

# ARI *news*

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

## HIGHLIGHTS



### SPECIAL FEATURE

Transnationalism,  
Urbanism and Religion



### NEW ARI RESEARCH CLUSTER

Science, Technology,  
and Society (STS)



FEATURE ARTICLE

# INTER-ASIA ROUNDTABLE 2009

The Asia Research Institute (ARI) was established as a university-level institute in July 2001 as one of the strategic initiatives of the National University of Singapore (NUS). Its mission is to provide a world-class focus and resource for research on the Asian region, located at one of its communication hubs. ARI engages the humanities and social sciences broadly defined, and especially interdisciplinary frontiers between and beyond disciplines.

#### **Changing Family in Asia**

The Changing Family in Asia cluster explores the dimensions of family change in the region, their causes and implications. These dimensions include rising ages at marriage and decreasing non-marriage, declining fertility and declining size of the nuclear family, increase in one-person households and alternative family forms, changing gender roles within families, and changes in family structures consequent on population ageing.

#### **Asian Migration**

The Asian Migration cluster explores issues arising from increased levels of human mobility in the region, both within and across national borders. Mobility of high-level professional and managerial personnel, unskilled labour migration (both documented and undocumented) and human trafficking all raise methodological and theoretical questions, and major policy issues, as does the role of migration in urban change.

#### **Religion and Globalisation in Asian Contexts**

The cluster explores global reconfigurations of conceptions of 'religion' in diverse Asian contexts. Particular attention is directed toward investigating dynamic interactions of secularization and religious

revival in the modern period, as well as to related issues of the invocation of authority and tradition in contemporary discourse and practice.

#### **Cultural Studies in Asia**

Cultural Studies in Asia is an emerging field of academic research in Asia which is challenging conventional disciplinary boundaries to rethink received knowledge on existing issues and/or to address new topics and concerns thrown up by the rapid changes and impact on cultural practices, brought about by new technologies and the new phase of global capitalism. Focusing on the popular cultural practices in contemporary Asia, practitioners in Cultural Studies have questioned the very idea of Asia and its current reconfiguration in view of the intense traffic of cultural products and cultural practices, crisscrossing national and cultural boundaries within the continent and beyond.

#### **Asian Urbanisms**

The Asian Urbanisms cluster provides space for empirical investigation of emerging urban forms, phenomena and experiences in the region. Asia's urban diversity is taken as a resource for wider theorization. The cluster is thus particularly interested in forms of relational,

comparative research which de-centre North America or Western Europe as the putative leading edge of urban transition, innovation and influence.

#### **Science, Technology, and Society**

The Science, Technology, and Society (STS) research cluster studies the inter-relationships between those three domains, especially in the context of Asia. NUS has one of the largest concentrations of faculty in Asia researching STS themes, and working on both global and regional scales. Some of our strengths lie in the history and philosophy of science & technology, interactive & digital media studies, the social and cultural study of biotechnology and biomedicine, and urban technologies, although we are not restricted to these interests.

#### **Open Cluster**

While any research institute must focus its work on certain particular frontiers on which it hopes to make a difference, ARI has also kept its doors open to talented people, exciting ideas and worthwhile projects across the whole spectrum of the humanities and social sciences. Many of our most exciting visitors have been in what we call the 'open' cluster, to ensure this openness to ideas remains.



Professor Lily Kong

## Word from the Director

*“The first Roundtable focused on gender relations in the family in the 21st century, and received praise from all who attended for the lively discussions generated.”*

The last Director's message in this newsletter assured me that many people do read ARI's newsletter, and indeed, the Director's message. I received many words of thanks for trying to create some space for intellectual dialogue and ferment, and for reminding ourselves that the language of large grants and big multidisciplinary projects is not the sum total of research in the humanities and social sciences. Thank you to everyone who wrote or spoke to me. I wish everyone the best in your intellectual pursuits.

This issue of the newsletter brings several highlights to the reader. I will elaborate on just two. The first is the establishment of a new cluster at ARI – the Science, Technology, and Society (STS) cluster. Due in large measure to the efforts of Gregory Clancey, jointly appointed between the History Department at FASS and ARI, the cluster has already developed an active range of projects and activities. It has established excellent international linkages and collaborations, it has made a bid for funding support for a large project on Asian biopoleis, and it has an active series of seminars and talks by members and visitors. Cluster members all have their own ideas and ongoing projects as well. A cluster workshop on neuroscience “Culture and Cognition in Asia: From Historical to Experimental Perspectives” (11 – 12 March 2010) is currently also being planned. Much of this build-up was possible

because of the support from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in the nascent years of development, and the cluster celebrates the collaboration between the Faculty and ARI, demonstrating the possibility and value of joint support of a common goal. We look forward to the cluster's contributions in the years ahead.

