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Save the Date**Asia Society Asian Australian Writers' Panel at the Sydney Writers' Festival 2001**

"*The Ever Present Past; Asian Mythology in Contemporary Australian Writing*" is an Asia Society AustralAsia Centre initiative that will bring together Asian-Australian writers to talk about their incorporation of Asian mythology into their work. Panellists include Ang Chin Geok, Merlinda Bobis, Adib Khan and Christopher Cyrill.

Thursday 17th May, 4.00 p.m. – 5.30 p.m.
Sydney Dance Company Studio, Wharf 4/5, Sydney

Free Event – No Bookings Taken.

For more information (03) 9650 0998

Report on The Williamsburg 29 Conference OKINAWA, JAPAN

By Richard Woolcott AC

THE Chairman, Hugh Morgan, and I attended the Asia Society's Williamsburg 29 Conference in Okinawa from 17-19 March. It was an interesting and timely meeting. The main items on the agenda were the likely Asian policies of the Bush Administration, the outlook for Japan, China, the Korean peninsula, economic trends in the region and developments in South East Asia, especially the complex situation in Indonesia.

As usual at Williamsburg Conferences, the attendees were mostly men and women of regional experience. Understandably, the Japanese representation was strong and included the Minister for Trade, Takeo Hiranuma, the Chairman of Itochu Corporation, Minoru Murofushi and the Chairman of Fuji Bank, Toru Hashimoto. North Korea was represented for the first time at the Williamsburg Conference.

"Australia's Future Engagement with Asia" was an agenda item at the Conference on this occasion. Stressing that I was offering personal opinions, I said that leaving aside the semantic debate about whether Australia was part of Asia or on the southern edge of East Asia, the relevant fact is that Australia must always be comprehensively and sensitively engaged with its own South East Asian and

South West Pacific neighbourhood. The issue is the extent and success of that engagement. This is a bipartisan policy. However, I had found on visits to Asia over the last year that a perception had unfortunately gained ground that, despite our role in East Timor, the Government was stepping back from Asian engagement. I know the Government considers this perception is wrong but it does exist and it does need to be countered.

It was sobering to find little interest in the future of East Timor at the Conference. If I had not raised it during the final session in discussing Australia's role in the region it would probably not have been mentioned. I argued that an independent East Timor would change the map of South East Asia later this year or early in 2002 and that, given it was going to happen, it was important that it be underpinned and succeed.

Continues page 2

Hugh Morgan AO, Chairman,
and Richard Woolcott AC, Founding
Director, Asia Society AustralAsia Centre
at the Williamsburg Conference in
Okinawa



Founding Director's Message



SINCE our summer newsletter I have visited Hong Kong, Singapore and Jakarta (twice) for board meetings, as well as Bangkok to participate in Forum 2001 organised by the International Foundation for Human Resources Development. I attended the Asia Society's Corporate Conference in Bangalore (11-13 March) with the Executive Director, Prue Holstein, and the

Society's Williamsburg 29 Conference in Okinawa (17-19 March) with our Chairman, Hugh Morgan. Separate items on the Bangalore and Okinawa Conferences appear in this newsletter.

In **Thailand** I met Deputy Prime Minister, Pongpol, and the Foreign Minister, Dr Surakiart, of the recently elected Thaksin Government. It was encouraging to find that while they have a natural focus on strengthening ASEAN and on the development of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS); both are well disposed towards Australia. Indeed the new Government is willing to consider negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA) with Australia. I briefed both on the activities of the AustralAsia Centre.

Prior to the election, the Chuan Government slowed down the implementation of its economic reform program for domestic political reasons. As a result Thailand's economy has stalled over the last nine months and, if the recovery process is to be revived, the Thaksin Government must tackle more effectively the bankruptcy issue, the non-performing loans of the major Thai banks, and the targets set for growth, increased exports and stronger domestic consumption.

