Main Story
THE CRISIS OF GLOBAL MODERNITY:
A Book by Prof Prasenjit Duara

Special Feature
THE KORAN IN ENGLISH:
A Public Lecture by Prof Bruce Lawrence

ARI Field Notes
CATHOLICISM IN SRI LANKA

Photo courtesy of Dr Bernardo Brown
2014 has been one of the best years for ARI in terms of external funding. Following upon the Muhammad Alagil Research Professorship Gift made in January, the Asian Urbanisms Cluster got a large grant of more than S$709,000 from the Ministry of Education, Singapore, for the project “Governing Compound Disasters in Urbanizing Asia” involving members of both the Asian Urbanisms and the Science, Technology, and Society Clusters, and the Religion and Globalisation Cluster also received funding of S$500,000 from the Luce Foundation (New York) for its project on “Religion and NGOs in Asia”. We are deeply appreciative of these awards as they represent recognition of our achievements and, still more, the importance of our chosen paths of research.

In addition to the areas of research that we have reported earlier, new areas are being explored. Judging from activities in the last few months these topics include disasters, vulnerable populations (the precariate) and the Anthropocene, or the era when human activities are beginning to affect nature more than any other factor. We can find conference titles such as the “Quotidian Anthropocene”, “Governance of Health in Disasters”, “Ethics of Religious Giving in Asia”, a new emphasis on cinema and the liveable city in the CityPossible Film Festival, and so on.

The special features in this issue follow up on some of these themes such as the Quotidian Anthropocene, the Koran in English and my new book. I was most gratified and honoured to participate in a panel discussing my book, The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future, which explores some of these topics such as the Anthropocene and Asian religions. More details about the panel and the book are covered within. Finally, we have an interview with former Acting Director and Changing Family Cluster Leader, Professor Gavin Jones, who retired from NUS at the end of 2014.

ARI would like to welcome two new members of the staff, Tay Minghua who has stepped in to assist the Events team most ably and Priya Latha who has filled Kristy Won’s position as PA to the Director and Deputy Director. We would like to wish Kristy, who served ARI for nine and a half years, the best of luck in her new job.

The Management and Staff of ARI congratulate Ms Kalaichelvi (Selvi) A/P Krishnan, Management Assistant Officer, for receiving the NUS Quality Service Award 2014 (Service Advocate). This award recognises her outstanding and exemplary performance in delivering consistent and high quality administrative service to the Institute.
Prof Chua Beng Huat gave two keynote speeches: “Return of/to the Politics of the Popular”, Conference on Culture and Commerce of Traditional, Modern and Contemporary Music Industries in Asia, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea, 12-13 December 2014; “Inter-referencing Southeast Asia: Absence, Resonance and Provocation”, Bridges to Southeast Asia: Perspectives from the Ateneo, Ateneo De Manila University, 27 February 2015.


Assoc Prof Michael Feener gave two keynote speeches: “Islamic Art in Asia: Regional Traditions of a World Civilization”, Minzu University of China, Beijing, 4 November 2014; “Muslim Cultures and Pre-Islamic Pasts: Changing Perceptions of ‘Heritage’”, Islamic Pasts, UCL Qatar, Doha, 10 December 2014.

Dr Connor Graham received the Residential College Teaching Excellence Award 2013-2014 awarded by NUS, 21 November 2014.

Prof Makarand Paranjape has received invitations to be Visiting Professor, Department of English Languages and Literatures, University of Bern, Switzerland, April-May 2015, and the inaugural Global South Visiting Professor, Eberhard Karls Universitat Tuebingen, Germany, June-July 2015.