The second highlight of the past few months is the first Inter-Asia Roundtable hosted at ARI. As one of ARI's flagship events/programmes (the other two being Asia Trends, and the Asian Graduate Student Fellowships and Summer Institute cum Graduate Student Forum), the Inter-Asia Roundtable is an effort to do two things explicitly: first, to generate conversations about inter-Asia flows, and encourage comparative perspectives; and second, to bring together well-established scholars of Asia (and preferably from Asia) to engage in (and indeed, lead) the intellectual (re)thinking of particular areas of study. The first Roundtable focused on gender relations in the family in the 21st century, and received praise from all who attended for the lively discussions generated. We can look forward to the publication that captures both the papers presented as well as the roundtable discussions that ensued. Next year's Inter-Asia Roundtable will focus on migration issues.

This issue of the newsletter is produced by members of the newsletter committee, some new, and thanks are due especially to our research fellow Melody Lu for energetically thinking about how to produce an attractive and engaging issue. She is assisted by long-time ARI research assistant Saharah Abubakar and other members of the team. There are new elements to the approach, following after the new look introduced in the last newsletter. Thanks to the team, news about ARI's research and events reach a wider audience. I hope you will all enjoy reading the newsletter.

## FEATURE ARTICLE

# Inter-Asia Roundtable 2009



*“Women’s education and full-time involvement in the paid workforce, along with increasing insecurity in the labour market, make women wary about marriage and family building.”*

The 2009 Inter-Asia Roundtable was the first of its kind in ARI, and is scheduled to become an annual event. Most research in the Asian region focuses

on particular countries or regions. Rarely do researchers from East, South and Southeast Asia get together to discuss common issues – partly because of the enormous cultural differences between the different parts of Asia. But this year’s Roundtable – entitled “Gender relations in the 21st century Asian family” – proved that there are enough common areas of interest to make a dialogue among people from all regions a very stimulating event.

The issue of the “female deficit” – resulting from abortion of female foetuses, relative neglect of young girls, and perhaps in some cases from female infanticide – is a major manifestation of gender issues in the family. Why has it been a problem in China, South Korea and parts of India, but not in Southeast Asian countries? The key is the patriarchal systems characterising China, Korea and northwest India, especially Punjab and Haryana. In these areas, the daughter is essentially lost to her natal family upon marriage. By contrast, in the bilateral kinship systems characterising most of Southeast Asia, the married daughter can maintain close links with her natal family. Rigidly patrilineal kinship systems marginalise daughters and reduce parents’ incentives to invest their resources in raising girls. The Chinese and Indian states have sought to undermine the traditional powerbases of clans and lineages, and industrialisation and urbanisation have furthered this process. These powerful forces reducing son preference were temporarily offset by the technology of ultra-sound and other methods that facilitated



*Courtesy of Anjali Roy and Chandrani*

*“Intergenerational relationships generated considerable discussion, ranging over issues such as care of grandchildren, long-term care of the disabled elderly, and the role of the state in care provision.”*

sex selection, but the forces undermining son preference have prevailed in South Korea from the mid-1990s, and may well prevail in China and India as well, though there is little evidence so far that this is happening.

Gender issues in Asian households are playing out in a rapidly changing socio-economic context. Women's education and full-time involvement in the paid workforce, along with increasing insecurity in the labour market, make women wary about marriage and family building. They are the ones with potentially the most to lose, if they end up with a husband in the traditionalist mode and a family-unfriendly workplace. In East and Southeast Asia, the “flight from marriage” is marked and well documented. In South Asia, where change has been slower, age at marriage has risen but remains much lower, with the exception of Sri Lanka.

Regional differences are particularly marked in the arrangement of marriage. In South Asia, parent-arranged marriage (frequently utilising the services of marriage brokers) remains the norm. In Southeast and East Asia, the role of parents in selecting partners has largely vanished, and the increase in singlehood is partly attributed to the vacuum this has created. But the vacuum is being partly filled by other marriage market mechanisms, including the Internet, and there are many other factors underlying the increase in singlehood in these regions. Among them are shortage of suitable husbands for the increasingly well-educated women, given norms of hypergamy, and the difficulty of changing the mindsets of men, who find it hard to accept that they need to play a greater role in housework and childrearing in the increasingly normative two-income households of the region.

Intergenerational relationships generated considerable discussion, ranging over issues such as care of grandchildren, long-term care of the disabled elderly, and the role of the state in care provision. Intergenerational relationships may be viewed from the conceptual lens of a



*Courtesy of Anjali Roy and Chandrani*

solidarity model, or a conflict model, or perhaps an ambivalence model. There is no doubt that filial piety ideology lies at the core of such relationships in East Asia, albeit reinforced by legal sanctions in Singapore, Taiwan and China. But intra-familial power relations may also play a role, as well as a very different factor, altruism. Should family caregivers be paid? While it can be argued that this is a progressive policy as it recognises the value of family members' (especially women's) care labour, one potential negative consequence may be that women are pushed back into the home.

The discussion on the “queer” family in Asia focused on the relationship between the notion of “family” and non-normative, same-sex subjectivities and relationships. One emphasis of the paper on which the discussion was based was that such relationships can often find expression within some quite surprising spaces, including the confines of “traditional” family structures. In the face of threats of legal persecution and physical and emotional violence which continue to exist in many societies, including across Asia, working from within the structures of patriarchy may actually be a safer option for many non-heterosexual individuals.

