

Professor Nicholas Tarling
In Memoriam: Peter Nicholas Tarling
1 February 1931 – 13 May 2017

One of New Zealand's most tireless servants of Asian Studies passed away suddenly on 13 May. Nicholas Tarling, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Auckland was the founder of the New Zealand Asian Studies Society in 1974. Nick retired from Auckland twenty years ago after more than three decades of enormous contributions as a long-standing Dean of Arts, Deputy and Acting Vice-Chancellor and key member of committees large and small. In his retirement Nick remained active as a Senior Fellow of the New Zealand Asia Institute, based in the university's Business School.

He gave an extraordinary half-century of vital service to Auckland and New Zealand. Appointed to Auckland's History Department in 1965, after a brief stint in Queensl and following his graduation from the University of Cambridge, Nick established and shaped the teaching of Asia-related subjects in the Faculty of Arts. At a time when New Zealand public and academic life was becoming more aware of our place in the world, Nick played a decisive role in fostering awareness of Asia. In 1974 he was the driving force behind the creation of the New Zealand Asian Studies Society. As a teacher, Nick was a marvellous performer, capturing his listeners with dramatic gestures, ominous pauses and even the occasional shedding of items of clothing, all the while posing unexpected questions. His courses on Southeast Asian history, the origins of the First World War and lectures in world history were models of concision, insight and stimulation.

Several generations of students encountered Nick at enrolment in his capacity as Dean of Arts, presiding in an office legendary for its piles of papers and books on every available surface, including the floor. Nick played a central role in the expansion of the University of Auckland from around 5,500 students to the 35,000 on his retirement. In this he worked closely with the long-serving Vice-Chancellor, Sir Colin Maiden. He also helped shape the development of the whole university system in New Zealand, through service on national committees.

Outside of work, Nick was a major contributor to the arts in Auckland and the nation. He became a radio presenter of classical music, a founder of Mercury Theatre, trustee of numerous arts organisations, and a respected actor. He was a well-known regular at classical music performances in Auckland for decades. The University's annual capping revues and outdoor Shakespeare performances were graced for many years by his skills as a thespian, honed regularly in our lecture halls. A fierce defender of university autonomy and role as critic and conscience of society, Nick was among a key group of academics who resisted in the late 1980s government attempts to consolidate control over the universities.

Somewhat reluctantly retiring in 1997, Nick turned fuller attention to his phenomenal scholarly productivity. His colleagues would joke about "a book a year" only to discover in some years that there were two coming off the presses. His careful studies of imperial policy in Southeast Asia at its height, in decline and during the Cold War drew on his amazing mastery of the British archival records (and what seems to have been chronic insomnia). Already in the 1960s he was writing transnational history long before the term was

invented. As editor of the two-volume Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Nick brought together a network of colleagues and students, many of whom gathered in Auckland for a conference to mark his 75th birthday. A large issue of the New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies (Vol. 11, 1, June 2009) comprised papers from that conference. In 2015 the University of Auckland celebrated Nick's fifty years there with a display of (at least) fifty volumes written by him. On his retirement, NZASIA established the Nicholas Tarling Lecture, delivered at each biennial international conference of the Society, as a small marker of his huge contributions to the study of Asia in New Zealand and the world.

For his former students like myself, Nick remained a source of wise counsel and friendship. He died doing what he loved, swimming at Narrow Neck Beach, just metres from his home on a beautiful late autumn afternoon. Asian Studies in New Zealand is hugely in his debt, as we honour his memory.

Paul Clark
Professor of Chinese, University of Auckland