LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

ASIA RISING

Can Vietnam go green?

Assessing environmental incentives of consumer behaviour

Message from the Executive Director

Welcome to our eighth issue of Asia Rising, La Trobe Asia's showcase for the excellent and diverse research undertaken in and on our region across La Trobe University.

This publication caps off a challenging yet very productive year for La Trobe Asia. While the team has been working from home for most of 2020, we have been contributing to crucial public discussions and debates with an extensive range of events and publications, including our popular zoom webinars, live recorded podcasts, and the fourth La Trobe Asia policy brief, *A More Dangerous Place: Asia during the Trump Presidency*. The move to online events has enabled La Trobe Asia to reach new global audiences and engage with experts in different countries in new and different ways.

I think you'll agree that this edition of *Asia Rising* demonstrates the breadth, quality and significance of the research conducted by La Trobe academics across Asia.

It highlights the important and diverse collaborations that La Trobe University and its academics are establishing and building across this region, within academia but also with non-government organisations and local communities.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us, strong research partnerships within and beyond the Asian region have never been more vital, and La Trobe University has a valuable contribution to make in facing some of the region's most pressing issues.

Thank you for your interest in the work of La Trobe Asia. Please do not hesitate to get in contact if there is anything we can help you with in relation to La Trobe's engagement with Asia.

Dr Rebecca Strating
Executive Director

About the series

Asia Rising is a publication from La Trobe Asia, based at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia.

The stories in this series present research from La Trobe University academics in collaboration with Asian partner institutions or based on topics in the Asian region.

Some of these researchers have recieved a La Trobe Asia grant to fund their research.

Photos

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Asia Rising #8

Does Singapore have a human trafficking problem?

Singapore is a wealthy Asian city, a hub of global commerce and a regional economic powerhouse. But beneath this patina of bright lights and bustling activity are more than 1.37 million foreign workers, running basic services and supplementing the country's manpower needs.

Many come to the city with dreams and promises of decent employment, but close to 1 million become low-wage migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation.

"Singapore has a trafficking problem, one that it doesn't necessarily acknowledge," says Dr Sallie Yea, a lecturer in Sociology at La Trobe University. "Vulnerable people arrive in Singapore from South and Southeast Asian countries like Bangladesh and India with the hope of finding employment, and they end up living in crowded conditions, working in construction, manual labour and house-keeping."

"Singapore relies on these people to keep the city functioning, but doesn't acknowledge trafficking as an issue beyond cases of sexual exploitation. They're a vulnerable population, and it's of little surprise that they've had the highest rates of coronavirus that have hit the city."

In her new book, *Paved with Good Intentions*?, Dr Yea traces the emergence of the anti-trafficking movement in Singapore from its inception in the early 2010s, until the time of writing in 2017–2018.

Singapore has been slow to address the problem, having passed anti-trafficking legislation recently in 2015. This places it second-last in responsiveness amongst Asian states, behind only North Korea.

She identifies three phases of the Singaporean government's attitude to human trafficking, beginning with 2010 when it reiterated its denial that human trafficking was a significant problem.

Faced with a growing body of evidence to the contrary, authorities then moved into a concessionary phase by establishing the Trafficking In Persons Taskforce in 2012.

