Issue No.3 – 2016

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

ASIA RISING

Making a difference in the Asian century

China in focus

latrobe.edu.au/asia

La Trobe Asia

CONTENTS

CREDITS

Cover photo:
Christian Wilmsen

Other photos:
Cheryl Dissanayake, Tess Flynn, Troy Kasper, Jose Ramos, Matt Smith, US Navy, Christian Wilmsen

Text:
Matt Smith
Nick Bisley
James Leibold

Design:
Basil Pardo
Stephanie Thompson

With thanks to:
Nick Bisley
David Evans
Diana Heatherich
Ricarda Jost

A MESSAGE FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

Welcome to the third issue of Asia Rising. This edition focuses on China and highlights some of the diverse Asia-related research being done at La Trobe University.

La Trobe University has had a long and productive relationship with partners in China. In the early 1980s, we were one of the first Australian universities to admit students from the People's Republic of China, and we have been partners with universities such as East China Normal University for more than thirty years. China is very important to us, and we have increased our engagement with China in recent years.

We recognise China's growing importance to economies all over the world, and have established a China Studies Research Centre that will be a leading international centre for research on contemporary China, and will support La Trobe Asia's work in leading La Trobe University's engagement with Asia.

Our long record of engagement with China gives us an excellent platform on which to build our expertise and engagement with China, and we are playing a leading role in helping Australian society better understand Chinese culture.

La Trobe University is also implementing its new China Strategy, which provides dedicated funding to support our University in being a leading centre for high quality research and teaching on China, and in shaping national debate about China in Australia. Under our China Strategy, we will establish new partnership programs with Chinese universities and we will undertake collaborative research supported by strategic investments.

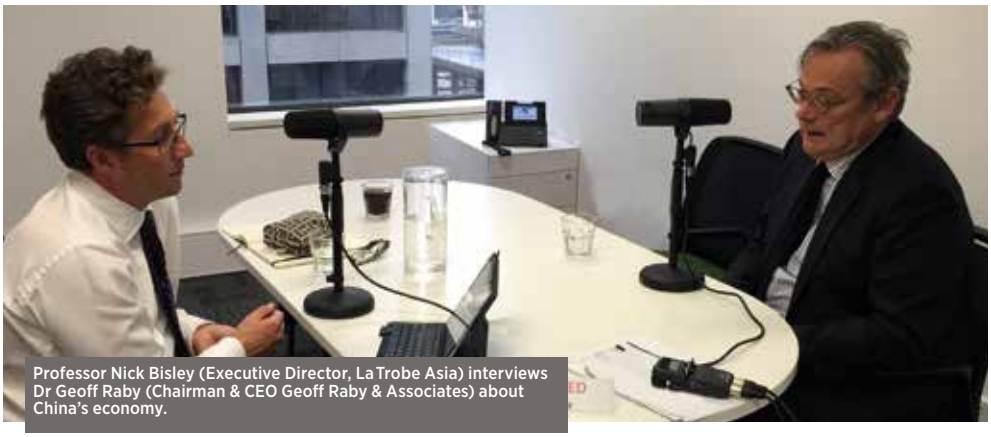
In the pages that follow, you will find articles on some of La Trobe University's strongest research, all of which is taking part in China or in collaboration with Chinese institutions.

We look forward to working closely with colleagues in China in the coming years to develop deeper partnerships and continue this program of research.

