After decades of de-urbanisation under the socialist economic regime, urban growth is now exploding in Vietnam: the country’s urban population has doubled since 1980.

This Focus offers a fresh perspective on the production of urban forms, the reconfiguration of local governance, and the renegotiation of daily practices, mainly in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Our intention is not only to highlight the path-breaking transformations taking place in today’s Vietnam, but also to contribute to the ‘Asianisation’ of urban studies’ paradigms through grounded analysis and interpretation, based on extensive fieldwork conducted with local colleagues in Vietnamese cities and neighbourhoods.
The Focus
Producing & living the city in Vietnam

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Beyond iconic new urban projects, the Vietnamese everyday city production still takes place in the interior of their specific urban pattern, namely their alleyway neighbourhoods. Marie Gibert and Phạm Thái Sơn explore their daily functioning and the current challenges they have to face both in Hanoi and HCMC.

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In the context of liberalisation and globalisation of the country’s economy, Juliette Segard explores how the city production and reproduction mechanisms actively contribute to reshaping State-Society relationship and local political structures. Urbanisation is then considered as a trigger for wider social and political changes.

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Emmanuelle Peyvel and Vũ Sáng Xuân’s article demonstrates how tourism and cities entertain a privileged relationship in Vietnam: cities structure the national tourist map, while tourism is a factor of urban growth and architectural transformations, fostering the global integration of the country.

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Emmanuel Pannier gives a glimpse into evolving urban sociability in Vietnam through the lens of gift-giving practices during wedding ceremonies, both in Hanoi and in a rural commune of the Red River Delta, named Giao Tân.
Waterless printing

This issue of The Newsletter will be the first to be printed by our new partner, Eco Print Center (EPC), located in Belgium. EPC uses a unique, innovative and environmentally-friendly printing process called ‘dry offset’ or ‘waterless offset’ (i.e., printing without water). Developed in Asia 30 years ago, this waterless printing technology was used until 2000 by only smaller local printers on account of its environmental and quality benefits. 16 years ago the German printing press manufacturer KBA became the first in the world to begin applying this ecologically-sound technology on an industrial scale. In 2006, EPC adopted the technology and has now become a pioneer in promoting waterless offset technology throughout Europe and all over the world.

THE INK MIST created in conventional printing processes, which can cause serious damage to the environment, does not occur with waterless offset. As a result, both the working environment and end-product are a lot cleaner. Importantly, the quality has also been improved with this technique, resulting in sharper images and text.

In short, there are 5 main environmental improvements:
- Water is completely absent.
- Start-up waste is reduced by over 50%.
- There are no ink changes and thus very little ink is wasted.
- The number of cleaning cloths and quantity of cleaning agents has fallen by over 50%.
- The technology has made the development of water-soluble inks possible.

Along with a change in printer and technology we have also decided to produce The Newsletter in 2 sections, like a real newspaper! The second section opens with The Focus, which is compiled by a guest editor(s), thereby giving this feature the special attention it rightly deserves. Besides this change to the layout we have otherwise retained our well-known features, including: The Study, The Review, The Network, The Opinion, and The Portrait.

We hope you enjoy the improved quality of The Newsletter, and appreciate the environmental benefits of our new printing process. We look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Sonja Zweegers,
Managing Editor of The Newsletter

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Recent forms of social contestation with regard to land tenure in Cambodia

Much has been written on land grabbing and deforestation activities in Cambodia, but very little is known about the reaction of the rural peasantry to such activities, those who no longer accept being labeled as mere victims. The existence of independent socio-political movements, operating at the grassroots level and occurring in each province, demonstrates the emergence of a collective desire among a substantial part of the population to take destiny into its own hands. An innovative strategy used in response to land grabbing has been the extension of networks from villages to international agencies, provided that the latter behave as partners and not instructors.

The ingredients: perverse national policies

For more than two decades, land security and access to natural resources traditionally used by lowland farmers and highlanders – or ethnic minorities – have constituted the two main challenges facing Cambodia. In spite of land titling programs being unequally and questionably implemented by the state, competition for land access is occurring between a vulnerable, dispersed peasantry and a well connected politico-economic elite. The former has almost no legal and social protection to claim its rights, while the latter is affiliated to the ruling political party – the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) – which has controlled land distribution and ownership since the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) elections in 1992.

The scant land tenure conditions that do exist are a hybrid of distinct historical considerations coupled with the recent introduction of market oriented policies and programs. Focusing here on the national land priority is helpful to better understand the emergence of social contestation throughout the country. The 2001 Land Law brought substantial reforms, but not in favor of the poor sections of the rural peasantry. The spoliation of families’ agricultural land has worsened for the sake of economic national development, through the granting of Economic Land Concessions (ELCs) on state-private land – the fourth classification of land ownership alongside state-public, private-individual and indigenous-communal land. Restrictions placed on the ownership of state-private land have not been respected, with companies encouraged to invest nearly everywhere (including in populated territories) by acquiring vast portions of fertile soil – supposedly to a maximum of 10,000 ha – mostly for agro-industrial crops such as rubber, sugarcane, soybeans, cassava and cashew-nuts.

Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean companies have been the main investors, particularly in the north and the north-eastern corner of the country, areas traditionally inhabited by indigenous people who, as a whole, constitute nearly 2.3% of the 15.2 million Cambodian population. It remains difficult to provide an exact figure of the total area of land already taken by acquiring vast portions of fertile soil – supposedly to a maximum of 10,000 ha – mostly for agro-industrial crops such as rubber, sugarcane, soybeans, cassava and cashew-nuts. Forest Trends’ analyses mention that the ELCs are clearing what happens to the ethnic minorities also happens to lowland Khmers, and such an unstable situation among the common peasantry has existed for a long time, from the 1970 coup d’etat against Prince Norodom Sihanouk, through the Maoist Khmer Rouge regime when all official documentation was destroyed (the Khmer Rouge abolished the notion of individual property over the period 1975 to 1978), to the Vietnamese liberation and occupation up to 1989, and finally to the neo-liberalism adopted since the early nineties, when a deregulated economy and “wild liberalism” was introduced to open-up the country, which had been under a political and economic embargo while the Vietnamese were present. The key aim of this recent liberalist period has been to attract investors and encourage trade and exchange with the outside world, as officially encouraged by national decision makers and politicians.

Land remains the single most contentious issue in Cambodia in 2015, as it has been for at least the last 12 years. By the end of 2013, over 2.2 million hectares of Cambodian land had been granted to large farms in the form of ELCs. These concessions and various other land grabs have affected more than 420,000 Cambodians since 2003. Worse, ELCs have become an additional driver of deforestation, which has had negative consequences for the livelihoods of people who rely on forest products. Independent analysts have confirmed that Cambodia is experiencing a “total system failure” in terms of its forest management regime, in the face of the government’s widespread and unlawful use of concessions – those aimed at growing crops – to instead allow companies to harvest timber.

Forest conditions vary greatly where ELCs are allocated. Drawing on forest fire data gleaned from US satellite imagery, Forest Trends’ analyses mention that the ELCs are clearing forest-trends.com/2015/01/19/cambodia-deforestation-report-2015/cover-a much bigger area than the ELCs – each covers an area of 20,000 to 70,000 ha and with the total exceeding 350,000 ha – are located in the two southern and northern national parks, as well as in the central forests, where there were a number of villages located. This data, which has been strongly denied by the government, does not take into consideration that land bought at a cheap price, or even taken illegally, by lowland Khmers, whether absent landowners from Phnom Penh affiliated to the party, or landless peasants from the valleys who have lost property rights in their native areas. This large-scale transfer, representing nearly half of the cultivated provincial area, has occurred to the detriment of the original occupants, as they have received no compensation at all. Villagers tend to find out about any encroachments at the last moment, once an ELC has already been signed. Three ministers are supposed to sign each of these agreements, which make the whole procedure unclear and difficult to track. Such agreements cause tremendous livelihood and lifestyle changes among the local people.

The most worryingly absent characteristics, land security and sustainable access to natural resources, threaten directly the future of the rural population, which is estimated to constitute nearly 70% of the 15.2 million Cambodian population. The most worryingly absent characteristics, land security and sustainable access to natural resources, threaten directly the future of the rural population, which is estimated to constitute nearly 70% of the 15.2 million Cambodian population. The most worryingly absent characteristics, land security and sustainable access to natural resources, threaten directly the future of the rural population, which is estimated to constitute nearly 70% of the 15.2 million Cambodian population.
The social seeds of grassroots contestations
Collective waves of popular discontentment began to take shape in Cambodia, mostly arising out of the 2013 national elections, which the opposition party (the Cambodian National Rescue Party or CNRP) seemed determined to win. Protest and demonstrations, and for the first time rural and urban demonstrators together expressed their desire for political reform. This created a sense of collective hope among the citizens that together, they could create a social force powerful enough to not allow the shocking privatization policies orchestrated by the party in power to go on. Important for this is what was evolving towards land security for the deprived population. Successful, peaceful demonstrations in the capital of Phnom Penh, in which hundreds of thousands of people participated, brought about the resignation of former prime minister Hun Sen. This case demonstrates that those who disseminate information, as LICADHO and ADHOC have been at the forefront of this promoted by NGOs and the UN, which has a permanent seat at the local level and spreading their ideas regionally and internationally. This is what happened with the Cambodian sugar cane plantations in Koh Kong Province, when forced evictions, widespread seizures of farmland, destructions of property, crops and community forests, and uses of violence and intimidation all took place. This was viewed as a last-ditch act by NGOs, who then made contact with international bodies like the International Finance Corporation (IFC), affiliated to the World Bank Group, which offers advice and asset management services to private sector developers in developing countries, but based on a public commitment to follow ethical and sustainable practices. The EU supports the World Bank’s core mandate of ending poverty. After receiving economic pressure and warnings from banks providing loans to investors, the company had to soften its attitude towards local villagers.

Interestingly, more and more of these grassroots organizations, while having a priority to strengthen commitment at the local level, are becoming multi-connected in nature and are looking for partnerships, regionally and globally, to coordinate their actions more effectively. Such a pragmatic form of engagement, while it may involve the use of diligent networking – and often its frequent frictions at the beginning – is neither spontaneous nor providential and accidental. In most cases, it is well thought through and calculated, based on a long-term perspective that usually involves a serious, cautious decision-making process. It is useful to identify serious, cautious decision-making processes. It is useful to identify serious, cautious decision-making processes that are effective in assisting communities, in terms of urbanization and rural security policies, to better understand how to proceed and what to do next.
Landlessness and rural deprivation have historically been virtually absent in the uplands of Northeast India. Currently, due to the increasing presence of a monetised market oriented economy, rural destitution is becoming an everyday reality. Previously, jhum or swidden cultivation would produce subsistence crops such as rice in abundance, but in many places that is no longer the case. Steep population growth, increasing popular demand for cash and large-scale statist interventions have resulted in a growing pressure on jhum land. Forced by the substantial investments that the commercialization of agricultural production demands, and a need for cash more generally, jhum farmers are increasingly in need of credit, creating indebtedness and even alienation of land.

Erik de Maaker, Dolly Kikon & Sanjay Barbora

IN INDIA, shifting cultivation has been controversial for decades. To administrators, agronomists and conservationists, it has primarily been primitive, wasteful and inefficient. "It is degrading the environment and ecology," as some critics put it! Even as policymakers point out the precarious nature of this agricultural method, anthropologists and environmentalists have identified shifting cultivation as a technique that is exceptionally well suited for the uplands climate and soil, and ecologically sustainable. Obviously, growing population pressure, and the acquisition of land for other agricultural purposes, has reduced the viability of jhum cultivation. But even as the odds are against it, people make great efforts to continue the practice. Encroaching upon areas that were hitherto uncultivated, jhum farmers move towards steeper slopes, and less fertile plots.

How can this sustained commitment towards jhum farming be explained, particularly since an increasing number of studies also show that subsistence peasants are rapidly becoming landless daily wage labourers or migrant workers in urban centres across India? What can we learn from these developments regarding the radical transformations that the economies and societies of the uplands are subjected to?

The critics of shifting cultivation continue to be vocal and well-represented both among policymakers and in the public domain, and quite a few government policies are in place intended to discourage it. Large-scale programmes have been initiated aimed at the expansion of capital-intensive commercial crops, such as rubber and tea, to improve the profitability of upland agriculture. In addition, and to some extent contradictory to these measures, over the 15 years or so several initiatives to sustain and improve shifting cultivation have also gained ground in Northeast India. From the middle of the 1990s onwards, the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) has worked with the North Eastern Council (NEC) in the North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas, encouraging community development projects (in Morigaon, Manipur, and parts of Assam). Comparable projects have started in Nagaland: the Canadian sponsored Nagaland Empowerment of People through Economic Development (NPEOD), as well as a large program funded by the UNDP (Sustainable Land and Ecosystem Management in Shifting Cultivation Areas of Nagaland for Ecological and Livelihood Security). In 2011, the World Bank-supported North East Rural Livelihoods Project (NERLP) started, which aims to improve rural livelihoods in Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. These various development interventions draw our attention towards the uneasy equation between shifting cultivators and the state. For decades, contractors, traders, and agents from the Brahmaputra valley and beyond exploited the hills for timber, bamboo, sand, pebbles and other natural resources. Yet, from the perspective of the state, the hills used to be places with little economic value and its societies as self-sufficient and simple. It was only with the large-scale hydrocarbon and hydro-dam projects that the hills were pushed into visibility as a significant economic zone. For example, a huge number of hydroelectric dams are in the process of being constructed (168 dams of 25 MW or more have been scheduled for Northeast India), while mining is likely to expand significantly as well (oil and gas reserves in Manipur and Nagaland). In addition, Northeast India has been and is at the centre of national policies such as earlier ‘Look East’ and more recently ‘Act East’, that propose to open up the region as a corridor for land-based connections (road, rail, pipelines) between South Asia and China. These developments have a great impact on the uplands in terms of economy, demography, and resource utilization.

The increasing state encapsulation of the uplands of Northeast India has many consequences. As road connectivity improves, private educational facilities develop, and the electrical grid is extended, people increasingly aspire towards modernity. The conspicuous absence of the state as a service rendering entity, notwithstanding its overwhelming visibility as a security force in the region, has resulted in a growing presence of private players. Private health care, educational institutes, loan companies, and consumer agencies have produced a debt culture and rural populations across the hill states of Northeast India are increasingly becoming indebted and are mortgaging homes, jhum lands and crops in order to attend to health emergencies or children’s education, or to pay agents for securing jobs in urban centres across India and abroad.

The growing demand for cash is gradually drawing subsistence cultivators from the uplands deeper into a money and market oriented economy. In this new economy, they are becoming visible as the poor, dispossessed, and the landless. It is within this context that the ongoing state interventions to integrate the jhum uplands need to be examined. Particularly measures aimed at the promotion of plantation economy and the commercialization of crops in the uplands appear to be dangerous since these undermine the political texture of local communities.

Jhum in the uplands

The uplands of the eastern Himalayas and its hilly southward extensions have over the last decades been subject to extensive ‘state-making’. This region, a single ecological zone, is criss-crossed by the international borders of India, China, Bangladesh and Burma/Myanmar. These states are actively consolidating their borders, and expanding their political and economic presence in the once semi- or ‘lightly’ administered uplands. Throughout these uplands, shifting cultivation has historically been an important economic activity.

Shifting cultivation, as the name suggests, is a method of farming on temporary fields. Throughout a growth season, which lasts for about six to eight months, the rain-fed fields carry both subsistence crops (such as maize, vegetables, pulses, rice, tubers) and cash crops (such as cotton, ginger, turmeric). The sheer diversity of these crops, and their ripening over a period of several months, spreads the risk of a failed harvest. The seeds are derived from previous harvests (no dependency on seed merchants), and many are unique varieties, that are well attuned to the specificities of soil and climate. The fields are abandoned after one or two years of cultivation, allowing shrubs and trees to grow back. People then cultivate a next plot. The alternation between periods of ‘cultivation’ and ‘fallow’ ensures the continuation of a jungle cover that helps to maintain biodiversity.7 The longer the rotational cycle, the better the harvest. But where this cycle would previously encompass ten to fifteen years, increased population pressure and market oriented economy has many consequences. As road connectivity improves, private educational facilities develop, and the electrical grid is extended, people increasingly aspire towards modernity. The conspicuous absence of the state as a service rendering entity, notwithstanding its overwhelming visibility as a security force in the region, has resulted in a growing presence of private players. Private health care, educational institutes, loan companies, and consumer agencies have produced a debt culture and rural populations across the hill states of Northeast India are increasingly becoming indebted and are mortgaging homes, jhum lands and crops in order to attend to health emergencies or children’s education, or to pay agents for securing jobs in urban centres across India and abroad. The growing demand for cash is gradually drawing subsistence cultivators from the uplands deeper into a money and market oriented economy. In this new economy, they are becoming visible as the poor, dispossessed, and the landless. It is within this context that the ongoing state interventions to integrate the jhum uplands need to be examined. Particularly measures aimed at the promotion of plantation economy and the commercialization of crops in the uplands appear to be dangerous since these undermine the political texture of local communities.

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ownership. The privatization of land titles provides individual upland cultivators with a valuable asset (land) that can be mortgaged, sold and bought. Growing income disparities, land alienation, and out-migration are a consequence. On a different note, the growing popularity of new religious groups weakens the redistributive mechanisms embedded in society, resulting in communities becoming increasingly stratified along economic lines. Although the distribution of resources such as land continues to be biased on preceding social patterns, the current economic developments result in a redefinition of terms of entitlement. This is best articulated in those parts of Northeast India that are exposed to a substantial in-flow of capital, be it as part of large scale territorialized resource exploitation (hydroelectric dams, mining), the in-flow of development-related money, or the increasing importance of plantation crops such as tea, coffee and rubber. While the initiatives aimed to increase the sustainability and profitability of shifting cultivation mentioned above intend to specifically benefit the rural poor, recent research suggests that even these projects inevitably contribute to the growth of income disparities.

Towards a trans-regional perspective

Compared to Northeast India, shifting cultivators of the Chittagong Hill Tracts have very limited access to capital and markets, resulting in the perseverance of prior social and economic arrangements. The same holds for the Chin Hills of Burma/Myanmar, reputedly one of the most deprived regions of that country. There, people who depend entirely on swidden cultivation tend to be poor, but nevertheless have a high level of food security (as among the Konyak Naga, or in parts of the Chittagong Hills tracts), due to the variety of crops that can be harvested spread across many months. Does this explain the remarkable commitment of shifting cultivators to absorb ‘state’ efforts aimed at controlling their ‘traditional’ practices, and to continue with these against many odds?