Three years after the hand over to **China** the Hong Kong economy remains relatively strong. Also the nervousness in the period prior to the handover about China and its intentions has largely dissipated. While growth in 2000 was a commendable 10%, the benefits do not seem to have flowed through the whole economy. Tung Chee Hwa will be reappointed as the Chief Executive of the Special Administration Region. Integration of the Hong Kong (and Taiwan) economy into the Pearl River Delta is gathering momentum and the gradual Sinofication of Hong Kong is, I believe, inevitable. This is important for Australian business interests, which are substantial, but provided the rule of law and clean government are maintained and China does not force the pace in a heavy-handed way, Sinofication need not be a cause for anxiety.

I had a forty minute meeting with Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri on 22 March. We discussed the state of Australian - Indonesian relations, the future of East Timor and the role of the AustralAsia Centre. I briefed her on the aims and the role of the Centre and invited her to address a major function hosted by the Centre in Sydney, Melbourne or Perth when she visits Australia. She said she would like to visit Australia. Australia was important to Indonesia. She described the Government to Government relationship as "troubled". We were neighbours and both Governments needed to work on improving relations. Meanwhile, the network of business and people to people contact was strong.

She agreed that Australia, Indonesia and an independent East Timor would need to cooperate closely in the future to help establish a stable state with a sound relationship with Indonesia.

Megawati was relaxed and friendly. She is widely regarded as the "President in waiting" and it is appropriate that the Centre has established contact with her.

Report on The Williamsburg 29 Conference OKINAWA, JAPAN

By Richard Woolcott AC (from page 1)

There seemed little interest, however, in East Timor as the focus on South East Asia was on the prospects for stability, economic recovery and security in Indonesia and, to a lesser extent, on Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines. The prospects for a viable, successful, independent East Timor, were regarded with pessimism. Other countries would have other priorities and could be expected to lose interest. Australia having taken the lead would be expected to shoulder the main responsibility into the future.

It was sobering to find little interest in the future of East Timor at the Conference.

It was agreed there would be no change in American policy towards **Japan**, except the Bush Administration would seek to inject more high level warmth and personal contact into it. Japan needed to carry out urgently structural reforms and stimulate domestic demand if it was to emerge from its protracted slow down. It needed revitalised political leadership to take initiative and actually force the pace of reform rather than talking about it.

The view was widely held that Japan, despite its political and economic stagnation, was unlikely to go into serious recession. It would recover. It was still the second largest economy in the world with a strong manufacturing base and a skilled workforce. But change was unlikely to be rapid, given Japan's culture.

Most speakers said that **China's** influence, both globally but especially regionally, would continue to increase relative to the influence of the United States and Japan. China is expected to sustain economic growth at about 7% over a number of years. So far China had responded cautiously to the Bush Administration and would avoid

provocation if the United States itself did not behave in a provocative manner over Taiwan and missile defence. (Williamsburg preceded the issue of the air incident leading to the death of a Chinese Pilot and the forced landing of the American EP3 aircraft in Hainan).

While the situation on the **Korean Peninsula** was volatile, China was playing a constructive role. Compromise and progress, if slow, towards reconciliation was more likely than conflict. It was important to distinguish between American and North Korean rhetoric and their actual policies.

The main conclusions I drew from the Conference from an Australian perspective, in addition to the comment already made on East Timor, were that the Government will need to give leadership in:-

- finding an appropriate balance between our alliance with the United States and our important long term interests in China and East Asia;
- dispelling the perception that Australia had stepped back from its policy of comprehensive engagement with East Asia as its first foreign and trade policy priority;
- showing sensitivity and understanding of Indonesia's current problems and to the need to restore the bilateral relationship, despite increased domestic concerns about Indonesia which, when it stabilises, will resume in future its prominent role in South East Asia and the Third World; and
- continuing to press for global and regional trade facilitation and liberalisation, for a new WTO round, including China, and working to revitalise APEC.

The Asia Society will produce shortly a full summary of the proceedings of the Conference.

Indonesia Update

Richard Woolcott AC

I MADE my fourth visit this year to Indonesia in late April. Regrettably, the economic and political situation has shown no improvement this year; in fact it has worsened. Destabilising and self-serving political rivalries among the political elites continue unabated. There is no real leadership, authority or direction.

On the economic side consumption driven growth is continuing at about 3.5% but a new crisis could unfold. Foreign investment has dried up and is unlikely to flow in before a measure of political stability and some clear guidelines emerge. There is a huge accumulation of debt. The rupiah has blown out close to 11,000 to

the US\$ (from 7,500 in March). Some businessmen and economists are suggesting that a fall in the rupiah to 14,000 or even 15,000 over the next three months is not unlikely. This would greatly exacerbate the already serious economic situation.

