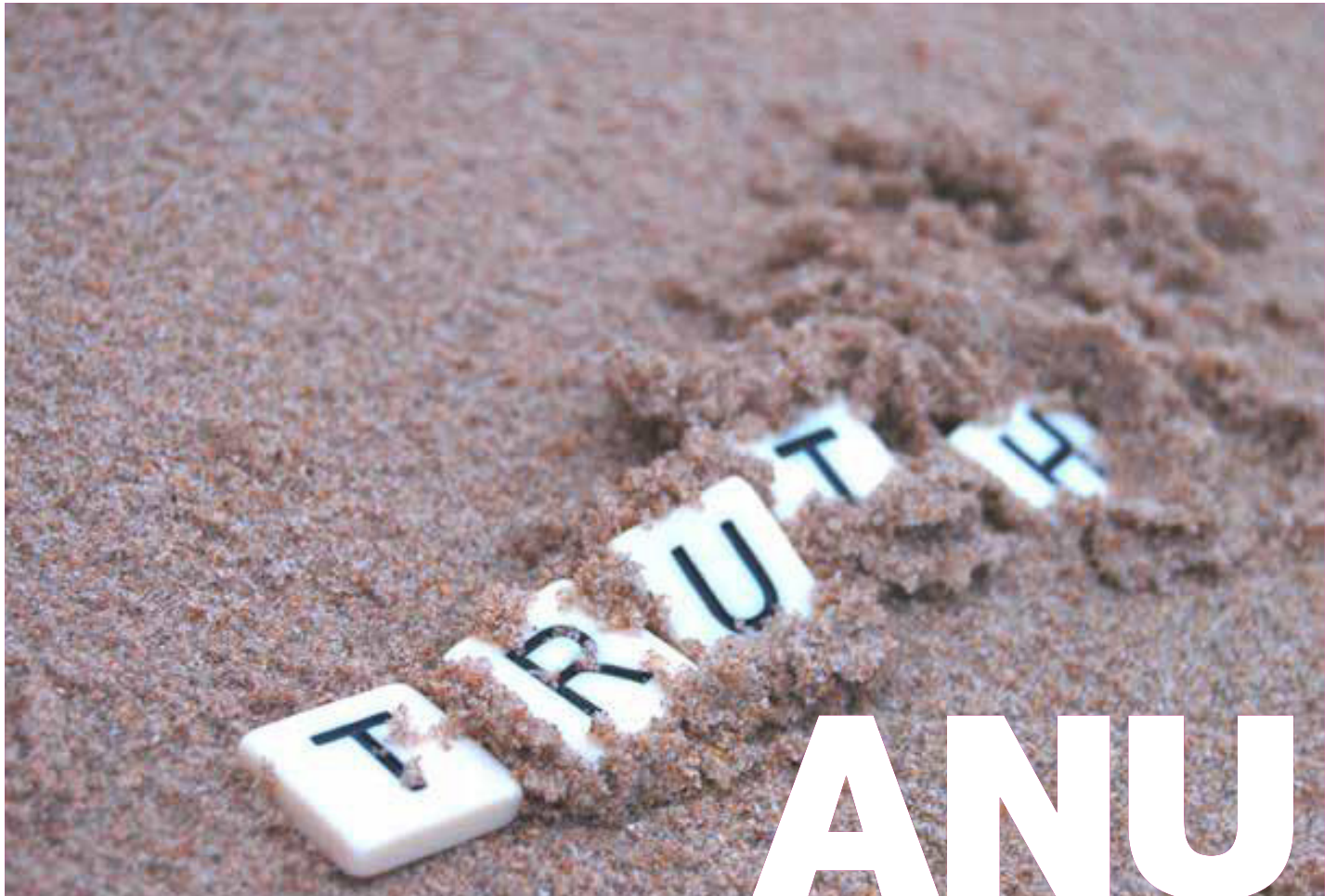




Australian  
National  
University



## FLAGSHIP WORKSHOP

THE 'POST-TRUTH' ERA? THE PUBLIC  
SPHERE IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

FRIDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2017

School of  
Culture, History and  
Language

ANU College of  
**Asia & the Pacific**

“Post-truth” is the Oxford Dictionaries international word of 2016. It refers to a political culture in which debate is framed by appeals to emotion rather than factual rebuttals. Many commentators warn that Donald Trump’s victory and the Brexit vote signify our entrance into a ‘post-truth’ era.

Is the Asia-Pacific witnessing similar trends? Are we really living in post-truth age that is different from previous eras? If so, what distinguishes our current public sphere? Some attribute the 24-hour news cycle, and the rise of social media ‘echo-chambers’, as responsible post-truth politics. Others see more insular, nationalistic, even xenophobic beliefs amongst citizens who are ‘threatened by forces of globalisation’.

