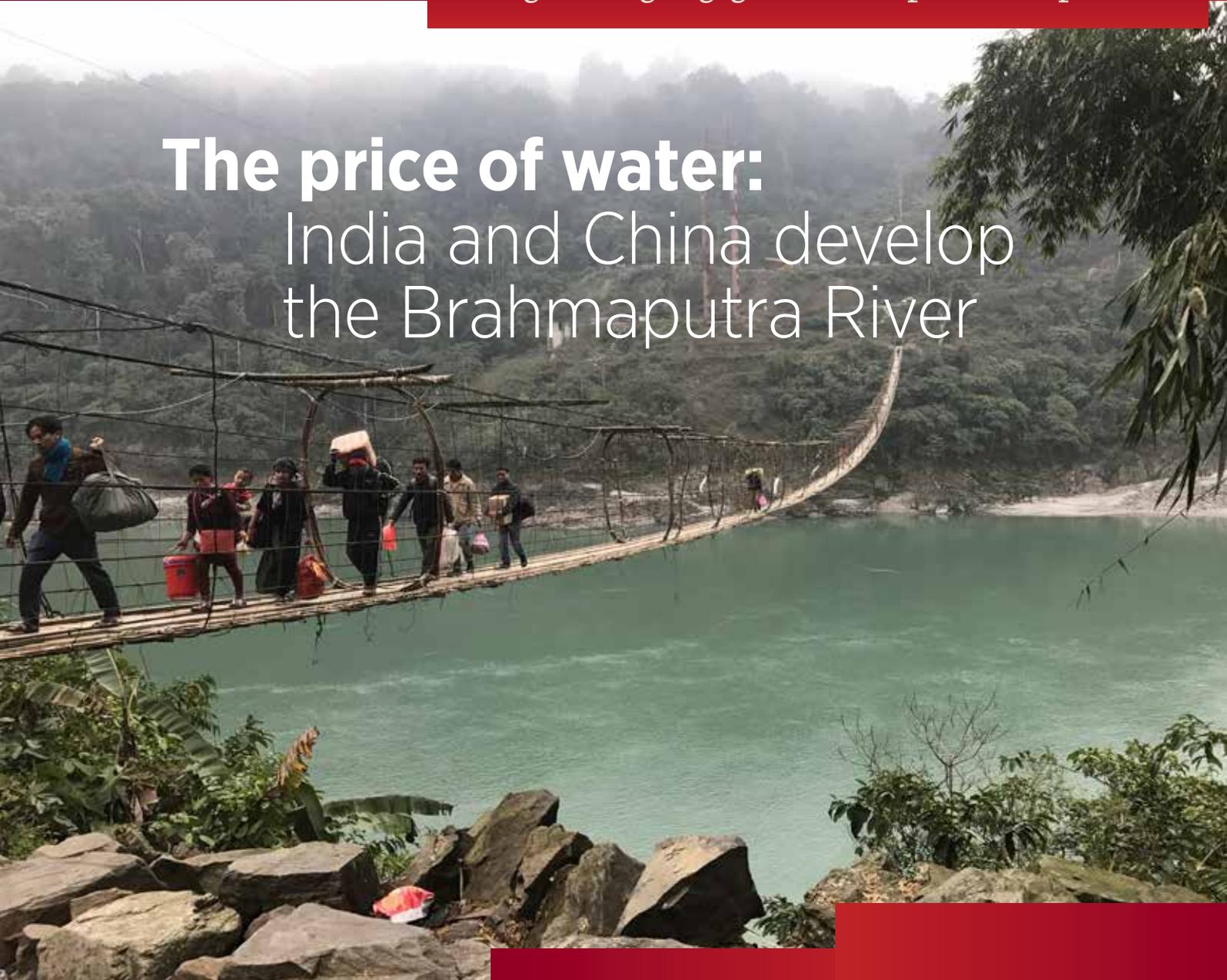


# ASIA RISING

Strengthening engagement and partnerships in Asia

## The price of water: India and China develop the Brahmaputra River



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### CREDITS

Front cover photo  
Northeast Indian bridge across the Brahmaputra River (Ruth Gamble)

Other photos  
Matt Smith, Diana Heatherich, Ruth Gamble, Benjamin Habib, Khmer Rouge Tribunal (ECCC), Arian Zwegers, Le Nhu Thuy

Back cover photo  
Mining along the banks of the Yarlung Tsangpo River, China (Ruth Gamble)

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With thanks to  
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# A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Welcome to the seventh issue of *Asia Rising*, a publication highlighting La Trobe University's strong collaborations and engagement with Asian states and societies.

