

# Language and Culture

The School of Languages and Cultures Magazine



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**

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Lorenzetti's allegory of  
good government in Italy

.....  
Beyond China and India in  
early Asian urbanism

.....  
Wonderings at the  
Chinese opera theatre

.....  
Translating the lost voices  
of German enemy aliens







## Professor Yixu Lu FAHA

It is customary in many cultures today that the end of the year is also a time for reflection on what has happened in the immediate past 12 months.

Humans are a time-conscious species. Time and space, my thoughts turn to the one name – Albert Einstein – and from there, to the one word: ‘relativity’.

The time was 28 November 1919. Einstein wrote a letter to the *London Times*, explaining his theory of relativity. The letter finishes with the following remarks:

*Noch eine Art Anwendung des Relativitätsprinzips zum Ergötzen des Lesers: Heute werde ich in Deutschland als „Deutscher Gelehrter“, in England als „Schweizer Jude“ bezeichnet; sollte ich aber einst in die Lage kommen, als „bête noire“ präsentiert zu werden, dann wäre ich umgekehrt für die Deutschen ein „Schweizer Jude“, für die Engländer ein „Deutscher Gelehrter.“*

“Here is yet another application of the principle of relativity for the delectation of the reader: today I am described in Germany as a ‘German savant’, and in England as a ‘Swiss Jew’. Should it ever be my fate to be represented as a *bête noire*, I should, on the contrary, become a ‘Swiss Jew’ for the Germans, and a ‘German savant’ for the English.”<sup>1</sup>

This must be the most accessible explanation of relativity. Everything is relative depending on the starting point – the intention of the subject who articulates his views and beliefs.

We do not possess the truth and must be aware of the relativity in our views. Only with this awareness of relativity can we hope to get closer to the truth. West and East, North and South, civilisations across times and borders – every time has its greats and every dewdrop a multitude of worlds.

I admire the sophistication with which the writers in this issue work through times, spaces and languages – weaving them into a beautiful piece of reflection sparkling with astute observations.

I would like to thank all members of staff who have contributed their creativity to our collective endeavour – the education of our coming generation and the critical enquiry into the myriad ways of human existence in different languages.

I wish all our students, colleagues and readers a happy festive season.

<sup>1</sup> English translation by Sonja Bargmann (1954). Albert Einstein. *Ideas and Opinions*. New York: Crown Publishers, p. 105.


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# Siena, its Palazzo Pubblico and Ambrogio Lorenzetti's 'good government' fresco

**Francesco Borghesi**

Senior Lecturer, Italian Studies

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Medieval society in Italy was often characterised by insecurity. The Tuscan town of Siena was no exception: this wealthy and elegant city was known in the late Middle Ages for its civic instability and political violence. Its urban structure shows it. When one enters the city from the North, the Porta Camollia, one of the main fortified gates to the city, greets the visitor with this Latin inscription: *Cor magis tibi Sena pandit* – “Siena opens its great heart to you”. The city’s impressive fortification and protective walls testify the threats to its independence.







Entering the city and strolling down Via Camollia, one arrives at the very heart of town, Piazza del Campo – one of the most beautiful squares of the Italian peninsula. ‘Piazza del Campo’ literally means ‘square of the field’, explaining the origins of this piazza which, until the late 13th-century, was an open field. This is the location that most effectively allows the modern-day visitor to experience the complex history of medieval Siena. Its civic factionalism and political instability are reflected in the still-popular *Palio di Siena*, the bareback horse race which origins trace back to the medieval times when the various town’s *contrade* (city wards) are each represented by a competing horse and jockey.

The ensuing tensions and feuds were leading to a pronounced difficulty in governing the city and were addressed in 1287 with the creation of the

Government of the Nine (*Governo dei Nove*): nine elected officials in charge of running the city to the best interests of its citizenship as a whole. In 1297, the ‘Nine’ commissioned the building of the splendid Palazzo Pubblico which dominates the opposite side of the steeply raked Piazza del Campo.

The Palazzo Pubblico, which in English could be translated as ‘city hall’, was the seat of Siena’s municipal administration. Made of stone at the bottom and brick above, the Palazzo Pubblico was built on vacant land so that the area in which it stood could not be controlled by any *contrada* or local patrician family. It was meant as a place for all Sienese citizens beyond urban and political factionalism, and family provenance – a place for the civic community.



Modern-day Piazza del Campo of Siena or the square of the field – one of the most popular squares in Italy.

It was meant as a place for all Sienese citizens beyond urban and political factionalism, and family provenance – a place for the civic community.

Like most communal medieval palaces, there was the seat of the city's governing authority and it contained meeting spaces, council chambers and the residential apartments in which the Nine resided, as they were required to live communally during their terms of office.

As a number of historians have noted, the Government of the Nine was the most stable and possibly the most effective republican form of government the city ever had – at least until 1355. The human and economic consequences caused by the Black Death of 1348 and 1349, as well as a resurgence of factionalism occasioned by the arrival of Charles IV of Luxembourg in the city, brought down the 'Nine' and led to the expulsion of any family associated with them.

However, the period between 1287 and 1355 was a wondrous time for Siena – apart from commissioning and constructing the palace itself, and adding the Mangia Tower. Between 1325 and 1344, the Mangia Tower was built to be higher than the tower of the Palazzo della Signoria in Florence – symbolising the deep rivalry that existed between the two cities.



The Mangia Tower of the Palazzo Pubblico overlooking the city.





The ceiling in the Room of the Risorgimento. Photo: Livioandronico2013/Wikicommons. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Once inside the Palazzo Pubblico,  
the temptations for art and history  
lovers alike are too many to enumerate.



The World Map Room with Simone Martini's Maestà (right). Photo: Jim Forest/Flickr. 'Siena: Palazzo Pubblico - postcard photo'. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.



Once inside the Palazzo Pubblico, the temptations for art and history lovers alike are too many to enumerate. There is only one, out of personal preference, which I would like to focus my attention to – pleading guilty on all counts for ignoring other points of interest of the palace. This includes Simone Martini's fresco of the Maestà – reminding the magistrates that the Virgin Mary is Siena's actual ruler – as well as his equestrian portrait of Guidoriccio da Fogliano, which celebrates the city's military power under the leadership of its war captain.

It is the Sala dei Nove ('Room of the Nine'; sometimes called 'Hall of Peace') – the hall where the Nine held meetings to decide how they would rule the city. It is here that, between 1338 and 1339, Ambrogio Lorenzetti was commissioned to paint on the hall's four walls images that represent good government (*buon governo*) and bad government (*mal governo*). They are, to this day, still one of Siena's major attractions. The two allegories are composed of panels depicting the practical effects of both forms of government on the city and the countryside.



Lorenzetti's fresco depicting effects of good government in the city.



Effects of good government in the countryside.



Effects of bad government in the countryside.



On one of the shorter walls, allegorical figures that represent good government contain a number of figures: Wisdom (*Sapientia*), who floats aloft, holding a large scale while, beneath her, the imposing figure of Justice, with eyes turned to Wisdom, holds the scale's pans in equilibrium. Two angels, perched on these pans, administer distributive and commutative justice. Justice hands down two cords, which Concord (*Concordia*), on a still lower plane, draws together and twines into a thicker single cord that is in turn grasped by 24 citizens who pass it to one another until it is firmly attached to the wrist of the right hand of Common Good (*Bene Comune* or Good Commune), who is seated on a throne. The figure's colours – black and white – are those of Siena; the city's symbol, a she-wolf suckling twins, lies at his feet.

Above the figure of Common Good hover three theological virtues, Faith, Charity and Hope (*Fides*, *Caritas* and *Spes*), while beside him are the four cardinal virtues, Prudence, Temperance,

Justice and Fortitude (*Prudentia*, *Temperantia*, *Iustitia* and *Fortitudo*), as well as Peace (*Pax*) and Generosity (*Magnanimitas*); nine figures in all like the nine priors who, as mentioned, governed Siena until 1355. The sequence that matters here is: Wisdom, Justice, Concord and the Common Good.

In addition to its stunning beauty, this fresco is interesting for Lorenzetti's representation of Concord. While the scales and their cords connect the figures of Wisdom, Justice and Common Good in an identical relation of dependence and derivation, Concord – a female figure who carries a large two-handled carpenter's plane on her lap – is exceptional in this kind of iconography. With her hands, she braids the strands of the cord of justice and passes it to a group of 24 Sienese citizens – an image evidently symbolising that Concord alone has the power to resolve discord. Concord's rope is meant to be the contrast of the saw, which represents division, the vice that tears its own flesh in Lorenzetti's depiction of bad government.