This workshop will bring together scholars of various disciplines to discuss how public information has been manipulated in the past and present; share experience in sifting facts from fiction; and to suggest ways of debating an emerging, yet so-far Western-centric, term which frames the times which we are living.

## **Time and Date**

9:30am - 4:00pm  
Friday, 29 September 2017

## **Venue**

McDonald Room  
R.G. Menzies Building #2  
McDonald Place, Acton ACT 2601

## **Workshop Registration**

This workshop is free and open to the public. For catering purposes, please register by Tuesday 26th September

Eventbrite

<https://post-truth-era.eventbrite.com.au>

## **Convenor**

Dr Shuge Wei  
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## Workshop Program

9:30-11:00 **Post-truth, Fake News and Post-modernism**

Welcome - **Professor Simon Haberle**, *Director, School of Culture, History and Language, ANU*

**Professor Nick J. Enfield**, *University of Sydney*  
Truth, Language, and Rational Discourse

**Dr Matthew D. Johnson**, *Taylor's University, Malaysia*

The New Propaganda: How Media Multipolarity, Divided Politics, and AI Stoke Fears of 'Fake News'

**Dr Kaz Ross**, *University of Tasmania*

Post-truth or Post-fact? Why Post-modernism is Not to Blame

11:00-11:30 Morning Tea

11:30-13:00 **Truth and History**

**Professor Robert Cribb**, *ANU*

Bullets, Tweets and the Strange Fate of Truth in the Contemporary World

**Professor Tessa Morris-Suzuki**, *ANU*

From Truthiness to Truthfulness: Dealing with History in the Breitbart Era

**Dr Shuge Wei**, *ANU*

Text and Context: Reports on the Sino-Japanese Crisis in History

13:00-14:00 Lunch

14:00-15:30 **News in Practice**

**Dr Sora Park & Jee Young Lee**, *University of Canberra*

New Ways of Accessing, Consuming and Sharing News: A Comparative Study of Australia, Japan, Korea, UK, and US

**Dr Ross Tapsell**, *ANU*

Post-truth Politics and Media in Southeast Asia

**Peter Cai**, *Virgin Australia*

Role of Reporters in Shaping the Public Sphere in China and Australia

15:30-15:40 Closing Remarks

## Nick J. Enfield

### Truth, Language, and Rational Discourse

In this short overview, I will present some coordinates for a discussion of the 'post-truth' crisis. I will make three points: (1) we need to reconcile the apparently contradictory but equally true statements that there is independent reality and that truth is socially constructed; (2) facts matter most when they are being presented as reasons for action; and (3) when truth plays a role in human affairs, it has to go through language to get to us.

*Nick J. Enfield is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Sydney, head of the Post-Truth Initiative (<https://posttruthinitiative.org/>), and director of the Sydney Social Sciences and Humanities Advanced Research Centre (SSSHARC). His work on language and human sociality is based on regular fieldwork in mainland Southeast Asia, especially Laos. Among his more recent books are *Relationship Thinking* (2013), *The Utility of Meaning* (2015), and *How We Talk* (2017). See: <http://nickenfield.org/>*

## Matthew D. Johnson

### The New Propaganda: How Media Multipolarity, Divided Polities, and AI Stoke Fears of "Fake News"

This paper surveys public conversations and official discourse concerning fake news, focusing on the United States, Southeast Asia, and the UK. I then contextualize these instances of fake news-related discussion in three ways: 1) technological, looking at changes in media and ICT systems, 2) geopolitical, looking at changes in the global balance of power between competing information regimes, 3) historical, comparing fake news to previous information panics and assessments of the relationship between media and political change. I conclude by reflecting on what propaganda studies and nontraditional security studies can bring to research on fake news, particularly with respect to issues of reception, causality, and policy-making.

*Matthew D. Johnson is Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Taylor's University, Malaysia. He studied at Harvard University (Social Studies) and the University of California-San Diego (History, China and modern East Asia), and has taught at the University of Oxford, Renmin University of China, and Grinnell College. He is a co-founder of The PRC History Group ([prchistory.org](http://prchistory.org)) and co-editor of the group's open-access publication, *The PRC History Review*. His primary areas of academic research include the Communist Party of China; propaganda, media, and soft power; U.S.-China relations; and independent documentary filmmaking.*

## Kaz Ross

### Post-truth or Post-fact? Why Post-modernism Is Not to Blame

Much has been made of a 'post-truth' paradigm being the defining feature of this new era in reporting. I will argue in this talk that even the term 'post-truth' itself is problematic in the way it defines the challenges we face at a time when social media has come to dominate (and decimate) journalism. Using research into online racism and bigotry against Chinese and Muslim people on Australian Facebook sites, I will argue that the term 'post-fact' is a more useful tool for understanding - and indeed responding to - the serious situation we face in fostering informed and accurate public debate.