Prof Jean Yeung was reappointed member of Board of Trustees, ISEAS, 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015.
On 30 January 2015 some of the finest minds of the National University of Singapore (NUS) assembled at the Shaw Foundation Building on the Kent Ridge campus. The occasion was the launch and discussion of the Raffles Professor of Humanities and Asia Research Institute Director Prasenjit Duara’s latest book, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future*. That the leading lights of NUS had assembled for the event was fitting since, as Prof Duara mentioned in his introductory comments, the book was a Singapore product developed in conversations on campus, particularly in different reading groups.
After brief opening remarks on the book by Prof Kishore Mahbubani, Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Prof Duara in a thirty-minute presentation outlined the major themes of his book. At the outset, he threw light on the book’s intriguing cover which shows two persons with painted faces. “They are protesters, who call themselves Cambodia’s ‘Avatars’, appealing to the government to save the Prey Lang forests. ‘Avatar’ is an ancient Hindu-Buddhist idea apparently redirected towards environmental protection by way of a Hollywood production,” Prof Duara explained. He connected the image with one of the central ideas of the book—histories are circulatory. “In my book, I try to substitute linear, tunnelled histories of nations and civilisations with the idea of circulatory histories,” he said. “Events have effects that disperse over space and time… Narratives loop back to events and their concatenations with different meanings and endings.”

Prof Duara then touched on the other central idea of his book: transcendence. “Historically, transcendent sources of moral authority—religions and universal ideologies, such as Marxism—were necessary to regulate disruptive circulations or excessive exploitation of natural resources or commons,” he said. But, according to Prof Duara, we now live in an anthropocene age where human forces shape nature and planetary condition more than in any other. This means that “salvation of the world today is still more urgent; it is needed more physically than metaphorically. Planetary sustainability is the transcendent goal of our times.”

Next, Prof Duara dwelt on the feasibility of elevating sustainability to a transcendent ideal. Despite the imperative of national leaders to not sacrifice national interests, he saw hope in the emergence of a transnational civil society working in alliance with vulnerable communities. He pointed to the idea of sacredness of nature in Indic and Chinese traditions where it exists often as a by-product of a more integrated perspective between the social, moral and natural order. Prof Duara cited instances in Asia of communities that are resisting efforts to exploit or industrialise their natural resources by appealing to the “sacrality” of the commons. These include Daoism in China and movements such as Chipko (or tree embrace) in India.

Each of the four panelists who followed Prof Duara was in agreement that his book was an outstanding contribution to scholarship even as they focused on specific aspects of the work. John Kelly, Visiting Professor in Social Science at Yale-NUS College, said the book offered a “paradigm of sustainable modernity” and was a challenge to the Weberian framework. Prof Kenneth Dean, head of the Chinese Studies Department, NUS, identified “dialogic transcendence” as the radical idea of the book. Kenneth Goh, Associate Professor of Sociology, pointed to some absences in the book, including a discussion of “society” and “immanence”. Ted Hopf, Professor of Political Science, had questions about the need to posit “Asian traditions” and Prof Duara’s attitude to religion.

The panel discussion was in reality the continuing of a conversation that Prof Duara had begun six years ago when he started writing his book. With the book out, the voices and participants in the conversation are likely to multiply exponentially.
Professor Bruce Lawrence, a scholar of Islamic Studies from Duke University, USA, performed double duty during his visit to the Religion and Globalisation Cluster at ARI this past January. In addition to delivering a keynote address at the *Wild Spaces and Islamic Cosmopolitanism* conference, Prof Lawrence also gave a public lecture to a standing-room only crowd of 72 registered attendees and many more non-registered guests at the Malay Heritage Centre. The Centre, located in the Kampong Glam neighbourhood, acts as a prominent heritage institution for the Malay community of Singapore and features many exhibits, programmes, and other public outreach activities such as Prof Lawrence’s lecture. In his talk, Prof Lawrence examined a less well-known aspect of Qur’anic studies: the Qur’an in English. By what criteria, Prof Lawrence asked, can scholars assess, judge, and provide commentary on the numerous translations of the “Noble Book” into English? How well or badly do translators “produce a work which can be orally arresting and eliciting an aroma of the original Arabic?”
From the very outset, Prof Lawrence made clear the daunting nature of trying to survey Qur’anic translations into English. A handout distributed to audience members listed 111 separate versions of the Qur’an in English. Prof Lawrence acknowledged, moreover, that his list was not comprehensive or complete. Nonetheless, Prof Lawrence provided a clear narrative history of the Qur’an in English, from the first English rendition in 1649, to the first Muslim translator, Muhammad Ali, to popular bestsellers such as Thomas Cleary’s 1993 The Essential Koran and countless versions found online today. The lecture also brought attention to the underappreciated fact that one of the most dynamic markets for the “Koran in English” today is South Asia. The process of producing the Qur’an in English entails a complex series of “second-order translations,” with text being converted from Arabic to Urdu, and then Urdu to English, or from Arabic to Turkish and Turkish to English. All of these efforts help South Asians “to elicit even a whiff of the aroma of the original in a dominant global language.”