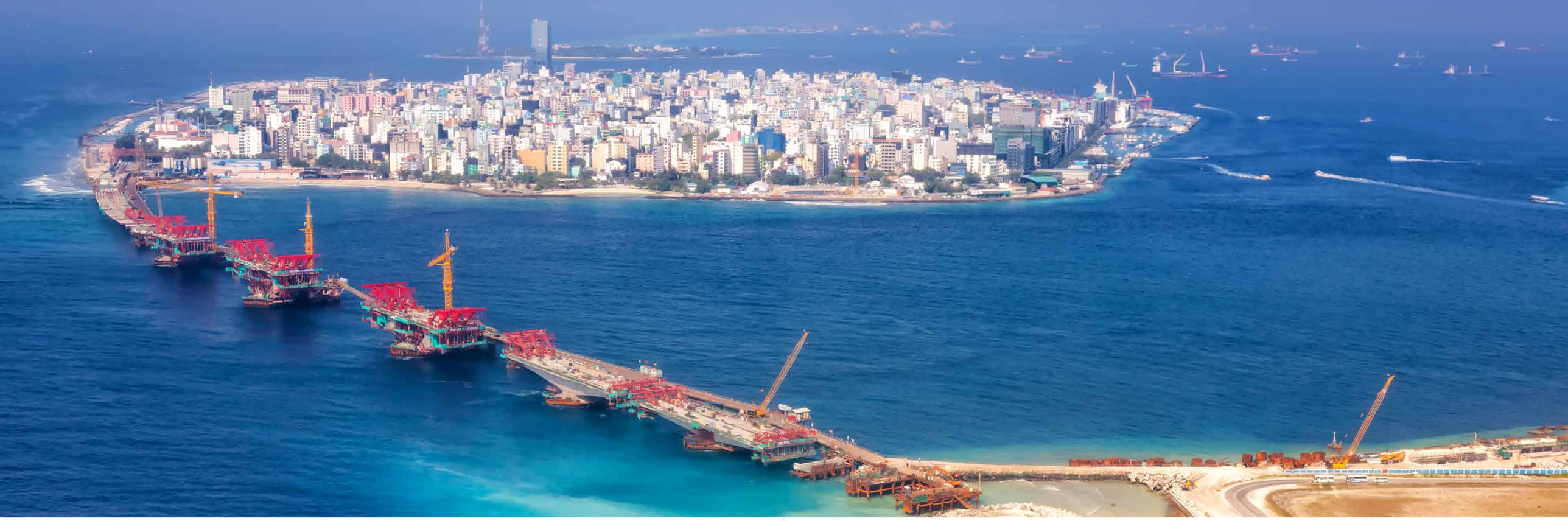
The third and current phase is characterised by a continuation and expansion of measures already introduced, but also by a parallel effort to define the parameters of victimhood.

"The government has effectively managed to reduce the numbers of prospective trafficking victims by narrowing the criteria for how victims are identified," says Dr Yea. "Only the most severe and unambiguous cases of human trafficking are classified as such, with child exploitation in the sex industry being a particular area of focus."

"By adhering to a more circumscribed definition of trafficking, Singaporean organisations, including bureaucratic ones, can claim that they're responding effectively to the problem," says Dr Yea. "Such a re-framing is misleading, however, because it ignores a wide range of migrant labour exploitation issues both within and beyond the sex industry that more accurately reflect the country's human trafficking landscape."

In 2018 the US State Department released a Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, which graded Singapore's efforts as not meeting the minimum standards needed to address human trafficking. Singapore refuted the findings, claiming that many of the cases investigated didn't meet the criteria of human trafficking.

"The problem with this 'master narrative' is that it propagates a narrow image of victimhood in which the plight of exploited migrant labourers in Singapore goes either undetected or unsupported, or both," says Dr Yea. "There is a clear disconnect between the experiences of individuals who are trafficked in Singapore, and the discursive construction and programmatic and policy responses to it."



The Belt and Road Guard Rail

When China's President Xi Jinping first announced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 it was presented as the ultimate global infrastructure investment project.

It would connect China to Asia and beyond through the development of road, rail and port, increasing China's trade and injecting financial opportunity throughout the region.

In the years since, its scope has expanded to fund not just infrastructure but a diverse range of projects, such as fashion shows and theme parks. It has attracted expressions of interest from more than a hundred countries across the world, many with only tenuous links to China and Asia.

"From China's perspective many aspects of the BRI are a resounding success, as it has not only generated income and activity for China's vast workforce, but a tremendous amount of development and good will in developing countries, particularly in the Asia Pacific," says Dr Brooke Wilmsen, a human geographer from La Trobe University.

By mid 2018 China had already spent an estimated US$400 billion on BRI projects. Some, like the enormous pan-Asia high speed rail line are of clear benefit to China, costing US$6.7 billion as it connects China to Singapore through Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

Other projects are reportedly aimed at demonstrating China's commitment to development in smaller countries, like the Sinamalé Bridge (originally the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge), a 2.1 kilometre bridge linking three islands of the Maldives: Malé, Hulhulé and Hulhumalé. It is the first inter-island bridge in the Maldives, costing an estimated US$210 million and contributing to the country's vast debt to China.