Professor John Dewar

Listen to the podcast

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



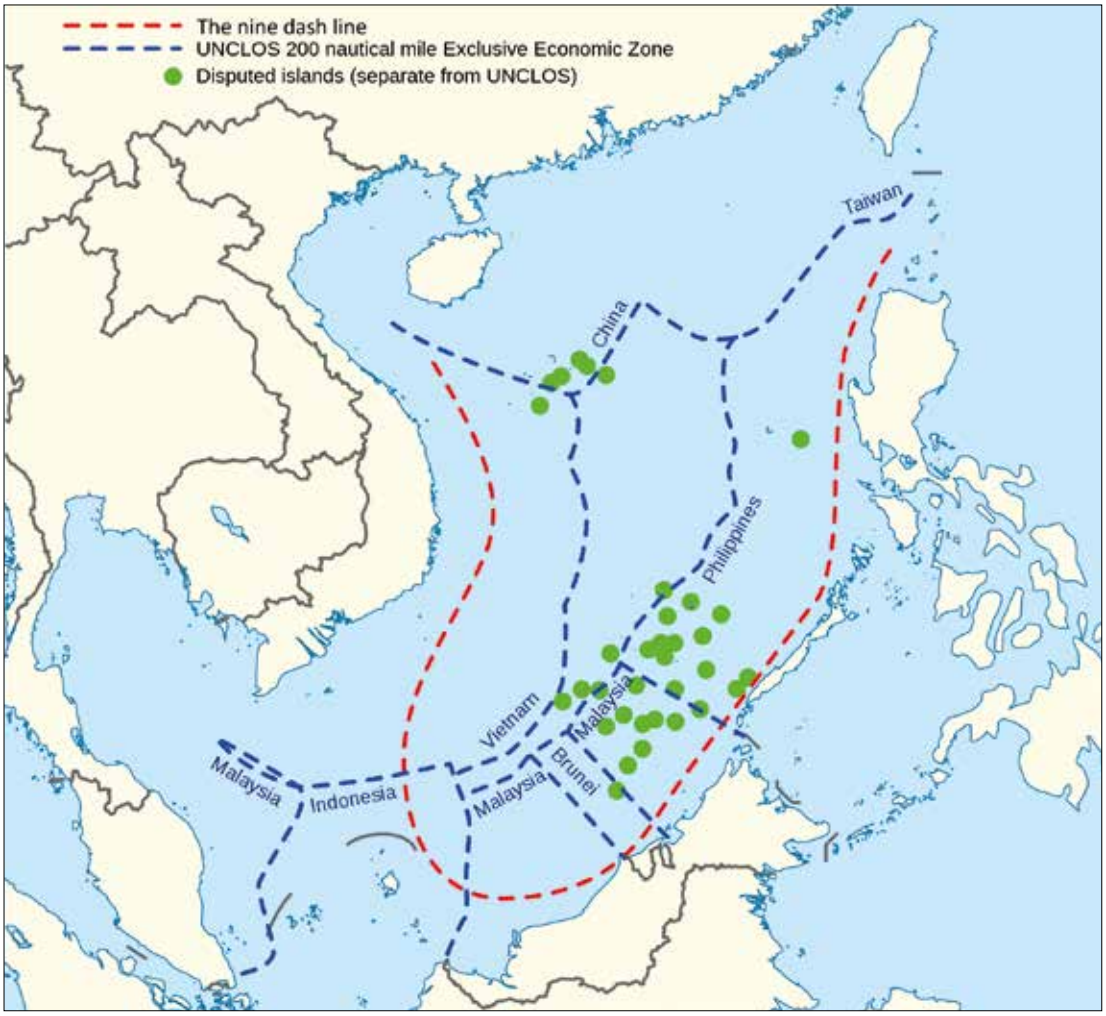
Professor Nick Bisley (Executive Director, La Trobe Asia) interviews Dr Geoff Raby (Chairman & CEO Geoff Raby & Associates) about China's economy.

WHAT DOES CHINA WANT IN

The complex disputes over islands, rocks and reefs in the South China Sea involve six countries: China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei. They have a long history, with their origins in the interruption of traditional practices by European and Japanese colonialism, and compounded by the post WWII conflicts in Southeast Asia. These disputes are among the most vexing issues in the region.

Despite this backstory the tensions associated with contestation have waxed and waned. The current spike in geopolitical temperature dates back to 2009, and in particular to China's issuing of the decidedly ambiguous 'dashed line' map. This map can now be found in passports, in inflight magazines and every school book in the country. Since then, China has begun to take steps to defend what it portrays as its rights in the sea. Disputed features have been built upon and now boast three kilometre runways and deep water ports. Sansha island in the Paracels, population 1200, has city status. While it is wrong to sheet all of the blame for the current tensions back to Beijing, its activities are the most widespread and destabilising.

Yet in spite of its many activities it is not clear precisely what it is that China wants. We can see plainly its methods of advancing its interests on a daily basis, but just what its larger strategic objective may be is uncertain. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of the dashed line map – it was presented accompanying a note in which China asserted its 'indisputable' sovereignty over the islands and the adjacent waters of the Sea. But it lacked specificity about what the dashes meant, where precisely on the map the lines are located or if by using the lines they were claiming the territory as their own.



THE SOUTH CHINA SEA?

Nick Bisley, Executive Director of La Trobe Asia and Professor of International Relations

This ambiguity is, in part, deliberate. It provides diplomatic leeway to manage events, it sows confusion in the minds of those who have a stake (however large or small) in the dispute, and of course it neatly papers over the fact that Beijing may not be entirely set in its own mind as to what it wants to achieve. But this lack of clarity makes managing the dispute extremely difficult and the process of negotiating some kind of settlement acceptable to all virtually impossible.

There are ultimately three main things that China appears to seek. First, as with all the claimant states, China is a net energy importer. The Sea is thought to be rich in oil and gas, and China wants not only the economic benefit that comes from having sovereign rights over hydrocarbon reserves but also the security of supply that it would entail. Equally, the South China Sea is a significant fishery and as a country which consumes growing volumes of protein this is highly prized.

This ambiguity is, in part, deliberate. It provides diplomatic leeway to manage events, it sows confusion in the minds of those who have a stake...

China also desires security for its maritime approaches. This goes beyond protecting shipping lanes; in the nineteenth century China was brought low by foreign forces that tore the country apart and humiliated its people, at least so goes the Party's nationalist mythology. The Party's claim to legitimacy depends on its ability to protect China and it follows from this that it must secure the means through which others approach China. The South China Sea is, in many respects, the country's front door and it does not want that door to be vulnerable.

Finally and perhaps most crucially the Sea is now presented by the Party-State as a fundamental part of China. It has long argued that China was once a great nation and that only through the tenacity and discipline of the Communists was it able to be made whole and once again sit at the top table in world affairs. The South China Sea thus has a nationalist and identity value above and beyond material resources, and questions of strategy, and this value should not be understated given the importance of this matter to the Party's legitimacy and sense of itself.