Overall, this was a very stimulating and intensive one and a half days of discussions. It will be repeated – on another theme – next year.

## Forthcoming Events

### Shi`ism and Beyond: "Alid Piety" in Muslim Southeast Asia

[www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/alid-piety-muslim-SEA.htm](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/alid-piety-muslim-SEA.htm)

**14 – 15 January 2010**

Contact person for  
further details:

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

One major debate that has been frequently reprised over the past century of scholarship on Islam in Southeast Asia has been that of the extent of "Shi`ite influence" on the region. This discourse has obscured more nuanced understandings of Muslim belief and practice, as well as the legacies of internal Muslim pluralism in the region. This workshop will address a number of specific themes, including: the historical dynamics that have brought "Shi`ism" and other forms of "Alid piety" to Southeast Asia; the various forms that "Alid piety" takes in the region and how these forms emerge and evolve; reflections of "Alid piety" on literature, art and material culture in Southeast Asia.

### Graduate Workshop on Secularization, Religion and the State

[www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/secularization-religion-state.htm](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/secularization-religion-state.htm)

**21 January 2010**

Contact person for  
further details:

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

Jointly organised by ARI, NUS, and University of Tokyo, this workshop will bring together graduate students from Tokyo University and NUS to examine the historical formation of concepts of secularization and religion in several countries, as well as interrogations of various conceptions of modernity involved in these processes. Particular attention will be directed toward understanding the relations between religion and the state in the contemporary world from a comparative perspective. These discussions will be based upon ongoing work on these issues being carried out at Tokyo University and NUS. Bringing together young scholars working on this timely subject at both of these institutions can help to develop possibilities for future research on religion and society in modern Asia from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, including sociology, anthropology, history and philosophy.

### Performing Space in Asian Film: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

[www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/performing-space.htm](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/performing-space.htm)

**22 – 23 February 2010**

Contact person for  
further details:

**Dr Charles Leary:**  
charles.leary@nus.edu.sg

Developing the multivalent perspectives of space, this workshop is structured around the performative potential of space in Asian films. Of interest is how space serves as more than context or setting in a film's mise-en-scène, and also how space is called upon to construct and reconstruct particular forms of identities, meanings and interactions. This workshop attempts to address several questions such as: Is there a distinctive way in which Asian spaces are performed? Are these distinctions specific to particular modes of Asian cinematic practice or in the work of particular filmmakers?

### Rural-Urban Networks and Transitions in Asia: Re-spatializing Cultural and Political Imaginaries

[www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/rural-urban-networks.htm](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/rural-urban-networks.htm)

**25 – 26 February 2010**

Contact person for  
further details:

**A/P Tim Bunnell:**  
aritgb@nus.edu.sg

Jointly sponsored by the Asian Urbanisms cluster of ARI and the Global Cities cluster of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, this workshop will contribute to efforts to bring the rural back into urban studies. It will assemble scholars working on various aspects of rural-urban networks, transitions and connections, including cultural, social, economic, political and spatial aspects, to bring out novel aspects of these networks and connections that are not adequately reflected in the influential literature and dominant paradigms in urban studies. By focusing on a range of cities in four countries in Asia – India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand – the workshop will provide scope for developing alternative approaches and modes of understanding the "urban", the "rural", and the "region".

## Empire, Civilisation and the Anthropology of China

[www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/anthropology-of-china.htm](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/anthropology-of-china.htm)

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**4 – 5 March 2010**

Contact person for further details:

**Dr Liang Yongjia:**  
arilyj@nus.edu.sg

A number of scholars are reconsidering China, whilst departing from conventional views that regard China as an authoritarian entity, an economic system, or a Confucian culture. This workshop will bring together these scholars to discuss aspects of long-term continuity and discontinuity, admixture, hybridity, distant connectedness arising with conceptual frameworks, with a particular emphasis on the need to explore relations between China's long literary history and empirical studies of social phenomena in more complex and sophisticated ways.

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## Culture and Cognition in Asia: From Historical to Experimental Perspectives

[www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/culture-cognition-in-asia.htm](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/culture-cognition-in-asia.htm)

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**11 – 12 March 2010**

Contact person for further details:

**Dr Philip Cho:**  
aripc@nus.edu.sg

Asia has become a key geographic and conceptual locus in nascent discussion and debate over culture and cognition. How can dynamically changing variations in the embodiment of cultural practices and neurocognitive plasticity be geographically situated without reverting to Asia as a stereotypical foil in a new-age bio-cultural Orientalism? This workshop will be an important first step in bringing together leading social and cognitive scientists to critically explore emerging areas of research at the intersection of culture and cognition, particularly those in which Asian cultures form an important working category.

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## CALL FOR PAPERS

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

[www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/transacted-intimacy.htm](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2010/transacted-intimacy.htm)

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**14 – 15 October 2010**

Contact persons for further details:

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

**Prof Brenda Yeoh:**  
geoy@nus.edu.sg

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

Focusing on the political economy of international marriages, this conference not only interrogates the political, economic and social structures in which love and intimacy are embodied, but also links intimacy with other domains of experience such as work, gender relations and family. Conversely, the conference also attempts to bring the economic back into discussions of the political, cultural and social processes that shape the contours of international marriage as a phenomenon. Those wishing to present a paper at the workshop are invited to submit a paper proposal which includes a title, a 500-word abstract, and a short biography by 15 January 2010.