Among the many shortcomings Prof Lawrence identified in translations, he paid particularly close attention to three issues: first, Protestantisation and the myopic fixation on individual words rather than overarching messages; second, the wide circulation of versions that constitute “political/ideological commentary masked as translation”; and third, the absence of any meaningful ranking or evaluation in the proliferating number of online lists of translated Qur’anic texts. These difficulties all hinder effective evaluation of the current state of the “Koran in English.”

However, Prof Lawrence also expressed optimism about Qur’anic translation. In particular, he delineated three criteria for what may be considered “good” Qur’an translations, including accuracy, clarity, and poetry. Most translators, Prof Lawrence argued, veer more toward accuracy and clarity, thus sidestepping the aesthetics and poetry integral to the experience of the Qur’an. Connected to this, Prof Lawrence argued, is the “unending pendulum” between accuracy and access. A focus on accuracy requires fidelity to the source language of the Qur’an, Arabic, while access “swings the pendulum in the opposite direction, toward the receiver or host language.” Only a few translators, such as Dr Maneh Hamad Al-Johani, Daoud Peachy, and T. J. Irving, have emphasised access in English.

Prof Lawrence finished his talk with an overview of the plethora of translations now available on websites like Tanzil.net, Alim.org, and Islamawakened.com. This profusion of online activity, Prof Lawrence concluded, demonstrates that “no closure on English translations of the Holy Book is in sight.” A spirited Q&A session with the audience provided a fitting end to an evening of discussion and outreach to the wider Singaporean community.
THE QUOTIDIAN ANTHROPOCENE: RECONFIGURING ENVIRONMENTS IN URBANIZING ASIA

Dr Eli Elinoff
Joint Postdoctoral Fellow
Asia Research Institute & Department of Sociology, NUS

Scenes from across Asia reveal a region wrestling with the implications of breakneck urbanisation and rapid environmental transformation. In China, lawmakers worry over the effects of microscopic particles on the lungs of citizens. In Hong Kong, residents measure their individual carbon emissions, assessing their contributions to human-induced climate change. In Thailand, architects and planners consider what it means to live in a time of devastating floods by proposing speculative urban landscapes without concrete. In Japan, tsunami-affected communities negotiate with the state and one another to decide how to remake society in the wake of a devastating disaster.

Some of the tsunami debris is piled up and waiting to be transported out of Kesennuma.
What is it like to live in a time of wide-scale environmental shift? What role has urbanisation played in shaping these ecological changes? How have Asian cities become crucibles for debates about future configurations of the natural environment? How are cities adapting to a time when natural disaster has become a “new normal”? Can humans live differently in this complex moment? In October of 2014, the Science, Technology, and Society Cluster and the Asian Urbanisms Cluster jointly sponsored The Quotidian Anthropocene: Reconfiguring Environments in Urbanizing Asia, to address these questions.

The Anthropocene is a term proposed by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer to highlight both the legibility and the influence of human actions on the geological record. Although geologists continue to debate whether humans have actually entered this new epoch, this workshop employed the framing of the Anthropocene to foreground the way everyday processes offer an important lens for understanding the social, political, and economic processes driving macro-environmental transformations. Doing so enabled scholars to move beyond the standard imaginary of the Asian city as a degraded environmental space by emphasising the diverse sites and processes producing our new environmental landscape. The workshop’s interdisciplinary approach offered new ways to think in this precarious moment marked by real uncertainty.

The workshop’s conveners, Dr Eli Elinoff and Dr Tyson Vaughan, invited a range of scholars whose research links micro-level social analysis of urban environmental phenomenon to macro-level questions about the stakes of environmental change. Panelists came from ten different countries, presenting case studies from Japan, Thailand, India, Singapore, Laos, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, China, the Philippines, and Pakistan. Their papers considered a wide variety of vantage points and locations demonstrating the complex ways in which these shifts are produced, being lived with, governed, and contested by actors at local, national, regional, and global scales.