In this issue you will find stories of La Trobe's research on matters critical to Asia's prosperity and development. Issues such as water sharing between China and India, waste management in Nepal and education access in Vietnam are featured, and this is just a sample of the University's research output on Asia. I hope that you will share my enthusiasm for the diverse scope of La Trobe University's focus in the region, and the contribution we can make.

It has been a busy year for La Trobe Asia, hosting and collaborating across the University on public lectures, book launches and workshops. Our successful grant program has continued,

supporting research collaborations and welcoming visiting fellows to the University. We have also launched a new publication, *The La Trobe Asia Brief*, as well as a podcast mini-series *India Rising* in partnership with the Australia India Institute.

As La Trobe Asia enters its sixth year we will maintain our strong presence in the national debate, and continue to promote La Trobe's connections with Asia, and look forward to new initiatives and opportunities.

As the new Executive Director of La Trobe Asia and a new member of the La Trobe University community I look forward to getting to know everyone and working with my new colleagues in 2019. We have also relocated the La Trobe Asia office to the David Myers West building, so feel free to stop by and say hello.

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

*Dr Euan Graham*

## Listen to the podcast

*Asia Rising* is also the name of the podcast from La Trobe Asia, with news, views and general happenings in Asian states and societies. Subscribe now on Apple podcasts, Stitcher or SoundCloud to hear interviews with La Trobe University academics and guests on a wide range of Asian countries and topics.



Dr Alexander Davis (NGN postdoctoral fellow at La Trobe University and the Australia India Institute) speaks to Matt Smith about India's Statue of Unity.

# TOURISM IN 'THE LAST SHANGRI-LA'

Royal weddings tend to be lavish, high society affairs, with officials and royalty from all over the world. That wasn't the case for Bhutan.

When King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck married Queen Jetsun Pema in 2011, they did so with just 57 international guests in attendance. One of them was Paul Strickland, a lecturer in hospitality and tourism at La Trobe University.

"The low number of international invites to a royal wedding isn't out of character for Bhutan," says Strickland. "Few people are allowed to visit and the country prefers it that way. It's at the point where being granted permission to visit Bhutan is a rare experience to even seasoned travellers."

The Kingdom of Bhutan was closed to tourists until 1974, and since then it has maintained a highly regulated tourism industry, overseen by the Bhutan Tourism Corporation. Tourist entry to Bhutan is capped at 100,000 a year, costing a minimum

of 250 USD per person, per day. The fee covers most of the visit, including accommodation, three meals a day, a designated guide, entry to attractions, and a driver.

Most tourists are prevented from travelling independently in the kingdom and activities are controlled, with permits and itinerary needing to be cleared ahead of time. This makes visiting Bhutan a premium activity, and those that see the high-altitude monasteries and dzongs are amongst the most seasoned and wealthiest of travellers.

"Bhutan is conscious of the good and bad side of tourism and has seen the effects it's had across the Himalayas," says Strickland. "Mass tourism can make an economy boom but destroy the culture and environment if left unchecked. By controlling entry to the country

they can target only the high-end visitors, and mitigate undesirable elements."

