Rethinking Australian Studies in Japanese Universities: Towards a New Area Studies for a Globalising World

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we can no longer think and act as if only the local matters, as if we owe solidarity only to those within our own city or state.

(Kofi Annan)

The vital importance of making Australia better known — more coherently understood, more profoundly appreciated — in the Asia-Pacific region could not be more salient at this time. Australia is still the victim of its lingering reputation in Asia as a ‘white dominion’ arrogating middle power pretensions to itself, laying claim to a deputy’s role on behalf of the USA. Philippines Senator Ralph Recto’s riposte in response to John Howard’s advocacy of the international legalisation of pre-emptive strikes gives a taste of the indignation such presumption arouses:

Howard is not a Crocodile Dundee who can treat the whole of Asia as an extension of the Australian outback. No [Asian] country will ever issue a hunting permit to Australian forces. Asia is not a place where Howard can go on a safari.¹

The ‘understandings’ (or misunderstandings) of Australia inherent in such comments need urgently to be weighed against wiser accounts of Australia’s distinctive potential in Asia. That potential — which is integral to an understanding of Australia’s distinctiveness — is acknowledged in Asia, as is evident in a recent editorial in Bangkok’s The Nation:

Australia has an important role to play in the peace and security of Asia, especially in Southeast Asia. By its own virtue, it has a special place in the region. It is imperative that Australia defines its own role independently. Southeast Asian countries dread to see another deputy sheriff ride into town. Instead they want an Australia with a mind of its own […] Anything else might just deny Australia its destiny in this part of the world.²

However, there are no established and recognised centres of educated opinion strategically located throughout Asia to build on this kind of acknowledgement. We need to be able to project Australia’s contemporary distinctiveness into the region far more intelligently than we do currently. Based on sound academic analyses of this distinctiveness, we need to show that we have much to offer the region as it grapples with the pressures of globalisation. There is no better place to start this scholarly projection than Japan, which demonstrates an impressive interest in Australian studies programs in some of its universities.³

In this paper we sketch a case for a fresh approach to Australian studies programs in Japanese universities. By ‘fresh’ we mean programs that move beyond ‘orthodox Australian studies’ — the rather inchoate and often under-
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collection of subjects and courses generally taught under that hold-all rubric. The theoretical coherence for which we are aiming (and which we acknowledge requires greater elaboration than we can provide in this paper) needs to incorporate aspects of globalisation theory and cultural studies (including gender studies), linking these into Japanese academic programs on globalisation. We also point to the need for a renewal of area studies academic programs that come to grips with the realities of the rapidly globalising world that now envelops us all. Our proposal is for Australian studies courses to be part of a renewed approach to area studies programs.

What we are proposing are Australian studies programs that have broader scholarly significance than the prevailing ‘orthodox Australian studies’ courses of study. We favour Australian studies programs that are intellectually ambitious and less politically correct — programs that are moving beyond being an ideological appendage to Australia’s cultural diplomacy in East Asia, especially in Japan. Our proposals would entail the comprehensive reform of ad hoc Australian studies practices in Japanese universities and elsewhere. This could include, for example, replacing programs that rely on visiting academic staff, usually recruited from Australia on short-term contracts, teaching their own specialist interests (for example, literature one year and labour history the next). Sounder arrangements are required to build up focused research centres, specialist graduate courses, and lively undergraduate programs.

‘Orthodox Australian Studies’ in Japan

At first glance, Australia does not have a compelling claim for inclusion in Japanese area studies curricula. Australia’s population is small: not quite twenty million people in a landmass almost the same size as the United States. The country is distant from the major power centres in the world. Its economy is largely reliant on resource exporting, which is good for Japan’s economy but not so good for Australia’s overall economic outlook. It has a limited military capacity. As mentioned earlier, it also has middle power presumptions, but its means for realising these are not equal to the task. Yet, as a major resource exporter, Australia has undoubtedly benefited from Japan’s post-second world war demand for raw materials. The continuation of this relationship looks assured for the foreseeable future. Both sides appreciate the commercial advantages in the relationship and mostly manage to conduct it without undue fuss. Even so, there are what Professor Camilleri calls ‘limitations’ inhibiting the relationship from maturing in ways that we could reasonably expect in a globalising world. He lists:

- the cultural and political distance separating the two societies, Tokyo’s preoccupation with issues of Northeast Asian security as against Canberra’s focus on Southeast Asia, and the still lingering historical sensitivities associated with the Second World War.

