means to make Australians Asia-literate, in the old Colombo Plan manner of acquiring deep expertise in Asian countries and cultures, languages and societies, peoples and world views. This approach, paradoxically, has had the effect of putting Asia definitively outside, and other to, the imaginative borders of Australia, even as the nation was increasingly aligned in the geopolitical region. It obscured the arrivals and affinities that existed between Asia and Australia from at least 250 years ago, when Chinese and Indian entrepreneurs entered the realm and made it their own. Under the New Colombo Plan, the focus remains externalised: sending Australians out to Asia, which while necessary perhaps to acquaint ourselves with the new face of Asia, comes at the expense of the considerable knowledge base that exists within Australia itself among Asian Australian lineages. In the age of hypermobility, COVID-19 notwithstanding, and what sociologist and philosopher, Zygmunt Baumann, calls liquid modernity, the earlier 'otherising' division and distance between Asia and Australia is no longer possible. People, places and phenomena are connected via enhanced and faster means of travel (COVID-19 aside), new tropes of transnational migration, technologies that make it possible to exist simultaneously in several time-zones and popular culture participation across multiple contexts and languages, e.g. through Google Translate, or common platforms like YouTube, where a globalised synchrony of cultural expression can make K-Pop or Bollywood a household commodity, available at the click of your mouse.

There has been some scholarship in the insistence upon, and implications of, Asia literacy in Australian policy and governance matters. As scholars note, the overwhelmingly economic rationale routinely provided to equip Australians to 'deal' with the influence of Asia (including in former Prime Minister Julia Gillard's White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century) is one of the predominant reasons why Australians are deemed to 'need' literacy in Asia. The constantly vacillating and contradictory pivoting of Australia as it imagines itself in the region (from looking north so as to be part of the Asian region to turning west and becoming Indo-Pacific) also stands in complex negotiation with the 'idea' of Asia itself, as a 'region for our times' that came into geo-political prominence and reorganisation in the wake of World War II. Asia literacy clearly has to be navigated in Australia through the entwined approaches of what has been termed the twin prongs of 'Australia-in-Asia' and 'Asia-in-Australia'. Herein lies the problem of gauging Asia literacy as a skill set, to be obtained just through languages and cultures rather than storytelling. As Indigenous societies have emphasised again and again, Indigenous epistemologies are revealed through storytelling. However, when it comes to Australia's other 'Others', i.e. its marked migrant-settlers of non-Anglo-Celtic origin, and Asians in the twenty-first century, the only recourse possible has been the ethnicity-based model of non-Anglophone speech, as evidenced in acronyms like NESB (Non-English-Speaking Background), LOTE (Languages Other Than English), CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) etc.

In this scenario, Asian Australians serve both as the link to that supercontinent to our north, arbitrarily termed 'Asia' through colonial mechanisms of nomenclature, and as the separate entity that distinguishes us from our 'Asian looking' neighbours in Asia, whose lineages we may share, but cannot be assumed to inhabit in the same lingual or socio-political spheres. In this respect, Asian Australians are both a bridge and not to Asia. This is an important distinction that tends to get lost both in discourses of Asian Studies and governmental policies: Asian Australians can often be misrecognised as cognates of Asians, conduits to Asia or consumers of Asian products. While all three attributions have elements of truth in them, they are not the only distinguishing factors of Asian Australianness. In fact, as Mark Wang, deputy chairman of the Museum of Chinese Australian History in Melbourne asserts, 'We are about Australian history. We're not about Chinese history.' However, in the racially-charged fallout of situations such as the one created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflation of Asians and Asian Australians become particularly problematic.

The burden of representation falls on Asian Australians to demonstrate the histories of arrival that might justify their Asian sensibilities, while maintaining their own legitimacy as 'fair dinkum' Australians. In the face of dominant representations of Australianness as Anglo-Celtic, it falls on to them to trace and narrate the indelible, but invisible-ised, chronicling of early Asian incursions and presences in Australia that testify to their belonging to this land as unquestionably as white settlers. In this scenario, it becomes all the more important to take note of Asian Australian stakes in media and popular culture

The burden of representation falls on Asian Australians to demonstrate the histories of arrival that might justify their Asian sensibilities, while maintaining their own legitimacy as 'fair dinkum' Australians

so that we can tell the story of contemporary Australia and persuade the world within, and out there, that we are indeed worthy of our multicultural appellation vis-à-vis Asia. That our Asianness is not something that is just part and parcel of a culinary exotica made familiar, à la *Masterchef*, or in an equal and opposite demonisation, cause for the needle of suspicion to descend when the COVID-19 pandemic hit our lives. This is when popular culture can be a critical aid to understand the razor's edge on which Asian Australian experiences and identities rest, and which make us an integral narrator of the various strands of settlements that characterise this settler colony.

In the last five years, there has been an impassioned debate in the Australian public sphere about the lack of Asian Australian representation on our screens and influenced by benchmarking reports like *Seeing Ourselves: Reflections of Diversity on Australian TV drama* and *Shifting the Balance: Cultural Diversity in Leadership Within the Australian Arts, Screen and Creative Sectors*. Unbeknownst to most Australian television watchers, now hooked to platforms like Netflix, Amazon, HBO Now and iTunes for foreign content, diversity has been slowly, but surely creeping into our living rooms in the shape of *The Principal*, *The Unlisted*,

The Hunting, and even the much-critiqued *Here Come the Habibs*. In 2020, an interesting mix of multicultural content hit our screens: *Hungry Ghosts*, a four-part supernatural drama brought home the trauma of the Vietnam war with a cast of more than 30 Asian Australian actors and 325 Asian Australian extras in an Australian TV first. The ever-popular *Masterchef* got a two-in-one representation of diversity in Melissa Leong (female and of Asian descent) and conversations about race and diversity governed the reviews. 2021 promises more fun in *Aftertaste*, a six-part comedy drama where a world-famous "angry white guy" has to find a new narrative in small-town Australia that already has its star restaurant run by an Asian young turk who had suffered racially-charged abuse while apprenticing under the celebrity chef.

However, I want to make a particular case for the soap opera that often does not have the same kind of artistic legitimacy as other media forms, and thus enters popular discourse via hoi polloi or low brow appreciation. By having such a broad-based appeal, especially in the context of the anti-intellectual bias that sees the ABC being attacked regularly, the soap opera in Australia can have unusual power to transform entrenched bias against those who are perceived to be outsiders to the dominant white settler narrative. Enter *The Heights*. A home-grown gem, it should rightly alter the *Home and Away* face of an Australia consumed the world over and replace it with what contemporary down-under in the Asian neighbourhood actually looks like. At least in its urban milieu, such a representation could possibly become an advertisement, and a shining new example, of its arrived-of-age multicultural diversity. It is important to make the point that it is

in the genre of the soap opera that one stands to make the most of such diversity, unlike the longer-standing contenders to the label, viz. *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. *The Heights* has been broadcast in the UK, but it should be a no-brainer that is precisely among our Asian neighbours that the show needs to be disseminated. The series is produced by Matchbox Pictures, the powerhouse television and film company co-formed by Tony Ayers (the Portuguese-Macau-born Australian creative and showrunner) and others, created by Warren Clarke and Que Minh Luu (Netflix director of local originals in Australia, previously executive producer at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation). This new kid on the block of television dramas exemplifies the relationship of Australia to its region in the Asian Century. The show premiered in 2019, with a follow-up second season broadcast throughout the COVID-19 pandemic period in 2020, but whether it has been renewed for a third season is yet unknown.

Arcadia Heights, the inner-city neighbourhood setting of the program, is as diverse as it could get, but ever so nonchalantly and matter-of-factly, with six families plotting the main storyline and a secondary cast of characters criss-crossing them depending on the trajectory of themes. Shot in Perth rather than the usual suspects of Melbourne and Sydney, the series is anchored, in equal parts, by The Railway, its local pub, and Dông Hu'o'ng, the Vietnamese corner grocery store. Both establishments are run by iron-fisted and sharp-tongued ladies, Hazel Murphy essayed with characteristic aplomb by the seasoned actress, Fiona Press whose career has spanned 37 years, and Iris Tran, played by first time debutant and refugee advocate, Carina Hoang, whose family fled Vietnam by boat in 1976, and lived in the

Galang refugee camp in Indonesia. The pub has been a longstanding feature of soap operas, viz. the British Coronation Street, which has clocked more than 10,250 episodes since 1960, and demonstrates the changing face of Britain using the ruse of the local bar. In the case of *The Heights*, the Vietnamese corner store occupies equal billing, and is actually shot in the real Ton Sian Grocery in Northbridge that was established 37 years ago and bears witness to the way in which urban spaces have been transformed by such migrations.

The characters of *The Heights* live in social housing, The Towers, amidst a rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood, and value judgements notwithstanding on either side, manage to have a mostly friendly association, and even find love across the lines in sand. While the Murphys and the Davies provide their versions of dysfunctional family dramas, the Trans and the Jafaris offer cohesiveness of a refugee ethos that stands in stark contrast to some of the other neighbours' shenanigans. Residents of European as well as Asian descent are shepherded by Indigenous Elders, Uncle Max and Aunty Pam, and other central First Nations characters like Mich and Leonie. Any tensions that exist between the denizens of this imagined community are washed over by an impossibly seamless co-existence that is as realistic as it is aspirational. The show manages to tick all the 'issues' boxes without seeming to: Indigeneity, ethnicisation, disability and class are cut across by a story board that manages to spotlight the difference between public and private schools, homosexuality in minority communities, games that local politicians play, the pitfalls of compulsive gambling and drug addiction, teenage sex education, and of course the numerous romps

in bed that are *de rigueur* for soap operas. In all of this, the narrative does not waver from its utter commitment to diversity in its true sense of the word. Surely it behoves Australian audiences to pay attention to this drama unfolding within our shores to get a sense that while we were fighting the history wars and indulging in identity politics, our neighbourhoods and suburbs had quietly but surely transformed into something quintessentially Asian Australian. The fate of Season 3 of *The Heights* seems to be in question, but it would be a real shame if such a powerful medium is allowed to quietly wither away without the kind of funding and viewership that would make it a real Australian television icon of the twenty-first century.

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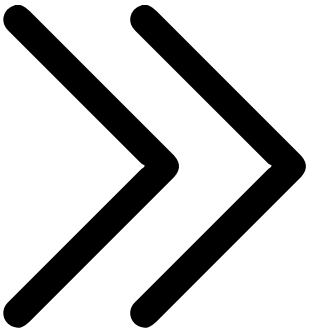

Many Asian nations are experiencing a revival of religion in public and political life

Azyumardi Azra

Religion is returning to public and political life in many Asian countries contrary to previously dominant ideas about the inevitable decline of religion through the process of modernisation. Economic development and socio-cultural progress in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, India, and China have brought religion back to the political and socio-cultural spheres.

Asia is the only continent where virtually all major world religions today originated and developed: Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Contrary to the classic sociological theories on the decline of religions in the face of modernisation and secularisation, which go all the way back at least to Max Weber, Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim, all these great religions are still going strong in most of Asia. In fact, like the other parts of the globe, Asia in the last four decades has been experiencing a religious revival.

In many parts of Asia, religions have long played a significant role, not only in the lives of the faithful, but also in public and political life. Hinduism plays an important role in India, and Buddhism is a crucial element in private and public lives in Thailand and Sri Lanka. Judaism is closely bound up with national identity in Israel, while Christianity, specifically Catholicism, is the single largest religion in the Philippines and Timor Leste. At the same time, Protestantism is making inroads in South Korea, Japan, China, Singapore and other places in Asia. Islam, the latest of the Abrahamic religions, is the predominant religion in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, and

Malaysia; in South Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan; as well as in the Middle East and Central Asia, while being an important minority faith in India. Even though most Japanese would say that they do not practice Shintoism, it is easy to find traces of this religion in their lives.