Lorenzetti's good government fresco in the Hall of Peace: the winged Wisdom (top left) floats above Justice; Concord (bottom left) holds out the cord to 24 Sienese citizens; Common Good, seated on the throne beneath the three winged theological virtues (top right) and the cardinal virtues on each side, holds firmly to the braided cord of justice.



Lorenzetti's Concord is a highly symbolic one and represents an ideal that finds repeated echoes in Italian late medieval and Renaissance culture.

While I will not be taking into consideration the equally interesting symbology adopted for the allegory of bad government, I will conclude by noting the image of Concord. Lorenzetti's Concord is a highly symbolic one and represents an ideal that finds repeated echoes in Italian late medieval and Renaissance culture. Lorenzetti's representation addresses a major element of Italian political culture's past and present – its factionalism – not only by analysing the causes of instability and discord, but also showing a way out of it.

This must be the reason why viewing it now is so instructive to Italian political culture as a whole and, perhaps, telling of the image Italians have of themselves to this day.

**Francesco Borghesi** is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Italian Studies. His research is concerned with the development of philosophical ideas in European history, especially between the 13th and the 16th century, and places itself at the intersection of the histories of philosophy, religion and literature. His current project focuses on the diffusion of the idea of ethical concord during the Renaissance and, by shedding new light on the thought of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, aims at providing an enriched view of the Renaissance's contribution to the definition of 'common good'. Among his more recent publications are: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Lettere* (Olschki, 2018)

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# Beyond China and India: Ancient town planning in Asia

## Matthew Stavros

Senior Lecturer and Director, Asian Studies

For decades, scholars have categorised the cities of premodern East and Southeast Asia into two broad categories based on their urban plans and the ideologies that shaped them. The first is the Chinese capital model, which was and continues to be a hallmark of Chinese civilisation. The supremely rational grid plans of early Chinese cities, their stout walls and opulent imperial compounds were material traits indicative of strong, centralised polities.

Chinese capitals were the most populous cities in the premodern world and their urban plans served as blueprints for the first cities of Korea, Japan and Vietnam. In Southeast Asia, Indian ideas informed an alternate urban paradigm – one based on notions of sacred geography and sacerdotal kingship. Although not as long-lived as their Chinese counterparts, the so-called ‘mandala cities’ of premodern Southeast Asia were the nuclei of Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms that ruled vast areas prior to the 14th century.

I have always been uncomfortable with strictly categorising early Asian cities according to the China-India models. Doing so ignores important cases of local innovation and hybridity, especially where shifting idioms of kingship inspired the blending of urban ideals. Indeed, my own research has uncovered evidence that Japan’s premodern capital of Kyoto – long viewed as a paradigmatic example of Chinese-style urban planning abroad

– was precisely such a place. The findings suggest that Japan’s medieval ruler, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408), projected a mandalic format over top of the original Chinese-style grid. In so doing, he leveraged the symbolic power of architecture and urban planning to bolster an audacious claim that he had surpassed the Japanese classical hierarchy by becoming dharma king (*dharmaraja*) and universal monarch (*cakravartin*).



## The Chinese Capital Model

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The defining feature of the Chinese urban model plan is a large, rectangular city wall which, besides providing defence, functioned to define a capital's formal boundaries. Chang'an, which reached its zenith in the eighth century CE, was surrounded by a wall over 3.5 metres thick and 8 metres high, enclosing an area of 84 square kilometres.<sup>1</sup> Nine formal gates, each studded with defensive battlements, pierced the four sides – the most important of which were located along the southern (front) face. Inside, the city was subdivided by over a hundred blocks arranged into neat rows and columns. Characteristic of all Chinese capitals, the resulting grid pattern was indicative of a robust bureaucratic polity, capable of organising people and space according to an administrative master plan. The traditional grid plan is readily apparent today in modern Beijing and Xi'an (see page 14 for reconstructed diagram of the Tang dynasty capital city of Chang'an).

At the top-centre of every Chinese capital was a walled imperial compound that, in terms of area, could easily occupy a fifth of the entire urban landscape. Inside were the residential palace of the emperor and his extended family as well as dozens

of administrative offices of the statutory state. The compound also housed shrines used to perform highly ritualised imperial ceremonies. Chinese emperors were not manifest deities, nor did they make claims of sacerdotal efficacy. Nevertheless, as the 'Son of Heaven' and recipient of the 'Mandate of Heaven', sovereigns made use of a variety of purpose-built structures to engage in ceremonies that enabled them to function as intermediaries between heaven and earth. The belief in a fundamental connection between the supernatural and good government is apparent in the urban plan itself. Geomantic and cosmological prescriptions were followed assiduously to ensure Chinese capitals were built in harmony with the mystical forces of nature.

The cities of China were, by far, the most populous of the premodern world. Chang'an in the eighth century and Beijing in the late-16th century had populations of over one million. European missionaries, and explorers such as Marco Polo, who began arriving in China during the 13th century were awestruck by the scale, material wealth and cosmopolitanism of Chinese capitals. Nothing in the Europe of their day could compare.

Characteristic of all Chinese capitals, the resulting grid pattern was indicative of a robust bureaucratic polity, capable of organising people and space according to an administrative master plan.

1 Steinhardt, Nancy (1990) *Chinese Imperial City Planning*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

# Tang Chang'an



Reconstruction of Chang'an, the Tang dynasty capital. Image: Jan Wignall. (Zoom in to view text details)



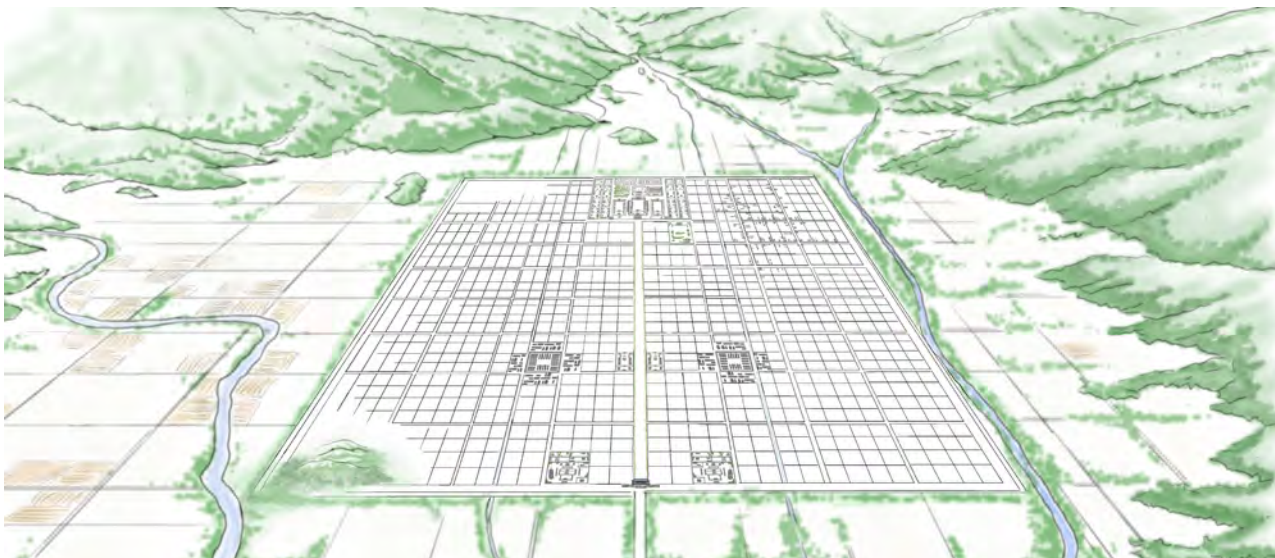
Geomantic and cosmological prescriptions were followed assiduously to ensure Chinese capitals were built in harmony with the mystical forces of nature.

## The Chinese Plan Abroad

The appearance of Chinese-style capitals in Korea and Japan from the seventh century was related to the consolidation of political authority and emergence of Sinocentric polities in both places. Copying the basic urban plan was one element of broader projects aimed at adopting and adapting key elements of Chinese civilisation, including the writing system, calendar, Buddhism, Confucianism and core notions of political legitimacy. Archaeological and textual evidence suggests that the Korean capitals of Gyeongju, Gyeongju and Haeinsa were close replicas of Chang'an, albeit substantially smaller. The same is true of the Japanese capitals of Fujiwara-kyō, Heijō-kyō (Nara) and Heian-kyō (Kyoto) – but with one significant difference: none possessed

a city wall.<sup>2</sup> In both Korea and Japan, possessing a Chinese-style capital stood as tangible evidence of Sinification, a trait synonymous with civilisation. It also signified the ubiquity of Chinese notions about the close relationship between form, function and political pageantry.