It is only Indonesia's commendable resilience and patience, its resources and its reservoir of talent which sustain my belief that Indonesia will not descend into anarchy or disintegrate – although that possibility can not be ruled out in the present state of drift – and that it will emerge from its multi-layered economic and political crisis over the next few years.

The Bush Administration

NO RECENT United States Administration has as many persons in senior positions who know Australia well as has the Bush Administration. While this will be helpful to the Australian Government in terms of access, as new contacts will not need to be developed from scratch, it also means that they will press us, as an ally, to support their policies on Asian issues especially in relation to China, Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula and the proposed missile defence system.

The Centre has good contacts with several members of the recently formed Bush Administration

It is likely to expect us to play a more prominent role in areas in our region in which trouble may occur, such as East Timor, Papua New Guinea, West Papua, Fiji, The Solomon Islands and, potentially, Vanuatu and New Caledonia. The Bush Administration's focus will be on North Asia and it is likely to see such problems which arise as in our part of the world and as situations in which the United States has no important interests at stake.

Our relations with China, Japan, The Republic of Korea, North Korea, Indonesia and with the other nine

countries of ASEAN will require sensitive handling by the government in the future in the context of our alliance with the United States as our interests may not always coincide.

The Centre will need to continue to act within its mandate of promoting a deeper understanding of Asian countries and cultures within the Australian community. It may also have opportunities through its connection with the Asia Society in New York to bring an Australian perspective to the United States thinking on Asian policy issues of mutual interest.

The Centre has good contacts with several members of the recently formed Bush Administration. Robert Zoellick, United States Trade representative, was our guest at a lunch in Melbourne. Michael Armacost, the Head of the Brookings Institute addressed a CEO Asia update in Sydney. Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defence and James Kelly, who has replaced Stanley Roth as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, are all well known personally to the Founding Director. He has already written to each inviting them to address a Centre function when they visit Australia.

From the Executive Director



THE 2001 programming has seen a strong start with two speakers from Japan. Professor Yuji Suzuki, Hosei University addressed the Japanese view of the situation in Indonesia and the need for the Indonesian government to work towards a reduction in the number of regional and local governments to improve

the effectiveness of the central government.

Michio Naruto, Chairman and Representative Director of Fujitsu Research Institute spoke to a strong information technology audience on Information Technology in the Asia Pacific, Japan, Australia and the United States.

The Asia Society's Asian food panel discussion held in conjunction with the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival and entitled "*Asian Cuisine: Have We Got it Right*" (see article on page 6) drew attention to the contributions being made by four of Australia's leading Asian Australian foodies – Elizabeth Chong, James Tan, Allan Koh and Jimmy Shu.

Such partnerships continue to be an excellent way for the Asia Society to reach a broader audience and raise the profile of the contribution Asian culture is making to the Australian community in general.

Another such partnership will take place on the 17th May together with the Sydney Writers' Festival. The Asia Society will again, courtesy of a grant made by the Pratt Foundation, be sponsoring an Asian Australian writers panel discussion to be chaired by Mabel Lee, translator of the Nobel Prize winning Chinese novel "*Soul Mountain*". The topic this time will be "*The ever-present past: Asian mythology in contemporary Australian writings*". Participants will include Ang Chin Geok, Adib Khan, Christopher Cyrill and Merlinda Bobis.

This same panel discussion is being presented again at the request of the University of Wollongong in August at their conference entitled "*Asia and Australia: Trading in Imagination*".

Work has commenced on the Asia Society's forthcoming *Twentieth Century Indonesian Art* exhibition – (see article on page 5) with a one day symposium jointly held with the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University in Canberra. Development work for this exhibition has been made possible with a grant from Visions Australia.

This symposium represents a further example of the role of the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre – not only as a catalyst for new ideas, but also as a facilitator bringing together the best minds on Asian countries such as Indonesia, which extends not only across academic disciplines of history, economics, politics and art but also across Australian art, academic and cultural institutions to help develop such projects.

