



**Asia**  
Society

India Centre

# Asia Society India Centre New Year Edition 2010

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## Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our latest edition of the quarterly newsletter from Asia Society India Centre. Our aim in this newsletter is to keep you informed of activities at our Centre and make you a part of the worldwide Asia Society community.

We have an exciting array of new information in time for the new year. We lead with an exclusive interview with Juan Du, Assistant Professor of Architecture at University of Hong Kong, who recently joined us in Mumbai for a discussion on urban renewal in Shenzhen. We also introduce to you Shaffi Mather, an Asia 21 ([www.asiasociety.org/asia21](http://www.asiasociety.org/asia21)) fellow who explains his trajectory in creating the Ambulance 1298 service.

Asia Society continues to address the critical issue of climate change globally. In keeping with this commitment, Asia Society India Centre hosted the CEO of the Climate Group, Steve Howard, and Meera Sanyal, Country Head, India, ABN-AMRO who addressed issues of climate change and business. Mark Edwards, a prominent photographer and environmentalist also presented an illustrated lecture on climate change titled "Hard Rain". In the US, the Texas Center organised the Conoco-Phillips Environmental Lecture Series which featured two wide-ranging discussions on hydropower and deforestation in Asia. In Washington DC, the Asia Society recently collaborated with the Pew Center on Global Climate Change to organise a task force on US-China cooperation on climate change, whose report, *Common Challenge, Collaborative Response: A Roadmap for U.S.-China Cooperation on Energy and Climate Change*, is now available (<http://www.asiasociety.org/policy-politics/environment/climate-change/roadmap-us-china-cooperation-energy-and-climate-change>).

I hope you will enjoy hearing about the various programmes that the Asia Society India Centre is committed to bringing you in 2010. This past year has been filled with wonderful programmes ranging from US-Asia relationships to Asian films; from contemporary art to renewable energy.

## Quick Link

[www.asiasociety.org/centers/india](http://www.asiasociety.org/centers/india)

## Upcoming Events

[www.asiasociety.org/events](http://www.asiasociety.org/events)

10 February  
*Partnerships for Knowledge and Social Justice: Higher Education in the Global Age* with Jehuda Reinharz, President, Brandeis University  
@ St. Xavier's College, Mumbai

19 February  
*The Quest for Genghis Khan: Travels in Secret Mongolia* with Ravi Bhoothalingam @ Volte Gallery, Mumbai

20 February  
Chinese New Year Celebration  
*Through Sacred China to Xanadu* with Ravi Bhoothalingam and *Spring Melodies* with John Thompson  
@ Jnanapravaha, Mumbai

2 March  
*Consular Briefing Series* with Mr. Wan Zaidi Wan Abdullah, Consul General of Malaysia @ Four Seasons Hotel, Mumbai

18-20 March  
20<sup>th</sup> Asian Corporate Conference  
*India Powering Asia's Ascent* @ Taj Palace Hotel, New Delhi

We are happy to see that so many of you find value in our programming. For those of you who are not yet members we encourage you to join now. Asia Society is, after all, a membership based organisation and your patronage helps sustain the quality and frequency of our programming. Please see our membership form for more information (<http://www.asiasociety.org/support/membership/india>), and feel free to contact us with any questions.

We have also increased our web presence and have recently launched our Facebook page. You can find us at [www.facebook.com/asiasocietyindiacentre](http://www.facebook.com/asiasocietyindiacentre). Do become a fan and keep up to date with our goings on.

Our next newsletter will reach you as Summer approaches in April 2010. We welcome your inputs and suggestions about the newsletter and our programmes. And we look forward to welcoming you at one of our upcoming events!

Bunty Chand  
Executive Director  
Asia Society India Centre

## 20<sup>th</sup> Asian Corporate Conference in New Delhi, March 18-20, 2010

India and many of its Asian neighbours have seen an economic resurgence in the face of the global economic downturn, although a sustained regional recovery has yet to establish solid footing. Following a sweeping victory in India's recent elections, the Congress-led Government of India has announced a major stimulus package and mandated that its main focus will be to boost the country's economic growth and address the long-term problems posed by the financial crisis.