Upland communities, as ‘state evaders’, have a history of self-governance. Their encapsulation by the states of which they have become part in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries has resulted in complex legal configurations that encompass both customary laws as well as state laws. The extent to which localized customary arrangements are recognized at the state level differ significantly. For instance, official land records exist only for certain parts of the uplands. Where there are no land records, as in most of Arunachal Pradesh, but also in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Chin Hills, the state informally recognizes customary arrangements. Such arrangements are vulnerable, since they can easily be challenged when competing claims to land are advanced by commercial companies or the state. The contiguous uplands of Northeast India, Burma/Myanmar and the Chittagong Hills Tracts constitute the ‘last enclosure’ perhaps the last area in the world that due to its earlier impenetrable terrain has remained outside the realm of state administrations, national laws, and the commercialization of natural resources. Development to the uplands implies their integration in lowland oriented political and administrative schemes, and an opening up of their resources for national if not global extraction.

India, Bangladesh and Burma/Myanmar are advancing hegemonic claims over the uplands that have triggered the emergence of ethnic movements that counter these claims. In turn, this has resulted in (frequently violent) counter reactions to the various states. States have also confronted upland ethnicity in other ways. In India, government policies distribute large amounts of subsidies along ‘ethnic’ lines (in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Chin Hills, ethnicity has not become a vehicle for preferential discrimination). This has resulted in political appreciation for local cultural practices, languages, and social institutions. On the flip side, ethnic politics have contributed to the radical transformations of terms of entitlement. This is best articulated in those parts of Northeast India that are exposed to a substantial in-flow of capital, be it as part of large scale territorialized resource exploitation (hydroelectric dams, mining), the in-flow of development-related money, or the increasing importance of plantation crops such as tea, coffee and rubber. While the initiatives aimed to increase the sustainability and profitability of shifting cultivation mentioned above intend to specifically benefit the rural poor, recent research suggests that even these projects inevitably contribute to the growth of income disparities.

References

3 In November 2014 a group of concerned social scientists, NGO-related policymakers and journalists committed to the uplands met at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Guwahati, in an attempt to trace the impact of current developments on the uplands. Pooling expertise and knowledge beyond the boundaries of discipline and profession, the workshop aimed to locate gaps in the current perspectives on the uplands, and identify themes that demand urgent academic attention. Whereas most of the participants are involved with Northeast India, the presence of scholars working on the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bangladesh) and the Chin Hills (Burma/Myanmar) allowed for an extension of the canvas to encompass the larger zone that these contiguous uplands constitute. The Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the Netherlands Research Council (NWO) sponsored the workshop under the ‘Social Science Scholar Exchange scheme’.

5 ‘State-making’ in peripheral and disputed border zones such as Northeast India can be understood as ‘nationalising’ space: political, administrative and economic integration achieved through the extension of state institutions, legal frameworks and developmental programs (Baruah, S. 2005. Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India. Oxford University Press, p. 38).
6 Northeast India is included in the Eastern Himalayas Biodiversity Hotspot, as defined by the influential US based NGO Conservation International (http://www.conservation.org/ الخارجية/hotspots.aspx).
7 The peripheral position of upland communities in relation to ‘states’ need not be seen as a being ‘left out’ of lowland based civilizations, but rather as the result of a conscious effort to remain as much as possible outside the sphere of influence of such states (Scott, J. 2009. The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia. Yale University Press).

Conclusions

Jhum farmers in Northeast India face increasing economic pressure, which challenges existing social and political textures. The increasing presence of the modern state in Northeast India and the growth of market oriented monetarised economic activities marginalizes jhum agriculture. Yet, people go to great lengths to continue to cultivate swiddens. One reason for this seems to lie in the fact that this long-proven agricultural technique keeps them – at least partly – outside the realm of the market. While market prices fluctuate, subsistence jhum crops retain their food-value. In addition, jhum cultivation seems to provide much more than a subsistence base, since it also allows for the anchoring of social and political configurations that connect the present to the past. Particularly in this latter respect, the relevance of jhum cultivation has so far remained ill-understood. Gaining better insights in its continuing, yet changing, social and economic relevance is a requirement for a better appreciation of the radical transformations that the Northeast Indian uplands are currently subjected to.

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Above: Bringing in cotton that has been harvested in the swiddens.

Below: Producers selling ginger to merchants at a local market.

All photos by Erik de Maaker.
From hyper-capitals to shadow capitals

While the definition of a ‘capital’ is not as straightforward as it appears, I will follow Ch. Montès in his recent inspiring analysis of American capitals and restrict this short discussion to cities that are the seat of the State’s political power.1 Such capitals as a type have given way to a disparate corpus of research in which two kinds of geographical discourse dominate: the ‘critical and analytical scholarly discourse of historical and cultural geography’,2 and the more ‘systematic discourse of city and regional planning’.3 The Korean case seems to be no exception to the trend, as I will discuss in this short essay based on this divergent corpus of work, in which I try to propose a reading of the multitude of capital cities of the ‘Korean World’ comprising two States (North/South) and a multifaceted diaspora. What is (are) the capital cities of such a fragmented, yet coherent geo-historical ensemble? Beyond the obvious two State capitals (Seoul and Pyongyang), or two well-known historical capitals such as Kaesŏng and Kyŏngju, other cities were once the capital(s) of past kingdoms ruling over the Korean peninsula. Today, in South Korea, the debate over the move of the capital from Seoul has been a long-standing one, while speculation over the future capital of a reunified Korea is also not unheard of.

Valérie Gelézeau 4

HOW MANY OBVIOUS CAPITALS of Korean geo-history?

Incorporating several statistical data such as demographic figures, city functions and transportation infrastructures, map 1 represents well-known features of the Korean urban network: the density of cities over a million inhabitants (more than a dozen, in an area that covers less than 3% of the territory of the United States), and the opposition of North and South regional networks (the primacy of Pyongyang in the North, and much more complex and megapolis-like network structure in the South). This geo-economical reading of the Korean urban networks highlights the position of Pyongyang and Seoul, which I call the ‘hyper-capitals’ of the contemporary States: the two cities cumulate economic, political, cultural and social functions, and are extremely visible on the international scene – albeit in very opposing modes. Although Seoul is not a global city as Sadia Sassen defines cities like London, New York or Tokyo – which are at the summit of an inter-connected global hierarchy, particularly for financial and informational power – Seoul is certainly a very real world city. In the North, Pyongyang cannot compare in economic wealth or cultural influence and, although the DPRK is far from a closed country, it is still poorly integrated in the global trade. Yet, as the capital of a State that stands in opposition to the international community (which is illustrated once again by the recent tests of nuclear power), the DPRK is certainly a real world city. Yet, in both North and South Korea geo-imaginary, the two historic capitals embody the locus of the ‘first’ Korean States that ruled over the greater part of the peninsula (Great Silla in South Korea; Koryŏ in the North Korean one), with the obvious metaphor of the pre-modern unified State functioning as the symbolic origin of the contemporary nation.7 In his 2008 book on Kyŏngju, R. Oppenheim, using Latourian translation theory, deplores extremely well how the South Korean nationalist discourse of the Park Chung-hee era identified Kyŏngju as the capital of the ‘first’ Korean ‘unified’ State (Great Silla), conveniently located in the extreme South-East of the peninsula, and how this discourse was then materialized in contemporary politics (from heritage policy, to city and regional planning); in so doing, Kyŏngju also became the ‘legitimizing capital’: it came to legitimate the contemporary South Korean nation itself.8

In contrast, in the North, the contemporary discourse on national unification identifies the posterior medieval State of Koryŏ as the locus of the ‘first’ unified Korean State, and Kaesŏng (which was actually one among several other capitals of the State) as the ‘legitimizing capital’, located in the North of the peninsula. The considerable efforts made by both South Korean States to have those respective capitals listed by UNESCO, appear to be more than just the wish for recognition of unique vestiges of the Korean past; they appear to be a very strong political gesture contributing to the legitimation process of both contemporary Korean States. In short, these four cities, Pyongyang and Seoul the ‘hyper-capitals’ on the one hand, Kaesŏng and Kyŏngju the ‘legitimizing capitals’ on the other hand, seem to be the obvious capitals of Korean geo-history.

‘Shadow capitals’ of Korean geo-history: from forgotten capitals to secondary capitals in the making

The four cities above may indeed appear obvious, yet others arise in the current discussion on Korean capitals – be it a discussion on past capitals or contemporary ones. Marginalized in the Korean history, or subaltern in contemporary territorial constructions, they remain in the shadows of the four obvious capitals of Korean geo-history. The capitals of States that were marginalized if not ostracized in the course of post-1948 national construction are good cases of ‘shadow capitals’. For example, Puyo or Kongju, the historical capitals of the Paekche kingdom. Although they are both located in current Chungch’ŏn Province, their capitalness refers to a State anchored in the South-West of the peninsula, and whose symbolic heritage is carried by the Cholla Province that was...
discriminated by contemporary South Korean politics. Forgetting or neglecting past capitals symbolic of States marginalized in the contemporary discourse is fully part of the legitimizing process of other capitals, located at the core of past States, which contemporary politics situate at the centre of national construction.

A few studies deal with Suwon, which was to become a capital, and was built as Chosŏn’s first planned new town during a brief historical ‘golden age’ of the 18th century. But this early project – the transfer of the national capital in South Korea modern and contemporary history – remained unfinished. A conspicuous remnant of this episode, Suwon’s Hwaesong fortress, is listed by UNESCO; Suwon, however, appears rather as a forgotten capital.

In South Korea, two other cities in the making, and central to contemporary regional dynamics, are also relevant to the discussion of capitals. The first one is Sejong city, a project that embodies the debate on capital transfer in South Korea. Depending on the social agents’ early intention, various factors are involved: geomatic ‘imperfections’ of Seoul’s site, national security reasons (Seoul’s proximity with the border and necessity to move Southward), or the imperative of territorial decentralization.

Similar in scale and temporality, the development of Songdo is likewise a mega-project reconceived to reorganize capitalization on a greater scale in the South. Songdo’s local architecture appears as a collage of references to other well-known international capitals (New York, Venice), and the building of the so-called ‘international city’ (Jātaka to) is meant primarily to develop an international hub, in order to reinforce the weight of the Seoul metropolitan region in global networks. Songdo is intended to enhance the global visibility of Seoul, the hyper-capital of South Korea, yet it remains in Seoul’s shadow.

**Which capital for future Korea?**

The issue of the future capital of a ‘reunified’ Korea is solely theoretically discussed – and then particularly in the more technical literature of city or regional planning. An edited volume published in 2011 after a series of reports by the KRIHS, is an example of such an attempt, in which, a South-centric view logically dominates. In it, the assets and disadvantages of several cities (the two ‘hyper-capitals’, the two ‘legitimizing capitals’, and Sejong City), that could possibly assume the status of the capital of a future unified Korean State, are categorized according to, among others: situation and localization, functions, architectural and material environment, and symbolic value. Conclusive remarks in the 2011 edited volume state that Seoul is “the most likely outcome”, while both capitals in the North are clear outsiders. Kaselov would have “some appeal” but with “visionary thinking”, and Pyongyang, despite “intriguing aspects” seems “a political non-starter”. As a “misplaced detour”, Sejong City is discarded. To some extent, this speculative research on the future capital, while carefully taking into account the multitude, or plurality, of capitals in the past and the present obvious capitals, expresses the performativity of a vision coming from South Korea where Seoul is the legitimate current capital. However, it doesn’t consider plurality as a characteristic of Korean capitalness itself.

An archipelago of Korean capitals?

Finally, the geometry of Korean capitalness is more complex than a mirrortile of twinline construction (two States, two capitals), or even a foursome structure (two contemporary State capitals + two historical legitimizing capitals), and seems instead to be shaped like an archipelago of present obvious and past capitals. As map 2 shows, this archipelago not only develops on the territory of the peninsula, it is also connected to the many diasporic capitals of the Korean world, for example, Konotown or New Seoul in Los Angeles as the capital for the North-American diaspora, and Alma Aty in Kazakhstan for the Korean diaspora in Central Asia. This archipelago of capitals offers an image of the Korean urban geography that is slightly different from the Korean urban network structured by a state-economic analysis (map 1), which is usually better known.

Regarding the hot issue of a divided Korea and its future, let us note that seemingly innocuous debates on the future capital of Korea in fact have high political significance and consequences. Considering that the capital is a spatial object instrumentalized by State power, the Korean archipelago of capitals is indeed linked to the contemporary political situation of a divided Korea and North/South polarization; I would like to consider the archipelago as one of the spatial and structural expressions (as they stand in scholarly discourse in geography and city planning) of the division system (pandon chip’i). While the moving of the capital as a political gesture of foundation (for a new kingdom), or even the co-existence of several capitals is far from rare or new in the world, and especially in Asia, the plurality of the capital cities was reactivated and polarized by the Korean division. Extremely strong competition between Pyongyang and Seoul (as capital) is one solid factor explaining the economic and demographic weight of both State capitals in their respective nations. At the same time, politicians also present historical capitals to legitimize the contemporary States in historical meta-narratives (Kaesong in the North and Kyŏngju in the South).

The Korean case confuses the concept of capitals as the centre of the nation-state, largely determined by a Euro-centric conception of nation-states with definite borders and a State capital. Triggering a rethink about the longevity of cities and the resilience of former capitals, the plurality of Korean capitals also questions emerging global spas-otic-economic structures, where global cities are actually included in multipolar urban regions (from megapolises to urban corridors). For geography in particular, and the social sciences in general, the Korean archipelago of capitals offers thus a good opportunity to trigger a general discussion about types of capitals that are seldom studied as specific urban objects with particular properties; beyond the ‘hyper-capitals’ and the ‘legitimizing capitals’ that are usually the centre of the analysis, other types of capitals may be discussed, such as ‘shadow capitals’, as marginalised or subaltern urban objects. This orientation may help develop research on cities other than those that are already over-studied in both Korean and Western research.

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Sri Mariamman worship in the Gulf of Thailand

Sri Mariamman (alt. Mariyamman) is generally understood to be a Tamil goddess associated with smallpox. She was in fact cursed with the disease in at least one version of her narrative, and so offerings to the goddess during puja are meant to ‘keep her away from your door’. Historically, her festival directly preceded the ‘hot season’ in Tamil Nadu, which coincides with the season of smallpox and other plagues. In Southeast Asia she was transformed, into an urban goddess of cholera prevention, as well as a ‘goddess of the soil’ for the Tamil diaspora.

William Noseworthy

MOST SCHOLARS WOULD AGREE that Sri Mariamman worship has its origins in south Indian temples, from Tamil Nadu to Kerala. In this context the goddess herself is generally dressed in green, has a pale complexion and holds a dagger, which Younger associated with Kali imagery. In one story, Parasarurama ‘switched’ the heads of Mariamman and an ‘untouchable’ (Harijan; Dalit) maid. When the heads were switched, the Brahmanic and non-Brahmanic caste imagery became blended, as did the imagery of ‘right’ and ‘left’ handed castes.

Regardless of the origins of the goddess, the picture that a historiography of records associated with Sri Mariamman worship paints is one where new diseases became associated with her figure, throughout the emergent Tamil diaspora in Southeast Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries.

First, there was already a smallpox vaccine in Southeast Asia that was being used in the 18th century. Although it was initially ineffective, we might rightly conclude that the utility of worshipping a goddess associated with smallpox prevention declined as the disease itself was effectively stamped out. However, mortality rates for smallpox itself remained high into the 20th century. This helps to explain Aiyappan’s assertion that the worship of the goddess in South India was related to the prevention of both smallpox and cholera, as well as Malabar’s assertion that Sri Mariamman, during the middle of the 20th century, had become associated with the prevention of smallpox, cholera, and even chickenpox.

Indianization and localization

From her origins in Tamil Nadu in the first millennia, as a goddess associated with smallpox, to a goddess who became popular throughout Southeast Asia, it is clear that certain local conditions impacted Sri Mariamman worship throughout the epochs. Scholars of South and Southeast Asia tend to examine these trends on spectrums of ‘localization’ and ‘Hinduization,’6 although I would assert that we should continue to include discourses of ‘Indianization’ and ‘Re-Sanskritization’ within this discussion as well. Here, for simplicities sake, ‘Indianization’ refers to the cultural influences of the greater subcontinent cultural zone (including what is now Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and India) on Southeast Asia. To presume the subcontinent as one cultural zone is problematic, and ‘sub-contentionalism’ may be more accurate, although an even more clunky neologism. By contrast ‘localization’ tends to refer to any active Southeast Asian adaptation of ‘Indian culture’. For example, the Balinese goddess Dewi Maha-pahit is clearly a local adaptation of Sri Mariamman who brings ‘the gift of the gods’ – smallpox – to the Balines. Local treatment of the disease includes lifting the affected – usually children – above the shoulders of those in a procession devoted to Sri Maha-pahit, and addressing ‘the children’ – or the afflicted – with the title ‘God’ (Dewa) or ‘Goddess’ (Dewi) for nine days, as a means of appeasing the goddess. Since Maha-pahit is also the name of the classical javanesian empire that ruled much of insular Southeast Asia, from the 13th through the 17th century, we may hypothesize that this particular localization involved a cheeky response to the javanesian conquest of Bali, under the auspices of Maha-pahit’s expansion and conquest of Bali in the 1340’s. It is not clear if other highly localized forms of Sri Mariamman appeared in Southeast Asia throughout the epochs, although it is clear that Sri Mariamman worshippers were not set aside from the other major trends that influenced religious people throughout the region. For example, as modernist-traditionalist debates swept throughout both Buddhist and Muslim communities around the Gulf of Thailand, during the early part of the 20th century, it does not seem that Tamils worshiping Sri Mariamman were exempted from these questions, as a full report (dated 6/1/1934) of events

Below: Sri Mariamman temple in Singapore. Image reproduced under a creative commons license, courtesy of flickr.

