

*The Dictionary  
of the  
Asian Language*

TODD CROWELL

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*The Dictionary of the Asian Language*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Dictionary of the Asian Language was one of the more popular features of *Asiaweek* newsmagazine when I worked there in the 1990s. It took about five years to run its course from A (*Aaiiiyah!* CANTONESE, what a Hong Kong real estate speculator bellows when he finds that his Mercedes has been stolen and put on a fast boat to China while he was at an all-night mahjong session) to Z (**Zhang Yimou**, the most prominent of China's "fifth generation" film makers, known for testing the limits drawn by the communist party.) I confess that when the editor-in-chief, the late Michael O'Neill, introduced the idea, I thought it was loony. In time I got hooked, as did many readers. One of my regrets is that the Dictionary moved inexorably forward from A to Z. If you happened to be in the Ms, for example, and came across a fascinating word beginning with C, you were out of luck.

In a way this book is a way of making up for that by including words I wish I had known back then. Yet as soon as it is published, newer words will crop up making me say, "I wish I had learned that one sooner". Hopefully, there will be additions.

Of course, a lot has happened in Asia in the decade since the Dictionary ran its course. *Asiaweek* itself stopped publication in 2001 after a 25-year run. New words, expressions and vogue words crop up all the time. Publication allows me to begin afresh. This book is entirely new, not simply a compilation of the old work. I have written this work from scratch, with only a handful of holdovers from the old Dictionary.

Don't be put off by the word "Dictionary". This book is not meant to be a comprehensive catalogue of any Asian language, much less all of them. Such a project would take an army of scholars working for decades and producing volumes. This book is meant to be a collection of vogue words and items that illuminate little corners of Asian life, culture, arts, politics and business. Think of each entry as a bite-sized story in itself.

The definition of "Asia" is not as cut-and-dried as one might think. For the purposes of this book, "Asia" is defined mainly as Northeast Asia (Japan, China and Korea) and Southeast Asia (Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, etc.) I make an occasional side glance at South Asia (the Indian subcontinent) but not Central Asia or what some prefer to call "West Asia," aka the Middle East. Whether Australia and New Zealand are really a part of Asia is a matter of dispute, but I cannot resist including some items.

The book is not an encyclopedia. I don't feel constrained to include everything. Such well-known figures from history as Mao Zedong or contemporary Asia such as Aung San Suu Kyi are not to be found, but lesser known but influential people are included such as Beate Gordon, the American who wrote the equal rights provision in Japan's American-drafted constitution. The book is meant to be idiosyncratic, and eclectic. The main rule is that there are no rules, except one: No item shall be boring.

Todd Crowell

## A

***aiiiyah!*** CANTONESE What a Hong Kong real estate speculator bellows when he finds out that his new Mercedes 420 has been put on a fast boat to China while he was at an all-night mahjong session.

**abacus** An ancient instrument for doing sums, first invented in Babylon or China depending on sources and still in common use throughout much of Asia. It comes in two basic forms: a seven-bead abacus and a five-bead version once used in Japan and called a *soroban*. Experienced practitioners can outperform electronic calculators.

**Abenomics** A widespread popular buzzword to describe the economic policies instituted by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe shortly after his party won a landslide victory. The use of the "-nomics" suffix probably goes back to US President Ronald Reagan. His economic policies, based mainly on large tax cuts, were called "Reaganomics" but they were considerably different from Abe's pump-priming initiatives.

**Abu Sayyaf** A Philippine Muslim terror organization founded on Basilan Island in the 1990s as an offshoot of the Moro insurgency that has raged for decades. The group, numbering in the hundreds, operates mainly in the Sulu islands that extend from Zamboanga in the Philippines to Sabah in Malaysia. It is uncertain whether the group is motivated by jihad or simply likes to kidnap people for ransom. Several hundred US troops rotate in and out of the region to train and equip the Philippine Armed Forces fighting the Abu Sayyaf.

