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ARI news

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GIFT FOR MUHAMMAD
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PROFESSORSHIP IN
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Special Features

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**ENGINEERED CONFLICTS:
The Environment and the Politics
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Photo credit: Rita Padawangi



PROF. PRASENJIT DUARA

WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

ARI is proud to announce that 2014 began with the endowment of the largest gift made to it, namely the Muhammad Alagil Distinguished Professorship in Arabia Asia Studies, which you can read about in our cover story.

Although preparations to receive the endowment took up much of our time, the last quarter of 2013 continued to be as busy as ever. The Religion and Globalisation cluster appears to have been particularly active, having organised one *Roundtable on Religion and Development in China* in addition to two other conferences in this period. Asian Urbanisms under the leadership of Mike Douglass has initiated a new Metacluster theme and launched several events with STS and Asian Connections. The theme is *DISASTERS IN ASIA: Localities, Knowledge, and Governance*, which is illustrated by the Special Feature article "History for Flood Disaster Governance" by Robert Wasson in this newsletter. Several workshops and conferences, particular on flood risks, have already taken place. The Asian Disasters group has also tied

in with several disaster research centres and institutes in various parts of the world, most recently with the Australian National University's Demographic and Social Research Institute.

ARI will be hosting a few major international events later this year. Among the most large-scale and pioneering of these is the inaugural AAS-in-Asia (US Association for Asian Studies meeting in Asia) *Asia in Motion: Heritage and Transformation* to be held on July 17-19. The programme committee and, in particular, ARI's events team under the untiring leadership of Valerie Yeo have been hard at work and promise to make this a most memorable event. Finally, on a sadder note, Verene Koh our Institute Manager and Associate Director who had been at ARI (and its predecessor)

for fourteen years and ran the office for eight of those years, has left for another position in NUS. Verene is replaced by Sharlene Xavier Anthony who joined in late February from NIE's Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice. We welcome Sharlene and look forward to working with her.

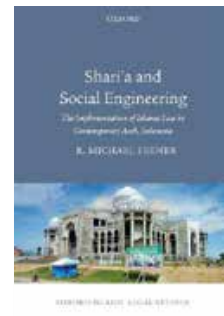
I wish to take this opportunity to thank Verene on behalf not only of the present ARI researchers and staff but all the past affiliates, visitors and friends of ARI for her wonderful managerial style and efficiency. Without her leadership, ARI could not have attained the reputation it has or have been able to produce the kind of satisfaction that almost every one of our visitors has expressed. Thank you, Verene, and good luck.



Special Issue: *Mental Health Casebook*
Asian Bioethics Review, 5(3), 2013
Chong Siow Ann and Tamra Lysaght
 (guest eds)



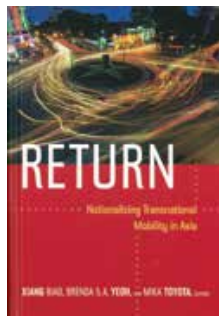
Economic Stress, Human Capital, and Families in Asia: Research and Policy Challenges
 Quality of Life in Asia Series 4
Jean Yeung Wei-Jun and Yap Mui Teng (eds)
 Springer, London and New York, 2013



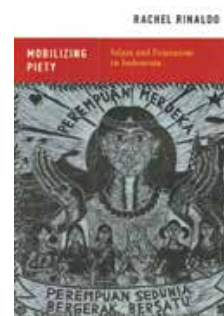
Shari'a and Social Engineering: The Implementation of Islamic Law in Contemporary Aceh, Indonesia
Michael R. Feener
 Oxford University Press, 2013



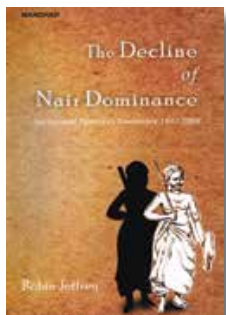
Special Issue: *Decentralised Governance and Urban Change in Asia*
Michelle A. Miller and Tim Bunnell
 (guest eds)
Pacific Affairs, 86(4), 2013



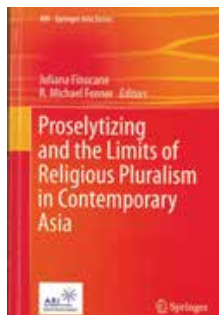
Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in Asia
Xiang Biao, Brenda Yeoh S. A., and Mika Toyota (eds)
 Duke University Press, Durham, 2013



Mobilizing Piety: Islam and Feminism in Indonesia
Rachel Rinaldo
 Oxford University Press, 2013



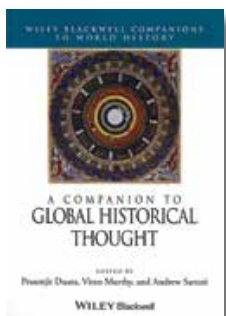
The Decline of Nair Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908, Third Edition
Robin Jeffrey
 Manohar, New Delhi, 2013



Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia
Juliana Finucane and Michael R. Feener (eds)
 ARI-Springer Asia Series 4
 Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg, London and New York, 2014



Special Issue: *Insurgencies, Social Media and the Public City in Asia*
Rita Padawangi, Peter Marolt, and Mike Douglass (guest eds)
International Development Planning Review 36(1), 2014



A Companion to Global Historical Thought
Prasenjit Duara, Viren Murthy, and Andrew Sartori (eds)
 Wiley-Blackwell, UK, 2014