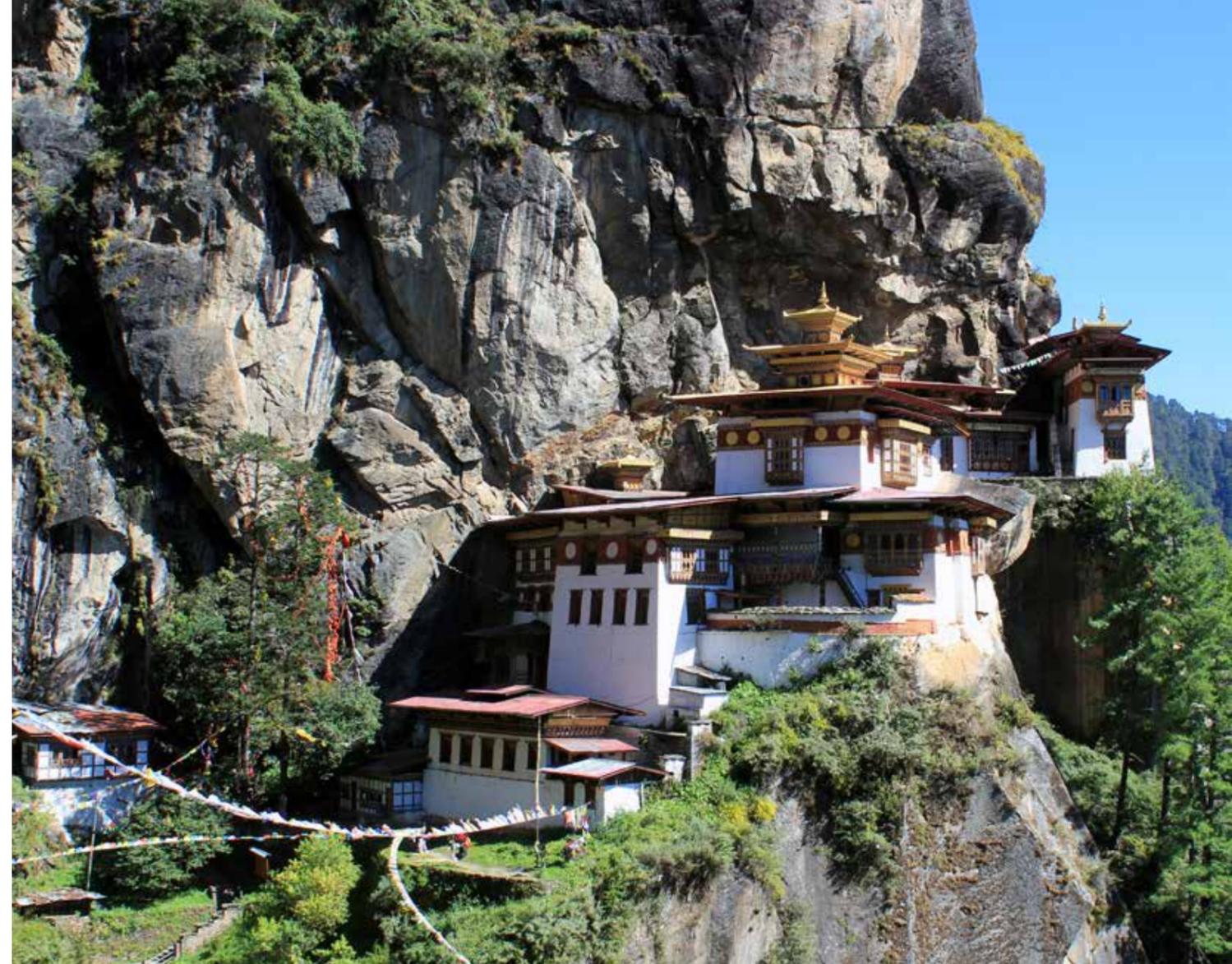
Early visitors to Bhutan experienced the simple conditions of a developing country. Exit surveys at the time had found a lack of satisfaction with amenities provided, especially given the price. Basics such as hot water, electricity, ice for drinks, desirable food, and electric blankets were expected as a minimum, and not delivered.

"By courting the affluent traveller Bhutan has set a high level for visitor expectations that they weren't able to deliver," says Strickland. "Wealthy tourists expect a higher level of luxuries as a minimum, when most of the country don't have even the most basic amenities."

"Meat was imported from India on unrefrigerated trucks and needed



Paul Strickland  
LECTURER IN TOURISM, HOSPITALITY  
AND EVENT MANAGEMENT



to be heavily seasoned to mask the decay. This type of roughing it might do for a backpacker, but if the country wanted to limit tourism to high-end customers they needed to level up the services."

Mr Strickland has been travelling to Bhutan since 2012, educating hotel supervisors in hospitality practises and procedures. He found he had to design courses beginning with the basics.

"Most of the students were themselves living without the basics of running water, electricity or indoor plumbing, and here they were being educated on how to operate electric blankets," says Strickland. "I had to work from scratch, and also design to teach within the limitations of what resources were available."

"I found the Bhutanese students to be hardworking, but they'd never experienced the living they were being taught, and had difficulty grasping why these luxuries would be important. There was a real learning curve for them to work through."

Working with Bhutan's Royal Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (RITH), Strickland taught a management level program of 30 students a year for a two year course. Students would graduate and be better equipped to instruct their staff on operating to a higher level of service in the tourism industry.

"Bhutan authorities instigated a rule where all accommodation of less than a three-star standard rating was de-registered, so the incentive to provide higher quality facilities and service are real," says Strickland.

"A Bhutanese can make triple the average income working in basic hospitality jobs, so these positions are in high demand."

In the years since he began teaching in Bhutan, Strickland has seen the entire industry evolve, going from poor and negative service standards to a level of 90% guest satisfaction and minimal complaints. Close to 200 students have graduated from his courses, and they have gone on to effectively instruct their own staff in hospitality practices.