Despite the predictions of classical sociology and classical modernisation theory, this has not changed in the face of socio-economic transformation since the end of World War II. Instead, the variety of ways in which religion has become integrated into social, political and cultural life have become more complex. This has ramifications for geopolitical and security issues across the Asian region. In the case of Muslim majority countries such as Indonesia, the most obvious problem is the link that is often made between Islam and political violence, although fundamentalist strains prone to violence have emerged from other religions as well.

Asian geo-politics, religions and security issues

For centuries, as suggested earlier, religion has been part and parcel of human life in Asia, spanning the social, cultural, and, of course, political spheres. In short, religions have been embedded in private and public life.

However, after World War II, newly independent nation-states had different constitutional arrangements on the matter of the place of religion in each country. India, Singapore, Japan and South Korea, for instance, are 'secular' states that officially give no special place to religion; religion is regarded as simply a private matter and, therefore, should not interfere in political and public life.

On the other hand, religions were accommodated in political and public lives in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, and yet the role of religion appeared to have declined with the initial introduction of modernisation and economic development programmes by the states. Religion in general had been regarded as not compatible with modernity and economic development by many state officials who expected modernisation processes would bring 'secularisation'.

In other countries, the decline of the role of religion was connected with the adoption of political ideologies such as communism in China, North Korea and some others. The communist ideology is hostile to religion; indeed, religion has been considered 'opium' that led people to escapism and therefore should be banned from public life.

Another historical variation emerged in the Middle East in Iraq and Syria, which adopted authoritarian-socialism based on the ideology of Baathism that in many ways was also unfriendly to religion. This inspired and drove some Muslim groups to oppose the political regimes, creating cycles of violence that are difficult to break. Opposition to these regimes continued into the 1990s when they failed to deliver their promises of better economic and social lives.

Momentum for change came when waves of globalisation (which also accelerated inequalities in Muslim-majority societies) and democratisation swept the region from the end of December 2010 onwards, creating the so-called 'Arab Spring'; sweeping not only Tunisia, Libya and Egypt in North Africa, but also Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria in West Asia. And, those who won the upper hand in the resulting

political change were the Islamists (demonstrating that Islamic forces can be democratising), even though potential dissent from authoritarian and secular elements in each country are far from over. Though varied in orientation, some of these Islamists had come to consider Islam as not incompatible with democracy.

Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and others that in one way or another adopted a friendlier attitude to religion where it was (and still is) given special status in constitutions and political realities. Despite that, religions initially tended to be sidelined in these countries during the process of modernisation in the decades following their independence post-World War II.

In Indonesia, Islam has increasingly reappeared in power politics since the early 1990s when the Soeharto regime introduced reconciliatory policies for Islam and Muslim groups many of which had been suppressed. These policies included the foundation of the All-Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Association (ICMI/Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia) with B.J. Habibie (Minister of Science and Technology in the Cabinet) as the chairperson, and permitted the foundation of Bank Muamalat, the very first Islamic bank in the country. This development continued into the post-Soeharto period, when Islamic forces have been intensively involved in political life. Yet, despite many signs of increased attachment to Islam among the people, Islamic political parties fared poorly in the successive general elections of 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019.

In China, phenomenal economic progress has resulted in many people regarding Confucianism as the spiritual base of development. At the same time, there is also a clear policy of new openness and rapprochement towards religion implemented by the Chinese government. Also, in Singapore for instance, senior government officials as well as experts have been discussing what they call 'New Confucianism' as the spirit and ethos behind their economic progress.

Together with the return of religion to private and public lives in many Asian countries, in the last two decades at least, religion has been also increasingly regarded as a problem of security. Firstly, this has a lot to do with the rise of radical and terrorist groups in some Asian countries that use, and abuse, their respective religions for their own political and religious purposes. Secondly, and related to that, is the rise of religious fundamentalism which is in one way or another condoned by the regimes in countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar or Afghanistan (under Taliban I, 1996–2001).

Religious violence and the case of Islam

Terrorism

Religious-linked terrorism or violence is clearly not unique to Islam

Religious-linked terrorism or violence is clearly not unique to Islam, although public discourse in the West tends to associate such violence with the behaviour of particular groups of extremists responsible for events such the September 11, 2001, attacks on the US, for instance, and the aftermath in

many places in the world. But one can find throughout human history a great number of terrorist acts that in one way or another are linked with different religions. With increased globalisation and the instant flow of information, the radicalisation of religious individuals and groups has tended to accelerate.

Religions with central authority seem to be less prone to violence and terrorism as opposed to (Sunni) Islam which has no central ecclesiastical authority. Religions without central authority could also become vulnerable to being co-opted by extremists, because of the decline of their religious authority and de-centering of religious authority and leadership.

Practically no religion is free from that kind of abuse by small groups of its followers. Radical groups can be easily found among Hindus in India; Buddhists in Sri-Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar; among the Shinto in Japan; Jews in Israel; Muslims in Indonesia, the southern Philippines, southern Thailand, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq; and among Christians such as the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) in north east India.

The case of Islam

The root-causes of radicalism and even terrorism among believers are very complex. In fact, there is a combination of various factors including unjust politics, economic issues such as widespread poverty and unemployment, and also internal and external religious differences that can result in bloody conflicts. In most cases, politics seems to be the most important factor. To take the cases of radicalism and terrorism perpetrated by some very small groups in the name of Islam

in Indonesia since the time of the Bali bombing in 2002 until today, it is apparent that politics, both domestic and international, is the main cause of terrorism. At the domestic level, the perpetrators of the bombings have been motivated by their anger and hatred of the Indonesian political system that they regarded as being 'un-Islamic'.

As for international politics, it is clear that even before the tragic events of September 11 in the US, the perpetrators of terrorism in the name of Islam condemned what they saw as injustice in international politics and relations. For them, the US and other Western countries are the enemies of Islam and Muslims; and Western countries, particularly the US, are hostile to Islam and the Muslim world. In fact, they believe, the US and other Western countries have conspired to destroy Islam and Muslims. The US' support of Israel at the expense of Palestine and US-led military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have only added fuel to their anger and hatred of the US and its allies.

Therefore, religion is seldom the only cause of terrorism. Political, economic, and other non-religious factors, get religious justification by perpetrators of terrorist acts.

The use, abuse, and manipulation of religious justification is perhaps potentially larger in Sunni Islam, which does not have a single body of religious authority. In the matter of leadership, Sunni Islam is of course different from Shi'i Islam such as in Iran which has a centralised leadership in the hands of the *mujtahid Mutlaq* (the absolute decider) in the body of *wilayat al-faqih* (the authority of experts in Islamic law) consisting of the most prominent *ulama* (Muslim scholars).

I believe that certain doctrines of Islam can be used and abused for justifying acts of terrorism. The doctrine of *jihad*, for instance, could easily be taken as a justification by certain Muslim individuals and groups to conduct holy war against any perceived enemies, including even Muslims. Certain verses of the Qur'an and the Tradition (*Hadith*) of the Prophet Muhammad are also prone to be interpreted in this way.

Arguably, the literal and *sharia*-oriented (*zahir*) understanding of Islam is more prone to radicalism. This kind of religious understanding is divisive even among Muslims. Those who are opposed to a sharia-oriented understanding of Islam are, in fact, regarded by others as having gone astray and, therefore, could be the target of *jihad* (war). This can be seen clearly in the cases of the Wahabis in late 18th century Arabia and the Padris of West Sumatra in the early decades of the 19th century.

The non-literal understanding of Islam, such represented by Sufism, is less prone to violence. This is mainly because of the strong emphasis Sufism puts on inclusiveness and the 'inner' (*batin*) aspect of Islam. Even though the Sufi, like the literalists, also appeal for purification through religious acts, they do it in a peaceful manner through spiritual exercises rather than by using force like the literalists.

Furthermore, the absence of a single authority in Islam—particularly among the Sunnis—makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to issue religious rulings (*fatwa*) that would decide once and for all that terrorism as *jihad* is religiously unjustifiable and invalid.

Also important is the precedent in Muslim history of radical acts that can be included in the definition of terrorism. The radical acts

perpetrated by the Kharijis (Seceders) who came into existence during the Siffin war 667 C.E. in the post-Prophet Muhammad period have inspired many, if not most, contemporary radical Muslim groups. There indeed exist certain radical ideologies among Muslims which basically believe that it is religiously valid to wage radical and terrorist acts.

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There is an urgent need, therefore, among concerned Muslim scholars (*'ulama'*) to rethink, reinterpret, and reformulate certain interpretations of classical and medieval *'ulama'* concerning *jihad*. For that purpose, the *'ulama'* and Muslim leaders must discard the defensive and apologetic attitude that is apparent when they respond to terrorist acts conducted by certain individuals or Muslim groups. They should admit that there are indeed terrorists among Muslims who—based on their own one-sided unauthoritative understanding of Islam—conduct terrorism. Admitting this problem, then the *'ulama'* could proceed to address the issue objectively from a religious point of view.

Religious-linked terrorism, such as that found in Indonesia, is not commonly associated with the state. Most radical groups are opposed to the state; they are usually non-state activists, often from obscure backgrounds. Moreover, they are, as a rule, outside of mainstream Muslim movements. In fact, they have bitterly criticised mainstream

Muslims as accommodating and compromising what they regard as 'un-Islamic' political, social, cultural, and economic realities.

There is a tendency, however, for radical individuals or groups to be recruited by or have links or connections with those in government or military. This is not new in Indonesia. The terrorist hijacking of a Garuda Indonesia airplane in Bangkok in March 1981 during the Soeharto period, for instance, was perpetrated by terrorists of ex-Islamic state movements in the 1950s that were recruited by certain Soeharto generals to launch the so-called *'komando jihad'* (*jihad* command). There have been many indications that certain military officers have incited and manipulated some radical groups in the post-Soeharto period.

Conclusion

It seems that religion in contemporary Asia will continue to be an important factor in many communities. But at the same time, religion will also continue to face many problems, not only related to society at large, but also within and among religions themselves. There will be differences and conflicts between different interpretations and schools of thought within any religion.

Violence among religious groups can also originate from their bitter response to modernisation and globalisation which they perceive as serious threats to religious belief and practices. The globalisation of instant communication and increased global travel has also contributed to the spread of transnational religious radical ideas.

Internal and external dialogues for mutual understanding and respect among religious leaders are essential. This in turn should be spread to

the faithful as a whole. Through this kind of effort, religion once again can contribute to the creation and strengthening of more harmonious and peaceful societies.

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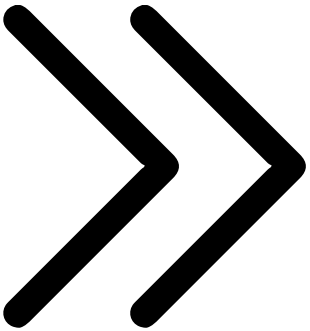
Melbourne Asia Review would like to acknowledge the passing of Azyumardi Azra and the impact of his work in the field of Islamic history and civilisation.



Learning how to say ‘you’ in Indonesian: why it’s time to embrace its complexity

Dwi Noverini Djenar

Indonesian has been claimed to be a relatively easy language to learn for native speakers of English, partly because it also uses the Roman alphabet. According to the US Department of State's Foreign Service Institute, it takes approximately 36 weeks or 900 hours to achieve 'Professional Working Proficiency' in Indonesian, compared to 'exceptionally difficult' languages such as Mandarin Chinese and Japanese, which take approximately 88 weeks or 2,200 hours to achieve a comparable level of proficiency.

