

ASIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA, Inc.

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Dear Sir/Madam:

The Council of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, Inc. has asked me as Immediate Past-President to make this submission on its behalf.

The circumstances outlined in the ASAA's comprehensive report, *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge* (2002) [enclosed in hard copy and available on the Web at <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/asia-knowledge-book-v70.pdf>] and in its Budget Submission for 2005-06 [attached electronically, sent in hard copy and available at <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/Budget/ASAA-budget-sub-2005.doc>] are still relevant.

The findings in those two documents may be summarized:

- Australia's capacity to learn and teach about China in its universities is slightly weaker than it was ten years ago. The base then was not high – fewer than 2 or 3 per cent of university students were exposed to any study of modern China and this was still true in 2002 when the *Maximizing* report was published;
- enrolments in Chinese language have grown sharply from a very low base, but the majority of students in such programs are students from Asia, usually from character-based-language backgrounds (Chinese or Japanese). They return to their homes after their studies; they do not add to Australia's foundations of knowledge or language ability

- retirements and head-hunting of senior scholars, who are often not replaced or replaced at a junior level, have reduced the capacity to deliver influential undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programs about China in Australian universities.

The ASAA advocates a strategy for dealing with this knowledge crisis in *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge* and in its Budget Submission, 2005-06. It calls for targeted programs to renew and reposition university expertise and deploy it for maximum impact in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programs. It further proposes programs to improve the attractiveness, the depth and the morale of language programs.

Australia and China are locked in a rapidly growing, intimate involvement. Australians are ill-prepared for that involvement, as indicated by the puzzlement over the "1000 spies" claim of asylum-seeking diplomat Chen Yonglin in June 2005 or the classroom murders committed by the disturbed and lonely Monash University student Huan Yun Xiang in October 2002. Few Australians have the knowledge or the skills to engage their Chinese peers in meaningful discussion. Yet discussion – meaningful or not – is inevitably going to occur. Until Australia commits itself to equipping the next generation with languages, social skills and historical and political knowledge of China (and other Asian countries), such discussion will take place on terms that do not favour Australia.

The President of the ASAA, Robert Cribb ([robert.cribb@anu.edu.au](mailto:robert.cribb@anu.edu.au)), of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, would be happy to appear before the committee, or to depute ASAA members who are China specialists to appear, to elaborate on the points made in this letter and in the two ASAA documents referred to.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Jeffrey, FAHA, FASSA  
(Professor)  
Immediate Past-President

*Enclosures:*

1. "Submission to the 2005-06 Federal Budget. After the tsunami – the urgency of maximizing Australia's Asia knowledge"
2. *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge: Repositioning and Renewal of a National Asset* (Melbourne: ASAA, 2002)



Submission  
to the 2005-06  
**FEDERAL  
BUDGET**

***After the tsunami –***  
the urgency of maximizing  
Australia's Asia knowledge

Renewing and repositioning a national asset

**Asian Studies Association of Australia, Inc.**

February 2005

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## Executive summary

The Asian Studies Association of Australia's 2005-06 budget submission draws attention to the urgent need to re-vitalize Australia's capacity to teach and research about the countries of Asia in the light of the tsunami disaster of December 2004. The response to this natural disaster emphasized the ties between Australia and its neighbours and the growing need for language capabilities and historical, political and cultural awareness. Tellingly, Australia's rapid and generous response to the devastation in Aceh produced a desperate demand for Australian speakers of Indonesian, which can no longer be met. Enrolments in Indonesian language in Australian universities have fallen by 15 per cent since 2001 and represent no more than 1,800 students at all levels of study and ability.

This submission identifies particular areas – language teaching and renewal of expertise – that require immediate attention over and above the important initiatives already taken by the Australian Government to promote Australia's Asian knowledge.