"The tourism industry in Bhutan has seen significant change in the past few years, and I'm glad for the part I've played in it," says Strickland. "For now Bhutan remains the Shangri-La, but it will be interesting to see if that changes in the future." ●

# Figuring victims at the Khmer Rouge Tribunals

When Dr Maria Elander first attended a hearing in the trial against the former leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime, she was struck by the communal sense of the hearing.

Seated in the public gallery amongst 400 members of the community, she watched as Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan were tried for war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. Despite more than 30 years having passed since the events the public gallery has often been filled to the brim, displaying a profound public interest in the proceedings.

“When the accused entered the Chamber a gasp went through the Public Gallery,” says Dr Elander. “After so long and so much suffering, finally the surviving leaders were appearing before the bench and before us. Everyone was holding their breath in anticipation, and that sense of communal experience has remained with me.”

Dr Elander is a lecturer in criminology at the La Trobe Law

School and has been researching how victims are represented in criminal law trials. For her the Khmer Rouge Tribunals provide a unique situation of victim representation.

“Holding the trials in Cambodia has allowed the Tribunal to play a direct part in victim outreach and education,” says Dr Elander. “It has sparked greater interest in the regime, triggering a range of cultural, historical and educational activities concerning aspects of the regime.”

Dr Elander’s research has been released as a book, *Figuring Victims in International Criminal Justice: The case of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal*, published by Routledge. She believes the tribunal’s efforts move beyond that of traditional criminal proceedings to provide public engagement.

“By operating within Cambodia, the tribunal has a direct connection to the victims concerned in a way many other international criminal law courts have lacked,” says

Dr Elander. “It allows victims of the regime to give testimony; some appear as civil parties, others sit amongst the visiting groups in the spectator seating. Victims have come to constitute and represent the link between international criminal law and the enterprise of transitional justice.”

Dr Elander’s research will now focus on visualising international law and justice, and the role that photographs, maps and paintings can play in international law.

“Visual documentation presented before the Khmer Rouge Tribunal has had a profound effect, not just on the rulings, but to the viewers as well,” she says. “By involving the community through programs such as site tours, lectures, and exhibitions they’re expanding the role and purpose of international criminal justice.” ●



Dr Maria Elander (R)  
LECTURER IN CRIMINOLOGY AND LAW



# EVALUATING WASTE NEEDS OF NEPAL

In 2015 Nepal introduced a new constitution, replacing an interim structure which had been in place since the civil war. The country had experienced a devastating earthquake in April of that year, and was undertaking a slow process of rebuilding.

“The new constitution led to a restructure of Nepal’s municipalities, and the country needed to rethink how it provided a lot of its services,” says Dr Bandita Mainali, a lecturer in Civil Engineering at La Trobe University. “One area that needed to be addressed was to identify the solid waste management needs of new municipalities, which can lead to a better management plan. A new baseline study was needed.”

Dr Mainali collaborated with Dr Dhundi Raj Pathak of Engineering Study & Research Centre, Nepal. They mobilised a team of undergraduate environmental students in Nepal to survey 60 municipalities across a variety of land types and uses. The project was funded by Nepal’s Solid Waste Management Technical Support Centre (SWMTSC).

Dr Pathak developed a survey questionnaire and instructed the cohort over a two-day workshop to survey residents and categorise collected solid waste, compiling a representative profile. Statistical analysis was carried out by Dr Mainali and others to explore influencing factors on waste generation and characteristics.

“The students collected waste and surveyed residents from more than 3,000 households, as well as commercial and institutional properties across the municipalities,” says Dr Pathak. “Residents were surveyed on lifestyle and expenditure habits, and waste was collected over a 24 hour period.”

The survey found that an average of 180 grams of municipal waste was generated per person, per day. The biggest component was organic waste at 62%, followed by plastics (12%) and paper products (11%). Household waste made up 60-75% of the material surveyed.

When compared to other developing countries the amount of waste generated was low - an earlier study in Ghana had found 0.51 kilograms of waste per person per day, but this also reflected a difference in land usage and other factors.

“The households we surveyed were mostly from a rural setting with low urbanisation, so we expected a low

amount of solid waste,” says Dr Mainali. “We also found a statistically significant correlation between household expenditure and household waste quantities.”

The new baseline can also be compared to highly populated and urbanised municipalities such as those in Nepal’s capital city, Kathmandu, where the average total municipal waste per capita per day is 318 grams. “The lower value in new municipalities represents a primarily rural setting with low urbanisation in new municipalities,” says Dr Pathak.