These are the very problems that good area studies programs could help resolve, to the advantage of both sides. Despite being little more than an ideological appendage to the trade relationship between Australia and Japan, the ‘orthodox Australian studies’ courses developed in Japanese universities over the years have fostered some
interest in Australia among some Japanese undergraduate and graduate students. Several have gone on to postgraduate study in Australian universities, motivated by their Australian studies programs in Japan. At the same time Australian studies graduates from Japanese universities have no doubt taken knowledge gained from their Australian studies interests into their subsequent careers — especially where this knowledge is relevant to managing aspects of the relationship between the two countries (for example, in trade or tourism). Hopefully, knowledge gained from Australian studies courses has replaced some of the myths and prejudices about Australia in Japanese minds.13

Australian studies programs are not an inappropriate focus for Japanese universities seeking to redevelop their area studies courses. However, if these Australian contributions to area studies are to become more than a diplomatic tool, the time has come for them to be reconfigured within a soundly theorised area studies framework, one that is at least as academically grounded as it is diplomatically useful.14

**The Decline and Revival of Area Studies**

In the 1950s, area studies courses flourished in liberal studies programs in universities around the world. This occurred with two broad educational aims in mind: to foster interdisciplinary research and teaching in liberal education programs; and to focus on states, societies and cultures of strategic significance. The programs reached their peak during the 1960s and 1970s, often in the ideologically fraught atmosphere of the cold war period. One has only to cite the Japanese studies program at Harvard and the Indonesian studies program at Cornell (with legendary scholars like Edwin O Reischauer and George McT Kahin among their respective founders) to recall how prominent area studies became in post-war universities. However, throughout the 1980s and 1990s they began losing students and resources in the fashionable rush to ‘relevance’ in more vocational courses (such as business, information technology, hospitality and tourism studies). At the same time, scholars like Edward Said mounted a telling critique of the ‘Orientalism’ in programs taught under a variety of Middle Eastern and South Asian area studies banners — programs accused by Professor Said of imposing a ‘subaltern’ consciousness (or ‘internal imperialism’) on the minds of colonised peoples.15

Despite these setbacks, more recent trends indicate that prospects for a renewal of area studies courses have never been higher.16 The main impetus for this is found in the educational challenges of globalisation.

Our advocacy of reformed area studies courses in universities is based on the conclusion that they could become an effective way of nurturing the interdisciplinary programs recently analysed by Martha Nussbaum.17 She investigated programs in gender studies, religion studies and ethnicity studies (especially African-American studies and studies of non-western societies) in a core of fifteen American colleges and universities. She collected data about curricula and literature resources; surveyed teaching methods; elicited views and opinions through interviews (conducted and taped personally and by research assistants); and she examined course evaluations. She then submitted the programs to a close philosophical interrogation. In the process, she persuasively
demonstrates that an interdisciplinary bent and an internationalising focus characterise those programs identified as successful. She shows that students exposed to the kinds of liberal education programs she has investigated will be well prepared for dealing with the challenges of a globalising world. As she explains: ‘Many of our most pressing problems require for their intelligent, cooperative solution a dialogue that brings together people from many different national and cultural and religious backgrounds’.18

We contend that area studies courses taking note of Nussbaum’s philosophical and pedagogical interrogations are likely to develop into the progressive curricula she is advocating. They can be developed into the very programs urgently needed — in Japan and all around the world — for understanding the contemporary realities of internationalisation. We’ve already noted that internationalisation needs to be more than a ‘superficial coating of “internationalness”’. Rather, it requires the ‘internationalising of attitudes or the acquisition of an international mind’.19 As Nussbaum puts it:

It is up to us, as educators, to show our students the beauty and interest of a life that is open to the whole world, to show them that there is after all more joy in the kind of citizenship that questions than in the kind that simply applauds, more fascination in the study of human beings in all their real variety and complexity than in the zealous pursuit of superficial stereotypes, more genuine love and friendship in the life of questioning and self-government than in submission to authority. We had better show them this, or the future of democracy in … the whole world is bleak.”20

A retreat from area studies in universities today would be counterproductive, not only to the universities themselves (and their students), but also to the world’s need for educated understandings of globalisation. As Nussbaum concludes: ‘It would be catastrophic to become a nation of technically competent people who have lost the ability to think critically, to examine themselves, and to respect the humanity and diversity of others’.21

Globalisation

What is meant by globalisation? Princeton’s Professor Richard Falk has observed that globalisation is almost a ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ condition. At a very simple level, it unleashes two related transforming pressures on the world: predatory globalisation and globalisation from below.22

Predatory globalisation is about shifting yet more global capital from the poorer parts of the globe to the already rich areas (thereby increasing global inequalities). It is possible to refer to it as neo-imperialism via the Internet in view of the billions of dollars that shift around the globe at the touch of a computer key during any one period of trading on stock, futures or currency trading markets. Predatory globalisation is ideologically present in the neo-liberal economic theories that act as an apology for the aggressive behaviours of these markets. It is evident in the widespread environmental pollution premised on manipulated markets and mindless consumerism. It is collaborative with institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and with many trans-
national and multi-national conglomerates that pursue profits by exploiting poorer states already crippled by debt burdens, and the crass and selfish indifference of the rich world.23  