Until the 10th century, Vietnam was an integral part of the greater Sinocentric world. As such, the regional capital that stood at the site of modern-day Hanoi was likely planned to conform to the Chinese urban archetype, although time and war have occluded the old city's history. Even after gaining independence from China, Vietnamese rulers continued to build cities in the same style. In Huế, Vietnam, for example, emperors of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1945) held court within an imperial compound modelled on Beijing's forbidden city, and excavations have revealed that the roads crossed at right angle to form the characteristic grid pattern. The impulse to build in the traditional Chinese way was likely more related to ingrained notions about what constituted a 'proper' dynastic capital than any intention of posing as a tributary state of China, as was the case in Korea and, to a lesser extent, Japan.



Eighth-century urban model of Classical Kyoto. Image: Matthew Stavros.

2 Stavros, Matthew (2014) *Kyoto: An Urban History of Japan's Premodern Capital*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.



Borobudur in Central Java, Indonesia. Photo: Matthew Stavros.

## Mandala Cities in Southeast Asia

The first cities of Southeast Asia were the nuclei of Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms that dominated vast portions of modern-day Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia. Their rulers looked to India for political and philosophical models, resulting in the creation of urban environments profoundly different from their Northeast Asian counterparts.<sup>3</sup> The limited knowledge we have of these early cities – none of which survived to the modern era – comes primarily from research conducted at the site of Angkor in Cambodia and, to a lesser extent, Borobudur in central Java, Indonesia.

Findings suggest that from about the eighth century CE, Southeast Asian rulers began adapting Indian notions of political legitimacy as a means of consolidating their authority and, in some cases, countering Chinese influence. For example, Jayavaraman II, the founder of the Khmer Empire (9–13th century), drew heavily on the language and symbolism of the Indian epics to declare himself ‘universal monarch’ and ‘dharma king’. His capital at Angkor, which eventually boasted over a thousand temples and monuments, was planned to resemble a mandala, a manifestation of sacred geography wherein the king occupied the physical and philosophical centre.

3 Tambiah, Stanley J (1976) ‘The Galactic Polity’ in *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A study of Buddhism and polity in Thailand against a historical background*, pp. 102–131. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



Like all premodern cities, gravely little is known about the daily lives of Angkor's non-elite majority. The newest research on the complex network of roads and waterways that constituted the city, however, suggests that they inhabited what was, in terms of sheer size, the largest urbanised environment of the preindustrial world.<sup>4</sup>

Japan's premodern capital of Kyoto, founded in 794, has long been considered an emblematic example of Chinese urban planning abroad. By about the 11th century, however, the grid plan began to crumble due to the weakening of the imperial state and central government. Urban conditions had only deteriorated by the 14th century when Ashikaga Yoshimitsu took power, first as shōgun, then as prime minister. Yoshimitsu was deeply interested in continental notions of authority and avidly engaged in esoteric rituals that symbolically transformed him into a dharma king (*Jp hōō*) and *cakravartin*.<sup>5</sup>

## Mandalised Urban Landscapes in Medieval Japan

Yoshimitsu's subscription to Indian notions of sacred kingship took material form in an aggressive building program that, over the course of about 20 years, resulted in the creation of a robust matrix of temples and pagodas that crisscrossed the medieval urban landscape. By examining textual and archaeological sources, I have discovered that this matrix conformed closely to a mandalic pattern in which an idealised sacred landscape was transposed over Kyoto's older grid pattern. Near the centre was Yoshimitsu's temple-palace complex, adorned by a breathtaking, seven-storey pagoda that was a staggering 110 metres tall.



Computer-generated reconstruction of the Shōkokuji Pagoda. Image: Tomishima Yoshiyuki and Takegawa Kōhei.

4 Evans, Damian *et al.* (2009) 'A Comprehensive Archaeological Map of the World's Largest Preindustrial Settlement Complex at Angkor, Cambodia.' In *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 104 (36): 14277–14282.

5 Stavros, Matthew (2017) 'Monuments and Mandalas in Medieval Kyoto: Reading Buddhist Kingship in the Urban Plan of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 77 (2): 321–361.

For a brief period at the beginning of the 15th century, Kyoto had become a monument to Indian notions of sacred kingship – smack in the heart of Japan.

In a more recent article, written with a colleague from Kyoto University, we argue that this pagoda and the urban landscape it towered above represented Yoshimitsu's impulse to leverage Indian symbolism to forge an anthropocosmic connection between himself and the divine.<sup>6</sup> For a brief period at the beginning of the 15th century, Kyoto had become a monument to Indian notions of sacred kingship – smack in the heart of Japan.

Such findings open up exciting new vistas for comparing the urban and architectural history of Japan and Southeast Asia. Over the coming years, and in collaboration with my colleagues in Japan, Singapore and the US, I will be looking for further material connections. By breaking down old categories, we expect to uncover far more nuanced and, ultimately, more compelling narratives of transcultural exchange.



**Matthew Stavros** is an historian of early Japan and the author of *Kyoto: An Urban History of Japan's Premodern Capital* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2014). His research focuses primarily on the urban and architectural history of Japan to about 1700, with interests extending to religion, material culture and monumentalism in East and Southeast Asia.

— [mstavros.com](http://mstavros.com)

6 Stavros, Matthew and Tomishima Yoshiyuki (2018) 'The Shōkokuji Pagoda: Building the Infrastructure of Buddhist Kingship in Medieval Japan'. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 45: 125-144.



# You will have been among people



## Wonderings at the Hokkien theatre

Written by Josh Stenberg

Chinese Studies

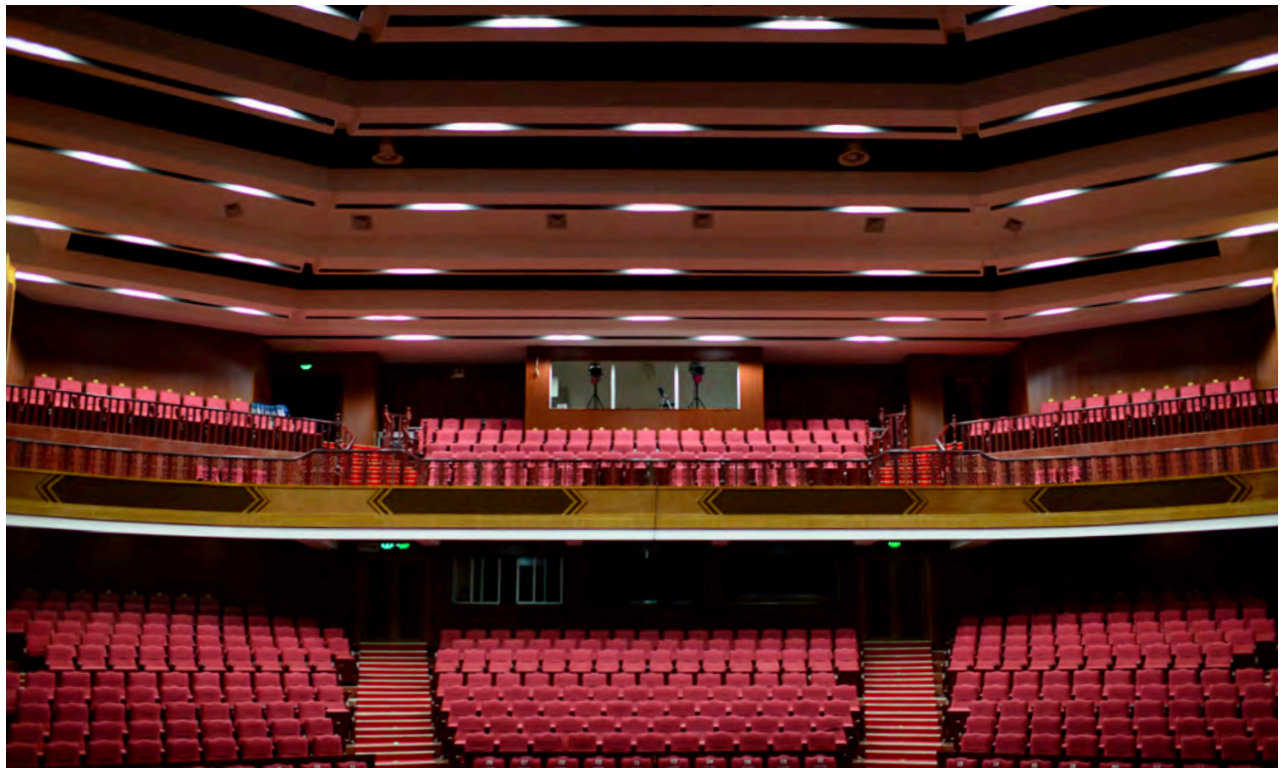
Derelict and overgrown fane, marble steps crumbling.<sup>1</sup>  
An unprepossessing aspect, barely visible from the path,  
itself rather diminished, encroached upon. I cannot give  
you a very good map and you may end up at some other  
ruin. Nor are instructions reliable, except in the sense  
that they will certainly displace you. Is there a rainstorm?  
Seek the nearest pavilion.