“The waste analysis has been beneficial, and in the future it can be improved by allowing for factors such as seasonal variation,” says Dr Mainali. “It demonstrates a potential benefit for establishing an effective household recycling program and composting programs within the municipalities.” ●



Dr Bandita Mainali  
LECTURER IN CIVIL ENGINEERING



Dr Dhundi Raj Pathak training student surveyors

# ENVIRONMENT vs DEVELOPMENT: SOUTH KOREA'S LAND USE DEBATE

In October 2018 the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* released a sobering report arguing that globally we have ten years to complete greenhouse mitigation measures, to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, or risk climate impacts that are civilisation-threatening in scale and scope.

For South Korea, like other developed societies, the transformation required to come in under the 1.5°C limit is more than a technological problem or a political task but is an all-encompassing collection of inter-related change processes, broadly grouped as the “sustainability transition.” This transition is seeing transformations across modes of production, consumption and exchange, and their associated social, cultural and technological systems, so that human societies are properly ecologically sustainable. The transition is a project for government as well as grassroots actors.

From a strong sustainability perspective, a society must exist in a way that its environment is able to support indefinitely through its ecosystem services and resource base. Human activities should be limited in scale to a level that is within the carrying capacity of the environment. Like many countries, South Korean society is way out of balance with its ecosystems.

There are numerous illustrations of friction points between environment and development in South Korea, however the one that most comes to mind is the case of Dumulmeori, at the junction of the Bukhangang and Namhangang rivers in Gyeonggi-do. Dumulmeori has been an ongoing battleground between organic farmers and

environmental activists, on the one hand, who want to establish a community-run organic farm on the site, and developers and municipal government on the other, who want to develop the site for eco-tourism and riverfront apartments.

Ostensibly a battle over land use on the peri-urban fringe of Seoul, it is also symbolic of the pronounced friction between government, economy and environment that has evolved along with South Korea's developmental state, which makes the Republic of Korea such an interesting environmental politics case study. The Dumulmeori case study is reflective of three observations from the broader literature on the evolution of Korean environmentalism.

First, and most obviously, environmental protection continues to come a distant second to rapid economic growth. As President Park Chung-hee's state-centric “developmental state” model gathered momentum in the 1970s, export-oriented industrialisation led to pollution clusters around new heavy industrial complexes run by the chaebol, South Korea's large industrial conglomerates. Here we see the seeds of the Korean environment movement in the rise of localised protests of residents living near the industrial precincts. Dumulmeori is reflective of both



South Korea's relentless developmentalism and the mobilisation of citizen resistance to oppose it.

Second, Korean environmentalism has been branded by the government-chaebol complex with the brush of “communism.” In part, this is because pollution incidents during the 1980s highlighted the excesses of the military dictatorship and the corruption of the *chaebol*. This allied relationship between the democracy and environment movements persists today. Activists supporting the preservation of Dumulmeori were targeted for arrest at the height of the protests against the Four Rivers Restoration Project.

Third, the bureaucratic momentum of developmentalism persists in shaping discourses and policy in environmental politics to the

present time. While environmentalism became professionalised as Korea democratised through the 1990s and 2000s, the logic of developmentalism continues to shape policy-making and official discourses around environmental issues. This has been a limiting factor on the efficacy of environmental organisations who attempt to lobby government and participate in policy-making processes.

This is where a Melbourne connection comes into play in the Dumulmeori case. The Doomoolcoop, who oversee the Dumulmeori site signed a memorandum of understanding with *CERES Community Environment Park* in Melbourne in 2011 to get international support for their efforts. In negotiations with the Yangpyeong-gun municipal government, Doomoolcoop cited

CERES specifically as the holistic community-led organic agriculture development model they wanted to emulate. As such, it would become an incubator for emerging models of food system resilience, community-run service provision, and alternative economies—all vital adaptive innovations for sustainability transition—as well as its value as a biodiversity corridor.