Professor Kim Fortun, from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute’s Department of Science and Technology Studies, delivered the workshop’s keynote address, “Disaster Analytics.” In her talk, Prof Fortun pointed out that the field of Disaster Studies offers important analytical lessons for scholars wishing to understand life in a time marked by both “acute and chronic disaster.” She argued that engaging this moment of ecological transformation demands understanding interactions between diverse sets of actors working at various spatial and temporal scales, analysing interrelated failures of environ-technical and socio-technical systems, and navigating long-term processes adjudicating blame, injury, and responsibility. She also argued that genuinely engaging the challenges posed by what she calls “late industrialism” means finding new ways to bring ethnographic knowledge to bear on the world. While Disaster Studies has pioneered many of these approaches, Prof Fortun argued that these analytical frameworks offer insights for scholars from a wide variety of disciplines grappling with the implications of living through this moment of incredible environmental upheaval.

The first day of the conference examined a variety of themes including climate activism, emerging forms of knowledge production, the ontological effects of the urban transition, and the spatial and temporal dimensions of urbanisation after disaster. The second day examined cases related to air pollution, low-carbon living, and the “re-mooring” of life after disaster. The papers offered a range of promising analytical possibilities for future avenues for understanding the rapid and widespread sorts of shifts taking place globally. They also demonstrated the importance of the everyday even as increasingly we are called to worry about our environment at ever-larger spatial and temporal scales.
TO BE ABLE TO PICK AND CHOOSE A BIT: AN INTERVIEW WITH PROF GAVIN JONES

PROF JI YINGCHUN
PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY,
SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE
DIRECTOR, SHANGHAI FAMILY, DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH RESEARCH CENTER, SHANGHAI UNIVERSITY

Yingchun: 11 years ago you came to Singapore from Australia. What was your motivation back then?

Gavin: At that point I was about 5 years from retirement at the Australian National University (ANU). Everybody expects professors at ANU to stay there until retirement. I had been at ANU for 28 years and was very happy, but I was given the opportunity by Professor Tony Reid, who was Director of ARI at NUS to head up the research cluster on changing family in Asia. My research is mostly on Southeast Asia, and Singapore is much closer to the scene of action than Canberra.

Yingchun: In ANU there were more demographers than in Singapore. How does that affect your research?

Gavin: It helps in two ways. I interact with people from broader backgrounds at ARI, attending seminars on much broader themes than I did at ANU. Here in ARI, the culture is that everybody should go to the weekly ARI seminars. This exposed me to a lot of new ideas.

Yingchun: You came to ARI at its infant time, and also served as the acting director later on. Can you tell me a little about the history here?

Gavin: Yes, well, it was an exciting time at early years. As Professor Tony Reid, the first director said, in any institution, the most exciting time is when it's starting, when it's building up. You have the opportunity to bring people in, you have adequate budgets. The strength of his approach was that he wanted to have notable scholars heading up each research cluster, building ARI's reputation on that base. The other thing of course was that there was strong emphasis on visiting fellows, conferences, seminars, and producing publications from all these activities.

Yingchun: Convergence of demographic transition is likely the most important debate in demography. In the Western literature, non-western societies are described as following the Western pattern. You have a very strong voice in this debate. Can you share your opinion here?

Gavin: The earlier view that somehow the rest of the world converges to the West is not really an adequate explanation of things. You have to look at the role of culture and family structure. For example, we are seeing a great trend towards non-marriage, both in the West and in East Asia. But actually East Asia has overshot the West in this respect, so you cannot really say it's a convergence towards the West. So it is good to look at the commonalities, but it is also important that you know each society has its own pattern. That's it in a nutshell.
Yingchun: How is the academic world different from your early time?

