**Australian Social Sciences in the Asian Century**

**Annual Symposium 2012**

**Academy of the Social Sciences, Australia**

The White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century emphasises the importance of developing an education system that encourages Australians to be Asia “literate” and Asia “capable” and which strengthens “research and teaching links between Australian institutions and those in the region”. Education, as “Australia’s fourth largest export earner”, is seen as playing a crucial role in building “people-to-people” links and “intangible assets, such as networks and knowledge of our region”.

In short, the White Paper highlights the need for a deeper intellectual engagement with Asia. This year’s Annual Symposium focuses on this pressing national concern and the challenges for the social sciences. How can we foster social science practitioners who are aware of, and willing to learn from, the diverse social science traditions in the region? What is the relevance of such an engagement to theory and methodology in the social science disciplines, to the study of a broad range of societies (including Australia), and to addressing contemporary issues which cross national borders?

After all, Asian countries are the source of many of our international students, and host an increasing number of the world's leading universities. The Asian Century’s shifts in economic and political power will also involve a changing geopolitics of knowledge. The Symposium is therefore designed to be relevant to all who are interested in the intellectual, social and policy implications for Australia of the Asian Century – as well as to specialist Asian “area studies” experts.

Improved Asia literacy will enhance Australia’s capacity to develop cultural and trade relationships in the region, and give Australian universities a comparative advantage in the Asian Century. This symposium will be of interest to policy-makers, business leaders, the media, and educators.

Specific aims of the Symposium are:

* to present the diversity of the social sciences in the region
* to bring diverse ways of doing social sciences into dialogue with each other
* to consider the role of Australia-based social scientists in mediating between different ways of doing social sciences in the region
* to provide an intellectual, social scientific framework for calls to engage with the Asia-Pacific region and to develop Asia literacy
* to consider the role of the social sciences in addressing pressing transnational social concerns in the region, and
* to examine the implications of the White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century for Australia’s higher education system and social scientists in particular

*Above all, a key aim of the Symposium is to draw the attention of Australian social scientists who are non-Asianists to some of the exciting insights that can be gained from engaging with the rich and diverse social science traditions in our region.*

The Symposium will draw on insights from economics, education, gender studies, history, political science, psychology, sociology and urban planning. Issues covered will range from the impact of the Asian Century on Australian tertiary education to the contributions which engaging with diverse social science traditions can make to understanding shared regional problems such as economic development, human security, climate change, , reproductive control, trade liberalisation and financial governance.

**Symposium Programme**

9.00-9.05 President’s welcome: **Barry McGaw**

9.05-9.15 Co-Convenors’ Introduction: **Vera Mackie** and **Carol Johnson**

9.15-9.40 **Raewyn Connell** ‘The Global Dynamics of the Social Sciences’

*Chair: Tim Rowse*

**Raewyn Connell** will reflect on the intellectual underpinnings of the social sciences, including her pioneering work on southern theory and global knowledge issues, including the importance of engaging with, and the insights that can be gained from, some key work produced in South and South East Asia. She will also identify some of the Australian educational policy issues that arise as a result of the global dynamics of social science

9.40-10.00 **Discussion**

**10-10.30 Morning tea**

10.30-12.00 **Diversity in the Social Sciences**

*Chair: Heather Goodall*  
10: 30~11.20 This panel will focus on the diverse traditions of social sciences in the Asian region. **Sujata Patel** will reflect on the colonial origins of the social science disciplines which have engaged with the Asian region, arguing that in the twenty-first century we need to move beyond these colonial frameworks which have reinforced restrictive and hierarchical national disciplinary and knowledge boundaries, in order to develop novel ways of thinking about the global intersections which connect and divide the world in new ways. **Chua Beng Huat** discusses the need for scholars in Asia to accept the West as one particular point of reference among others, while diversifying the points of reference to include issues and perspectives grounded in the Asian region. He argues that ‘inter-referencing’ Asia when examining political and economic practices, ranging from export-oriented industrialization, to urban planning and regional cultural media industries, can potentially generate concepts that more adequately explain developments in Asia, rather than simply using ‘universalising’ concepts developed outside of Asia.

11.20-12.00 **Discussion**

**12.00-1.15 Lunch**

1.15–2.35 **Regional Issues for the Social Sciences**

*Chair: Vera Mackie*

1.15-2.00 One of the challenges for the social sciences in the twenty-first century is that the urgent problems faced in the region transcend national borders and therefore need supranational, regional or global solutions. **Tessa Morris-Suzuki** focuses on recent signs of a gradual transition to a ‘post Cold War’ East Asia, rather different from the earlier transformations of the Western hemisphere. A regional approach is needed to grasp the connecting threads that link social and political changes occurring throughout East Asia, and to visualize the possible long term implications of these changes, whether we are considering security in the conventional sense or human security in the wake of disasters. **Sylvia Estrada-Claudio** takes a critical approach to issues of reproductive freedom, drawing on her work as a medical practitioner, psychologist and academic in the Philippines and her involvement in regional and global networks of advocates for reproductive health and reproductive control. **Kanishka Jayasuriya** will argue that the study of Asia needs to be incorporated into the social sciences at all levels – people, institutions, and content. A truly global social science itself needs to be fundamentally oriented towards a more problem oriented approach which will enable us to build research around key issues, problems, and puzzles of social, economic, and political transformations pertaining to the region as a whole, ranging from development issues to issues of financial governance and climate change.

2.00-2.35 **Discussion**

**2.35-3.05 Afternoon tea**

**3.05-4.30 Australian Social Sciences Engage the Asian Century**

*Chair: Carol Johnson*

3.05-3.50 This panel will focus on the recently-released White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century, its policy implications, and the contributions which Australian social scientists can make to addressing the issues raised. **Simon Marginson** will focus on the implications of the development of higher education in the region, particularly in ‘Post-Confucian’ university systems, for the Australian social sciences and tertiary education more generally, as well as their implications for our understanding of issues of social and human capital and governmentality. **Leong Liew** will analyse the government’s focus on the role of access to tertiary education as the means to achieve the higher economic productivity required in the Asian Century to improve standards of living for the nation’s citizens. In the process, he will draw attention to relevant policy issues that impact on whether higher productivity growth and reducing income inequality are to be achieved. **Peter Drysdale** will consider the economic implications of the Asian Century for Australia, drawing on his long career of engagement with such institutions as APEC and his membership of the Advisory Panel for the White Paper.

3.50-4.30 **Discussion**

4.30 **Close and President’s Drinks**