It recommends:

Funding Ten Chairs of Asian Language to signal that the national interest demands Australians fluent in the languages of the region **Cost: \$1.5 million annually for 5 years**

Securing Strategically Important Languages by funding tertiary institutions to provide both web-based delivery, and face-to-face teaching in the locality of the institution, of a number of languages of lesser demand, but high strategic importance. **Cost: \$1.2 million annually for 5 languages for 5 years**

Renewing Australia's Asia Knowledge by creating 15 entry-level appointments in the study of Asia in Australian universities to be created at the rate of five a year for three years. **Cost: \$1.5 million annually for 5 years**

Establishing an "Australian Fulbright" Scheme for Asia which would build links with people who make policy and influence opinion in Asian countries, thereby enhancing and promoting Australia's Asia knowledge. **Annual cost for 3 fellowships: \$270,000**

Holding a Language Summit to provide national leadership in the promotion of Asian language study and as an impetus to policy development. **Cost: \$200,000 (2005)**

## 1. Asia knowledge: urgently needed, clearly shrinking

*“And just as we expect our neighbours [in Asia] to respect our values and our institutions, we have tried to develop a greater understanding of, and sensitivity to, the historic and cultural foundations of their societies ... The government has always understood the imperative of close engagement with the region.”*

- John Howard, Asialink national forum on Australia’s engagement with Asia, Canberra, 13 August 2004.

The tsunami that devastated the Indian Ocean region on 26 December 2004 highlighted Australia’s links to its region, as did Australia’s unprecedented commitment, sealed in the Prime Minister’s speech of 9 January 2005, to helping recovery, particularly in Indonesia.

This submission by the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) makes the following case:

- **first**, that Australia’s capacity to understand and talk to its neighbours in the region is stalled at an undesirably low level;<sup>1</sup> and
- **second**, that to enhance that capacity requires only modest financial investment, coupled with national leadership.

The study of Asia justifies special concern because

- interaction with Asia is an inevitable and natural part of the life experience of growing numbers of Australians
- more than half of Australia’s trade is with countries of Asia and yet long-term investment in the region is not strong
- special attention is needed to communicate Asia’s different and varied history, tradition and politics – this is *not* Europe or North America where most Australians have a cultural headstart
- Australia’s security depends on relations with the peoples of Asia
- one in every 20 Australians comes from a country of Asia

This submission puts forward the first steps towards enhancing Australia’s Asia knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> The circumstances outlined in *Maximizing Australia’s Asia Knowledge* (Melbourne: ASAA, 2002) have not changed significantly.

See <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/asia-knowledge-book-v70.pdf>.

## 2. Australia's Asia knowledge, 2004

*“We see aid groups practically on top of each other, competing for scarce resources such as translators, petrol, vehicles, helicopters, bulldozers ...”*

- Louise Garrett, development specialist, speaking after the tsunami, “PM,” ABC Radio, 6 January 2005.

A shortage of petrol, vehicles, helicopters and bulldozers can be remedied in hours or days. Able, culturally attuned speakers of languages take years to develop.

**Internationally**, Australia's enmeshment with Asia became even more evident in 2004 with the tsunami tragedy reminding Australians of their strong links to their region. Before that, Indonesia's election of a new president reminded Australians of the experiment with democracy and nationhood being carried on by our largest, nearest neighbour.

**Economically**, China's potential excited investors around the world and appeared to herald particular opportunities for Australia.<sup>2</sup> For the first time as well, there was sustained discussion of an “Indian economic miracle,” which made itself felt most obviously in the call centres based in India providing services to clients all over the world and in direct Qantas flights to Mumbai.

**Strategically**, Australia was actively concerned in efforts to defuse tensions in North Asia. It was also involved in various measures to combat terrorism in the region.

