Why do we categorise? Just because we can…

- Nicholas Tarling

Nowadays we avoid talking of niggers – but accept ‘blacks’ – and, rightly, avoid using ‘race’. But we attach people to their ‘ethnicity’ or their ‘culture’, stereotyping at grave risk to an understanding of their complex individuality, even while purposing protection and support; risking, too, ignoring change. Perhaps, too, it risks the stability of the complex society in which they live and with which they have a reciprocal relationship. Even, it may be, there is a risk to the larger human society which globalisation has created, though we seem more or less ready to accept the dual allegiances of diaspora and the implications of transmigration. Why do we engage in this categorisation? Sometimes, it seems, just because we can.

Taking a census was part of making a state from early times. The nineteenth-twentieth century colonial state insisted on including ‘racial’ and ‘tribal’ affiliations. ‘There is no doubt’, a North Borneo [Sabah] census report remarked in 1931, ‘that a good deal of confusion and doubt exists not only in the minds of the enumerators but of the natives themselves as to which [tribal] subdivision they really belong in.’ The people had identified themselves with the rivers along which they lived and through which they communicated with others. Now they had to decide their identity on another basis, or internalise one thrust upon them.

Census-takers remain obsessed with identity, even, or especially, in the [post-modern] nation state. In recent New Zealand censuses we have been successively asked with which ‘ethnic group’ we ‘identify’ or which ‘belong to’, and offered a weird mix of possible answers. ‘[I]nformation on the communities that make up our country’, the Statistics Minister explained last year, was ‘key’ to making New Zealand prosper. The census was a ‘fantastic tool’, declared Henry Chung, Associate Professor of Marketing at Massey University. ‘The reality is the needs and demands for goods and services are very different for each ethnic community.’ For example, moon-cakes were a must-have product for the Chinese community for the Moon Festival. The data would help the Pak’n Save chain ‘identify the super-markets where the demand for mooncakes would be highest’. One would have thought the supermarket buyer knew already.

In the 2000 US census respondents were asked to describe themselves as belonging to one or more of 15 ‘racial’ identities: if they refused, their racial identity would be imputed by the Census Bureau. I leave the ‘ethnicity’ answer on my New Zealand census form blank, and I suppose something similar happens. The fact is that, like others, I ‘identify’ with much and ‘belong to’ none.

The questions and the posited answers would be ludicrous if they were not dangerous. David Cannadine has pointed to the risks of what has been termed ‘totalising’, namely the habit of describing and defining individuals by their membership in one single group, deemed to be more important and more all-encompassing than any other solidarity – and indeed than all others – to which they might simultaneously belong.

The other much-used or abused word is ‘culture’. That, of course, has shifted its meaning over time. Currently it is often used as a label of difference alongside ‘identity’, rather paradoxical though that may be. It carries overtones of the stereotyping that arises from the alien or unfamiliar. ‘How should we do business with people from other “cultures”?’

‘A recent Asia Savvy conference held at NZAI was asked. Of course, in foreign countries, they do things differently, as they did in the past. But human beings are more complex than that suggests, and they change in changing circumstances.

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References
The New Zealand Economy in a Changing Asia-Pacific

On March 18, Dr Alan Bollard, Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat and former Governor of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, spoke at a business breakfast jointly organised by the NZ Asia Institute (NZAI), the Business School and the Graduate School of Management. Prof Natasha Hamilton-Hart, Director of NZAI’s Southeast Asian Studies Centre, welcomed and introduced the guest speaker to a houseful of participants from across Auckland. In his talk, Dr Bollard detailed major structural changes in East Asian economies in the APEC community, and where New Zealand would fit in the transformations.

He pointed out that trade-liberalisation-led GDP growth was for a long while the central theme of APEC. Yet while this trend was expected to continue, globalisation and technology development had set in motion a rapid reconfiguration of production in the region, featuring the growth of manufacturing and services supply chains among the member states and beyond. In this regard, production networks in East Asia were perhaps among the most extensive and sophisticated in the world, with ever more products travelling across borders multiple times in the manufacturing process from raw material to intermediate goods to finished merchandise. He attached even greater importance to the fact that the APEC region, especially East Asia, not only accelerated the mobility of production, but also sped up service integration, which had been a weak link in its economic regionalisation.