*Kaz Ross teaches Asian Studies at the University of Tasmania. Her research interests include early connections between colonial Tasmania and Asia, racism and hate speech online, and digital identities.*

## Robert Cribb

### Bullets, Tweets and the Strange Fate of Truth in the Contemporary World

Falsehood is not new. Those with the power to control information have always shaped it to their will. Stubborn resistance to truth is not new either. People of all times and from all levels of society have refused to accept evidence that has stared them in the face. Comfortable, self-justifying views whose costs fall to others to bear have a universal appeal. We cannot be in a 'post-truth' era when there has never been a truth era. What has changed, rather, is the field of battle. In the 1950s we knew, with Mao, that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Truth was a minor ally in any political struggle, an early casualty in war. Today we know, with Gramsci, that hegemony over discourse is all. Our determination to seize the commanding heights of discourse is the greatest enemy of truth today.

*Robert Cribb is Professor of Asian History in the Coral Bell School of Asia-Pacific Affairs, Australian National University. He has written widely on Asian history, including issues of genocide, national identity and environmental politics. With his colleague, Professor Li Narangoa, he has taught a course called 'Lies, Conspiracy and Propaganda', which focusses on the place of deception in public life. His recent books include *Wild Man from Borneo: a cultural history of the orangutan* (with Helen Gilbert and Helen Tiffin) and *Japanese War Criminals: the search for justice after the Second World War* (with Sandra Wilson, Beatrice Trefalt and Dean Aszkielowicz).*

## **Tessa Morris-Suzuki**

### **From Truthiness to Truthfulness: Dealing with History in the Breitbart Era**

In 2005, satirist Stephen Colbert coined the word 'truthiness' to describe ersatz information which sounds vaguely true without being based on the facts. The term was later voted 2005 'word of the year' by the American Dialect Society, and has gained even wider currency with the advent of the Trump Presidency in the USA. In a book published in the same year I tried to address some dilemmas of history in the age of the Internet and of the postmodern critique of knowledge by using the more mundane term 'truthfulness'. This paper will explore the era of 'truthiness', and re-examine the role of 'truthfulness' as a basis for strengthening the foundations of the pursuit of historical knowledge in this era.

*Tessa Morris-Suzuki is Distinguished Professor of Japanese History and Australian Research Council Laureate Fellow in the College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University. Her research focuses on informal life politics in the Japanese context, and on issues of migration and of history and memory in East Asia. Her books include Exodus to North Korea: Shadows from Japan's Cold War (Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), Borderline Japan: Foreigners and Frontier Controls in the Postwar Era (Cambridge University Press, 2010) and East Asia Beyond the History War: Confronting the Ghosts of Violence, London and New York (Routledge, 2013, co-authored).*

## **Shuge Wei**

### **Text and Context: Reports on Sino-Japanese Crisis in History**

This presentation seeks to analyse the interaction between fact and opinion in history, and to understand how falsehood prevails when a thorough historical investigation is not immediately available. It traces China and Japan's rivalry in newspapers over the Jinan Incident (1928) and the Mukden Incident (1931), two of the most important Sino-Japanese conflicts during the late 1920s and early 1930s, and demonstrates that Japan was able to twist the public's understanding of the events in 1930s not only because of its advanced news networks in China, but also its skilful reference to the context of public opinion. Japanese newspapers took advantage of Western audiences' memory of looting when Nationalist soldiers occupied Nanjing in 1927 to recreate the looting scene in its reports of the Jinan Incident. After the Mukden Incident, Japanese editors cited the death of Nakamura and Thorburn to enlist international audiences' support for Japan's military action in Manchuria. In both cases, the

line between facts and perceived facts was intentionally blurred. Texts were subordinate to contexts that guided the judgement by the public.