## ARI SPECIAL FEATURE

# Transnationalism, Urbanism and Religion



social context(s) of nineteenth-century British literature, and literature's role in mediating and negotiating social concerns. Religion – its negotiations and changing fortunes in the course of the nineteenth century – was of course one of those cultural parameters.

From the late 1990s onwards (under the consecutive leadership of Deans Tong Chee Kiong, Lily Kong and Tan Tai Yong), NUS's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences began to make a big push for social sciences and humanities research on Asia, not just relying on the excellences of individual scholars, but promoting collaborations, institutional emphases, and ultimately clusters of researchers. Despite my background in literary studies (or perhaps because of my underlying interest in wider issues of Asian society), I was asked to help as assistant director of the Centre for Advanced Studies (ARI's predecessor). Helping to organise collaborative and multi-disciplinary conferences on urbanism and migration put me in increasing contact with geographers, sociologists and historians of cities and migration, both at NUS and overseas, and led to publications such as *Theorizing the Southeast Asian Cities as Text* (published in 2003, which I co-edited with Brenda Yeoh), *Asian Diasporas: Cultures, Identities and Representations* (2004, which I co-edited with novelist and Professor Shawn Wong), and *Contours of Culture: Space and Social Difference in Singapore* (2005). In all these projects, I tried hard to bring into complementary relationship the methods of literary and cultural analysis on the one hand, and of sociological and spatial analysis on the other.

When I was asked (by Director Lily Kong) to help at ARI, and also (by Vice-Dean Brenda Yeoh) to help with FASS's Cities research cluster steering committee, this gave both opportunity for more multidisciplinary collaborative work, as well as stimulus for me to think more about the connections between cities, migration and

The road to ARI and religion research, for me, was a long and particularly winding one. I did my PhD on nineteenth-century literature at the University of Chicago, which at that time was (and probably continues to be) very strong not just on literary history, but the social contextualisation of literary production. Perhaps because of the general atmospheric influence of (although I had absolutely no direct contact with) Chicago Economics Nobel Laureates like George Stigler, Milton Friedman and Merton Miller, my dissertation (on S. T. Coleridge) had a fair bit of contextualisation in the intellectual history of economic thought (Adam Smith, James Steuart, David Hume, particularly on ideas of humane interventions in commerce and the market system).

After my PhD, I came back to NUS (in 1993) and worked in nineteenth-century literature, teaching courses (among other things) on Romanticism and the gothic, and publishing articles on Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, Rudyard Kipling and others. However, I continued to be interested in the



**Associate Professor Robbie B. H. Goh**  
Head, Department of English Language and Literature and Deputy Director, Asia Research Institute



religion. My own religious life and practice had meanwhile brought me into contact with the leaders of the Methodist Church in Singapore (beginning with Bishop Robert Solomon), and thinking about the institutional history and development of Christianity; this led to a book entitled *Sparks of Grace: The Story of Methodism in Asia* (2003), and a follow-up book, a short monograph entitled *Christianity in Southeast Asia* (2006).

These various initiatives and influences have more recently started to converge in work on the role of Christianity in Asian transnationalism. Preliminary thinking about Christianity in Asia's historical flows (in the missionary movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), institutional legacies (internationally-networked denominational churches, mission schools, hospitals) and characteristics (its predominantly Anglophone basis, its ready adoption of media such as television, music CDs and the Internet) led to claims about the networked nature of Christianity in Asia and in diasporic conditions, in the form of articles in *International Journal*

*“Religion, and Christianity in particular, actually forge the social networks that are in many cases responsible for transnational relations and movements in the first place.”*

*of Urban and Regional Research and Journal of Religion and Society.* It was then necessarily to fine-tune and test some of these more general theories by doing a more detailed analysis of a particular diasporic Asian group. My own social and religious life had brought me to India many times, and into contact with many Indian co-religionists and social contacts, so it seemed a natural thing to formulate a project on “Christianity in the Indian Diaspora”. With timely NUS funding, I was able to visit communities of Indian believers in Australia, Hong Kong, Qatar, Oman, Switzerland, the UK, the US, Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, and of course Singapore. Qualitative interviews with individuals in a wide range of occupations and social positions gave me a far deeper insight into the way religion, and Christianity in particular, worked not just to negotiate and sustain social identities, but actually forge the social networks that are in many cases responsible for transnational relations and movements in the first place. The findings from this project will hopefully appear in an authored volume before too long.

I have by no means lost sight of literature and other cultural expressions such as film, popular cultural documents, advertising, public discourses and the other texts which were the grist for my early scholarly mill. I would like to think that these forms of textual analysis add another dimension to my work in religion and transnationalism, allowing a greater sensitivity to the ways in which identities are imagined and represented (including, as it were, misrepresented) under such conditions.