**Domestically and educationally**, there were promising developments in 2004:

- an International Centre for Excellence in Asia-Pacific Studies (ICEAPS), established at the Australian National University, offers prospects for national coordination of Asia-related activities (<http://iceaps.anu.edu.au/>)
- the National Centre for Language Training established at the UNSW aims to provide “short practical beginners courses through to more advanced courses,” which will be “targeted to the needs of Australian business” ([http://www.pm.gov.au/news/media\\_releases/media\\_Release1071.html](http://www.pm.gov.au/news/media_releases/media_Release1071.html))
- an Asia-Pacific Futures Network (APFN), funded by the Australian Research Council, provides a five-year capacity to network research scholars and the wider community of professionals who work in countries of Asia (<http://www.sueztozuva.org.au/>)
- an expanded scheme of Endeavour scholarships increases opportunities for research scholars from Australia to work in Asia and vice versa (<http://www.dest.gov.au/International/Awards/endeavour.htm>)
- the Australian Federal Police (AFP) reported that more of fifty of its officers had a knowledge of Indonesian language<sup>3</sup> and indicated a commitment to cross-cultural training for staff being sent on overseas missions.

<sup>2</sup> “CBA flags a Chinese evolution,” *Age*, 26 November, 2004, Business, p. 1 – “fantastic opportunities” – “robust cultural exchange.”

<sup>3</sup> Telephone interview, Kirk Coningham, Australian Federal Police with R. Jeffrey, 21 September 2004.

These measures, however, do not address the shrinking potential for Australia's university students to learn about the countries of Asia. The facts are that

- fewer than 5 per cent of university students did any study of an Asian country in 2001
- fewer than 3 per cent studied a language of Asia at any level
- languages of Asia, particularly Indonesian, are in jeopardy at some universities and Indonesian enrolments have fallen nationally by 15 per cent since 2001
- languages of high national importance, but lower student demand (e.g., Thai, Vietnamese, Korean, Hindi and Urdu, Tagalog, Arabic), are increasingly seen as financially unviable by university administrators
- Asia expertise in disciplines like History and Politics is contracting not growing
- teacher-education programs are not providing knowledge of Asia to future teachers
- curriculum at Years 11 and 12 provides little opportunity to learn about Asia.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Languages of Asia

*“Language proficiency represents another core competency for the A[ustralian] I[n]telligence C[ommunity]. Many of the agencies lack depth in this area, a weakness that reflects generally poor levels of formal foreign language training in Australia.”* - Philip Flood, *Report of the Inquiry into Australian Intelligence Agencies*, 2004, Chapter 7 [http://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/intelligence\\_inquiry](http://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/intelligence_inquiry)

The Flood Report into Australian intelligence agencies underlined the problem of language-learning in multi-cultural, monolingual Australia:

- English is the sole official language
- various other languages contend for support in schools and universities and
- no single country is in such wide, regular contact with Australians as to make its language the obvious choice as “Australia's second language”

Australia needs a number of “second languages”.

The problem is how to offer such languages widely, economically and effectively. To solve this problem is essential, not merely for security but for long-term commerce, communication and social harmony, both in Australia and in the world.

Since 2001, the ASAA has collected annual data on university enrolments in Asian languages. These figures are the most reliable available because they are collected by language specialists who understand both the complexity of the measuring system and the workings of their own university's information units. The data are recorded as Equivalent Fulltime Student Units (EFTSU).<sup>5</sup>

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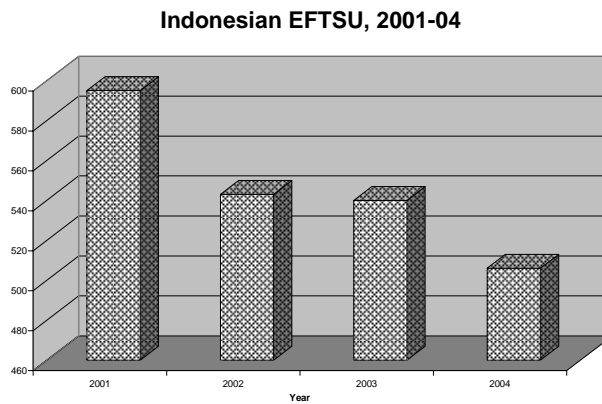
<sup>4</sup> See *Maximising Australia's Asia Knowledge* for detail.