Globalisation from below is about the evolution of global citizenship. It is about the global population learning to value each other as fellow humans. Hence, the concept incorporates a deep and extensive critique of globalisation from above. It means coming to an educated realisation that we have to work together to establish peace and human rights. It means co-operating to provide access to food, health and shelter, and to offer each other relief from natural disasters (such as global warming, earthquakes, floods and HIV/AIDS).24 It is about understanding that all this is in the interests of the entire world. It is not about the world’s rich minority persisting self-righteously to proffer to the impoverished majority of the international community more cold and inadequate charity. The new and hopeful globalisation is evident in the controversial rise of humanitarian interventions around the globe by the UN and its agencies, by other non-government organisations, and by governments in a variety of bilateral and multilateral arrangements. It is also laudably present in the recent establishment of an International Criminal Court to prosecute cases against those accused of crimes against humanity.25  

For Professor Falk the challenge is to amplify the second form of globalisation, while placing effective limits on the former. This means encouraging the growth of a:

- global civil society [to] encourage a human rights and democracy orientation toward global citizenship — the world as delightfully heterogeneous, yet inclusive of all creation in an overarching frame of community sentiment, premised on the biological and normative capacity of the human species to organize its collective life on foundations of nonviolence, equity, and sustainability.26

Education is a major means for achieving Falk’s objective. As Amartya Sen points out: ‘The contribution of basic education to development is not … confined to economic progress. Education has intrinsic importance’.27 It contributes to progressive social developments like female equality, environmental awareness, and the nurturing of a democratic consciousness which includes demands for participation and accountability in hitherto authoritarian and corrupt political regimes, encouraging them towards one or other of many possible ‘transitions to democracy’.28  

Our argument assumes that area studies programs conceived in the light of Falk’s globalisation from below — a globalisation that welcomes a global civil society where people are comfortable with each other, where they recognise and enjoy their cultural differences and the multiplicity of deeply-felt identities, where they co-operate in order to solve problems that threaten global security, to live in a civilised world order — are likely to be both attractive to students and of scholarly value in the university of the twenty first century.29 This admittedly liberal (as opposed to realist) view of a renewed approach to area studies in universities is immediately confronted by Realpolitik area studies practices that still exist — if somewhat in decline — in many universities round the world.
Scholarly analyses of the features of superpowers and big powers, including their major strategic, security, diplomatic, economic and foreign policies, provide Realpolitik (i.e., plausible, but not always ethically responsible) rationalisations for designing and delivering area studies curricula in American studies, European studies, and Asian studies. American studies programs, for example, should be able to provide: coherent explanations of the US superpower’s political and economic systems; its foreign and defence policies; and its historical and cultural development; as well as the history and politics of its relations with Japan. European studies programs should be able to inform us about the contemporary impetus for Europe’s integration — and whether it constitutes the birth of a new superpower. If so, what kind of superpower will it be — unilateralist or democratically collaborative with the world (a new, less ‘anarchic’ superpower)? Contemporary East Asian studies programs should, presumably, focus on China’s potential as a superpower in the region. Will it remain a united state, or will it disintegrate like the old Soviet Union? If it remains united, will it be a post-communist superpower?

We acknowledge the strategic relevance of Realpolitik area studies courses. However, it is our view that, when they focus predominantly on superpowers or big powers, they are open to significant criticism. If area studies are taught uncritically or without a wider comparative focus, students are in danger of being absorbed (or persuaded or seduced — even brainwashed) into the ideological apparatuses that all big powers have deployed throughout history to impose what may be depicted as ‘subaltern mindsets’ on colonised or otherwise subjugated peoples around the world, in the interests of the metropolitan powers. British imperial histories of India, for example, can sometimes be read as an apology for Britain’s colonising (‘civilising’) of the Indian ‘hordes’. This viewpoint has been radically challenged in recent years by post-colonial and subaltern studies. Throughout the cold war, some American studies and some Soviet studies programs were used (sometimes subtly, sometimes very unsubtly) by each of the superpowers, for their own purposes — by funding publications, research projects, selected personnel, and curricula believed to be sympathetic to their respective (if not always respectable) ways of participating in world politics. If this is done covertly, without any accountability — by laundering funding and resources through philanthropic organisations — then its manipulative intentions will undermine any academic advantages, especially where inconvenient truths are glossed over in deference to an ‘official’ line.

Some area studies courses tend to be obsessed with the military capabilities of superpowers. Superpowers and big powers are not the only players in international politics — nor are they always the winners. The withdrawal of the US and its allies from Vietnam in 1975, and the defeat of Soviet forces in Afghanistan prior to Osama bin Laden and al Qa’ida, indicate that superpowers can sometimes be accountable to militarily unsophisticated communities and states.

