

Contents #38

The Asia-Pacific War: history & memory

- 1, 4, 5 **Nations in the looking-glass: the war in changing retrospect, 1945-2005** / Ethan Mark
- 3 **The politics of memory** / Takeo David Hymans
- 6 **War and the colonial legacy in recent South Korean scholarship** / Kyu Hyun Kim
- 7 **Between the national and the transnational: Li Xianglan/Yamaguchi Yoshiko and pan-Asianism** / Yiman Wang
- 8 **On occupied China** / Poshek Fu
- 9 **The lament of progressivism: voicing war responsibility in postwar Japan** / Rikki Kersten
- 10 **Workers at war: class formation in wartime Chongqing** / Joshua H. Howard
- 11 **Neither victors nor victims: transplanted/suppressed memories of the Sino-Japanese War in postwar Taiwan** / Mike Shi-chi Lan
- 12 **Memorializing the Tokyo air raids** / Cary Karacas
- 13 **The memory wars: Japan, China and Asia's future** / Peter King
- 14 **A slow remembering: China's memory of the war against Japan** / Rana Mitter
- 15 **Militarization of nutrition in wartime Japan** / Katarzyna J. Cwiertka
- 16 **The nation's path interrupted: the Pacific War in Philippine history textbooks** / Portia L. Reyes
- 17 **Catastrophe on Peleliu: islanders' memories of the Pacific War** / Stephen C. Murray
- 18 **A nightmare in the making: war, nation and children's media in Japan, 1891-1945** / Owen Griffiths
- 19 **Anatomy of the Yūshūkan war museum: educating Japanese youth?** / Takashi Yoshida
- 20 **Negotiating colonialism: Taiwan literature during the Japanese occupation** / Lin Pei-Yin
- 21 **Connecting the experiences of the Sino-Japanese and Asia-Pacific Wars** / Ethan Mark
- 22 **Borneo constituencies: Japanese rule and its legitimization** / Remco Raben
- 23 **'If the self is cultivated, ...' - some remarks on philosophy and politics in wartime Japan** / Christian Uhl

International Institute for Asian Studies

- 24 - 25 **International Convention of Asia Scholars 4 in Shanghai**
- 24 - 25 **The future of Asia: cross-cultural conversations in history** / Barabara Watson Andaya
- 26 - 27 **IIAS fellows**
- 28 **IIAS research programmes, networks & initiatives**
- 28 **Energy Programme Asia** / Mehdi Parvizi Amineh
- 29 **Socio-Genetic Marginalization in Asia** / Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner
- 30 **Seeking knowledge unto Qum: the education of Indonesian Shi'i ustadh's** / Zulkifli
- 31 **The heart of Borneo: a challenge for social scientists** / Manon Osseweijer and Gerard A. Persoon
- 31 **Towards social stability and democratic governance in Central Eurasia: challenges to regional security** / Irina Morozova
- 32 **Illegal but licit: transnational flows and permissive polities in Asia** / Willem van Schendel
- 33 **Books received**
- 34 **The future of rural income and rice production in China** / Marrit van den Berg, Huib Hengsdijk, Wang Guanghuo, Joost Wolf, Martin van Istersum, Reimund Roetter
- 35 **European Alliance for Asian Studies**
- 36 - 37 **Announcements**
- 38 - 39 **International conference agenda**

Asia scholars as intermediaries between East and West

Director's note

Until very recently, many scholars had the idea that Asian Studies was a western endeavour. However, looking at the origin of the participants at ICAS we see that half of them were from Asia and the other half from the rest of the world, living proof that Asian Studies is and will increasingly become an Asian exercise.

One of the most important effects of the return of Asian Studies to its source is that several research traditions which have strong regional anchoring, the Anglo-Saxon, the South Asian, Chinese and continental European, will meet in Asia on a level playing field. The founding of an agile and mobile Asian Institute for Advanced Studies in Beijing could lead to a platform in which new ideas emanating from the fusing of these rich research traditions can blossom. To give a higher profile to Asian Studies in Asia, I hope that the initiative of CASS to form an Asian Alliance for Asian Studies will materialize in the course of next year.

Looking at the situation in Europe, a complicated picture presents itself. Recently, Potocnik, the Euro-Commissioner of Research, pleaded for a European approach and cooperation in all fields of study. Some representatives from Asian Studies in Europe have tried hard in the past decade to make this come true, but if we look at the reality, we see the crumbling of Asian Studies at universities all over Europe. There is still not enough willingness to view Asian Studies at a European, let alone global, level.

What we see, just as in the US and Australia, is a mad scramble for Asian students who are shortsightedly considered as means to prop up the budgets of universities. Actually, the number of students from Asia in the western world has reached its zenith and their numbers are dropping. Within one or two decades Asia will be more than self-sufficient in educating not only its own intelligentsia, but also many other students from the rest of the world who will find the high quality and low cost of education in Asia most attractive.

We, as Asia scholars, never had to be convinced of the importance of Asia. Our role will be to act as intermediaries between East and West amidst converging research traditions in the emerging global research space of the 21st century, which will encompass all disciplines. In that way, Asia scholars can be considered avant garde. The mainstream will doubtlessly catch up in the not too distant future. ◀

Wim Stokhof
Director, IIAS

www.iias.nl



IIAS values dynamism and versatility in its research programmes. Post-doctoral research fellows are temporarily employed by or affiliated to IIAS, either within the framework of a collaborative research programme or on an individual basis. In its aim to disseminate broad, in-depth knowledge of Asia, the institute organizes seminars, workshops and conferences, and publishes the *IIAS Newsletter* with a circulation of 24,000.

IIAS runs a database for Asian Studies with information on researchers and research-related institutes worldwide. As an international mediator and a clearing-house for knowledge and information, IIAS is active in creating international networks and launching international cooperative projects and research programmes. In this way, the institute functions as a window on Europe for non-European scholars and contributes to the cultural rapprochement between Asia and Europe.

IIAS also administers the secretariat of the European Alliance for Asian Studies (Asia Alliance: www.asia-alliance.org) and the Secretariat General of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS: www.icassecretariat.org). Updates on the activities of the Asia Alliance and ICAS are published in the *IIAS Newsletter*. ◀

IIAS Newsletter

The *IIAS Newsletter* is a forum for authors from around the world to share commentary and opinion; short research essays; book, journal, film and website reviews; fiction and artwork; and announcements of events, projects and conferences with colleagues in academia and beyond. As the gap grows between specialist knowledge and public discourse, we hope this newsletter will fill a science journalism niche within Asian studies.

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