Finally, membership is growing strongly with 11 new corporate members in the last twelve months. The Centre is now supported by over 50 leading Australian, Asian and American corporations. The Centre is grateful for their support and is working on developing new programming that continues to keep the importance of Australia's relations with the Asian region in the public arena while continuing to meet corporate needs for access to and insights from key decision makers.

Prue Hobstein

Asia's Technology Future: Transforming Business

The Asia Society's 12th Annual Corporate Conference – Bangalore, India, March 11–13th, 2001

THE ASIA Society's 12th Annual Corporate Conference was held in Bangalore, India and explored technology's impact on business and society in Asia. Dubbed India's "Silicon Plateau", Bangalore has rapidly gained recognition as a leading technology hub in Asia and is today one of the top ten software producing cities in the world.

The co-organisers of the conference were Dow Jones & Company, a long time cosponsor of the Asia Society's annual corporate conference in Asia, and the Confederation of Indian Industry.

The conference was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee in an address that emphasised the growing convergence of technologies, business, markets and economies across Asia and the world and the need to remember that scientific and technological knowledge need to be utilised not so much for profit but more for the benefit of the human race.

Attendees included senior level Indian government and business representatives as well as prominent executives from Asia's information technology and business sectors. The Founding Director of the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre, Richard Woolcott AC and the Executive Director, Prue Holstein were in attendance as well as a small delegation from the University of New South Wales headed by the Vice-Chancellor & President, Professor John Niland AC.

The key note address was given by the Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Republic of Singapore, Mr. Yeo Cheow Tong.

The speakers examined regional and industry trends and business opportunities, profiling new technology centres, technological innovations and their practical applications, technology transfer, human resource issues, finances, government approaches to technology and recent lessons from global experiences. Case studies drawn from several industries and economies helped to elucidate the latest successful practices across Asia.

In view of the climate of economic uncertainty since the crash of dot.coms on the NASDAQ and other capital markets, it was concluded that views of the longer-term trend of technology and the Internet should not change.

The New Economy is here to stay and transformation of business, society and culture in Asia started by the Internet would continue. Every country in Asia should be focussed on how to move its industry and society into the Internet age.

It was recognised that Asia was a market that was huge and diverse with multiple languages and cultures and was one where the use of infocomm technologies varied widely. Some Asian countries already had some of the highest per population PC ownership,



Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee,
Honorable Prime Minister of India at the
Asia Society's 12th Annual Corporate Conference

Internet penetration and mobile phone penetration in the world while other areas were still rolling out basic telecom infrastructure to their rural areas.

Asia is forecast to become the world's mobile phone powerhouse especially with NTT DoCoMo leading the world in putting the web on the cellphone.

In order to continue the momentum towards change and growth in the IT industry, Asia needed to create an environment of opportunities that would attract talent from afar and retain talent in the region. There was a need for Asian cities to join together and build an IT community – this was already happening with South Korea, Japan and China coordinating and standardising on future developments in IT, mobile telephony and the internet. Singapore and India had strengthened bilateral ties with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding for infocomm collaboration and the 10 ASEAN countries had already put in place an eASEAN framework.

For an Asian IT belt/Silicon Valley to develop further, there was a need to create an e-marketplace, e-capital and e-talent to allow for free flow of talent, ideas and capital.

Asia has already demonstrated an innovative spirit with Japan becoming a world leader in miniaturisation of electronics and

optics, and cars. Singapore has become a model in creating an electronic island, Taiwan and South Korea have become leaders in memory technologies. India in the software industry by teaming up with Silicon Valley offers a 24 hour productive day and the global delivery model joining forces with US.

To continue the momentum, greater attention needs to be paid to tightening the regulatory environment to control cyber crimes, ensure intellectual property protection over the Internet, jurisdiction and taxation. At the same time, flexibility is required to ensure the capital and skills are available to allow the industry to grow and prosper. There was also a recognised need for greater collaboration between the public and private sectors to ensure an environment conducive to growth.

Australia was represented in the final session entitled, "The House versus the Mouse: Can the Old Economy Save the New Economy?" Mr. Neville Roach AO, Chairman, Fujitsu Australia spoke in the final session and balanced an otherwise Asian/ American focus with perspectives from Australia.