## ARI SPECIAL FEATURE

# Cities, Mobilities and Difference



**Francis Leo Collins**  
Postdoctoral Fellow  
September 2007 – June 2009

Assistant Professor  
Department of Geography, NUS  
(Since July 2009)

Cities intrigue me: the often incongruous built environment; the circuits of social, economic, cultural and environmental flows; the juxtaposition of stability and mobility; the manifestations of difference that exemplify exactly what cities are about and yet also make them so hard to characterize.

It was during my doctoral studies that I started to engage with questions of temporary migration and the manner in which individuals come to embody difference in urban spaces. My dissertation focused on the journeys of South Korean international students to Auckland, New Zealand and the manner that their presence, practices and experiences were involved in both small and large scale urban transformations.

This research interrogated some of the emergent mobilities associated with international education across a range of geographic scales: from the national state to transnational networks, the city to individual embodiments. Crucially, the research was able to uncover the ways that the presence and practices of international students have been drawn into and have influenced changing urban forms and discourses in Auckland's inner city including the development of apartment towers, new uses and values associated with office space, and changing streetscapes. These developments certainly illustrated the influence of globalising processes and new urban economic developmental forms. The research focus on the intersections of cities and mobilities, however, also made it possible to view these developments as the result of explicitly grounded transnational activities not only by international students themselves but by a broader set of economic, political and institutional actors who have sought to utilise the internationalisation of education as an opportunity to embed Auckland in emergent global networks.

Although the focus of this research is quite particular it should be apparent that an approach to cities that is multi-scalar, concerned with processes of mobility and difference, and fundamentally focused on issues of embodied urban lives has a much wider remit. Indeed, such an approach can

serve to uncover important issues in the ongoing transformation of cities in multiple locales. In addition to providing space to publish from my dissertation, my time at ARI has served as an opportunity to develop new projects and new thinking around cities, mobilities and difference in important ways.

I have begun a new individual project investigating the urban lives of different temporary migrants within the Seoul Metropolitan Region (SMR) in South Korea. Although the migrant population in the SMR, and Korea more broadly, remains proportionately quite low, the rapid increase in the number of temporary workers, international students and marriage migrants in recent years has meant that diversity is becoming significant for national and urban governments as well as in the lives of urban inhabitants in the SMR. The research I have begun during my time at ARI looks to compare the lives of "unskilled" "migrant workers" with "skilled" "foreign English teachers" in the SMR. The project seeks to investigate these quite different lives as a means to understand the ways that migrant origin, socio-economic positionality, and social and cultural practices influence incorporation into cities and to more broadly account for the growing influence of migration in South Korean cities and Seoul in particular.

ARI has served as a useful space to bring together my existing research experience and new interests and to develop ways of thinking through the urban implications of migratory processes: the role that cities play in different sorts of mobilities and the reciprocal role of migration on the social, cultural, political, economic and physical form of cities; the regulation of more and less mobile bodies; the regrouping of mobile lives in and through everyday practices that serve to (re)constitute micro- and macro-spaces of cities; and the politics of cultural-contact and cultural-change.

As I move campuses to take a faculty position within the Department of Geography at NUS, I will be continuing to work within these areas and hopefully will continue to have the opportunity to interact and work with colleagues at ARI.

## ARI SPECIAL FEATURE

# Blurring the Difference between Work and Play



**Liew Kai Khiun**  
 Postdoctoral Fellow  
 May 2007 – May 2009

Over the past two years, every time I boarded the taxi to and from the Bukit Timah Campus, there would be two questions raised by bored taxi drivers. The first: "Are you a student?" would be met by the automatic reply: "I wish." After finding out that I am into research, the next question would be: "What do you research on?" My response: "I watch television and film as well as listen to popular music for a living." My area of research has often been met with shock and incredulity expressed not only by taxi drivers, but students and even fellow academics as well. Although we are constantly exposed to popular entertainment in most of our waking hours, compared to international politics and economics, its position in both the public and scholarly realms has never garnered the same attention as other supposedly more critical disciplines or research areas. Too polite to be expressed, there is always a suspicion that movie blockbusters, prime-time television soap operas and mushy love songs are considered too frivolous for any serious critical interrogation. Yet, what continues to irk me in both academia and the media are the sweeping generalisations based on poorly informed assumptions that politicians and even eminent dons make, especially on contemporary cultural trends.

Although my doctorate has been related to the field of historical studies, I have maintained a simultaneous interest in the area of popular culture studies ever since I started my postgraduate studies almost a decade ago. My initial motivation was spurred by a desire to give greater legitimacy if not more informed appreciation of youth subcultures as well as marginalised vernacular expressions in Singapore, where such activities have been repressed by social prejudices and public policies. In fact, I used to be both participant and observer of such activities, and hence, rather than mere disinterested undertakings, this research area also represented a search for my own socio-cultural identity and positionality.