Below: Sri Mariamman temple in Singapore. Image reproduced under a creative commons license, courtesy of flickr.
at the Kuala Lumpur temple indicates that positions of those in the temple in such debates were aligned between those who supported the new faith, (and therefore the priest). As a result, the 'populist' group that sought to make an appearance in front of the 'electoral board' (the urar) is an example of 'everyday religious practice', identifying specific sites, reflushing historical memory, and adopting other religiously significant Daoist images. However, the particular example of Guan Yin (a Chinese, gender shifted, adaptation of the classical Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara) and 'the Laughing Buddha' (Pu Tai; a manifestation of a historical event wherein many Chinese became aware of a new Daoist deities, explicitly to counter balance the power of Hokkien, Hakka and other Overseas Chinese in the Straits Settlements, especially in the 1920s. At the same time, nationalization and 'Indianization' ran high as anti-imperialism sentiments mounted. There were, however, a few explicitly Tamil responses to the day. Tamilam was a temple that was published out of Kuala Lumpur. The serial actually discouraged Tamils from taking positions on British rubber plantations, and emphasized above all else the consolidation of Tamil (not Indian) identity in the straits. As an explicitly Tamil goddess, therefore, Mariamman continued to gain followers, with temples being constructed in Singapore at 126A Mandalay Road [1945]; by Families of New Soon Village], at Davenham Road at the 6th milestone of Bukit Timah [1954, for the employees of the rural Club and on Coronation Road, as well as a secondary shrine at the Subramanian temple of Singapore Naval Base [shortly after 1966]. The placement of the Sri Mariamman temple initially followed what Younger highlighted as a practice of establishing 'village shrines'. Younger draws from an earlier Anthropologist, Becker, who claimed that the 'village shrines' were indicative of the non-Brahmanical 'right hand' Sudra landowning caste practice, of blessing new land with new temples. Moreover, in worship in Southeast Asia, the goddess Sri Mariamman underwent another transformation, from a 'hot' goddess to a 'goddess of the soil'. Sri Mariamman's own transformation has included an alteration in the worshipping community and of practices in urban Southeast Asia. The emphasis on the willingness of worshipers to undergo extreme pain appears less common in the temples in Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City, for example, strongly contrasting with observations regarding Tamil celebraions, particularly centered around the Thai Pousam festival. Devotees may also insert hooks into their body, suspending weights from them, connected to wires. These ceremonies remain common in contemporary Sri Lanka and Indian Ocean communities. For example, the Mahout Festival in Singapore is also a site where Hindu temples have been able to '(re)Indianize', as well as being embraced by many South Indian activists in favor of the term 'Dalit'.

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Although the transplantation of Chinese gardens to the Western world over the past few decades might appear far removed from the topic of Edward Said's classic study, the cultural essentialisation of which it partakes shares much with Said's original conception of Orientalism. But this is a form of Orientalism in which the power relationship has shifted dramatically.

Stephen McDowall

IN JUNE 1664, John Evelyn took an opportunity to view “a Collection of Rarities” shipped from China by Jesuit missionar-
ies and bound for Paris. Among the astonishing sights “as in my
life I had not seen” were minuscule horses, ruses, and “Dives’ Dives” that our Protogonists would “in a manner could make nothing of.” An “exquisitely polished” type of paper, “exceedingly glorious
Drougs that our Drougists & physitians could make nothing of.”

Granted, not everyone was content to lose himself in the fan-
tasy. The stated objective of the Designers of Chinese Buildings
(1757) that peaked during the mid-eighteenth century.3 A visitor’s
dispatch to the province of Sichuan to source appropriate
hardhats with their American counterparts, before being
dispatched to the province of Sichuan to source appropriate

(photograph by
the author).
Appropriating Orientalism
In her 1952 autobiographical novel A Many Splendoured Thing, Han Suyin has her British protagonist reflect on the relationship between tourism, culture, and preservation:

Anglo-Saxon are muddled with useful thinking about your country. To us it is still a wonder land of hidden wealth and sublime wisdom. We suspect that it may not be true, but we go on hoping, for we are sentimentalists. Our tourist minds are intent on preserving old customs in other countries, exotic manifestations of natures of other lands. We like to dream of Eastern nations drawn up in picturesque pagodas, a perpetual durbars, wrapped in gold brocade and gorgeous embroidery and charming rugs, practising old magic dances by moon and torchlight, and especially being very photogenic. We say with complete disregard of them as human beings: "How awful of you to give up those dear old customs, that wonderful family system we admire so much (since we did not have to live under its yoke). It's not you we want, but your traditions, your culture, your civilization." We are museum-haunted, collectors of a glass-encased past labelled: "Do not touch." 

It is tempting to view the entire project of transplanting Chinese gardens to the West as an Orientalist preservation exercise, with the implied message that we can safeguard your cultural heritage better than you can. Indeed, what could be more reminiscent of nineteenth-century Orientalist practice than the placement of a Chinese garden within a Western museum? In this context it serves as a souvenir, carefully labelled and categorized, an object that "alleviates the tourist to appropriate, consume, and thereby "tames" the cultural other" in Susan Stewart's thoughtful phrase.  

But in the case of the Chinese garden, the Western authority to view, represent and create the Oriental "Other" in a Saidian sense can no longer be taken for granted. Consider the anxiety expressed by a New Zealander involved in the creation of the Dunedin Chinese garden in 2008:

I was very concerned that we would do something that was amateurish and that would reflect European ideas of Oriental gardens. And I know enough about Chinese gardens [to know] that no European could ever build a Chinese garden. There is far too much history, far too much culture that we simply don't understand that goes into the [making].

This statement comes close to the "delicious surrender to the unmitigated exoticism of total illegibility" that David Porter observes of the eighteenth-century passion for chinoiserie.

The Chinese garden, and by implication Chinese culture more generally, has once again become ancient, mysterious, unknowable. Instead, Chinese garden culture has now been entirely reclaimed by Chinese actors, a process that signifies not pow erlessness but rather China's newly-acquired confidence within a global context. The dramatic economic transformation of the People's Republic of China since 1978 and its re-engagement with the Western world after a period of relative isolation has seen something called 'traditional Chinese culture' become a marketable commodity once more. The Chinese state increasingly presents itself as guardian of the nation's culture, and in this context, "classical gardens of Suzhou have become an authenticated category of cultural heritage, with nine being added to the UNESCO World Heritage List between 1997 and 2008." 

As the landscape photographer Zhong Ming observed in 1991, "It has taken the attention of the West to bring home to contemporary Chinese the need to preserve historic gardens and to restore them in an authentic way, rather than simply rebuilding either in a contemporary idiom or with an uncholarly contemporary idea of what a classical garden should look like." As said described it, one of the key components of nineteenth-century Orientalist practice was cultural essentialism, or the ahistorical tendency to represent societies by a set of internally-coherent cultural characteristics "bound together by a spirit, Klima, or national idea." The self-Orientalizing process that led to the invention of the "traditional" Chinese garden in the late twentieth century is perhaps not adequately explained by Said's one-directional model, but the end product – an elegant stereotype – is not a million miles away from his original Oriental fantasy.

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Memory and urban heritage

As urbanisation expands and the rural is incorporated into the urban, the pace and scale of urbanisation has often been called destructive. However, the continuing resilience of the urban populations, the adaptation and accommodation of urban informatics, makes it better to consider urbanisation as a complex churning of temporal and spatial layers of cultural heritage, resulting from the historical and contemporary fusion of incoming migrants with existing populations. Besides, rather than ‘freezing’ heritage into particular time periods, or genres, memory and place studies show how incoming migrants bring with them their own intangible heritages that shape the physical and mental urban landscapes in conjunction with existing populations.

Conceptualising heritage as fluid rather than static is central to understanding how heritage can survive in the age of contemporary globalisation. The contrasting approaches of ‘formal planning’ and the ‘organic self-generated informal’ can usefully reframe thinking on ‘internally generated place’ versus ‘designed public spaces’, or even ‘aesthetic’ versus ‘kinetic’. Similarly, cultural heritage can be situated within its ecological and environmental contexts, which include crafts and vernacular heritage, and the ways this works with geography.

Memories, both collective and individual, are crucial for the understanding of who and what we are. When people preserve their heritage they are actually reinventing their memory and place studies show how incoming migrants bring with them their own intangible heritages that shape the physical and mental urban landscapes. Urban landscapes can be approached in terms of this relationship, constituted and sustained through a series of informally institutionised practices. Every city and town contains fragments of historical landscapes intertwined with its current spatial configuration. When decoding these layers of time, the city becomes legible and ‘place’ makes sense. Cultural heritage is not just about old things. New or newly altered objects, places and practices are just as much a part of cultural heritage, in that they hold cultural value for today’s generations. The city in their heart—a personal map of memories, experiences and expectations that define relationship with the surroundings—is something that all residents have. By provoking an articulation of the imagination, this mass of interacting ideas, emotions and preferences can be stimulated into defining the urban space as residents see it.

Sharing and collecting urban heritage – creating neighbourhood occasions

The three “Scenes” on these pages come from a number of events organised in the context of the Neighbourhood Museum Programme in Delhi. Such programmes of documenting the history of everyday life and its diversity, in a city where the margins and peripheries are spatially located within (in the form of the old city and the hundreds of urban villages), are of vital importance to discover how the city is imagined and perceived. Unplanned additions continue to mark the character of Delhi, since they represent the oldest continuously inhabited areas of the city, besides being home to the majority of its citizens. A large number of monuments, from ancient to medieval, are also located in such areas, which in turn define perceptions of the city’s historic identity. In human terms as well, Delhi’s peripheral spaces function as a safety valve for the residential and the small-scale industrial needs of the capital.

Because the size and diversity of the city makes centralised collection, which focuses on diversity and the many layers of urban life, both difficult and desirable, the Centre for Community Knowledge at Ambedkar University Delhi has initiated a multi-year Delhi Citizens Memory Programme, currently in its third year. Called the Neighbourhood Memory Programme, this multi-year research and documentation initiative travels around different neighbourhoods of the megacity, with each local event accompanied by an exhibition and public memory sharing forum. With a mandate to document the ‘lived everyday’ in Delhi, it does so by using memory, local history and the communication arts. Designed to make local heritage a local spectacle, these exercises in provoking multiple narratives of a shared place in a public setting are designed to make layers of meaning visible. By introducing oral (contemporary) and written narratives from history about the diverse experiences of place, the relational and dialogic take precedence over the static, in what is an attempt to transfer agency to the residents of the city.

The emphasis on public sharing emerged out of previous experiences by the author of this paper, as such sharing allows space for dialogue and discussion. As a cultural exchange and communication process, the exercise occurs on the border between art and life, as a performance with no boundary between performers and audience. The organisers of these events walk a tightrope in their attempts to explore diversity, rather than simply consider it ‘different’. The main questions facing the Neighbourhood Museum Team include—What marks the neighbourhood? What is to be collected (memory, image or artefact) and from whom? How is this exploration to be done? Keeping in mind the question, “Who have you met before me?”, is not a formality but a move on the chessboard of local social relations; and an important question emerges: Who from the neighbourhood will introduce the team in the locality, so that every person approached will actually engage with the questions?

The comments in Scene 1 and Scene 3 emerged during public sharing at the Neighbourhood Museum events at Nizamuddin (South Delhi) and Shadi-Khampur (West Delhi). The comments in Scene 2 came forth at a workshop on local urban heritage in the neighbourhood adjoining Ambedkar University.

A moment in the memorialisation of heritage

Despite the relative isolation of village societies, the cultural patterns of pre-industrial India showed a larger complex society. Across rural South Asia, the duality of traditions can be seen, for example, not only in some common forms of folk religion, but also in a stratum of beliefs and rituals that can be traced to a different past. This was explained to me once by a group of Korku tribal children from central India, playing in the sand in the hill town of Pachmarhi in Central India.Replying to my obviously ignorant questions, they pointed out the path one of them had traced in the sand, from her maternal village across the valley, and the walk along the
ridge into town. A sand hill decorated with leaves and flowers located beside the village were not part of their reference, so I inquired about them, they giggled, before the eldest explained to me that it was the Hill of Bara-dev where they had offered a floral tribute before they came to town. And before I could say anything else, another stepped in to say, “You won’t understand it. You live in Pachmarhi, not in the village.” Then the first girl explained, “In town the Gods are found in images at home and carvings in temples, but in the village the Gods stay in the forest. So that is why we go to the hill to pray.”

Tales like this are common across South Asia, as they are in some other parts of the world. Despite the existence of local deities, the uniformity of the shared cultural heritage follows patterns of market integration. Here, patterns of building and construction, marriage practices, the existential basis of agricultural life, and the travels of the carriers of specialised knowledge (bards and storytellers, blacksmiths, healers and others), among other factors, culturally integrate the hinterland of a given market centre. It becomes ‘a way of knowing and seeing’. In engaging with heritage, people are constructing a sense of their own identities. This is an act of assertion, in coincidence with, or simply remain outside the terms of the ‘authorised discourse’. These positions are not reducible to the simple question of divergent opinions and values; it is rather about how people are caught up in a range of activities that involve remembrance, forgetting, communicating, asserting identity, and so forth, as well as cultural values.

The local exhibition at the Neighbourhood Museum group.

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Scene 1

Neighbourhood Museum Exhibition, Nizamuddin East
Community Centre, New Delhi, India, April 2015

Like many other parts of India, Nizamuddin is a mix of class, religion and archaeological heritage. The older Western section is poorer and predominantly Muslim, and home to the commercial heritage. As a post partition residential colony, is more middleclass Hindu, and is less concerned with the conservation of built heritage, this has several limitations when applied to the city. A city is more than a collection of pretty old (or new) buildings, squares, parks. Urban space is also a reflection of the configuration of productive and social forces. Whose city is this? To whom does it belong? As this is a plural, heterogeneous entity, the answer is sadly obvious: to the people with money and power. Heritage in such a discourse tends to exclude understandings that are not focused on material assets but on people’s attachments, identities or sense of belonging.

Dialogism, alternative voices, and contested heritage

A space of all social identity and development, and cultural heritage is the endowment that each generation receives and passes on. There is a wide variety of cultural heritage. It can be tangible, such as buildings, landscapes and artefacts; and intangible, such as language, music and customary practice. It is not just old things, pretty things, or physical things and it often involves powerful human emotions.

This means that heritage emerges as a relational idea: it is about how individuals and groups actively take up positions in relation to sites, buildings, events, histories. It becomes ‘a way of knowing and seeing’. In engaging with heritage, people are constructing a sense of their own identities. This is an act of assertion, in coincidence with, or simply remain outside the terms of the ‘authorised discourse’. These positions are not reducible to the simple question of divergent opinions and values; it is rather about how people are caught up in a range of activities that involve remembrance, forgetting, communicating, asserting identity, and so forth, as well as cultural values. Lefebvre indicates how humans create the space in which they make their lives; it is a project shaped by interests of class, experts, the grassroots, and other contending forces.

To whom does it belong? As a private, homogeneous entity, this has moved from active use by humans and animals alike, to one of apathy, and then as real estate. Our heritage is an inescapable part of our existence and it serves as an intangible structure, encompassing our behavioural patterns and conceptions, enabling some actions while making others unimaginable. Heritage is a bit like Felipe Fernandez-Arnesto’s description of history, “the more you shift perspective, the more is revealed. If you want to see her whole, you have to dodge to slip between many different viewpoints”.

Keeping in mind the notions of ‘space’ and ‘place’, we can look at the city as belonging to dual categories. On the one hand, it is a geographical entity, however, the city can also be recognised as a space upon which many different categories like modernity, progress, urbanity, citizenship and technology are inscribed. It is therefore, necessary to understand that the space we talk about is related to several other spaces that might not be obviously implicated.

Scene 2

Workshop on local heritage, Ambedkar University Delhi, Kashmere Gate, Delhi, April 2014

Finding a free moment at the workshop, Sarla, a boatman’s wife from the adjoining Yamuna riverfront said with a smile on her face, “The guards at the university gate did not want to let me come in, so I showed them your invitation. We are neighbours after all!”

This rhetorical question invoked a notion of shared ownership of the riverbank and the adjoining section of the old city of Delhi, harking back to a time in living memory when residents of the old city used the riverbank around the clock, from the religious and ritual, to trade, riverine trade, seasonal flood plain farming, or simply for relaxation, health or for drinking water.

Reconnecting the tangible and intangible in the urban landscape, aligning the different ways of seeing the structures of everyday life that connect city and river, allows us to identify Delhi’s transforming imagination of the river. Since the mid-twentieth century in Delhi, this has moved from active use by humans and animals alike, to one of apathy, and then as real estate.

Today as commodification changes the riverfront from a neglected ‘non-place’ – riverbed flood plain to a high value riverside destination for private and public corporations – it imagines a value by excluding the ‘non-consuming people’ from the river. While at one level the contestations can be seen as ‘enclosure of the commons’ or ‘accumulation by dispossession’, the eco-cultural landscapes of the river remember the periodic floods that overwhelmed the riverbanks. Nature’s way of reiterating ecological limits, emphasising that the floodplain of the Yamuna continues to be a place that defies commodification.

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Scene 3

Neighbourhood Museum Exhibition at the Studio Safdar Theatre, Shadi-Khampur, New Delhi, March 2013

Having moved into the neighbouring area and set up a theatre studio a year ago, the group wanted to establish a connection to the locality despite being a recent arrival. For three months, the studio space was transformed into a neighbourhood museum, with images, artefacts, printed panels and audio-visuals, highlighting and sharing memories from this mostly overlooked and lesser known part of the city.

A team member and local resident pointed out that the exhibition showed how “Common people have a history worth recording, worth telling, worth documenting, worth showcasing, and everybody who comes in here feels that. Some people just come in for that one photograph of their house, but those who read the panels are impressed by how many different aspects, how many different levels, how many different layers we have gone into. When locals visit, putting the social diversity of the neighbourhood in the same room forces them to engage with it. The engagement began unexpectedly, as life stories tell of a known and shared history of urban development, but the voice was of a neighbourhood otherwise unremarkable and invisible because of their low caste and social status” (Sushama Deshpande, Theatre Director and Co-Curator).
**Globalizing Bollywood is indeed a reality.** The impact of Hindi films on ‘crossover audiences’ not only in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia and European nations with sizeable ethnic Indian/South Asian populations, but also in Asia and the Caribbean, further strengthens the argument in favour of a rapidly expanding visual and cultural language, which is being consumed with immense interest. Brian Larkin6 and Sudha Rajagopalan1 have written about the adoption of Indian (Hindi) film styles in Nigerian Hausa ‘video films,’ the developing taste for Hindi-language cinema in post-Soviet Russia, and the ever larger fandom for Bollywood cinema in Japan.

As a vehicle of transcultural movement, the Indian cinema industry of which popular Hindi film remains the centrepiece, has succeeded in combining extensions and/or marginal reflections of this central element such as theatre, fashion, and media at large to create an ensemble that has redefined textual meanings and viewing pleasures to the background, while foregrounding forms of production and consumption derived from Bollywood visual matrices. These forms have been transduced into local cultures and histories to generate a new, hybridized cultural landscape. The corporatized Hindi film industry based in Mumbai has over time constructed a global cultural regime that brings these financial and cultural flows together, thereby positioning the visual text as a by-product of a fusion of cultures – Indian and foreign. Raj Kapoor’s fan following in Russia, therefore, is the stuff of legend, while Amitabh Bachchan and (surprisingly) Akshay Kumar remain top draws among Afghans, in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

India – a country with a meagre diasporic population of 120,000 ethnic South Asians – reports a steady increase in video rental parlours dishing out the latest Hindi films for a lawmakers audience. A video of a Jakarta traffic policeman dancing to the tune of Chhajye Chhajye went viral on the Internet making media pundits sit up and take notice of this new wave of interest in Bollywood cinema in South East Asia.