"Many infrastructure projects that are funded by the BRI would have struggled to achieve finance otherwise," says Dr Wilmsen. "While this is initially good for the recipient country it can leave them financially vulnerable to debt stress when making repayments."

"The vast majority of BRI projects are financed by banks owned by the Chinese government, and executed by Chinese companies in recipient countries. They're granted with a 'hands off' approach, deferring to host-country's laws and regulations. Environmental and social protection laws are severely lacking in many BRI member countries. The rule of law is often weak and enforcement is unlikely."

Dr Wilmsen has been analysing the environmental and social risks of BRI projects, and the geopolitical implications they present. She believes that China's non-interference policy when managing BRI projects has placed a number of countries in precarious positions.

"We've seen instances of violent protests, political turmoil and financial crisis brought on by projects funded under the BRI," says Dr Wilmsen. "This can have a negative impact on China's reputation, and ultimately be a detriment to their geopolitical and geo-financial ambitions."

There is growing interest in the hard power implications of the BRI. In early 2018, for example, the Australian government expressed concern about the high level of debt some Pacific Island countries have incurred to the Chinese government, which could generate financial crises and political turmoil.

China has invested heavily in its legal infrastructure to raise the environmental and social protection standards of Chinese firms, and domestically there has been an improvement in laws and agencies in this area. However, there remains a great degree of uncertainty about what environmental and social standards will be applied to BRI projects.

"While Chinese banks and firms are developing their own corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies, the concept is mostly in its infancy and the managers responsible often regard it as a public relations exercise," says Dr Wilmsen. "What's more, guidelines pertaining to the overseas operations of Chinese firms are non-binding."

Dr Wilmsen's analysis is part of an edited volume *The Belt and Road Initiative and the Future of Regional Order in the Indo-Pacific* published by Lexington Books. She collaborated with Andrew van Hulten, Xiao Han and David Adjartey.

"Two key findings came out of our analysis. The first is that China has the capacity to rapidly raise environmental and social standards. How it exercises this capacity will depend on whether early BRI projects deliver the promised benefits to host countries as well as how other countries respond to China's growing influence in Asia and the Pacific," says Dr Wilmsen.

"Secondly, China has gone to great lengths to ensure its ability to manoeuvre. It has created a multitude of mechanisms through which it can fund BRI projects, all which entail different environmental and social standards."

An example of these projects is in Pakistan, where the World Bank and Silk Road Fund are co-financing a hydropower project built by Three Gorges Company, a Chinese state-owned hydropower firm. China has invested more than $30 billion in Pakistan through the BRI, more than any other country.

"Such a deal will need to comply with environmental and social safeguard policies dictated by the World Bank," says Dr Wilmsen. "Meeting international standards will be important to the success of the BRI, the impacts on recipient countries and China's reputation in the long run." •

Cosplay and identity

Every year the city of Nagoya, Japan, is crowded with colourfully-dressed visitors attending the annual World Cosplay Summit (WCS). Participants come from more than 40 countries around the world, and it is an opportunity to network, express yourself, and show off your talent.

"Cosplay is a rapidly growing expression of popular culture and has a particular resonance in Japan," says Dr Emerald King, a lecturer in Japanese at La Trobe University, who has attended, studied, and participated in cosplay conventions around the world. "It's a term that is principally used to describe fans who dress as anime or manga characters, but is now applied to all kinds of fictional or pop culture characters throughout Japan and western countries."

Dr King first travelled to the WCS in 2017, where she was one of the few academics to have access to all areas. She has returned in subsequent years, allowing her to study cosplay trends, and survey participants on topics of cosplay, gender identity, and attitudes towards Japanese culture. The data gathered forms part of her ongoing research into cosplay and language.

"Cosplay has become a tremendous outlet for members of these communities, to express everything from their creativity to their gender identity," says Dr King.

One aspect of her work is examining trends of 'crossplay', a subculture of cosplay where the character you dress up as isn't restricted by gender. While some crossplayers do so out of a sense of parody, others strive to pass completely as the gender of the character they are portraying, or make their gender ambiguous.