<sup>1</sup> Prevarication already. In fact, I am  
on the roof floor of a Hokkien theatre,  
overlooking a famous garden. Although  
the garden is polluted by constant and  
nationalistic karaoke, the rattan chairs  
are comfortable, the toil of computer  
bondage seems abstracted and the clown  
is preparing noodles in the kitchen.

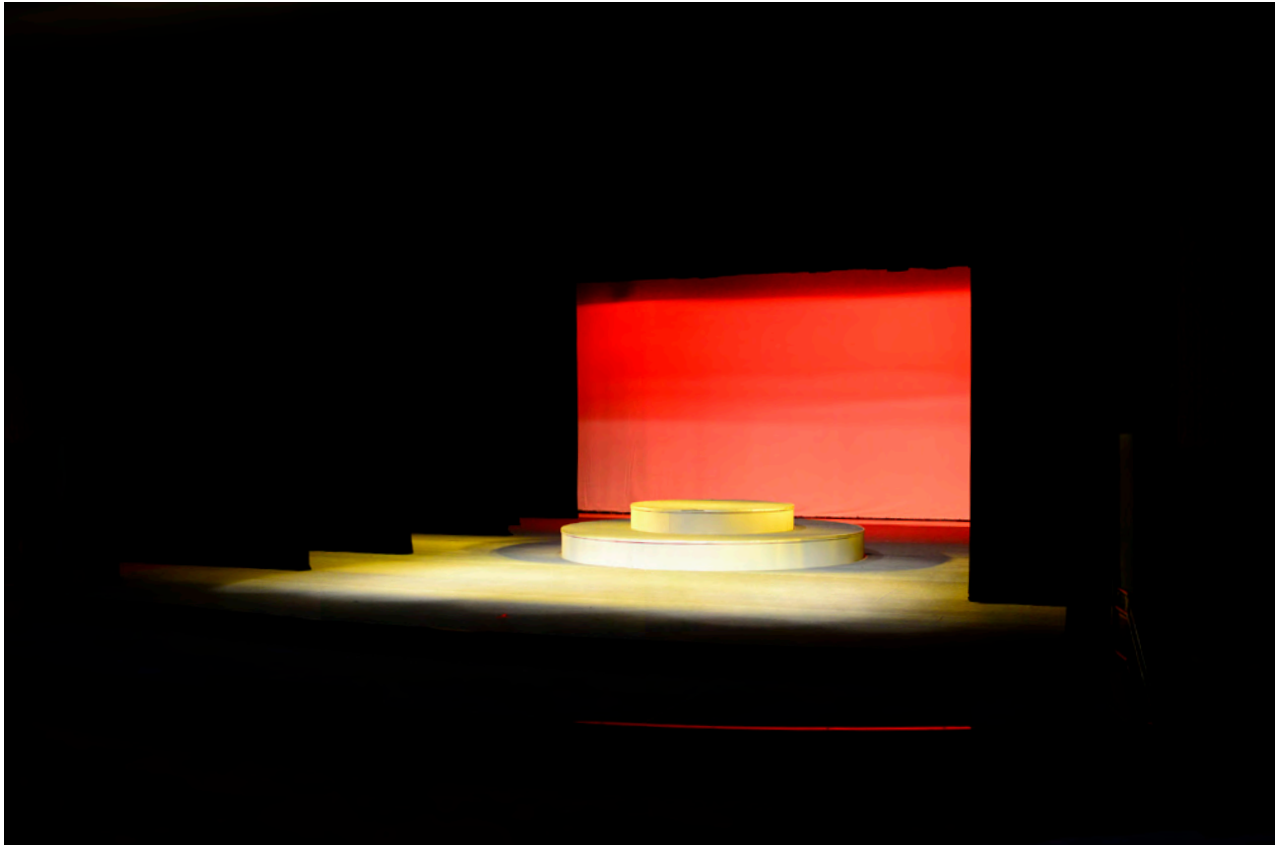
Despite the mists and perils, the purring and screening, I advise you to listen for the drums and clappers on Saturday evenings; pick up their beat underneath the din of construction, the screens' elisions, detours, the blizzard drone of traffic. As you approach, perhaps you will make out the dulcimer, the flute – or else the recollection of a flute – its echo being the space between, like the last pause before the applause begins, began, was to have begun.

What and where is this narrow space? A room is defined by its borders: on one side is text, on the other cinema.<sup>2</sup> Texts underlie the stage – propose the act – but they are also very naked, inflammable and quiet. We can do nothing, go nowhere, without them, though their principal claims – to record, to convince – are weak and wishful, air-painting, ripple-making. Can they be events? More often they are lonely instigations, spinning threads or drawing wires, providing transient and faulty frames, balanced precariously on experience, cast aside and filtered out. They are also solitary, disrupted and defenseless. But enactment never depended on writing and dance likely precedes the spider web of verb.

2 Where is the boundary with experience? There is no boundary with experience. When we are watching people act we are merely reminded of how we are always acting. Of course you can derive this observation from Shakespeare, Calderon, and/or Tang Xianzu, and in fact you would be better off if you went and did that now.







Films are the late, destructive, distributed achievement, turning rapidly into anecdote – into hypnosis. Most often they manifest as collective delusions, alien confections, employing a staff of hundreds to portray intimacy being stripped for the disarmament, the cradling of millions, the hypothermic needle.

Elaborate shadow puppets, they are carefully spliced and scientifically scored, to lull or distract or detract or dull. It takes a strong hand to turn them away from their natural state of waste and into a provocation, even just a process.

The space between is occupied by performance, by theatres, cheap and tawdry, identified in Chinese tradition as more debased than poetry – if a shade nobler than fiction. They are situated in that forgotten sphere, three-dimensional reality, and they are uncomfortable, for when not defaced by projections you will have to deal with the tangibility and proximity of your sweating fellows, the actual plea for which you have paid.

The space between is occupied by performance, by theatres, cheap and tawdry, identified in Chinese tradition as more debased than poetry – if a shade nobler than fiction.

In fact, you too are in the performance, of it, exposed, interpellated, proximate your doziness, your pair of eyes dwelling in darkness and margin, the recipient, the potential interrupter, emitter of pheromones and crucial-moment cough victim, critical joss-burner, rearranger of plot, of character, of time, of word, your inapt adept. Wretched constricted soul or basket of dialogic identities, events or poetry are occurring *at* you, at your unwilling behest, as you sip your wine and mirror yourself in the brief, laughing or agonising other, shell-of-other, mimicry; and by inference, retain, mould, reconstruct yourself.



And, yes, here are the people. For once the old dead dream of community enforced by space and hangover – a mass unstable and energetic, decomposing like radioactive elements. They engage a very old bet, watching the players make an older one: the wager that something in their transmission and incorporation – the passage of meaning (open, brazen, lying) through bodies, voice boxes and musculature – may produce approval. The wishful little prizes and claps on the back or of one hand – or even that approval may turn to subsistence or even livelihood.



They lose this bet, of course, which is the fate of every decent bet.<sup>3</sup> Nor will the people or the players arise and overthrow, they cannot reconstruct, may not even consent to reflect society or defend themselves in terms of gain: they are salutary rather than profitable. They cannot even truthfully admit to influence, to a breaking across the boundary, the little closet of suspension and strict lawlessness. Outside the space, the lies become social rather than Socratic.

Mercy.<sup>4</sup> The people on the stage, like the people being staged, are so inevitably us – with our feints and forgettings, transformations and occlusions, servility, folding, perorations on fugitive love or absent honour. Our perspiring pallor in the blaze, our dripping eyes, our little soubrette arias of delusion, our unconvinced wedding quartets: how much did you – while pretending you were otherwise than you – cause me to think of me, of you-the-other, of us, of else? How much was your cynical sensibility forced to its knees, or your sentimentality exposed, burnt out, in a new and necessary light?