<sup>5</sup> An Equivalent Fulltime Student Unit (EFTSU) represents the number of subjects a student in a particular course must do to be recognized as a fulltime student. For example, a student in an Arts degree might be required to do three subjects (e.g., History, English and Japanese) to qualify as fulltime. Her or his enrolment in Japanese would therefore count as one-third of an EFTSU. Three individual students in the same Japanese class then add up to one EFTSU for purposes of calculating Japanese enrolments.

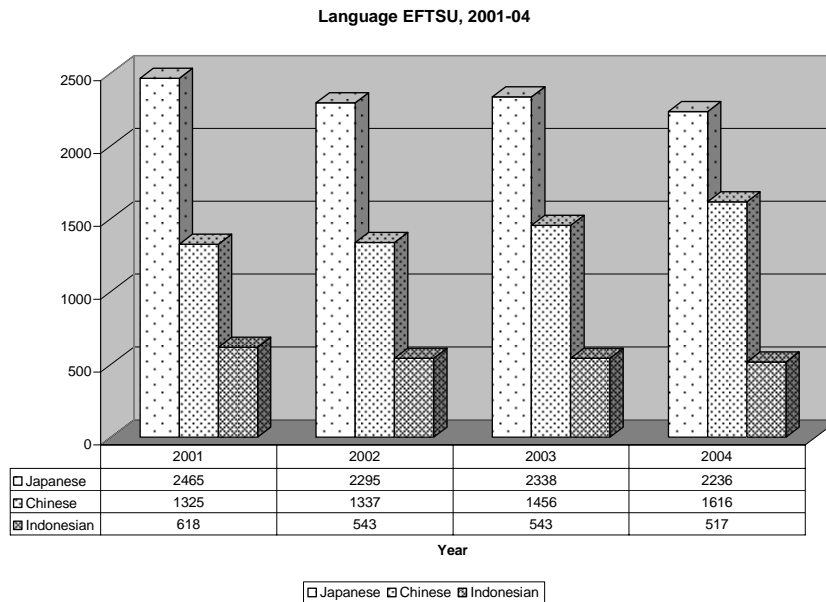


Between 2001 and 2004, the data show that enrolments:

- *fell* in Indonesian by more than 15 per cent



- *fell* in Japanese by 5 per cent
- *rose* in Chinese by more than 20 per cent



Source: Data compiled by the ASAA from universities.

Other languages of Asia survive through the commitment of specific individuals and their ability to influence their institutions. There is no national plan to maintain and improve the availability of these languages. They continue to run the risks that come with the loss of a key advocate or a shift in institutional policy. Such signals of uncertainty in themselves reduce student demand.

## 4. Urgent need

*“Almost none of the high-profile journalists who operate in the Arab world speak more than a few words of Arabic ... The networks rely excessively on ‘fixers’ and local intriguers for their access to well-placed interview subjects , but ... the journalist ... is merely a spectator receiving one possible translation of the words he [or she] retails.”* - Nicholas Rothwell, *The Australian*, 3 February 2005, p. 13.

Four immediate measures will arrest the shrinkage, and begin a vigorous extension, of vital areas of Australia’s Asia knowledge. These measures require the creation of:

- a) 10 nationally funded chairs of language to oversee the teaching and promotion of key languages with vigour and direction
- b) a nationally funded and nationally available method for teaching languages of lower demand
- c) 15 entry-level positions to reposition and renew Australian expertise on Asia in universities and thereby complement initiatives in language
- d) an Australian “Fulbright” scheme for Asia.

### **a) Nationally funded chairs of language**

To signal that the national interest needs Australians fluent in the languages of the region, the ASAA recommends that the Australian government fund, for five years, 10 chairs of Asian language. Universities would tender for such chairs. They would be required to:

- i) demonstrate their existing commitment to the language and its attendant studies
- ii) undertake to preserve the position beyond the expiry of the five-year Commonwealth funding.