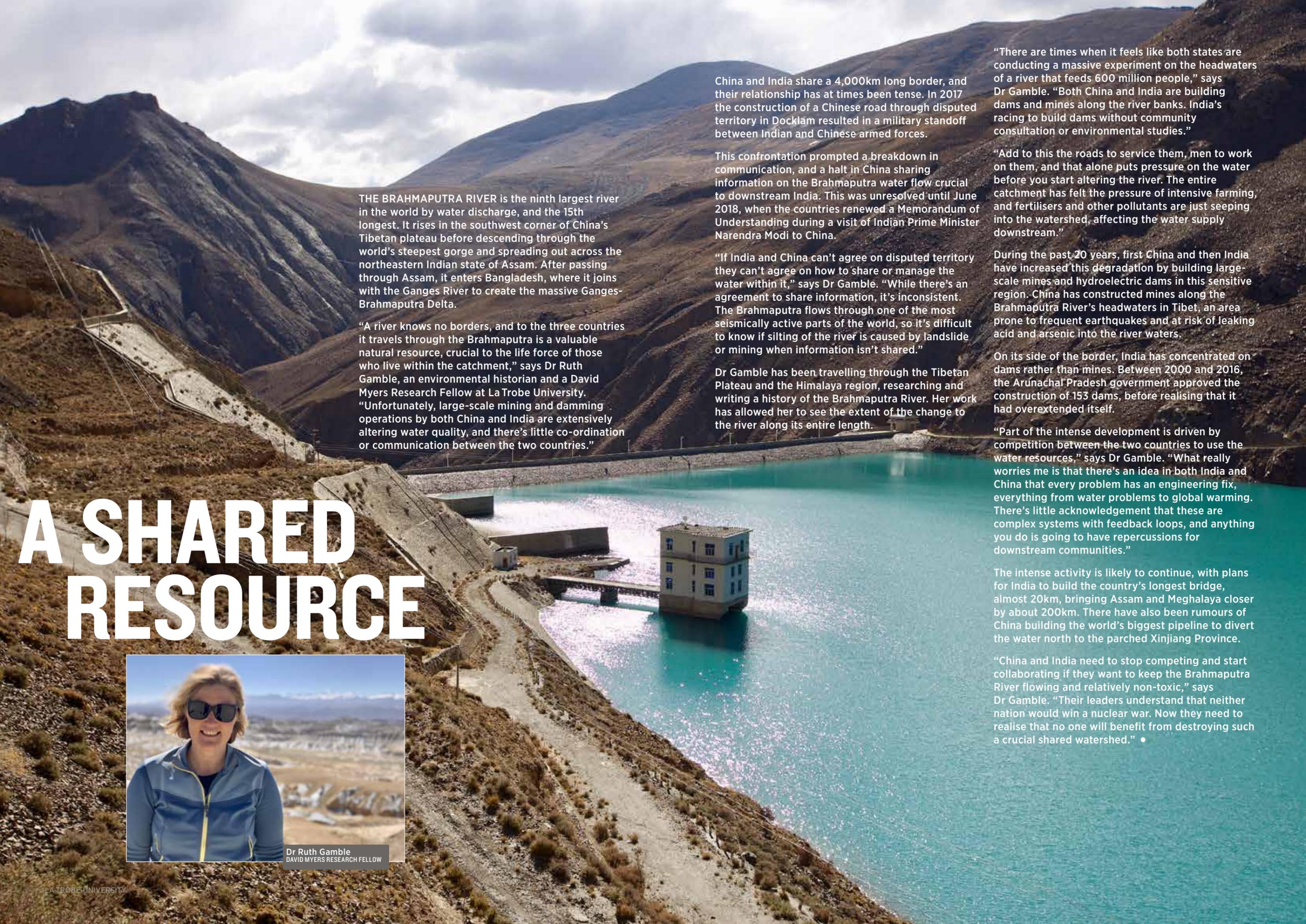
In July 2017 I was part of a group that rekindled this connection with Dumulmeori when I co-led a La Trobe University student group from our *Environment and Sustainability in East Asia* on a short overseas intensive study trip to Korea with our partner CERES Global. I returned again this year and spent time at Dumulmeori as part of my field research funded by La Trobe Asia. Dumulmeori has captured my imagination precisely because of its importance as a

contested political space and an incubator for emerging sustainability transition practice.

South Korea's unique story of economic, democratisation, and environmental vulnerabilities make it a poignant case study for sustainability transition. The Korean case demonstrates that we are now in a period where we need to evaluate environmentalism as more than just a reaction to the pollution excesses of the developmental state, but also as part of change processes that are global in scope and that are coming to define the politics of the 21st century.

*Dr Benjamin Habib is a Lecturer in Politics and International Relations* •





THE BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER is the ninth largest river in the world by water discharge, and the 15th longest. It rises in the southwest corner of China's Tibetan plateau before descending through the world's steepest gorge and spreading out across the northeastern Indian state of Assam. After passing through Assam, it enters Bangladesh, where it joins with the Ganges River to create the massive Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta.