Yet, there is a seemingly simple aspect of Indonesian that eludes learners: how to say 'you' to an addressee.

Like western European languages such as French, German, Spanish and Italian, Indonesian has more than one form of 'you', but unlike these languages and more akin to other languages in East Asia and Southeast Asia, it also has multiple forms for 'I' and these are not limited to pronouns. Kin terms from various Indonesian and foreign languages, titles, and names are widely employed. I will focus on the question of 'you' in Indonesian.

Deciding which 'you' form to use is not always easy for Indonesian language learners because in any given conversation, a speaker needs to consider who their addressee is in relation to them and on what kind of occasion they are speaking. The pervasive use of kin terms, titles and names in Indonesian poses a particular challenge for learners who are unfamiliar with a system that is relatively more complex than English.

In Indonesian, kin terms can be used to refer to the self ('I'), the addressee ('you') or a third party ('s/he'), depending on who speaks

and to whom. Take *kakak* 'older sibling' and *adik* 'younger sibling' for instance. The statement ***'Kakak** tahu **adik** sakit'* can be translated into English as '**I** know **you** (younger sibling) are sick', '**You** know **I** (younger sibling) am sick' or '**The older sibling** (s/he) knows that **the younger sibling** (s/he) is sick'.

Which of the translations is correct depends on whether the statement is uttered by an older sibling to their younger sibling, a younger sibling to their older sibling, or by a person who is reporting to someone that the older sibling knows their younger sibling is sick. Note that Indonesian is not unique in this instance, as a well-known study on Vietnamese by anthropologist Hy Van Luong demonstrates.

Indonesian language textbooks used in Australian schools generally mention that kin terms such as *ibu* 'mother' and *bapak* 'father' are appropriate when speaking to adults, including one's teacher. Second person pronouns *kamu* and *anda* are introduced early in teaching as terms for self-introduction and greeting. This seems simple enough as an introduction to the Indonesian speaker-addressee system, but it doesn't necessarily properly equip Indonesian language learners with skills to participate in real-life interaction with speakers of Indonesian, which is ultimately the aim of learning the language.

There seems to be a tacit assumption that dramatic simplification of the system is necessary for learners who are practicing language in the limited context that is the classroom. Such an assumption is problematic because the reality is, when learners step out of the classroom, they inevitably encounter people, face-to-face or virtually, in social roles

that are not limited to teachers and peers. And if language learning is about developing intercultural skills that enable learners to engage with speakers of the language, then a reductionist approach doesn't help in achieving this goal. Among other reasons, it engenders a false thinking that social relations expressible in Indonesian are either hierarchical (student–teacher) or flat (peers).

Why kin terms are not just about respect

To clarify the issue, it's useful to distinguish between *addressing* and *referring* to the *addressee*. In referring to the addressee, the addressee is implicated in what is said. Take the following situation for example. A teacher who saw a colleague carrying a tray of coffee while trying to open their office door, rushed to help the colleague. In return, the colleague said: 'Thanks, **you**'re so kind'. In this utterance, 'you' *refers* to the colleague, implicating the person as the one to whom the evaluative phrase 'so kind' is intended to apply.

Addressing is the act of nominating someone as the recipient of an utterance. Consider the following situation. A teacher is asking students in the class to each take a turn in reading a text. Turning to a student called Jane, the teacher said '**Jane**, **you** are next.' This utterance consists of two main parts: the proper name 'Jane' and 'you are next'. The proper name is being employed to call out the student named Jane, to draw her attention that she (and not Yukiko or Tom, for instance) is the person being spoken to or *addressed*. The pronoun 'you' in the proposition 'you are next' refers to Jane and identifies her as the person being instructed to read next.

In Australian schools, it's common for students to *address* teachers with 'Miss', 'Mrs' or 'Mr' (with or without name) and to *refer* to them with 'you'. It's in the latter that the problem arises when learners speak Indonesian. Take the simple utterance 'I gave it to **you** this morning, **Miss**.' To say this in Indonesian, the kinterm *ibu* 'mother' would be used for both the addressee reference 'you' and the address term 'Miss': *Saya sudah berikan ke **Ibu** tadi pagi*, ***Bu*** (*ibu* is commonly shortened into *bu* when used as an address term).

A common error among learners in this instance is to use the Indonesian pronoun *anda* as addressee reference instead of the kin term. I discuss below why this pronoun is unsuitable for instances such as this. Further research could help us understand whether the error is simply a result of unfamiliarity with a system that makes use of multiple forms for 'you' such as Indonesian, or it's motivated by an assumption of literal equivalence, that is, an assumption that an utterance containing a pronoun in a source language should also be rendered with a pronoun in the target language.

Anthony Liddicoat and Angela Scarino, writing about intercultural language teaching and learning, emphasise that, in language learning, languages and cultures are not separable, and learners' linguistic and cultural repertoires interact in complex ways in the process of language learning. They also highlight the point that meaning, or 'message', doesn't reside in linguistic elements alone but crucially includes elements that are not linguistically expressed but are understood through shared knowledge.

The Indonesian kin terms *ibu* 'mother' and *bapak* 'father', when used by students to address their teacher, may be functionally equivalent to English 'Miss' and 'Mister' in the school context. But these are not two sets of semantically equivalent terms. *Ibu* and *bapak*, like the English terms, indicate gender and social status, and when students use them to address their teacher, they invoke asymmetrical, student–teacher role relations. Because of this, the terms have been described in language textbooks as terms that should be used to show respect. But *ibu* and *bapak*, unlike 'Miss', 'Mrs' or 'Mister', also denote kin relations and people use them to address and refer to adult addressees in a wide range of occupations, from the president and ministers to teachers, bus drivers, food sellers, home helpers and school caretakers.

When used in the school context, *ibu* and *bapak* do not merely identify teachers as individuals of a particular gender and social status but implicate the speaker and addressee as social actors who are related to each other in a web of kin relationships, with all the associations to rights and responsibilities that such relationships are understood to entail.

Kin terms can be used to convey respect but also show feelings of familiarity and affection. As learners progress in their learning and interact more with speakers of Indonesian, they would also find that those terms are used in ways that depart from the norms, so instead of conveying respect, they may use the same kin terms to question others' actions or to make fun of them.

Given these considerations, the range of kin terms that are taught should extend well beyond those usually employed to convey respect in asymmetrical relations, to include terms learners can use to refer to addressees of different ages and social roles. Apart from enabling learners to extend their language learning beyond the classroom, gaining broader knowledge of cultural practices in which those terms are involved helps to avoid the common fallacy that *ibu* and *bapak* are only used when talking to someone older, as has been generally promoted.

Misconceptions often occur in the reductionist approach to teaching about kin terms. For example, an Indonesian teacher told her partner, who does not speak Indonesian, that her students call her *ibu*, and that the word means 'mother'. Hearing this, the partner earnestly commented: 'Your students must respect you so much that they call you 'mother'. This misconception is common among those unfamiliar with Indonesian. Some adult students continue to be uncomfortable when others in the class call them *ibu* or *bapak* as they claim it makes them feel old, even as they recognise that these terms are multivalent.

Why reductionism doesn't work

In Australia, Indonesian is taught against the background of English as the instructional language. The usual way of *referring* to the addressee in this language is by using the pronoun 'you', regardless of the speaker's or addressee's age, gender and social status.

Compared to English, Indonesian seems unwieldy because it has multiple pronouns for 'you', some are standard forms while others are used mainly in colloquial speech and informal modes of written

Compared to English, Indonesian seems unwieldy because it has multiple pronouns for 'you'

communication such as text messages and online chats. The question about which ones should be included in teaching material naturally arises. Most textbooks settle for the following pronouns: *kamu* and *anda*. A popular textbook used in Australian schools during the late 1980s through to the early 2000s gives the following description for these pronouns.

When you are speaking to somebody and want to say 'you', take care to choose the appropriate form of address.
When speaking to children, or intimate friends and relatives, use either: ***kamu*** *or* ***engkau****.*
When speaking respectfully to people of a similar age to you, and who you do not know intimately, use either: ***anda*** *or* ***saudara****.*
(all bold face and italics in the original)

There is clearly an attempt here to introduce multiple pronouns (though *saudara*, meaning 'relative', is not a pronoun, strictly speaking). However, the instructions are problematic, not least because relations between people that these pronouns are supposed to signify are reduced to just two social dimensions: age and degree of familiarity. To say nothing of the fact that parts of the instructions are simply wrong.

While *kamu* is indeed a pronoun commonly used to speak to children, among friends or relatives of a similar age, *engkau* is mainly found in novels, poetry and song lyrics. Imagining a student talking to their

peer using this poetic form, one would be forgiven for thinking they are characters in a classic novel. Similarly, it is highly unlikely that a young Indonesian speaker would use *anda* or *saudara* to speak to an unfamiliar person of a similar age or younger, regardless of situation (remember this is a textbook for high school students).

The assumption that *anda* is appropriate to use with strangers of a similar age, as the textbook suggests, is misguided and doesn't help learners develop knowledge that enables them to be competent participants in social interaction. The same textbook gives the following model conversation for *anda*. Ibu is an adult female talking to Yanti, a younger female speaker.

*Ibu: Siapakah nama **anda**? ('What's your name?')*
Yanti: Nama saya Yanti, Bu. ('My name is Yanti, Bu.')
(bold face and translation added)

Anda is a pronoun coined by technocrats in the 1950s as an attempt to have a socially neutral term that citizens of the-then newly independent nation could use to refer to each other as equals. But as anthropologist Joseph Errington observed among Javanese Indonesians he studied, speakers used this pronoun not to mark equality but to identify the addressee as anonymous or absent. Anda, as Errington remarked, has an 'impersonal character' and was commonly used in advertising. This pronoun is also widely used in journalistic interviews.

More recent textbooks may not repeat this dramatic error, but the tendency to reduce the various forms for 'you' into *kamu* and *anda* seems to persist, as can be seen in a recent free online Indonesian language

course, and also in samples of student work viewable through the Australian Curriculum website. And so, it continues to be engendered in learners that, in Indonesian, any potential addressee can be identified in stark terms, either as someone familiar (*kamu*) or socially distant (*anda*).

To be fair, it must be mentioned that the textbook from which the above examples are taken is only one among several that were used in schools at the time. However, despite variation in the description of 'you' across older textbooks, a common approach that prioritised certain forms can be found. This situation is gradually changing with more recent learning resources expanding the range of forms to include sibling terms and proper name.

Rethinking the Indonesian language textbook (and other types of learning material)

What should be done to make sure the complexities of Indonesian addressee-reference system are reflected in the learning material for this language? The present Australian Curriculum (for Languages, Years 7–8) provides useful guidance for this.

In its description for understanding language, the Australian Curriculum recognises that language use varies 'according to participants, roles and relationships, situations and cultures' and that registers shift 'according to familiarity and social position'. It is somewhat unfortunate, however, that this important point is accompanied by examples for register shifts reminiscent of the narrow focus in older texts: 'using *kamu* and *aku* for friends, and *Anda*, *Ibu/Bapak* for teachers and adults'.

Notice that the kin terms and pronouns mentioned are precisely those at issue here (with the exception of *aku* 'I', which is a first-person pronoun). Perhaps this is where the opportunity for fine-tuning lies. Rather than mentioning specific terms, the description could identify general principles that underpin interactional norms. If giving specific examples is important, perhaps consideration could be given to a wider range of terms to reflect the variety of social roles people occupy in daily life.