Hence, till date, all of my research into cultural studies do in some ways concern my encounter with popular literature and activities, ranging from books to films and other forms of visual and

performative arts in the popular realm. In the course of my two years at ARI, I have been trying to synergise my research directions towards that of a more interdisciplinary approach in the area of medical humanities by merging themes of popular culture studies with that of the socio-cultural aspects of medicine and biopolitics through looking at the representations and performance of medical discourses in East Asian film and television dramas. In some ways, this research agenda can be considered as part of my attempts to broaden my academic perspectives outside the confines of my existing studies on Singapore and Malaysian history and society to encompass a broader region. To some extent, Singapore can be conducive to the understanding and bridging of different parts of Asia. Having been brought up in a plethora of popular entertainment from South, Southeast and East Asia almost everyday on television and the movies, Singaporeans like myself, are generally familiar with the popular tastes of the region. In addition, our immigrant heritage coupled with the bilingual education in English language and the so-called "mother tongue" have made the regional cultures more accessible to many Singaporeans.

Some may have quietly thought that I have deviated from my discipline in history into the more contemporary social sciences. However, aside from a strictly administrative and departmental perspective, I do not see this as a completely different trajectory. To begin with, the world of popular culture and media has been changing so rapidly that any studies would probably belong to the realm of history by the time the works are published. Moreover, be it official documents from archives or DVD copies of films from the neighbouring retail outlet, one methodology of enquiry should not be privileged over another.

As I have often explained, by embarking into this area of research into popular culture studies, I have effectively erased any differences between my work and leisure hours. Hence, the next time you see me at the movies, it can be simultaneously for work and for leisure.



**DR PHILIP CHO**

has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Open Category with effect from 6 July 2009.

Dr Cho's research broadly examines the manifold influence of popular religion on the development of Chinese science, technology and medicine during the social and cultural transformations of the 16th through 19th centuries. He is also interested in contemporary developments in science and technology in Asia, especially south-south technical cooperation.



**DR KIM SUJEONG**

has commenced an 18-month appointment as a Visiting Research Fellow in the Cultural Studies Cluster with effect from 14 July 2009.

Dr Kim's research focuses on audience reception studies and cultural identity construction. She is particularly interested in transnational cultural practices across Asia. She is currently Assistant Professor of Communication at Chungnam National University in Korea. At ARI, Dr Kim will be working on exploring structure of feelings and taste for program formats by Singapore audiences, investigating their television watching in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Asian contexts.



**DR LIANG YONGJIA**

has commenced a 2-year appointment as Senior Research Fellow in the Religion & Globalisation Cluster with effect from 16 July 2009.

Dr Liang has published on religion, nationalism and ethnicity of China and India. His research interests include world renunciation, Esoteric Buddhism, territorial cults and Chinese intellectual tradition. Dr Liang is currently researching on the topic of religiosity and ethnicity of the Bai, southwest China.



**A/P NG ZHIRU**

has commenced a 1-year appointment as a Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms Cluster with effect from 16 July 2009.

A/P Ng's research interests include medieval Chinese Buddhism, transmission of Buddhism from India to China, Buddhist cults, religious visual culture, death and afterlife rituals, Dunhuang studies, and Buddhist modernism. She is Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Pomona College. At ARI, she will be writing a book-length monograph on art, charity, and the making of religious authority in contemporary Buddhism in Taiwan.



**A/P GREGORY CLANCEY**

has commenced a 2-year joint appointment as Associate Professor with ARI and the Department of History, NUS with effect from 1 August 2009.

A/P Clancey teaches Japanese History and the History of Science and Technology at NUS. Since 2006, he has also been Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. He is the Cluster Leader of the new Science, Technology, and Society Cluster of ARI. At ARI, he is working on a monograph, an edited collection, and the special issue of a journal.



**DR CHOO KUKHEE**

has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Cultural Studies Cluster with effect from 19 August 2009.

Dr Choo's research interest lies in transnational media flow, gender and postcolonialism, and cultural policies in Asia. At ARI, Dr Choo will work on turning her dissertation into a book manuscript and produce journal articles and book chapters that deal further with cultural policies in a broader Asian context.


**PROFESSOR IAN HARRIS**

has commenced a 1-year appointment as a Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Religion & Globalisation Cluster with effect from 3 September 2009.

Prof Harris is Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Cumbria, co-founder of the UK Association of Buddhist Studies (UKABS) and has written widely on aspects of Theravada Buddhist ethics and politics. He is currently engaged in research into Buddhist political activism in pre-Pol Pot Cambodia, with particular emphasis on wider Southeast Asian networks.


**DR TOMAS LARSSON**

has commenced a 6-month appointment as a Visiting Research Fellow in the Open Category with effect from 15 September 2009.

Dr Larsson's research interests include processes of state formation and the comparative political economy of development in Southeast Asia. He is a lecturer in the Department of Politics, University of Cambridge. At ARI, Dr Larsson will be revising his dissertation, "Capitalizing Thailand: Colonialism, Communism, and the Political Economy of Rural Land Rights", for publication. He will also be working on a book.


**A/P JOHAN FISCHER**

has commenced a 3-month appointment as a Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Religion & Globalisation Cluster with effect from 1 October 2009.