The deep imprints that popular Hindi cinema has made outside Indian shores became evident during a recent discussion with exchange students and young scholars from China, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. As the Chinese student expressed his ignorance of Indian screen idols like Amitabh Bachchan, the Indonesian student remarked, “It’s rather strange that you do not know Amitabh Bachchan," and saying that she ticked off titles of Bachchan films she had watched. In another chat with a group from Gambia and Somalia, I was pleasantly surprised at their homogeneous knowledge they had of Bollywood films, and at their recall of names like Rajesh Khanna and Hema Malini.

These exchanges might not be conclusive but they certainly illustrate the spread of the Bollywood universe, and the roots of any further and comprehensive scholarship on the global outreach of popular Hindi cinema as a cultural product lie in these pools of interest that the visual material has been generating, especially since 1995. The liberalization regime of the early 1990s impacted functional and financial systems in the film industry, opening up more lucrative vistas for the dream merchants of Mumbai. Production houses like Yash Raj Films and Dharma Productions – currently two of the biggest enterprises in Bollywood – owe their initial success to designer-romance-NBFI films they produced in the mid-to-late 1990s, which took the Indian diaspora, steeped in nostalgia for the homeland, by storm, not only establishing a sub-genre of films that catered specifically to Indians/South Asians living on faraway shores, but also exposing Indian idioms, tropes and motifs to the mainstream audience.

**A song and dance**

The Hindi film song could be considered as a cultural vehicle that has played a prominent role in this ongoing process of globalisation of the Indian culture industry. When Char mp avait les dés du bol de riz [Come home O foreigner, your country calls you] played as the background score of Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge, there was a barely a dry eye. Or when ghazal maestro Faridkot Udhas sang Chitta behein or watan ki duniya or chiti ayi [He has come from your far-off homeland, a letter has come to you] in Noor (1985, Dir: Mahesh Bhatt), the impact was momentous. The enormous reach of the Hindi film song is inseparably linked to the global appeal of Hindi cinema.

Nowhere is the impact of the Hindi film song more visible than in the emergence of dangdut music in Indonesia. The dangdut is a form of hybrid pop music popular with the working class and youth, which incorporates elements of Western pop, Indian film song and indigenous Malay tunes. In the Indonesian mediascapes, therefore, Hindi film tunes perform a major cultural function, even shaping the birth of a local popular music genre. Subsequent to the airing of the Indian mythological film Rani Parvati, the dangdut genre made its presence felt on Western pop, Indian film song and indigenous Malay tunes. This has led to the development of new pop forms of popular music in Indonesia and elsewhere.

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The rapid movement of cultural flows across the world in an age of growing multi- and trans-cultural ideologies, and the advent and consolidation of a largely inter-connected and magnified media industry, appear to have been the harbinger of a perhaps unexpected cultural revolution through the visual idiom recreations of the popular Hindi film. Through international film festivals, film tours and international premieres, co-productions, global film-based channels or even multiplexes, the enhancement in the scope and reach of Bollywood cinema is inseparable from the liberalization regime of the early 1990s that have impacted functional and financial systems in the film industry, opening up more lucrative vistas for the dream merchants of Mumbai. Production houses like Yash Raj Films and Dharma Productions – currently two of the biggest enterprises in Bollywood – owe their initial success to designer-romance-NBFI films they produced in the mid-to-late 1990s, which took the Indian diaspora, steeped in nostalgia for the homeland, by storm, not only establishing a sub-genre of films that catered specifically to Indians/South Asians living on faraway shores, but also exposing Indian idioms, tropes and motifs to the mainstream audience.

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The following articles come from ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute’s ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC). The ASC devotes much effort on issues pertaining to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as an institution and a process. ASC conducts studies and provides inputs and ideas to ASEAN member states and the ASEAN Secretariat on issues and events that call for collective ASEAN actions and responses, especially those pertinent to building the ASEAN Community.

Five facts about the ASEAN Economic Community

Sanchita Basu Das

EVEN WITH THE ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) now formally in place, there is still a lively debate over whether ASEAN is really an economic community or if the AEC should be seen as a work in progress. The majority belongs to the former group and feel that the AEC’s deliverables, namely an integrated production space with free movement of goods, services, and skilled labour have not yet been achieved. These broad statements have some merit. But we must also ask what ASEAN wants in terms of economic community.

FACT ONE, the AEC was not developed to accord with the European Union (EU) model, though there are some learning experiences to be gleaned from this process. Since the early days of ASEAN, the sovereignty of nation states and non-interference in domestic matters were its key principles. Economic cooperation was sought in areas where it was felt to be necessary, such as to provide economies of scale to multinational companies doing business in Southeast Asia or to anchor the production networks (i.e., a single good is not produced in multiple countries) that were already developing in the larger Asian region. ASEAN economic cooperation is envisioned as a gradual process with long-term aspirations, starting only in 2003. It is an immense task that started only in 2003. It is trying to integrate the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – the region with the most dynamic and diverse economies in the world – onto the agenda. Slowly, by the 1990s, economic cooperation had become a form of diplomacy and most often was carried out in foreign ministries in consultation with the commerce or trade ministries. This led observers of trade to say that economic regionalism in Southeast Asia is a subject for political elites, with almost no involvement from other stakeholders. This has been accompanied by a generalised low level of awareness of relevant economic cooperation measures, particularly among the end-users. The advocacy for trade initiatives is not unanimous in nature and is often driven by the relative strength of particular firms that bring in foreign direct investment to the country.

FACT TWO, even if ASEAN cannot deliver on the AEC, who is accountable for that? To answer these and more, I will attempt to explain five crucial facts about ASEAN economic cooperation.

FACT THREE, ASEAN is one of the few remaining regional groupings seemingly at peace with itself. To note that the vision for the AEC was developed with an awareness of current global economic trends, such as production fragmentation, China’s accession to WTO, developments of the EU and the NAFTA and the 1997-98 financial crisis. The ten countries of ASEAN realised that WTO membership by itself was not helpful as there are 150 countries at different levels of economic development involved; and the concerns and objections of small economies like the ones in Southeast Asia are not likely to be heard. ASEAN is a small grouping where the member economies are relatively small in size and non-tariff barriers. The advocacy for trade initiatives is not unanimous in nature and is often driven by the relative strength of particular firms that bring in foreign direct investment to the country.

In summary, the AEC should be seen as a work in progress. It is an immense task that started only in 2003. It is trying to bring together ten diverse economies, who are not only facing constant global challenges but also domestic resistance and antagonism from protectionists. These are bound to slow the progress and hamper the goal of a ‘single market and production base’.

Nevertheless, now, more than ever, is the time when the ten countries can come together to strengthen the economic community. The global economy has been in a constant state of flux since the 2008 crisis, and the exponential growth of the social media has meant that every event is instantly transmitted and discussed all over the world. In such an environment, any form of cooperation among the ten small countries is warmly welcomed.

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The ASEAN chairmanship: duties, obligations and challenges

Tang Siew Mun

THE ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING (AMM), the organisation’s workhorse, met for the 48th time on 4 August 2015. The leaders discussed and reviewed ASEAN’s many activities and initiatives, including updates on the three pillars of community-building and relations with external parties, but it was the South China Sea (SCS) disputes that hogged the limelight. Its lengthy 28-page joint communiqué bears testament to the AMM’s comprehensive mandate and responsibilities.

Malaysia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs missed the deadline in releasing the communiqué, which led to much media frenzy and speculation about the reasons for the delay. In the end, however, the ignominy of the Phnom Penh debacle, where ASEAN failed to agree on a joint communiqué for the first time in its history, was averted. This episode was nevertheless instructive in two aspects. In the first instance, it reinforced ASEAN’s spirit of compromise, collegiality and consensus, which has been its hallmark since its formation in 1967. It is no secret that some member states would prefer to debate or dispute altogether with any mention of the South China Sea, but acceded to the larger interest of the group and respected the positions of the ASEAN claimant states. Secondly, it underlines again the critical role played by the ASEAN Chair. Malaysia’s statemanship shone most brightly in building the consensus document under extraordinary circumstances.

Malaysia’s objective dispensation of its chairing duties was all the more commendable considering that it faces certain Chinese displeasure and rebuke. This is no small feat as China is Malaysia’s largest trade partner. According to Malaysia’s Department of Statistics, in 2014 China accounted for 12% and 16.9% of Malaysia’s exports and imports respectively. The two-way trade has exceeded the US$100 billion mark. China may have understandably felt imports respectively. The two-way trade has exceeded the US$100 billion mark. China may have understandably felt discomfort at Malaysia’s objective dispensation of its chairing duties as ASEAN Chair. Malaysia’s dispensation of its duties as ASEAN Chair is a case study for future Chairs that share the strategic predicament of having a relatively high degree of economic dependency on external parties. Malaysia was able to perform the role of consensus builder by exercising the principles of neutrality and independence, which provide the Chair with the diplomatic cover to minimize blowback from external parties. It is vital for the Chair to recognize that its actions represent ASEAN’s collective will and interest, and not its own.

It is also important for external parties to understand and respect the role of the Chair as a facilitator and consensus builder. ASEAN’s credibility will be put into question if the Chair is seen to privilege one party over another or bows to external demands. An impartial Chair enhances ASEAN credibility by facilitating intra-ASEAN consensus building and serving as an effective interlocutor with external parties.

As ASEAN inches closer towards a community, which will draw heightened interest from the major powers, it is in its best interest to reaffirm and strengthen the impartiality and independence of the Chair to avoid being pulled in different directions by external parties. ASEAN centrality is predicated on it being relevant to itself and to external stakeholders. Malaysia has led by example in taking a principled stand that may be painful in the near term, but it held its head high and refused to let ASEAN down. The bar has been set for Laos who will chair ASEAN in 2016.

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ASEAN HAS A LONG LIST of responses to transboundary issues in the region, including haze, pandemics and natural disasters. ASEAN has learned from these crises by putting into place workable regional mechanisms to coordinate responses across borders and departmental jurisdictions. Still, there are gaps and challenges, requiring ever flexible adaptation to new or emerging realities.

Serious episodes of smoke haze from peatland forest fires affected countries in maritime Southeast Asia throughout the late-1980s and 1990s, worsening to a then-unprecedented level in 1997-1998. Recurring regularly since then, 2015 is the worst haze season for decades. The haze crisis in 1997 affected millions of people and caused losses in the transport, tourism, construction, in igniting the forest fires and causing the haze. To punish the irresponsible plantation companies involved in igniting the forest fires, Indonesia in September 1997, President Suharto, who gave instructions to re-activate a moribund regional haze action plan, and seek external assistance in tackling the issue on the ground.

The ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Haze (supported by a Haze Technical Task Force) adopted a Regional Haze Action Plan at its first meeting in Singapore in December 1997. This action plan was unique among ASEAN mechanisms at the time, as it had an operational focus that required monitoring by the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre based in Singapore. ASEAN environment ministers again met in Brunei Darussalam in 1997, ASEAN countries including Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, and Singapore other ASEAN shores including Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam. The outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 followed by the H1N1 Avian Flu has periodically occasioned bilateral tensions between ASEAN countries, requiring flexible arrangements to prevent/mitigate and manage forest fires. Sub-regional fire-fighting arrangements were institutionalised to ensure coordination among national fire-fighting responses to the haze. Following the adoption of the Regional Haze Action Plan, the Asian Development Bank and ASEAN with an offer of technical assistance to strengthen ASEAN’s haze monitoring and response efforts, to which the governments of Australia and the Asian Development Bank assisted with the Southeast Asia Fire Danger Rating System (Handover to the Asian Development Bank in 2003). These efforts set in motion the move for developing a region-wide agreement on transboundary haze pollution, which was adopted in 2002. The agreement entered into force in November 2003, after six ratifications. Indonesia was the last country to ratify the agreement in September 2014, after haze levels spiked again in 2013. Until September 2014, Indonesia was the single remaining ASEAN country that had not ratified the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution. But even after the Indonesian ratification, and despite the commitment of President Joko Widodo and some members of his administration, Indonesia’s decentralised government structure has shown weak enforcement of the agreement’s provisions. The haze crisis in 2015 shows unprecedented levels of air pollution that continue to hover between unhealthy to hazardous. But no special meetings of the ministers on haze have been convened, although bilateral meetings have taken place among ministers of Indonesia and Malaysia, and Indonesia and Singapore. The haze has also affected President Joko Widodo’s attempts to be more hands-on in tackling this issue; his planned visit (in September) to the ‘ground zero’ areas in Sumatra and Kalimantan had to be cancelled due to the haze causing poor visibility below the legal minimum. Yet, local authorities have been reluctant to declare states of emergency in the affected areas, and seem more concerned with “looking good” in the upcoming regional elections. This highlights the political nature of regional responses and the reality that ASEAN countries will be more responsive to their domestic priorities over collective regional interests. ASEAN wide initiatives have thus had limited success in managing the problem. Consequently, Singapore took the unilateral action in 2014 to enact the Transboundary Haze Pollution bill as an alternative solution. But ASEAN countries, most notably Singapore and Malaysia, have also bolstered their participation in regional initiatives by offering bilateral assistance to Indonesia to support responses in the affected provinces. Regionally, all ASEAN members are involved in peatland management strategies under the environmental cooperation framework.

At the time of writing, Indonesia has accepted the offer of help from Singapore (among other countries offering assistance) after earlier refusing overtures from these countries when the haze started spreading westward. It seems that bilateral or sub-regional negotiations between the affected parties may be the way to go. A hitherto unexplored area is to engage civil society organisations (CSOs) more in public awareness and support initiatives. A Singaporean CSO recently travelled to Kalimantan, to offer respiratory masks to the local population who were suffering the brunt of the haze pollution. The humanitarian aspect of the haze situation and its nexus with natural disasters is also worth examining, as ASEAN members can consider formally engaging the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) as a platform to assist the communities in need. To this end, more flexible application of ASEAN’s non-interference policy may be necessary, as all offers of assistance are still subject to domestic acceptance on the recipient side. A significant difference between the haze situations of 1997 and 2015 is the immediacy of information and analysis shared via social media platforms and networks. This, if anything, has the power of nudging policymakers, private enterprises, and people towards practical responses.

What are the key takeaways from this recent haze saga?

• Bilateral and sub-regional responses among the countries most affected/concerned seem to have replaced the convening of special ASEAN ministerial meetings of the past. Even more cooperation lies at the national level, the political factor plays an important part in any national government’s responsibility to meet its regional commitments, or lack thereof. The role of the mass media, especially social media, has become evident in 2015, in providing information and context to the issue.

• Non-governmental organisations may have an important role in monitoring and reporting activities related to environmental degradation; they can also work with local communities to assist these communities cope with the situation.

• The humanitarian assistance role of ASEAN to assist communities at the source of the haze pollution has not yet come into play.

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3 The ASEAN Peatland Forests Project funded by the Global Environment Facility (2009-2014), and the EU-funded project on Sustainable Management of Peatland Forests in Southeast Asia.
4 At ‘ground zero’ in Kalimantan, the air pollution level was ten times more than what Singapore or Malaysia experienced on the Pollution Standard Index.

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Dharavi, Mumbai: a special slum?

Dharavi, a slum area in Mumbai started as a fishermen’s settlement at the then outskirts of Bombay (now Mumbai) and expanded gradually, especially as a tannery and leather processing centre of the city. Now it is said to count 800,000 inhabitants, or perhaps even a million, and has become encircled by the expanding metropolis. It is the biggest slum in the city and perhaps the largest in India and even in Asia. Moreover, Dharavi has been discovered, so to say, as a vote-bank, as a location of novels, as a crime-site with Bollywood mafiosi skillfully jumping from one rooftop to the other, till the ill-famous Slumdog Millionaire movie, and as a planned massive redevelopment project. It has been given a cult status, and paraphrasing the proud former Latin-like device of Bombay’s coat of arms “Urbs Prima in Indis”, Dharavi could be endowed with the words “Slum Primus in Indis”. Doubtful and even treacherous, however, are these words, as the slum forms primarily the largest concentration of poverty, lack of basic human rights, a symbol of negligence and a failing state, and inequality (to say the least) in Mumbai, India, Asia... After all, three hundred thousand inhabitants live, for better or for worse, on one square km of Dharavi!

Dharavi’s leather workers

Several socio-scientific studies on Dharavi have been written as well, most of these since the turn of the century and by researchers from all over the world. The book of the French anthropologist Marie-Caroline Saglio-Yatzimirsky forms to some extent a good example of this scholarly attention. Her book gives a detailed account of many aspects of life in Dharavi and of the changes that have taken place in the slum. Her study, however, actually reads like two books telescoped into one another: the core of the imaginary first one is largely a monograph on the workers and their dependants in the leather industry in Dharavi, based on ample fieldwork in the 1990s, well before the slum attracted most domestic and foreign scientists. It has been translated and updated from her French publication in 2002 (Parts II and III, following a broad introduction in Part I). The second imaginary book is concentrated around an analysis of dramatic changes that took place with regard to the slum during the 1990s and the 2000s (roughly Part IV). In the first study the living and working conditions of the several communities of workers and their families in the leather industry, their mutual relations, migration histories, their ways and degrees of integration in new urban setting, etc., are described and analysed in much detail. The leather workers are mainly sub-groups of untouchables (Dalits, Harijans) or (in rather outside of) the Indian caste system, who migrated from various corners of Tamil Nadu in S. India, nearby Maharashtra, Bihar in the North of the country) to Mumbai, and hence Saglio-Yatzimirsky has given a welcome brief introductory exposé of the caste system and the place of untouchables in Indian society in her comprehensive first part of the book. Similarly, her overview of the usage and the meanings of the often misleading, but so convenient, term ‘slum’ and its local Indian equivalents is useful.

The mentioned ‘construction’ of two telescoped books also matters because the focus on Dharavi’s population and its workers (Parts II and III) is almost completely restricted to its leather workers, while in Part IV the focus is almost completely on external pressures on the whole of the population of the slum. The leather workers are, as the author states: “the best example to gain an understanding of the interconnections between Dharavi’s migrants, residents and workers and the rest of Mumbai” (p. 25). This is understandable, but they constitute only a quarter of Dharavi’s population. A bit more information on other categories of the population, in terms of work, caste, region of origin, relations, etc., would have yielded a more balanced picture of the heterogeneous and complex society of Dharavi. Nevertheless, this well-written book on the leather workers in Dharavi forms interesting reading, and results in a lively portrait of their communities. Unfortunately, the author is rather vague in the account of her database, apart from an impressive pile of written sources. She writes about participatory observation, surveys and interviews in general words only (pp. 23-23), but whom did she observe, survey and interview and what did she discuss and ask?

Redeveloping Dharavi?