Textbooks could make more room for an explanation that language is used to communicate with people in varied roles, and that in any given interaction, people are likely to refer to their addressee as well as themselves. Introduction to the range of language forms available in Indonesian can follow from this. A more recent textbook currently used at several Australian universities provides an example of how this can be done succinctly. The model could be easily adapted for school texts.

Examples of interaction in which the different forms of 'you' are used are valuable in showing learners how the forms they learn in class can be applied in daily situations. Video examples from the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities produced in 2015 include exchanges in which, instead of a pronoun, a personal name is used (such as a student speaking to a fellow student, a school principal speaking to a newly arrived Indonesian student). Examples such as these could provide the basis for metapragmatic discussions to promote awareness of diversity in referring practices.

Learning materials that include model conversations between two adults familiar with each other in which they use *ibu* and *bapak*

to address and reference each other would also help learners move beyond the stereotyped model of respect. Online material for beginners Indonesian designed by the University of Victoria (Canada) provides an example that could similarly be adapted for schools.

Needless to say, these are only a few among many examples of resources that can help learners develop what scholar Claire Kramsch calls 'symbolic competence', that is, the competence to recognise that the discourses that surround people in daily life—from the media to popular culture and conversations—shape their imagination and sensibilities, and which are in turn brought to bear in the process of language learning.

Learning to say 'you' is learning to engage with others

So then, to confirm what we already know: saying 'you' in many languages involves more than simply choosing which form to use and with whom; it is about learning how social relationships are formed, maintained or broken. In the language class, these relationships have to be imagined and enacted as if real for the purposes of language exercise. Through such exercises learners are introduced to the richness of social life.

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Based on this understanding, if the number of forms that should be learned is to be reduced, then such a decision should be based on principles that recognise the diversity of language and cultural practices, as scholars of intercultural language teaching and learning have reminded us. Without such principles, the decision would risk running on the assumption that learners do not have the capacity to deal with a complex system and mistaking complexity with unnecessary difficulty.

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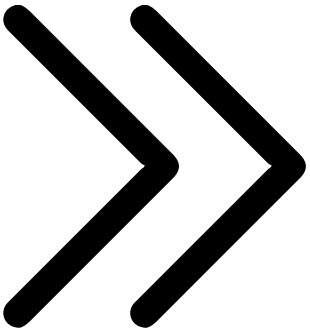

Global Arabic studies: Lessons from a transnational Asian heritage

Tarek Makhlouf

Sometime in early 2010 I was visiting my favourite bookshops in the al-Halbouni suburb of Damascus. Al-Halbouni is an Arabic bibliophile's paradise: it has dozens of bookshops door-to-door packed with books of all genres and types. Closely scanning the shelf before me, my hand went instantly for a volume with a blank spine, a good sign that it was a facsimile of a rare text printed in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. My intuition did not fail me: I had stumbled on a commentary of a classical Arabic philosophical text that was new to me. But my excitement was soon replaced by astonishment as my eyes went down the page. I stopped and stared at the two lines of Cyrillic text. The accompanying Arabic told me that this book was printed in 1901 in Kazan, in what was then the Russian Empire. I had seen texts printed in many places before; from Leipzig to Lucknow and many others in between. But this book elicited new emotions and thoughts. I felt like I had discovered a new planet, a new world yet unexplored—which prompted a question: is Arabic studies generally taught too narrowly?

Reconfiguring Arabic studies in Australia

Today, Arabic is mostly thought of as the language of the Arab world and the liturgical language of Islam. Arabic, and its literary heritage, is much more than a national or religious language: it is a classical and global cosmopolitan language with a vibrant culture that spans a millennium. It is a language that gives access to a treasure-trove of literature, culture, and philosophical learning. From Nanjing to Lisbon, Kazan to Cape Town, and Manila to Edinburgh, the Arabic language and its modes of thought continue to shape the world as we know it today. The wide geographic spread of Arabic and its complex interactions with different

Asian cultures challenge us to think of Arabic studies differently. To think of Arabic's many engagements and interconnections beyond the Arab world is to engage in an interdisciplinary and transnational study of much of Afro-Eurasia.

In the following lines, I'll trace how Arabic spread over Asia. Similar or longer articles can be written for each of Africa and Europe. While each brief account could itself be the basis of a lengthy study, my purpose here is to speak to the significance of the sum total of these accounts. The bottom line is that Arabic has significantly influenced, and continues to influence, Asia; and Arabic culture forms the substratum of a large part of Southeast Asian and South Asian culture. Arabic and Asian studies programs should be redesigned to make this cultural sphere more accessible to a new generation of students.

The beginning of Arabic

Arabic began as the language of the inhabitants of the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula at least two thousand years ago. The Arabs were politically insignificant on the world stage and therefore there was not much interest in their language.

Some Arabs were sedentary and others semi-nomadic. The western region along the Red Sea (the Hijaz) was on an ancient trade route between India (via Yemen) and Damascus. The Arabs prided themselves on their poetry.

Islam forever changed the fate of Arabic, transforming it from the language of a people to the language of a religion and many empires

They used poetry to speak of love and betrayal and to call their tribe to arms or lampoon their enemies.

Islam forever changed the fate of Arabic, transforming it from the language of a people to the language of a religion and many empires. In 610 in the city of Mecca, the Arabian hub of the Hijaz trade route, the Prophet Muhammad began receiving a revelation from Allah known as the Qur'an. The message of the Qur'an was to shun idolatry and adhere to monotheism, and that Muhammad was the last in the line of series of prophets sent by God to guide humanity. The Qur'an was regarded as the verbatim word of God, and this religious weight was the historical foundation of Arabic's power.

The early expansion of Arabic

A series of socio-political events ensured that Arabic would not be confined to a ritualistic language of scripture. The Arabic language's ascendancy was buttressed by three developments that occurred mainly in the eighth century: the explication of Arabic's grammar and refinement of its orthography, the use of Arabic as an imperial language, and the adoption of a new technology: paper.

The initial impetus for the development of Arabic grammar was the worry that Arabic would be lost. After the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 the Arabs increasingly lived in multi-lingual societies. All languages change with time, a process probably accelerated by contact with new languages. The Prophet's companions perceived a change in their own language and within decades after his death they began a concerted effort to preserve the type of Arabic that was in the idiom

of the Qur'an. The poetry of the Arabs was recorded, and data was elicited from native speakers. Furious debates about the validity of data and the methods of rule formation were part of a vibrant intellectual community. This linguistic work reached its apex in the grammatical treatise known simply as al-Kitab (literally 'the book') of Sibawayh (d. c. 796). The *Kitab* is a full explication of Arabic grammar, thoroughly referenced and replete with evidentiary quotes to substantiate its claims. In tandem with the need to preserve Arabic, the need to better understand the Qur'an motivated Muslims to closely scrutinise the mechanics of Arabic. More specifically, the Qur'an brought attention to its language by challenging the Arabs, a nation of poets, to match its eloquence. The need to understand the Qur'an's inimitability (a seemingly paradoxical quest) propelled scholars to make wonderful strides in the study of Arabic grammar, rhetoric, and literature. These works are still read and appreciated today, the contents of which are significant for world history, linguistics, and Islamic jurisprudence. During this time the Arabic script underwent a series of small yet significant changes. Different sounds using the same letter were differentiated by dots, short vowels were made explicit using small symbols, and spelling was standardised.

A second development occurred when Arabic assumed a political role. The Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (d. 705) decreed that Arabic would become the official language of the empire, replacing the other administrative languages: the Greek of the Byzantine Empire and Middle Persian of the Sassanid Empire. The use of Arabic in the bureaucracy meant that many scribes had to be trained, spawning a genre

of writing manuals that uncannily resemble our own. Arabic also became publicly visible: it was minted on coins and inscribed on buildings.

A third development formed the backbone of Arabic's proliferation: Muslims imported the technique of paper-making from China. Prior to this the main materials used for writing were either papyrus or parchment. Papyrus, made by smashing the reeds of the papyrus plant together, was cheap to make, but not very durable. Parchment, created from the prepared skins of animals, was durable, but expensive. Paper, made then out of cotton or linen (and not wood), balanced cost with durability.

By the beginning of the ninth century Arabic was ready to be used widely: its grammar was sufficiently well documented and therefore could be learned, it was backed by an empire and a network of patrons, and could be distributed in a relatively cheap manner on paper. Arabic travelled wherever Muslims went—bringing with it its script and literary canon. It cruised around the Mediterranean, traversed the silk roads, sailed around the Indian Ocean and crossed the Sahara.

Arabic in the Arab world

At the time of the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Arabic language was only spoken in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula and the Syrian desert. By the middle of the eighth century the Islamic empire had spread from the Iberian Peninsula (in modern day Spain) to the Sindh (in modern day Pakistan). While Islam was the religion of the governing class and Arabic the language of administration, Islam and Arabic were not immediately adopted by the population. It took several centuries before Arabic became the dominant language in southern

Arabia, the Levant, Egypt and North Africa—regions that are today thought of as squarely within the Arab world. This Islamisation and Arabisation also occurred unevenly; rural areas took much longer to Arabise. Certainly, the draw to Arabic for any Muslim was inescapable; it was the only language that could assure spiritual and material benefits.

Different languages in the region had different fates. Arabic slowly eclipsed Syriac (a type of Aramaic) which was the dominant language before Islam in the Levant. Languages related to Syriac (known as neo-Aramaic) are still spoken in pockets in Syria and Iraq and the diasporas of these communities. Syriac is still the language of many eastern Churches. Arabic never became dominant in the Kurdish and Persian speaking areas, despite their proximity to the Arabian Peninsula, but Arabic did take hold throughout North Africa and even in al-Andalus (Islamic Spain and Portugal). More to the point, a handful of South Arabian languages are still spoken in the region between Yemen and Oman and pre-date Arabic's arrival in this region. Factors such as the immigration of Arabs, the lack of local patrons for non-Arabic languages, and attitudes towards the languages of conquerors all played a part in Arabisation.

In the ninth and tenth centuries many Muslims, mainly Persian, participated in the *shu'ubiyya* movement protesting the privileged position of Arabs within Muslim society. Arabs would inevitably have unequal power in a society that privileged Arabic for political power. The position of *shu'ubiyya* protesters was nuanced: Arabic was resisted as a marker of religious superiority and political hegemony, but welcomed as a language

of religion, culture, and science. Counterintuitively, the *shu'ubiyya* movement, amongst other factors, inevitably lead to Arabic language and culture spreader farther and wider, a point to which I will return.

Arabic literary culture

By the ninth century the majority of those writing in Arabic were ethnically non-Arab. Arabic became the new site of world culture. The Nestorian Christians translated Hellenistic learning to Arabic (mostly via Syriac translations): the great philosophers of Athens (especially Aristotle) and the learning of Alexandria: the medicine of Galen, the mathematics of Euclid, and the astronomy of Ptolemy. The Persians brought their Middle Persian learning which often contained Sanskrit knowledge. One of the earliest great works of Arabic prose was *Kalila wa-Dimna*, translated from Middle Persian by Ibn al-Muqaffa (d. 759) and ultimately came from the Sanskrit *Panchatantra* ('five treatises')—a book of animal fables to teach virtues. In the following centuries the cultural and scientific knowledge held in Greek, Coptic, Ge'ez, Persian, Sanskrit, and many other languages flooded into Arabic making it a truly cosmopolitan language—not to mention the sizable religious literature that was written as Arabic became the lingua franca of the Islamic world.