Mr. Roach considered that the new economy was already an engine for the old economy throughout the region. Old economy companies did need to adapt new technologies urgently however. Greater importance needed to be placed on diversity of the workforce, liberalisation of rules and regulations to free up the human mind and spirit, as well as stronger corporate governance and transparency with no one country dominating as a 'super power'.

He considered that countries including the United States needed to contribute towards a freeing up of trade restrictions as well as the movement of people. Such issues as fairer Internet pricing between countries, fairer and more uniform copyright laws and a more level playing field were generally needed.



Mr Aman Mehta
addresses Asia
Society

Mr Aman Mehta, Chief Executive Officer, The Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited addressed a private CEO briefing in Melbourne.

This dinner was kindly sponsored by
HSBC Bank Australia Limited.

Speech available
from the
AustralAsia Centre

Mr Neville Roach AO, Chairman, Fujitsu Australia recently addressed a CEO Asia Update Luncheon in Sydney on "Australia's image and identity – views from Asia and Australia". Mr Roach spoke on Australia's image and identity – how we see ourselves and especially how our Asian neighbours see us.

20th Century Indonesian Art Exhibition Development Symposium

Canberra, 24 April, 2001

LAST YEAR the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre received a grant from the Federal funding body Visions of Australia to develop a twentieth century Indonesian art exhibition addressing the influence of western modernism and traditional art in a social and political context. The exhibition will include artworks from both Australian and Indonesian public and private collections and tour regional Australia. The idea for the exhibition came from the desire of the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre to build bridges with Indonesia in a cultural context and to broaden the understanding of the developments in Indonesian society amongst Australians.

...a twentieth century Indonesian art exhibition addressing the influence of western modernism and traditional art in a social and political context.

The first step in this process was bringing together the best international and Australian experts in this field to identify and discuss the major issues. The Indonesian art exhibition symposium was an initiative of the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre organised in partnership with the Humanities Research Centre at ANU. The symposium was held on 24 April in Canberra at ANU and opened by Prue Holstein. It was attended by thirty experts in Indonesian politics, culture, history and art from major Australian universities, cultural institutions and galleries including Robyn Maxwell, NGA, James Bennett, MAGNT, Julie Ewington, QAG, and John Clark, The University of Sydney. Three keynote speakers from Australia, Canada and Indonesia addressed the symposium.

The keynote speakers were:

Jim Supangkat, a renowned Indonesian art critic, curator and artist who lives in Bandung. He is a curator and judge of many contemporary Indonesian art shows shown abroad and the leading theorist in the interpretation of contemporary Indonesian art in a global context. He contributed to the Asia Society's exhibition, *Traditions/Tensions, Contemporary Art in Asia* and regularly contributes to the Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane.

Dr Astri Wright, Associate Professor of Southeast Asian studies at University of Victoria, Canada. Dr

Wright's expertise and research explores the relations between the social and political landscape of Southeast Asia with a focus on Indonesia. Her work has been highly influential in the field of Southeast Asian studies addressing issues of history gender and representation. The author of over eighty academic papers and a number of books including "Revolusi & Evolusi Sudjana Kerton" (1999) and "Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters" (1994).

Dr Robert Cribb, Associate Professor of History at University of Queensland, is an expert in Southeast Asian Studies with a focus on Indonesia and was recently head of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Denmark.

Robert Cribb set the background for the discussion by raising key issues, which faced Indonesia in the twentieth century. The forging of the concept of nationalism in the context of Dutch colonialism and Japanese rule. The burden of creating a society that embraced unity and diversity. The struggle to achieve independence and unite a country of such diverse ethnic backgrounds and broad geographical spread. The tensions and dissatisfactions within society reflected in the Sukarno and Suharto eras, due to unresolved issues, related to regional and religious identity.

Jim Supangkat explored the issue of modernity and the influence of Western art practice in Indonesia. In Indonesia modern art grew out of Western art over a long period of time under the colonial period, then after independence modern art became anti-Western, an assertion of Indonesian identity.