Dr Bollard further highlighted two massive phenomena that accompanied the development of production networks in East Asia, namely, swift urbanisation and explosive growth of middle income populations. These occurrences, he continued, were themselves attended with major changes in people’s consumption patterns, dietary choices, accommodation types, and balance sheets. Put differently, growing incomes created rising demands for quality and choice, brand and fashion, leisure and recreation, higher education and self-fulfilment, security and healthy environment, good governance and better public-service outcomes. The guest speaker meanwhile also reminded the audience of the fact that personal savings rates remained high in East Asia, and equities held through publicly listed companies stayed low. Virtually the only popular financial instrument of choice was buying apartments for residency status and/or capital gains, adding ever more debts to many balance sheets. Yet the quick debt build-up would not likely lead to a global financial crisis because these debts were not linked up in the way to allow contagion to happen as the US and Europe had experienced in 2007-2008.

Dr Bollard noted that while East Asia continued to wrestle with serious problems of public concern about medical services, elderly care, housing, transport, education, income distribution, food safety, and law and order, there was greater focus in the region on value added. The Fung Global Institute, for example, mapped out the value distribution along the value chain of a $425 jacket sold in the United States. The “smiling curve” emerged from its data indicated that the share of the real manufacturing component in the “made-in-China” jacket was 9%, or $38, and the rest was taken up by pre- and post-production services.

Would New Zealand products get on the many “smiling curves” born by middle income demands in East Asia? If yes, where?

In answering these questions, Dr Bollard emphasised that while the production part was often consensually deemed as low value-added, the primary sector should still fit well in the global supply chain. He did acknowledge, however, that persistent trade barriers for agricultural products continued to limit the access of New Zealand primary sector to globalisation. Moreover, the prevalent definition of R & D by and in the sector as public good also made harvesting or charging returns from its copyable results difficult. Additionally, off-farm activities might not be easily connected to replicate the story suggested by a typical smiling curve. Yet he called the audience’s attention to two NZPECC case studies on UHT milk technology and infant formula. The research findings indicated that New Zealand did all right in the supply chain of the former, largely due to the rather basic nature of the technology. The infant formula, on the other hand, presented an “unsmiling” curve, with farmers getting 7% of the values, powder factories in Singapore 9%, R & D and processing 29%, marketing operations in Singapore and China 17%. Dr Bollard commended Fonterra’s effort to increase the value-added of dairy farming, but also pointed out that the forest sector had proved in the past that there was no single answer to this challenge. He believed that to improve its position in the global value chain, New Zealand dairy farming industry might want to focus more on “intangible assets”, including design concept, market research, branding, marketing, logistics, business services, e-commerce, certification, quality control, transportation, packaging, retailing, advertising, after-sales, warehouse services, environmental services and so forth.
Celebrating 40 Years of New Zealand-ASEAN Relations: Visit of Indonesia Foreign Minister

HE Ms Retno Marsudi, the Foreign Minister of Indonesia, accompanied by the Hon. Murray McCulley, her New Zealand counterpart, visited the New Zealand Asia Institute (NZAI) on 2 March. Introduced by Prof Jenny Dixon, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Strategic Engagement), and welcomed by a substantial audience, including many of her compatriots, she spoke about the Republic’s policies and prospects under President Joko Widodo. She also responded to a number of questions.

In his vote of thanks Professor Nicholas Tarling, Fellow and historian of Southeast Asia at NZAI, questioned whether we in New Zealand were as interested in and informed about Indonesia as we should be. It is the largest Muslim nation, the largest state in Southeast Asia, the immediate neighbour of our immediate neighbour, Australia, and an increasingly important trading partner.