The problem is that these three goals make devising a negotiated settlement that involves anything but a maximalist vision of China's claims over the sea extraordinarily difficult. More significantly, its vision is incompatible with the view that the US and its allies have for Asia's future. And it is for this reason that the South China Sea has become such a significant part of the region's international politics. ●

China and Australia have a long relationship anchored by strong trade bonds but it isn't without tension. The two countries often find themselves sitting on opposite sides of the same table when it comes to broader bilateral ties and disagreements over foreign investments, and the position of interests of allied countries threaten to prevent any meaningful co-operation or interaction.

INTERVIEW

PROFESSOR HOU MINYUE

Many countries think about China first and foremost when considering foreign relations, and Australia is one of them. How does China think about Australia if at all?

To be frank, Australia is not the centre of Chinese diplomacy. It's the United States, followed by Russia, Japan, EU Nations and neighbouring Asian countries. Only after these is Australia considered.

Many Chinese would not think it appropriate to consider Australia, but there are some positive connections. Australian products such as wool, beef, and wine are well regarded.

Then there are other commodities, like the iron ore imports from Australia. Before 2013, the percentage share is less than 50% total Chinese imports of iron ore. Then starting from 2013, over 50% of Chinese iron ore imports come from Australia. Last year over 63% of Chinese iron ore imports are from Australia, it's a significant amount.

What does China think of Australia's caution when it comes to doing business with China, especially around foreign investment?

I think firstly we need to recognise the fact that Chinese investment in Australia in general is successful. The 'Australian worry', or the 'Australian–China panic' to some extent is self-made. For the first time in Australian history, the Number 1 trading partner is not the protector and that makes it nervous, but for many countries of world that is the case.

Historically Australia was isolated, but it has increasingly realised that its security interest is in Asia, not in some other places. For Australia, Asia is not the Far East, but the Near North. This realisation, and the consequences of a long and shared history, makes Australia nervous.

How about Australia's strategic position? Our relationship with the United States must be a factor in how we are perceived.

Yes actually, in terms of foreign policy it is a consideration, but not the only one.

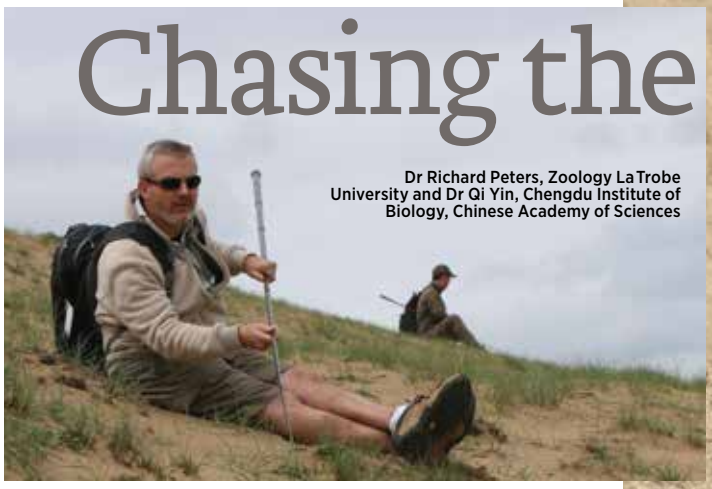
Australia thinks it's a middle power. It expects to play a role in Asia, and more often than not, to play a leadership role. But it has disadvantages when dealing with Asian countries. Without the support or co-operation from a Western Nation, a big power like the United States, Australia is not confident enough about the positive role it can play in Asia.

There is always competition between globalisation and regionalisation in East Asia or across the world. If you pay too much attention to bilateralism, you will miss something in your role in the regionalisation.

It is understandable for Australia to think about the security situation in East Asia, to try to play a positive role with neigbouring countries, and to defuse tensions if they arise.

Professor Hou Minyue, is the Deputy Director of the Australian Studies Centre at East China Normal University in Shanghai, and an alumnus of La Trobe University. ●

Chasing the dragon's tail



Dr Richard Peters, Zoology La Trobe University and Dr Qi Yin, Chengdu Institute of Biology, Chinese Academy of Sciences

Phrynocephalus vlangalii

On the Tibetan plateau 3,500 metres above sea level, a ten hour bus ride from the city of Chengdu, China, there's a population of lizards called the Qinghai toad-headed agama (*Phrynocephalus vlangalii*). They live in burrows amongst the sand dunes, clumps of grass, and the occasional yak or hardy goat. It's a remote place to travel to study lizard behaviour, but for Dr Richard Peters it is a necessary journey.

Like many species of lizards, *P. vlangalii* use their tail to communicate, and a series of flicks or curls can warn an enemy away, court a mate or signal to another lizard. Observing and filming their behaviour in the field can give an accurate account of how and why motion signals vary, and whether these signal are dependent on external conditions.