Gavin: I must admit that I am glad I am reaching retirement. I think that academic life was easier 30/40 years ago when I joined the ANU. Now we are assessing everything, in the way we count publications, we count citations, we evaluate this and evaluate that, everybody is aware of the publish-or-perish thing. So it’s quite tough and in some ways it can restrict creativity I think. For example people learn that, “OK I’ve got this body of research, but don’t just write one paper, better that I slice it into four different papers and publish in four different places”.

Only if it is widely recognised as a problem, people will more creatively think about how to get around in how to give more credit for something which doesn’t get credit in the current evaluation system.

Yingchun: I heard you are very athletic. You do tennis, running, etc.

Gavin: Well, in ARI I think nobody actually knows about my running career. I play tennis too but nothing brilliant. But I was a pretty good runner. When I was working in the Population Council in the US, I was doing a lot of competitive running and came thirtieth in the Boston marathon in 1967 (my first marathon). That’s a long time ago. Yeah, the exact time, 2 hours 32 minutes 20 seconds. And my team won the US cross-country championship. I think that was 1968, in California.

Yingchun: Is being runner part of your identity?

Gavin: Oh yes, very much. You know I still try to do some every day. But just to keep healthy.

Yingchun: What is your next step?

Gavin: Well, I am retiring at the end of 2014. I don’t intend to just stop doing everything, but I will be able to pick and choose a bit what I do. Still hope to be doing some writing. Maybe doing a few consultancies and things like that.

I have already started packing. Have to get rid of more than half my books. By the way, in a few days I am going to say anyone who wants to take books from the book shelf can just do that...

Yingchun: Prof Ji Yingchun was a Research Fellow at the Changing Family In Asia Cluster, ARI, from 2012 to 2014.
Dr Bernardo Brown commenced a 1-year appointment as Joint Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Migration and Religion and Globalisation Clusters on 3 November 2014. He researches on the culture and history of Catholic Sri Lanka and his project in ARI is a multi-sited ethnography of Catholic clergy who travel between Sri Lanka and Italy.

Ms Tay Minghua commenced appointment as Management Assistant Officer (Events) on 2 December 2014 and will be assisting in events management and outreach. She holds a Diploma in Business Administration from the Kaplan Higher Education Institute.

Ms Chee Pui Yee, Liz commenced a 1-year appointment as Research Associate in the Science, Technology, and Society Cluster in ARI and Tembusu College on 12 January 2015. Her research interest is on the use of animal tissue in Chinese Medicine.

Dr Simone Shu-Yeng Chung commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Urbanism Cluster on 8 December 2014. At ARI, she will critique the role of moving image in the experience and representation of space, with a focus on the urban scale and with Singapore serving as the site of exploration.

Prof Kenneth Dean commenced an 8-year joint appointment as Professor in the ARI Religion and Globalisation Cluster and Head of the Department of Chinese Studies, NUS, in January 2015. His current research concerns transnational trust and temple networks linking Singapore Chinese temples to Southeast China and Southeast Asia.

Ms Priya Latha D/O Sathiyamoorthi commenced appointment as Management Assistant Officer on 22 January 2015. She holds a Diploma in Business Administration from BMC International College, and will be providing secretarial support to the Director and Deputy Director.

Ms Ho Wei Pin commenced a 1-year appointment as Research Assistant in the Asian Urbanisms Cluster on 2 January 2015. She holds a BA with Honours in History from NUS. She will assist Prof Mike Douglass and Assoc Prof Gregory Clancey in the project “Governing Compound Disasters in Urbanizing Asia”.

Dr Olivia Su-Lin Khoo commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Cultural Studies Cluster on 15 January 2015. Her research focuses on Asian and Asian Australian film and screen cultures, and at ARI, she will be working on a new monograph on Regional Asian Cinema.
Prof Kim Dong-Won commenced a 6-month appointment as Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Asian Connections Metacluster and Tembusu College on 2 January 2015. His major research fields are history of physics in the 19th and 20th centuries, and history of science and technology in Korea and Japan. He is currently working on two book projects on cosmic ray research in the 20th century and the history of science, and a textbook on technology in modern East Asia.

Dr Lee Tsung-Ling commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Connections Metacluster on 15 December 2014. Her research examines the intersection of public international law and health, with a focus on regulatory theory. At ARI she will examine the emerging regional migration pathways in the field of elderly care.

