Our Asian centuries: provenance and proximity

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Nitmiluk Lounge, Level 4, Parliament House

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Lecture abstract
The recently released and much publicised Australian Government White Paper Australia in the Asian Century is a detailed response to Asia’s ascent as ‘the defining feature of the 21st century’. The ‘Asian century’ is seen as an Australian and regional opportunity, as ‘the tyranny of distance is being replaced by the prospects of proximity’. In this lecture, Professor Bell draws on more than 30 years’ personal and professional engagement with Asia to interrogate the concept of ‘proximity’. It is argued that Australia’s engagement with Asia has been, and continues to be, characterised by both inclusion and exclusion; where hostility and fear as well as generosity and compassion have powerfully defined Australia’s place in the region; where, over time, complex flows of people, knowledge and culture have been both embraced and disrupted; and where the perspective from Northern Australia has often looked very different to that from the South.
Professor Sharon Bell’s background is as a senior academic leader, a documentary filmmaker and an anthropologist. Professor Bell holds a PhD from the University of Sydney in the discipline of anthropology. She has worked with international agencies such as the World Bank, the Sri Lankan University Grants Commission and AusAid on institutional capacity-building projects.

Professor Bell is currently a recipient of an Australian Research Council Grant on Women in the Scientific Research Workforce. She also continues the research on post-colonial Sri Lanka that began with her doctoral studies in anthropology.