Nurturing the Salafi Manhaj: A Study of Salafi Pesantrens in Contemporary Indonesia
Din Wahid
 Utrecht University, 2014

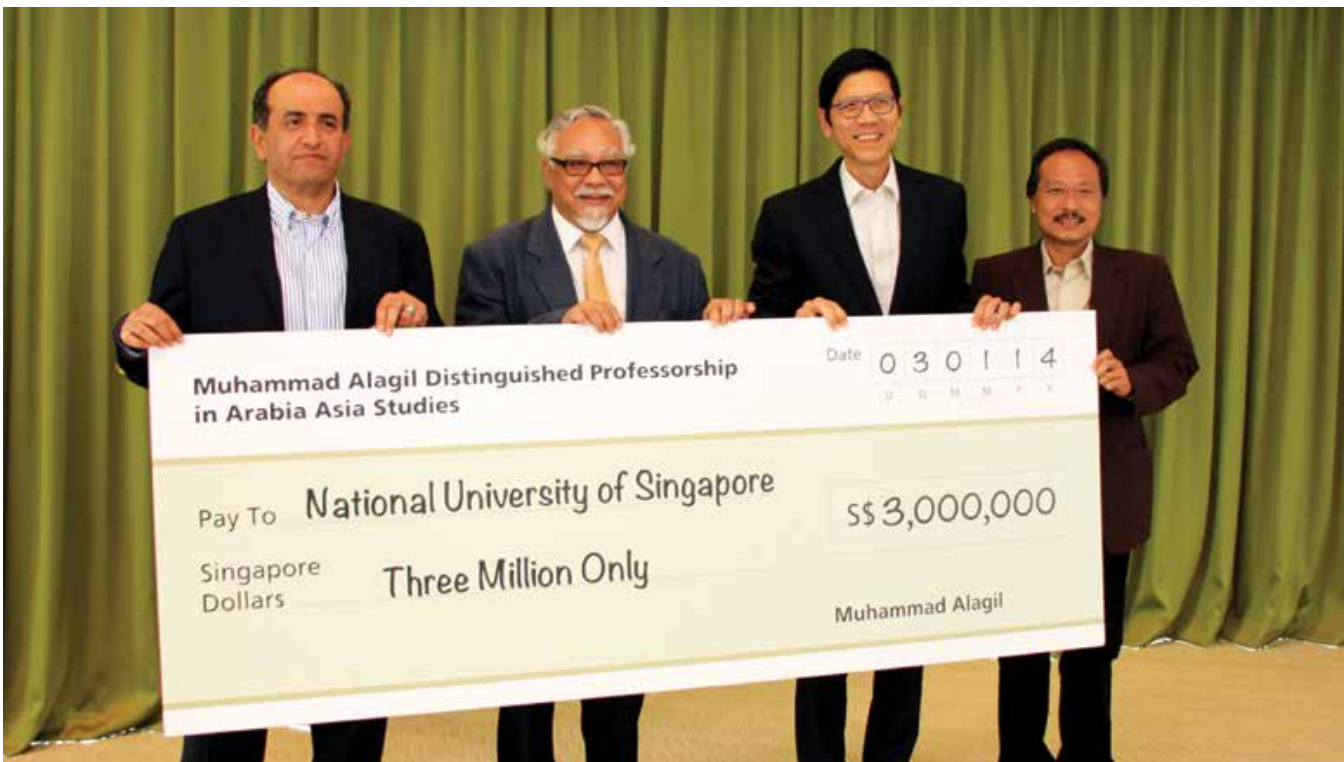


Salafism in Lebanon: Local and Transnational Resources
Zoltan Pall
 Utrecht University, 2014

ARI RECEIVES ENDOWMENT GIFT FOR MUHAMMAD ALAGIL DISTINGUISHED PROFESSORSHIP IN ARABIA ASIA STUDIES

PROF PRASENJIT DUARA
DIRECTOR, ARI

Since ARI began to promote inter-Asian studies or Asian Connections, as we call it here, these efforts have drawn attention from scholars and scholarly institutions around the world. We have formed a partnership to promote this research with the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in New York City, Hong Kong Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (HKIHSS) at the University of Hong Kong, Yale University, Göttingen University and others. These efforts were recently crowned by the gift of three million dollars (expected to be matched by the Singapore government) to ARI made by Saudi businessman Mr Muhammad Alagil to promote research on historic and contemporary relations between the Arabian Peninsula and Asia, especially South, Southeast and East Asia.



From left: Mr Muhammad Alagil, Prof Duara, NUS President Tan Chorh Chuan, Prof Ho Eng Seng



Prof Duara presenting a token of appreciation to Mr Muhammad Alagil



Mr Muhammad Alagil giving his speech

In order to acknowledge and honour Mr Alagil for his generous gift to ARI, NUS held the inaugural ceremony of the Muhammad Alagil Distinguished Professorship in Arabia Asia Studies on January 3, 2014. Prof Ho Eng Seng, professor of History, Cultural Anthropology and Islamic Studies at Duke University in the United States will be the recipient of the visiting professorship. He will spend two months of the year at ARI promoting research in the historical and contemporary relations between the Arabian Peninsula and Asia. Prof Ho, who is a leading global scholar of Islamic migration in the Indian Ocean world and author of the celebrated work, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, was also present at the ceremony.

NUS President, Prof Tan Chorh Chuan presented the vote of thanks in an opening speech, praising Mr Alagil as an "intellectual-entrepreneur (who) has an extraordinary talent for innovation, which is exemplified in his life story: transforming a small family run bookstore into the large and successful Jarir Bookstore chain, as well as diversifying into a broad spectrum of successful investments including retail, marketing, furniture, real estate and much more".