Dr Mu Zheng commenced a 1-year joint-appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Changing Family in Asia Cluster and the Centre for Family and Population Research on 12 January 2015. Her research interests include marriage and family, fertility, ethnicity, gender inequality and quantitative methods. At ARI, she will work on projects examining heterogeneities in the mechanisms and outcomes of Chinese migrants’ marital behaviours.

Prof Makarand R. Paranjape commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Asian Connections Metacluster on 13 January 2015. He is Professor at the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. At ARI, he will work on “Re-presenting Asia: Regional Inter-referentiality, Global Connections.”

Dr Anju Mary Paul commenced a 6-month appointment as Assistant Professor under the Writing Semester Scheme on 1 January 2015. She researches on international migration patterns to, from, and within Asia, especially as they intersect with issues of race, gender, labour, and globalisation. At ARI, she will continue work on her study of the return migration decision-making processes of Asian-born, Western-trained bioscientists.

Assoc Prof Teresita Cruz-del Rosario commenced an 8-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Asian Connections Metacluster on 6 January 2015. Her research interests are on migration, development and underdevelopment, social movements and civil society, and comparative political transitions.

Ms Hioe Zhi Hui, Joanna commenced a 4-month appointment as Research Assistant in the Asian Migration Cluster on 23 February 2015. She has an MA in Cultural Studies from the SOAS, University of London. At ARI, she will be working on the Casino Mobilities project.

Ms Kellynn Wee Jiaying commenced a 1-year appointment as Research Assistant in the Asian Migration Cluster on 2 March 2015. She has a B.Soc.Sci (Hons) degree from NUS, and will be assisting in the Migrating Out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium.
On 28 November 2014, the Asian Migration Cluster organised a public symposium and short film screening entitled “Migration and Construction Work in Asia”, as part of the ARI ASIA TRENDS 2015 lecture series. The event brought together over 120 participants, which included members of civil society, NGO practitioners, policymakers, and students.

Dr C. R. Abrar, Director of the Refugee Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), gave an insightful presentation on the situation of migrant construction workers in Bangladesh, Nepal, and India, whilst Grace Baey, Research and Communications Officer at ARI, shared findings from a recently completed study on migration and precarious work amongst Bangladeshi construction workers in Singapore. The panel also included John Gee, Head of Research at Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2).

In collaboration with local arts initiative Beyond the Border, Behind the Men (BTBBTM), a short film featuring the livelihoods of return migrants in Bangladesh was screened, alongside a multimedia piece that illustrates the migration journey that Bangladeshi men undertake to secure work in Singapore. The screening and presentations sparked a lively discussion on key issues and challenges facing migrant construction workers in the region, as well as recommendations for the way forward.

The short film and multimedia piece are accessible online at: http://www.storiesfrommunshiganj.com

In November 2014, the Asian Urbanisms Cluster organised another of the popular CityPossible Film Festival, the third in the series. Freely open to the public, its “spaces of hope” theme brought together independent films from Asia and around the world to celebrate the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

In February 2015, the Dialogic Workshop on Progressive Cities in Asia and Europe brought scholars from the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3 and NUS to share research on the rise of progressive cities in the 21st century. Hosted by LKYSPP, ARI, and the Future Cities Lab at NUS, it will be followed by a second workshop in Paris in May. AUC

is also moving forward with its MOE Tier 2 project on “Governing Compound Disasters in Urbanizing Asia”. This project, which is a multi-disciplinary approach to disaster research, had its conference on Decentralized Disaster Governance in Urbanizing Asia on 5-6 March 2015 at ARI.

Over the past few years the Religion Cluster has engaged in a wide-ranging series of investigations into the theme of religion and development in Asia. Thanks to a generous grant from the Henry R. Luce Foundation Initiative on Religion and International Affairs, the Cluster will build upon and expand this line of inquiry with a new two-year project on “Religion and NGOs in Asia.” The goal of this project is to explore the negotiations and engagement of religious NGOs with policy and regulatory frameworks at multiple levels—organisational, sub-national, national, and trans-national. The Cluster has initiated a search for postdoctoral fellows to work full time on this project and it is looking to organise multiple conference events around the theme over the course of the project.