"If you want to get an accurate picture of how these lizards communicate to each other it won't work in captivity," says Dr Peters. "The lizard needs to be in its own habitat, and comfortable enough that it's going to act naturally. It's not going to do that in the lab, so that means we have to go to the lizard, out on the plateau."

Dr Peters is a zoologist who has spent his career studying reptile behaviour, in particular the tail-flicking behaviour of lizards. He's worked extensively in Australia and Ecuador, and his current collaboration with Dr Qi Yin of the Chengdu Institute of Biology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, takes him to China.

"The toad-headed agama is an excellent subject for us because of their complex dynamic tail displays, simple desert habitat, and population density," says Dr Qi. "This provides us with an excellent system to test the function and evolution of dynamic visual signals."

Travelling to China for a month armed with filming equipment and rugged field gear yielded results. Dr Peters and Dr Qi have been able to observe and document the behaviour of *P. vlangalii* and begin to develop 3D animations to replicate it. Working with PhD students Jose Ramos and Yayong Wu have now published their first study together in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

While signaling is usually just a trait of the male, the tail-curling behaviour has also been observed in the female *P. vlangalii.* While it is unusual it isn't unheard of, and Dr Peters says these lizards have a lot at stake in their environment.

"To these lizards their burrow is the centre of their universe," he says. "If they lose it they're without shelter, and if winter hits it can mean their life, so they can protect it fairly fiercely."

In the future their research will focus on refining 3D animations to provoke the *P. vlangalii* to signal in controlled conditions. Their filming and observation techniques will also be applied to other species of *Phrynocephalus* lizards in China. •

Tibetan plateau 3,500 metres above sea level, a ten hour bus ride from the city of Chengdu, China.

Professor Jim Whelan
CO-DIRECTOR OF AGRIBIO
Centre for AgriBioscience

INCREASING RICE YIELD

China is the world's largest producer and consumer of rice, accounting for around 30% of its production and consumption. It is a staple food for two-thirds of its population, and effective production is vital.

"The widespread adoption of hybrids has been crucial in increasing the rice yield in China, but our future challenge will be to boost production even further," says Professor James Whelan. "It's not just rice, there's increasing demand for food by a growing world population."

For the past ten years Professor Whelan, a plant biologist at La Trobe University's AgriBio facility, has been collaborating with researchers in the College of Life Sciences at Zhejiang University in China. Their goal is to increase the absorption rate of phosphate fertilisers in crops.

"At the moment crops will absorb and use about 10-30% of phosphate fertilisers, with the remainder being washed away," says Professor Whelan. "Not only is this phosphate runoff a waste of expensive fertiliser, but it is damaging the environment. It's this type of pollution that is causing coral bleaching and algae blooms on the Great Barrier Reef."

Professor Whelan's laboratory works with thale cress (*Arabidopsis thaliana* – the first plant in the world to have its genome sequenced in 2000) and rice (the crop plant that feeds more people than any other crop).

"We study how plants respond to different fertiliser application rates to identify key regulators of phosphate uptake and grain yield", he says. "Modern crops are 'spoiled' due to high fertiliser input. We are working with natural inbred lines of their wild relatives that thrive in low phosphate environments."

The team conducts genome-wide studies of hundreds of lines to identify genes associated with more efficient phosphate uptake. Introducing these back into modern crop varieties will help them to thrive with less fertiliser input.

"These fertilisers aren't cheap, so anything we can do to increase the absorption rate will mean less waste and increased crop yields." says Professor Whelan. "Even just a change of 5–10% will save tens of millions of dollars." •

EARLY DETECTION FOR AUTISM IN CHINA

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition, with a global prevalence estimated at 1 in 68 individuals. For a country like China with a population of 1.38 billion, the number of people potentially affected could be around 16 million. Detecting autism at a young age is critical, as early intervention can improve a child's development and help reduce later adult disability.

"Early intervention in autism is crucial to improving the quality of life, but the average age of diagnosis is between 4 to 6 years," says Dr Josephine Barbaro, Research Fellow at the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) at La Trobe University. "Health care providers and parents needed to be aware of the signs of autism earlier, and for this reason we developed the Social Attention and Communication Study (SACS), bringing the age of diagnosis down to as early as 18-24 months."

The SACS method is based on repeated developmental observations of a child, monitoring signs such as a failure by babies to make consistent eye contact, to smile, show their toys to others, point, to play social games and respond when their name is called. It has led to the development of ASDetect – an award-winning mobile app that gives parents access to information, videos, and signs to be aware of when monitoring their child's development for signs of autism.

The success of the app and the surveillance tool has earned the team global attention, and Dr Barbaro and her fellow researchers at OTARC have been collaborating with researchers at Nankai University and Tianjin Women and Children's Health Centre to implement the SACS surveillance tool throughout Tianjin, China, a city of 7.5 million people.

"The Tianjin Government has embraced the SACS surveillance method, and now every child born in Tianjin is assessed early for signs of autism," says Dr Barbaro. " We have helped train more than 600 doctors to monitor children's development using the early autism identification program, and the majority of babies referred for follow-up have been diagnosed as on the spectrum."