3 Gambling has reached its electric apex with the advent of CGI horses and dogs whose fortunes you must bet on. On the boggling screen, the algorithms progress — certainly not to accrue the highest profits to shadowy entities and predatory shell companies.

4 Note the restraint in the punctuation at this point.



The people on the stage, like the people being staged, are so inevitably us – with our feints and forgettings, transformations and occlusions, servility, folding, perorations on fugitive love or absent honour.

Often you will not be pleased; sometimes you may not even consider. In a world as compartmentalised and demarcated as ours, nervous of thought and suspicious of strangers, you will have been among people – toiling, storytelling people desirous and contemptuous of your attention tonight. Pondering others, flesh-and-blood ones, as they enact pretense for our benefit and we begin to mobilise our responses, our disbeliefs and concessions.<sup>5</sup>

It becomes antiquated to situate human boundaries in the hidey-holes we have become accustomed to: tools, genetics and playfulness. Perhaps instead the human quality is disbelief: the capacity to distrust the eye, in which case humanity squared is to suspend that disbelief. Of course, you can do the same when watching an ad for the world's most marvellous new discovery in chips or electro-hydraulic steering, in deodorant and multivitamins, but that is only the enforced cynicism of our age and our constant need to defend against jingles and rhinoplastic celebrities.

Mendacity has many temples and, as with all temples, purpose resides in and varies with the worshipper.<sup>6</sup> You have been to such a temple – many such temples – today. You are coming from one now and you direct your steps to another. But in the theatre, the lies are, at their most, honest – most human – and, in their regular refusal to instruct, most instructive.



5 This might seem to fall back on a sociological justification for performance. It's an odd historical moment we occupy, where we have to keep finding excuses for being human, for not behaving like better data.

6 Absolutely nothing may be inferred from the switch to religious terminology.



There are two kinds of lies that pretend to be truth.  
One disinforms because it desires to mislead and  
reduce its listener to a pawn or an asset. Exit this place  
whenever, as you must, several times a day, discover  
that you are in it.

The other one is harder to find and discounted  
precisely and ironically because it advises you that  
it is not real or true; incapable of these, a mawkish  
simulacrum. If you are a true believer in it, then you  
have failed its test and will certainly be cast out. It is in  
fact only the façade of a temple and behind it lies the  
garden you are looking for along with the well from  
which we must draw.

There is still some water in that well.

Is it clean? Is it pure?

Of course it is not pure.

How could it be?

.....



**Josh Stenberg** is a Lecturer in the Department of Chinese Studies, poet and short fiction writer. He has translated fiction by authors such as Su Tong, Ye Zhaoyan, and Chen Xue, and is the editor of *Irina's Hat: New Short Stories from China*. He was a Fulbright Taiwan fellow and a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellow in Theatre and Film.



## Enemy aliens: Translating the voices of German internees

Students in a new unit of study within the Department of Germanic Studies had the unmissable opportunity to work with the State Library of New South Wales to translate papers left by Germans internees in Australia during the First World War.

Coordinated by senior lecturer Dr Cat Moir, the project has not only revealed the previously unheard voices of German ‘enemy aliens’ who interned at Australia’s German Concentration Camps, it has also helped students achieve real-world impact.



A student translator recounts the journey in uncovering voices from the archives alongside six fellow classmates – from initial classroom expectations to being the first to translate the stories of this little-known episode of history.

**Written by Giulia Ara**

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Perhaps it's just me, but when I walked into the first class of Translating German Culture, my feelings and expectations of this unit of study were found to be very far from the reality which I gladly discovered as Semester 2 went on. I remember thinking, "Great, only seven people are taking this unit because, well, it's German! Remind me again, why did I choose to take this language?"

Now, it's quite hard to explain how humbled I feel for having taken part in this project, and how much it gave me to reflect upon and grow.

Dr Cat Moir made it clear from the very first day: we were not simply going to study translation theory and exercise the acquired translation skills with pre-set texts. Instead, we were going to work as real translators for The State Library of New South Wales and – I would add – for the sake of history. The massive scale of this project hit us when we visited the Library archives.

Most of us probably imagined the visit to the archives would involve accessing a dusty and mysterious candlelit dungeon filled with ancient books. Instead, this turned out to be a delightful meeting with librarians Anna Corkhill and Margot Riley inside a regular, modern conference room.

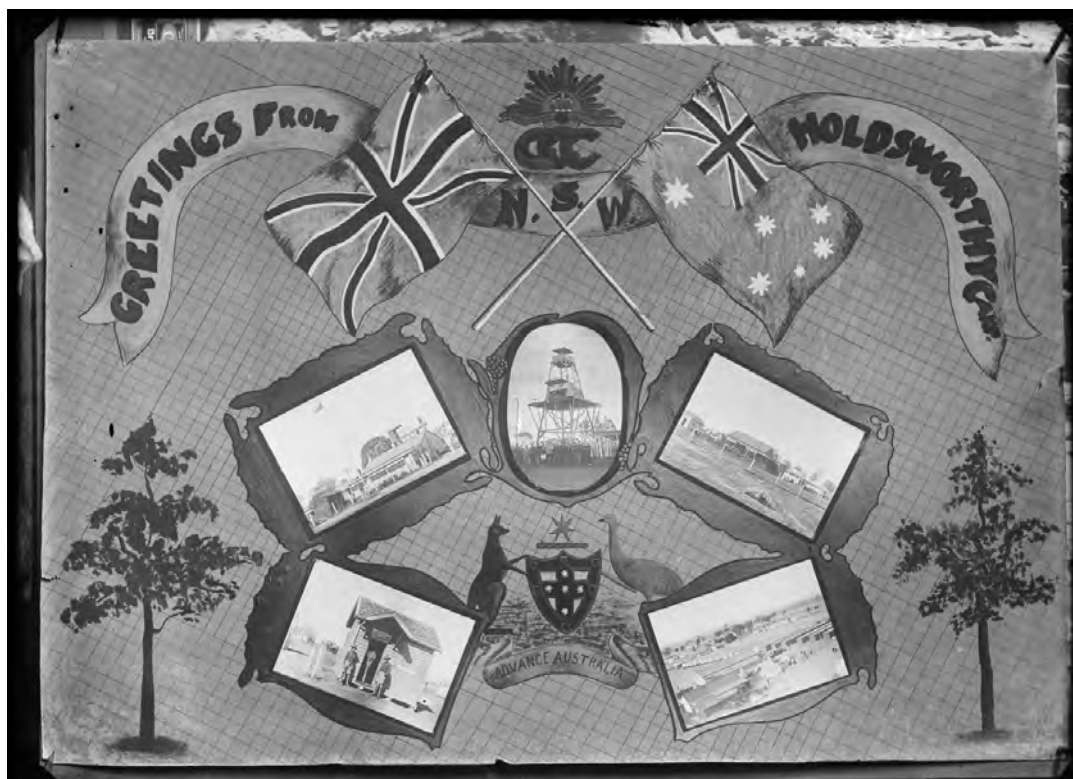
Anna and Margot carefully set out for us the UNESCO Memory of the World collection of papers produced by German internees in Australian camps. These represented the ancient element in the room.

Yet, the co-presence of us and these papers suddenly captured the real essence of our project: coming in close contact with history and the purpose of gaining something useful for the present as well as the future.

The collection of papers we could choose to translate from German into English includes military reports, camp newspapers, letters of complaint as well as personal diaries and poems written by Germans who interned at Trial Bay in the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales and Holsworthy in south-western Sydney during the World War One period. Learning about the history of the 'enemy aliens' from the remarkable lectures given by historian Associate Professor Gerhard Fischer from the School of Languages and Linguistics at University of New South Wales, and from the papers written by the internees' very hands is a whole different story from learning about it in class.



Parcels for internees at the Holdsworthy German Concentration Camp (GCC). Liverpool, NSW. 1916.



Collage of photos and paintings: "Greetings from GCC, NSW, Holdsworthy Camp"



“My classmates and I became important actors and crucial intermediaries between the late German internees and the papers they intended to hand down to posterity – to historians, history enthusiasts, students and anyone interested in going deeper into this short, but touching, part of Australian and world history.”