Complementing the theme of religion and development in Asia, Religion Cluster members have also been pursuing a vibrant research agenda along various historical and anthropological lines of inquiry. In a notable example of international collaboration, Joshua Gedacht co-organised a conference entitled Wild Spaces and Islamic Cosmopolitanism in Asia with Amrita Malhi of the International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding, University of South Australia. This two-day gathering, held at ARI in January 2015, brought together a mix of senior and early career scholars to explore the interplay between efforts to enclose local Muslims in discrete geographical territories and the fashioning of open-ended Islamic identities, engagements, and mobilities across recognised boundaries. Keynote lectures from two leading scholars of Islam, Professors Faisal Devji of Oxford University and Bruce Lawrence of Duke University, provided thought-provoking reflections on ways to conceptualise Islamic and “Islamicate” cosmopolitanism amidst a larger backdrop of unequal power relations and militancy. The conference also featured 15 academic papers covering Muslims in every region of Asia, from China and Southeast Asia to the Indian subcontinent and the historical Ottoman territories of Central Asia. The diverse geographical perspectives of the participants generated provocative insights on the relationships between Arabia, the “Middle East,” and Asia broadly conceived. The organisers look forward to continuing these international collaborations and fruitful discussions over the next few years.
METACLUSTER: HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF ASIAN CONNECTIONS  

The Metacluster, which has brought together a focus group within ARI to develop a paradigm of Asian circulations and connections as a motor of historical and social change, has expanded in two major directions in pursuing its objectives—to understand modernity and modern science through its research perspective. Prof Prasenjit Duara’s recent study, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), explores how Asian spiritual traditions and values could ameliorate and counter the crisis of ecological overreach generated by the domimative ethos over nature informing contemporary modernity.

Being revised for publication is a volume of essays entitled *The Bright Dark Ages; Comparative and Connective Perspectives* (eds, Arun Bala & Prasenjit Duara, Brill) which brings together scholars to investigate how circulations of scientific knowledge across Eurasian civilisations and cultures in the millennium 500-1500 prior to the modern era, deemed the “Dark Ages” of European science, laid the framework for scientific advances in both the pre-modern and modern periods.

The Metacluster also organised a series of talks and panel discussions to pursue its Asian connectionist perspective. These include Kapil Raj’s talk “Bringing the World into the History of Science” which forges a dialogue between global histories of modernity and global histories of science, and a roundtable discussion with two Asian luminaries Mr Jairam Ramesh (Former Minister of Rural Development for India) and Professor Wen Tiejun (Renmin University of China) on the relationship between rural development and environmental sustainability in the emerging giants of Asia.

CHANGING FAMILY IN ASIA  

Members of the Changing Family Cluster published the special issue, *Marriage in Asia* (October 2014) in the *Journal of Family Issues* (guest eds, Gavin Jones and Jean Yeung). Two more special journal issues are in progress, both in leading internationally reviewed journals—one on *Growing Up in One-parent Family in Asia* in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* (guest eds, Jean Yeung and Park Hyunjoon); another on *Living Alone: One-person Households in Asia* in *Demographic Research* (guest eds, Jean Yeung and Adam Cheung). The latter is a ground breaking effort as the first systematic collection on the various aspects of the living alone phenomenon in many Asian countries including Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Japan, Korea and China, such as characteristics, trends and patterns of one-person households, impact of living in one-person households, and psychological well-being, health and mortality among those living in one-person households.