Realpolitik area studies tend to be uniformly political, sometimes forgetting that there is more to the world than politics. Though equally important cultural, literary, linguistic, artistic, gender, historical and religious issues tend to be
neglected if the curriculum focus is limited to strategic issues (making them collaborative with strategic studies). If area studies programs are to fulfil their roles as engaging liberal contributions to university curricula in a globalising world, such programs must be free to venture beyond playing a handmaiden role to the realist apologies of international relations and beyond rationalising the world as we think we know it.

The importance of globalisation to area studies cannot be underestimated. As the world globalises, the need for wider-ranging area studies courses in universities will become obvious. As noted in our earlier references to Nussbaum, today’s students need to know how to deal with contemporary increases in global human mobility through increases in trade and commerce, increases in travel (tourism, business and educational exchanges, cultural exchanges, refugees and asylum-seekers, human trafficking, conventional migration), and increases in information availability (new media, such as the Internet). More than ever before, young people require an education in global citizenship; they need to know how to feel at home in the entire world, not just in their own comfort zones or within parochial or narrowly regional contexts.

In short, we are proposing that the old Realpolitik rationale for area studies is no longer legitimate. If area studies courses are to be revived successfully in universities, they need to be re-configured and revitalised in the light of the burgeoning scholarly responses to globalisation. With this in mind, we return to our focus on Australian studies in Japan.

What we are intimating here is that the Japan-Australia relationship contains possibilities for an area studies focus that contributes to globalisation from below. While our focus in this paper is on Australian studies, its corollary — of necessity — is a renewed approach to Japanese studies, a discourse that also needs considerable rethinking in the light of globalisation. To help situate our discussion, we briefly outline a view of the similarities in Japan’s and Australia’s status in the Asia-Pacific region.

**Two Estranged States on the Edge of Asia**

Beyond the limited instrumentalism of their established trade relationship, Japan and Australia face oddly similar problems in their relations with neighbouring states in their geo-political region.

Japanese estrangement — even alienation — from Asia has long been noted. It remains a scar on Japan’s ongoing diplomacy. Even during the Meiji Era, Japan’s ‘modernisation’ was more a process of copying economic and technological structures rather than absorbing the so-called secularism and rationalism that provide the determining cultural components of what is loosely referred to as ‘western modernity’.35 Nor was the post-Meiji Era an opening up to Asia. Asian societies and economies (especially Korea and China) were pressed — sometimes ruthlessly — into the war strategies of the Japanese government, resulting in widespread suffering.36 That this history remains a problem for Japan’s reputation in the region is now an unavoidable, if uncomfortable fact.37 Since the second world war, Japanese governments have, largely, been reluctant to apologise meaningfully for this negative period in their dealings with countries like Korea and China. A few expressions of regret — mostly perceived as inadequate — have
been proffered at various politic moments. This reluctance — often seen as aloofness, even arrogance — has needlessly prolonged tensions in Japan’s relations with East and Southeast Asia generally. While this counterproductive diplomacy persists, Japan’s reputation for hubris in the West and South Pacific will also persist.39

Australia, too, has a history of self-inflicted alienation from Asia. From the time of European settlement in 1788 an ‘anxiety’ about Asia prompted Australians to exclude Asian settlers, while seeking to remain under first a British and then an American security umbrella.40 This anxiety was based on a toxic combination of colonial dependency (maintaining a ‘British’ identity in a distant part of the British empire) and racist fears of a ‘Yellow Peril’ — later a ‘Red Menace’ — thought to be about to sweep out of China, through Southeast Asia, to engulf Anglo-Celtic Australians.41 The worst example of this racism was the so-called white Australia policy (1901-1973). The Whitlam Government repealed this policy in 1973, though it had been ignored by governments from the mid-1950s, permitting not insignificant numbers of Asians to settle in Australia from that time.42 Since 1973 Australia has pursued a non-discriminatory immigration policy that has seen large numbers of settlers arriving from Asia.43

In the minds of many Australians the country remains nostalgically linked to its dependency on Britain and America. While there have been attempts to ‘engage’ with Asia in recent years, they remain patchy and inconsistent, even if there have been a few gains along the way.44 The rise of populist political organisations like One Nation (a right-wing political group reacting against globalisation and Asian immigration) has been watched ruefully by many potential friends in Asia. And today, as Professor Milner has noted, the Howard government seems more inclined to promote a ‘comfortable and even complacent Australia, rather than a tenacious, resourceful and Asia-sophisticated community’, one that would ‘engage’ with Asia rather than retreat from it — the latter course appearing the preferred course of the current federal government.45

Similarities in Japan’s and Australia’s unfortunate beliefs in their respective cultural/racial superiorities have kept them on the political (if not economic) edge of Asia. Sharing critiques of their estrangements from Asia could constitute preliminary grounds for imagining a more adventurous bilateralism — one that goes beyond the shallow trade utilitarianism that presently consigns the relationship to complacency. Sooner rather than later, we would need to move beyond merely comparing and critiquing each country’s estrangement from Asia, to more positive forms of bilateralism. It is disappointing that a more mature bilateralism hasn’t developed long before now — as it might have if, for example, the tragi-comic manoeuvrings surrounding the multifunction polis (MFP) had been treated with greater seriousness on both sides.46