Mr Alagil who forgot to bring along his speech spoke freely and movingly about his background and motivations behind the award. Although his early years were spent in a relatively isolated and sheltered Salafi background, he encountered a great variety of Muslims from all over Asia when he went to university in Dhahran. He saw Saudis from the Hadramawt, Saudis who were Shiites, Malabar, Bugis, Sini, Kashgari and others. Subsequently, he went to Berkeley in the US and "saw the world", but his intellectual curiosity in Arabia Asia connections was awakened by listening to and reading Prof Ho's works. He has travelled with Prof Ho to Southern Thailand, Quanzhou in Southeast China, Singapore – almost camping out in Arab Street – and other places with historical and present-day ties to Arabia. These ties were forged very differently from those between Westerners and Arabs forged through the Crusades and wars. Since Singapore is deeply multi-cultural and highly efficient, and ARI has been at the forefront of this scholarship he decided not only to endow the professorship here, but also to jumpstart the project with additional funding.

Following the cheque presentation ceremony also attended by the press, Prof Tommy Koh who is the Chairman of ARI's international advisory board, chaired the lecture by Prof Ho regarding the importance of Arab Asia studies in the context of inter-Asian connections and in relation to communities in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Prof Ho's speech outlined the reasons why ARI was better situated than most area studies institutions in the West to study inter-Asian relations. These institutions were organised to specialise in individual countries and when a broader conceptual perspective did emerge it tended to focus on abstract modes of globalisation largely devoid of geographical and historical sensibility. The resources and emphasis in ARI on both individual societies and their connections enable a more contextualised, differentially scaled and historically informed work. Prof Ho went on to discuss the millennial long exchanges between Arabia and other parts of Asia, especially the lesser known relations with China.

Recently there had been an upsurge in relations between China and Arabia which he exemplified with two dramatic events. In 2005, the new Saudi king, King Abdullah, went to China, India, Pakistan and Malaysia on his first trip abroad. This broke precedence, since his predecessors had gone to Washington on their inaugural trips abroad. Second, Saudi Aramco broke ground on a new integrated and novel type of petroleum refinery to produce downstream feedstock in China. Interestingly, this refinery was located in Quanzhou, a city of early Arab settlements and known to Marco Polo and Ibn Batuta as Zaytun. "In thinking about Arabia-Asia connections in Singapore, we are interested in the slender threads across the ocean. In this Quanzhou-Saudi refinery, many of these threads come together tying Saudi Arabia with China and surprisingly with Singapore", he said, as he elaborated on Singapore's intermediary role in Asia. A lively discussion followed the lecture in which President Tan, Mr Alagil, Prof Wang Gungwu, Prof Koh, Dr Ameen Talib, Syed Alwi Aydid, Vice-President of Al-Wehdah Arab Association of Singapore, Prof Duara and others participated.



HISTORY FOR FLOOD DISASTER GOVERNANCE

PROF ROBERT J. WASSON
PRINCIPAL RESEARCH FELLOW

Is history relevant to modern day flood governance? After all, so much has changed recently. Climate and of course human vulnerability to floods have changed so that history may be irrelevant.

In answering the question with a resounding “yes” let us consider an example.

If embankments are built along rivers to contain floods and thereby reduce and even eliminate loss of life and damage to property, it is presumed that flood history is well enough known to design the embankments. That is, the frequency of floods of a particular size is known.

Embankments certainly contain small and medium size floods, and are common in China and India and increasingly in Southeast Asia. But they have unintended consequences such as waterlogging of agricultural land and villages that are between the embankments, and water ponding with health impacts. People previously adapted to floods lose experience of floods and become complacent. Villages are built on embankments upon the assumption that they are safe. But their vulnerability has actually increased because the embankments cannot save them from huge events or when breaches occur; as in the Kosi River flood of 2008 in India. Embankments also promote sedimentation in the channel, so flood levels increase but the river flow has not. In addition, many benefits are external to the people directly affected by the embankments, such as politicians and contractors, meaning that the total benefits may be much larger than seen by local people.



At risk ‘when’ an 1830’s-like super flood occurs again. Ping River floodplain, northern Thailand



Flood deposits at Bhainswara in the upper Ganga River catchment, central Himalaya, India. The 1970 flood deposit beneath the small bush in the foreground was overtopped by the June 2013 flood deposit that is behind the figure. The 1970 flood, one of the triggers for the Chipko Environmental Movement, had been the largest for the preceding millennium. (Photo courtesy of Professor Y.P. Sundriyal, HNB Garhwal University)

There are two historical components to this account. The first is that the history of floods is needed to properly design embankments. Second, the history of embankment construction tells us about motivations, who wins and who loses, and how vulnerability has been increased not decreased. Moreover there are complex relationships between floods and human decisions that can either increase or decrease vulnerability. These issues are taking on even greater salience as large floods in much of Asia are predicted to increase in frequency as the climate warms, and embankments are seen as an adaptation strategy.

Research on this topic at the Asia Research Institute, with colleagues elsewhere at NUS and other universities, consists of three components. First is the construction of long flood histories, to augment usually short records provided by traditional gauging of river flow, using the sediments left behind by receding floods (known as palaeoflood analysis) and documents produced before measured flows began. The second is to determine the history of vulnerability, its causes and consequences; and where possible options to reverse poor decisions. The third is to analyse the complex human-environment relationships using a method of analysis that comes from the field of System Dynamics that explicitly documents connectivity through time.