**Aceh** Indonesian province at the extreme western end of Sumatra. Given its proximity to trade routes in the Indian Ocean, it became the first part



of the country to embrace Islam and is still noted for its piety. About 98 per cent of the population is Muslim. It was the last region of the archipelago to be pacified by the Dutch, if that is the right word. Rebel groups under the common banner of *Gerekan Aceh Merdeka*, or Free Aceh, conducted a long insurgency against the central government in Jakarta over religion and the sharing of natural resources. The Indian

Ocean Earthquake in late 2004 precipitated a tsunami that devastated the capital, Banda Aceh, and hinterland, killing an estimated 170,000 in Indonesia plus thousands more in Thailand and Sri Lanka. However the disaster seemed to sober both sides which concluded a peace treaty the following August, mediated by the former president of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari. As part of the deal, Aceh is the only province in Indonesia that imposes Shariah law, albeit a relatively mild version of it.

**Acer** Taiwanese maker of desktop computers and laptops which became the first Asian company outside of Japan to score big internationally using its own brand name. Acer was founded in 1976 by Stan Shih, his wife and five others. Shih had started out selling eggs on the street with his mother.

**Ade** Pen name of Jose de Santos Ferreira (1919-1993), a 20th-century poet who was probably Macau's most famous writer (not counting Luis Vaz de Camoes, Portugal's most famous poet who may or may not have lived in Macau). He wrote plays and poems in the Macanese *patua* full of nostalgia for a dying people and their fading culture. He is still a much loved figure in the **Macanese** community. *Patua*, a pastiche of Portuguese, Chinese and Malay, is not much used today though there are local groups dedicated to keeping it alive.

**Agent Orange** A chemical herbicide sprayed by the millions of gallons over a large area of South Vietnam for the better part of a decade from 1961. It has had long-lasting consequences both for former American soldiers and especially for the Vietnamese in terms of stunted lives and deformed babies, as it contained toxic dioxin. The chemical was mainly spread by the USAF in "Operation Ranch Hand" with the stated purpose of depriving the Viet Cong enemy of forest cover. An unstated purpose was to destroy crops and force farmers into the cities where they could be better controlled.

**ah chaan** CANTONESE A patronizing term that Hong Kong people often applied to new immigrants from mainland China (formally *dai*

*luk sun yee man*) derived from a bumpkin-like character in a popular television series. Illustrative of the way Hong Kongers looked down on their mainland “compatriots” in the years immediately preceding and after the 1997 handover. With the growing prosperity in mainland China and Beijing’s decision to permit individuals to visit the territory, friction has increased, especially as tourists flaunt their wealth and buy up real estate, helping to inflate property prices. They still consider mainlanders country bumpkins, only rich country bumpkins. (See **sandwich class**)

**AKB48** Spacy name for a large group of teenage performers, founded in 2005, that has become the most popular girls’ revue in Japan. The group is made up of 88 girls, of 14 to 20 years of age, who are then subdivided into four “teams” for performances, making it the largest and one of the highest-earning pop music groups in the world. Unlike other pop groups, AKB48 has its own theater in the Akihabara district of Tokyo, usually noted for its many electronics stores, hence the initials AKB. There is a constant churn of members as girls “graduate”, i.e. age out, and replacements are recruited in endless auditions. The management makes a big deal out of the girls’ supposed purity – they are not allowed to have boyfriends under the terms of their contract – despite the often risqué performances on stage. The management has been criticized for the unrealistic and often hypocritical demands that it makes on its performers. Members have been known to make tearful apologies on YouTube for having a boyfriend.

**Ahmadiyya** A Muslim sect, founded in 1889 by Mirza Ghulan Ahmed, that is considered heretical by both Shia and Sunni Muslims. Mainstream Muslim clerics accuse it of violating a central tenet of Islam, that Muhammad was the final prophet. Adherents are scattered throughout Muslim Asia, where they often face persecution. Indonesia is said to be the home of about 200,000 Ahmadi. Under pressure from conservative Muslims, the Indonesian government banned the sect from proselytizing in 2008 but stopped short of formally banning the group. Frequently

the subject of violent mobs. Followers believe that Jesus Christ is buried somewhere near Srinagar, Kashmir.

***ah quah*** [ah kwah] HOKKIEN Straits Chinese word for transvestites. For many years they entertained tourists along Singapore's Bugis Street, gorgeously outfitted in colorful gowns and hairstyles. Cases of drug and theft assaults on single male tourists (many of whom mistook *ah quah* for the real thing) caused the government to crack down. Some of them moved to Orchard Street. (See **lady boys**)

***aiguo rensbi*** MANDARIN for patriot (literally "love country person"). Basically an honorific bestowed by Beijing on rich overseas Chinese who make large investments in the country, often in their ancestral provinces (even if they were actually born and raised in Hong Kong or Indonesia). In Taiwan a similar honor, *chung chen* (faithful-true), is bestowed on overseas Chinese who support the old Nationalist cause and hang a picture of Chiang Kai-shek over the television.