Part IV is different. It covers in a thrilling account the interferences from a variety of outside actors with the slums of Mumbai in general and with Dharavi in particular, and has a much broader coverage than the leatherworkers in the earlier parts. Apart from some earlier slum clearance attempts, Mumbai’s slums were successfully discovered as vote-banks since the 1990s. The Hindu-nationalist and populist Shiv Sena party won elections in the 1990s with the promise to build decent houses for slum dwellers. A ‘Slum Rehabilitation Scheme’ included a public-private partnership: private investors were invited to build market-oriented apartments in parts of Dharavi in exchange for the construction in situ of small high-rise apartments to be given free of charge to those slum dwellers who owned a house. Those who could not prove to have lived there before a dividing cut-off date and tenants, i.e. most dwellers, were supposed to depart to the urban fringes. However, the scheme failed away before noticeable implementation: just 100 inhabitants of Dharavi were finally covered by it. This failing scheme was followed by a more grandiose ‘Dharavi Redevelopment Project’ (DRP) involving the lines of public-private partnership in the 2000s, and introduced with more top-down vigour, since Dharavi was gradually located in the centre of expanding Mumbai and very close to a new central business district in the making. Hence, the value of Dharavi land rose rapidly and (foreign) investors were expected to come and turn the city into a ‘world class metropolis’ “like Shanghai” (p. 298). It was estimated that about one third of Dharavi’s population would be rehoused in situ and free of cost. The schemes caused much opposition among the Dharaviites and NGO’s working on housing, etc., in Mumbai, notably on the planned exclusion of a majority of the inhabitants while those included also protested against the planned forced separation between working and living spaces: their shops and workshops next to huts and houses were not foreseen in the world-class apartment towers! The world economic crisis of the late 2000s, the swelling protests, and (perhaps) the worldwide media, students, social scientists and town planners’ coverage brought the plans to the dooldums.’ Under these conditions a new plan was developed that took the demands of the inhabitants of Dharavi into account. A pro-poor, bottom-up and to be implemented incrementally plan, according to Saglio-Yatzimirsky, and an example of ‘new forms of right to the city’ demands” (p.132). Her book ends with this euphoria that is also expressed in the sub-title: “From Mega-Slum to Urban Paradigm”.

This account of Dharavi comes to an end in about 2012, but events do not stop. The redevelopment of Dharavi is back in motion. In the Spring of 2015 a revised and “final” DRP was published. In January 2016 private developers were formally invited to submit a bid for sector-wise redevelopment. Eligible inhabitants will each get 25 square metres in high rise buildings, while developers may place 40,000 apartments for sale on the market. Now, as the die is cast, it has yet to be seen whether the neo-liberal hunger for profitable urban land and up-market apartments will now defeat the combined resistance of a huge local society helped by NGO’s, planners and scholars.

Yet, the point remains that the inhabitants of Dharavi (and for that matter all slums) deserve better living conditions than the state has (and should have) provided for them in the course of decades. It was half a century ago that the Bombay administration observed that “Private enterprise moved by profit motive is seen to restrict itself mostly to housing of higher income groups leaving the ones that need it most.” This lesson should not be forgotten when assessing the latest attempts to redevelop Dharavi.

Marie-Caroline Saglio-Yatzimirsky deserves praise for bringing in detail, the social, economic and political dimensions of the attempts to redevelop Dharavi to the fore. Her book matters also for planners, professionals and especially inhabitants of many more slums, in Mumbai and elsewhere.

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1 Quite a few MA and MSc students from all over the world did their fieldwork in Dharavi. A large scale involvement was from the Development Planning Unit, London, involving over 80 students and many staff, in writing about and re-designing parts of Dharavi for their Masters’ degrees, in collaboration with concerned community organisations and some of the most influential NGO’s of the city. See: Boano, C., Hunter, W. & C. Neetoom, 2003. Contexted Urbanism in Dharavi University College London.

How popular culture defines identity

Indonesia is often referred to as one of the countries in which social and visual media and their users play a key role in the formation of society and politics. But these media have also been influential in how Indonesian people, especially the young and urban based, see their own cultural identity.

Patrick Vanden Berge

Take 1: Spring, 2008
Looking for some last minute presents for those at home, I ran into a long queue at a kioske in one of the many shopping malls in Jakarta. My friends tell me that I should have made up my mind earlier about visiting the mall because then we would have had time to watch the absolute film 'Ayat-ayat cinta' ('Aphorisms of Love') a romantic drama based on the bestselling novel with the same title by Indonesian author Habiburrahman El Shirazy. The movie turned out to be an instant success. Later I learn that it will be the best selling Indonesian movie ever until the release of 'Taske Pelangi' (Rainbow Warning) in 2009.

The movie owed its popularity to its fulfillment of a long-standing desire among the young to define a position between the mutually incompatible Islamists and the overzealous, pious and submissive Muslims. Ayat-ayat cinta features some male and female youth with a moral conscience and individuality, who feel at ease with both their religious background and a Western way of life, full of modern equipment. The people that flock to Ayat-ayat cinta are those that have been waiting for a long time to see their aspirations and dreams of being young, pious, and materialist mirrored in a feel-good movie. These people that don't feel at ease at expensive clothes and bags in shopping malls, where western music alternates with the regular calls to prayer, are the main focus of Ariel Heryanto's 'Identity and pleasure'. In this book he looks into the role of media and screen culture (film, digital appliances...) in the life of young, urban-based Indonesians living in the first decade of the 21st century and how the use of these media has helped them to redefine their identity.

Post-Islamist piety
In his book 'Post-Islamist piety' Heryanto starts with some theoretical explanation of how Islamization has recently shaped the Indonesian society after the fall of the Sukarno-regime. In fact Heryanto proposes not to use the term Islamization for the past twelve years of the declining Sukarno's new order, but to use a category of intellectuals and ideologists in the government in order to gain power. Secondly, the term has led to conflicts between those who referred to the commercialization of Islam (Islam being domesticated by commercialism and globalization) and those who see it in the triumph of Islam by slowly penetrating Western culture. Heryanto prefers the use of Post-Islamist piety as it draws closer to the formation of a new group of modern (and modernist) Muslims, who tend to redefine what it means to be Muslim in a global, secular world. As examples of this Heryanto refers to recent changes in Iran, Egypt and the Middle East. The new status of these young and multi-culture middle-class Indonesians has generated new needs, politically, culturally as well as in religious domains. In this context it suffices to look at the popularity of television preachers who combine their messages with the use of a new style of communication. Unlike the Middle-East (where people are weary with the idle promises of Islamist regimes) this post-Islamist piety in Indonesia has not developed out of a crisis, but it has emerged in an organic way to become a trend even before and after the breakdown of the Suharto era. The young Indonesians of 2008 try to show how this Post-Islamist piety is reflected in popular culture.

Take 2: Spring 2014
In my hometown I am waiting to buy a ticket for a movie I have been eager to see for quite a while. I am not surprised to see that most people around me are queuing for the blockbusters, while ignoring the movie I want to see. Two hours later I find no difficulty recognizing the people that sat through the same movie as I did. While most people leaving the theatre are cheerful and smiling, only those having watched 'The act of killing' show frowns of aversion and bewilderment. Joshua Oppenheimer’s magnum opus has let none untouched, even those that have no link with Indonesia. The topic of this documentary has been commented on in many media and should not be repeated in this article although it features at length in Heryanto's book, an example of how recent documentary movies have destabilized familiar notions of opposites. 'The act of killing' was produced in a time in which the media had already led together opposing parties in a schism that has run through the nation for decades.

As this book shows (and many others have, time and time again) no study of recent Indonesian history (be it politically, sociologically, culturally...) can ignore the events of 1965 when violence of previously unseen vigour swept through many parts of the country, following the abduction and murdering of some high level generals. 'Identity and pleasure' stresses the importance of film as a means of forces within Indonesian society to gain control of power and legitimacy. On the one hand, film is used in a propaganda way as the compulsory watching of the state-sponsored film 'Pengkhianatan G30 Sjober' (The treachery of the 30th September Movement). Secondly, the movie 'Ayat-ayat cinta' has shown, while on the other hand younger generations of independent documentary makers have recently tried to counterbalance the official narrative. Heryanto notices that the attempts of this second group of people have neither been numerous nor always very successful in terms of appreciation or cinematographic quality. Not only because the new generations are rather indifferent to facts that happened half a century ago, but also because any attempt to produce an attractive movie or documentary on the 1965 happenings, faces numerous problems, such as the need to provide enough historical context as most people have limited knowledge of their past, and the dilemma of addressing the question of what really took place in 1965. As Heryanto shows in a different context, maybe the most problematic issue is whether the filmmaker will be able to conclude his project since many parties still oppose any attempt to rewrite official history. If ‘the act of killing’ challenges this general remark, it is because it is unique in its approach. In the movie the faces and voices of those responsible for killing real and supposed members of the Indonesian communist party are shown. In fact, they are the leading characters of the film; not only describing but also showing (in order to visualize this, Joshua Oppenheimer uses the technique of making a movie within a movie) how they carried out the killings and executions. It is this grotesque aspect of the movie that has drawn large numbers of spectators to its screening (evidently more abroad than in Indonesia).

The beginning of Indonesian film
A complete chapter is dedicated to the position (and lack of visibility) of Chinese people in Indonesian film history. Using a sociological approach Heryanto claims the Chinese to be an ethnic minority under eraise. While their position and realizations in almost any field is swept away, traces of their ethnic background are brought to surface for ongoing discrimination. For Heryanto this is the result of the colonial concern with labelling people in clearly defined categories. This labelling renders discrimination and stigmatization normal. As a result the position of the Chinese in film history results from a narrow, almost racist view, based on an ethnical segregation by Indonesian film experts. The best example is the occupation of Chinese experts with the beginning of Indonesian film history. While many (especially Chinese) film makers have made movies in the first years of Indonesia's independence, officially Indonesian film started in 1962 only, with the shooting of ‘Dron Digdo’ (Blood and prayer). In order to justify this stance the term Indonesian cinema is used without clearing the vagueness of this term. In reality, the choice for this movie as the official beginning has more to do with the fact that it was the first movie to be produced and directed by 'true' Indonesian only. Fortunately, the leading roles and contributions of the ethnic Chinese (and other social groups not considered full blood Indonesians) to the early developments of screen culture have recently received some attention. Furthermore, the renewed interest in the role of the non-pribumi in cultural matters may be the trigger for an unbiased examination of Indonesia’s history.

The rise of recent popular culture does not only reflect the social empowerment of clearly defined religious or ethnic groups - it represents a significant socio-cultural trend among the middle-class women. The popularity of K-Pop (a generic term for popular culture originating in mainly South Korea and enveloping many forms) has accompanied the social mobility of urban middle-class young women. This becomes clear in Korean movies which, unlike Indonesian-made serials, feature female protagonists that struggle to overcome the various battles resulting from living in an strongly patriarchal culture as second-hand citizens due to gender. This mirrors the attempts of Indonesian female Muslims to find peace with their position in society. In a similar way these girls give to job security and financial independence. It is obvious that the depiction of this battle has struck a chord with urban middle-class female spectators. The popularity of soap operas and reality TV can – in their most basic manifestation – be seen in the lives of many Indonesians who lighted up the behaviour and speech of actors in popular movies and television shows. One may also wonder – and this is a question that Heryanto does not address – whether the role of the government in bringing cultural phenomena to the surface is not crucial. While the Korean government has supported K-Pop extensively in an attempt to promote South Korea among foreigners, Indonesia has never invested much in its culture. While Heryanto's book, although experts pointed at the genuine power (of among others) Indonesian dance and wayang theatre.

Democracy according to reality TV
Finally Heryanto shows how increasing access to popular media has influenced the official political way. For this he compares the periods of elections during and after the New Order. It is no surprise to see how the sham elections during Suharto's period were a political way for the government to have control over the huge crowds that were granted some temporary power. The government allowed what were meant to appear as opposing parties to take part in the election to have their say for any of the three allowed political parties. Within the restrictions set up by the government, popular culture during election times and after formed a平台 for the young and the underprivileged driving around the main cities on motorcyles. In Heryanto’s opinion these actions should be considered as utterances of power, subversion and hyper-obedience. Unfortunately as the book draws closer to its end, the author's attempts to elaborate on these ideas get poorer and this theory is not really defended in a convincing way.

Of course the political arena and media has changed in the way in which people participate in elections. For this it suffices to look at the elections of 2009. Two characteristics come to the foreground: the role of new strength in the election of the independent candidate campaigning with some self-made propaganda tools. As a result the election campaign attained a high level of entertainment in which popular culture (song, dance, theatre) played a key role. Together with the feminization, the 1999 elections were a turning point in the way Indonesian people got involved in this democratic process. It is still unclear if this change will bring positive results. Anyway, what we have seen (an issue Heryanto’s book missed because it was published earlier) is that during the recent presidential elections in 2014, social media proved to be essential instruments in mobilizing people, disseminating information and commenting on results.

For Ariel Heryanto, the role of Indonesian people with items that come to them through screens, should not be seen separate from the fact that Indonesians have been raised for decades by the non-pribumi media and culture have recently been valorised. In this sense the full blood Indies (full blood Indonesians) to the early developments of screen culture have recently been valorised. In this sense the full blood Indies (full blood Indonesians) to the early developments of screen culture have recently been valorised. In this sense the full blood Indies (full blood Indonesians) to the early developments of screen culture have recently been valorised. In this sense the full blood Indies (full blood Indonesians) to the early developments of screen culture have recently been valorised. In this sense the full blood Indies (full blood Indonesians) to the early developments of screen culture have recently been valorised. In this sense the full blood Indies (full blood Indonesians) to the early developments of screen culture have recently been valorised. In this sense the full blood Indies (full blood Indonesians) to the early developments of screen culture have recently been valorised. In this sense the full blood Indies (full blood Indonesians) to the early developments of screen culture have recently been valorised. In this sense the full blood Indies (full blood Indonesians) to the early developments of screen culture have recently been valorised. In this sense the full blood Indies (full blood...
In terms of thematic exploration, David Arnold’s book on technological modernity in colonial India, which covers the period between the 1880s and the 1960s, is seminal. In the current historiography, there is hardly any book which includes sewing machine, bicycle, rice mill, and typewriter in one single account that tells us the story of modern India that unfolded at the intersections of technology, state and society.

The making of Mongolia’s modernity

As I was reading through A Monastery in Time, it occurred to me how the publication of this book, and the more recent volume Mongolian Buddhism in History, Culture and Society, suggests that Mongolian Buddhism is slowly becoming a meaningful academic study, quite distinct from the Tibetan Buddhism from which it initially developed. Scholars of religion and history, as well as individuals and organizations involved in cultural preservation, are ever more focused on understanding how Buddhism in the Mongolian ethnic region (including areas that are nowadays considered politically part of Russia and China, in addition to Mongolia itself) has morphed, over the centuries and under many diverse influences, into what it is today. Such scholarship, moreover, contributes to an enrichment, not only of our understanding of the past, but of our involvement in the contemporary development of Inner Asia.

Simon Wickham-Smith
Bicycles were distributed to help policing, typewriters in government offices and courts to speed up administrative work and to keep track of official correspondence, and cars to speed up the movement of administrative personnel and information. The state was not the producer; in fact, within the ironic relationship between indigenous and imported inputs, the basis of American products (Singer sewing machines, Remington typewriters and Ford automobiles) dominated the Indian market. But the state significance of these relationships was not simply a matter of technologies strengthening the “inner state” of the nation. They did so on inscriptions. During the Second World War, for instance, the expansiveness of the state in terms of being able to regulate the usages of these technologies was quite marked.

Yet this is only one part of the story. The social and political re-calibration of these technologies to either subvert the state project or to support a nationalizing identity was equally important and forceful, which Arnold lucidly demonstrates. Women working for communist organisations and low-caste villagers, for instance, used them for disseminating anti-colonial nationalist aspirations – they all pointed at colonial control that was lack of if not absent. All they show that the life of technology was beyond the simplistic control of the state. They all indicate that different social groups used these technologies to articulate the idea of modernity and modern self-hood.

Nature of technological modernity

What are the axes and scope of this technological modernity? Exactly how does one get a historically nuanced understanding of the nature of this modernity, which this book like many others especially on a colonial society, does. Numbers definitely are not on the side of knowing the “quantitative” axes of this modernity, precisely because with which these commodities became part of Indian life, they were still used rather sparsely if compared with figures of other countries. Arnold’s knowledge of the mechanism and hence the way out for him is to underscore the social, experiential and utopian articulations of this modernity. The mix of social life captured through visual, literary works and films is interesting. The articulation of this modernity is tied to the manifold effects these different technologies produced on diverse social groups and classes. Moreover, Arnold explores the peripheries of modernizing initiatives of some Indians selling, part manufacturing, repairing, and assembling these products, Arnold leads us into the world of used bicycles, where technology such as sewing machines and typewriters require new skills? Who were the people that moved in to operate them? Did they lead to depression of existing groups? Did? One gets glimpses of answers into these questions. Bicycles empowered rural folk and elite women; typewriters mainly remained within the confines of Anglo-Indian women in offices and scribal Indian men outside the courts; rice mills took away the work of poor women; and sewing machines tapped into the existing skills of darsu, but also became part of the reformist discourse of “new women” of the turn of the nineteenth century. The last enlarged the scope of domestic work for women.

Yet, many of the answers to the question of modernity are just about at the exploratory level. Bicycle races fitted into the notion of Bengali manliness, but did it also contribute to the emergence of a new sensibility and aesthetics of landscape, space and movement, and if yes, how? Did the new modernity based on widespread use of some kind of technology produce a culture of mass production and consumption? Was it linked to, if any, the emergence of new ‘modern’ fashion? How did the newly individualized notion of self transcend the veranda of their masters/employers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries transform into a shop based work culture of the later period, in which these people were not the owners of their tools? Did technological modernity bring alienation and firmer labour control? Passages from literary sources on sewing machines (141-42), and work-related changes brought about by rise of islands (134-40), are used for disseminating anti-colonial nationalist aspirations – they all pointed at colonial control that was lack of if not absent. All they show that the life of technology was beyond the simplistic control of the state. They all indicate that different social groups used these technologies to articulate the idea of modernity and modern self-hood.

Conflicting resistance

If modernity is a product of conflictual claim and counter-claim making, then the history of technological modernity should also reflect the same – conflicts between social groups and classes. Arnold says that “there is at least some cultural resistance to sewing machines” (49), but what about resistance based upon capital and skill? Did the traditional catchment of darzis’ work and the economic use of women started sewing at home (and quite massively, with vernacular magazines publishing essays on how to sew different types of materials) and did it compensate for it? (p.50-51)? The competitive clerical job market revolved around the skill of typewriting; what kind of social conflicts did it lead to? Arnold prefers to look at the history of interaction between technology and society through assimilation and acculturation; I wonder if there is more to be said about conflicts and discourses; to be fair, they are not absent (but are most often channelled into a bigger discussion) and popular producing?