There are other reasons why history is important for flood governance. Long records, over centuries, expose relationships between flood size, frequency, and the state of the climate. For example, in India and Northern Australia flood frequency has increased since about 1850CE in concert with increased variability of ENSO (the El Niño Southern Oscillation), the most important source of climate variability globally and a key to the climate of Asia. While it is not yet possible for climate modellers to predict the future of ENSO as the climate warms, when they can the relationship between floods and ENSO in the past will be a valuable input to adaptation plans. It is also becoming clear that flood frequency in India and Northern Australia is now outside the envelope of variability for the past thousand years, suggesting that Global Warming is playing a role.

Of more immediate use to planners will be the identification of super floods in the past as examples of what will (not might) happen again. One such example has recently been identified on the Ping River in northern Thailand in the 1830's when the river may have widened by tenfold. When this happens again the impacts will be devastating, as the floodplain is completely settled.

Histories of floods and human vulnerability to floods are critical inputs to our ability to cope with future floods, and apply as much to rural locations as they do to cities. Furthermore, the ability to understand the complex relationships between floods and people will hopefully provide not only deeper understanding but also avoidance of errors that increase vulnerability.



A/P RAVI RAJAN
VISITING SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW

ENGINEERED CONFLICTS: THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE POLITICS OF EXPERTISE IN INDIA

Last week, I met a young Indian politician from the badlands of Uttar Pradesh (UP). He was in Singapore as part of a programme initiated by the government to showcase the country's many achievements in infrastructure and development to upcoming politicians from India. Our conversation was interesting in one important way. Although raised in the rough and tough world of UP politics, this young man wanted to do something different. He wished to base his political career upon demonstrating good governance, and he wanted to learn what the academic world could teach him. Over the past two years, I have met at least half a dozen young politicians like him, and countless bureaucrats, who, to quote ARI's own Tania Li, have "The Will to Improve."

The question to me, having decided to engage, and attempt to deploy my skills as a scholar trained in traditions of "critical" social sciences to explicitly practical ends, was: "what can my scholarship offer to such people?"

In the book that I have recently completed whilst a visiting fellow at ARI, I have addressed this question by focusing on the infrastructure of expertise – the very bedrock of the development state. In doing so, I draw upon the work of Star and Bowker, who argue that physical infrastructures serve as modes of standardisation and classification; tend to black-box critical and controversial issues; and accentuate particular traits whilst rendering others invisible. I hypothesised that infrastructures of expertise have similar affects – that they exist in the form of professional agencies and institutions; transmit their memes through systems of pedagogy and cultural and tacit practices; and in doing so, run in to conflicts with other entities with contrary passions

and interests. My book is a study of these engineered conflicts. It seeks to understand the infrastructures of environmental expertise in modern India. Crucially, it also attempts then to take a normative turn and suggest new approaches to inclusive environmental governance.

The book has three parts. The first, addresses a well worked terrain – that of natural resource management regimes, such as forestry and irrigation. It begins with a quick overview of colonial and post-colonial state systems, and the politics of exclusion that they engender. The rest of this section focuses on case studies of the many experiments with new hybrids that seek more inclusive and democratic pathways,



and analyses how they build alternative approaches to infrastructures of expertise. Here, I draw upon some of the classical concepts in economic anthropology – such as those of mutuality, reciprocity, and the gift – to explain how these concepts can be embedded within regimes of expertise.

The second section examines disasters. Building on my own past work on Bhopal and other industrial and natural disasters, I describe and analyse the concept of what I call “missing expertise.” In particular, I describe three different types of missing expertise – contingent expertise (the inability to respond adequately to the immediate challenges posed by a novel event, such as Bhopal); conceptual expertise – the lack of capacity to innovate when faced with a conceptually wicked problem (such as devising alternative economic livelihood plans in the context of reduced work capacity consequent to inhaling poisonous gas); and ethnographic expertise – the ability to listen carefully to the concerns of the governed (for example, the violence caused by the sheer complexity of the claims forms).

The third part of the book examines institutional responses to emergent environmental threats in a bid to understand the politics of the infrastructures of expertise that they might nurture. It includes a study of the Indian Supreme Court’s

use of experts; an analysis of poly-vocal expert claims in the controversy over genetically modified organism (GMO) risk regulation; an examination of the contingent dynamics of relief and rehabilitation following natural events such as floods and cyclones; and a description of the safety and siting debate in conflicts over nuclear power.

The book concludes with an analysis of how inclusive infrastructures of expertise can be scaled; problems of missing expertise addressed systematically, and normative principles mobilised to address institutional responses to emergent environmental risks, as opposed to institutional cultures that consist in cherry picking randomly amongst a wide range of opinions, practices and processes. It also addresses objections, such as those from political economy, by arguing that there are many spaces for reform and engagement that are offered by states and individuals within them. How to respond to these spaces, it concludes, is the next big frontier for the reflexive social sciences.

Reference

Star S. L. and Bowker, G. C. (2006). “How to infrastructure.” In Leah Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone (Eds.), *Handbook of New Media* (pp. 230-245). London: Sage Publications.



A/P Daud Ali has commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms Cluster with effect from 4 February 2014.

His research interests include the history of South and Southeast Asia before 1600. At ARI, he will be commencing work on a new research project looking at relations between local society and regional political entities during a period of political instability in medieval South India.



Dr Celine Coderey has commenced a 1-year joint appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Science, Technology, and Society Cluster and Tembusu College with effect from 13 January 2014.