***aisatsu*** JAPANESE The word *aisatsu* is often translated as "greetings" but it is more accurately described as a "courtesy call." It refers to a kind of meeting where no real business is conducted but where relationships are cultivated. The presidents of two corporations under merger may have an *aisatsu* to put their final seal on a deal that has actually been worked out well in advance. A variation is *aisatsu mawari* or "walking around meeting", usually during the New Year break, to pay respects to customers and business clients.

**Ai Weiwei** (1957- ) Chinese avant-garde artist, sculptor, designer and now political dissident. Ai was in sufficient official favor to play a major role in China's most important modern prestige project, the design of the National Stadium, the chief venue of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, commonly called the **Bird's Nest**. He was also the son of an important modern Chinese poet, Ai Qing. He ran afoul of the authorities when he very publicly denounced the government for the consequences stemming from the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Some 5,000 schoolchildren were

killed in the quake as a result of crumbling, shoddy school buildings. He was arrested, allegedly for tax evasion, in 2011 but conditionally released two months later.

**Airlangga, King** (991-1049) Balinese king who consolidated his rule in his birthplace and then extended it into east and central Java, supplanting the dying Srivijaya empire. Airlangga means “he who crossed the water” and describes how he crossed the Bali Strait to conquer the eastern part of Java, creating the Kingdom of Kahuripan. He abdicated and went with his guru into the woods to seek truth. During his reign the north-coast city of Surabaya became an important center of trade, as it has remained for the past millennium. He is revered as a hero in Indonesian history textbooks.

**aircraft carriers** Several Asian navies have aircraft carriers, although they don't advertise it. Japan calls its two *Hyuga*-class carriers “helicopter destroyers” though the 13,500-ton flat-tops hardly look like conventional destroyers. Japanese avoid calling them aircraft carriers as the term suggests an offensive capability constitutionally denied the Maritime Self-Defense Force (see **Article 9**). Their main mission is anti-submarine warfare. The flagship of South Korea's navy is an 18,000-ton helicopter carrier called the **Dokdo**. Seoul is planning to build four more. China, of course, has long aspired to acquiring aircraft carriers and in 2011 put to sea a training carrier that it bought from Ukraine. The purchase was made through a travel agency connected with the People's Liberation Army, ostensibly as a floating casino for Macau, but was towed (it lacked propulsion) to Dalian for refitting. In 1997 Thailand acquired a carrier, HTMS *Chakri Naruebet* (“Chakri Dynasty”), from Spain. It made Thailand the only Southeast Asian nation to have an aircraft carrier, albeit a small one. It spends most of its time in port. (See **Blue Water Navy**)

**akachochin** JAPANESE for red lanterns of the kind seen in entertainment districts. Often hung from *yakitori* (skewered chicken) stalls, where **salarymen** booze after work and complain about their bosses.

**Aksai Chin** A remote corner of northeast Kashmir disputed by India and China and occupied by the Chinese since 1962. It has colored relations between the two countries for some 50 years, although in the 1990s the two countries signed agreements to recognize the “actual line of control” as the de facto border. The region is unbelievably remote and virtually uninhabited. It has no permanent settlements and few if any natural resources of any consequence. It is important to China as it contains an all-weather highway linking Tibet to the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. It is administered as part of Xinjiang but is also officially recognized by New Delhi as part of Jammu and Kashmir. The 1962 war led to the severing of direct air links between India and China that were not revived until 2002, during a period of improving bilateral relations.

**Akubra** AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL for a distinctive Australian brand of bush hat with a wide brim that makes good use of the fur of Australia’s burgeoning rabbit population. The name is derived from the Aboriginal word for a head covering and has been trademarked since 1912. The hats are made by the Akubra Company, which is still a family-owned concern. The current owners are the great-great-grandchildren of Benjamin Dunkerley, who made the first Akubra hats in 1870.

