

LAUNCH OF THE TEXT BOOK ASIA ALIVE

Address by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to the Catholic Education Centre, Melbourne, 17 March 1995

It gives me great personal pleasure to have been invited to launch the textbook *Asia Alive* today

- especially after launching the Victorian Catholic Schools Strategic Plan, which it complements so nicely.

I congratulate the authors - Annette Chidzey and Jeanine Valmadre - on a job tremendously well done.

Asia Alive is a particularly apt title. Not only does it give a good sense of the energy that characterises Asia but it also reflects the tone of the text designed to capture the attention and imagination of students in the middle secondary years.

I have had a good look through the textbook and I have to say I wish such a book was available when I was a kid at school - indeed, I wish it had been available when my children entered secondary school.

Its starting point - the question "What has Asia got to do with us?" hits the nail on the head, for Australians young, and I suspect, old as well. With all the talk about the Asia Pacific Community, engagement or enmeshment with Asia, Australians have rightly asked that question.

- This textbook seeks to answer it in a lively, entertaining way that seeks to whet the appetite, pique the curiosity, and I'm sure, encourage kids to ask more questions.

In the textbook, we're taken through the history of Australia's contact with Asian countries, the ins and outs of our search for an identity, and (I'm intrigued by the chapter title) the "rediscovery" of our place in the region.

Students are provided with a comprehensive introduction to the major players in

the Asian region, in an honest, warts-and-all way, that informs, entertains and, importantly, allows students to draw their own conclusions.

The book is certainly engaging. It has an attractive layout, its clearly written and it has some excellent illustrations, as well as some rather cheeky cartoons scattered through it.

- I am thinking of one in particular taken from The Age newspaper in December '93, with Prime Minister Keating's head being offered up on a plate to Dr Mahathir, the Prime Minister of Malaysia (p.221). I'm not sure that Dr Mahathir would relish the role of Herod any more than Paul Keating would appreciate being cast as a decapitated John the Baptist, but its a lovely image...

Asia Alive - its a good title and it deserves a good plug! - will without doubt very gently and easily introduce young Australians to a truly fascinating subject - and one that's enormously important for the future of this country.

As I said earlier on this morning - and I think it's worth repeating - I firmly believe that the efforts of institutions such as the Catholic Education Office and textbooks such as *Asia Alive* have contributed greatly to the continuing sea-change in the national consciousness of young Australians and will continue to do so

- by turning the unfamiliar into the familiar;

- by changing perceived fears and threats into perceived opportunities;

- by allowing young Australians to grow up informed and curious about the part of the world that we live in, knowledgeable about how our regional neighbours view us; and

- comfortable with the notion of where we fit into the regional scheme of things.

This textbook will make a major contribution to the teaching of Asian studies in Victorian schools. I hope that it is used by, or at least becomes a model for, the teaching of Asian studies at the middle secondary level in the Victorian and Australian school system generally.

Once again, I congratulate the authors - Ms Chidzey and Ms Valmadre, and

everyone else at Edward Arnold the publishers and elsewhere, associated with its production. *Asia Alive* is definitely a book in the right place at the right time, and I wish it the success it deserves.