Astri Wright focused on the themes of identity, struggle, continuity and change in Indonesian art. Her particular focus was on Hendra Gunawan, one of the fathers of Indonesian painting. Famous for his interest in the life of the Indonesian people. His work was banned under the Suharto regime and he was imprisoned for his depiction of social issues.

Discussions in the afternoon were led by Caroline Turner, Deputy Director of the Humanities Research Centre and Jacky Healy, Arts Consultant working with the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre concerning the structure and content of the exhibition and identifying key issues.



Attending a dinner held for the keynote speakers hosted by The Director of The Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Professor James Fox. Keynote speaker Dr Astri Wright; Caroline Turner, Director, Humanities Research Centre, ANU; Prue Holstein, Asia Society AustralAsia Centre; Jacky Healy, Arts Consultant, Asia Society AustralAsia Centre and keynote speaker Jim Supangkat



At the dinner: Robyn Maxwell, Senior Curator Asian Art, NGA; keynote speakers Jim Supangkat and Astri Wright, David Williams, Director, School of Art, ANU; and keynote speaker Dr Robert Cribb, Department of History, The University of Queensland



Robyn Maxwell, Senior Curator Asian Art, NGA; and Professor Jamie Mackie, Economics Division, RSPAS, ANU



Nancy Sever, Director, The Drill Hall Gallery, ANU; and keynote speaker Jim Supangkat



James Bennett, Curator of Southeast Asian Art, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and Charlotte Galloway, Curator, NGA

Asian Cuisine in Australia: Have we got it right?



Panellists James Tan, Patricia O'Donnell, Jimmy Shu, Elizabeth Chong and Allan Koh together with Prue Holstein, Executive Director, AustralAsia Centre.

THE ASIA Society AustralAsia Centre, in what proved to be a very successful collaboration with the Melbourne Food & Wine Festival, held a panel discussion over lunch entitled "Asian Cuisine in Australia: Have we got it right?" The panel featured Patricia O'Donnell as moderator (Mietta's Queenscliff Hotel), and panellists – Elizabeth Chong (Writer, teacher and Asian food expert), Allan Koh (Koko), Jimmy Shu (Near East and Hanuman), and James Tan (previously Mandarin Duck and the Duck). The wines for the luncheon were generously sponsored by Yering Station.



Michael Bond, Elizabeth Syme, John and Vivienne Wallington

The luncheon succeeded in melding fine food designed by the panellists, with lively and engaging debate about the nature of Asian cuisine in Australia. Held at The Victorian Arts Centre with a crowd of over 120 people including well know Asian foodie Tony Tan, Japanese Consul-General Kagefumi Ueno, a number of Melbourne food writers and journalists from Asian daily's such as the South China Morning Post and The New Straits Times.

The lunch featured dishes chosen by each member of the panel to reflect their individual perspective on the discussion and wines were selected by Yering Station to compliment each dish. Elizabeth Chong presented a subtle dish, poached chicken with ginger and spring onion dip, informing the audience that this was a classic example of Chinese cuisine much revered but all too frequently ignored

by Chinese restauraters, catering to an Australian public. Malaysian born Allan Koh contributed a dish of eggplant with miso sauce, indicating in his discussion that quite often Japanese restaurants add extra flavour to a dish as their Australian customers do not appreciate the subtlety of Japanese flavours. Also contributing to the canvass of flavours with a bold statement was Jimmy Shu. His dish of Beef Rendang was a fiery accompaniment. Prue Holstein warned that this dish was best eaten last (and it was well worth the wait). James Tan offered, in true cutting edge style, a Chinese-Italian-Australian inspired dessert, pandan and coconut panna cotta with mango sauce. He noted that he had been mixing flavours since he was a student in Sweden.

The debate ranged over topics such as Australia's national identity and relationship with Asia, immigration and early Chinese influences on Australian tastes.

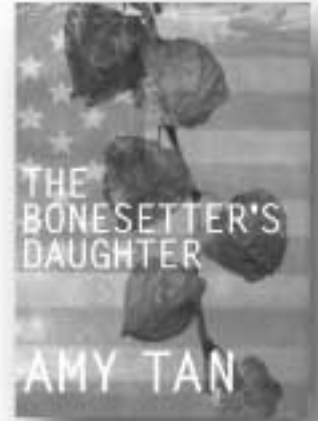
Given the success of the event we look forward to our continued association with the Melbourne Wine and Food Festival in 2002. In the meantime, the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre is continuing its engagement with the popular topic of Asian Food by hosting an event in association with Reader's Feast Bookstore, "In Conversation with Charmaine Solomon". Charmaine will discuss her career and her latest cookbook with Tony Tan on 21st May at Reader's Feast, Melbourne.