"A river knows no borders, and to the three countries it travels through the Brahmaputra is a valuable natural resource, crucial to the life force of those who live within the catchment," says Dr Ruth Gamble, an environmental historian and a David Myers Research Fellow at La Trobe University. "Unfortunately, large-scale mining and damming operations by both China and India are extensively altering water quality, and there's little co-ordination or communication between the two countries."

China and India share a 4,000km long border, and their relationship has at times been tense. In 2017 the construction of a Chinese road through disputed territory in Docketlam resulted in a military standoff between Indian and Chinese armed forces.

This confrontation prompted a breakdown in communication, and a halt in China sharing information on the Brahmaputra water flow crucial to downstream India. This was unresolved until June 2018, when the countries renewed a Memorandum of Understanding during a visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to China.

"If India and China can't agree on disputed territory they can't agree on how to share or manage the water within it," says Dr Gamble. "While there's an agreement to share information, it's inconsistent. The Brahmaputra flows through one of the most seismically active parts of the world, so it's difficult to know if silting of the river is caused by landslide or mining when information isn't shared."

Dr Gamble has been travelling through the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalaya region, researching and writing a history of the Brahmaputra River. Her work has allowed her to see the extent of the change to the river along its entire length.

"There are times when it feels like both states are conducting a massive experiment on the headwaters of a river that feeds 600 million people," says Dr Gamble. "Both China and India are building dams and mines along the river banks. India's racing to build dams without community consultation or environmental studies."

"Add to this the roads to service them, men to work on them, and that alone puts pressure on the water before you start altering the river. The entire catchment has felt the pressure of intensive farming, and fertilisers and other pollutants are just seeping into the watershed, affecting the water supply downstream."

During the past 20 years, first China and then India have increased this degradation by building large-scale mines and hydroelectric dams in this sensitive region. China has constructed mines along the Brahmaputra River's headwaters in Tibet, an area prone to frequent earthquakes and at risk of leaking acid and arsenic into the river waters.

On its side of the border, India has concentrated on dams rather than mines. Between 2000 and 2016, the Arunachal Pradesh government approved the construction of 153 dams, before realising that it had overextended itself.

"Part of the intense development is driven by competition between the two countries to use the water resources," says Dr Gamble. "What really worries me is that there's an idea in both India and China that every problem has an engineering fix, everything from water problems to global warming. There's little acknowledgement that these are complex systems with feedback loops, and anything you do is going to have repercussions for downstream communities."

The intense activity is likely to continue, with plans for India to build the country's longest bridge, almost 20km, bringing Assam and Meghalaya closer by about 200km. There have also been rumours of China building the world's biggest pipeline to divert the water north to the parched Xinjiang Province.

"China and India need to stop competing and start collaborating if they want to keep the Brahmaputra River flowing and relatively non-toxic," says Dr Gamble. "Their leaders understand that neither nation would win a nuclear war. Now they need to realise that no one will benefit from destroying such a crucial shared watershed." •

# A SHARED RESOURCE



Dr Ruth Gamble  
DAVID MYERS RESEARCH FELLOW

# ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

As in other societies, socially disadvantaged students in Vietnam confront additional barriers to educational and employment opportunities. These range from ethnic minority stereotypes to lack of disabled accessibility on campuses. The situation is compounded by the entrenched power structures of Vietnamese higher educational institutions, which make it difficult for staff to come forward with ideas and solutions to these problems.

“Cultural hierarchies within Vietnamese educational institutions are very strong,” explains Dr Howard Nicholas, Associate Professor in the School of Education at La Trobe University. “The challenges that various minority groups face aren’t necessarily acknowledged in institutional practices, and there remain issues of gender inequality and social disadvantage that need to be addressed.”

*“We wanted to help staff in Vietnamese universities gain a better sense of who disadvantaged students are.”*

**Dr Howard Nicholas**

Between April and June 2018, Dr Nicholas and PhD candidate Le Nhu Thuy spent time in northwestern Vietnam working with lecturers from Tay Bac University and Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry. Their work was sponsored by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Dr Nicholas and his team met with ten staff members from each institution, who were then invited to a workshop in Hanoi. Participants were encouraged to identify, unpack and discuss the relevant workplace challenges that they faced in supporting disadvantaged students, and to brainstorm possible solutions to them.

“We wanted to help staff in Vietnamese universities gain a better sense of who disadvantaged students are,” says Dr Nicholas. “Once staff identify the intellectual strengths that students from vulnerable backgrounds bring, they can help bring their assets to the fore.”