How should India confront the domestic and global challenges that are testing the resilience of its economy? What investments in infrastructure, agriculture, healthcare, and education should be made to ensure India's long-term, inclusive growth? How will these investments benefit both India's domestic market as well the economies of its regional counterparts? Will India assume a leadership role in multilateral institutions and play a decisive role in facilitating global trade negotiations? And will the emphasis of India's leading corporations on building truly global and sustainable brands succeed in contributing to the overall health of Asian as well as the world economy?

Join government leaders, key decision-makers and industry experts from the international and Indian business community to discuss how India will fulfil its optimistic economic forecasts.

*India: Powering Asia's Ascent*  
*The 20th Asian Corporate Conference*  
**March 18th – 20th, 2010**  
*The Taj Palace Hotel, New Delhi, India*

Please visit the conference website, <http://asiasociety.org/conference10>, for further information including the conference agenda, latest invited and confirmed speakers, and sponsorship opportunities.

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## Designing the Contemporary Chinese City with Juan Du

*The Asia Society India Centre recently hosted a lecture with Hong Kong based Architect Juan Du at Max Mueller Bhavan in Mumbai as part of the two day symposium "Looking East: Emerging Urban Practices in Asian Cities" organised by the Kamala Raheja Vidyaniidhi Institute for Architecture and Environmental Studies and the Indian Institute of Urban Designers. Asia Society India Centre organized a session on "Theorising Asian Cities" through mediated forms with artists Rashmi Kaleka, Tushar Joag and Sreedeeep Bhattacharya. We later sat down with Juan to discuss urban renewal in Shenzhen, architecture in Asia, and the responsibilities of architects in the modern world.*

**Asia Society:** How do you think Shenzhen is trying to present itself to the outside world? What about these urban villages is frustrating that picture?

**Juan Du:** Shenzhen is presented to the world as a brand new modern city that is full of office parks, commercial centres, modern transportation facilities and manicured landscaping. The urban villages, by their sheer numbers and scale, are a direct contradiction to the image of an uniformly generic modern city. Shenzhen is often referred to as a city without any history, both by those who criticize it and by those who praise it. The formation and organisation of the current urban villages and their close relationships to the agrarian villages in the past that occupied the land for hundreds of years also goes against the image of Shenzhen as a city without a history.

**AS:** Is there anything that you think makes architecture in Asia distinct?

**JD:** This is a big question. If you are referring to what makes the modern architecture currently designed and constructed in Asia distinct, then I would say the modern or contemporary images that these buildings broadcast is ironically contradictory to the way they are built. The current Asian buildings and cities are often constructed with very basic techniques and a less skilled or trained labour force. Yet in this contradictory state, new experimentations are happening that could potentially develop into a truly distinct contemporary language of design and construction in Asia.



**AS:** When you begin a project like your Shenzhen proposal, what are the first considerations you make? Are there certain ideas that you always strive to incorporate in the projects?

**JD:** For the Shenzhen CBD [Central Business District] Huanggang District Planning, the first step was to clearly analyze the different and conflicting needs of the parties involved. As with most large scale urban projects, all of the involved have conflicting interests, and an

important task is to add considerations for those who are not in the economic or political position to negotiate. In the case of this project, the migrant worker renters are the majority of the population to be affected by the project yet they have no formal claim on the land or property. The design process in this case is also used to incorporate social concerns into the planning and design language. The main principle concepts for this project—Connectivity, Porosity, Flexibility, Temporality, Topology, Intensity, and Continuity—are all spatial concepts that also encourage and generate social and civic qualities for the urban area.

**AS:** Do you still have hope that your winning projects, which have been halted for various reasons, will proceed and be built?

**JD:** Yes of course we always must have the hope--otherwise it would be pretty difficult to take on challenges of the projects to come. Although as with any other large urban design and

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planning project, it most likely will be dragged on for many years to come. I of course would like to see the design and planning fully realized, but I would be content even if just some of the social and architectural concerns in the design could inspire and influence the eventual outcome of the project.

**AS:** From the short periods that you have spent in India, do you have any advice for Indian architects and urban planners? Are there any issues that Indian architects face that you find particularly striking or difficult?