Future efforts will further develop the ASDetect app for the local Chinese market, including translating the resources into Mandarin and providing culturally appropriate materials. Efforts are underway to educate health and healthcare providers in Poland, Nepal, Korea, Japan and Bangladesh, and it was also a finalist for the 2016 Google Impact Challenge, receiving an award of $250,000 to translate the app into Mandarin.

"The assessment tool and the app has had a lot of positive feedback from countries all across the world," says Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Director of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre. "It's encouraging to see such dedication in furthering the health care of children, and giving parents the proper resources to be better informed." ●

Dr Josephine Barbaro
RESEARCH FELLOW
Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre

IS CHINA A TICKING TIME BO
OF ETHNIC CONTRADICT

James Leibold
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN POLITICS

China's ethnic periphery can be a volatile place. Over the past decade, violence has repeatedly marred the remote yet strategic regions of Tibet and Xinjiang, which comprise nearly a third of Chinese territory and are its chief sources of oil and water. Here, the Tibetan and Uyghur ethnic minorities have long chafed under the integrationist policies of the Han-dominated Chinese Communist Party, with bloody cycles of resistance and conflict.

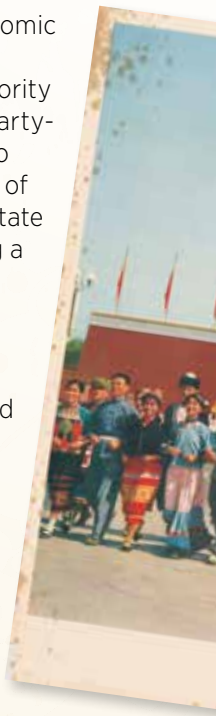
In fact, recent episodes of interethnic violence, such as the Lhasa (2008) and Ürümqi (2009) riots and the horrific Kunming train station attack (2014), portend a rising storm of ethnic contradictions that threaten to spin out of control. While Party-state officials depict these incidents as the work of "separatists" and "terrorists," many commentators in the West view them as examples of national decay and harbingers of national implosion.

Longtime China-watcher David Shambaugh warns that Xinjiang and Tibet are "living on the brink of exploding into full-scale civil disobedience and anti-regime activities." Some inside China agree, warning that centrifugal forces could propel China down the same road as the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Here, metaphors like "crisis," "emergency," "tinderbox," and even "ticking time bomb" are sometimes employed when discussing the current state of ethnic relations in the world's most populous nation-state, highlighting the sense of "urgency" in addressing perceived policy failures.

Yet these predictions are not only premature, they also obscure both the scope and dynamics of internecine conflict in China today. On the whole, interethnic relations are sturdy yet unstable. Tensions remain high in parts of Tibet and Xinjiang, but conflict here does not resemble that of Palestine or Chechnya as some would have us believe. Despite intermittent violence, relations between China's officially recognized ethnic groups are generally amiable, at least on the surface, with far more examples of cooperation than conflict.

That said, deep-rooted bigotry, misunderstanding and distrust in certain segments of the minority and majority communities alike (among other problems, chiefly poor governance, heavy-handed policing and a corrupt legal system) engender subterranean strains that under the right conditions can flare into open discord and even violence. These sorts of tensions are most evident in Tibet and Xinjiang, but also affect ethnic relations in Inner Mongolia, the Hui areas of Ningxia and Gansu, and ethnic ghettos in major cities like Beijing and Shanghai. The result is a "wobbling pivot": a series of structural fulcrums that keep a lid on open revolt while also sowing the seeds for deterioration should the sociopolitical environment shift suddenly.

First, the PRC's current policies have resulted in significant improvements in the livelihood of many Chinese minorities, with increased social and economic mobility as well as autonomous spaces for the development of ethnic cultures and identities. Minority elites have been co-opted into all aspects of the Party-state system, from its local security apparatuses to national level committees, and this lends a degree of stability to the current regime. In sharp contrast, state policies have been far less successful in cultivating a sense of national belonging, with ethnic consciousness and alienation increasing sharply among the Uyghur, Tibetan, and Hui communities. Here religion plays an obvious factor, with the Party-state's restrictions on religious practices, and at time outright hostility, alienating many within these communities.