The occupant would be expected not merely to lead a vigorous language program but to promote the program throughout the institution and the community.<sup>6</sup>

**Cost: \$1.5 million annually (5 years)**

### **b) Securing Strategically Important Languages**

No single university in Australia can be expected to maintain languages of high strategic importance but low student demand. To maintain the teaching of such languages requires a national program which will in turn create a national – and therefore economically viable – cohort of students.

The ASAA recommends that the Australian government call for tenders from tertiary institutions to provide both web-based delivery, and face-to-face teaching in the locality of the institution, of a number of languages of lesser demand, but high strategic importance. New technologies and appropriate incentives should be used to encourage such programs to expand their potential to deliver language instruction nationally and globally.

These languages might include Arabic, Burmese, Hindi-Urdu, Khmer, Korean, Pashto, Persian, Tagalog, Thai, Vietnamese or others. Many of these languages are spoken in regions of political instability, thus underlining their security importance.

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<sup>6</sup> The Canadian government instituted a comparable, though far larger program, when it established 1,000 Canada Research Chairs in 2000. [www.chairs.gc.ca](http://www.chairs.gc.ca)

The terms would include:

- funding for the equivalent of two fulltime positions for a period of four years in the first instance
- developmental, infrastructure and administrative expenses
- the requirement that successful institutions:
  - teach the language face-to-face in the locality of the institution
  - teach the language in distance mode, using all appropriate technologies and techniques (including face-to-face summer schools and in-country study periods), and drawing on a student pool from all Australian universities and fee-paying students overseas
  - promote awareness of these languages to all Australians (not merely conventional students) and internationally to fee-payers
  - secure agreement from Australian universities to credit these language courses towards a student's degree in any institution in Australia (*Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge*, p. 52-3)
  - collaborate with the National Centre for Language Training

**Cost: \$1.2 million annually (5 languages, 5 years)**

### **c) *Repositioning and Renewing Australia's Asia Knowledge***

To reposition and renew Australian expertise on Asia, the ASAA recommends the creation of 15 entry-level appointments in the study of Asia in Australian universities to be created at the rate of five a year for three years.

Institutions would tender for these opportunities, to be awarded partly on the basis of an institution's demonstrated commitment to the study of Asia. These appointments will require an institution to show that the position has support in at least two disciplinary areas. A key aim is to *reposition* the study of Asia by fostering and enriching the *diffusion* of Asia knowledge throughout institutions and courses. The government would meet the salaries for these appointments for three years, after which institutions would be required to guarantee their continuation.

(*Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge*, p. 54-6)

**Cost: average \$770,000 annually (5 years)**

### **d) *An "Australian Fulbright" Scheme for Asia***

The ASAA recommends the creation of three fellowships to be awarded annually to distinguished younger scholars, officials or writers to work in Australian institutions. These fellowships should bear the name of an outstanding Australian individual or of a company or institution (which might be invited to endow such fellowships) and should aim to carry the prestige of "a Fulbright" or "a Rhodes" but be distinctively Australian (and named after a prominent Australian). This has the advantage of further signalling high-level commitment by Australia to constant exchange with its neighbours. The scheme would build links with people who make policy and influence opinion in Asian countries, thereby enhancing and promoting Australia's Asia knowledge. Such two-way traffic:

- contributes to the diffusion of Asia knowledge in Australia
- establishes networks for Australians studying and working in Asian countries

- makes women and men from Asian countries “Australia literate.” Australia benefits from having larger numbers of influential neighbours with extensive experience of Australia.

When *Maximizing Australia’s Asia Knowledge* was endorsed by members of the House of Representatives on 8 September 2003, Dr Andrew Southcott (Liberal, Boothby, SA) applied a name to this recommendation (p.62):

Such a scheme requires the name of an outstanding Australian. When looking for a name, we should not go past Weary Dunlop, a surgeon famous for his humanitarian work on the Burma-Thai railway who had a lifelong interest in South-East Asia ... I encourage ... the Minister for Education, Science and Training and the Minister for Foreign Affairs to adopt the recommendations.