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References

The expression of time in the title relates not only to the unfolding of history, but also to its collapse in day-to-day terms in the lives of these characters. The immersion in the ongoing experience of the monks today of religious leaders such as the Mergen Gegen (1777-1796), who was closely associated with the Mergen monastery, and whose Mongolian-language history of Buddhism, Alten Todobe is central to the monastery’s self-aware preservation of Buddhist rituals in Mongolian, renders time – and so history, and so manifestation itself – a somewhat slippery study. Indeed, in their discussion of the concept of concentration” (p386). Right at the book’s close, the authors come to the book’s narrative, the awareness of western scholarship of Mergen Monastery’s “preserving history, of preserving local and cultural knowledge and are transformed over time by the current forms of modernity. The urge to preserve culture is itself recognized and is this a most important and exciting contribution to the field of Mongolian studies. The Review | 25
Human Trafficking in Colonial Vietnam

Christina Firpo

Human Trafficking in Colonial Vietnam is the first in-depth historical study of trafficking in Vietnam. Drawing on a vast body of empirical evidence from 19th and early 20th century missionary reports, military documents, newspaper stories, diplomatic correspondence, and reports from the domestic colonial government, Lessard explores large-scale trafficking networks that sold women and children within Vietnam or to China and Hong Kong, where they would ultimately be sold into marriage, prostitution, or domestic servitude. Lessard argues that while trafficking networks aimed to stop slavery and the sale of women and children, their solutions were driven by misconceptions about Vietnamese culture and gender roles. Missionaries operated under the assumption that children would fall victim to infanticide and women would be negatively influenced by what they judged to be a promiscuous Vietnamese culture, as a result, missionaries refused to return trafficking victims to their home villages.

Chapter 2 investigates kidnappings and trafficking that occurred within the context of the pacification of Tonkin in the second half of the 19th century. Lessard draws on military memoirs, missionary accounts, and travelers' memories of their experience with trafficking in Tonkin, a politically volatile region during this time period. Trafficking of women and children occurred in areas with low-cost labor, such as border islands, where missionaries refused to return slaves and adopt them into the missionary community. The French government launched a campaign to deport slaves and adopt them into the missionary community. For all their good intentions, as Lessard shows, their efforts were ill executed. Missionaries focused on saving only Christians and they were driven by misconceptions about Vietnamese culture and gender roles. Missionaries operated under the assumption that children would fall victim to infanticide and women would be negatively influenced by what they judged to be a promiscuous Vietnamese culture, as a result, missionaries refused to return trafficking victims to their home villages.

The third chapter focuses on trafficking incidents discovered by the French consul to China or discovered by merchant marine vessels or customs and borders agents, both of which were accountable to the command of the consul in cases of human trafficking. The French consul was responsible for reporting trafficking victims, yet, as Lessard shows, this policy was not strictly enforced, and as a result, Vietnamese women were often victimized. The Vietnamese state was reluctant to acknowledge the presence of trafficking networks, as this would have embarrassed the French colonial government. Vietnamese intellectuals criticized the colonial state for the hypocrisy of justifying colonialism with claims to protect its subjects. As much of the trafficking trade was run by Chinese gangsters, these gangs were able to use the French consular system to exploit Vietnamese women.

The final chapter examines the pressures that human trafficking placed on the colonial government in Indochina. With newspapers reporting horrifying cases of beatings and victims being thrown overboard, France's inability to stop traffickers from crossing borders or using colonial ports and coastland embarrassed the French colonial government. Vietnamese intellectuals criticized the colonial state for its hypocrisy of justifying colonialism with claims to protect its subjects. As much of the trafficking trade was run by Chinese gangsters, these gangs were able to use the French consular system to exploit Vietnamese women.

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Sander Holsgens

Human Trafficking in Colonial Vietnam is a thorough investigation into the political, diplomatic, and economic context in which the market for women and girls flourished during the colonial period. With its incredible detail drawn from an array of sources — some known to historians and many previously unpublished — Lessard proves that human trafficking is not a modern concept in Vietnam and indeed has a long history in Indochina. One of the strengths of this book is that the author is able to successfully integrate different sources of evidence, including official colonial documents, missionary accounts, and travelers' diaries. This book will be essential for the study of human trafficking — both academic and applied. It will be useful for both undergraduate and graduate courses in Asian history, French history, and gender studies. It should be a mandatory read for aid workers who focus on traffickng in Vietnam and China.
Institutional engineering and political accountability
Reviewer: Iqra Anugrah

Money in Asia
Reviewer: Simon James Bytheway

Art and craft workshops under the Mughals
Reviewer: Martha Chaiklin

Witnessing Krakatau
Reviewer: Phillip Drake

A compact and thoughtful treatment of China’s past
Reviewer: Li Hung Tui

Aging and loss
Reviewer: Ilana Maymind

Fire and potency: the essences of Akha space and identity
Reviewer: Maren Tomforde

Asian cities racing to capitalise on culture
Reviewer: Simon Obendorf

Dutch scholarship in the age of empire and beyond
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Art and craft workshops under the Mughals
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McCuire-Ra, D. 2016. *Borderland City in New India*. Amsterdam University Press ISBN 9789089647380


Engaging with the urban field in Vietnam: crossing approaches

In a world where more than 50% of the population lives in cities, Vietnam and its current 34% of urban dwellers remains associated with rurality in the global imaginary. But this last figure should be put into perspective: after decades of de-urbanisation under the socialist regime the national urban growth is now exploding; the country’s urban population has doubled since 1980, with an official average growth of 3.4% per year. Beyond this steady demographic development, urbanised areas multiplied by 4 between 1995 and 2010. Most of the urban growth takes place in and around Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), even though secondary cities are also engaged in a rebalancing process. Today these two main metropolises of the country have respectively 7 and 7.9 million inhabitants. In addition, since the introduction of đổi mới reforms in the mid-1980s, cities have been officially recognised as the engine of national economic growth by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), which leads the country.

In this renewed context, our Focus offers a fresh perspective on the production of urban forms, the reconfiguration of local management, and the renegotiation of daily practices in Vietnamese cities. Our intention is not only to highlight the path-breaking transformations taking place in Vietnam today, but also to contribute to the ‘Asianisation’ of urban studies paradigms through grounded analysis and interpretation, and to discuss an alternative theoretical framework, based on extensive fieldwork in Vietnamese cities and neighbourhoods.
Unfolding the layers of the Vietnam urban fabric

If contemporary urban transformations are taking place in increasingly globalised contexts, they should also be understood by considering the long-term urban history that explains the distinctiveness of the Vietnamese metropolitan ‘art of being global’. Furthermore, the contemporary ‘openness’ echoes the previous international links these cities kept during the historical contexts of Chinese Diaspora trade, French colonisation and the socialist bi-nationalisation period. Thus, after experiencing colonisation, decades of war, socialism and de-urbanisation, followed by the national reunification of 1975 and doi moi reforms, different Vietnamese cities reveal different urban trajectories.

In that regard, the literature has contrasted Hanoi and HCMC for a long while. HCMC is usually depicted as the country’s liberal and international metropolis, while Hanoi is often associated with bureaucracy and Party enhanced control. Hanoi, as the national capital city, is indeed the place where decisions are taken, while HCMC is considered to be the potential economic engine of the country. The different places they occupy in the urban hierarchy continue to influence the understanding of Vietnam’s urbanisation, even though this dichotomy is becoming less significant these days.

The two metropolises are now engaged in a similar trend of urban sprawl, which leads to a progressive ‘convergence process’. Thus, while concentrating mainly on these two leading cities – thereby also reflecting the reality of the academic production today, as far as urban Vietnam is concerned – this Focus will go beyond the simple juxtaposition of two competing cities, by highlighting the complementarities of their two ‘worlding paths’.1

Metropolisation: towards a reading of the ‘worlding paths’ of Vietnamese cities

With the adoption of a ‘socialist-oriented market economy’ and the opening-up to international financial flows, major Vietnamese cities, as well as secondary ranking cities like Danang located in economic development corridors, are stimulated by a common metropolisation process.

In this Focus, metropolisation is understood as a process that affects a city both in its forms and functions, and is characterised by a concentration of population, activities, and wealth. This phenomenon cannot, however, be reduced to its demographic dimension only. Its originality relates to the diversification of the activities, to the concentration of strategic economic functions, and to the attractiveness of and accessibility to communication networks at various scales. In particular, metropolisation integrates cities into the networks of the global economy. While they take part in this tendency, Asian cities display specific features. The desolate pattern defined by McGee suggests that metropolisation leads to the assembling of territories that combine agricultural and non-agricultural activities.2 In addition, by using cheap means of transport, such as motorbikes, transportation of goods and people is facilitated between inner cities and their fringes.

In Hanoi and HCMC the early signs of metropolisation appeared with the arrival of the first Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) at the beginning of the 1990s. Though buildings of more than ten storeys were already built in HCMC during the 1960s and 1970s, Vietnamese cities generally remained quite ‘low’. Until the FDI triggered the construction of the first high-rise buildings. This paved the way to the verticalisation and ‘super-sizing’ of the city. The construction of the New World Hotel in HCMC in 1991, and the Hanoi Tower in 1996 (that combines service apartments, hotel, offices and retail functions), embodied the first international functions and vertical shapes. On the outskirts, FDI materialised through the construction of rescaled industrial zones and factories (see the article by Trịnh Kiều Minh in this Focus section). For instance, the Japanese firm Honda settled its first motorcycle assembly chain in the North of Hanoi nearby the international airport in 1997.

In addition, urban sprawl has progressed rapidly. In the last 20 years, in both cities, an average of 1,000 hectares per year of agricultural land has been urbanised. As a result, the inner cities and their outskirts (i.e., the peri-urban areas) were densified. Noteworthy landmarks of this trend are the experimental residential areas, known as ‘new urban areas’ (Khu đô thị mới), which city authorities initiated in the early 1990s. Both Hanoi and HCMC started to develop their iconic projects in 1996, with Ciputra in Hanoi and Saigon South in HCMC. These two projects represent the kick-start of large scale urban projects in Vietnamese cities (over 400 hectares) located at the cities’ outskirts, where private and foreign investors and developers are involved (see article by Ségard). Furthermore, there has clearly been a shift from an organic growth of the city to ‘project-based development’ (see article by Cibert and Phạm Thu Sĩm).3

In this context, the construction of new mass rapid transit systems became a major issue (see article by Moul and Võng Khühl Tráºn). Furthermore, while cities deal with planned adjustment phases to frame the construction of modern economic infrastructures, urban spontaneous developments also continue.

Engaging with the urban field in Vietnam: crossing approaches continued

A street scene in Phú Mỹ Hưng, a new urban area in HCMC, with the Bitexco Tower, a city landmark, in the background (photo by Marie Gibert).

A reordering of stakeholders: urbanisation as a political process

Spaces are changing, so too are the stakeholders. Even though the economic transition and international opening-up have been orchestrated by the Party, the Regime has evolved, influenced both from the ‘outside’ (regional powers, international donors, Western countries) and from the ‘inside’ (intellectuals, Party branches, religious groups, inhabitants, etc.). The current production of the city, governance issues and power relations, all illustrate the complexification of the political, economic and social life of the country.

The two metropolises are now engaged in a similar trend of urban sprawl, which leads to a progressive ‘convergence process’. Thus, while concentrating mainly on these two leading cities – thereby also reflecting the reality of the academic production today, as far as urban Vietnam is concerned – this Focus will go beyond the simple juxtaposition of two competing cities, by highlighting the complementarities of their two ‘worlding paths’.1

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In this Focus, metropolisation is understood as a process that affects a city both in its forms and functions, and is characterised by a concentration of population, activities, and wealth. This phenomenon cannot, however, be reduced to its demographic dimension only. Its originality relates to the diversification of the activities, to the concentration of strategic economic functions, and to the attractiveness of and accessibility to communication networks at various scales. In particular, metropolisation integrates cities into the networks of the global economy. While they take part in this tendency, Asian cities display specific features. The desolate pattern defined by McGee suggests that metropolisation leads to the assembling of territories that combine agricultural and non-agricultural activities.2 In addition, by using cheap means of transport, such as motorbikes, transportation of goods and people is facilitated between inner cities and their fringes.

In Hanoi and HCMC the early signs of metropolisation appeared with the arrival of the first Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) at the beginning of the 1990s. Though buildings of more than ten storeys were already built in HCMC during the 1960s and 1970s, Vietnamese cities generally remained quite ‘low’. Until the FDI triggered the construction of the first high-rise buildings. This paved the way to the verticalisation and ‘super-sizing’ of the city. The construction of the New World Hotel in HCMC in 1991, and the Hanoi Tower in 1996 (that combines service apartments, hotel, offices and retail functions), embodied the first international functions and vertical shapes. On the outskirts, FDI materialised through the construction of rescaled industrial zones and factories (see the article by Trịnh Kiều Minh in this Focus section). For instance, the Japanese firm Honda settled its first motorcycle assembly chain in the North of Hanoi nearby the international airport in 1997.

In addition, urban sprawl has progressed rapidly. In the last 20 years, in both cities, an average of 1,000 hectares per year of agricultural land has been urbanised. As a result, the inner cities and their outskirts (i.e., the peri-urban areas) were densified. Noteworthy landmarks of this trend are the experimental residential areas, known as ‘new urban areas’ (Khu đô thị mới), which city authorities initiated in the early 1990s. Both Hanoi and HCMC started to develop their iconic projects in 1996, with Ciputra in Hanoi and Saigon South in HCMC. These two projects represent the kick-start of large scale urban projects in Vietnamese cities (over 400 hectares) located at the cities’ outskirts, where private and foreign investors and developers are involved (see article by Ségard). Furthermore, there has clearly been a shift from an organic growth of the city to ‘project-based development’ (see article by Cibert and Phạm Thu Sĩm).3

In this context, the construction of new mass rapid transit systems became a major issue (see article by Moul and Võng Khühl Tráºn). Furthermore, while cities deal with planned adjustment phases to frame the construction of modern economic infrastructures, urban spontaneous developments also continue.

A street scene in Phú Mỹ Hưng, a new urban area in HCMC, with the Bitexco Tower, a city landmark, in the background (photo by Marie Gibert).
It is important to bear in mind that the Regime’s stability relies on its ability – more or less – to ensure growth and to improve living conditions for a majority of its people. The Party-State carries a strong developmentalist discourse and its members position themselves as ‘state-craft thinkers’, who have to, and can, turn the country from a ‘lattercomer state’ into an ‘advanced country’, by making adjustments inspired by exogenous Western or Asian models.19 But growth has slowed down and inequalities are increasing, especially in urban contexts, leading many to question the legitimacy of the ‘socialist and communist’ Regime.

So far, pragmatism and flexibility have been key to mitigate shocks and react to emerging demands, internal or external, from the local ‘civil society’ or from the private sector. The Party-State has demonstrated its ability to adapt and react subtly by postponing unpopular or sensitive reforms, by co-opting potential sources of opposition, by adopting new rules or by taking a step back from urban or peri-urban projects that provoke local conflicts.

Beyond the ‘black box’

Walking through the city, from the coffee shop on the corner of the street, past private homes, official offices, city departments and police stations, our findings result from extensive fieldwork, exploring urban and peri-urban areas, engaging with people, and producing a collective effort to circulate information and perspectives.

Beyond the documentation of Vietnamese urban mutations in their various forms, this Focus also wants to offer a renewed perspective on urban studies’ tools, from the specific context of Vietnam: the Rise of Local Authorities Resources, limits, and challenges.”

References

4 Ibid.
6 These are the official data of the Vietnamese national census. Thus, these figures do not take into account the ‘floating population’.
7 dĩ mô means ‘innovation’ in Vietnamese and refers to a series of state reforms marking a shift from a centrally planned economy to a ‘socialist-oriented market economy’.
11 Ibid., Roy & Ding 2011
Understanding the Vietnamese urban fabric from the inside

Once low, dense and organic cities, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) are now engaged in a steady-paced verticalisation process, especially in the new urbanised areas flourishing at their edges (khú dã thi mówi). But beyond iconic new urban projects and glitzy business districts, the everyday city production still takes place in the interior of their specific urban pattern, namely their alleyway neighbourhoods.

Hanoi's alleyways: the evidence of a rural palimpsest

The mechanisms of alleyway development, together with the city-wide phenomenon of illegal encroachments by house construction, explain the extremely narrow width of the alleys. In Hanoi, 90% of the alleys are less than 4m wide, with a significant disparity among the different urban areas: the further from the city centre, the larger the alleys. As a result, most alleys are inaccessible to cars.

HCMC's alleyways: the pragmatism of city dwellers during uncertain historical times

In HCMC, the very dense network of alleyways was born mainly out of the city dwellers' pragmatism during uncertain times. Only the colonial grid-pattern covering district 1, a part of district 3, and the historical structure of the Chinese neighbourhood of Cho Lãm, at the West of district 5, were planned and calibrated during the 19th century. At that period the street networks were considered to be the matrix of the urbanisation process. But beyond the production of these historical neighbourhoods, urban growth took place following a spontaneous and linear logic, first guided by the main trading axes, and later by a process of densification.3

The further we get from these structuring main streets, the more random the alleyway grid becomes, revealing the historical intertwaving between the planned and the spontaneous in HCMC's urban production. The different morphological patterns of the alleys answered the variety of local situations: like a palimpsest, their spatial organisation often reveals the ancient frame of rural paths, paddy fields or embankment systems, that structured the territory many decades ago. As a result, HCMC's urban structure is notably based on the juxtaposition of different composite urban fabrics. Both in Hanoi and HCMC, low-rise urban fabric allows for direct street access to a maximum of residents. Indeed, trading functions have historically driven the format of urban housing in Vietnam. Alleyways directly connected to commercial streets are the most valued. Furthermore, within this urban texture, the different blocks and neighbourhoods are not structured around any central plaza. The idea of centrality is linearly embedded by the main alleyway, which constitutes the backbone of the local structure and which is the most socially and commercially dynamic place in the neighbourhood.

In Vietnamese spatial practices, the built environment itself is structured by and according to the street: it is the distance to the street that orders the layout and the functions associated with each room in the house, through a succession of ranked thresholds. The entrance room, which opens directly onto the street, constitutes the pivot of this spatial apparatus: it allows an efficient interface between public and private, commercial and domestic. Thus, Vietnamese alleyways offer a relevant example of an integrated urban apparatus, where interrelations between the form of places and their practices are obvious.