Dr Coderey has conducted research on the implementation and appropriation of biomedical practices in Burma mainly in the field of reproductive health and mental health. At ARI, she will conduct research on how political and social transformation within the country affect both the healing practices and the health-seeking process in Myanmar.



Prof Richard R. Barichello has commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Asian Migration Cluster with effect from 3 January 2014. His research has been on the economic analysis of public policy, particularly trade and agricultural policies and institutions, Canadian dairy and poultry quota markets, and on a variety of agricultural development issues, mostly applied to Southeast Asia.

At ARI, Prof Barichello will be focused mostly on rural labour market issues.



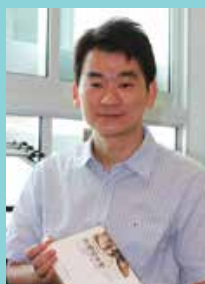
Dr Kurtulus Gemici has commenced a 6-month appointment as Assistant Professor under the FASS Writing Semester Scheme with effect from 1 January 2014.

His research interests include economic sociology, economic development, political sociology, and contentious politics. At ARI, he will investigate how capital markets developed in Hong Kong and Singapore in the last two decades and the role of financial regulation in the development trajectory of these capital markets.



Dr Joshua Samuel Gedacht has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation in Asian Contexts Cluster with effect from 14 January 2014.

His research examines the relationship between colonial era war-making, Islamic networks, and the reconfiguration of religious connections in Indonesia and the Philippines. At ARI, he will research on the postcolonial implications of colonial wars for the Muslims of Southeast Asia.



Dr Huang Yinghong has commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Open Cluster with effect from 22 January 2014.

His research interests are political transformations in India and China, Gandhian Satyagraha, and the Sino-Indian border dispute under the perspective of their nation building process. At ARI, he will work on the programme titled "How did the Governance Regimes Change: Land Acquisitions in India and China".



Dr Eli Asher Elinoff has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms Cluster with effect from 16 December 2013.

His research focuses on citizenship, emerging political practices, notions of sustainability, and contestations over urban development in Thailand. At ARI, Dr Elinoff will continue his research on practices of participatory design and histories of urban struggle in Northeastern Thailand.



Ms Wajihah Hamid has commenced a 6-month appointment as Research Assistant with effect from 1 November 2013.

Ms Hamid recently completed her MA in Migration Studies at the School of Global Studies, University of Sussex. At ARI, she will be assisting Prof Gavin Jones in the project "Estimating and Projecting Urbanization and City Growth". Her research interests include migration, South Asian Diaspora and transnationalism.



Dr Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells has commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Open Cluster with effect from 3 January 2014.

During her term in ARI, she will focus on Indonesian national parks as emblematic of contentious environmental issues emanating from institutionally-perceived dichotomies between culture and science, and "tradition" and "modernity", which affect the nation state at multiple levels.



Prof Tania Murray Li has commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Asian Migration Cluster with effect from 3 February 2014.

At ARI, she will be writing up the results of research on the social aspects of oil palm conducted with fellow anthropologist Dr Pujo Semedi of Gadjah Mada University on the lives of the people who are involved with this crop, with a particular focus on land, labour, capital, and the new social-political configurations that emerge.



Ms Khoo Choon Yen has commenced a 6-month appointment as Research Assistant in the Asian Migration Cluster with effect from 1 January 2014.

At ARI, she conducts field and library research for projects commissioned under the Migrating Out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium, focusing particularly on Indonesian migrant workers. Her areas of research include labour migration from/within Indonesia and Southeast Asia, gender and migration and return migration.



Mr Ashish Rajadhyaksha has commenced a 6-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Cultural Studies in Asia Cluster with effect from 28 January 2014.

At ARI Mr Rajadhyaksha intends to complete Volume II of his Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid project which covers a period between the 1920s to the 1950s, and includes research over three continents (South/South East Asia, Britain, Australia, Canada and South Africa) of a film industry that emerged in the inter-War period.



Dr Kanchana N. Ruwanpura has commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Open Cluster with effect from 13 January 2014.

At ARI, she will write her ESRC-funded research on the apparel sector which is interested in drawing upon labour histories and struggles as well as current global political economy engagements to draw out the nuanced ways in which management and labour negotiate everyday work practices in the apparel sector of Sri Lanka.



Dr Earl Tyson Vaughan has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms Cluster with effect from 14 January 2014.

At ARI, Dr Vaughan is helping to build a centre of global expertise on Disaster Governance in urbanising Asia, extending his research on participatory recovery planning in post-tsunami Japan, and reworking his dissertation into a book, to be published with the *Inside Technology Series* of MIT Press.

Dr Tabea Bork-Hüffer was awarded the National Prize for the Best Dissertation Thesis in Human Geography by the Verband der Geographen an Deutschen Hochschulen (VGDH) or the Association of Geographers at German Universities on 4 October 2013. Her dissertation title is “Migrants’ Health Seeking Actions in Guangzhou, China. Individual Action, Structure and Agency: Linkages and Change.”

A/P Tim Bunnell gave a keynote speech on “Transborder and Global Issues: Best Practice and Policy Transfer in an Era of Globalization”, at the *International Conference on Regional Development*, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Diponegoro University, Semarang, Indonesia, 20-21 November 2013.

Prof Chua Beng Huat gave a keynote address on “Consumption, Lifestyle and Asian Modernities”, at the conference on *Consumption in Asia: After the New Rich Generation*, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia, 3-4 November 2013.