In January 2015, Research Fellow Sharon Quah was awarded a research grant by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) Family Research Fund to conduct an exploratory study on transnational divorces in Singapore from 2015 to 2016. The study will investigate, with in-depth interviews, the post-divorce trajectories of Singaporeans who had dissolved their transnational marriages with non-Singaporeans, in particular, cross-border issues and challenges faced in dissolving their marriages and working out different aspects of their post-divorce lives. The findings will not only inform our understanding on the experiences of Singaporean divorcees from transnational marriages but also this particular social phenomenon of transnational divorce that is becoming more prominent and common in the global context.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

27 - 28 APRIL 2015
ALTERNATIVE URBAN SPACES: CITIES BY AND FOR THE PEOPLE

Contact Person:
Ms Tay Minghua; aritm@nus.edu.sg

24 - 26 JUNE 2015
10TH SINGAPORE GRADUATE FORUM ON SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

Contact Person:
Ms Tay Minghua; aritm@nus.edu.sg

30 JUNE - 2 JULY 2015
GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF MIGRATION: MATERIAL AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES OF SOUTH-SOUTH MIGRATION

Contact Person:
Ms Valerie Yeo; valerie.yeo@nus.edu.sg

20 - 21 JULY 2015
THE FORCE OF LIFE: LIVING IN PRECARIOUS SPACES AND TIMES IN ASIA

Contact Person:
Ms Sharon Ong; arios@nus.edu.sg

26 - 27 AUGUST 2015
INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL TRAVEL AND THE POLITICS OF TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY IN ASIA

Contact Person:
Ms Sharon Ong; arios@nus.edu.sg

22 - 23 SEPTEMBER 2015
GOVERNANCE AND CIRCULATION OF ASIAN MEDICINES

Contact Person:
Ms Valerie Yeo; valerie.yeo@nus.edu.sg

Details of events are available at: http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/calendarofevent.asp?categoryid=6
Last January was an eventful month in Sri Lanka. Presidential elections were scheduled to take place on 8 January, only five days before the arrival of Pope Francis to Colombo for the canonisation of Joseph Vaz, Sri Lanka’s first saint. The upheaval caused by the unexpected ousting of Mahinda Rajapaksa after ten years in office was cut surprisingly short, as the arrival of the Pope caught the attention of the media without allowing Sri Lankans much time to get used to seeing a new face in Temple Trees. Maithripala Sirisena, the newly minted president, did not have much time either to settle into his new role as head of state. After assuming duties on Friday, his first official appearance was to welcome Pope Francis to Sri Lanka the following Monday. Just like anyone struggling with the first day at a new job, Sirisena could be seen slightly hesitant about protocol procedures but was overall successful in navigating the cameras and crowds with the guest from the Vatican.

That same Monday I had the opportunity of visiting the Jesuit Provincial House in Negombo where two days later his Holiness would make a brief public appearance before heading to Manila, the next stop of his visit to Asia. Negombo was only a minor event compared to the more than half a million people that congregated in Galle Face Green for the canonisation of St. Joseph Vaz, or the special helicopter ride that Pope Francis took to the shrine of Our Lady of Madhu in the predominantly Tamil region of Mannar. But this was probably the reason why receiving Pope Francis—even if only for an hour—was such a historical moment for this city where more than 90% of the population identifies as Catholic. Not in vain has Negombo been known as the “Capital of Catholic Sri Lanka,” and somehow more ambitiously, its residents are proud to refer to their hometown as “Little Rome”. Although the official agenda for Pope Francis in Negombo was to offer his blessing to the site where the “Pope Benedict XVI Institute for Theology in Asia” is being built, he was also here to pay a personal visit to a fellow member of the Society of Jesus.

At the Jesuit House, I had the opportunity to meet with Father Vito Perniola S. J., an Italian missionary who arrived in Sri Lanka back in 1936 and at the age of 101 is working on a new book on the history of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. He is the author of a massive work of research and translation of Church official documents and correspondences since the Portuguese colonial era in the 16th century. An extremely valuable resource for any student of colonial Sri Lanka, Perniola’s work includes nineteen historical volumes that span the Portuguese, Dutch and British colonial periods, as well as a seminal book on Pali grammar and several other volumes in Sinhala and English. Last January, Fr. Perniola with his seemingly endless good humour and energy, noted how happy and honoured he was to receive the visit of Pope Francis. However, as he also confided, he was worried that his worsening eyesight would be an obstacle to completing his research projects. One of his younger colleagues tried to reassure him saying that it would be no problem to find volunteers willing to help him put his work in writing. But Fr. Perniola, showing no intentions of slowing down the pace of his work, promptly retorted, “Yes, but how am I going to write if I can’t read all these documents?...”