Each ethnic and religious group had a unique relationship with Arabic. For example, Syriac Christians wrote Arabic in the Syriac script which they called Garshuni, and the Jews wrote Arabic in the Hebrew script, today known as Judeo-Arabic. Any speaker of Arabic can read these texts today if they spend a few hours understanding how the

Syriac and Hebrew scripts were employed in writing Arabic. Arabic was a melting pot of cultures and languages. It was the language everyone wanted to read and in which everyone wanted to be read.

Persian: A model for adopting and adapting Arabic

The tenth century ushered in a new literary renaissance for the Persian language. In the centuries following Islamic conquest in the seventh century, Arabic largely displaced Middle Persian (Pahlavi) as the literary language. The Abbasid Caliphate, centred in Baghdad, nominally ruled the whole Empire, but by the ninth century its various regions became essentially autonomous, effectively ruled by their governors. A number of these emirates in the western Iranian lands began to patronise Persian literary production in addition to their substantial patronage of Arabic science and literature. In this cosmopolitan milieu, the Persian literati fashioned a connoisseur's language: new Persian. New Persian was a mixture of various Middle Persian languages heavily infused with Arabic vocabulary and idioms. New Persian adopted the Arabic script, modifying several letters to accommodate sounds not in Arabic, giving birth to the Perso-Arabic script. A clear division of labour formed within these Persian dynasties of the tenth century: Arabic was largely used for scientific and religious purposes and Persian was the court language and the main language of literature. A key proponent of this new cultural model was the Samanid Empire, centred in Samarkand and later in Bukhara.

The Persian model of adopting and adapting Arabic idioms, motifs, vocabulary and script was a watershed moment. Firstly, it provided other languages with a model to localise Arabic language, literature,

and script (such as Pashto, Uyghur, Turkic, Urdu and many others). Secondly, and more significantly, it became the prism through which the rest of mainland Asia experiences Arabic. This hybrid Arabo-Persian culture became the subsequent foundation of what is known as the Persianate world. This is a defining quality of the spread of Arabic culture throughout mainland Asia which contrasts with the spread of Arabic in Africa and southern Europe.

Central Asia and the Turco-Mongol world

In between forging a new cultural formation, the Samanids found time to convert Turkic peoples in central Asia to Islam. By the end of the tenth century the Turkic Ghaznavids had overthrown the Samanids. Unbeknownst to them, the Samanids had set into motion a second socio-political force that would last a thousand years: the Turco-Mongol peoples became the major political force amongst Muslims in mainland Asia. While it was their military acumen that secured their political superiority, they became connoisseurs and patrons of the Arabo-Persian culture that they encountered. Turkic was added as a language for military and administrative matters, yielding a tripartite linguistic model that endured in certain places in Asia until the twentieth century. Today we associate Turkish with modern day Turkey, however the various Turkic peoples and their associated languages originate from central Asia. Needless to say, these Turkic languages were heavily influenced by Arabic and Persian. What followed was a series of Turkic and Mongol empires that spread Arabo-Persian culture from Eastern Europe to China and Korea. Some of the more famous ones include the Seljuks (eleventh-twelfth) the Ottomans (fourteenth-twentieth), the

Il-Khanates (thirteenth–fourteenth), and the Timurids (fourteenth–sixteenth). The spread of Islam in the tenth century through the Caucasus and up the Volga river to the Volga Tatars, a Turkic people, is another instance of this. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Kazan became a publishing powerhouse, producing books in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic languages, demonstrating just how long the tripartite model endured.

The purpose of discussing the Persian and Turkic languages here is threefold. The first is that wherever Persian went, Arabic was present as scientific and religious language. In many of these regions around Asia today only Arabic remains (because it is the language of Islam and the lingua franca of Muslims). Secondly, given that nearly every author who wrote in Persian also knew Arabic, and that Persian is infused with Arabic words and ideas, places Persian squarely within the cultural influence of Arabic. Thirdly, and most importantly, we do not need to limit Arabic studies to regions or texts that are exclusively Arabic. Some of the most fruitful research is to trace the intermingling of literature and idioms and the shift between languages which created a kaleidoscope of cultures. This mixing and hybridisation of culture is the crux of the flow of Arabic throughout Asia.

South Asia

The region that today forms Pakistan and northern India came under the sway of Arabic and Persian culture from the eleventh century. The height of this hybrid culture was achieved under the Mughals, a Turkic people who had adopted the Persianate culture and who ruled the region

from the sixteenth century. Persian remained the court language until the nineteenth century. The sixteenth century onwards saw the rise of Urdu, but that is another discussion all together. Acclaimed scholar of India, Richard M. Eaton, adeptly discusses some of these topics with incredible sensitivity in his recent book *India in the Persianate Age: 1000-1765*. Within the Mughal empire, Arabic remained a scientific and religious language. In the nineteenth century many Arabic and Persian texts were printed in India; in Calcutta, Lucknow, Delhi and other places—demonstrating the continued vitality and currency that these languages had. Of the languages and cultures influenced by Arabic and Persian in the south of India I would like to single out Arwi, a dialect of Tamil written in a Perso-Arabic script with loanwords from Arabic. Arwi was widely used by Muslims in the southern tip of India and Sri Lanka to write poetry and literature as well as for religious purposes.

China

By the eighth century Arab and Persian Muslim traders had started settling in China in larger numbers. The Mongols of the Yuan Dynasty in China (thirteenth–fourteenth centuries) were partial to Muslims and many central Asian scholars, fluent in Arabic and Persian, found their way into the Chinese court. In the fourteenth century Muslims in China had developed Xiao'erjing, a system of writing Sinitic languages in Arabic characters. This system is still used among Chinese Muslims today. Traditional Muslim scholars in China are trained in Arabic and Persian to access a range of classical texts. One of the most astonishing intellectual and literary projects in Islamic history is a collection of works known as the *Han Kitab*. The name of this body work is itself a

symbol of a hybrid culture: 'Han' the Chinese word for Chinese, and 'Kitab', the Arabic word for book. The project began in the seventeenth century in the Qing dynasty when Wang Daiyu, a master of Arabic, Persian, and Chinese, studied Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism intensively after having mastered the Islamic disciplines. Wang chose to use Chinese words instead of Arabic or Persian ones, giving his works a distinctive Chinese flavour.

Southeast Asia

Islam spread to Southeast Asia via South Asian and Yemeni contact. This direct link with the Arabian Peninsula has meant that unlike mainland Asia, Persianate culture is not prevalent in Southeast Asia. The Malay language was written in the Jawi script, the earliest surviving witness is the Terengganu Inscription Stone (*Batu Bersurat Terengganu*) dated to 1303. Jawi was used to write many other languages across Southeast Asia including Tausug in the Philippines. The Javanese, Madurese, and Sundanese languages were also on occasion written in an Arabic script known as Pegon. Ronit Ricci of the Australian National University gives a peak into this world in her book *Islam Translated: Literature, conversion and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia*.

Towards global Arabic studies

The Arabic book printed in Kazan that I found in Damascus was a catalyst for me to reconsider Arabic studies. The role of Arabic in Africa, Europe, and Asia and the role of Persian across Asia is established in the academic literature, but is not yet common knowledge in the wider academic community. Arabic is not a single star, but a constellation.

Arabic is not a single star, but a constellation.

The various modern nation states and borders might obscure the broader influence of Arabic, but we neglect these transcultural and intercultural aspects to our own detriment.

With this in mind, Arabic studies in Australia can be redesigned to study not just the Arabic world, but also the influence and perfusion of the Arabic language, culture, script, and literature through Asia. In this way Arabic studies can be truly transnational - tracing the complex interactions that the Arabic traditions had in different regions, and the dynamic exchange it had with other literary cultures such as Persian, Sanskrit, and Chinese.

The flux, confluence, and divergence of these cultures is politically and culturally significant to the fabric of the Asian society today. To think of Arabic studies this way is to make Arabic studies pluricentric. It does not privilege an assumed centre over areas that are presumed peripheral, and it places hybridity and interaction centre-stage. Subjects that look at Arabic through the Silk Road or Indian Ocean trade routes could help achieve this aim. Similarly, subjects that include Arabic texts, or texts influenced by the Arabic sphere, in Asia while studying the various cultural contexts of their production would be interesting and lively. Teaching Arabic studies in this way in our universities will certainly make Arabic studies more vibrant and relevant to students. It may even help us restore a way of thinking and being that we have lost in an age where we find ourselves oscillating between hyper-nationalism and hyper-globalisation.

The author has abstained from using diacritics to improve readability.

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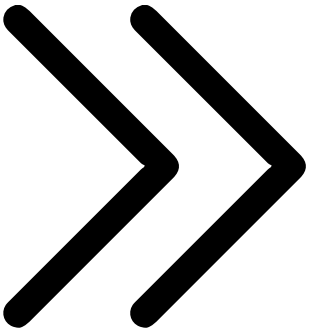

Australia and Southeast Asia: Australia needs a new plan

Richard Robison

Australia's recently announced Defence Strategic Review promises more of the same in the nation's defence and strategic thinking. This is concerning when we consider the urgent need for a substantial reconsideration of Australia's relations with Southeast Asia.

Great expectations

Successive Australian governments have built their policies towards Southeast Asia on the assumption of a special relationship with governments in the region. This was not an unreasonable view given the alliances forged in the Cold War when the US (and Australia) played a key role in propping up conservative regimes facing the threats of revolution and reform.

While the circumstances have changed, Australian policy makers continue to see these real or imagined relationships as the keys to our foreign policy interests in Southeast Asia. As the region has become one of increasingly critical strategic and economic importance, the Australian Government's Foreign Policy White Paper of 2017 (its most recent), has called for deepening engagement by 'pursuing shared interests' with its governments and 'demonstrating our enduring ties' to the countries of Southeast Asia.

Underlying these strategies is the view that these governments can be bulwarks against the spreading power and influence of China on our northern approaches and the keys to stability and social cohesion within the region. They can open the door for Australia in the scramble for its emerging and potentially lucrative markets. All that is needed, it seems, is to mobilise them within a raft of security and defence partnerships and economic and trade agreements.

In other areas, too, the White Paper argued that cooperation with Southeast Asian partners can address the spread of 'terrorism and extremist ideas' and the 'growing transnational challenges such as crime and people smuggling.' Almost as an afterthought it added that development partnerships can enable 'effective programs to promote economic reform and inclusive growth, reduce poverty and address inequality.'

What went wrong?

While the White Paper painted a picture of a region of stability and prosperity, it is in reality one of increasing unrest and conflict. Military coups in Myanmar and Thailand have overthrown democratic governments while Cambodia's one-party government rules by unleashing its security forces against opponents and critics. In the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, oligarchy increasingly erodes the authority of public institutions and corruption fuels popular resentment in civil society. It is also clear that the governments across the region, despite their caution, are not going to throw their weight behind Australia's deep concerns over China's growing economic and strategic power and influence and are unwilling to embrace the US-led strategic alliance.

Contrary to expectations, Australian economic activity in the region remains at stubbornly low levels, despite the growing number of investment and trade agreements. It is confined largely to mining and energy. And while cooperation on matters of governance and regulation has been successful in important instances, problems of trafficking in peoples, drugs and wildlife, land grabbing, money laundering and environmental destruction remain endemic. Australia seems unable even

There is a feeling among many Australian analysts that Southeast Asia has drifted away from us

to convince its closest neighbour, Indonesia, to contain illegal fishing in Australian waters.

There is a feeling among many Australian analysts that Southeast Asia has drifted away from us. They see this as a problem of policy or institutional failure on Australia's part and the need to learn how to 'get it right' in Southeast Asia, in part by accepting the 'Asian way' of doing things.