A/P Fischer is an Associate Professor in the Department of Society and Globalisation, Roskilde University, Denmark. His work focuses on modern Islam and consumer culture in Southeast Asia and Europe. At ARI, he will work on a research project entitled "Certifying halal: Between state-regulated Islam and capitalism in Malaysia" and will be studying the proliferation of halal in a Singaporean context.


**PROFESSOR KATHRYN ROBINSON**

has commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Changing Family/Migration Cluster with effect from 2 October 2009.

Prof Robinson is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University. She has been researching in Indonesia on issues including mining and development, gender relations, migration and the Internet. While at ARI, Professor Robinson will work on writing up a research project on Internet-mediated transnational marriages, involving ethnographic research with Australian-Asian families in Australia, and couples participating in a 'Fil-West' chat room.


**DR JULIANA FINUCANE**

has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster with effect from 7 October 2009.

Dr Finucane received her PhD from Syracuse University, USA. Her dissertation considered the intersection of religion and the media/public understanding of religion in comparative perspective, with a focus on Singapore and the United States. Dr Finucane has also taught a number of classes on religion and anthropology at Wells College in Upstate New York.


**DR CHIARA FORMICHI**

has commenced a 1-year appointment as a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster with effect from 15 October 2009.

Dr Formichi obtained her PhD and MA from The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Her PhD thesis examined the political career and ideology of S.M. Kartosuwiryo, founder of the Darul Islam rebellion and Islamic state of Indonesia in 1949. Her research focuses on the history of Islam and its contemporary manifestations in Southeast Asia with a regional focus on the Indonesian Archipelago.

**Professor Brenda Yeoh** delivered a keynote speech titled "Families/Households in Motion: Transnational Strategies and their Implications for Human Development in Asia" for the 2009 ISSBD Asia Pacific Workshop on Human Development in the Context of Movement within and across National Boundaries, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia, 4 – 5 July 2009.

She has also been appointed to the Ramphal Commission on Migration and Development, one of the first two Commissions, on international policy issues of particular interest to the Commonwealth, which are being promoted by the Ramphal Centre in London.

**Professor Duncan McCargo's** *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand* (Cornell University Press; co-published regionally by NUS Press, 2008), written during his 2006 – 07 visiting senior research fellowship at ARI, has won the 2009 Asia Society Bernard Schwartz Book Award. Out of over 65 excellent book submissions, it was selected for the award by a jury of eleven experts across the U.S. and Asia for its superb fieldwork and reporting on this critical part of the world.

**A/P Gabriele Marranci** has been awarded by Cardiff University an honorary senior position at the Center for the Study of Islam in the United Kingdom as Senior Research Fellow, in recognition of his research in the UK in the past five years.

**Professor Gavin Jones** was one of three international speakers invited by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the Seoul Foundation of Women and Family to present at the 2009 Seoul International Forum on Low Fertility Policy on 4 September 2009. His presentation was titled "Issues in raising fertility in East Asian cities: with special reference to Singapore".

He has also been appointed a member of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Regional Programme Advisory Group to provide guidance to the implementation and review of the Asia and the Pacific Regional Programme.

**Professor Venni V. Krishna** delivered a keynote address on "Emerging STI Policies and Reforms in the Indian Innovation System" at the Annual Meeting of the Asian Network for Learning, Innovation and Competence Building Systems (ASIALICS) held at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, 6 – 7 July 2009.

He was also invited as Visiting Professor, United Nations University – Institute of Advanced Study, Yokohama, Japan (2009 – 2012), for the programme on Science, Technology and Sustainable Development.

In June 2009, he was appointed Member, International Scientific Committee, Triple Helix on University, Industry and Government Relations VII, Glasgow, UK, and Member, Editorial Advisory Board, *Knowledge-based Innovation in China*, Emerald Publications, UK, in July 2009.

## New Books



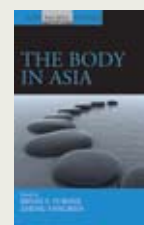
*Reconciling Indonesia: Grassroots Agency for Peace*  
**Birgit Bräuchler (editor)**  
New York, Routledge 2009



*Faith, Ideology and Fear: Muslim Identities Within and Beyond Prisons*  
**Gabriele Marranci**  
London & New York, Continuum Books 2009



*Megastar: Chiranjeevi and Telugu Cinema after N.*  
**T. Rama Rao S.V. Srinivas**  
New Delhi, Oxford University Press 2009



*The Body in Asia*  
**Bryan S. Turner and Zheng Yangwen (editors)**  
Oxford, New York, Berghahn Books 2009



*Muslims in Singapore: Piety, politics and policies*  
**K.M. Nasir, A.A. Pereira, and Bryan S. Turner**  
London & New York, Routledge 2009



*Christianity and the State in Asia: Complicity and conflict*  
**Francis Khhek G.L. and Julius Bautista (editors)**  
London, New York, Routledge 2009



*Islamic Connections: Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia*  
**R. Michael Feener and T. Sevea (editors)**  
Singapore, ISEAS Press 2009