A supportive environment was cultivated that fostered constructive criticism and led to encouraging and productive discussions among the group. Most participants had already heard about the relevant concepts, but the Hanoi workshop gave them a valuable opportunity to engage with them in practical ways rather than as abstract ideas. Working bilingually (with interpreters) was an important part of the process.

“In the Vietnamese language, two different words can be used to capture the meaning of accommodation and ‘adaptation to,’” says Dr Nicholas. “One (‘thích nghi’) conveys a sense of moving on and leaving behind, while the other (‘thích ứng’) implies recognition and a will to build upon. This linguistic difference prompted a

discussion between the participants over which approach they thought better in the context of improving the educational prospects for disadvantaged students. They reached consensus that the latter term was the appropriate one.”

A fortnight after the Hanoi seminar, Dr Nicholas and Le Nhu Thuy travelled back to the participants’ home institutions for follow-up workshops. Here, the participants had the added responsibility of running elements of the sessions themselves. Their colleagues, and in some cases their superiors, were invited to attend these ‘train-the-trainer’ workshops, where each participant led activities with their colleagues centred around the participants’ ideas on how best to engage disadvantaged students.

“Participants discovered that you could make safe spaces, take risks and learn from them. That they took a risk to publicly show and reflect on their own pedagogical experiments was a great outcome – it demonstrated that they had built trust with the group and actively supported one another.”

At the conclusion of the sessions, reports with recommendations were given to the administrations of each university. They addressed several points, with a particular emphasis on soft skills such as employability, learning techniques, presenting and other non-disciplinary graduate outcomes. In Vietnam, university staff are recruited as specialists in their field, and do not necessarily undergo comprehensive training in teaching techniques. This initiative thus

equipped them with valuable and transferrable pedagogical skills.

A primary goal of the project was to foster a sense of collaboration and to help support more horizontal relationships in the Vietnamese education sector. For Dr Nicholas, one episode in particular stands out in this regard.

“One man came from a minority ethnic group, and he asked if he could play a song for us. His melody used only the leaves of a tree, and it was a great moment as it demonstrated the pride that exists within ethnic groups,” says Dr Nicholas. “Further to the point, in welcoming the man and celebrating his culture with him, the participants showed that they had taken on board key lessons from the project.”

Dr Nicholas and Le Nhu Thuy believe their program demonstrates that the education and empowerment of teachers, while beneficial on an individual level, also has the cumulative potential to improve the lives of disadvantaged and minority students in other ways. In 2019 they hope to extend the initiative to work with staff in specific disciplines in the same universities. ●



**Dr Howard Nicholas**  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



# A disability research network across two countries

In 2016 Indonesia passed a new disability law with the enactment of Law No.8/2016 on Persons with Disabilities. The Law marks a shift in Indonesia's perspective towards a human rights-based approach on disability.

"Indonesia has made a strong commitment to ensure that people with disabilities are included in the country's development, but it carries a high economic and social cost," says Dr Dina Afrianty, a Research Fellow at the La Trobe Law School. "Accurate statistics and data are crucial in the decision making process. In the past Indonesia has underestimated the number of persons with disabilities in its population, meaning that services have struggled to cope with demands."

"In contrast, disability research is a well established discipline in Australia. For this reason non-government organisations, development agencies and academics across Indonesia have signalled their interest in developing scholarship and collaborating with Australian institutions."

The Australia-Indonesia Disability Research and Advocacy Network (AIDRAN) has been established to promote interdisciplinary research between the two countries and engage academics working within the field. The network is hosted by the La Trobe Law School at La Trobe University and Universitas Brawijaya in Malang.

Dr Afrianty will serve as the network's president, and a number of experts from institutions in both countries make up the advisory board and executive committee.

"The network will give academics, industry activists and policy makers in Indonesia and Australia the opportunity to interact and collaborate in research, public activism, and advocacy that will be useful and engaging to both countries," says Dr Afrianty. "We hope we can benefit from each other's experience and be able to develop a better understanding of each country's needs and strengths."

"Disability rights and social inclusion are a core area of public policy and Australia possesses significant experience and resources in the field of disability research, services and advocacy," says Professor Patrick Keyzer, Head of the La Trobe Law School and member of AIDRAN advisory board. "La Trobe Law School is delighted to play host to the AIDRAN network and foster strong collaborative ties between researchers, advocates and students in both countries."

AIDRAN is actively developing publications and online resources in a number of languages, as well as working towards its next biennial conference in 2019. ●



Dr Dina Afrianty with Ms Spica Tutuhaturunewa (Indonesian Consul General to Victoria) at the Melbourne launch of AIDRAN network.



This issue features  
La Trobe University  
research in...

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