For some analysts, the problems are ultimately about cultural misunderstandings on Australia's part that require better understanding and knowledge of Asia. This comes dangerously close to the arguments of Singaporean commentator, Kishore Mahbubani, that the difficulties must be understood in terms of a civilisational clash between the liberalism of a declining West and the resurgence of 'Asia Values' in a newly assertive Asia.

This broad approach is echoed in a seemingly upbeat report by the Business Council of Australia and the Asia Society Australia in 2021. It argues that COVID-19 may give Australia 'a second chance to get Asia right,' learning how to 'play and win in Asia' by better understanding the complexities of Asian markets and the 'Asian Way' of doing business. It pleads with government to provide business with information to help 'tell its story well through its new national brand' with the help of 'hands-on business-focused inputs' through a new national business advisory group.

In his recent analysis in Australian Foreign Affairs, prominent foreign affairs analyst, Allen Gyngell sees the problem mainly in terms of the strategies and tactics of diplomatic activity. He agrees that liberalism can never be the basis of Australia's relations with the region but sees the prospect of agreement on principles opening the door for a 'new statecraft' that can make up for a period of neglect where Australia's attention was drawn away from Southeast Asia to the Middle East and to the priorities of its US alliance. For Gyngell, this 'new statecraft' will extend an existing framework of defence and security agreements and economic and trade arrangements as well as its informal 'people to people' networks.

Ultimately, though, there is nothing new in this vision of a 'new statecraft.' It does not challenge the principles of Australia's present strategy of engagement with Southeast Asia as much as asking for more and better versions of the same.

But there are no easy policy or institutional fixes or cultural solutions to Australia's seemingly faltering engagement with the region. We cannot escape problems through diplomatic hyperactivity or better marketing of 'brand Australia'. These ignore the systemic factors rooted in the very structures of the region's political systems and its economies and societies and in Australia itself.

At one level, both Alan Gyngell and Kishore Mahbubani have recognised that Southeast Asia's different place in the geopolitical landscape provide logical reasons for its governments to adopt a more cautious and conciliatory approach to China and to embrace some of the economic and trade ties on offer.

But we cannot understand the dynamics of the relationships between Australia and Southeast Asia when we see governments as undifferentiated entities. Missing from the debate is an understanding of the complex forces and interests that shape their policies, and which make engagement a volatile and highly contingent proposition. Also missing is any recognition that Australia's policy towards the region and the very notions of 'national interest' and 'shared values' are the proxies of bitter struggles over power and ideas within Australia itself.

Can we 'dance with dictators'?

These realities were brought to the surface during the ASEAN Leaders Meeting in Sydney in March 2018 when the Australian public came face to face with some of the political leaders of the region, including those involved in military coups and repression of civil rights. This raised questions about what Australia can expect from alliances with such leaders and their governments.

To strangle a quote from China's former President, Deng Xiaoping, does it matter if the cat is democratic or authoritarian so long as it catches the mouse?

The answers to these questions depended upon what contending interests within Australia want from the relationships. The 2017 White Paper presented a confusing and sometimes contradictory array of objectives. Some are focused on security, some on access to markets and others on 'good governance' and even programs of 'economic reform and inclusive growth' that would 'reduce poverty and address inequality'.

For Elaine Pearson, the Director of Human Rights Watch Australia, issues of human rights and social justice were priorities. She proposed that Australia should stop 'dancing with dictators' and end military assistance and cooperation with political leaders who presided over 'horrific human rights abuses across the region.' She argued that Australia should consider matters of human rights and social justice in framing relations with the governments of Southeast Asia rather than just focusing on questions of security, terrorism, and trade.

There was little enthusiasm for such proposals amongst Australia's policy makers. As former Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, had boasted in 2016, he was right never to allow 'moral posturing' (we must assume this to include taking stands on such issues as honest government, human rights, or social justice) to threaten Australia's national security interests.

Abbott's position was bolstered by the growing influence of security and defence interests in framing Australia's foreign policy. Incubated in the disastrous interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and fuelled by the spectre of Islamist insurgency in Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia and the spreading power of China in the region, Australian foreign policy shifted towards the idea that all problems (including Southeast Asia) are security problems. In a shift back to the discourses of the Cold War it focused increasingly on what it saw as achievable security objectives rather than what former Army Chief, Peter Leahy described in the *Australian Financial Review* of 10–11 July, 2021, as 'unrealistic forays into social reform and nation building.'

Neoliberal ideas have been a second pillar of Australia's Southeast Asian policies. Following the lead of the US and the World Bank, Australian policy aimed at transforming the economies of the region through market reforms and by dismantling the old state dominated economies, building prosperity and in the process opening them to Western investors and financial markets.

Even before Milton Friedman proclaimed a natural 'fit' between 'free markets,' and dictatorship in an alliance with Pinochet in Chile, Australian policy makers saw the Soeharto government in Indonesia and his technocrat policy makers as the natural vehicles for market reform through the 1970s and 1980s.

For neoliberals, authoritarian governments could most effectively impose supply side market policies, including fiscal austerity, privatisation of public institutions and functions, deregulation of markets and ending of protective policies. They had the power to clear away the vested interests and distributional coalitions in a way that democratic regimes could not. Public Choice libertarians like Ayn Rand, Peter Thiele (popular in libertarian circles in Australia and in the CEO community), and even Friedrich Hayek himself were sceptical of democracy's ability to deliver and to protect markets.

The same ideas persist today. Writing in the *Australian Financial Review* of Tuesday, 9 August, 2022, Peter Drysdale, an influential figure in Australia's Asia policy circles, saw no contradiction in urging India's Prime Minister, Nahendra Modi, who he describes as possessing 'a brilliance perhaps unequalled among the World's top leaders today' to

entrench India's global competitiveness by cutting its trade barriers and opening itself to international competition, shedding the baggage of state-backed vested interests .... and other regulatory burdens.

But the benefits that might come from 'dancing with dictators' were often not what they initially seemed. As the US discovered from its foreign policies in Central America, and the Middle East over more than a century, authoritarian allies did not bring political order but more often fuelled endless social unrest and political violence, hollowing out the political centre and crushing or co-opting the institutions of civil society.

Neoliberals also confronted unexpected consequences. Just as the imposition of market 'shock therapy' most famously set loose unconstrained rentier capitalism and oligarchy in Russia and in Iraq under Paul Bremer, the same pattern is widespread in Southeast Asia. Deregulation and privatisation of banking systems, for example, transferred public assets into private hands and opened the door for the plunder of the financial sector by large conglomerates. Property laws enabled vast transfers of land into the hands of large corporate agricultural enterprises and forestry companies.

As the liberal idea of a benign state descended into the reality of oligarchy where states are predatory and politicians and officials deal in the currency of rents and privileges, it became difficult to explain who might drive the reform process. In Indonesia, for example, it was the elected parliamentary members and the police themselves who led successful attempts to dismantle its high-profile Anti-Corruption Commission.

Belated attempts to limit the damage done by out-of-control rentier capitalism, bad governance, and money politics by policies aimed at building good governance have largely failed. The deepening grip of oligarchy on the politics of Southeast Asia has put a lie to hopes that 'free markets' could be achieved through alliance with technocrats floating above the vested interests of politics. There are few signs of self-reflection from the advocates of the security approach. The reluctant withdrawal of support for the military in Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia, has been less a recognition that such policies were a profound mistake than they were, especially in the case of Myanmar, a rush for the exit when the brutality of these regimes towards their own populations began streaming to world audiences on media platforms.

Changing the Australian model

As Alan Gyngell has observed, Australia is not rich or powerful enough to enforce change in the region. He suggests a strategy of 'persuasion' and appeals to mutual interest, something like Joseph Nye's idea of 'soft power.'

If it is this difficult, is Australia seeking engagement for engagement's sake? More important, though, whose 'mutual interests' are we talking about? What does it really mean for Australia to focus its defence partnership with Southeast Asia on policies directed towards what Gyngell suggests are, 'our mutual needs to maintain an autonomous security capability in the region'? Military cooperation based on supposed mutual interest is especially dangerous when the military across much of the region acts more as a political and security force, protecting ruling interests from the demands of reformers rather than a defence force in normally accepted terms.

Support for military forces in Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand might be examples of mutually agreeable cooperation in defence and security, but they also show the dangers. Claimed by Australian military and defence spokespersons, either naively or disingenuously, as a means of introducing 'professionalism', human rights and democratic values, these ultimately became, unsurprisingly, the very forces that overthrew democratic governments and provided the muscle for ongoing repression.

In the Philippines, Australian military support in helping to bail out a dysfunctional and inept government floundering in the face of an Islamist insurgency may have been little more than another temporary prop for a system of oligarchy that has fuelled political unrest, inequality, and insurrection for over a century.

While the security model might seem to be a disaster it is a model that works for its beneficiaries in the Department of Home Affairs, the Department of Defence and its security agencies that now spill over the normal bounds of 'security' into a broader 'security state.' It is also embedded in a growing body of laws that extend the security agenda across the public bureaucracy and into civil society more broadly, including its educational and media institutions.

It works also as a foundation for a conservative political ascendancy that has extended from the Cold War to the more recent eras of conservative politics under former Prime Ministers Howard, Abbott and Morrison. The rhetoric of 'Keeping Australia Safe' with its fears of terrorism and Chinese expansion and the need for a public perception of

ongoing emergency, including in our foreign relations, is embedded in the culture wars that have been electoral winners.

The same problems emerge when we consider the need to address Australia's problematic economic relations with the region.

There is no doubt that Southeast Asia is a difficult place to do business when it is so thoroughly controlled through access to political gatekeepers. But the problems also lie in Australia itself. The Business Council's Report, 'A Second Chance', notes that economic engagement is constrained when we cannot offer much beyond mining and energy or beef cattle or when the bulk of our engagement with the region is with Singapore. It expressed hope that COVID-19 will force Australia to diversify its economy and look for different sources of growth as the world's centre of economic and political gravity shifts further towards Asia.

But any shift to an innovative industry policy will confront the ideas of neoliberal orthodoxy and its central principle of free trade and the political alliance of conservative politics and the fossil fuel economy.

In other words, providing a list of suggestions for future policy directions in Australia means little where there are few means of politically enforcing them.

This is also the case when we consider the prospect for a return to a 'development' approach. Gyngell raises this prospect, noting the continuing problems of poverty in Southeast Asia. He suggests ramping

up cooperation in areas such as health, climate change, renewable energy, technical assistance, and vocational education. There is no doubt this could be hugely popular among the region's burgeoning middle classes and strengthen beleaguered civil societies and social movements.

... reform of our relations with Southeast Asia requires fundamental change in the political interests driving the Southeast Asian agenda within Australia

But such an agenda, with its redistributive implications, is not a priority for the most powerful interests in the region. And it flies in the face of the view among Australian foreign policy makers that Southeast Asia is a security problem or a market problem rather than a social or political problem.

In other words, reform of our relations with Southeast Asia requires fundamental change in the political interests driving the Southeast Asian agenda within Australia.

Ultimately, a reform of Australia's approach to Southeast Asia will depend on whether the new government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese can fundamentally shift policy and ideology in Australia itself. Can it shift the way policy makers see things, from immigration to education and workplace relations, from being threats and risks or simply market opportunities to being potential elements in building social cohesion and economic prosperity?

At one level the signs are not promising. The new government remains tied to the US alliance and is fearful of being wedged on security issues, especially in relation to China. To the surprise of many it has left the Orwellian Department of Home Affairs relatively intact and most of its highly conservative apparatchiks in place.[1]

There are few signs that education is understood outside the old market and 'shovel ready' epithets of previous governments as a key strategic and social resource and one that can build Australia's presence and prestige in Southeast Asia.