It has been possible through the media to follow some of the Republic’s recent history, but not very adequately. Professor Tarling continued. And our universities – driven by immediate student interest and lack of resource – have let it slip. We still have a few experts. But twenty years ago University of Auckland taught Indonesian to MA level, and we had two of the major historians of Indonesia, Barbara and Leonard Andaya, on the staff of the History Department.

So it was especially good to have a real live Indonesian Foreign Minister to speak at the University, and Professor Tarling expressed the hope that we could find ways to rebuild the academic relationship. The NZ Asia Institute had been doing its best: it held a conference on Indonesia in 1999 and one on ASEAN at 40 in 2007; put on a number of lectures on Indonesia in recent years; and encouraged and helped the Centre of Continuing Education to offer Indonesian language courses.

New Zealand did not attend at the first ASEAN summit in 1976; nor even send a message to the meeting as a whole, though it did send messages to the individual leaders: it would be like sending a congratulatory telegram to a country wedding, one official suggested. But Prime Minister Muldoon was at the second summit in 1977, speaking in a forthright manner at Kuala Lumpur in 1977, and, as Mr McCulley pointed out, the relationship had gone ahead since.

Her Excellency, Professor Tarling concluded, was in a line of distinguished Indonesia Foreign Ministers. He instanced Professor Mochtar, who played a major role in the Law of the Sea Conferences and in realising the Republic’s ambition to be recognised as an archipelagic state. And he vividly recalled the late Ali Al-Atas, who in his retirement took a full part in NZAI’s conference on ASEAN at 40.

Japan in Northeast Asia: Challenges of Reconciliation in the Neoliberal Age

- Koichi Nakano, Sophia University 2015 Visiting Scholar, Asian Studies and NZAI Japan Studies Centre, University of Auckland

It is a striking fact that the so-called “history” issues still remain so salient in 2015 – as the world commemorates the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The controversies concern the history textbooks used in Japanese schools, the visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the prime ministers and other prominent politicians of Japan, and the “comfort women” (sex slaves) issue, among other things. The obvious question is why has Japan not overcome these issues yet?

The remarkable degree of elite continuity (between prewar and postwar, but also through the postwar period) is part of the reason why successive governments have had such a difficulty in coming to terms with the wartime past in Japan. Revisionism is often a family affair as is clearly the case with Prime Minister Abe who idolizes his grandfather Kishi, a member of the Tojo Cabinet in 1945.

In other words, the history issues are not 70-year old, but they were only born in the final phase of the Cold War as the nascent neoliberal trends were opening up societal demands that were until then largely silenced or ignored by the iron grip of the authoritative state elites.

In fact, it may even be pointed out that the history issues emerged as diplomatic issues in Northeast Asia only in the 1980s – following the neoliberal market reforms that were started in PRC from 1978 and as the democratization movement gained momentum in ROK throughout that decade. In other words, the history issues are not 70-year old, but they were only born in the final phase of the Cold War as the nascent neoliberal trends were opening up societal demands that were until then largely silenced or ignored by the iron grip of the authoritative state elites.

What that means is that the history issues cannot to be resolved by a simple “deal” between state leaders because that is precisely why they emerged in the first place. The ruling elites of PRC and ROK as well as Japan have to be able to convince the domestic publics at the same time as they try to come to an understanding with their counterparts across the border. It is commonplace to say “it takes two to tango” for former aggressors and victims to make amends, but in reality, it is even harder because it takes more than that to dance to the tune of reconciliation in the neoliberal age.
In fact, the initial reaction of the ruling elites in Japan to the history issues was based on the prevailing neoliberal, internationalist spirit – to be “considerate” of the sentiments of the former victim countries as they understood that reconciliation in the region was a precondition for Japan to play a larger (including military) role in the international community. In other words, their “nationalist” ambitions were clothed in certain internationalist orientation.