"For many who take part in crossplay it provides a safe environment for them to explore their gender identity. There's an inclusivity amongst the community that can offer an escape," says Dr King. "The global cosplay communities already show signs of this term falling out of favour, which may indicate a change in perspective and more inclusive attitudes – it's interesting to see academia attempt to catch up with describing global trends."

Cosplay differs from country to country, and in addition to her work in Japan, Dr King has also conducted research in New Zealand and at local conventions in Australia such as Supanova, Comiccon and Madman Anime Festival.

Her research on gender and cosplay has recently been published in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture* and she is working on a single author volume that compares representations of classical texts in cosplay. •

Caesarean concern in Bangladesh

The rate of infant delivery via caesarean section has been increasing worldwide, and Bangladesh is no exception to this trend. Improved access to medical services and a more affluent urban population has led to a surge in popularity for the delivery method, but there is growing concern at the number of interventions which are medically unnecessary.

"The World Health Organization recommends a caesarean section rate of 10% and 15% of all births in a country, based on needed medical interventions," says Dr Mofi Islam, a senior lecturer in Epidemiology and Biostatistics at La Trobe University. "Bangladesh has seen a rapid increase in caesarean rates, from 3.5% of births in 2004 to 23% in 2014 (31% in 2016). This brings with it associated risks which vary significantly across regions and socio-economic groups."

Dr Islam has been working with researchers across Bangladesh to analyse survey data collected between 2004 and 2014 by Bangladesh Demographic and Health Surveys (BDHSs).

The data presented a cross-section of households across all administrative regions of Bangladesh, and included information on a wide range of indicators such as family size, household income, access to health services and levels of education.

His analysis highlighted a number of key factors in the increasing rate of Caesarean use, including urban living, wealthy, well-educated, advanced maternal age (over 35), higher education and maternal overweight and obesity.

"Clearly, the significant increase of caesarean sections for delivery is much higher than the WHO recommended upper limit," says Dr Islam. "If this trend continues then it is very likely that caesareans will bring more harm than benefit at the population level."

Dr Islam's findings are similar to those of studies in other developing countries. For example, retrospective analyses of data in India and Pakistan found a comparable rising trend with higher prevalence in private sector health facilities, higher educated mothers and those residing in urban areas.

"There could be any number of reasons for increasing average caesarean deliveries amongst these populations," says Dr Islam. "An increase in availability and access in urban areas, generally women in urban areas are better off and can afford these services, more private facilities in urban areas, and a higher women employment rate in urban areas."

His analysis emphasises the need for increased education and awareness amongst healthcare providers and expecting parents as to the use of caesarean delivery as a medical intervention, not a convenience.

"While it is encouraging that parents are engaging more in antenatal care, they are at risk of a growing private medical industry that often exploits maternal behaviour to undertake a costly medical procedure for financial gain," says Dr Islam. "It also burdens the system and creates an access problem, making it harder for those living in disadvantaged areas or of a lower socio-economic status to find the maternal care they need."

Dr Islam highlights the importance of close monitoring on compliance of relevant regulations and equitable distribution of caesarean sections across the country. •

Migrating increases diabetes risk for South Asians

The stress of migrating to a new country can take its toll on an individual. There is the need to adapt to a new society and culture, and many struggle to establish links within their own ethnic community. The strain can have a detrimental effect on mental and physical health and impair the management of conditions such as type-2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Dr Sabrina Gupta, a lecturer in the School of Psychology and Public Health at La Trobe University, has been researching the effects of migration stress when it comes to the development of lifestyle diseases.

Her work has focused on South Asian populations that have migrated to Australia, primarily Indian and Sri Lankan.

Working with Dr Rosalie Aroni of the Australian National University and Professor Helena Teede of Monash University, Dr Gupta's recent study focused on the experience and perception of physical exercise amongst South Asian migrants in managing these diseases.

"Researchers studying the physical activity levels amongst South Asian migrant groups in developed nations have found that they take part in less structured exercise," says Dr Gupta.

"It's important to work out why this is the case, not just for their individual health and well-being, but for the potential impact on the healthcare system."

Dr Gupta interviewed South Asian individuals with either type 2 diabetes or CVD and compared the results with those of a similar cohort of Anglo-Australian participants that she also interviewed.