*Shuge Wei is a postdoctoral fellow at the School of Culture, History and Language at the Australian National University. She holds a PhD from the ANU and an M.A. from Heidelberg University. Her research interests include Chinese media history, Chinese international propaganda policies, Sino-Japanese War, grassroots movement in China and Taiwan. She is the author of News under Fire: China's Propaganda against Japan in the English-Language Press, 1928—1941. Her publications include articles in Modern Asian Studies, Twentieth-Century China, and the Journal of Asia-Pacific. She is a research associate of Shih Hsin University in Taiwan, and Heidelberg University in Germany.*

## **Sora Park & Jee Young Lee**

### **New Ways of Accessing, Consuming and Sharing News: A Comparative Study of Australia, Japan, Korea, UK, and US**

With increased digitalisation, news media have transformed the way news content is disseminated to news consumers, especially among societies with high internet penetration and usage. Drawing on Reuters Digital News Report 2017, a global survey of 36 countries, we selected Australia, Japan, Korea, UK, and US to compare the consumption behaviour of Western and Asian digital news consumers (N= 10,377). This study reveals that, although it is a global trend that news consumers are increasingly turning to digital channels to access news, the ways in which they discover and consume news differ between countries. A cross-national comparative analysis reveals that there are differences in consumption, sharing and participatory behaviour between the Asian and Western news consumers. Americans are most actively engaged in sharing news in a number of ways, whereas Japanese were least likely to share news with others. Western news consumers are more likely to directly go to a news website to access news, while Asians tend to search for news or use news aggregators. Asian news consumers are less likely to be actively selecting news that are similar to their own viewpoints. Overall, a significant correlation between the inclination to stay in echo chambers and the tendency to avoid news is commonly observed. However, the results are exactly the opposite in case of Korean news consumers. This study aims to discuss various cultural and societal factors more deeply in order to understand the emerging digital news consumption patterns in countries with high mobile and internet penetration, and where digital news consumption behaviours are prevalent.

**Sora Park** is Associate Professor of Communication and the Director of the News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. Her research focuses on digital media users, media markets and media policy and has written widely on the economics of television, newspaper markets and other information industries. She has extensive experience in policy research and consultancy regarding digital media in South Korea.

**Jeong Young Lee** is a doctoral researcher at the News & Media Research Centre. Her work focuses on policy issues and digital environments. Her PhD thesis explores a user-centric inclusion framework for a digitalised society and the role of digital divide policy in addressing exclusion. She has received a fellowship research grant from Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) (Indonesia) for a research on "Digital technology to Indonesian young people: trends and opportunities for Education".

## **Ross Tapsell**

### **Post-truth Politics and Media in Southeast Asia**

In this presentation I seek to advance theoretical discourse around 'post-truth', the zeitgeist of modern political punditry. I examine Southeast Asia's shifting information society, and how digital media has the ability to shape recent election campaigns, using empirical research gathered in the Manila and Jakarta in 2017. In this research I ask how political candidates have represented the nation-state in their campaigns, and how social media was used to advance these representations. Evidence from these elections suggest the winning candidates successfully managed to create a divisive and highly-charged election, then claim that their candidate is the most likely to 'unite' citizens in the aftermath. Social media is essential in allowing these post-truth narratives to flow, whereby voters were encouraged to make decisions around emotions of anxiety and sectarianism, rather than facts and policy details. In 2016 Indonesia had 76 million Facebook users, the fourth largest number in the world. In the Philippines, 94% of adults who have access to the internet use social media (mostly Facebook) on a daily basis. If social media is causing a destruction of democracies as recent 'post-truth' scholarship has argued, then we should look to countries in Southeast Asia as the likely first ones to fall.

**Ross Tapsell** is a lecturer and researcher at the ANU's College of Asia and the Pacific, specialising in media and culture in Island Southeast Asia. He is the author of *Media Power in Indonesia: Oligarchs, Citizens and the Digital Revolution* and co-editor of *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence*. Upon completion of his PhD, Ross was a recipient of the Australian Government Endeavour

Postdoctorate Award. He has been a Visiting Fellow at The University of Indonesia (Jakarta), Airlangga University (Surabaya) and Indiana University (Bloomington, US). He has previously worked in Indonesia with *The Jakarta Post* and the *Lombok Post*. Ross is involved in a number of Southeast-Asia activities at the ANU. He is currently Director of the ANU's Malaysia Institute. He is involved in the ANU's Indonesia Project and the academic news/analysis website *New Mandala*. He is also on the editorial board of the scholarly journal *Asiascape: Digital Asia* (Brill).

## **Peter Cai**

### **Role of Reporters in Shaping the Public Sphere in China and Australia**

Journalists play a crucial role in shaping public discourse about foreign countries. My presentation wants to explore how Chinese and Australian journalists write about other countries in particular China and Australia.

**Peter Cai** is currently Group Chief Advisor with Virgin Australia. He is a Nonresident Fellow at the Lowy Institute. Previously he was a journalist with *The Australian*, *Business Spectator*, *The Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, covering business and economic news. Prior to becoming a journalist, Peter was at the Australian Treasury where he worked in the Foreign Investment Review Board Secretariat, focusing largely on state-owned enterprises and sovereign wealth fund investment policy. Peter has a master's degree from Oxford University and holds undergraduate degrees from The University of Adelaide.