**Akutagawa Prize** Japan’s most prestigious literary award named after Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927), the country’s celebrated short story writer, who killed himself at the height of his popularity. It has been awarded twice yearly since 1935. Awards go mainly to short story writers rather than novelists. The winners receive one million yen and buckets of publicity. Several famous Japanese writers, such as Nobel laureate Kenzaburo Oe and Kobo Abe, have won the prize, but other distinguished writers, such as Yukio Mishima and **Haruki Murakami**, have not. Mishima has an award in his name and Murakami has gone on to be an international best-selling novelist. Among the winners of the Akutagawa Prize is Shintaro Ishihara, the longtime conservative politician and governor of Tokyo. He won in 1955 for *Seasons of the Sun*.

**Allah** ARABIC The word Allah for God is usually associated with Islam. However, many Southeast Asian Christians use “Allah” for “God” in their own languages. The Bible (*Alkitab*) translated into the Indonesian language is one example. Christians in Indonesia and Malaysia say that the word is simply interchangeable with God, but some Muslims feel that Christians are misappropriating their sacred word. They find particularly offensive the phrase *anak Allah*, or “Son of God”, since the God of Islam has no son. The word *tuhan*, a neutral term for God, is used in Malaysia for official oaths. The first translation of any portion of the Bible outside of a European language was into Malay in 1612 (one year after the King James version was completed). It used the word Allah for God.

**All Blacks** The name for the New Zealand national Rugby Union team, taken, of course, from the team uniform. For more than 100 years the national rugby players have been wearing a black jersey and matching black shorts with the silver New Zealand fern emblem on the chest. By most measurements the All Blacks are the most successful rugby team in world sporting history. But though often ranked number one in the world, the All Blacks have a strangely poor record in Rugby World Cup competition, winning the inaugural event hosted jointly with Australia in 1987 before finally triumphing again in 2011. Before each international competition the All Blacks perform a traditional Maori *haka* challenge dance to psych out their opponents. New Zealanders are obsessively loyal to their national team and any prominent defeat, such as in the 2007 world cup competition, is cause for a national funk and an avalanche of criticism of the team and the coach. (See **Rugby Sevens**)

**amah** From PORTUGUESE, an almost universal Asian word for maid. In India the word is *ayah*, also from Portuguese. In Hong Kong the word *amah* usually refers to aging Chinese maids who are now very few compared with tens of thousands of maids, or as they prefer “domestic helpers”, from the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Maids are not restricted to the rich. In Hong Kong and Singapore even middle-class families often have at least one maid, allowing the wife to hold an outside

job. Japan has the riches to pay for domestic help, but for cultural reasons and a prejudice against allowing tens of thousands of Southeast Asians into the country, relatively few Japanese employ maids. For the same reasons, they restrict Asian caregivers, despite a growing need to care for an aging population.

***amakudari*** JAPANESE for “descent from heaven”, taken from Amaterasu Omikami, in Japanese mythology the sun goddess and the most important Shinto deity. In its modern, political connotation, the practice of senior civil servants finding post-retirement jobs in the private or semi-private sector. In this construction the bureaucrats are the “gods”, the civil service “heaven” and the earth the hard landing which they are trying to avoid. It is brought about by the practice of retiring senior civil servants in their mid-50s, when they are still in their prime of life, but with few public corporations in which to find post-retirement jobs. Successive reformist administrations have sought to end or curb *amakudari* without much success.

**Amaral, Joao Maria Ferreira do** (1803-1849) Portuguese governor of Macau who arrived in the enclave in 1846 and immediately began to assert Portuguese sovereignty over Macau (before then, it was mainly a self-governing trading outpost). In 1849 he was assassinated while riding near the border. For many years a large equestrian statue of Amaral dominated the roundabout leading to the bridge to Taipa Island in front of the Lisboa Hotel. It was taken down and returned to Portugal several years before the handover of Macau to China in 1999.

**Amputuan Massacre** The term for a particularly gruesome, politically motivated massacre that occurred on November 23, 2009, in Manguindano province on Mindanao in the southern Philippines. Some 58 people, women and journalists, were ambushed, allegedly by members of the locally dominant Amputuan family, while on their way to witness a candidate filing to run against an Amputuan family member for provincial governor in the 2010 elections. It is considered the single deadliest mass

killing of journalists in recorded history. Of the 37 reporters trailing the candidate, some 34 were murdered.