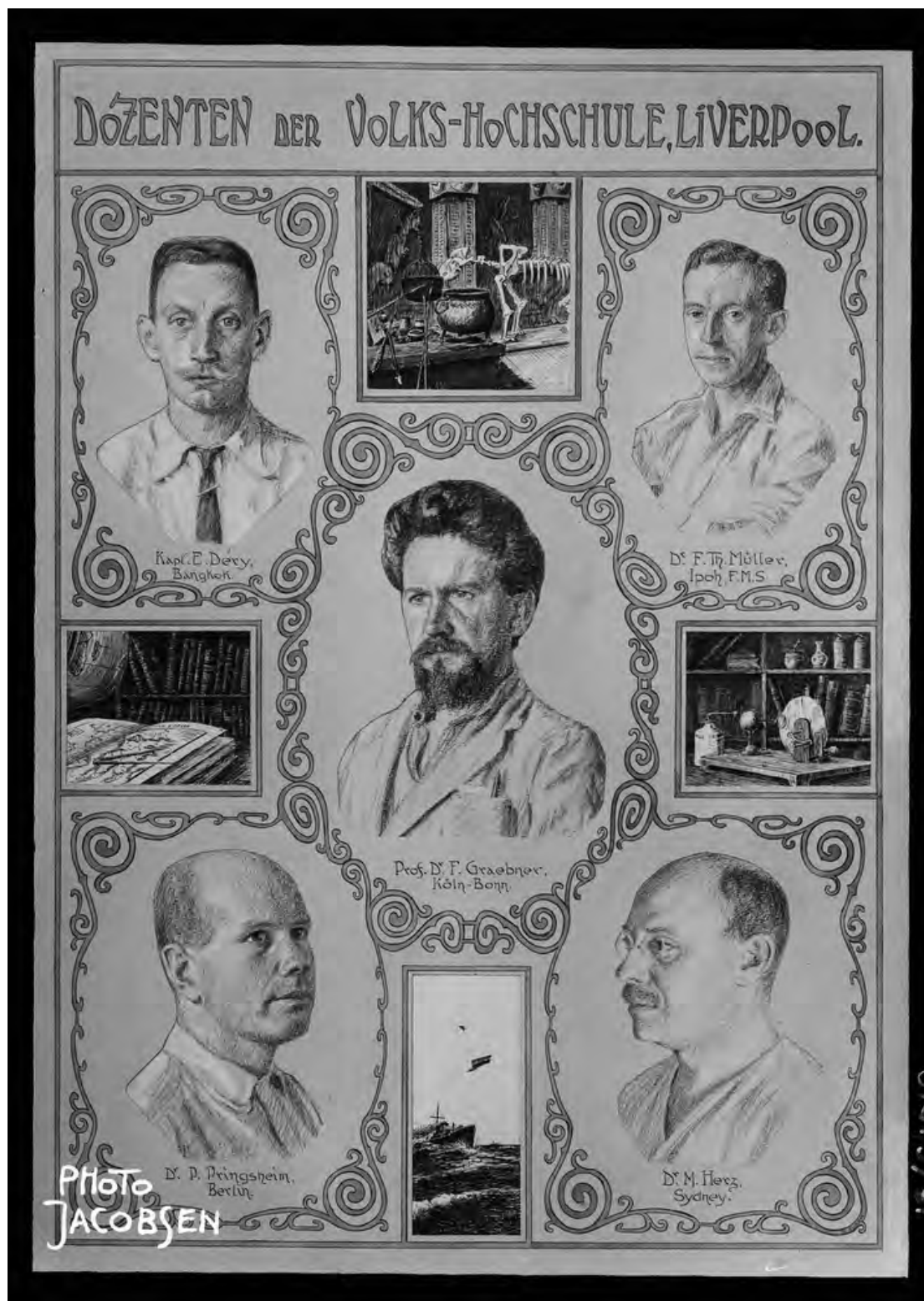
This very part of history has often remained unknown to most even in Australia. The papers we chose to carefully handle and translate are now on display at the State Library of New South Wales – and we are the first to translate them from German into English. This turned a simple university translation project into a mission. My classmates and I became important actors and crucial intermediaries between the late German internees and the papers they intended to hand down to posterity, historians, history enthusiasts, students and anyone interested in going deeper into this short, but touching, part of Australian and world history.

Translating the internees’ letters to family, diaries and poems was arguably our favourite part of the project – and the most challenging. While military reports, camp newspapers articles, advertisements and reviews on cultural events inside the camp came mostly typeset, diaries and poems came elegantly handwritten. After experiencing the moving moment of encountering the fragile, ancient papers that were handwritten 100 years ago, the real challenge arrived.

Translation theory refers to translation loss which occurs when a finished translated text loses some of the culturally and linguistically relevant features of the source text, especially when the lack of a direct equivalent in the translated language makes such loss unavoidable. Surely, we experienced translation loss – and gain, too – while working on this project, but before that, we had to go through another loss: material that we simply could not translate.

As we had previously imagined and learned from other legible papers as well as those that had already been translated, camp life was trying. Enemy aliens<sup>1</sup>, guilty of being born in Germany, a country at war with Australia, suddenly found themselves jailed without trial. Their will to leave behind testimonies about the internment was so strong that it pushed them to challenge the camps’ censorship policy, leading to the confiscation of revealing papers in shorthand. While it posed an impediment on our project, this form of resistance conveys a powerful statement on a historical level.

1 The label of ‘enemy aliens’ was later extended to naturalised British people coming from enemy nations and Australian-born descendant of migrants born in enemy nations.



Card with portraits photographed by Jacobsen with the names of five internees of the Liverpool Holdsworth GCC in NSW. 1916.

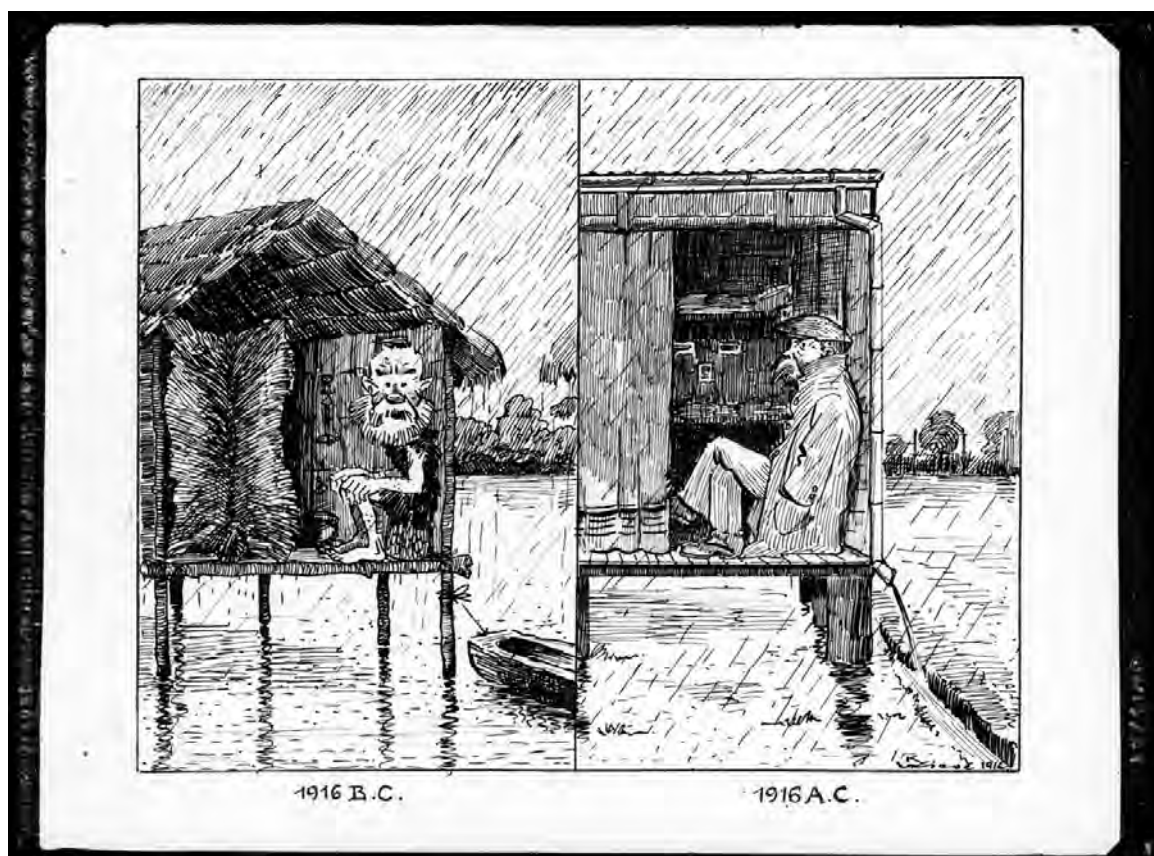




GCC Holdsworthy internee Sports Club 1916.



Internees in the cafe at GCC, 1916.



Satirical cartoon by German Concentration Camp internee in Holsworthy, NSW, 1916.