Thus, when the history textbook controversy flared up as a diplomatic issue for the first time in 1982, the government issued the Miyazawa Statement that pledged to curb the excessive revisionist tendencies then. Similarly, when China reacted strongly against Prime Minister Nakasone’s official visit to Yasukuni Shrine in 1985, Nakasone made it clear that he would refrain from future visits from the following year. These moves were followed by the Kono Statement on the “comfort women” issue in 1993 (in reaction to the emergence of the issue in Japan-ROK relations in 1991), and also by the Murayama Statement in 1995.

As the pace of neoliberal reforms was accelerated and as the gap between the rich and the poor widened in all of the three countries, the internationalist orientation that was predominant earlier was swiftly replaced by a rising nationalism not only in Japan but also in PRC and ROK. Moreover, the ruling elites in Northeast Asia came to learn that history issues might conveniently be exploited to divert attention away from domestic ills. The revisionist backlash that began in Japan in the late 1990s has become mainstream with the “progress” made in Koizumi’s structural reforms, paving the way for the alarming revisionism of Abe’s second premiership today.

Roundtable with Ambassador Ong Keng Yong from Singapore

During his visit to New Zealand, Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, currently Executive Deputy Chair of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies within Nanyang Technological University and Director of its Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, stopped by at NZAI on 26 June and had a roundtable discussion with over a dozen academics from across the University and local government representatives from Auckland city. Being a former Secretary-General of ASEAN (2003-2008), he spoke highly of New Zealand’s effort in the last 40 years to maintain active partnerships and collaborations with the Association and its member states.

He then briefed the participants on some key issues on ASEAN’s immediate agenda, one of which was East Timor’s membership application. He indicated that Singapore openly questioned whether East Timor was willing and had the capacity to participate fully in ASEAN and work with all the ten dialogue partners. One concern was the language barrier to effective communication as it is a Portuguese-speaking country. Ambassador Ong acknowledged Singapore’s effort in recent years to help East Timor’s English language proficiency, but stressed that the challenge remained daunting considering ASEAN would typically have over 1,000 meetings a year. A thornier issue was that the ASEAN Charter made it difficult for “break away” entities of member states to join the Association.

Within ASEAN countries, Ambassador Ong felt encouraged that the 2005 Aceh peace agreement remained in place in Indonesia, even though uncertainties still lurked ahead. Similarly, in the Philippines, the 2014 peace deal between the government and the Muslim separatist forces in the south ended their long-standing armed conflict. But many in the rebel groups now looked to Sabah in Malaysia for opportunities, which kept Kuala Lumpur concerned. Insurgent movements in South Thailand remained active as well. Yet while there was no quick end in sight, the Thai government seemed able to manage the situation. In comparison, the conflict between Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar seemed more worrisome as an increasing number of people were fleeing the country for Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

About ASEAN regional integration, Ambassador Ong frankly admitted that as a community there was still much to be done to build its identity on the ground. Economically, while tariffs were greatly reduced, other barriers still existed. A particularly serious issue was that there were increasing calls in business sectors of some member countries for their state governments to go back on their regional commitments. Whether or not responding to such domestic pressures, some of those countries began to slow down their effort in implementing ASEAN’s visions and plans. This had a ripple effect as some other member states decided to take a wait and see attitude about their following the procedures set for ASEAN economic integration.

Yet Ambassador Ong concluded that ASEAN was in a challenging but exciting phase in its development, and that the overall prospects for its Economic Community remained promising. In answering the New Zealand participants’ questions about ASEAN’s reactions towards China’s rise, maritime disputes in the Asian waters and big players’ competing agendas for the region, Ambassador Ong noted that while national interests, security concerns and strategic priorities varied among the countries in ASEAN, none of them wanted to see conflict breaking out in the region. China, Japan, the US and other powers involved in Asia seemed to share this perception as well, as they would usually step back when tensions were building too high. When asked about how to further ASEAN-New Zealand relations, Ambassador Ong replied categorically that Southeast Asian countries would like to do more with Kiwis, particularly in practical areas like environmental protection, resource use and management, urbanisation and sustainable cities, business competency training, and knowledge transfers. The roundtable ended on this positive note.
Domestic and Global Implications

China's “New Normal”: Domestic and Global Implications

In 2015, NZAI's Korea Studies Centre continued its joint seminar series with Asian Studies in the Arts Faculty. Partially funded by a grant from the Academy of Korean Studies in Korea, this year's two guest speakers were Prof Hyaeweol Choi from the Australian National University and Prof Byong Won Lee from the University of Hawaii.