**Australia’s Distinctiveness in a Globalising World**

We are not arguing for a bilateralism between Japan and Australia that is merely a diplomatic success story — positive though this goal most certainly is. We are also suggesting that a maturing of the relationship beyond the utilitarianism that presently limits it could become an educational contribution to the growth of globalisation from below. This maturing should permit, for example, Japan to
engage directly with Australia about three ‘core’ areas of international (or global) relevance: Australia’s treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; its multiculturalism; and its proximity to Asia. We suggest that these three core areas are not simply aspects of potentially better-theorised Australian studies programs. Related to the three core areas are other areas that undoubtedly are of importance too — literature, film, art, drama and music, for example. They need to be integral to any explorations of the three core areas of our focus on Australian studies. Our approach here is a ‘big picture’ one: further refinement is unquestionably necessary.

Reconciliation with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

European settler-colonialism (or ‘settler capitalism’) on the Australian continent proved holocaustal for its Indigenous populations. The cruel — sometimes savage — marginalisation of Indigenous peoples has remained deeply problematic ever since. As Geoff Clark, chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, has noted, Aboriginal communities today ‘are crippled by social problems, substance abuse, domestic violence and chronic division and disputation within communities and families’. This constitutes a calamity in the midst of non-Indigenous Australians whom aggregate statistics place among the healthiest, best-educated and richest populations on the globe. In this sense, Australia is a contemporary microcosm of the inequality that many colonised peoples routinely experience and which predatory globalisation is currently intensifying around the world.

In recent years there has been a growing consciousness of the significance of Aboriginal Affairs in Australian public policy. In the 1970s the Dunstan Government of South Australia began the great drama of acknowledging Aboriginal ownership of land by granting the Pitjantjatjara people legal title to parts of the state identified as Pitjantjatjara lands. On 3 June 1992 the High Court of Australia, in its famous *Mabo* judgment, found that the colonial doctrine of *terra nullius* (that the land was unoccupied on the arrival of the Europeans) was legally invalid and that in certain circumstances descendents of those peoples originally displaced from traditional lands may be accorded compensation or the return of traditional lands. Since the *Mabo* ruling, demands for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians have been increasing.

Broadly, there are two kinds of reconciliation being advocated in contemporary Australia. The first — which we label as substantive reconciliation — is ambitious and envisages a revolutionary transformation of the living conditions and opportunities of Indigenous peoples in contemporary Australia. The second — referred to by John Howard as practical reconciliation — is more pragmatic and less ambitious. The former is seen as a ‘progressive’ approach to Indigenous advancement in contemporary Australia. The latter is seen as a conservative and, in some cases, reactionary response to the progressive initiative.
Substantive Reconciliation

Substantive reconciliation entails governments enacting a mixture of comprehensive legal reforms promoting Aboriginal community development, focusing on health, housing, employment and educational programs. It includes the provision of compensation payments by governments to Indigenous people who can establish traditional claims to land where those claims can no longer be restored, and compensation to victims of past policies (including the forced removal of part-Indigenous children from their mothers — the so-called ‘stolen generations’). It involves providing support for traditional and semi-traditional community development. Its most symbolic element is the proposed signing of a legal treaty with Indigenous peoples, to be ratified by the Federal Parliament, acknowledging that contemporary Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the descendents of those who suffered invasion and unjust displacement from their lands upon European invasion. Their descendents are still disadvantaged in the dominant structures and practices of contemporary Australian life. The treaty would also include a formal apology to Indigenous peoples for past sufferings and injustices. The Howard government has recently rejected proposals for a treaty and a formal apology to Indigenous peoples as recommended in the report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

Practical Reconciliation

John Howard is a strident critic of substantive reconciliation. He is especially opposed to any official apology for past wrongdoings, on the grounds that the evils of history are not the responsibility of those in the present. (He has, however, expressed his own personal regret that Indigenous people might have suffered in the past.) He argues that practical reconciliation requires well-targeted policies to lift Aborigines from their poverty and alienation and enable them to enter mainstream Australian life. He also argues that any special (affirmative) policies towards Aborigines would be unfair to other minority groups and that all Australians, including Aboriginal Australians, should be treated equally before the law, by governments and all other social institutions. Howard’s position has been gained some support among Aboriginal leaders who see welfare handouts as keeping Aborigines dependent and marginalised. Noel Pearson, for example, one of the most impressive Aboriginal leaders to emerge in recent times, has complained of the lack of ‘innovative policies aimed at helping communities overcome passive welfare’. Nonetheless, as ATSIC chair Geoff Clark pointed out, the idea of the precinct was ‘deficient’ without a treaty: ‘At the end of the day it’s the certainty and security that a final agreement will bring to future generations — rather than conflict’.