The handwritten pieces which we were able to decipher and translate gifted us a deeply touching opportunity both as translators and individuals. We got involved and upset like the internees of the Singapore Straits settlement who bitterly complained about rations and scarce sanitary conditions in the camps. We were impressed to read camp newspapers like *Der Kamerad*, in which we found sports, music and theatre articles, and reviews on plays, as well as what seemed to be thriving football and handball competitions. Given the assumption that the internees had a miserable time in the camps, it was impressive to observe the fond will to survive as expressed through the cultivation of their own identity and culture.

We felt empathy and laughed at the satirical pieces (often words accompanied by a cartoon) on the variety and taste levels of camp meals. We carefully sought to preserve rhyming schemes and syllable patterns to do justice to the English-translated versions of internees' poems to respect their lyrical individuality that arose from such troubled times, and to do justice to noble and profound feelings like *Sehnsucht* (yearning), a concept which is too often taught as an abstract concept in class rather than a real human feeling. Most importantly, we filled in noteworthy blanks in history and had the chance to reflect upon Cicero's phrase: *historia magistra vitae* – history is the teacher of life.





From 6 October 2018 to 5 May 2019, you can view the translated works and collection of papers at the UNESCO Six Memory of the World exhibition in the State Library of New South Wales.

For more information, visit

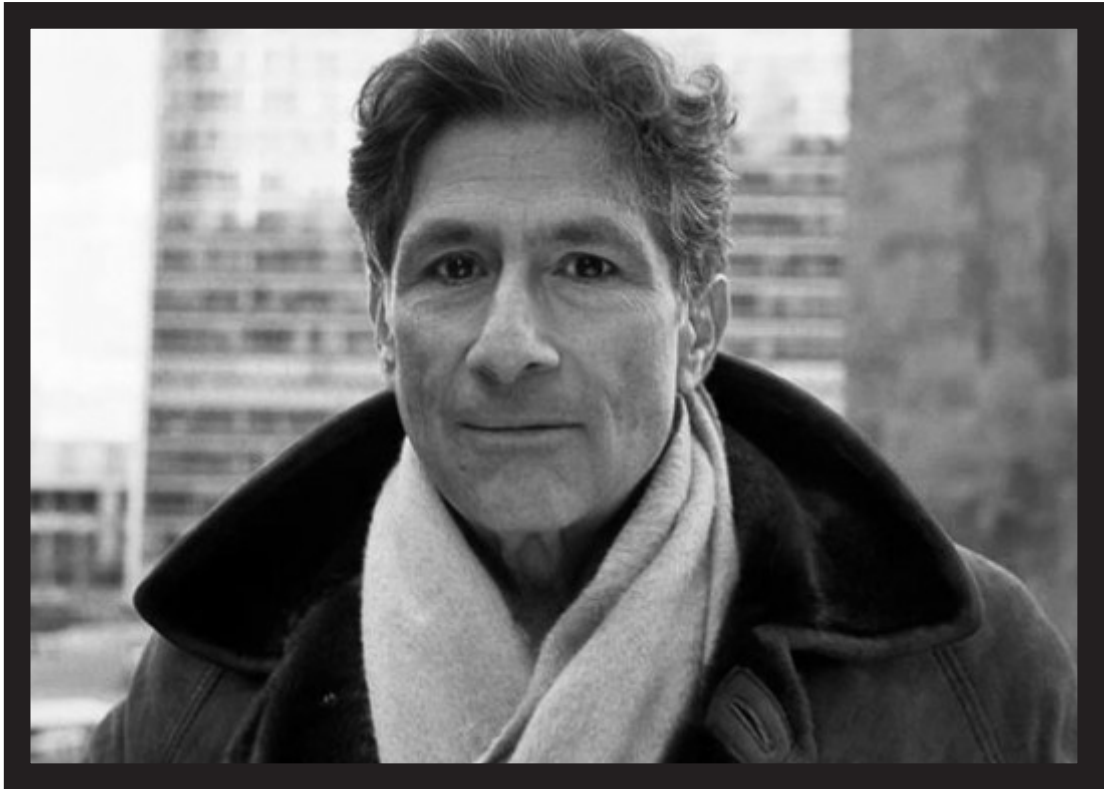
– [sl.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/unesco-six](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/unesco-six)

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Student translators: Holly Anderson, Giulia Ara, Brigitta Bene, Alexander McDonald, Lauren O'Hara, Benjamin Walker and Ruby Watters.

Read Dr Cat Moir's article on *The Conversation* for the history of German internment in wartime Australia

– *In their own words: internees tell of life in our German detainment camps*



## *Celebrating 40 Years of Orientalism*

With the centenary of Asian Studies at the University of Sydney, the Department of Arabic and Language Cultures and Asian Studies Program held a special symposium to commemorate Edward Said's *Orientalism* since its first publication four decades ago.

Over 70 attendees including students, academics, artists and international guests gathered to hear cultural studies scholars and historians of Japan, China, India and the Middle East discuss the legacy of Said's work.



The *40 Years of Orientalism* symposium was held on 13 September 2018 in the Professorial Boardroom of the University of Sydney's Quadrangle Building.

Chaired by academics from the School of Languages and Cultures, three sessional panels featured guests from the University of Sydney's School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry and other universities:

#### **Orientalism and the New Critical Middle East Studies**

Chair: Dr Lucia Sorbera

- Professor Mark LeVine (University of California, Irvine)
- Dr Lana Tatour (University of New South Wales)

#### **East Asia**

Chair: Dr Matthew Stavros

- Professor Devleena Ghosh (University of Technology, Sydney)
- Judith Snodgrass (Western Sydney University)

#### **Orientalism and Now**

Chair: Professor Adrian Vickers

- Dr Meaghan Morris (Department of Gender and Cultural Studies)
- Dr David Brophy (Department of History)

## **Written by Lucia Sorbera**

Arabic Language and Cultures

The symposium was opened by a conversation between myself and Mark LeVine about the power of narratives, and how they have been used to dehumanise Middle Eastern, Muslim and Arab people. “One of the most important arguments in *Orientalism* was that narratives imagined and deployed by those in power can construct a reality that actually did not previously exist,” said LeVine.

“In particular,” according to LeVine, “the idea of ‘Western civilisation’, which has little material or empirical validity as an identity, has had incredible discursive and ideological power to shape an identity of chauvinist superiority and racist, damaging policies – both towards minorities at home and societies abroad.”

LeVine’s words, as I pointed out, resonate with Said’s argument that the terms of ‘East’ and ‘West’ do not hold ontological stability. They are constructions situated in history – and history conceals as much as it narrates.



Professor Mark LeVine at the opening panel. Photo: Christian Wilson.



Adrian Vickers. Photo: Lucia Sorbera.



Matthew Stavros and Davleena Ghosh during the second panel session on East Asia. Photo: Christian Wilson.

“If we are engaging from Australia,  
what is our positioning on this?  
Do we have a different position or are  
we a province of Europe and America?”

**Adrian Vickers**  
Professor of Southeast Asian Studies

Devleena Ghosh, Judith Snodgrass and Matthew Stavros discussed Orientalism from the perspectives of Indian, Japanese and Asian Studies. They directly addressed the necessity to shift away from European categories of knowledge as well as to question the same Eurocentric system of knowledge. The panel called for an epistemic shift, leading to a more intercolonial construction of knowledge.

Posing a question to the panel, Professor Adrian Vickers asked: “If we are engaging from Australia, what is our positioning on this? Do we have a different position or are we a province of Europe and America?” Ghosh offered a gendered perspective in response, noting that, “Being an

Australian woman in India meant to be white and peripheral at the same time and, yes, intercolonial connections are quite important and should be studied more.”

In the final panel, Meaghan Morris discussed *Orientalism* in the context of her experience from teaching cultural studies in Hong Kong. Remarking with her usual spark, Morris challenged the popularisation of Said's text, “a book much more quoted than read.” David Brophy also questioned the centrality of 'the West'. He brought the example of the Uighur perspective whereby the dominant colonial actor had never been the West, but rather China and Russia.

In tune with the legacy of *Orientalism*, the symposium opened a space for discussion that appropriately intersected the history of ideas with politics. As LeVine remembered, *Orientalism* was a book embedded in Said's larger activism. "Said was ready to risk everything for the causes he believed."

"The ideas in the book are directly related to the struggles that defined his life," LeVine commented. This is true and, from my knowledge of the young intellectuals and activists involved in the 2011 Arab revolutions, the identity of the public intellectual is one by which Said is remembered.