***amuk*** MALAY One of the few English words borrowed from Malay, to describe uncontrollable rage often described as “running amok.” It refers to an individual (always a man; women do not run amok) who shows no signs of previous anger or disposition to violence, but who acquires some kind of weapon and then tries to kill everyone he encounters, ending, usually, in his own death. In Malaysia, it is described as someone possessed by some kind of evil spirit and who thus is not really responsible for his actions. That may be why one European visitor said “homicide is here a joke and goes without punishment.” Amok entered English through the diaries of British explorer Captain James Cook. It is thought to be a form of suicide where it is forbidden by the tenets of Islam.

***Anak*** FILIPINO for “child” and the title for what is unquestionably the most popular and most widely known ballad in the Philippines. Composed by Freddie Aguilar in 1978, it has been translated into 26 languages and has sold 30 million albums. *Anak* is also part of the word ***peranakan*** for Straits-born Chinese.

**Angka Loau** CAMBODIAN Literally the “organization on high,” what the Khmer Rouge called their regime. Within days of winning power in 1975 Pol Pot set about enforcing a revolution that probably went farther and faster in destroying a society than any other in history. Cities were emptied, schools and hospitals closed, money forbidden, all in an effort to turn the clock back to **Year Zero** and turn Cambodia – or Kampuchea as it was temporarily renamed – into some kind of rural paradise. Many were tortured and killed in the special **S-21** prison, but many more died of starvation and disease due to the gross mishandling of the economy.

***angklung*** An Indonesian musical instrument sort of like a xylophone made from bamboo tubes set in a bamboo frame. The oldest surviving *angklung* is about 400 years old. Though now widespread throughout Southeast Asia, it is closely identified with the Sundanese of West Java

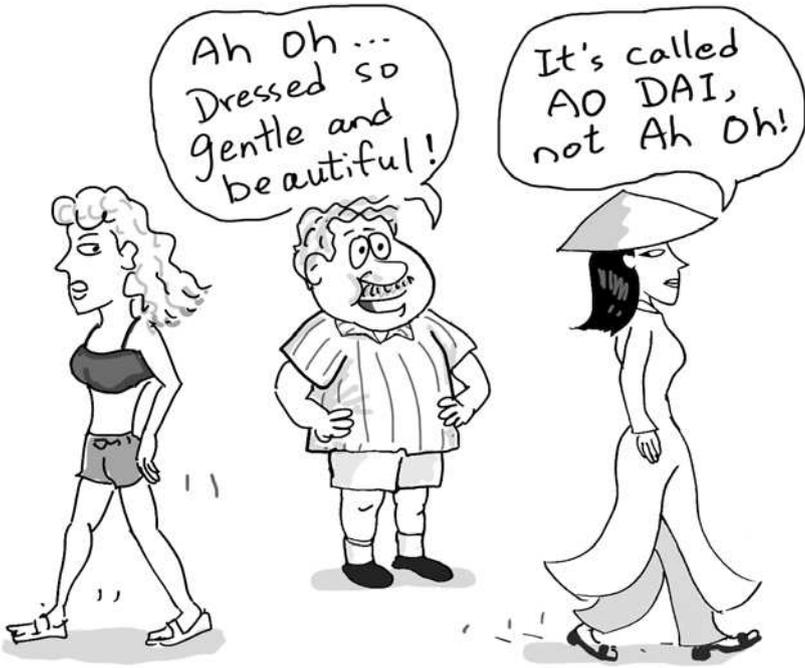
and an institute for promoting its preservation and development is in the Sundanese capital **Bandung**.

**Anjin-san** JAPANESE name for William Adams (1564-1620), the first Englishman to debark and live in Japan after his ship got lost in a storm around 1600. The local *daimyo* valued his shipbuilding skills so much that he overlooked the *bakufu* prohibition against contact with foreigners save for a small Dutch enclave in Nagasaki. James Clavell made his life the center of his novel *Shogun*.

**Anpanman** JAPANESE Anime cartoon figure for children that has been popular for more than two decades. The figure with round, dough-like head and two red cheeks is as ubiquitous in Japan as Mickey Mouse used to be in America. The face appears on every children's product imaginable from toys to snack foods and is, of course, the star of numerous cartoon series. The term *anpan* is an amalgamation of the word for bread, *pan*, which is one of Japan's oldest borrowed words from Portuguese, and *an*, which means red bean paste.