Designing the study this way allowed a direct comparison between participation and attitudes towards physical activity, diet, and lifestyle choices associated with disease management.

The researchers found different practices and attitudes when it came to approaching physical activity, despite both groups showing awareness and acknowledgement of its benefits. Anglo-Australian participants reported dedicating time for exercise, while South Asians largely described their physical activity as 'unplanned'.

"South Asian migrants do not prioritise physical exercise, and their approach is to treat it as a social experience," says Dr Gupta. "When they migrate to Australia the social aspect of their life can suffer. Their diet can change dramatically, and they undertake worryingly low levels of physical activity when compared with Anglo-Australians with type 2 diabetes and/or cardiovascular disease (CVD)."

Anglo-Australians perceived exercise and organised sport as the primary forms of physical activity to be undertaken to prevent disease and maintain health. It was often a planned event, with dedicated time, and at times a solitary practice.

In contrast, South Asians sought little dedicated time for exercise. They construed all movement as physical activity and viewed taking "time out" to exercise as selfish as it was viewed as taking time away from the family which did not accord with their cultural norms.

"The data showed clear divides between perceptions of exercise and socio-cultural priorities," says Dr Gupta. "South Asians considered themselves more family oriented than Anglo-Australians, with many commenting that they had less time for personal pursuits and felt guilty about taking their time away from family if they exercised."

"For South Asians exercise is very much tied to their ethnic identities, through communities and families setting group goals," says Dr Gupta. "Once they come to Australia they desire to retain these cultural norms but can have trouble making connections in the community. Their diet is also adapted to some extent to accommodate what is available domestically."

"South Asian migrants do not prioritise physical exercise, and treat it as a social experience."

Similar studies about South Asians have been carried out in the United Kingdom and Canada and participants in those studies reported similar levels of exercise and attitudes to physical activity, but a very different level of knowledge regarding benefits.

South Asians in Australia were aware of the need for sufficient physical activity in maintaining health with type-2 diabetes and CVD, but this had little impact on the levels of activity undertaken.

"The differences in knowledge levels between migrants to Australia and other countries could be explained by the effectiveness of health promotion campaigns and the strong presence of exercise as an Australian cultural value," says Dr Gupta. "Despite this, exercise levels among South Asians remain unchanged and this is a matter of significant concern."

Respondents to Dr Gupta's study expressed a desire for more detailed advice from healthcare providers, with culturally tailored programs specifying the type, duration and intensity of physical activities presented in appropriate formats for different ethnic groups.

"A number of South Asian respondents acknowledged a general lack of motivation to be active or eat healthily," says Dr Gupta. "Clinicians need to provide advice that recognises the need to conduct physical activity with family. If there is greater alignment between exercise and cultural values it may make health promotion activities more successful. This could be an area for future research."

Trust in medicine in India

Type-2 diabetes is rapidly emerging as a major threat to global human health, and a growing problem in India – with close to 80 million people living with the disease, much of the challenge lies in the treatment and medication, especially in rural areas.

Dr Gupta has been exploring the self-management practices of people living with type 2 diabetes in Karnataka, India.

Working with Dr Jency Thomas, Dr Markandeya Jois and Dr Peter Higgs at La Trobe University, Dr Clarice Tang at the University of Western Sydney, and collaborating with JSS Medical College in India, the project interviews patients, carers and health professionals. The data is collected by PhD student Rahul Krishna.

Despite being a leading producer of pharmaceuticals with a considerable market of generic medications, evidence suggests that people living with diabetes in India prefer treatment with traditional medications over western medications and will often self-medicate.

"There is a lot of trust in traditional medications across India, and it transcends socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, as they were often recommended by friends and family members," says Dr Gupta. "They are perceived to have less side effects, be less costly, and more readily available than western medications."

One aspect of the study looked at the prescription of medications, including the engagement with subsidised generic medications available to Indians depending on their financial situation.

"Subsidised medications available through programs such as 'Jan aushadhi' can address the issue regarding the cost of western medicines, but there is a lack of knowledge among local pharmacists on the scheduling of certain medications," says Dr Gupta. "Further regulation and education of health professionals is needed so that patients are confident that they're prescribed an appropriate and affordable medication."