It is also wary of exiting the grip of the fossil fuel sector at a time when the prospect of a global energy crisis is imminent and when revenues from this sector are essential given the huge fiscal deficits the new government faces.

There are some brighter prospects. Spurred by the realities of supply chain vulnerabilities exposed during the COVID pandemic there are signs of an intent to diversify the economy and to help advance technology and research. Industry and Science Minister, Ed Husic, for example, pledged investment in tech and manufacturing in a $15 billion National Reconstruction Fund. He stressed the need to keep Australia's research innovation from simply being shipped overseas.

Ultimately, the test is whether the new government can realistically adjust what it expects to gain from 'dancing with dictators' and redefine

1 It is also interesting to note important links between the security industry and libertarian conservative institutions and ideas. No less than the head of the Office of National Intelligence, Andrew Shearer, publishes his foreign policy thoughts with the libertarian think tank and fossil fuel lobby, The Institute of Public Affairs.

engagement with the region from one that is essentially an alliance between conservative ideas and interests in both Southeast Asia and Australia to one that sees a prospect of common interest and values in more progressive terms.

It must also realise that we can strengthen our prestige and our authority by making sure we can make claim to the ethical standards of social justice, human rights and environmental responsibility we often use as criticisms of governments elsewhere.

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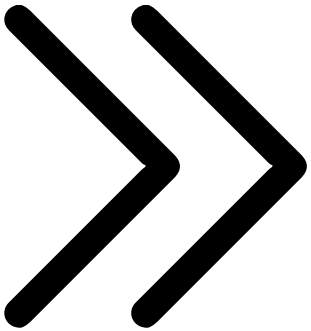

INTERVIEW: From a public health crisis to a ‘police state’: China during and beyond COVID-19

with Murong Xuecun

Murong Xuecun is the *nom de plume* of an exiled Chinese writer most well-known for his outspoken defence of freedom of expression and criticism of the Chinese Communist Party.

He wrote his book *Deadly Quiet City: Stories From Wuhan, COVID Ground Zero*, after covertly travelling to the epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak Wuhan in April 2020 and interviewing ordinary people about their experiences in the locked-down city of 11 million people.

The book was published in March 2022 and has attracted international attention. As China continues its policy of 'zero-COVID' he spoke with *Melbourne Asia Review* (the interviewer wishes to remain anonymous).

Based on your visit to Wuhan in 2020, during the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak, could you give us a sense of what the lockdown in Wuhan was like and the impact it had?

I got to Wuhan on April 6, 2020, two days before the lifting of the lockdown. By the time I arrived, the lockdown in Wuhan wasn't really that strict anymore. People were out and about on the street. They were lining up out the front of vendors' booths for snacks, enjoying themselves by the river. You could see young people about who had recently moved out of home. Everyone wore a face mask, but the masks weren't concealing very many smiles.

Honestly, Wuhan's lockdown was far more serious than what I witnessed at the very end there.

When coronavirus was at its worst in February, Wuhan's lockdown policy was very strict. If you want to get an idea of what it might have been like, you can take Shanghai as a reference point [referring to the surge in COVID-19 cases in Shanghai in March 2022 and the citywide lockdown that followed soon after]. In Wuhan, residents weren't allowed to leave their own neighbourhood community. They couldn't even leave the front door of their homes. Every neighbourhood community had people guarding the gates. Cars and other private vehicles weren't allowed to leave. The streets were completely empty. It was a ghost town.

China has completely and unequivocally become a police state

Could you draw on a couple of examples from your book to give us an idea of what sort of impact citywide lockdowns had on people?

An example would be Jin Feng [one of the main people in the book]. She's a cleaner at the Central Hospital of Wuhan. She got coronavirus and passed it to her husband. Because their neighbourhood community was locked down, they couldn't go to the hospital on their own. Their names had to be recorded and reported to the neighbourhood community staff. But because of a tiny mistake—that neighbourhood community left their names out of the record—they couldn't go to the hospital. Her husband's condition was at crisis point. He was coughing up blood. He was

terribly weak. But they simply couldn't go to the hospital. This 61-year-old woman ran down to the gates of the community, threw herself on her knees, crying and yelling, pleading with the neighbourhood community staff to take her husband to the hospital. But what she got instead is one staff member after another shirking their responsibility, even having a go at her. In the end, the neighbourhood community finally sends for a car. But the car didn't take her critically ill husband to the hospital; rather it took him off to a quarantine facility. Then, this woman, who is suffering herself from serious illness, draws on everything she's got to find a way out for her husband. She called innumerable people. At long last, they admitted her husband to hospital. But it's too late, and before long, she lost her husband.

There are many of these types of cases. People who find themselves in these sorts of circumstances, especially those who have been infected with coronavirus and are critically ill while living under these incredibly strict neighbourhood community lockdowns, don't have their voices heard. Sometimes the only thing they can do is to lie there and wait to die.

Another example in my book is the doctor [another main people in the book]. When he is stationed at the quarantine facility as the supervising doctor, he encountered a similar situation: A patient experienced an allergic reaction to medication. Their throat began to swell and ache. They couldn't breathe. When the doctor saw this, he went straight to the facility's leaders to report the case, telling them they needed to send for a car and get this patient to the hospital.

The hospital was very, very close to where they were; about a 10-minute drive away. This was also a serious situation, and if the patient didn't get to the hospital in time, they might suffocate and die. But not one of the leaders at the quarantine facility, nor their leaders, dared to take responsibility for the case. So, this doctor continued to write report after report. A handwritten report is not permitted, so he had to type it up and print it out. Then it must be processed at each and every level of administration for feedback. From the first to the second, and then to the third and fourth stage … the application travelled through innumerable levels of leaders. When it got to the final stage, the leaders told the doctor that they had experienced these situations before and knew how to handle it: the doctor makes the diagnosis, and the leader on shift will decide how to handle the situation.

To put it another way, all these applications were a waste of time. Applications going around and around in circles, only to return to where they had started. The doctor became angry beyond bearing, so he went on his Weibo [Chinese Twitter] and laments. In the eyes of a doctor, human life is precious, but in the eyes of the government, people are just pawns.

We're talking about a super powerful and extremely efficient oppressive system, which has no regard whatsoever for the individual's life and dignity

The patient was lucky. Her immune system began to fight the allergic reaction, the swelling in her throat went down, and the pain gradually receded. It could have gone another way. She almost died because of an allergic reaction and all because of a policy bereft of humanity.

So, what do you think was the core problem with the Wuhan lockdown? We all know that different countries around the world have had to implement lockdown measures. With Wuhan, or China more broadly, what's going on?

I think the core problem here is that the Chinese government doesn't care if people live or die. We're talking about a super powerful and extremely efficient oppressive system, which has no regard whatsoever for the individual's life and dignity.

When Zhang Zhan [the Chinese civil rights journalist who was arrested for following and reporting the coronavirus situation in Wuhan] visited Wuhan, she found so many people there simply not coping. Among the people she encountered was a woman in her 80s living on her own. She didn't know how to use a smartphone. She couldn't buy stuff online. She had no relatives she could go to for help. Zhang Zhan arranged for two batches of vegetables to be delivered to her. Zhang Zhan had a depressing thought: If not for me, this elderly woman would have had to rely on the neighbourhood community; she most certainly would have died of hunger.

In the initial stages of Shanghai, we saw the prevention and control measures go up a notch. I believe, without a doubt, there were many pensioners in Shanghai like the woman Zhang Zhan encountered. And there would definitely

have been lots of young people without any savings. Under this policy and its total disregard for human life they would have struggled to feed themselves and some would have even starved to death. This sort of thing has probably already happened. Looking at China's case numbers, I think many people have this bewildering feeling of the gains not justifying the losses. They are thinking to themselves '[w]hy is the government going about it in this way?' Another thing: You will find that these over-the-top prevention measures, measures bereft of humanity, are not at all about protecting people. It's more about controlling society, controlling people. Every official on every level has their political responsibility [to implement the policies of the central government]. They ratchet up[1] the criteria, each crueller than the last. Yet very few people would think: This kind of cruelty, this terrible suffering … what's it all for? Is it worth it?

We say this word 'lockdown'. In Chinese, we say (*fēngchéng* 封城), which actually translates to 'locked down city'. In English, we just say 'lockdown'. They are the same word, but there's a massive difference. Most Westerners probably don't get what 'lockdowns' actually entail in China. Lockdowns in China mean that you cannot leave the front door of your house at all. Lockdowns in China mean your door is sealed and even nailed shut. They mean you cannot go to the hospital on your own. You can't go out to buy supplies. If

1 'Ratcheting up criteria' refers to when each agency at each level of the Party or state adds tasks or criteria at their operational base, meaning that COVID-19 prevention and control measures become more and more stringent. Excessive 'criteria' at the local level may be the result of those officials' hopes for affirmation from higher up.

you're hungry, then you just have to put up with it.

Lockdowns in China could also mean that all those things you once thought were yours, don't actually belong to you. Before, [in Jiangxi province in southeast China in a prefecture-level city called Shangrao], many residents were forced out of their homes and taken to a quarantine facility. When they had to leave their homes, they weren't even afforded the right to lock up their own homes, because the government sends people to 'disinfect and deep clean' their homes. The same thing happened in Shanghai and has probably happened in many other cities. I think the implications are profound. Maybe it will jolt the middle class out of their pretence that 'everything is fine and dandy'. You thought you bought a 100,000 yuan/square metre [expensive] mansion. You thought all this stuff belonged to you. But, in fact, it is only yours in name. The government can force you to hand over the keys. They can barge into your house at will. So, your 100,000 yuan/square metre mansion, your savings, your property, everything you have … does it really belong to you? What assurances do you have?

Let's turn now to what this book means for you and the political risks involved …

From the very beginning, I was clear about what I was going to write and what the book would mean. The whole process, from start to finish, has been like being in a thriller. From the moment I hopped on the train from Beijing to Wuhan, the secret police knew. They started to call me. While I was in Wuhan, they called me multiple times. It even got to a point where I often felt like I was being followed and I suspected my room was being bugged.

In the end, I left Wuhan because of a phone call. After I had been in Wuhan for a month, I suddenly decided to pick up the secret police's phone call. He started to ask me: 'What are you up to in Wuhan?'. I didn't react and said that I had just come for travel. Then he said: 'Ah, just travelling. No worries. Be careful not to catch anything, okay? If you were to catch anything, it might put you in a spot of bother.'

This call sounds super ordinary, but if you think carefully about what it infers, it becomes really quite scary. At the time, I had already pulled together about 1 million Chinese characters [approximately 500,000 English words] in interview material. Without a doubt, this phone call was a warning. I thought to myself, 'if I stay here any longer, that 1 million Chinese characters couldn't stay with me.' So, I left right away.

I said to my friend, 'you remember this: No matter what happens to me, this book has to be published'

Later, when I was in the middle of writing the book, I was continuously getting their [the secret police] calls asking what I was up to. It was really scary when they called. I took a lot of care in keeping my work under wraps. When I completed a chapter, I would use encryption to send it to my friend abroad and then delete it on my own computer. I did this for each and every chapter. When I sent that final chapter, it was a real weight off my mind. I said to my friend, 'you remember this: No matter what happens to me, this book has to be published'. At the time, I would think about how if this book were to be published, and I was still in China, what would

happen to me. Not only would I be summoned by the police, face criminal detention and imprisonment, but I would suffer the stigma of labels like 'traitor of the Han people' or 'a traitor of China/a Chinese who conspires with foreigners'.