Hansard, 8 September 2003, p. 18900

**Annual cost (three fellowships): \$270,000**

## 5. Long-term strategy

*“Australia in my view is a country whose dominant interests in the years ahead will be found in this region [Asia]. This is our part of the world, this is the part of the world to which we most immediately relate, not only in a geographic sense but increasingly also in a strategic and economic sense”.*

- John Howard, Austcham Lunch, Singapore, 1 February 2005.

The urgent measures advocated above should be part of an integrated, longer-term strategy to make the most of Australia’s position on the map and its Asia-knowledge potential. Both symbols and substance are necessary. Symbols are important because they affect the perceptions of Australians and Australia’s neighbours. But symbols must foster practical programs aimed at measurable goals.

### ***Council for Maximising Australia’s Asia Knowledge and Skills***

In past submissions, the ASAA has recommended the establishment of a Council for Maximizing Australia’s Asia Knowledge and Skills chaired by a distinguished Australian, with a board composed of suitable appointees and served by a small secretariat. The ASAA remains convinced that such a coordinating mechanism would both serve to ensure Australians get the most out of public investment in its Asia knowledge and to encourage the private sector to contribute to building Australia’s ability to interact with Asia. The question of such a coordinating mechanism should be one topic of debate at the Language Summit.

### ***The Language Summit***

The summit would be a mechanism for coordinating government and academic programs, as well as an opportunity to engage the wider community, including business, media and schools in a discussion about how best to address the urgent need to nurture Australia’s language skills. It could be a collaborative effort involving the Australian Government, the recently established International Centre for Excellence in Asia and Pacific Studies,

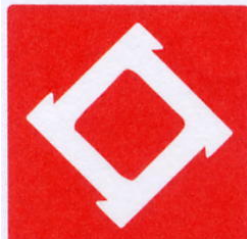
the National Centre for Language Training, the Asian Studies Association of Australia and others. Among its aims would be the identification of sponsorship programs to assist in the funding of the above proposals.

## 6. Methods of funding

Recognising that fostering Asia knowledge affects many strands of Australia's national interest—strategic security; commercial success; domestic harmony; world competitiveness, including in educational attainment—the ASAA makes this submission to four departments:

- Education, Science and Training
- Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Defence
- Industry and Tourism

The ASAA also sees potential for attracting private sponsors to assist in the funding of some of its proposals, although considers this is more likely to be achieved once the Australian government has taken the lead in recognising the urgent need to revitalise Asian studies in Australian universities.



## Appendix

**Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) Executive and Council, 2005-06**

<p><i>President</i>  <b>Robert CRIBB</b>  <u>Robert.Cribb@anu.edu.au</u>  (02) 6125 4247  Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies  Australian National University  ACT 0200</p>	<p><i>Immediate Past-President</i>  <b>Robin JEFFREY</b>  <u>R.Jeffrey@latrobe.edu.au</u>  (03) 9387 3980 h; (03) 9479 2692 w  Politics Program  La Trobe University  Victoria 3086</p>
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<p><b>Helen CREESE</b>  University of Queensland</p>	<p><b>Kam LOUIE</b>  <i>Asian Studies Review</i>, Editor  Australian National University</p>
<p><b>Tamara JACKA</b>  Australian National University</p>	<p><b>Barbara LEIGH</b>  University of Technology, Sydney</p>
<p><b>Jim MASSELOS</b>  Sydney University</p>	<p><b>Lesley POTTER</b>  Australian National University</p>
<p><b>Kalpana RAM</b>  Macquarie University</p>	<p><b>Lara VANDERSTAAY</b>  University of Queensland</p>
<p><b>Sandra WILSON</b>  Murdoch University</p>	<p><b>Renee WORRINGER</b>  University of Queensland</p>

**Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge**

The report, *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge* was published in 2002. Page numbers in the following document refer to *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge* and indicate the location of supporting data.

- Copies of *Maximizing* accompany this submission.
- Additional copies are available from the ASAA.

Web address: <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/asia-knowledge-book-v70.pdf>.