Prof Mike Douglass gave 4 keynote speeches: “Creative Communities – Urban Kampung by and for Residents”, at conference on *Gaung Bandung—“Kampung Wajah Kota*, Ikatan Mahasiswa Arsitektur Gunadharma, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia, 6 October 2013; “The Urbanization of Environmental Disasters: Livable Cities = Resilient Cities”, at the *International Conference on Resilient Cities – Beyond Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery*, The Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Institute of Technology Surabaya, Indonesia, 8 October 2013; “The Political Ecology of Flooding in Mega-Urban Regions in Asia: Seeking Spatial Justice through Participatory Disaster Governance in Jakarta”, at the *International Conference on Challenges of Extended Mega Urban Regions: The Changing Face of South East Asia and the World*, Putrajaya, Malaysia, 19-21 November 2013; “Livability as a Process of City Making – In Search of Progressive Cities in a Global Urban Age in Asia”, at the *International Conference on The Future Cities and the Quality of Life – Community Wellness and Livability: Qualitative Indicators of Livable Cities through Life Cycle Perspectives*, Ewha University, Seoul, Korea, 13 December 2013.

Prof Prasenjit Duara gave 3 keynote speeches: “Network Asia: Futures of the Past”, at *Is Asia One? Towards an Asian Art History*, Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore, 14 September 2013; “Narratives of Community”, at the Inaugural IHC Seminar on *People, Ports and Places: The*

Narrative of Indian Communities in Southeast Asia, Indian Heritage Centre, Singapore, 20 September 2013; and “Network Asia: China and its Asian ‘Routes’”, at the *7th Asian Political and International Studies Association (APISA) Annual Convention*, Ankara, Turkey, 25 October 2013. He also gave 2 Distinguished Public Lectures on “Sustainability and the Crisis of Transcendence: The Long View from Asia”, at the Research School of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, 25 November 2013; and at Nalanda University, Patna, New Delhi, 28 November 2013.

Dr Malini Sur’s *Jungle Passports and Metal Fences. Living on the Border between Northeast India and Bangladesh* (2012) received the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) PhD Prize 2013 and has been long listed in the Social Sciences category.

Prof Robert J. Wasson gave 2 plenary speeches: “Beyond the Usual: Climate Change, Catastrophe, and the Solid Earth”, at the conference on *Emplacing Climate Change: Reconstructions of Changing Environmental Realities*, NUS, 6 November 2013; “Too Little, Too Much, Too Polluted: Acute and Chronic Water Disasters in the Himalayan and Tibetan Region”, at the conference on *Disaster Governance: The Urban Transition in Asia*, ARI, NUS, 8 November 2013.

Dr Wu Keping gave a plenary speech on “Rebuilding Religions in China: Social Service Provision of Buddhist and Protestant Groups”, at the *Inter-Asia Roundtable on Religion and Development in China*, ARI, NUS, 17-18 October 2013.

Prof Brenda Yeoh gave a speech on “Mobile Subjectivities and Categorical (In)stabilities: Migrant ‘Workers’ and Foreign ‘Wives’ in the Global City-state of Singapore”, as a keynote at the *Asian Migration and the Global Asian Diasporas Conference*, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 6-7 September 2013, and as the Invited HART Fellow Public Lecture at the University of Sheffield, United Kingdom, 24 September 2013.

Prof Jean Yeung Wei-Jun gave the Inaugural Distinguished Lecture on “Transitioning to Adulthood and Intergenerational Relations in Asia”, at the Institute of Social Research, Fudan University, Shanghai, China, 9 December 2013.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

5 - 6 May 2014

YOUTHFUL FUTURES? ASPIRATIONS, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN ASIA

Contact persons:

Dr Suzanne Naafs; arisn@nus.edu.sg
A/P Tracey Skelton; geost@nus.edu.sg

15 - 16 May 2014

ENCOUNTERING URBAN DIVERSITY IN ASIA: CLASS AND OTHER INTERSECTIONS

Contact persons:

Dr Maureen Hickey; arimhh@nus.edu.sg
Dr Junjia Ye; ye@mmg.mpg.de

25 - 27 Jun 2014

9TH SINGAPORE GRADUATE FORUM ON SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

Contact person:

Dr Michelle Miller; arimam@nus.edu.sg

1 - 2 Jul 2014

GROWING UP IN ONE-PARENT FAMILY IN ASIA

Contact persons:

Prof Wei-Jun Jean Yeung; ariywj@nus.edu.sg
A/P Hyunjoon Park; hypark@sas.upenn.edu

8 - 9 Jul 2014

MOBILITIES AND EXCEPTIONAL SPACES IN ASIA

Contact person:

Dr Kumiko Kawashima; arikumi@nus.edu.sg

17 - 19 Jul 2014

AAS-IN-ASIA CONFERENCE 2014 – ASIA IN MOTION: HERITAGE AND TRANSFORMATION

Contact person:

Ms Valerie Yeo; ariyeov@nus.edu.sg

21 - 22 Aug 2014

GLOBALIZING HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Contact person:

Dr Arun Bala; ariab@nus.edu.sg

9 - 10 Oct 2014

THE ETHICS OF RELIGIOUS GIVING IN ASIA: HISTORICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATIONS

Contact persons:

Dr Wu Keping; ariwk@nus.edu.sg
A/P Michael Feener; arifm@nus.edu.sg

Details of events are available at www.ari.nus.edu.sg

RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT READING GROUP

DR WU KEPING

The Religion and Development reading group was first formed in March 2012 as part of the Religion and Development in Asia research project initiated by the Religion and Globalisation Cluster.