The search for meaningful reconciliation between Indigenous and colonising non-Indigenous peoples is not new in the world. The American First Nations peoples have been coping with related problems for over two centuries. Similar problems confront the Indigenous populations of Siberia, Canada and Greenland. A comparable situation is evident with the Ainu peoples in contemporary Japan. How does a globalising world view these matters? How, in particular, is globalisation from below going to confront them?
Increasingly, human rights interventions are talked about by the international community and sometimes enforced by its agencies. As Robert Jackson has noted: ‘The doctrine of humanitarian intervention is a positive ethics in which human rights displace state sovereignty as the primary normative consideration in deciding questions of intervention’.

This is the way of the globalising future, as such violators of human rights as Slobodan Milosevic and General Pinochet are discovering, not always comfortably. While not ignoring the myriad controversies inherent in this global issue, the condition of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander peoples is no longer a discrete aspect of Australian domestic social problem-solving. It is increasingly a global problem inviting global critiques and/or interventions. Thus Australia’s responses to global criticisms of the treatment of its Indigenous peoples, and to demands for changes in this treatment, take on a far wider scholarly significance than even the events and the participants themselves.

**Multiculturalism**

More positively, the monumental publication in 2001 of *The Australian People* offers contemporary evidence of how Australia is emerging as a relevant social experiment in globalisation from below. *The Australian People* catalogues over 120 different communities that make up the ethnic pluralism of contemporary Australia. The number of languages, religious and cultural traditions, forms of social pluralism, demographic complexity and gender relations that Australia’s multiculturalism encompasses makes it one of the most interesting experiments in globalisation from below that the world has yet seen. In a sense Australia can be regarded as a test case in the construction of global citizenship.

This is not to suggest that multiculturalism has been without its opponents. We highlight four critiques of multiculturalism: all are opposed to multiculturalism as an apology for large-scale immigration programs; they all depict multiculturalism as part of a liberal agenda to dilute traditional Australian life and culture. However, we believe that a defence of Australian multiculturalism is eminently plausible.

Anglo-Celtic nostalgics claim that the foundational institutions of Australian society — the rule of law, representative democratic government, family structures, churches, community organisations, schools and universities, trade unions and political parties, and our artistic and literary achievements — all owe allegiance to Anglo-Celtic cultures with their roots in Britain. But this nostalgia overlooks conflicts with British power structures and traditions that Celtic and other non-English peoples, especially the Irish, experienced during the harsh convict years of settlement. It also wrongly presumes a homogeneous Anglo-Celtic culture in Britain that has long been an ethnically plural society.

Some labour market rationalists are inclined to point to ethnic diversity in the workplace as being a social problem with serious economic consequences. And they suggest that increased immigration will simply add to the pool of unemployed. This is one of Geoffrey Blainey’s arguments in his controversial book *All for Australia*. However, subsequent studies all point to ways in which ethnic pluralism has transformed workplace relations in Australia, sometimes improving, in some instances reviving effective trade unionism and facilitating cultural linkages that contribute to industrial harmony and productivity — at least
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as much as they work against it.60 At the same time, Australia’s post-war economic development would simply not have been possible without the large-scale multicultural immigration policies begun by the Whitlam and Fraser Governments in the 1970s.

In his controversial book *The Future Eaters* environmentalist Tim Flannery61 has demonstrated that the Australian continent’s geological fragility constitutes a serious environmental issue for contemporary Australia. This fragility is evident in thin top soils that should not be intensively farmed (but often are being farmed intensively), the salination of large tracts of land through irresponsible irrigation, and other bad farming practices such as over-enthusiastic tree and forest felling, and the introduction of exotic plants and animals destructive of the environment (including sheep and wheat, two staple agricultural industries in Australia). Threats to the environment are also evident in the expansion of cities like Sydney, increasing pollution and spreading into green fields space. The solution suggested in *The Future Eaters* is to lower population numbers by lowering immigration (even suspending it indefinitely). This entails a negative view of multiculturalism because the policy would bring more people of greater diversity to Australia. But the central flaw in Flannery’s case is that soil desalination, reforestation, and the regulated growth of cities are all costly activities. They require a larger economy, greater expertise and highly skilled workers to achieve their goals. Paradoxically, this could mean more immigration, not less.

There has always been racism and xenophobia in Australian culture — as there is in all cultures, including Japan. In Australia its presence was dramatically evident in the white Australia policy. Since its repeal in 1973 Australia has been accepting and successfully settling large numbers of non-white settlers.62 Residual racism can be mobilised by cynical politicians, but probably not for long. The Howard government has recently announced increases in immigration targets, including immigrants from Asia.