**ao dai** VIETNAMESE [ao zai] A distinctive costume for women in Vietnam, often called the country's national dress. It is comprised of a tight-fitting silk tunic worn over pantaloons. Though dating back to the 18th century, the modern look coalesced in the 1920s under the influence of French fashion, and found its final refinement in the 1950s. It has generally been more commonly worn in the free-wheeling south rather than in the stern north, but it is rapidly gaining stature as perhaps the best-known Vietnamese cultural artifact. Commonly, it is worn at weddings, during the **Tet** celebrations and other formal occasions. A pure white version serves as a high-school uniform. The *ao dai* is also worn by flight attendants, hotel and restaurant staff and others that interface with tourists.

**Aotea-roa** MAORI For "land of the long white cloud", or New Zealand. It probably looked like a cloud on the horizon when the first transoceanic canoes were making their landfall about a thousand years ago. The



Maoris, Polynesians related to Samoans and Hawaiians, spread across the two main islands.

**Apo** Active volcano in southeastern Mindanao that is the highest point, at 2,954 meters, in the Philippines. Open to climbers, it is a protected area as the principal home of the nearly extinct Philippine Eagle (sometimes called the “monkey-eating eagle” from its presumed favorite meal). It is one of the largest and most majestic of the eagles and the Philippines’ national bird.

**Aquinaldo, Emilio** (1869-1964) The leader of the Philippine resistance, first against Spain and later against the US, in a war that the Filipinos call the Philippine-American War and Americans the Philippine Insurgency. He formally declared the Philippines independent on June 16, 1898, which today is celebrated as Independence Day. He welcomed the Japanese in 1942, buying into their propaganda of liberating Asians from

colonial rule. As such he was briefly imprisoned after the war but later released. He lived to be a feisty 94.

**Aquino, Corazon** (1933-2010) Eleventh president of the Philippines, elevated in the People Power revolt of 1986 that ousted longtime strongman Ferdinand Marcos. Known universally as “Cory,” she was the widow of longtime opposition leader Benigno S. Aquino Jr., who was murdered on returning to the country from the US in 1983. She was the daughter of a rich ethnic Chinese landowner (family name Cojuangco) whose family still has extensive land holdings. She served one six-year term, as stipulated by the post-1986 constitution, characterized by several aborted coups. Her son, Benigno S. Aquino III, was elected president in 2010.

**Area Licensing Scheme** One of several ways in which Singapore manages to avoid the kind of traffic gridlock that seems endemic to other Asian capitals. Introduced in 1975, the ALS (everybody calls it by its initials) charges drivers for entering a designated central business district, also known as the “restricted zone” during the day. This was the world’s first urban traffic congestion pricing scheme to be successfully implemented. Singapore has other means for restraining the growth in private automobile ownership and use. In 1990 it introduced the Vehicle Quota System, in which the potential car owner must first purchase a permit to buy a car, then pay for the car itself. It is a kind of social engineering that one could label “only in Singapore”. These measures have however been successful in limiting the growth of automobile ownership to about a third of Singaporean households.

**arigato** JAPANESE for “thank you”. In full: *domo arigato gozaimasus*, which has the same meaning but is considered more polite. The word *arigato* alone is a bit abrupt. The greater the obligation and thanks, the greater the bow that goes with it.

**Airang Festival** Unquestionably the world’s largest choreographed extravaganza, featuring a cast not just of thousands but tens of thousands.

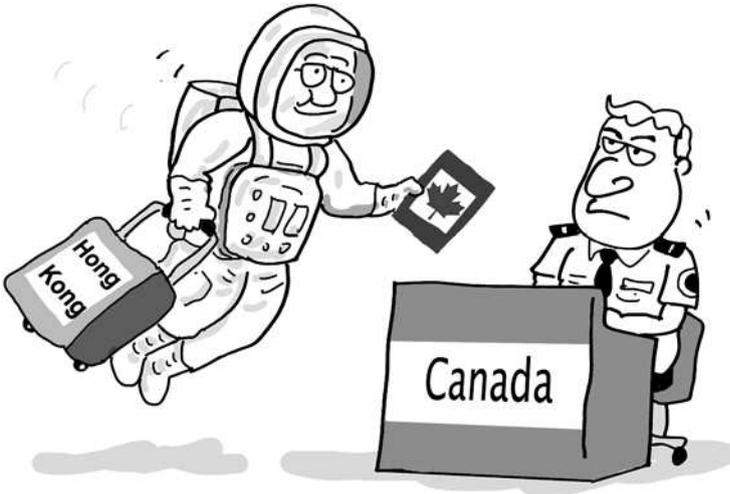
Named after a traditional Korean love song, the Arirang Festival was first held in 2002 to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the birth of North Korea's founder Kim Il-sung (he had actually been dead for several years), but it goes on for two months. The most impressive feature is the massed card flippers composed of about 30,000 schoolchildren seated in one bank of the huge May Day Stadium in Pyongyang, whose synchronized card flipping produces a mosaic of images. Somehow it seems fitting that the mass gymnastics should be held in Stalinist North Korea since nowhere else is the individual so effectively submerged in the mass. Some foreigners have witnessed the Arirang Festival, but it is a question whether North Korea really exploits the tourist value of this unique performance. Most outsiders who have seen it have only one word to describe the experience: awesome.