In her talk on “Between 'Home, Sweet Home' and 'A Doll's House': Modern Domesticity in Colonial Era Korea” Prof Choi re-examined the modern history of women in Korea from a transnational perspective, focusing on the dynamic flow of ideas, discourses and people across national boundaries that triggered new gender norms and bodily practices. She specifically traced the genealogies of the idea and image of the “modern home” in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Korea, and highlighted the role of Western Protestant missionaries, enlightenment-oriented social reformers and foreign-educated intellectuals in fashioning the ideal home as reflected in the images associated with the “missionary home,” the “sweet home” and “a doll's house.” Her analysis went beyond the simple binary framework of the coloniser and the colonised, and situated the concept and images of “home” at the centre of a network of ideas and people outside the geographical borders of the nation. In doing so, she effectively demonstrated the ways in which modern domesticity emerged from the complex interplay between the local, the national and the global, between desire for and anxiety about the modern and between imagined ideals and naked realities.

Prof Lee's seminar was titled “Politics of Arirang: Tripartite Political Dynamics of the Korean Folksong in South Korea, North Korea and China.” He explained that Arirang was the best-known and most popular folksong of Korea, which originated from the central region of Korea in the middle of 1900s as a Sin-minyo, or New Folksong. It evolved since then to be the iconic song for Koreans the world over. In 2011, China designated it as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of the ethnic Koreans in its Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. Nationalistic South Koreans were suspicious of the Chinese advance as part of an ongoing Chinese effort for the appropriation of Korean heritage, including the ownership of some historical events. The South Korean government, in actively promoting the song worldwide as the national musical icon, also ran the risk of exaggerating its historical origin. The rival claims between the two countries resulted in the registration of “Arirang” as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanities in 2012. Prof Lee went on to point out that North Korea had rarely mentioned “Arirang” until the early 1980s when it inserted the song title in its “Arirang Mass Games”. This was widely seen as an effort of the North to tone down its ideological embossment and to project a utopian Korea through the unification of the peninsula on its terms. Prof Lee concluded that the tripartite political dynamics saw “Arirang” becoming a nation-branding icon in South Korea; a soft image-making medium and ideological disguise in North Korea; and a political act gesturing the embracement of ethnic minorities in China.

Prof WANG Gungwu examined Eurasia as the centre of recorded history in nine-tenths of the past 5,000 years. He pointed out that three distinctive civilizations had arisen from its edges: the Mediterranean, the Indic and the Sinic. Mixtures of these had been taken back and forth across the continent by mobile confederations of tribes throughout the millennia. China and its Sinic civilization had meanwhile been faced landwards north and west where their enemies came from. Only after the 1970s were the Chinese able to build a truly modern navy. Yet still no match of the US in terms of global, or even regional, maritime presence, China seemed recently to try to break the maritime arc of US allies with financial, economic and technological responses that could draw the states of Eurasia closer together. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt were recent initiatives in this regard. In Prof Wang's opinion, however, the core of these strategies would depend on the revival and relevance of old World values and institutions of the Eurasian continent that the American New World had sought to replace.

Ambassador Wu and Professors Huang and Xu explained in great length that China initiated the belt/road strategy largely out of domestic economic concerns. In other words, it intended to find new outlets to export its industrial overcapacity and material oversupply, particularly in the steel, coal and cement sectors. Prof Jingdong Yuan then brieﬁed the audience on the impact of China’s slower growth on Australia. According to his data, Australia-China trade in per household terms increased from AUS $3,400 in 2009 to AUS $16,985 in 2014, and 200,000 Australian jobs were sustained by direct exports to China of which 72,000 in mining, 38,000 in hotels and restaurants and 18,000 in agriculture. With China’s slower economic growth being expected to affect Australia’s resources sector, many on the other side of the Tasman believed that new areas of future trade expansion would be in food (beef and dairy), tourism, education and services. Prof Yuan wondered if and how would this might impact New Zealand’s trade with China.

