MARWOTO Hadi Soesastro — widely known simply as Hadi or Mingkie — left a remarkable legacy as a public intellectual, institution builder and visionary, both in his home country of Indonesia, as well as in neighbouring countries, and nowhere more so than in Australia.

His life and interests were diverse, ranging across international economic policy, East Asian regional architecture, energy issues, and economic policy making in Indonesia. From his base at Jakarta’s Centre for Strategic and International Studies for nearly four decades, he piloted that institution to international pre-eminence, as the best-known Indonesian think tank dealing with international economics, politics and security issues.

In East Asian forums he was a top-class thinker and writer about the region’s economic integration. He was arguably Indonesia’s best-known intellectual in these and related fields. He was closely involved in every important policy initiative in this field over the past 25 years. On each occasion the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations sought to chart a new way forward, he was a key adviser.

Although never formally in government employ, he was highly influential in the public domain, and also within Indonesian government ministries as a high-level adviser, particularly in the Office of the President, and departments of foreign affairs, trade, finance, and mines and energy. Moreover, in his quiet, unassuming and highly effective manner, he projected Indonesia to the region and the world as a sort of unofficial ambassador, in both good and challenging times.

His wise counsel was constantly sought by ministers, diplomats, academics, journalists, officials from international organisations, civil society activists and business people.

But Hadi was much more than a public intellectual and ever present participant on the domestic and international conference circuits. For more than 30 years, he was a prolific writer, in Indonesian, English and occasionally a continental European language. Most years he would write at least a half-dozen substantial pieces of work, in addition to numerous notes and opinion pieces. And he served as an inspirational role model to a younger generation of Indonesian students, at CSIS and the various other institutions where he taught or advised.

Hadi had special Australian connections. He was a permanent resident here, the largest number of his many international collaborators were Australian, he held an Australian National University adjunct appointment (the university also awarded him an honorary doctorate last year), and his two sons received their university educations here.

Hadi was born Tan Yueh Ming in April 1945. Growing up in Malang, East Java, family life was comfortable and happy. He had a cosmopolitan, literary upbringing with a pronounced Dutch influence in a typical Chinese-Indonesian environment. His father was Buddhist, his mother a late convert to Catholicism and a younger brother later converted to Islam on marriage.

After Hadi graduated from the famous St. Albertus School in 1963, the family decided he should study abroad. They chose the Technische Hochschule in Aachen, Germany, where he enrolled in mechanical engineering. Aside from his studies, Hadi was active in the Indonesian students association, becoming chairman of the West German branch. Completing his studies in 1971, Hadi became increasingly attracted to the idea of establishing a new institution in Indonesia.

To be called the CSIS, it was set up as he graduated, and Hadi immediately became a staff member. The centre dominated the remaining 39 years of his life, apart from PhD studies at the Rand Graduate School in California, and visiting professorships at Columbia University and the ANU. Hadi quickly became a leading figure in the centre. He was its executive director on three occasions, 1973-74, 1989-96, and 1999-2008.

In addition to his responsibilities at the CSIS, Hadi maintained an amazing array of domestic and international responsibilities. He taught, on a regular or occasional basis, at several Indonesian universities. He attended a dozen or so international conferences each year, and many in Indonesia. He oversaw and contributed directly to the CSIS’s publications. He was on the editorial and advisory boards of numerous international institutions and academic journals. And he was a constant senior adviser to the Indonesian government, particularly in the arena of international economics and politics.

Hadi would typically write about 20 papers a year, reflecting his range of interests, and the fact that he could never refuse a request from his many close friends. Two fields dominated. The first was political economy. As befits the best work in this field, Hadi would think through the “first best” analytics of an issue, what would be the ideal outcome, and then develop his arguments cognisant of the political constraints and realities. For example, a 1989 paper became the standard reference in understanding how and why Indonesia’s comprehensive 1980s economic policy reforms were successfully introduced and implemented, in the process avoiding a debt crisis.

Second, Hadi was at the forefront of initiatives to promote greater economic integration and co-operation in ASEAN and the broader East Asian region. There was hardly a domestic or regional initiative with which Hadi was not involved, and for 25 years he was arguably the most influential Southeast Asian intellectual in this field. Hadi never deviated from his belief in an internationally oriented Indonesia and ASEAN, with the responsibilities attached to such a role.

He had many other interests. He took a close interest in the economic development of East Timor, writing frankly and critically about the problems in the then Indonesian province when it was highly sensitive to do so. And as East Timor’s independence approached in 2002, he was at the forefront of arguing for close relations between the two countries, including Indonesia’s responsibilities.

Hadi had extraordinary personal skills. He was modest, exquisitely courteous, even-tempered, unselshful, and unfailingly loyal to his friends and colleagues. He treated all people equally, from heads of state to students and his personal staff. He moved effortlessly across international boundaries, cultures, classes and age groups. He took particular interest in his younger staff, in nurturing them and their careers, paying attention to their professional and personal development.

He is survived by his wife, Janti, and their two sons, Agus and Albert.