A completed study review has highlighted that many participants were using traditional medications while simultaneously using western medications prescribed by their doctor. It is undetermined if traditional medications alone are sufficient to manage blood glucose levels.

Balancing progress and heritage in Ahmedabad

In November 2019 a fifteen-foot-tall red brick gate was quietly demolished while carrying out road maintenance construction of a new bus stand. The gate stood in the locality of Gita Mandir in Ahmedabad, India.

A remnant of the Mughal period, it had stood for 400 years before it was destroyed. The contracted firm was fined and ordered to rebuild the gate, but the damage had been done.

"The gate was one of many examples in Ahmedabad of the vulnerability of the old city, and the pressure to move aside and accommodate new development," says Dr Kiran Shinde, a senior lecturer in Urban Planning at La Trobe University. "Many buildings and structures have become at risk in the rush of modernisation and progress."

Ahmedabad was founded in the 15th century by Sultan Ahmad Shah as the state capital of Gujarat, a function that it held until 1970. In 2017 it became the first Indian city to be given UNESCO World Heritage City status, an acknowledgement of the extensive cultural and architectural importance.

"People are proud to know that Ahmedabad has received the UNESCO recognition, but they are apprehensive about many restrictions to their way of life as usual," says Professor Sharma.

"Owners of buildings and structures identified as "heritage" want to retain their development rights and economic benefits but they need technical guidance as to how to restore the structures. They also think the government is very slow in responding to their aspirations and expectations."

The status came a year after Ahmedabad had been nominated a 'Smart City' by the Government of India.

India's Smart City initiative is a nation-wide program to make cities more citizen friendly and sustainable through projects that retrofit existing infrastructure and encourage urban renewal. While it has a modern development agenda there is a strong connection to heritage in the criteria.

The urban-renewal program gave it access to ₹98,000 crore ($18.7 million AUD) funding, with the aim of increasing modernisation and sustainability.

"There is much of the character of the city that is being overlooked and destroyed."

"Having a UNESCO World Heritage City status has been both rewarding and challenging for Ahmedabad, and there are real consequences for those living within the historic core," says Dr Shinde.

"While it brings the benefit of prestige and tourism it comes with the burden of conservation and balancing progress. The challenge is how to allow development without compromising preservation."

Dr Shinde is working with colleagues at La Trobe University's Asian Smart Cities Research Innovation Network (ASCRIN) and Professor Utpal Kumar Sharma, Director of the Institute of Architecture and Planning at Nirma University in Ahmedabad.

They aim to develop a knowledge and skills transfer, as well as providing a receptive environment to learn from the experience of colleagues across India.

It initially included 100 cities across the country, with Ahmedabad selected within the first round of announcements. There is an expectation that projects are completed by 2023.

"Being a Smart City in India brings a tremendous opportunity for Ahmedabad, but also a certain amount of anxiety," says Dr Shinde. "Balancing the expectations of development and infrastructure with the city's heritage status and what makes it unique is an ongoing debate at all levels of society and government, and there are conflicting views and priorities."

Ahmedabad has undergone a significant amount of urban renewal in the three years since being awarded heritage city status.

A 2019 survey by the heritage department of the 489 listed properties found instances of demolition, adaptation and poor maintenance. 30 percent of the total were classed as compromised or vulnerable, far more than initially estimated.

"Part of the problem is a lack of awareness as to which structures are listed as heritage protected, what makes them significant, and how to maintain and preserve them," says Dr Shinde. "While the large, significant structures are more visible there is much of the character of the city that is being overlooked and destroyed."

"There is also a glimmer of hope and renewed interest in understanding and preserving of heritage," says Professor Sharma.

"In many traditional pols (neighbourhoods), communities have repaired bird feeders that are considered central to their spatial organisation and a key social interaction space. A children's museum has been founded. The municipal corporation has commissioned a report on the condition of buildings and have started restoring many gates and the remains of fort walls."

Ahmedabad is a city of religious significance which developed as a textile city, a trading centre, a centre of education, and a hub of innovation. This diversity offers the opportunity for a multidisciplinary approach to academic research, and exploring different processes of producing urban heritage.