**Asia pivot** A foreign policy term identified with the administration of US President Barack Obama, which purportedly means refocusing America's attention on Asia, broadly defined to include the arc of countries running from India to Japan, and away from the overwhelming focus on the Middle East and Afghanistan. In more practical terms it has meant paying closer attention to organizations such as ASEAN and the East Asia Summit. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made her first trip abroad to Asia and has made about a dozen more, visiting some countries, such as Cambodia, that don't often get such senior-level attention. It has also meant deploying additional military assets to the region, such as a contingent of Marines to be stationed in northern Australia.

**"assassins"** When in 2005 several veterans of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) voted down former Prime Minister **Junichiro Koizumi's** pet plan to privatize the Japanese postal service, including its extensive banking system, the premier decided to call a snap election on the issue. Using his powers as party president Koizumi read the rebels out of the party and handpicked candidates to oppose them in the election as legitimate LDP representatives. The press immediately dubbed these stand-in candidates meant to punish the rebels as "assassins." Before the

press got tired of this story angle the election was held, and it turned out to be a Koizumi triumph. Some rebels running as independents got back in; some others did not. Many of the freshmen **Diet** members were women, dubbed “Koizumi’s daughters”. Most were swept away in the 2009 general election. (See **Ozawa, Ichiro**)

“**astronaut**” An expression for Hong Kong men who sent their families abroad to establish foreign residency and obtain passports while they stayed behind to make money. It was current in the years before 1997 as people sought “insurance” against things turning out badly after the handover of Hong Kong to China. It often involved separations of three years or more until the family member established foreign residency and obtained the precious document. Relatively few were interested in actually emigrating. The term is a pun on the CANTONESE *tai hung yan*, which means astronaut in the globe-orbiting sense but also can mean a man without his wife (*tai tai*). The Chinese term for a real astronaut is *taikongnaut*.



**Aum Shinrikyo** “Shining Light”, a Japanese cult that in 1995 perpetrated the world’s first and, so far, only act of urban terrorism using a weapon

of mass destruction delivered in a *bento* (lunch) box. The cult spread sarin nerve gas at several locations on Tokyo's extensive subway system. Twelve people died and many more were injured, some for life. The cult leader Chizuo Matsumoto (alias Shoko Asahara) and 11 other followers were convicted of murder, although the guru himself was convicted only after a trial that lasted nine years! Japanese justice grinds slowly. One of his lieutenants, Fumihiro Joyu, became something of a pop hero to many teenagers who thought he was cute (see *kawaii*). Interestingly, Japan never banned the cult outright. Japan's most famous contemporary writer, **Haruki Murakami**, wrote about the cult in a book called *Under Ground: The Tokyo Gas Attacks and the Japanese Psyche* published in 1997. The cult members, he wrote, "found a purity of purpose they could not find in ordinary society."

**Australian Labor Party** Although Australia mainly uses British spelling, the name of the Australian Labor Party is spelled in the American style. The New Zealand Labour Party uses the British spelling.

**Ayutthaya** The capital of Siam from 1350, when it was founded by King U-thong, to 1767, when it was sacked by the invading Burmese army. For four centuries it was the seat of 33 Siamese kings from several dynasties, some of whom, such as King Narusuan, were among the country's greatest monarchs. It was named after Ayothaya, the capital of King Rama, the hero of the great Hindu epic *The Ramayama*. King Narusuan changed the name to Ayutthaya, meaning "undefeatable city", during his short reign. Protected on three sides by rivers and a canal on the fourth, making it practically impregnable, until the Burmese arrived. Now a thriving tourist city about an hour north of Bangkok.