The reading group has been generously supported by ARI and Division of Humanities and Social Sciences in NUS since September 2012. It is widely attended by scholars from all ARI clusters, NGO workers, researchers and faculty members from NUS, NTU, and the larger academic community in Singapore. The reading group meets every other month for the first year and monthly starting September 2013. We discuss most recent and original publications on religion and development ranging from history, sociology, anthropology, political science, literature, philosophy, developmental studies, etc. The group adopts broad and wide-ranging definitions of both "religion" and "development", and seeks to examine multiple related themes including (but not limited to) religious actors in development, secularism and development, religious charity and philanthropy, religion and civil society, humanitarianism and religion, enchanted development and spiritual economies, missionaries and development, and the sociology as well as politics of disasters. The readings help the group explore new and even disruptive relationships between the often-assumed but problematic binary of "religion" and "development".

ASIAN URBANISMS CLUSTER CONFERENCE ON CONCEPTUALIZING CYBER-URBAN CONNECTIONS IN ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

PROF MIKE DOUGLASS

On 23 and 24 January 2014, Asian Urbanisms Cluster members Asha Rathina-Pandi and Peter Marolt convened a conference on *Conceptualizing Cyber-Urban Connections in Asia and the Middle East*.

Supported by cluster members Mike Douglass, Tim Bunnell, Rita Padawangi and Eli Elinoff who acted as chairs and discussants, we brought together young scholars and leading experts from inter- and multidisciplinary backgrounds to better understand and re-theorise "cyber-urban" connections in Asia and the Middle East as they affect people, networks, and social and built environments. Keynote speaker Merlyna Lim opened the conference by mapping out the spatial dynamics of contemporary social movements. The first day of the conference focused on social movement questions, while the second day specifically gave attention to cyber-urban connections. The two morning sessions opened conceptual avenues of discussion, and the afternoon sessions then provided empirical confusions, making for

vibrant discussions throughout the two days. Each session addressed new ways of seeing digital materialities; protest sites; movement narratives and interdependencies; grounding the cyber and augmenting space; protest forms; and other forms of mediated resistances. The discussions yielded insights on specificities and commonalities of experiences in Asia (including but not limited to China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines and Singapore) and the Middle East (including Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Morocco and Tunisia), and on how to better conceptualise cyber-urban connections. We have come away with a strong desire to further deepen our understandings of both the origins (roots) and processes (routes) that lead to highly visible urban protests. These issues remain understudied yet highly important conceptually.

Other recent events in the Asian Urbanisms Cluster are as follows:

Conference on Disaster Governance: The Urban Transition in Asia. 07-08 November 2013. Conveners: Professor

Mike Douglass and Dr Michelle Ann Miller. The event focused on how Asia's urban populations deal with disaster and its threat from a governance perspective.

Workshop on Governing Flooding in Asia's Urban Transition. 20 January 2013, NUS Bukit Timah Campus, Singapore. Convened by Michelle Ann Miller and Mike Douglass, this one-day workshop was jointly organised and co-funded by *Pacific Affairs* journal and ARI.

AUC Seminar. **"It was the Negro": Spectres of Global Urbanism and the Just City.** 20 February 2014. Professor AbdouMaliq Simone

AUC Seminar. **Building Community Resilience from Merapi Volcano Eruptions: Synergizing Urban-rural Connections towards Sustainable Disaster Governance.** March 3, 2014. Gatot Saptadi, Chief Executive of the Regional Disaster Mitigation Agency of Yogyakarta Province, and Mahditia Paramita, CEO of the Housing Resource Center Indonesia.

RELIGION AND GLOBALISATION IN ASIAN CONTEXTS

DR ROBIN BUSH

The Religion and Globalisation Cluster continues to focus its work on research and publications around the theme of its Cluster Project on Religion and Development. Two edited volumes and a special journal issue are in progress, following on conferences held earlier in the year. We were pleased to have Tabassum (Ruhi) Khan join us as a Senior Visiting Fellow for two months (Jan-Feb) and to welcome Joshua Gedacht who began a one-year postdoctoral fellow appointment in February. We also congratulate Philip Fountain on his promotion to Senior Research Fellow. The cluster has re-

instated its monthly Works in Progress (WIP) group, in which we review each other's work at draft stage and provide constructive critical commentary to assist with publication. We have also continued our Religion and Development reading group, most recently reading Marie-Hélène Huet's *Culture of Disaster*. Details of all of these activities are on the ARI website, and we welcome anyone who would like more information on these, or who would like to participate in Cluster activities, to contact any of us via our contact information also available on the website.

METACLUSTER IN THE NEWS

DR ARUN BALA

The Metacluster reading group on Asian connections continues to grow with participants drawn from social scientists, historians and area studies specialists in both ARI and other NUS departments. It has begun to isolate several themes that show the role that population, economic, cultural and scientific exchanges, and empires, trade and religions, play in connecting the different parts of Asia in the second millennium. In particular these readings also facilitate a deeper understanding of the comparative versus connected perspectives on history to be explored through close collaboration with the participants in the Religion and Globalisation in Asian Contexts and the Science, Technology, and Society clusters.