In 2015, NZAI’s Korea Studies Centre continued its joint seminar series with Asian Studies in the Arts Faculty. Partially funded by a grant from the Academy of Korean Studies in Korea, this year’s two guest speakers were Prof Hyaeweol Choi from the Australian National University and Prof Byong Won Lee from the University of Hawaii.
The subsequent keynote address was delivered by Prof Siah Hwee Ang from the School of Marketing and International Business at Victoria University of Wellington. He was a well-known scholar to many in the audience through not only his outstanding research achievements, but also his extensive affiliation with the University of Auckland. He taught and served as the Associate Dean Postgraduate and International in Auckland Business School for ten years before his current appointment in 2013 as the inaugural BNZ Chair in Business in Asia at Victoria.

Prof Ang began with a brief overview of his role responsibilities as the BNZ Chair, pointing out that the position, the result of a partnership between Victoria University, the Bank of New Zealand and three key government agencies, signified a nationwide, cross-sector keenness for more and informed engagement with Asia. Drawing on his extensive involvement in domestic and international executive programmes and consulting projects, he emphasised that for New Zealanders seeking business or other substantive interactions with Asia, knowing how to use chopsticks, whether to eat the last piece on a serving plate, or who should sit towards the door, would not suffice for being “savvy” about the region. They should have at least some grasp of the economy, politics, geography, development, history and socio-political issues of the countries they would want to do business with.

Prof Ang took note of recent research data showing that Kiwi businesses commonly expected Asia to be the most influential factor, positive or otherwise, in the New Zealand economy in the foreseeable future. Yet while seeing Asia as holding the key to growth, many local businesses felt ill-equipped to cope with the challenge of asymmetrical China and India. Prof Ang acknowledged that in coping with the challenge of asymmetrical size, some Kiwi companies fixed their gaze on smaller cities in the two Asian giants, and others joined the appeal for New Zealand to shift more attention to ASEAN as an alternative trade option to China. He cautioned, however, that ASEAN’s own economic integration with China was already quite advanced. This meant that Southeast Asian countries would acutely feel the impact of and readily react to changes in China’s economy. A case in point was that when China devalued its yuan after the “Black Monday” crash of its stock market in August this year, all emerging markets, including those in ASEAN, followed suit and lowered their currencies to stay competitive.

An important lesson here was that to do well in Asia, New Zealand businesses would need to be “savvy” in a broader sense rather than simply having a rudimentary cultural, protocol and demographic awareness of the region.

The speakers in the following panels substantiated Prof Ang’s argument through their personal work and life experiences in Asia and New Zealand. Mr Jay Waters, Senior Advisor to the Korean Embassy in Wellington, recalled the importance and usefulness of maintaining a constant sense of appreciation of Korea’s 5,000-year history in his daily decisions and social interactions when living in that country. Speaking on the long-standing and multifaceted relationship between New Zealand and Korea since the Korean War, he maintained that Kiwis should engage more with Korea as they might find it an easier country to do business with than other giant economies in Asia. He encouraged interested members in the audience to take advantage of many available opportunities presented through scholarships, English teaching jobs and commercial internships as pathways to Korea.

Ms Laura Browne from NZAI, who once lived and studied in China for more than a decade, noted that the billion-people country was not merely stock market crashes, pollution, growing appetites for luxury brands, which hit headlines worldwide. It was, instead, a complex and segmented society featuring at one level wide generation gaps, even between those of the “post 80’s” and “post 90’s”, with the former commonly seen as being ambitious but naive, and the latter worldly but pessimistic. Yet given the fact that seven million new tertiary graduates were added to the job market each year, observed Laura, both groups felt uncertain about their future and hence adopted an attitude of “living for the moment”. In other words, their looking for hobbies, indulging in consumerism, touring the world and studying overseas, including New Zealand, were by and large for “experiencing things today”. This mentality also saw young Chinese promoting and practising “togetherness” for fun through social networks, such as WeChat that had 450 million monthly active users.