Many questions remained open and, of course, there was a big elephant in the room: the wave of violent racism and white supremacism that is crossing the world including Australia, and the fear that education institutions can be complicit in them – if they do not address them unequivocally. History can be a good space to understand the dangers we are facing. On 5 September 1936, anti-Semitic laws were issued in Italy, leading to the expulsion of 896 Italian Jewish teachers from schools and universities. 895 of them were replaced by non-Jewish Italian professors; Massimo Bontempelli was the only one who refused to replace his colleague. Today, like 82 years ago, indifference can turn into complicity.

Edward Said was right to say that *Orientalism* has become a collective book over the years or, in the words of Mark LeVine, "the first song of an album that has yet to be finished." Hopefully, we have been able to reproduce the symphony.



**Dr Lucia Sorbera** is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Arabic Language and Cultures, and also teaches in the study areas of International Comparative Literature and Translation Studies, International and Global Studies, and European Studies. She has published extensively on modern Egyptian history, Egyptian feminism, the Egyptian 2011 revolution and Iraqi cinema. Besides her academic work, Dr Sorbera actively engages in public outreach in Australia and Europe, and regularly contributes to the Sydney Ideas public lectures. Her articles have been published by *Mada Masr* in Egypt, *OrientXXI* in France, *Minima&Moralia* in Italy and *The Conversation* in Australia. She ideated and curates alongside Middle Eastern current affairs analyst Paola Caridi *Arab Souls*, a program focusing on Arab literature and cultures at the Turin International Book Fair in Italy.

 @luciasorbera

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'40 Years of Orientalism' was organised by Dr Matthew Stavros (Director of Asian Studies Program) and Dr Lucia Sorbera (Chair of Department of Arabic Language and Cultures), and supported by the China Studies Centre.





# Autumn cherry blossoms, or why we still need unsexy academic writing

Written by Rebecca Suter

Japanese Studies; International Comparative  
Literature and Translation Studies



We are in mid-October and Sydney is showing signs of spring everywhere. Soon the Jacaranda in the University of Sydney's Main Quadrangle will be in bloom, while azaleas and gardenias are already blossoming all over campus. A little further west, cherry trees are blossoming in the Auburn Botanic Gardens, where the Japanese Garden attracts locals and tourists with its spectacular pink and white flowers every year. But if cherry blossoms are a common sight in Australia in October, they are a little more surprising in Japan, where it is concurrently autumn.

Over the past few days, a large number of English-language media sources – from *Forbes*<sup>1</sup> to *The New York Times*<sup>2</sup> – have published articles reporting the unexpected blossoming of cherry trees in Japan, which they attributed to the unseasonably warm weather and/or to the particularly violent typhoons that the country experienced in late September.

Some of the articles simply present this as a curiosity, while others more directly relate it to global warming, with titles like 'Confused by Climate Change, Japan's Famous Cherry Blossoms Bloom Six Months Early' seen on *Global Citizen*<sup>3</sup>. Many of the articles are accompanied by stock photos of cherry blossom viewing events with spectacular trees in full bloom, like this one from Phys.org<sup>4</sup> which, while not presented as actual photos of the unusual October bloom, contribute to increase the sensational effect of the news.

Cherry trees do, indeed, as all these articles remind us, mostly bloom in April in Japan, and have long been a symbol of spring in the country. What those articles do not say, however, is that there are species of cherry that also bloom in autumn such as *Prunus Subhirtella*, also known in Japanese as *higan sakura* (Autumn Equinox cherry) or *jūgatsu sakura* (October cherry).



The *Prunus Subhirtella*, also known as *higan sakura* or *jūgatsu sakura* (October cherry blossom).  
Photo: Kimon Berlin/Flickr. CC BY-SA 2.0

1 Andrews, R 2018, 'Surprise! Japan's Cherry Blossoms Are Appearing In October – Here's Why', *Forbes*, 17 October.

2 Victor, D 2018, 'Japan's Cherry Blossoms (Some of Them) Appear Months Early', *The New York Times*, 18 October.

3 Deck, J 2018, 'Confused by Climate Change, Japan's Famous Cherry Blossoms Bloom Six Months Early', *Global Citizen*, 19 October.

4 AFP 2018, 'Blooming early! Japan's famed cherry blossoms make unexpected appearance', *Phys.org*, 17 October.



Some municipalities have even turned them into a significant tourist attraction, such as the city of Obara in Aichi prefecture, where autumn-blossoming cherries have been planted alongside Japanese maple trees that turn bright red at around the same time, creating a stunning combination of colours.

The articles cited before – which all refer to the same generic “350 sightings” of cherry blossoms around Japan in October 2018 – do not give details about the species of the blooming cherries. Neither do they mention in any way the existence of autumn-blossoming cherries in Japan. If these sightings have been reported, it is very possible that there have been more of them than usual, which is likely connected to the rise in global temperatures. Providing such information would help put the phenomenon into context and would offer a more balanced picture, but it would also pretty much kill the news value of the fact.

“Japan’s Famous Cherry Blossoms Bloom In October As They Do Sometimes, Particularly The ‘Autumn Sakura’ Species, But This Year There Have Been More Sightings Than Usual, Which Is Arguably Connected To Climate Change” is not exactly clickbait – and, in fact, a much more honest title.

In the past few years, both scholars and journalists have pointed out that journalistic writing needs to appeal to the limited attention of its audience more than it ever did before – particularly in the highly competitive digital media environment today. In an analysis of algorithmic implications behind the popular headlines of online news media, [one commentator](#)<sup>5</sup> notes: “partisanship is an amazing driver of engagement.” Successful journalistic articles on digital platforms, such as those seen on our social media news feeds, are typically the ones that trigger immediate strong responses.



Autumn leaves and cherry blossoms. Obara, Japan. November 2018. Photo: kammo\_t\_asai/Flickr. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

5 Rose-Stockwell, T 2017, ‘This Is How Your Fear and Outrage Are Being Sold for Profit’, [Medium](#), 15 July.





Generic stock images of cherry blossoms like the above are used in the news articles.

Connecting autumn *sakura* to global warming is a good example of this mechanism. Climate change is something most individuals have a strong opinion about; a mention of cherry blossoms blooming “six months early” is bound to pique readers’ interest, whatever their position on the issue may be. It is a sexy topic that will guarantee a high level of audience engagement. An engaging media article often is based on an oversimplified representation of a complex reality that is likely to foster a culture of indignation and counter-indignation that does not allow room for nuanced analysis.

The connection between *sakura* and climate change is also a good example of using a different approach to information analysis and dissemination. Springtime cherry blossom viewings have been an important tradition in Japan since the eighth century AD. They have been reported regularly with a plethora of detail in official logs, personal diaries and literary texts. We thus have today documentary evidence of this natural phenomenon over the course of more than a thousand years, which can provide insight into the changes in the environment that surrounded the cherry trees.

“Japan’s Famous Cherry Blossoms Bloom In October As They Do Sometimes, Particularly The ‘Autumn Sakura’ Species, But This Year There Have Been More Sightings Than Usual, Which Is Arguably Connected To Climate Change” is not exactly clickbait – and, in fact, a much more honest title.

An engaging media article often is based on an oversimplified representation of a complex reality that is likely to foster a culture of indignation and counter-indignation that does not allow room for nuanced analysis.

Scholars such as Associate Professor Aono Yasuyuki from Osaka Prefectural University, who studied the area in the former capital of Kyoto, have collected this data and examined it to gauge the changes in the area's temperature over the course of 12 centuries<sup>6</sup>. The results of this kind of research are much more complex – and much more interesting – than the “autumn *sakura*” news items cited at the beginning of this piece. They are also potentially much more useful to understand climate change.

This is why we need – more than we ever did before – a space for the kind of nuanced, unsexy writing that is becoming more and more difficult to produce in digital media.



**Rebecca Suter** is Associate Professor and Chair of Department of Japanese Studies, as well as Director of International Comparative Literature and Translation Studies. Her main research interest is in modern Japanese literature and comparative literature. Her first book, *The Japanization of Modernity*, focused on contemporary Japanese writer Murakami Haruki, particularly on his role as a cultural mediator between Japan and the United States, as well as on his use of meta-fictional techniques. Before coming to Sydney, she taught Japanese modern literature at Harvard University and Brown University. She also works as a translator of manga, and has translated works by Shinohara Chie, Anno Moyoko, Miuchi Suzue, Asano Inio, Kitoh Mohiro, Katayama Kyoichi, and Unita Yumi, among others.

6 Kazui, K 2007 'Phenological data series of cherry tree flowering in Kyoto, Japan, and its application to reconstruction of springtime temperatures since the 9th century', *International Journal of Climatology* 28(7): 905–914.







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