The fact is that Australian multiculturalism is a profoundly noteworthy achievement. It is arguably of global significance. As mentioned earlier, it is successful in ways that positively intimate the viability of global civil society. Australia’s relatively peaceful handling of its growing ethnic pluralism is evidence that global harmony is not just an idealistic dream. Australians are not sure why they have been such successful multiculturalists, nor are we all that confident that we can maintain this enviable record. Even so, if Australians are intuitively practicing what Professor Charles Taylor has labelled the ‘politics of recognition’ with such apparent success, there is perhaps something for the world to consider.63 One of the strengths of Australian studies in Japan has been its focus on multiculturalism. Japanese scholars could well contribute (some have already contributed) to an international examination of the Australian experiment in global citizenship.

**Proximity to Asia**

Australia’s geo-political situation on the edge of Southeast Asia may seem at odds with its predominantly (though not exclusively) European origins.64 This ‘Europeaness’ is routinely the target of Dr Mahathir, Prime Minister of Malaysia, who insists that Australia is not ‘Asian’ and therefore does not deserve a place in
major regional forums like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or at the annual Asia-Europe Summits. Dr Mahathir’s persistent insolence towards Australia begs the question of what ‘Asian’ means — as does his jointly authored (with Ishihara Shintaro) and equally crude defence of ‘Asian values’. The cultural, linguistic, religious, political and regional pluralisms of Asia are arguably the region’s most significant (and interesting) features. For a multicultural country like Australia to expect, much less request, to be integrated into this ‘Asian mosaic’ seems hardly remarkable. The advantages of Australia’s proximity to Asia, for both Australia and Asia, deserve greater respect than the Dr Mahathirs of the region allow.

In addition to Australia’s multiculturalism, the country’s experience as an effective and stable constitutional democracy is not irrelevant to Asian states heading along their own various and dynamic pathways to democratic governance. Australia’s experience includes a federal system of government and this experience, too, is relevant to states like Indonesia and Burma, which struggle with separatist movements and civil and regional conflicts. Indeed, Australian expertise in federalism may not be irrelevant to a future China as it ponders a democratic way forward while maintaining national unity (as far as Tibet and Taiwan are concerned).

Australia also has established social institutions that have been effective in opening up good relations with Asian states. The most noteworthy of these are its schools and universities where thousands of Asian students (especially from Southeast Asia, including Malaysia) have received, and are receiving, their education. Equally its health systems (including its world class public hospitals) and its legal systems (in which judicial independence and habeas corpus are constitutionally entrenched) are well established. Its banking and commercial institutions mostly function according to accountable and stable principles of law, and in terms of closely monitored professional ethical codes.

In economic terms, Australia’s resource base provides promises of complementary trade relations with most of its Asian neighbours. This base also provides endless opportunities for joint venture developments that could see the rise of value-adding and large scale manufacturing industries in Australia. As the trade relationship with Japan demonstrates, Australia is a stable trading partner. At the same time, Australia’s food production is amongst the cleanest and most economical in the world. While labour costs are probably higher in Australia than those of most Asian economies (though even this gap is narrowing), Australian manufactured goods are nonetheless competitive in Asian markets.

In diplomatic terms, Australia maintains close relations with the United States, with Britain, and with the European Union. At the same time, in the very recent past, it placed high priority on relations (‘engagement’) with its Asian neighbours (some of whom, like Japan, are also partners in the American alliance).

In short, Australia’s proximity to Asia — especially in terms of its ‘Europeanness’ in an Asian geo-political setting — should be seen as something that justifies an academic focus, in terms both of teaching and research. In multilateral and bilateral terms, Australia can be a useful player in the Asia-Pacific region. Its links with western and Asian states and within various regional and global networks (APEC and the Commonwealth) offer real possibilities of...
Australia working closely with its neighbours in the region to understand and negotiate the many challenges being thrown up by globalisation.

**Conclusion**

In this paper we have sketched a *prima facie* case to show that Australian studies programs are capable of being a great deal more than merely an orthodox accompaniment to a highly utilitarian (hence narrowly conceived) trade relationship — one that is also in danger of falling into complacency. For Australian studies programs to make positive contributions to contemporary Japanese university curricula, it needs to be established that Australia is an area studies focus of fruitful academic interest in a globalising world. It is time to move on from the prevailing ‘orthodox Australian studies’ approach in Japan. The relationship between Japan and Australia needs scholarly interrogation to show that it could become more than just a good trade partnership. Australian studies programs should be leading, not following, in this intellectual exercise. They can do this by focusing on the three core areas of distinctiveness we have identified to nurture the educated awareness of other peoples, other nations, other places. At the same time, Australia’s contemporary coming to grips with the justice issues involving Indigenous peoples, its successful multiculturalism and its proximity to Asia make it especially noteworthy for Japanese academic area studies programs. Separately, and together, these issues point to the promise of re-theorised Australian studies programs that call into play Nussbaum’s liberal education reforms, Falk’s globalisation from below, and Taylor’s politics of recognition. These are profound international issues that are leading Australia into an era of developing global citizenship.