Kaye Elliot with Asia Society members, Graeme Black and Sally Romanes

The Bonesetter's Daughter

By Amy Tan
Flamingo, 2001
\$39.95



AMY TAN'S latest book *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is again about mother-daughter relationships, the love and tension, the immigrant experience in America, themes which prevailed in her previous books: *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Some of her fans however, would like to see her writing in an entirely different direction. But *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, besides exploring a mother's heritage, is also a dark tale of murder, attempted suicide, betrayal, survival, the mining of dragon bones, the archaeological discovery of the Peking man, vengeful ghosts, hidden secrets and family curses.

It is told in two separate narratives; the story of Ruth and her mother Luling.

Ruth is in her mid forties, an American born Chinese, who lives in San Francisco. She is married to a divorced man with two teenage daughters, and works as a ghostwriter. She tends to have periodic speechlessness, which stems from a traumatic accident in her childhood. As a child Ruth was constantly subjected to her mother's superstitions about ghosts and curses, and was forced to communicate with ghosts (especially that of her Auntie Precious) by writing on a tray of sand. When her formidable mother is aged and succumbed to dementia, Ruth's own marriage too has come to a standstill. It confronts the very real problem of adult children who become the caretakers of their aged parents. When she is forced

to move into her mother's flat to care for her, it serves as a trial separation from her husband Art. This is when she discovers her mother's diary written in Chinese, hidden in the flat. She takes it to Mr Tang a translator. Hence the story of her mother Luling unfolds layer by layer.

Luling had an idyllic childhood in the village of Immortal Heart as the daughter of a prosperous ink merchant. She was raised by a nursemaid; the previously beautiful Auntie Precious, daughter of a famous bonesetter from the Mouth of the Mountain. When her father and the man she was to marry were both killed, Auntie Precious attempted suicide by drinking molten ink. This burned her face, and she became mute due to scar tissue in her mouth. Auntie Precious and her charge mined dragon bones, some of which could be the bones of Peking Man. But when Luling was matched to marry the son of the man who destroyed Auntie Precious's life, the nursemaid revealed the brutal secret to Luling before killing herself. It is in a crumbling ravine known as the End of the World where Auntie Precious's scattered bones lie, and Luling believes this casts a curse over her. Luling was orphaned and suffered the harsh experiences of the Second World War before making the long journey to America.

Widowed for forty years, she was constantly battling the ghosts of her past, the restless spirit of Auntie Precious seemed to have followed her half way round the world. As her mental faculty was insidiously failing she tried to hold on to the past by writing events of her childhood in her diary.

But who really was Auntie Precious? When Ruth uncovers the truth of her family secrets, she understands the ground for her mothers fears and superstitions and is able to sort out the confusion of their identities, thus healing the relationship between mother and daughter, as well as that of her short term estranged husband Art.

Reviewed by Dr Lillian Ng

Author of two fictions:
Silver Sister and *Swallowing Clouds*. She is in the process of writing her third book: *The River Beautiful*.

AustralAsia Centre

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RENEWING

SUPPORTING MEMBERS

Jennifer Beck
Peter Church
Paul de Carvalho
Alice de Jonge
Professor Stephanie Fahey
John Grill
Christopher Leptos AM
Colin McDonald QC
Paul McSweeney
Paul Murnane
Christine Sather
Paul Sumner
Michael Timmins
Dr Cynthia Vanden Driesen
Captain Robert Wilkie
Emma Wilkie
Anthony Willmott
Terry Young
Kyoko Young
Derek Young

ASIA SOCIETY AUSTRALASIA CENTRE

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*Executive Assistant and
Office Manager*

Asia Society is a non-profit,
non-governmental organisation
dedicated to fostering
understanding about the
countries and cultures of the
Asia-Pacific Region.