Alleyway households as self-organised communities

Alleyway households are divided into several resident groups (tổ dân phố) of 50-100 persons. Each group is led by a head person, who represents the neighbourhood at the ward level. The groups organise monthly meetings, in which they inform residents of administrative news, discuss local policies, and mediate household conflicts. Thus, alleyway households proactively participate in the management of their daily lives and the development of their surrounding space and landscape.

A good example of the willingness of urban residents to participate in the production of their space is the local project that re(constructed) alley pavements and underground sewers. To carry out the project, each household contributed to the budget; so did the Ward People's Committee, in accordance with the principle Nhà nước và nhân dân cùng làm (the state and people work together). Resident groups relied on their ‘head person’ to supervise the work, but each resident also kept an eye on work done in front of their own home. Most residents were satisfied with the outcome and the quality of work, more so than with projects that are totally financed by the public sector, in which cases they do not have any right of supervision or participation. Another example of urban

In the morning

HCMC (district 3)

An alleyway in

Above:

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Narrow lane, small street, my home is there
In my dreams, I still remember this ...

Marie Gibert and Phạm Thị Sơn

These ancient neighbourhoods are characterised by the ‘smallness’ of their plot division and by the very high density of population they foster (more than 80,000 inhabitants/km² in some central areas of HCMC, in district 10 for instance). Although lacking official recognition from the urban authorities, the urban network of alleyways still houses almost 85% of city dwellers in HCMC, and 88% in Hanoi.4 As such, it remains an important ingredient of the Vietnamese urban identity. Reading the contemporary production of metropolitan spaces through this lens provides insights not only into the evolution of the inherited spatial apparatus, but also into the social and political dimensions of the urbanity. It allows one to embrace the ethnographical turn in metropolitan studies that Ananya Roy and Aiwha Ong call for, in order to fully integrate “the diversity of urban dreams, project and practices […] in emerging world regions” in the field of urban theory.3
The street, enlarging an alleyway both maximises the value of the plot and allows residents to build higher. Thus, increasing the land is profitably understood as one of the most powerful engines of urban renewal of the vernacular neighbourhoods.

And so is the urban authorities’ will to control and regulate the daily practices of urban population. The figure of the street seller is among the most threatened. Despite his central place in the everyday nature of the urban fabric, his presence is more and more perceived as contrary to the “working” ambitions of Hanoi and HCMC. At the interface of network and territory, both fixed and on the move, the street seller is an interesting pivot of the street socio-spatial apparatus in Vietnam. Yet the street seller tends to be evicted in favour of traffic. In this context, there is a growing convergence of views between the urban authorities and the urban middle classes. This convergence can be explained by the growing worry of middleclass members to protect and mark out the boundaries of their newly acquired properties by promoting a clear distinction between public and private urban spaces. The urban authorities officially support this growing distinction, by promoting the intended edification of what is called a “civilised and modern” city (ô cho’ mnh, hinh do). Official poster campaigns urge urban dwellers to follow new urban rules of civilisation, such as no trade on the sidewalk, in order to build a cultural modernity.

Furthermore, the current evolution of each neighbourhood depends greatly on its relationship with the emerging and renewed “metropolitan centralities” of HCMC, wards 21 of Bình Thạnh district and 13 of Phú Nhuận district are among the most integrated in the official renewal projects. Interestingly, despite their advanced level of metropolisation, these two wards show different trends as alleyways are concerned. Most alleyways of ward 13 in Phú Nhuận have been enlarged and renewed over the past five years, whilst those in ward 21 in Bình Thạnh district will soon be able to regenerate their back-alley urban forms, as lengescaled transport infrastructures. These infrastructures are already abruptly cutting up the ancient urban fabric, reflecting perfectly a common effect of “project-based urbanism”.

The alleyway, a matter of function
Hanoi and HCMC street patterns are characterised by an endless network of alleyways. These alleyway neighbourhoods have already shown a great capacity for transformation over the past decades, especially through the various creative interventions by residents, who make full use of the alleyways on an everyday basis. Alleyways remain core elements of the urban identity and are still the most common form of public space, even though current infrastructure developments are leading to new, very distinct, articulations between public and private spaces, which were once very blurred categories in the Vietnamese urban context.

The organic growth of the urban and social network appears to be challenged today. Despite its modest local ambitions, the current project of alleyway enlargement operates within a broader development of infrastructure by the metropolitan authorities. In the current metropolisation process, movement is privileged above the production of local territories. In this perspective, the street is envisioned as a single-function urban object, entirely dedicated to transit traffic, while it used to be highly multifunctional.

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1. Ngô phi hồ sơ, hồ sơ di ở. Trong gọc mơ ô làn thơm mỏ. Extracted from “Hồ Phi hồ sò” (Hanoi and me) song of Le Vinh.
As a consequence of their economic take-off and rapid urbanisation, the two major Vietnamese metropolises, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), saw a tremendous increase of private vehicles (motorcycles and then cars) in their streets, leading today to severe traffic congestion. To address this critical issue, the cities have two responses. On the one hand, they build new roads to satisfy the emerging middleclass that can afford private vehicles. On the other hand, they attempt to modernise public transit networks, especially by developing large scale mass rapid transit systems. While the latter is considered an appropriate response to solve urban problems (e.g., traffic congestion, atmospheric pollution, and urban sprawl), the local authorities are facing various constraints that could jeopardise the construction of the expected public transit facilities. Hence the transportation sector provides another perspective to the challenges of the metropolisation process in both Hanoi and HCMC.

**Clement Musil & Vuong Khai Toan**

**Filling the urban transport infrastructure gap**

IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME since electric tramways were carrying people in Hanoi and HCMC’s streets. This urban snapshot actually belongs to two different past periods. The northern metropolis operated its tramway network until the early 1990s. Decades after the American bombing campaigns that heavily damaged Hanoi’s transport infrastructures, the tramway was finally dismantled because of a lack of financial resources to maintain it. In the southern metropolis, that back then was called Saigon and was the capital of the Republic of South Vietnam, the tramway only ran until the mid-1950s. The then president of South Vietnam, Ngô Đình Diệm, decided in the name of modernity to remove the trams to make room for imported cars as well as scooters and motorbikes. Despite different trajectories regarding urban transportation, both cities do not yet have other collective transit services (apart from bus lines); while today private vehicles increasingly clog the cities arterials. The ongoing urban transport transition Due to a rapid economic development that has driven the country since the mid-1980s, and its positive consequences for the population, city dwellers started to have the financial resources to drop bicycles and abandon inefficient public bus services in exchange for individual motorbikes. Because this transport mode proved to be very compatible with the network of narrow alleyways in the two cities, Hanoi and HCMC quickly became two so-called ‘motorcycle dependent cities’, in the same way as other South-East Asian metropolises. As a result, in 2015, the capital city had nearly 5 million registered motorbikes for an estimated population of 7 million, while the Southern metropolis counted more than 8 million inhabitants with 6.5 million registered motorbikes. Although the motorbike modal share is on average 80% (and less than 10% for public transit) in both cities, the dependency is evident today with inhabitants merging with their motorbikes like Centaurs with their horses, on a never-ending commute through the city. Whereas motorbikes dominate the streets, cars emerge and appear as a strong competitor in terms of desirability, status and scarce road space. Even though the number of cars can still be considered low, it is rising by more than 10% every year in both cities. The increase of vehicles has at least two most undesirable, yet well known, consequences: congestion and pollution. Congestion leads to an annual shortfall of USD 1.2 billion for the economic stakeholders in HCMC. It is an effort to tackle congestion-related problems, to improve the environmental quality for city residents, and to cope with climate change-related adverse effects, the Government plans to fill the urban transport infrastructure gap by carrying out two main projects in each city. The strategy aims at expanding the existing road network (widenning major axes, building ring roads, elevated highways and flyovers) on the one hand, and building extensive mass transit systems composed of metro lines and bus rapid transit corridors on the other. Urban transport is thus transitioning from being purely individual, to a transport system that provides public transit as an alternative.

The expected urban transport transition Stimulated by vibrant economic growth (more than 8% on average this last decade) and by a rapid increase in population (between 3-4.5% since 2009), Hanoi and HCMC recently adopted ambitious urban transport public transit plans. The ‘Capital City Master Plan to 2030 and Vision to 2050’, approved in 2011, foresees building eight metro lines (a total of 331 km), three monorail lines, plus nine express bus routes. In the south, HCMC adjusted its transport plan in 2013, which suggested that by 2030, the city would be equipped with eight metro lines, plus one tramway and two monorail lines, for a total of 216 km (see map 1) and will count six bus rapid transit corridors that bring an additional 100 km of public transit. The objective set out for both cities is a modal share of public transport reaching 25% of city travel by 2020. However, between what the plans target and what is being realised today, there is a significant gap. Hanoi has two metro lines under construction (No.3 and 2A, of 13.3 km and 11 km respectively), a 15 km bus rapid transit corridor, and two other metro lines (No.1 and 2) in the detailed design phase. HCMC is building its first metro line (No.1) of 20 km, and line No.2 plus a section of line No.5, with the first bus rapid transit corridor barely in the detailed design phase. According to the Ministry of Transport, the first mass rapid transit that will run in Vietnam should be metro line No.2A in Hanoi; for which the opening ceremony is expected by the end of 2016 – though all projects commonly suffer critical delays and significant cost overruns. Even if construction of these public transit systems is slow, the process has been triggered. Consequently, the urban landscape in both cities will soon radically change. The new infrastructures will be built mainly with viaduct sections, and underground sections applied in high density areas only. Regarding their spatial orientation, these facilities will connect the inner city cores to their suburbs, where the local governments plan to develop satellite cities and new urban areas. These facilities will also bring ambitious and large-scale estate developments such as high-rise offices, housing, and shopping malls.

These urban development and renewal patterns are not unfamiliar in South-East Asia. In the era of globalisation, the construction of these new transportation systems confirms that the urbanisation process in Vietnam joins the ‘single urban discourse’. The trend is also reinforced by the involvement of powerful private domestic real estate developers (e.g., Vingroup, Bitexco, Dai Quang Minh) who are investing in areas surrounding future metro stations, as they manage to bypass the rigid public planning process. Both the transportation network and property development are features of ‘urban convergence’ observed since the late 1990s in the South-East Asian region. Today Vietnam is definitely part of this tendency with new mega-infrastructure projects underway. However, these projects are functioning under several constraints that could jeopardise the development of the expected mass public transit systems.

**Constraints to the development of cities’ public transit systems**

Apart from technical issues that delay the construction of the metro lines and bus rapid transit corridors, the final realisation of the overall transport plans are challenged by various additional obstacles in both cities, namely financial issues and land acquisition difficulties. Although the Vietnamese Government aims to develop modern public transit systems, the authorities face a severe lack of financial and technical resources. The authorities mainly lean on Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided by international donors, and secondarily on private sector capital. However, because public transit projects are today both costly and sophisticated, it is uncertain whether they will generate any profit (all over the world public transit systems are mainly in deficit and subsidised), ODA mostly co-funds these initiatives. The Government contributes up to 20% of the construction costs of each project. Today the situation seems to be troublesome and fragmented. Among all the projects that are under construction and in the detailed design stage (i.e., 9 in total), there are 9 different international donors involved. The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) co-funds metro lines No.1 and 2 in Hanoi and No.1 in Ho Chi Minh City, the Chinese Government finances one line in Hanoi (No.2A), the French Government and its cooperation agency (Agence Française de Développement) teamed up with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the European Investment Bank (EB) to co-fund metro line No.3.
in Hanoi; the German and Spanish Governments also joined the ADB and the EIB to co-fund two metro lines in Ho Chi Minh City (No. 2 and 5), and the World Bank grants loans to build the first bus rapid transit corridor in both cities. Despite this multitude of donors, the financing of numerous additional planned projects still requires confirmation, and although other donors, such as those from an Asian bilateral cooperation, as well as private investors have expressed certain interest, little discussion has been concluded and uncertainty remains. While the Government is in need of financial assistance, ODA donors are in a comfortable situation to offer, and also to compete against one another. This is explained by the benefits that each ODA supplier can gain in granting loans to Vietnam. In fact, each donor imposes particular conditions for granting their loan. The Japanese assistance, which has the most attractive financial offer, is mainly characterized by a "tied" financial aid. This means that the loan is conditioned by the use of Japanese technology and expertise. On the other hand, for facilities in which multilateral donors are involved, the financial aid is considered to be ‘untied’. The development banks allow open tenders for which both foreign and local contractors can submit their bids. However, these donors impose other strict requirements such as respect for ethical, social and environmental rules when implementing the project. The Vietnamese Government has then to meet conditions like minimising the project’s adverse effects on the environment and population, particularly when resettlement is required. Diversified financing sources are certainly an advantage to the cities, helping them with access to required funds for project implementation. In return, however, these loans weigh heavily on the country’s debt and the authorities are made to comply with each donor’s conditions.12 They are often forced to depend on various foreign techniques and technologies, which may not be totally compatible with each other. Furthermore, diversification of financing parties has the effect of partitioning the projects. This approach could be counterproductive, as the goal is that all public transport facilities form a unified system in order to challenge private vehicles. In addition to the financial aspect, access to land has been a major obstacle in every urban transport project initiated so far in Vietnam. Problems in accessing land increase the overall costs and delay the completion of the works. Expropriation, compensation and resettlement procedures are the most difficult stages in the project implementation. Unlike road building projects, the first studies on metro and bus rapid transit corridors seemed to have little impact on the land (as was the city authorities’ understanding). Indeed, metro lines are built off-ground and appear to be less land-consuming. As for bus corridors, they are integrated in enlarged road arteries and thus do not directly need land acquisition. However, since works started in Hanoi and HCMC, the land issue has re-emerged as a major concern. Whereas the need for land acquisition is limited, resettlement is inevitable, especially for works on train depots, access to stations, roads and other network deviations, installation of ventilation shafts and safety systems in underground sections. For instance, in the case of metro line No. 2 in HCMC, out of 22 hectares of land located in urban districts are to be acquired and 400 households will be relocated and compensated, with the total cost estimated at USD 115 million. With such conditions, the local governments face two major challenges when building other public transit facilities: the establishment of land reserves and the management of resettlement procedures. Although cities in Vietnam do not have the ‘urban pre-emption right’ to establish land reserves, both cities do have a Land Development Centre. This kind of public body is in charge of acquiring plots and compensating land users. However, they have had little room to operate so far since they have limited financial resources and land use planning is unclear. In this context, those Centres are in an unfavourable position to establish land reserves and to provide plots for building the expected infrastructures. Moreover, the land located around the future metro stations where high land value increase is predicted, has already been acquired, notably by well-informed property developers. Resettlement procedures related to public transport infrastructures pose another problem for the authorities. Whilst public transport projects are developed in the name of public interest, most of the land users who are affected by the projects are reluctant to transfer their rights to the administration.13 Though land users do not oppose the legitimacy of the operation, they contest the amount of proposed compensation. Actually, land prices are often underestimated, while both cities periodically experience uncontrolled land price increasing.14 Furthermore, from the first land assessment until the government’s request for site clearance, which may take several years, land prices may have surged, causing fresh disagreements with disaffected households. Moreover, opposition is stronger and more violent with households who do not have regulated land use rights. The administration estimates that the latter are only compensated for their lost property but not for the land, and the compensation amount for the building is often ridiculously low compared to the amount paid for the land. The progress of urban transport projects poses a critical issue of equity of households to administrative procedures, and questions the transparency of resettlement regulations.

The future of public transit depends on pragmatic policies

Due to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City’s rapid urbanisation, building modern mass transit systems is a priority to ensure sustainable and liveable urban development in the coming decades. To break with current practices of city travel mainly by motorbikes, the Government has no option but to invent a new way of mobility based on fast, efficient and attractive public transport, ensuring that commuting is viable across the entire metropolitan areas.

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5 See Vietnam Net (09/16/2014), ‘Kết nối ở hai thành phố lớn’ [“Connections in major cities”].
6 Regularly the local press reports news concerning the reassessment of both cost and schedule of the projects. As an example see following articles. Tuế Trĩ (27/10/2015) “Chinese-contracted railway project in Hanoi suffers 57% cost overrun”, Thanh Niên (13/09/2014) “Metro: cost overrun”; “Chinese-contracted railway project in Hanoi suffers 57% cost overrun”; “Traffic jams in HCM City become worse”.
7 Without denying the local specificities, Dick and Rimmer (1998) in an article entitled “Beyond the Third World City: the new urban geography of South-East Asia”, suggest that since the late 1980s, and after the colonial period, the process of urban convergence re-emerges, i.e., “South-East Asian cities are on the way to become more like Western cities”.
8 Based on the case of Metro Manila, a similar trend has already been analyzed by Shaktin (2008) in “The city and the bottom line: urban megaprojects and the privatization of fauna and flora in South-East Asia”, suggest that facilities under construction may later function as a unique system.
9 Given these constraints, it is doubtful that urban planning projects are reluctant to transfer their rights to the administration.13 Though land users do not oppose the legitimacy of the operation, they contest the amount of proposed compensation. Actually, land prices are often underestimated, while both cities periodically experience uncontrolled land price increasing.14 Furthermore, from the first land assessment until the government’s request for site clearance, which may take several years, land prices may have surged, causing fresh disagreements with disaffected households. Moreover, opposition is stronger and more violent with households who do not have regulated land use rights. The administration estimates that the latter are only compensated for their lost property but not for the land, and the compensation amount for the building is often ridiculously low compared to the amount paid for the land. The progress of urban transport projects poses a critical issue of equity of households to administrative procedures, and questions the transparency of resettlement regulations.

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10 Given these constraints, it is doubtful that urban planning projects
The Vietnamese Party-State, characterised by its communist affiliation, enduring centralisation and lasting authoritarianism is nevertheless evolving.

The city production and reproduction mechanisms actively contribute to reshaping state-society relations and local political structures.

Juliette Segard

The production of the city: reshaping state-society relation

URBANISATION IN VIETNAM, both in its nature and motivations, can be seen as an ‘colonisation’ of urban and rural areas, as local stakeholders (from the public authorities to the inhabitants) are excluded from the planning and decision-making processes. The scale and pace of projects have increased tremendously in certain regions, as in the Red River Delta, bringing urbanisation to an all new level, especially since infrastructures have been developed and migration rules loosened, allowing people to move more easily. For instance, both urban-dwellers and rural migrants resettle in peri-urban areas, the latter to fill unqualified and low-paid positions in industrial zones or to work in the construction sector. Urban fringes are thus profoundly transformed by these material, exchange, debate and awareness raising, are multiplying in size and number. Some of these groups actually advocate for change, in policies or practices, while others are much more local, yet still in favour of helping to build a community.

The Regime pragmatism: containing the crises

The regime, while powerful and authoritarian, is also well aware of people’s opinions and is careful to use the proper amount of repression on the one hand and leniency on the other, to take divergences of opinion into account or to limit their expression. 4 The production of the city and planning regulations are good examples of the iterative process, between State and Society, of designing and adapting the law and even institutions, so that the Party-State is not threatened. Adjustment to reality and pragmatism are key, and in that sense the Regime and its powers are well suited to quickly reacting and adapting.