Sharing his extensive consulting and project managing experience in Southeast Asia, Mr Chris Henderson from Cognition Education Ltd called for Kiwis who planned to build their careers in ASEAN countries to invest in people and places rather than only its markets. He believed that by doing so, they would actually also invest in their own abilities, including cultural competence, which in turn would help open doors and cultivate relationships. He opined that those who tried to connect to Southeast Asia should pay attention particularly to Indonesia as its demographic dividend projected to continue for the next 20 or so years indicated increasing numbers of young people, growing entrepreneurship, more cutting-edge activities, and rising purchasing power. Connecting with that social segment should provide massive opportunities for New Zealand. Yet Mr Henderson also alerted the audience about the fact that Kiwis might find it ever more challenging to work as consultants in Indonesia. For to lower costs, institutions and companies there increasingly sought to hire skilled young people from countries like the Philippines and Thailand rather than from Western nations. Indonesia’s intensifying competitive environment required New Zealand to keep looking for new ways to sustain its effective business engagement with that country.
Gong Ho! Pizza Beijing co-founder Jade Gray fascinated and intrigued the audience with his enterprising spirit, varied commercial involvements, resourcefulness and creativity in grabbing market opportunities and responding effectively to challenges in building and running businesses in China since the mid-1990s. He began his colourful journey first working as a ski instructor in China’s Heilongjiang Province, then managing a cattle ranch in Liaoning Province, and later running a supermarket in Yunnan Province. From 2000 onwards, he went into setting up his own ventures in Beijing, which included a gym franchise and several food and beverage establishments. In 2010, Prime Minister John Key cut the ribbon of his Gong Ho! Pizza chain in Beijing. During his twenty odd years in China, he always incorporated public-good initiatives into his business activities, ranging from collecting rubbish on the Great Wall to starting an organisation to fund Dog Shelters in China’s capital. His rich and successful business development experiences in China attracted the attention of the New Zealand government, which appointed him to its Business Beachheads Advisory Board (China) in 2009. His “three Ps” business motto, i.e., profits, people and planet, was covered by China Daily, which was also his advice to those in the audience who planned to engage in commercial activities in Asia.

Ms Nova Mercier, a Policy Advisor from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, told her story of how a chance encounter with a Chinese student inspired her to learn the Korean language, get a scholarship to complete her MA in Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, tutor North Korean refugees in English, and work for a digital site sharing their insights. She believed that her extensive exposure to Korea widened her horizons, polished her skills, provided a springboard for her career in New Zealand, and enabled her to envision the broader region beyond Korea. She invited interested members of the Asia Savvy community to check out the Kimchi Club, a network of young professionals having ties with Korea, which went global soon after its opening in New Zealand in 2009. Ms Nova Mercier supported the idea of Kingston that commercial activities in Asia would constitute the first step towards building common grounds for doing business.

Yet how could “Asia-savvy” university graduates get potential employers interested in them? Ms Lena Li, a recruitment consultant from Manpower Group, suggested some strategic and hand-on tips. She first asked the audience to always remember that recruitment was about “you”, not the company. She then stressed that recruitment agents and potential employers would normally look for “key words” in applicants’ CVs and during interviews to help uncover “special” candidates. In this regard, contenders could borrow commonly recognised “key words”, or show their “difference” by coming up with their own that might demonstrate creativity, humour and sophistication. Ms Li assured the audience that recruitment agents were not there to make people fail, but to help them reach their goals. Yet to realise this intention, applicants would have to first find their goals, know their values, be able to articulate to “strangers” their uniqueness, and demonstrate their self-confidence in being “Asia savvy”. She reminded the audience not to overlook social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, or treat them carelessly, when constructing, communicating and managing their professional profiles. Recruitment agents and companies regularly checked therefor top talents and references.