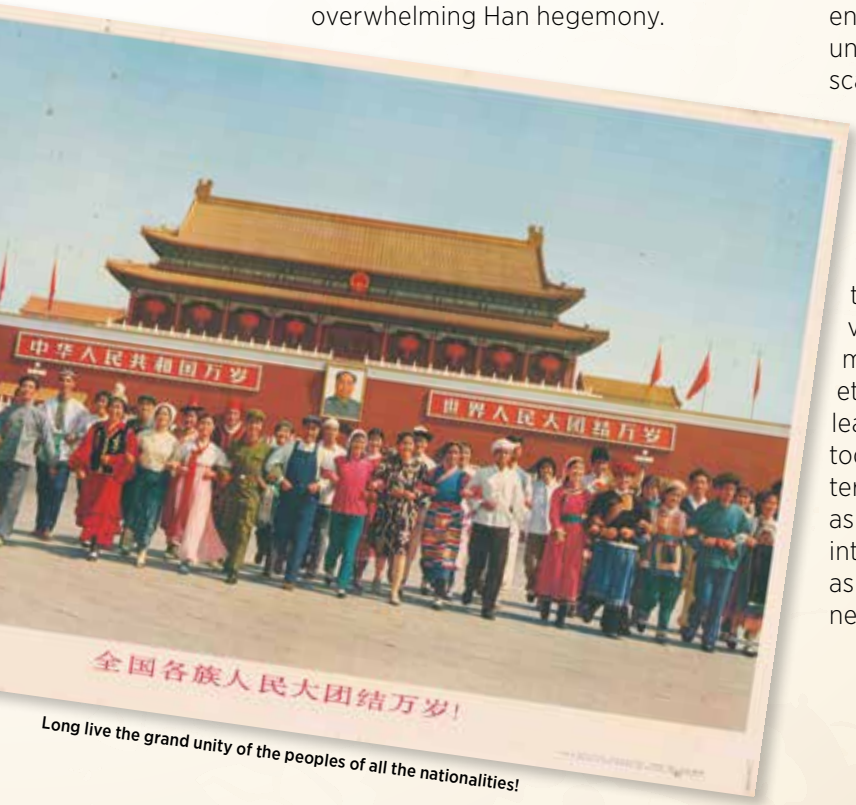


Second, the fragile stability of interethnic relations in the PRC is built on a complex system of social controls, with overlapping institutional structures ensuring that ethnic groups remain both segregated and closely monitored. The

MB IONS?

limited contact between groups, I would argue, is one obvious but often overlooked deterrent to conflict; although it also prevents the sort of daily interactions that could foster tolerance and even acceptance of ethnocultual differences in the long run. Due to historical factors, including the system of regional ethnic autonomy and the household registration system's stringent mobility restrictions, ethnic groups in China live in largely segmented communities with limited daily contact between groups. This is particularly evident in rural Tibet and Xinjiang, but is also a feature of urban life where ethnic enclaves and segregated schools are still the norm.

Finally, the spatial and demographic structure of ethnicity in the PRC also limits the scope of conflict, at least as it relates to China's officially recognized "ethnic" (民族 *minzu*) groups. To the extent that one can speak of a "minzu/ethnic crisis" in the PRC today, this predicament is confined to a handful of areas, with pockets of Uyghur-Han-Hui, Hui-Han, and Tibet-Han-Hui enmity contrasting significantly with the largely amicable relations between the Han majority and the more than 33 million ethnic minorities in southern provinces like Yunnan and Guangxi. The size of the minority population (less than 120 million) pales in significance to the over one billion people officially registered as Han by the Party-state. Those ethnic minorities who actively resist the current system or seek to undermine Han rule and power are extremely small in number and largely impotent in the face of overwhelming Han hegemony.



Long live the grand unity of the peoples of all the nationalities!

Managed diversity is the norm in China today: a sort of museum-style multiculturalism that celebrates the country's ethnocultural diversity in carefully staged performances while regulating real world contacts through authoritarian controls.

Associate Professor James Leibold

In short, managed diversity is the norm in China today: a sort of museum-style multiculturalism that celebrates the country's ethnocultural diversity in carefully staged performances while regulating real world contacts through authoritarian controls. In fact, tensions within the Han majority itself – either over identity or ideological divisions – poses a far greater threat to CCP rule and social stability, as witnessed by recent events in Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as the truculent outbursts over the South China Sea among Han nationalists.

Where does this leave the embattled Tibetan and Uyghur minorities? Sadly, in a precarious position. Any change in the status quo — such as a new round of social and political reforms, increased transnational ties, and the weakening or collapse of CCP authority — will erode existing demographic, spatial and security controls, and likely increasing ethnic conflict and violence. In spite of widespread domestic and international criticism of current ethnic policies, efforts to either increase minority autonomy or strengthen national integration will heighten ethnic competition, enmity and discord. And while any resultant violence is unlikely to undermine China's territorial integrity, the scale of bloodshed would be significant. It would seem a strong and stable Party-state is more conducive to short-term interethnic harmony than an unstable, changing or democratizing China.

The resulting options are stark: continue with targeted ethnic repression and segregation through the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, or loosen state controls and facilitate ethnic mobility and competition that will produce increased ethnic tensions over the short-to-medium term, at least. Ironically, the relative lack of interethnic contact today could ultimately prove detrimental to the long-term health and durability of multiculturalism in China, as the current system exhibits obvious weaknesses in interethnic tolerance, trust, and understanding, as well as the governance and conflict management strategies necessary for a robust pluralism. •

THE DAM THAT MOVES A

In the last fifty years, the economy of China has transformed at an unprecedented rate with substantial changes for its population. Remarkable in its scale, speed and reach, accelerated urbanisation has seen millions of people moving from the country to the city in response to employment opportunities largely in the manufacturing sector.

Dr Brooke Wilmsen
RESEARCH FELLOW
Department of Social Inquiry

One of the most significant and controversial interventions was the construction of the Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest hydroelectric project. Straddling the Yangtze River, it stretches from the village of Sandouping (near Yichang city in Hubei Province) to Chongqing city – some 600 kilometres. At a cost of more than ¥180 billion (more than $350 billion AU), broadly, the Chinese government considers it historic, an engineering, social and economic success.