Asia Society AustralAsia Centre Programme Calendar

MELBOURNE

Asia Society Cultural Event 'The Ever Present Past; Asian Mythology in Contemporary Australian Writing'

Asia Society Asian Australian Writers'
Panel Discussion. Panellists include
Ang Chin Geok, Merlinda Bobis, Adib
Khan and Christopher Cyrill, as part
of the Sydney Writers' Festival.

Thursday 17th May
4.00 p.m. - 5.30 p.m.

Sydney Dance Company Studio
Wharf 4/5, Sydney
For more information
(03) 9650 0998

MELBOURNE

Asia Society Cultural Event Charmaine Solomon in conversation with Tony Tan – hear Charmaine speak about her latest book, *Asian Favourites*

Monday 21st May
6.30 p.m.

Reader's Feast Bookstore
Corner of Swanston & Bourke Streets
For more information
(03) 9650 0998

MELBOURNE

Asia Society Cultural Event A light luncheon with Amy Tan, author of *Joy Luck Club* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* in partnership with Reader's Feast Bookstore

Tuesday 22nd May
12.30 p.m.

Supper Room, Melbourne Town Hall,
Swanston Street
For more information
(03) 9650 0998

MELBOURNE

CEO Asia Update Mr Trevor Flugge AO Chairman, AWB Limited "Developing Agribusiness in Asia"

Monday 28th May
12.15 for 12.30 p.m. - 2.00 p.m.

The Grand Hyatt Melbourne
123 Collins Street, Melbourne
For more information

(03) 9650 0998

Other Asia Society Centres

HONG KONG

From the Spirited to the Spiritual:
Indian Classical Music Performance
Music Performance and Talk by
Rajeev Taranath and Uday Raj
Karpur.

Internationally acclaimed performer
Rajeev Taranath is one of the world's
finest exponents of the sarod, the rich-
ly textured relative of the lute.

Friday 11th May
For more information
+852 2868 6765

HONG KONG

Resurgent India – Vision and Agenda
for Growth.

Dinner Presentation with The Hon.
Yashwant Sinha, Finance Minister of
India

Tuesday 15th May
7.30 p.m.
For more information
+852 2868 6765

NEW YORK

Crossovers: Sola & Friends
An ensemble of five musicians from
diverse backgrounds, creating an
eclectic mix of jazz, Chinese folk,
Peking opera, rock, and African
American blues.

Presented by Asia Society and
Yangtze Repertory Theatre.

Wednesday 9th May
For more information
+1 212 288 6400

LOS ANGELES

How will President Bush handle
China-Taiwan cross-strait relations?
What are challenges facing the Chen
Shui-bian administration in the
Taiwan Strait issue?

Wednesday 16th May
8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
For more information
+1 213 624-0945

NEW YORK

Meet the Authors: Anita Rau Badami
and Michael David Kwan

Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book Prize
authors Anita Rau Badami (Fiction
Finalist) and Michael David Kwan
(Nonfiction 2000 Winner)

read selections from their work and
talk about issues surrounding being

Canadians of Asian descent.

Tuesday 5th June
For more information
+1 212 288 6400

TEXAS

Never a Better Time for Doing
Business with Australia.
Featuring the Hon. Michael Baume
AO, Australia's Consul General,
New York.

Thursday 10th May
12 noon
For more information
+1 713 439 0051

WASHINGTON DC

Update on the Philippines (His
Excellency Fidel V. Ramos)

On January 20, 2001, Gloria
Macapagal Arroyo, was sworn in as
the tenth post-World War II President
of the Republic of the Philippines.

Monday 30th April
For more information
+1 202 833 2742

WASHINGTON DC

Asia Society Washington Center
2001 Annual Dinner
With Diplomatic Hosts: Ambassador
of China His Excellency and Mrs.
Yang Jiechi.

For more information, please e-mail
DCInfo@AsiaSoc.org
Thursday May 3

WASHINGTON DC

Concerts at the Embassies
Evenings of classical music and
improvisation at the Embassies of
Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan.
Discover—or re-discover—the rich tra-
ditions of South Asian classical music
at a series of chamber
concerts in the elegant atmosphere of
the embassies.

Wednesday 23 May
For more information
+1 202 833 2742

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