"India has traditionally relied on a 'master plan' strategy for city development, but that approach is more of a colonial vestige," says Professor Sharma. "Sustainability in India's megacities cannot be achieved through conventional master planning, nor the current enthusiasm for technology-driven smart cities."

Dr Shinde and Professor Sharma aim to complete an extensive survey of heritage structures within the historic core of Ahmedabad to identify those at risk and develop a framework for balancing heritage and development interests.

"Ahmedabad has lost much of what makes it a historically significant city to the demands of development," says Professor Sharma. "We need to develop new frameworks and strategic land management, or risk losing our heritage status."

Can Vietnam go green?

Like many Asian nations, consumer power is rapidly growing in Vietnam, but it has come at a price. With the country's development on the rise, its pollution level has accelerated, and carbon emissions have doubled over the last decade. This has made the pace of economic growth difficult to sustain.

Vietnam has a population of over 96 million and an alarming 60,000 deaths each year are attributed to causes aggravated by air pollution, with its two major cities, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, listed in the 'top 15 polluted cities in Southeast Asia'. The air quality in Vietnam has also been identified as "moderately unsafe" according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), which attests to the gravity of this nation's problem.

Transportation has been identified as being the main cause of pollution in Vietnam. The country has 3.6 million automobiles and 58 million motorbikes, many of which are old, lack modern emission control technology and emit large amounts of visibly black air pollutants into the environment.

"I grew up in Hanoi, one of the most polluted cities in Vietnam, and there are days when the air is so dense with pollution that you can hardly see very far ahead," says Dr Ninh Nguyen, lecturer in Marketing in the La Trobe Business School. "The government and environmental groups try to improve the air quality, but they've made little progress, and if you live with it your entire life you unfortunately get used to it."

Dr Nguyen has recently conducted a study on the environmental incentives of consumer behaviour in Vietnam while collaborating with researchers at the Vietnam University of Commerce. He believes western countries have been the prime focus of these studies without much light shed on Asian emerging markets.

The study was conducted in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City using in-depth interviews and paper-based surveys. Resulting data reported that the majority of consumers seem to be more concerned about personal benefits rather than environmental benefits.

"If you live with it your entire life you unfortunately get used to it."

"We particularly focus on two types of pro-environmental behaviour - energy efficiency behaviours and organic food consumption," says Dr Nguyen. "Both of them are good for the environment, and promoting such behaviours is essential for environmental sustainability."

The study found that Vietnamese consumers had a reduced level of environmental awareness when compared to similar surveys conducted in western countries, with some basic awareness of the purpose of energy rating labels as well as having access to certified organic products.

"In terms of consumer behaviour, we found out that not many consumers are aware of the benefits of such products for the environment," says Dr Nguyen. "When considering energy efficient advantages, they think of saving money, but they don't really care about the impact on environment as much."

"We found similar responses when we investigated attitudes towards organic foods. Respondents believe it is good for their health, but they don't care about how organic farming is benefitting the environment."

Some of the key influences regarding the lack of interest in organic foods was the general attitude towards the environment, the limited availability of produce, extra effort of having to shop in specialty stores, as well as going against their normal diets and habits.

With energy efficiency, people were deterred by the higher price of energy efficient appliances, limited availability and low confidence in energy rating labels.

"While the current study is by design more exploratory, it does give us useful data with which we can draw a comparison between Vietnam and western countries," says Dr Nguyen. "From my observations, mainly in Australia, people in these (western) societies care strongly about the environment. It has a positive impact on purchase intention and behaviour, and this is a main point of difference with Vietnam."

The findings of this project will also assist key stakeholders in identifying environmentally conscious consumers in Vietnam and developing effective strategies to promote the purchasing of eco-friendly products.

Dr Nguyen hopes that such strategies could be developed and implemented jointly by governmental organisations, marketers, sustainability campaigners, and social institutions.

"The responses prompted us to suggest to policy makers and marketers the need of educational or information programs to increase consumer knowledge and awareness about the benefits of such products," says Dr Nguyen. "This is important not just for consumers themselves but for society as a whole. When you have a better environment to live in, it's good for everyone."