The disruption caused by this project is substantial. The dam fundamentally changed the landscape of the province, flooding cultural and archaeological sites and altering the ecosystem. It has destabilised the area increasing the risk of landslides, and has officially displaced some 1.3 million people.

Dr Brooke Wilmsen, a Research Fellow in Anthropology at La Trobe University, has been researching forced displacement and resettlement, and the long-term effects of the Three Gorges Dam have been of particular interest.

"The Chinese government's official number of 1.3 million people resettled always comes with a footnote about how you define displacement," says Dr Wilmsen. "When factoring in those who have had to move due to seismic activity caused by the dam and environmental protection we estimate it to be closer to 6 million people."

"A project of this scale has had a long-term effect on development in the region, and that's before you get to the actual displacement caused by its construction. It's impossible to draw an accurate line around who has been affected by the Three Gorges Dam and who hasn't. There are people whose homes are inundated by the dam, but then there are people displaced for a whole lot of reasons related to the dam, including lost livelihoods."

There had long been an intention to alter the Yangtze River as it flowed through the Hubei province. It was first proposed more than 70 years ago by Dr Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the Chinese Republic. In the 1950s Mao Tse-Tung penned a poem called 'Swimming' in which he envisioned 'walls of stone' to be erected.

"The Three Gorges Dam has been a long-term project for China, in both conception and construction," says Dr Wilmsen. "This had impacted development in the area decades before the dam began serious planning."

Dr Wilmsen first travelled to the Hubei Province in 1997 before the area was submerged, and returned in 2003 to survey the residents about the resettlement process and the impact it was having on their livelihoods.

"The Maoist ideology was particularly strong in the area before the resettlement. Pictures of Chairman Mao were still in the main rooms of the houses, and the people subscribed to the idea that they had suffered for the greater good of the country."

Dr Wilmsen's longitudinal study followed the resettlement process

MOUNTAIN

of 521 households and found that despite widespread impoverishment in 2003, by 2011 there was remarkable improvements across a whole range of indicators.

"The residents who were displaced were often poor to begin with," says Dr Wilmsen. "Many of them were employed in manual construction labour that had sprung up in relation to the dam. While they received compensation it wasn't an adequate amount, and there was a lack of information and support for resettlement. In 2003 many of the people I met were living off their compensation just to cover their basic needs."

However, by 2011 the regional development initiatives that had been driven by the Chinese government had begun to pay off.

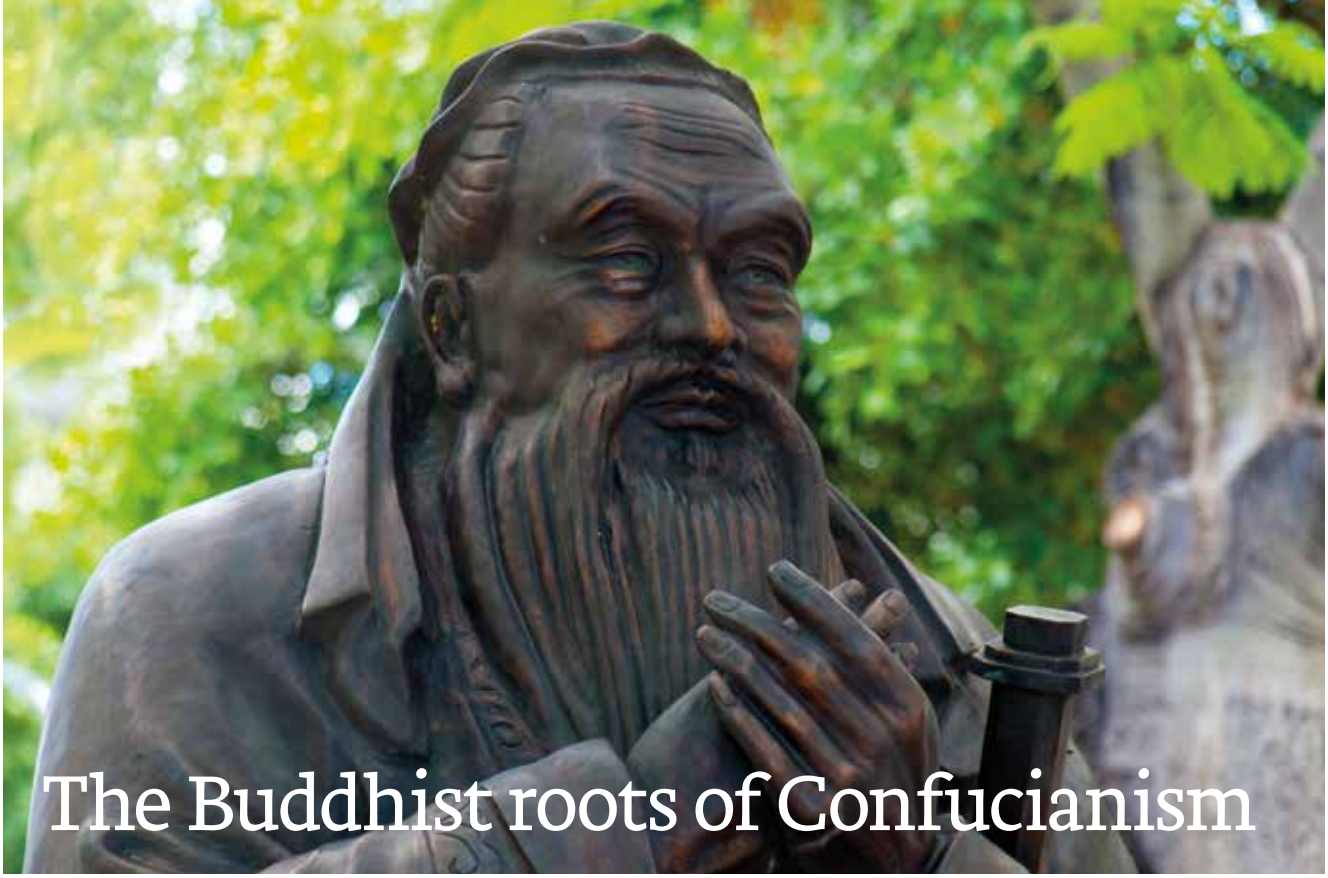
"Incomes had increased and especially in the urban areas, incomes were almost 80% those of affluent Yichang City," says Dr Wilmsen. "Surprisingly, over the eight years between surveys, social wellbeing had also improved suggesting that people are adapting to their lives."