Ms Sachie Nomura’s success in building her award-winning Sachie’s Kitchen Cooking School in New Zealand and her headhunting practices for qualified, “Asia savvy” and “unique” employees exemplified many of the key points highlighted by the above guest speakers. She emphasised that as a Japanese-born “new Asian-New Zealander”, her cooking school, internationally syndicated Sachie’s Kitchen TV show, popular cook book Sachie’s Kitchen, 15,000 Facebook followers, and 30,000 plus customers did not come out of the blue. When embarking on her ventures, she would go through the process of writing down her dreams on a whiteboard, creating visions, setting goals, working out road maps, executing plans and taking time for reflections. Besides putting her heart, mind, spirit and soul into her endeavours, she attributed her achievements also to the fact that she saw each of her projects as a “bridge” to help others reach their goals, be it the cooking school, a TV show, or a publication. She revealed that among the new ideas on her whiteboard was to do something together with the NZ Olympic Committee for the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

The engaging guest speakers and their stimulating talks inspired heated discussions among the 100 strong student participants during the three workshop breakout sessions. They eagerly exchanged opinions on where to work in Asia, how to use their Asia-savvy skillsets in international careers, and how to be Asia-savvy in New Zealand. They also enthusiastically participated in the pilot green event initiative and activities jointly introduced into this year’s Asia-savvy conference by the Organising Committee and the University’s Sustainability and Environment office to reduce carbon footprint and waste of the forum. The results were encouraging: 55% of the conference waste was recyclable; and 58% of the attendees used public transport.

The New Zealand Asia Institute wishes to acknowledge the generous support of ASB, Beanbelt Coffee Co., Campus Store, Fortune Cookies, City Cake Co., L’Occitane En Provence, PB Technologies, Printing.com, The Quad Cafe, Rapoo, University of Auckland Business School, University of Auckland Centre for Continuing Education, University of Auckland Confucius Institute, University Book Store.
Recent publications by NZAI staff

Orientalism and the Operatic World explores places opera in the context of its steady globalization over the past two centuries. In this important survey, Tarling first considers how the Orient appears on the operatic stage in Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and the United States before exploring individual operas according to the region of the “Orient” in which the work is set. Throughout, Tarling offers key insights into such notable operas as George Frideric Handel’s Berenice, Giuseppe Verdi’s Aida, Giacomo Puccini’s Madama Butterfly, Pietro Mascagni’s Iris, and others. Orientalism and the Operatic World argues that any close study of the history of Western opera, in the end, fails to support the notion propounded by Said that Westerners inevitably stereotyped, dehumanized, and ultimately sought only to dominate the East through art. Instead, Tarling argues that opera is a humanizing art, one that emphasizes what humanity has in common by epic depictions of passion through the vehicle of song.

By Nicholas Tarling
Rowman & Littlefield, 2015
ISBN: 978-1-4422-4543-3

Japan is still coming to terms with the ‘triple disaster’ of 2011 – earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown. Only two decades ago, the country was similarly shaken by the ‘double disaster’ of earthquake and sarin gas attack in 1995. What can we learn about Japan through the diverse responses to these two critical moments in postwar history when a ‘normal’ sense of stability and existing social order was severely undermined? This edited collection brings together a multidisciplinary team of scholars to engage this question and explore the wide-ranging and diverse responses by national and local governments, political leaders, citizen activists, concerned mothers, religious organizations, literary figures, and public intellectuals.

Edited by Mark R. Mullins and Koichi Nakano
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Korea: Outline of a Civilisation is a cultural history that examines the ways the Korean people over the past two millennia understood the world and viewed their place in society. In the traditional era, the interaction between several broad religious and philosophical traditions and social institutions, state interests and, at times, external pressures, provides the framework of the story. In the modern era, the chief concern is with the rapid and momentous cultural changes that have occurred over the past one and a half centuries in the idea and spread of education, the rise in influence of students, the development of mass culture, the redefinition of gender, and the continuing importance of religion.

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