Whether this means maintaining a narrow focus on Australia or whether Australian studies courses should become part of a larger area studies ‘imagining’ (Oceania studies, South Pacific studies) deserves close and immediate consideration. What the Australian government needs to do is to act swiftly to establish academic centres of Australian studies in strategic academic locations throughout Asia. These should mostly be staffed academics from the Asian countries in which they are located. These ‘local’ appointees should be complemented and supported by regular short-term Australian studies visiting specialists from Australian universities. Such strategic academic centres throughout Asia would soon provide solid knowledge-based understandings of Australia in the region where its national reputation and interests are most directly at risk. Such understandings would help counter the prejudiced or distorted accounts of Australia — peddled by a range of populist Australian and Asian politicians for their own, often egregious, purposes — that threaten to undermine our standing in the region and globally.
Rethinking Australian Studies in Japanese Universities: Towards a New Area Studies for a Globalising World
Allan Patience and Michael Jacques

2 3 December 2002. This editorial was reprinted in Tokyo’s The Daily Yomiuri, 5 December 2002.
3 Masayo Tada, Grappling With Another Other: Australian Studies in Japan, unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 2002. In arriving at this judgment, the authors are also drawing on their own experiences in teaching and researching Australia in Japan. The authors have tried to distill their experiences in Michael Jacques and Allan Patience, ‘Australia’s Distinctiveness in a Globalizing World’, Journal of the Japanese Association of Australian Studies, March 2003.
4 While acknowledging that this is a broad generalisation, we note that even so there has been an impressive development of scholarly writing in Australian Studies over the past twenty years or so, ranging, for example, from Richard White, Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1981, to Richard Nile (ed), The Australian Legend and its Discontents, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2000.
8 We may justifiably question why there are not more Japanese scholars, especially those with PhDs from Australian universities (of whom there are some impressive examples), more in evidence in tenured academic positions in these programs.
13 See especially Tada, op cit.
14 It may, of course, be argued that there can be both economic (diplomatic) and academic grounds for promoting Australian Studies in Japanese universities. Our concern is with the priority given to the economic grounds, perhaps too frequently at the expense of the academic grounds — or at least with a bureaucratic indifference to the scholarly value of those grounds.
Notes to pp 45–50


20 Nussbaum, op cit, p 84.

21 Ibid, p 300.


28 Kristina N Gaerlan (ed), Transitions to Democracy in East and Southeast Asia, Institute for Popular Democracy, Quezon City, 1999.


Notes to pp 50–54


46 For a negative account of the MFP, see Gavan McCormack, ‘Bubble and Swamp: MFP and the Australia–Japan Encounter’ in Anthony Milner and Mary Quilty (eds) Australia in Asia: Episodes, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998. There has yet to be a positive account written about the at-times-visionary MFP idea. A more sympathetic account is needed before a balanced understanding of the issue can be reached.


48 Geoff Clark, as reported in the Sydney Morning Herald, 4 June, 2002.


50 John Summers, ‘Aborigines’ in Andrew Parkin and Allan Patience (eds), The Dunstan Decade: Social Democracy at the State Level, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1981.

51 Consider, for example, the following extract from a recent speech by Professor Lowitja O’Donoghue at the Australian Refugee Forum on 10 September, 2002:

On Mother’s Day this year, I made my usual pilgrimage to the Colebrook Memorial at Eden Hills. For those of you who don’t know it, there is now a marvelous remembrance to the Stolen Generation on Shepherd’s Hill Road. It’s the site where so-called ‘half-caste’ children lived, having been taken from their mothers, mainly in the tribal lands of northern South Australia. The Church took upon itself the duty of care (not terribly well, in my opinion) and the children came under the jurisdiction of the Protector of Aborigines. These are children who were neither fully black nor white. They too, lived on the brink between daylight and darkness. Their mothers were most certainly black, but their fathers were not. They were Irish, Englishmen, Chinese or Afghani. I was one of those children. My father was an Irishman. I was removed from my mother when I was two and didn’t see her again until I was in my thirties. The pain I saw in her eyes when we met, I will never forget. It vividly painted for me the terrible error committed against Aboriginal families by Assimilation. And the consequences are still felt throughout this Country.

52 Noel Pearson, as reported in The Age, 7 May, 2002. See also Pearson, 2000, op cit.

53 ATSIC chair Geoff Clark, as reported in The Canberra Times, 23 July, 2002.


63 Professor Taylor argues that a philosophically sound and progressive multiculturalism will open people constructively and creatively to human diversity. It is thus the antithesis of policies aimed
at asylum seekers in contemporary Australia. As Taylor suggests, within the social and individual diversities of others we start to recognize ourselves. In the process we become familiar with — at home in — our shared humanity across the globe. Charles Taylor, ‘A Catholic Modernity?’ in John Heft, A Catholic Modernity? Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, p 14. Without this complementarity and the sharing there can be no globalization from below.