Dr Nguyen's ultimate goal is to design environmental awareness programs in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, where the surveys were conducted. A further survey to be conducted in the city of Da Nang has been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"During the pandemic, with less air travel, tourism being scarce and the closure of industries, the quality of the air has significantly improved, so we may look at how consumers view this change in air quality in Vietnam," says Dr Nguyen.

"Because we already have the data from before the pandemic, we can then collect the data from the same respondents to see if it has affected consumer knowledge and awareness of the environment."

Trialing eye-tracking technology in ASD diagnosis

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) covers a wide range of neurological conditions, affecting an estimated 1-2% of the global population. Early diagnosis of ASD is critical for achieving the best prognosis and treatment. However, it can be a lengthy and subjective process.

Gazefinder, by JVCKENDWOOD Corporation in Japan, is technology which uses eye-tracking in order to diagnose ASD. It is now funding clinical trials in Australia, headed by Dr Kristelle Hudry of La trobe University.

"Gazefinder is a simple technology designed to make the diagnostic process faster and give professionals more confidence in their diagnosis," says Dr Hudry, a senior lecturer in the School of Psychology and Public Health at La Trobe University.

The trials, conducted at La Trobe University in Melbourne and the Telethon Kids Institute in Perth, aims to test Gazefinder's accuracy of diagnosing ASD in young children across the spectrum.

"What we are trying to pull apart is where children allocate their attention," says Lacey Chetcuti, Research Officer and PhD candidate at La Trobe University.

"Gazefinder does this by using an infrared sensor built into its screen which can then record the coordinates of where exactly a child is looking."

"ASD is thought to be underpinned by brain differences in social motivation and attention control, and these are what Gazefinder aims to identify in children," says Dr Hudry.

"The information that the eye tracker records can tell us about what captures children's interest. If Gazefinder can identify that autistic children are systematically more interested in different things than non-autistic children it can help professionals be more confident in diagnosing ASD."

"Compared to other assessments we do, it's very quick and places very few demands on children," says Alex Aulich, Senior Project Coordinator with the team. "It's a three-minute video. There are no instructions, just whatever comes naturally for the child to look at."

The Australian trial involves around 200 children, aged between two and four, with a ratio of 1:1 of children with and without ASD.

If the trial indicates the technology is accurate in identifying the children with ASD, JVCKENWOOD Corporation will seek certification from the Therapeutic Goods Association for use as a medical device in Australia.

Trials will continue until early 2021.

Featured La Trobe University academics

Kiran Shinde
Senior Lecturer, Planning

Dr Shinde's teaching combines research training of an academic and professional practice of a planner. His research interests include religious and cultural tourism, heritage, urban planning, and destination management.

Sabrina Gupta
Lecturer, Public Health

Dr Gupta coordinates and teaches sociocultural and multicultural perspectives of health and wellbeing. Her research is with culturally and linguistically diverse populations and health.

Emerald L. King
Lecturer, Japanese Studies

Dr King has lived and worked in Japan and New Zealand before returning to Australia in 2018. Her research is split between Japanese women's literature and Japanese popular culture.

Brooke Wilmsen
Senior Lecturer, Social Inquiry

Dr Wilmsen is a human geographer whose research focuses on development-forced displacement and resettlement and agrarian change, primarily in China. Brooke's latest publications can be found in *Progress in Human Geography and World Development*.

Sallie Yea
Lecturer, Social Inquiry

Dr Yea is a human geographer whose research focuses on human trafficking, labour migration, gender and transnationalism. She is currently researching migrant labour in the Southern Riverina region of Australia, and human trafficking in the global seafood industry.

Mofi Islam
Senior Lecturer, Public Health

Dr Islam coordinates and teaches epidemiology and biostatistics, systematic review and evaluation of healthcare research. He researches healthcare services and public health programs for vulnerable population groups, substance use and addictive medicines.

Kristelle Hudry
Senior Lecturer, Psychology and Public Health

Dr Hudry teaches developmental psychology and leads the Childhood Autism Phenotype Team (CAPTeam), researching autism from birth to school-entry, including early identification, diagnosis, and how intervention can best support families.

Ninh Nguyen
Lecturer, Marketing

Dr Nguyen coordinates and teaches Consumer Behaviour and Customer Relationship Management. He publishes in the areas of green marketing, environmentally sustainable behaviour and corporate social responsibility.

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