The Asian connections perspective was extended in a novel direction this year with the growing awareness that disasters in Asia are increasing in both frequency and magnitude, and that they can have pan-Asian impacts. Under the rubric *Disasters in Asia: Localities, Knowledge, and Governance* members of the Metacluster have worked with scholars in the Asia Urbanisms, Religion and Globalisation in Asian Contexts, and Science, Technology, and Society clusters to fashion an approach that simultaneously honours the particular perspectives of each cluster but provides the beginnings of an overall conceptual framework.

THE CULTURAL STUDIES RESEARCH CLUSTER

PROF CHUA BENG HUAT

The Cultural Studies Research Cluster co-organised with the Department of English Literature of NUS, a *Graduate Workshop on Cultural Studies in Asia* at ARI, on 10-11 February 2014. The workshop was co-sponsored by BK21 Plus Project, Department of English Language and Literature, and ARI. Seven students from each institution presented their ongoing thesis research work for discussion. Two separate panels were constituted for senior scholars from both institutions; three professors and one postdoctoral fellow from Yonsei and Dr Sun Jung and Dr William Peterson, University of Melbourne, and currently Visiting Senior Research Fellow, from Cultural Studies Cluster. Both invited

guest speakers, Prof Dinah Roma, De La Salle University, Philippines, and Dr Olivia Khoo, Monash University, Melbourne, were former ARI visiting research fellows. Prof Roma presented an update on her research on Travel Writing, while Dr Khoo presented her new research initiative on the "carceral regime" of refugees in Australia. Prof Chua gave the opening keynote address that encourages the graduate students to use the rich local empirical material to develop new concepts, rather than depend on West-derived received concepts in existing literature. A small in-house publication of the proceedings will be issued by the two workshop partners in the near future.

CHANGING FAMILY IN ASIA CLUSTER

PROF JEAN YEUNG WEI-JUN

Economic Stress, Human Capital, and Families in Asia: Research and Policy Challenges (2013), edited by Wei-Jun Jean Yeung and Yap Mui Teng (Springer Netherlands), presents recent findings about the consequences and policy implications of economic stress for human capital development and family well-being in Asia (see book image in the New Books section). The chapters explore the impact of current financial crisis, job loss, low-wage employment, and catastrophic natural calamities. The authors show how macro-level economic stress can filter down through households to affect individuals' economic and socio-psychological well-being. The chapters reveal a wide spectrum of economic stresses experienced by families in Asia that is linked to poor human capital development, emotional distress, health problems, changing fertility patterns, more frequent geographic

movement, and less supportive parenting behaviour. The elderly, women, children, and low-skilled workers are particularly vulnerable. The economic shocks in the past several decades have exposed the vulnerability of the family institution and the weaknesses in this region's social protection system that can lead to detrimental long-term effects on human capital development. The book results from the *International Conference on Economic Stress, Human Capital, and Families in Asia: Research and Policy Challenges* held in NUS, convened by Prof Jean Yeung, Prof Gavin Jones, A/P Angelique Chan, and Dr Yap Mui Teng, which brought together about 200 eminent policy-makers, practitioners, researchers, academics, and non-governmental organisations from 18 countries. Details of the book are available at: <http://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-94-007-7386-8>

RESEARCH AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: REFLECTIONS FROM "READING ACROSS WORLDS"

MS GRACE BAEY
RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Reading Across Worlds (RAW) is a project that aims to bring visibility to inspiring stories of migrant domestic workers in Singapore through film and photography. Grace Baey offers her reflections on setting up the project with Bernice Wong and Ng Yiqin, co-founders of the local arts initiative Beyond the Border, Behind the Men (BTBBTM).

"Hey folks, I drafted a project description for our Facebook page. Any thoughts?"
 "Sounds too wordy. Where are you going to put it?"
 "There's space in the 'About' section."
 "Nobody reads that."
 "Really?"
 "Post the write-up with a picture, and we can share it amongst our friends."
 "Good thinking!"
 "Yes, it's more about shareability."

Shareability. Ever since this word was mentioned, it has continued to inform the ways in which I think about research and public engagement. As academics and researchers, many of us are well aware of the age-old criticisms. We write too obscurely. The format is unfriendly. And the most disheartening of all: Nobody reads that!

Having researched on migration issues for over five years, I often slip into the false presumption that people would be interested to know about these topics just because they are

socially relevant in Singapore's everyday context. But social relevance doesn't always translate into social interest – not without deliberate effort, at least.

Stemming from my experience working on the "Reading Across Worlds" project, I'd like to share three takeaways that I've found useful for doing research communications. First, find compelling stories to illustrate key issues. Everyone loves stories, and they have the ability to connect people on an emotional and intellectual level.

Second, explore different mediums that can be shared and grasped easily. Having identified your main message, try novel ways of presenting the information, such as through an infographic or photo series. Third, use social media to promote your piece. Whether we like it or not, that's how most people consume information these days.

Whilst there might be concerns about the potential dilution of academic rigour when taking on these tasks, making research accessible through customised outputs remains a necessary first step to raising public awareness on social issues. Whenever I am unsure or have questions, I always try to tell myself: Take courage, and step out!

RAW's short film entitled "Ceria" will be publicly released online on International Women's Day. For more information, please visit [facebook.com/readingacrossworlds](https://www.facebook.com/readingacrossworlds)



In July 2013, Grace travelled to Indonesia with Bernice and Yiqin from the production team to document the story of Ristanti Ningrum (third from left), a migrant domestic worker who recently returned home to Desa Bader, Dolopo, after ten years in Singapore to set up a children's library for her village community.



The RAW team at the opening ceremony of Ceria, Rista's newly set up children's library in Desa Bader.



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