**JD:** No advice, but perhaps some shared aspirations as there are many similarities between the current urban development of India and China. I think we all should closely examine the qualities and limitations of the local condition to derive ideas and designs that are both modern and unique. The majority of my generation of architects, and perhaps also the generation before, were all educated with similar training and aesthetics that came from a certain historical moment of architectural and urban development in the West. What is difficult for architects and urban planners in Asia now is to adapt the existing design and planning tools for a very different social and economic context, and at the same time, invent new languages and strategies to analysis and design. Architects in India and in China are facing an urban revolution that is unprecedented in scale and we must strike a careful balance between passive nostalgia and insensitive development. The combination of economic, political, cultural, and social contradictions are particularly important for architects to recognize as responsibilities as well as opportunities.

**AS:** You mentioned in your talk at Max Mueller Bhavan that Western cities like New York are “dying” because of their inability to accept or incorporate the new. As a native New Yorker, I feel this to be very true. Can you see some way for cities like New York to counteract this trend towards stagnation and remain vibrant, growing places?

**JD:** The main cause of this phenomenon is the process of gentrification of the urban centres. When costs of living, construction, operations etc become prohibitively high for new businesses and migrants, the urban system becomes self-referential and insular. This economic limitation will then affect other aspects of the city's social and cultural developments. Cities need to be constantly open to outside influences and peoples, from all levels of the economic spectrum. The sustainability of a city depends very much on its economic diversity as well as the programmatic. Encouraging small and informal businesses, developing mixed-income or even temporary housing, these are all lessons that New York could learn from cities such as Shenzhen and Mumbai.

**AS:** Finally, you said in your speech at the symposium that architects must, “stand on the railway tracks” and “stand for something.” What do you strive to stand for?

**JD:** I was referring to a better self-positioning of the responsibility of the architect in the current process of urban planning and development. As an architect trained in design, I am exploring how to effectively apply design thinking into the processes of city development. As an architect, I am aware that my limitations, strengths, agendas, are different from those of developers, governments, and in some cases planners. Through research, writing, teaching and most importantly through design, I am translating social and cultural ideals into the material, physical and organisational matters of the city. In this way, I define my responsibility as an architect and strive to contribute to society through my profession.

***Juan Du** is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of Architecture at the University of Hong Kong. She is the founder of Hong Kong-based architecture office IDU\_Architecture. Her work has been exhibited in international exhibitions such as La Biennale di Venezia, the Guangzhou Art Triennial and the Hong Kong Architecture Biennale. She was the co-curator of the First 2005 Shenzhen Biennale of Architecture/Urbanism. She has taught architectural and urban design at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Graduate Center of Architecture at Peking University.*

## About Asia Society

Asia Society is the leading global and pan-Asian organisation working to strengthen relationships and promote understanding among the people, leaders, and institutions of the United States and Asia. We seek to increase knowledge and enhance dialogue, encourage creative expression, and generate new ideas across the fields of arts and culture, policy and business, and education.

Founded in 1956, Asia Society is a nonpartisan, nonprofit educational institution with offices in Hong Kong, Houston, Los Angeles, Manila, Melbourne, Mumbai, New York, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai, and Washington, DC.

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For more information on the following, please email [admin@asiasociety.org.in](mailto:admin@asiasociety.org.in).

- Upcoming events
- Join the mailing list
- Individual membership
- Corporate Membership

If you would like to react, offer suggestions, or comment on any of the content you've read in this newsletter, we would be happy to hear from you. Please write to [asiasociety@asiasociety.org.in](mailto:asiasociety@asiasociety.org.in). We look forward to your active participation in the Asia Society India Centre community.

Thank you!



## A Roadmap for US-China Cooperation on Energy and Climate Change

### An Asia Society Task Force Report

Conceived as a collaboration between the Asia Society Center on US-China Relations and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, the Initiative for U.S.-China Cooperation on Energy and Climate addresses the unfolding global climate crisis and the critical roles that both the U.S. and China must play in forging a solution. The project specifically aims to catalyze U.S.-China cooperation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions resulting from energy use, especially the continued reliance on coal to power our respective economies.