*Spatial Planning for a Sustainable Singapore*  
**Wong Tai-Chee, B. Yuen and C. Goldblum (editors)**  
Dordrecht; London, Springer, with Singapore Institute of Planners 2008

# New ARI Research Cluster Science, Technology, and Society (STS)

*This highly interdisciplinary field, founded in North America and Europe in the late 1960s, now accounts for more than a hundred academic departments, research institutes, and graduate programmes at leading universities around the world.*

In August 2009 ARI launched a new research cluster on the theme of Science, Technology, and Society (STS), also known as Science & Technology Studies. This highly interdisciplinary field, founded in North America and Europe in the late 1960s, now accounts for more than a hundred academic departments, research institutes, and graduate programmes at leading universities around the world. NUS was the first university in Southeast Asia to establish an STS presence, beginning with a research cluster in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in 2006, and now with the current university-level initiative at ARI.

The Cluster Leader, Associate Professor Gregory Clancey, received his PhD in the History and Social Study of Science & Technology from the STS Program at MIT in 1998. He has been a member of the NUS History Department since 1999 and an Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences since 2006. He is also a member of the Executive Council of the Society for the History of Technology, and his book *Earthquake Nation: The Cultural Politics of Japanese Seismicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) won the society's prestigious Edelstein Prize in 2007.

Other Cluster members include Prof Venni Venkata Krishna, Professor in Science Policy in the Centre for Studies in Science Policy at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), who holds a senior visiting appointment; Dr Philip Cho

(PhD, University of Pennsylvania), who joined us from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and holds a postdoctoral appointment; and Dr Kim Tae-Ho (PhD, Seoul National University) who is just beginning a postdoctoral fellowship. In addition to these regular members, the cluster has seven Associate Members, all NUS faculty, from the departments of English, History, Sociology, Philosophy, Political Science, and Communications and New Media (CNM).

The cluster will work on a variety of issues, but one flagship project will be on Asian Biopoleis (Bioscience Cities), for which members have already submitted a large grant application and engaged global collaborators. Other staff interests include cognition and culture (the subject of the international conference on Culture and Cognition in Asia: From Historical to Experimental Perspectives, 11 – 12 March 2010), scientific knowledge production at Asian universities, inter-active media in Asia, urban technologies, and science & religion. As the newest and hence smallest cluster at ARI, its interests will likely grow in number with the entrance of more research staff.

Even before the cluster's official launch, ARI hosted a number of international workshops and seminars in 2009 by prestigious visiting scholars in the STS field. The very first international conference on STS in Southeast Asia, jointly funded by NUS, Sydney University, and the journal *East Asian STS*, took place at ARI in January 2009, followed by a workshop on STS in East and South Asia in March. ARI has also co-sponsored talks in the last year by Prof Christopher Cullen of the Needham Institute, Cambridge; Prof David Arnold of Warwick University; and Dr Gail Davies of University College London, among others.

## 4th Asian Graduate Forum on Southeast Asian Studies

15 – 17 July 2009



Convened by Prof Gavin Jones, Dr Chee Heng Leng, Dr Patrick Daly, Dr Peter Marolt, Dr Premchand Dommaraju, Dr Ronit Ricci, and Dr Titima Suthiwan, this was the fourth of an annual series of forums for postgraduate students who work on Southeast Asia. The Forum provided a platform for postgraduate students who are at an advanced stage to present their work, and also to communicate and interact, as they mature into the next generation of academic leaders.

The three-day Forum commenced with an opening address by Prof Lily Kong. The sessions were organised thematically around issues in history, economics, politics, religion, gender, culture, and migration. The participants included ARI's "Asian Fellows," as well as postgraduate students from NUS and other parts of the world. Three experts of the region shared, in keynote addresses, their insights on challenges and issues facing contemporary social science scholarship in Southeast Asia.

## The Politics of English in Asia: Language Policy and Cultural Expression

4 – 5 August 2009



This workshop was organised by A/P Robbie Goh and A/P Lionel Wee. A total of 16 papers were presented, including a keynote by Alastair Pennycook of University of Technology Sydney. Participants from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines came together

to discuss various aspects of the language policy, debates, controversies, cultural politics and practices of English in a number of Asian settings. An edited volume comprising papers from the workshop is being planned.

## Transnational Mobilities for Care: State, Market and Family Dynamics in Asia

10 – 11 September 2009



This conference was jointly organised by the Asian Migration Cluster and the Changing Family in Asia Cluster of ARI, and the Migration Cluster of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS. The convenors were Dr Chee Heng Leng, Prof Gavin Jones, Prof Brenda Yeoh, Dr Mika Toyota, A/P Shirlena Huang and A/P Thang Leng Leng.

highlighted the importance of eldercare issues to Singapore society. Nicola Yeates (Open University, UK), in her keynote speech, presented an expanded conceptualisation of "global care chains". Speakers from Japan, India, the Philippines, Singapore, Australia, the UK, and the USA presented 25 papers on the four sub-themes of transnational healthcare work, transnational retirement migration, changing family and care provision, and international medical travel.

Paulin Tay Straughan, newly appointed NMP, opened the conference with an address that

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