The Chinese government has declared its relocation efforts a great success, but the Three Gorges resettlement is an exceptional example. Most resettlement projects do not attract the attention or investment afforded to the Three Gorges Dam, and basic compensation for losses and impoverishment is commonplace.

At the Three Gorges, China's rich east coast provinces partnered with the affected counties to build infrastructure such as schools and hospitals. Moreover, incentives and national mobilisation efforts encouraged extensive economic development, fuelling a dramatic increase in manufacturing activities. The area has been rebranded 'Gateway to the West', and new freeways and railways have had a pay-off for resettled residents.

However, the region of the Three Gorges Dam is not without its problems. The pressure of the dam has led to unstable geology in the area, and increased seismic activity has caused earthquakes and landslides. One of the country towns Dr Wilmsen studied has been deemed unstable, and residents are being resettled a second time.

"There has been an enormous out-migration of around 30% of the population that we worked with," says Dr Wilmsen. "In the villages now you have mostly older people and young people, which is the story of rural China, so how sustainable these locations are in the long term is really the question." •



The Buddhist roots of Confucianism

In China, and indeed throughout much of the world, Confucianism is typically presented as an expression of a native system of ideas, developed independent of external cultural influences over two thousand years. It is privileged as the true representative of Chinese cultural ideals and values, and an integral part of traditional Chinese social and cultural identity.

"Despite being vilified in China for much of the twentieth century, over the past three decades various aspects of Confucianism have been rehabilitated," says Professor John Makeham, Director of the China Studies Research Centre at La Trobe University. "Diverse interest groups both within and outside the Chinese academy have favoured Confucianism over other forms of traditional thought and philosophy, touting it as the principal exemplar of indigenous Chinese thought and so best suited to nation- and state-building."

"This emphasis, in turn, feeds an assumption that Chinese philosophy is a hermetically-sealed tradition or set of traditions that can be understood and adjudicated only by reference to its own 'internal' norms and premises. But to regard Confucianism this way is to ignore the important contribution of Buddhist thought to its intellectual makeup."

Professor Makeham has been leading a study into the Buddhist roots of Confucian philosophy, funded by two ARC Discovery Projects. Introduced into China more than two thousand years ago, Buddhist philosophy has shaped the development of indigenous Chinese traditions of religion, philosophy, art and literature.

"Defenders of Chinese Confucianism tend to ignore or downplay the influences of Buddhism on the development of Confucian thought and philosophy but the evidence tells a different story," says Professor John Makeham. "From at least the fourth century onward, Chinese philosophy has been fundamentally shaped by constructs derived from Indian Buddhism."

A particular focus of his current research is the pivotal role of the Buddhist text *Treatise on the Awakening of Mahayana Faith* in the construction of modern forms of Confucian philosophy, an influence widely ignored by contemporary scholars.

"The debt that New Confucianism owes to the *Awakening of Faith* is philosophically and historically significant," says Professor Makeham. "It provided thinkers with the conceptual tools to develop the most creative ontologies and epistemologies in modern Chinese philosophy. I believe it will become increasingly necessary to acknowledge and, indeed, to celebrate and to enhance the hybrid quality of Chinese philosophy, and its rich legacies, if Chinese philosophy is to thrive in a rapidly globalizing world." ●

Professor John Makeham
DIRECTOR
China Studies Research Centre

This issue features La Trobe Asia work from these areas in China

CONTACT DETAILS

La Trobe Asia
La Trobe University
Melbourne Victoria 3086
Australia

T +61 3 9479 5414
E asia@latrobe.edu.au

latrobe.edu.au/asia

CRICOS Provider 00115M LTU Digital Creative 33428 10/16