The first report of the Initiative, *Common Challenge, Collaborative Response: A Roadmap for U.S.-China Cooperation on Energy and Climate Change*, presents both a vision and a concrete roadmap for this new collaboration. With input from scores of experts, stakeholders, and policy-makers from the sciences, business, civil society, and politics in China and the United States, the report explores the climate and energy challenges facing both nations and recommends a programme for sustained high-level engagement and on-the-ground action.



To download the report, please visit: <http://www.asiasociety.org/policy-politics/environment/climate-change/roadmap-us-china-cooperation-energy-and-climate-change>

### Asia 21 India

#### Shaffi Mather and Ambulance 1298

*The Asia Society India Centre supports over 80 Asia 21 Fellows with varied backgrounds in areas such as environment, film, business, health, and education. This space will feature a different Asia 21 India Fellow in each edition and highlight their organisations, initiatives, and projects. To learn more about Asia 21 visit [www.asiasociety.org/asia21](http://www.asiasociety.org/asia21). This quarter, Shaffi Mather, Co-Founder, Dial 1298 for Ambulance, explains how the organisation came about and his other current activities.*

I am a big fan of enterprise and entrepreneurship. Since 1993, I have explored, experienced and experimented enterprise and capitalism to my heart's content. I built along with my brothers the leading real estate company in Kerala and then worked professionally with two of India's biggest businessmen in their start-up enterprises. This made me realize 3 key lessons:

- The importance of end goal being more than 'profit'
- The importance of means in making money
- And the utmost importance of service to the society

In 2002-03, when I stepped out of pure play capitalistic sector to work on so called social sector issues, I definitely did not have any grand strategy to pursue and find 'for profit' solutions to pressing public issues. Yet, I realize now that it is exactly what I have been doing – creating, nurturing and growing social enterprises as these enterprises are now being called. I believe this outcome is a product of the interplay in me of the forces of communism in Kerala where I grew up and capitalism in the United States where I did my higher studies.

In the emotionally churning entrepreneurial background I found myself in 2002-03 due to my background, life brought about a series of death and near death experiences within my close circle which highlighted the need for an emergency medical response service in India similar to 911 in USA. To address this, I along with four friends founded Ambulance Access for All to promote Life Support Ambulance Services in India. I set 3 key goals for this project: 1. Providing world class life support Ambulance Service; 2. To be fully self sustainable from



own revenues; and 3. To be Universally Accessible (in a medical emergency irrespective of the capability to pay).

The service which grew out of this 'DIAL 1298 FOR AMBULANCE' with one Ambulance in 2004 now has 100 plus owned Ambulances and 500 plus networked Ambulances in 3 states in India & has transported over 100000 patients and victims since inception. The service is fully sustainable from its own revenues without accessing any public funds.

The cross subsidy model actually works wherein rich pays higher, poor pays lower & accident victims getting the service free of charge.

Since then, I also co-founded / co-promoted two other social enterprises. One is 'Education Access for All' setting up schools in small town India and bringing digital e-learning support for teachers and students. And the other is Moksha Yug Access (ideated, founded & led by Mr. Harsha Moily) which is integrating rural supply chain on the foundations of self help group based microfinance.

In all these, I seem to be doing at least a few things right as diligent venture funds and investors have committed over 7.5 million dollars in funding to these projects. More significantly, these funds were raised as equity capital which expects a return on investment in sectors that are normally funded either by government budgetary funding or philanthropy.

In my newest social venture, I have been working on a pilot basis to fight and address individual instances of demands for bribes for common services or entitlements. I believe these tools that worked in the pilot cases can be consolidated in standard processes in a BPO kind of environment and made available for a fee on web, call centre and franchised physical offices to serve anyone confronted with a demand for a bribe. I am working at present to execute this vision of a 'for profit' company to fight bribes and corruption into reality.



### Launch: Asia 21 India

In conjunction with 20<sup>th</sup> Asian Corporate Conference in New Delhi, Asia Society will launch **Asia 21 India** on March 20<sup>th</sup> between 2-6PM. The aim of Asia 21 India is to establish a strong association of young leaders and entrepreneurs who are experts in their fields. The group will work to create its own guidelines and internal leadership. We look forward to seeing all Asia 21 Fellows there.