In August last year, the publisher Hardie Grant started to become really insistent that I leave China. Probably because they were afraid I would fall victim to this fate. They kept pushing me, so I thought 'alright then, I'll see if I can get out of here (China)'. I actually wasn't prepared at all. On the morning of August 7, I packed a simple suitcase. I took two pairs of shoes, two coats and some books. Apart from these, everything I had accumulated, everything I had established in my 47 years, I had to cast aside and walk away from. I had to leave the apartment I rented as well, without closing the lease. Right up until I went through customs, I couldn't be certain I would be able to leave. But remarkably, they didn't stop me, and I was able to pass through without a fuss. Then, only then, did I call my friend to tell them what had happened. I told them I was still renting the apartment. I told them the directions, how to get there, my key code to get in, and asked them if they could go there to sort some of my things out. Later on, when the book was published, Hardie Grant released a lengthy statement. I posted it online. Then came the internet trolls hurling abuse, calling me a traitor of the Han people, a traitor of China and so on. Of course, I am already used to this sort of thing. If I were to say what the worst political risk and outcome is, then it would be this: I probably won't be able to get back to China for a very long time.

On the matter of the secret police calling you, I feel they went about it in a rather indirect and roundabout way. It's no secret that you are a 'regular tea drinker' [a euphemism denoting someone who has been identified as a dissident and who has been summoned by the police for questioning 'over tea' at the police station] and a person of interest to the police. Knowing you had gone to Wuhan, why do you think they didn't intervene there and then, but instead issued such loaded inquiries and warnings?

Firstly, when I went to Wuhan, I wasn't at all open about it. The secret police of course knew, but in public forums, I wasn't carrying on about going down to Wuhan. When I'd been in Wuhan for a week, I certainly avoided mentioning anything to do with coronavirus. I just posted some inconsequential little things on social media like, today I had a bowl of hot dry noodles, [a famous Wuhan dish that a 'typical visitor' to Wuhan would plausibly post about on social media] or I saw some flowers by the lake—things like that. To look at these posts, you would think it's an everyday person going about their business. So, they probably couldn't be absolutely certain where I had visited and what I was actually doing. That's why, in the end, they started calling me.

Later, when I was in Sichuan province in southwest China in Mount Emei writing the book, they called me again. I said I was writing a science fiction novel. When I called my friend, I would deliberately start to talk about this sci-fi novel I was writing, describing the story and who the characters were. If they were really listening in, I think they might have been thrown off the scent a bit and thought that I was in fact writing a sci-fi novel. That's what I think. They really are far

reaching and scarily capable, but they can't possibly know everything. The steps I took might have done the trick. Maybe they thought, this person has genuinely gone to Wuhan for a trip, then buried himself away up at Mount Emei to do a bit of writing. But what I was actually writing, they couldn't be 100 percent certain.

The other thing is the impact of coronavirus. In fact, since the end of 2019 when coronavirus started up, I haven't 'drunk any tea' really. The police are also worried about getting infected, and they take pains to reduce the chance of transmission.

But now the situation has changed again. Recently, a friend in Beijing told me that just in the last little while, they received an invitation from an embassy to attend an event. For Beijing-based dissidents to receive this type of invitation is in fact a pretty good thing. But this friend of mine still spent some time thinking about it, and in the end didn't dare go. The Domestic Security Protection Bureau were very quick to call them up. They said Teacher X, if you go to the embassy, we won't stop you. But because you're interacting with foreigners, you may increase your risk of being infected. So, when you come back from the embassy, your health QR code may turn yellow[2].

A lot of people don't realise how scary a yellow health code is. For people like us, to be invited to 'drink tea', to even face detention and arrest is to be expected. We're prepared for that. But for a health code to turn yellow is even more serious than any of this. Because you can't return home and it

2 Health QR codes have been in place in China since early 2020. Unlike COVID-tracking apps. in other countries (such as Australia), these QR codes are mandatory for Chinese citizens and foreigners living in China. From entering supermarkets to boarding domestic flights, the health code is required for everything. Authorities have complete control over the status or 'colour' of the code.

implicates your family members and anyone around you. Any one of them could be dragged off to quarantine (to isolate). So, this sort of thing is far worse than going to prison. Under these circumstances, you can imagine how big the impact of COVID-19 prevention policies is on people like us, as well as for Chinese society as a whole.

In your view, what kind of conduct would more readily attract their attention and punishment? How will they continue to intimidate and punish outspoken dissidents like you?

I used to think I understood China's censorship rules. I thought I knew where the red lines were. But now, our power of discernment is completely out of step on this ever-changing mega system. Censorship standards are becoming harsher and harsher, the baseline is lower and lower. I don't know any more where that baseline is.

One day in 2019, not long before the coronavirus outbreak, at around 11pm, two police suddenly turned up at my door. They asked me to go with them to the local police station. It wasn't until after we arrived that I realised this was all because in 2016, three years before then, I had made two Twitter posts—two political cartoons which referenced Xi Jinping. Because of this, the police had brought me to the police station for interrogation. In the law, this is called 'a summons'. They requested I delete my Twitter posts. But it was an old account and I could no longer log in. I told them that I couldn't delete it. Then, they made me write a statement, guaranteeing that I wouldn't again share these kinds of views on social media.

As far as I know, during those few years in China (2016–2019), it is likely that hundreds of thousands of people, even hundreds of thousands of Twitter users, were summoned by police and forced to delete their posts before writing a statement like the one I had to write. And these views aren't new. They were around years ago. This sort of thing happened a lot, and we had next to no idea where the boundaries lie. Did you see that poem 'To Cicida' [an incident involving Shanghai media personality Xuan Kegui, who was blocked from his personal Weibo account after he posted 'To Cicida']. It was just one little poem—nothing at all wrong with it—but it was taken down as well.

Now the rules of expression, you could say, have almost got to the point where people aren't able to speak. Anything you write could get you into trouble. The lightest measure might be to have your content screened or blocked. The next step is to have it deleted and then for your account to be monitored. If you keep going you will be summoned by the police. In more serious cases you might even end up in prison. This is the five grades and tiers of punishment that you must be prepared to endure at any point in time.

Luo Changping [a former journalist] probably didn't think that because of a comment regarding a film he would be sentenced [in reference to Luo Changping's criticism of the patriotic film 'The Battle at Lake Changjin', for which he was sentenced to seven months prison and ordered to make a public apology]. Luo Changping is an experienced journalist. He's a very active public figure in China. But he also wouldn't have thought it would end up like this. Now,

we have almost no way to judge the standards by which China's censors are operating and what direction it will take next. But one thing's for certain: it will become harsher and harsher.

You mentioned some changes that have taken place in the last two years. Could you speak more about the changes to China's prevention and control of COVID-19 in the past two years as well as your views on China's 'dynamic zero-COVID' policy.

When I arrived in Wuhan the health code hadn't yet come into use. So when we went out, we didn't need to scan the QR code, otherwise it would have been impossible for me to travel so easily to Wuhan. But during the month or so I was in Wuhan, this health code did come into use. No matter where you went—taking a taxi, when you called a Didi [a ride-hailing service]—you needed to scan the code. This code's control mechanism has become extremely sophisticated and complex. Not only are the codes using different colours to represent different statuses, but there are also pop-ups, asterisks and exclamation marks. And to give someone a yellow or red code doesn't require any proof. If authorities say you have a yellow code [even without justification] then you have a yellow code. Last year, I saw something in the news which I felt shocked by it at the time, but now I'm already numb to this kind of thing happening. In Heilongjiang province in northeast China in a prefecture-level city called Heihe, the health codes of every single 1,280,000 people living there were switched to yellow overnight by the government. This meant that all 1,280,000 of them couldn't go anywhere. Not even an inch. All this in the name of COVID-19 prevention and control.

People have already become accustomed to these policies. Just when you think it can't get any worse, it does. It's got to the point where we can tell that these prevention and control measures, including the QR code regime and the system of all-controlling neighbourhood communities, are here to stay, even when coronavirus is eliminated. These policies are in place for a long time to come and will have a long-lasting impact on Chinese people's lives.

In many cities, doing PCR tests has already become a part of daily life just like charging your phone. Everyone has had to do their time doing a test, waiting around for the result before they are allowed to leave. The China of today has gone too far. It is at a ridiculous point now. It's like Oceania in George Orwell's book '1984', a state unbound by reasonable limitations. This is what the COVID-19 disaster has brought us. I think the Communist government is taking full advantage of that disaster to increase their hold on society, to expand further the scope of its power. Indeed, we can say that China has completely and unequivocally become a police state.

Based on your observations, how does the ordinary Chinese person judge the past two years of control measures? Do you think they would hold similar views to yours? On social media, we frequently see instances of people putting forward a positive outlook. For example, they think that other countries don't care about their citizens' health, only the Chinese government is taking responsibility—this kind of viewpoint. So how do you view Chinese society's attitude towards their experiences and their views of the government's containment of coronavirus over the past two years.

Because China lacks genuine opinion polls, it's very difficult for us to get a sense of the extent

of public support. But based on everyday experiences and encounters, I think you could say because of the screening and censoring of information, it's likely that the majority of Chinese people believe that, when it comes to COVID, chaos abounds abroad.

I returned to Australia from the US just the other day. I didn't need to show my CovidPass this time round, nor did I need to show a PCR test. I didn't need anything, it was just like before. I just had to have my passport and visa and away we go. In most parts of the world, life is gradually returning to normal, so there aren't many people (abroad) who would feel afraid (of the virus).

But you're probably thinking 'why China is different?' Many Chinese people are still afraid of the virus. Let's reflect on where this fear comes from and why it's there. I think the government's censorship and system of control have played a significant role in projecting that fear on ordinary everyday Chinese. Through an all-consuming system that entails misinformation, restricted access to information, screening of information, the majority of Chinese people believe that the virus is still extremely serious, and that the government is protecting them from it.

You spoke earlier about how residents in Shangrao in Jiangxi province were handing over to security the keys to their own homes, and that the lockdown there shows the state's increased interference in people's lives. Do you think that these kinds of extreme prevention and control measures will ignite societal discontent?

I think discontent exists already. We can see in Shanghai videos like 'Voices of April' and 'Voices of June' [collections of viral audio-visual content from pandemic lockdowns in Shanghai and other

Chinese cities] popped up and were widely watched. During Wuhan's lockdown, we also saw 'Fang Fang's Diary' [an online diary written by Chinese writer Fang Fang about life during the Wuhan lockdown]. Their content set the problems out plain as day. But one thing I have to say is because we lack data, it's quite tricky for us to know how many people support 'Voices of April' and 'Voices of June', or how many people back Fang Fang. In the same way, it's hard for us to know how many people support the government. But we can see that there is a mood of discontent out there. However, in the China of today, it is very difficult to find a sustainable avenue to express your discontent. I feel like China is like a society on the bottom of the ocean. On the surface, all is tranquil but under the surface, in places where the rays of the sun do not reach, we don't know what lurks there. We don't know where the whirlpools and currents are.

In this kind of society, discontent without a doubt exists. But will this discontent be able to change the Chinese government's cruel COVID prevention and control policies? I don't think so because the Chinese government does not place any importance whatsoever on the views of the people. Can this discontent bring systematic change to China? I think, at least in the near term, it's going to be very difficult and quite probably not possible. But this discontent is like a seed: It is ever so quietly on the move, growing and developing where the deep, penetrating search lights of the Party cannot reach. Maybe one day, it will bring real change to China.

This interview has been translated into English from the Chinese original. The translator was Darcy Moore.

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