For instance, when eviction and coercion manoeuvres can sometimes succeed, especially when public forces are involved, villagers’ coalitions can also manage to halt a project, change its location or mobilise negative actors which influences law-making, rules, procedures. By bypassing traditional structures of ‘representation’, their arguments emerge in the public realm. Newspapers, blogs or oral transmission contribute to raising awareness on planning and land-related conflicts: people know what happened in other villages and methods of resisting are spreading through the peri-urban areas. At the same time, people are better informed of rules and rights; in some urban districts citizens have utilised the justice department and have started legal trials. Nevertheless, even in these cases there is a clear accumulation of resistance and ‘hot-spots’, it would be misleading to interpret this as the creation of a common front or a wider social and political movement. 5 Conflicts are predominantly local, contingent with local affairs and rarely go beyond that. However, in recent years in the Red River Delta, for instance, examples of threats in public policies or implementation decisions have been numerous. Following the 2008 change of administrative and territorial boundaries of the capital, the city’s authorities – under central government – decided to suspend most investment and construction licences, officially in order to check their relevance for the Master Plan. But it was also a way to benefit more directly from the extension of Hanoi, both politically, and to ‘freeze’ and then cancel some projects that triggered popular resistance. 6 This cut-down reflected the multiplication of projects that didn’t respond to any need and which only revealed distinct/province entrepreneurial positioning or speculation. Nowadays, reconversion of uses and renovation of licences for industrial parks that have been announced by the Prime Minister show the central authority’s pragmatism: withdrawal support to projects, sometimes locally selected, that are not justifiable in view of any plan or have used local resistance. Institutional and legal frameworks are also evolving by partly taking into account citizens’ claims, thereby redefining. For instance, the revised Land Law was adopted and entered into force in 2014. Some articles clearly address opacity and haziness of procedures; e.g., while the payment of compensation is set to be implemented by the president of the People’s Committee at the provincial and communal levels, in order to evaluate the local circumstances and suggest compensations accordingly.

Obviously, there is a major disconnect between the legislative frameworks and the implementation on the ground, and these laws or decrees are issued to a great extent in order to present a more democratic and voluntaristic face to the public opinion, but also to the international community and the private sector, even if it is not backed by strict enforcement. Nevertheless, the legislation and the administration evolve, so does the regime, and citizens sometimes actively contribute to these dynamics.

Control over natural resources and urban planning question both structures and individuals, public authorities and citizens: how they position themselves, what to protect, which limits to impose, what matters. Production or renova- tion of cities challenge power and in Vietnam’s case it actually contributes to ‘negotiating’ the Regime’s authoritarianism, as a growing number of citizens rally to defend either their livelihoods and interests, or the common good. 5

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URBANISATION IN VIETNAM, both in its nature and motivations, can be seen as an ‘colonisation’ of urban and rural areas, as local stakeholders (from the public authorities to the inhabitants) are excluded from the planning and decision-making processes. The scale and pace of projects have increased tremendously in certain regions, as in the Red River Delta, bringing urbanisation to an all new level, especially since infrastructures have been developed and migration rules loosened, allowing people to move more easily. For instance, both urban-dwellers and rural migrants resettle in peri-urban areas, the latter to fill unqualified and low-paid positions in industrial zones or to work in the construction sector. Urban fringes are thus profoundly transformed by these material, exchange, debate and awareness raising, are multiplying in size and number. Some of these groups actually advocate for change, in policies or practices, while others are much more local, yet still in favour of helping to build a community.

The Regime pragmatism: containing the crises

The regime, while powerful and authoritarian, is also well aware of people’s opinions and is careful to use the proper amount of repression on the one hand and leniency on the other, to take divergences of opinion into account or to limit their expression. 4 The production of the city and planning regulations are good examples of the iterative process, between State and Society, of designing and adapting the law and even institutions, so that the Party-State is not threatened. Adjustment to reality and pragmatism are key, and in that sense the Regime and its powers are well suited to quickly reacting and adapting.

For instance, when eviction and coercion manoeuvres can sometimes succeed, especially when public forces are involved, villagers’ coalitions can also manage to halt a project, change its location or mobilise negative actors which influences law-making, rules, procedures. By bypassing traditional structures of ‘representation’, their arguments emerge in the public realm. Newspapers, blogs or oral transmission contribute to raising awareness on planning and land-related conflicts: people know what happened in other villages and methods of resisting are spreading through the peri-urban areas. At the same time, people are better informed of rules and rights; in some urban districts citizens have utilised the justice department and have started legal trials. Nevertheless, even in these cases there is a clear accumulation of resistance and ‘hot-spots’, it would be misleading to interpret this as the creation of a common front or a wider social and political movement. 5 Conflicts are predominantly local, contingent with local affairs and rarely go beyond that. However, in recent years in the Red River Delta, for instance, examples of threats in public policies or implementation decisions have been numerous. Following the 2008 change of administrative and territorial boundaries of the capital, the city’s authorities – under central government – decided to suspend most investment and construction licences, officially in order to check their relevance for the Master Plan. But it was also a way to benefit more directly from the extension of Hanoi, both politically, and to ‘freeze’ and then cancel some projects that triggered popular resistance. 6 This cut-down reflected the multiplication of projects that didn’t respond to any need and which only revealed distinct/province entrepreneurial positioning or speculation. Nowadays, reconversion of uses and renovation of licences for industrial parks that have been announced by the Prime Minister show the central authority’s pragmatism: withdrawal support to projects, sometimes locally selected, that are not justifiable in view of any plan or have used local resistance. Institutional and legal frameworks are also evolving by partly taking into account citizens’ claims, thereby redefining. For instance, the revised Land Law was adopted and entered into force in 2014. Some articles clearly address opacity and haziness of procedures; e.g., while the payment of compensation is set to be implemented by the president of the People’s Committee at the provincial and communal levels, in order to evaluate the local circumstances and suggest compensations accordingly.

Obviously, there is a major disconnect between the legislative frameworks and the implementation on the ground, and these laws or decrees are issued to a great extent in order to present a more democratic and voluntaristic face to the public opinion, but also to the international community and the private sector, even if it is not backed by strict enforcement. Nevertheless, the legislation and the administration evolve, so does the regime, and citizens sometimes actively contribute to these dynamics.

Control over natural resources and urban planning question both structures and individuals, public authorities and citizens: how they position themselves, what to protect, which limits to impose, what matters. Production or renovation of cities challenge power and in Vietnam’s case it actually contributes to ‘negotiating’ the Regime’s authoritarianism, as a growing number of citizens rally to defend either their livelihoods and interests, or the common good. 5

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1 According to the Statistical Yearbooks of Vietnam by the General Statistics Office, from 2009 to 2014 the Red River Delta Region saw a decrease of 25,400 hectares of agricultural land, while residential land increased by 8,100 hectares and office/commercial/infrastructures by 27,900 hectares.
2 This paper is based on a doctoral research carried out (2008-2014) especially in four periurban villages of the Red River Delta. More than 100 interviews were conducted with various stakeholders, ranging from inhabitants to national authorities. Representation is entitled: “Living Rural to Urban in Hà Nội’s Fringes: Craft Villages, Power and Territory,” and was defended by the author in 2014.

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In HCMC’s metropolitan area, suburban areas are home to a significant concentration of population and industrial estates. Essentially funded by foreign companies, HCMC’s industrial parks are hubs for export activities and flows of internal migrant workers. This concentration leads to various social and economic issues, including the temporary and incomplete integration of migrant workers into the community. Mostly coming from rural areas, Vietnamese migrant workers suffer various social and economic difficulties essentially due to a restrictive and obsolete internal residency permit system known as the hố khảo system. In response to such a precarious situation, Vietnamese migrant workers establish multiple individual and collective adaptation strategies. Furthermore, the dynamics linking the suburban areas, industrial estates and worker dormitories, create a new dominated social class eager to claim social rights and seek recognition from the authorities.

Trần Khthé Minh

From economic insecurity and social stigmatisation to adaptation strategies
Migrant workers’ integration into the city is complicated by several powerful material and immaterial factors. Firstly, the majority of migrant workers live in poorly equipped dormitories, sharing small rooms of 15-18 square metres. Migrant workers’ consumption patterns and lifestyles are described as an identity conflict between a young and dynamic urban world, inspired by modernity, and a declining ancient rural world, marked by tradition and sensory overload. Meanwhile, industrial estates and worker dormitories are a perfect theatre for these oppressions to flourish, and in doing so, they contribute to the production of an “unequal cities” in Vietnam.

Spatially segregated and socially stigmatised, migrant workers in HCMC establish a large range of adaptation strategies to facilitate their integration into the city. Community support networks, tightly linked to worker dormitories, represent the most primitive form of these adaptation strategies. They are strictly based on regional affiliations of migrant workers. They are also characterised by their omnipresence and versatility: community networks are able to disseminate information and to provide daily and continuous support to workers. As a consequence, the household registration system is becoming less and less of an administrative constraint for migrant workers. Finally, migrant workers do not show a strong will to integrate. Migrant workers’ careers are unstable, temporary and unsustainable, which often encourages them to persist in the hố khảo system. The intention to return to their native provinces is ranked in many migrant workers’ priorities.

In conclusion, the administrative process to obtain permanent residency permits for migrant workers is particularly slow or even deliberately delayed by local authorities. The anti-vesting the segregation between local population and migrant workers. Finally, migrant workers do not show a strong will to integrate. Migrant workers’ careers are unstable, temporary and unsustainable, which often encourages them to persist in the hố khảo system. The intention to return to their native provinces is ranked in many migrant workers’ priorities.

Despite the State’s attempts to pacify the situation, the recent policies present several weaknesses. Firstly, the majority of migrant workers are excluded from permanent residency permits because companies commonly refuse to sign long-term contracts, which is one of the most important criteria to obtain permanent residency permits. Secondly, microcredit and social housing are scarce and hardly accessible to migrant workers. Finally, migrant workers do not show a strong will to integrate. Migrant workers’ careers are unstable, temporary and unsustainable, which often encourages them to persist in the hố khảo system. The intention to return to their native provinces is ranked in many migrant workers’ priorities.

State withdrawal from labour issues and the crisis of the Vietnamese trade union
Before the dí mõi reforms, labour issues were entirely in the hands of the State. To protect workers’ interests, the Vietnamese government established its own executive organism – the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) has also created a unique national trade union, the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL), to take charge of labour issues.

After the dí mõi reforms commenced, the role of the State in labour protection issues became more and more obsolete. Today, the VGCL and the MOLISA are particularly weak in protecting workers. The slow legal procedures when organising a strike and the inefficiency of VGCL’s local cells cannot provide a strong framework for workers’ mobilisations. Essentially remaining under the control of the CPV, the VGCL appears to be a simple propaganda tool.

The diminishing role of the State in labour protection issues has led to the emergence of worker activism. The development of a new worker activism is essentially based on the emergence of a new political actor, “the informal workers’ leaders”, who co-ordinate the movement at a local level. The relation between this new political actor and the State is particularly conflictual. For example, the VGCL and the MOLISA exclude of informal workers’ leaders from labour issues negotiations. According to the State, the informal workers’ leaders are considered to be reactionary and politically incompatible with the communist party. Consequently, the creation of a new institutional order has led to the structural breakdown of the traditional State workers’ leaders system. The state has recently undertaken a set of policies aiming to improve workers’ living conditions and to reform the VGCL. In 2005, a new household registration procedure was created with a simplification of the criteria for obtaining permanent residency permits. As a consequence, the household registration system is becoming less and less of an administrative constraint for migrants trying to settle in the cities. The State has also established policies to improve migrant workers’ living conditions through new bank loan systems, to encourage the construction of affordable low-income housing and micro-credit systems, with the help from NGOs and international institutions.

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Vietnamese cities are key in the regional positioning of their country’s tourism sector. The authorities have encouraged this role, aiming for a stronger urban hierarchy. From the local to the international level, tourism participates in the material and symbolic production of Vietnamese cities. It is a significant factor in urban growth and architectural changes, but tourism also fosters global integration.

Emmanuelle Peyvel & Võ Sáng Xuân Lan

IN 2014, THERE WAS A RECORD NUMBER OF 38.5 million domestic tourists and 7.87 million international visitors in Vietnam, generating 7.3 billion euros. 1 According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), that amount represented 9.3% of the GDP and 7.7% of total employment in that same year (including jobs indirectly supported by the industry). 2 This mobility is fast growing: in 20 years, domestic tourism has multiplied by a factor of 11 and international tourism by 8. While the growth of international tourism in Vietnam is impressive, we should keep in mind that it only represents a third of the visitors to Thailand and a seventh of those in China. Nevertheless, this country is an ever-more popular destination in Pacific Asia, which remains one of the most dynamic touristic regions in the world: this region received less than one hundredth of the international tourism flow in 1950, it now receives almost a fifth. By 2030, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) forecasts an average annual growth rate of 3.3% worldwide, 4.5% in Asia-Pacific. Therefore, Asia is today a center of gravity in the global tourism system, in which Vietnam fully belongs. Tourist nationalities reflect both regional and international links with the past: the Chinese, Korean and Japanese respectively occupy the top three places, the USA comes in 4th, Russia 6th and France 11th.

The growth of tourism is a consequence of the urban transformations in the country since 1954. Indeed, tourism and cities entertain a privileged relationship: cities are both gateways for international tourism and transit points structuring the tourist map of the country, but they are also destinations in their own right. For all these reasons, tourism is an essential actor in Vietnamese urbanisation, both materially and symbolically. It is a factor of urban growth and architectural transformations, but also fosters global integration with its associated flows of people, capital, practices and imaginary.

Tourism also contributes to urban lifeways. It shows us the types of city-dwellers that the Vietnamese are becoming, the expression of their individuality, their aspirations and the meaning they assign to wealth. Tourism is a good way to understand how the Vietnamese society builds its relationship with time, both past and future. The Vietnamese city is increasingly valued for its emblematic places of both modernity – embodied by buildings and shopping malls – and historical depth – with active heritage policies, and now 8 properties inscribed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage that contribute to an international recognition of the country. We will study these transformations from a geographical perspective to better understand how tourism is actively involved in contemporary spatial changes in Vietnamese cities. This work was conducted by delving into French colonial archives, planning documents and official statistical sources, with participative observations made during long term fieldwork in Vietnam. At the national scale, we demonstrate that tourism is a factor of urban growth and ex nihilo constructions.

Tourism is an urban and colonial creation

The history of tourism in Vietnam reveals the complexities of globalisation. Recreational mobilities, such as hydrotherapy and pilgrimage, are not new: travelers’ tales echo Chinese aesthetics of landscape and body. However, the modern understanding of tourism appeared with French colonisation and the construction of the first infrastructures dedicated to tourism: 7 seaside resorts (Hòn Gai, Đồ Sơn, Sầm Sơn, Cửa Lò, Cửa Tùng, Nha Trang and Cap St Jacques, renamed Vũng Tàu), and 5 hill stations (Đà Lạt, Bảo Ngọc, Tam Đảo, Mẫu Sơn and Sóc Trăng). Those places were chosen for aesthetic and landscape considerations. However, the proximity to big cities, where settlements were concentrated, is essential in understanding the location of those stations and resorts. Indeed, those places were created for the rest and recreation of city dwellers: in the North, Hanoi commanded three hill stations (Gia Phượng, Tam Đảo and the small station of Mẫu Sơn) and four seaside resorts, that were directly dependent on medium-sized towns: Cửa Lò in connection with Vịnh, Đồ Sơn and Hòn Gai with Hải Phòng and Sầm Sơn with Thọ Xuân. In the South, Sóc Gôn’s dwellers could enjoy the seaside resort of Cap Saint Jacques and the hill stations of Đô Lát. They also gradually invested in seaside resorts such as Phan Thiết and Mũi Trong. In the Centre, the settlers of Tourane (today Đà Nẵng), and to a lesser extent of Huế and Quang (Huế An today), could visit the hill station of Bà Nà and the seaside resort of Côn Tông.

In the colonial context, these stations were outstanding, not only for the physical landscape, but also in the way they were conceived. Recreational landscape transgressed both the spiritual function traditionally given to the mountains by the Khmer people, and the livelihood function assigned to the sea by the fishing culture. Both the mountain and the sea were feared. That explains the extent to which hotels, sport fields, hiking trails, panoramas and belvederes that were built in the mountains, or seascapes and beaches developed along the shoreline, constituted profound spatial innovations.

At that time, the practices and representations associated with these infrastructures were totally new to the Khmer people. Tourism was therefore not only a populating activity, it also participated in the circulation of urban practices into rural places such as Đô Lát, on the mountainous plateau of Lang Biang, where phonies, running water, electricity and even cinemas suddenly made their appearance with the first tourists. 8 Tourism-driven urbanism has been sustained despite decolonisation, war and the Cold War period; none of the recreational destinations have disappeared. Today, all of them still live off tourism, and have even experienced demographic growth and economic diversification, giving them a complete city status. Vũng Tàu and Nha Trang now exceed 400,000 inhabitants; their economy is being diversified with oil and fishing, and even academics in Nha Trang. Đô Lát has over 214,000 inhabitants living mainly from tourism, horticulture and academics today. Tourist conurbations have been built, particularly between Phan Thiết and Mũi Né, and between Núi Blộng and Hội An. Mainly fuelled by big resorts, this phenomenon has led to the privatisation of the coastline, which can lead to conflicts with the local people who see their access to the sea increasingly restricted.

Urban hierarchy and the regional structuration of tourism

Today, cities are key in the structuring of tourism in the country. This function was encouraged by the Vietnamese authorities in their first development plan, for the period 1995-2000. This plan initially identified four tourism regions: North, Central, South Central and South of the country, each structured by a regional capital and a well identified urban network. The Northern region, stretching from Hà Nội to Hô Tô Tịnh, was arranged around Hanoi and secondarily by Hòa Liên, and by the seaside resorts Sầm Sơn and Đồ Sơn. Hanoi also gives shape to tourism by means of tours to ‘ethnic minorities’ in the Northern mountains, mainly through the town of Lào Cai. The Central region, stretching from Quy Nhon to Qúy Châu, was arranged around Huế and Núi Blộng, and differentiates itself through visits to historical sites related to the former imperial capital Huế, to war heritage (with the DMZ) and to the Cham civilization (with Mây Son). Hội An has continued to gain traction in this region, particularly since its UNESCO classification in 1999. More recently, the third and fourth regions were merged. Initially formed by the South of the Centre and the South, this entity now extends from Kon Tum to Mê Linh Hô, and has been arranged primarily around Vũng Mui, but secondarily also Nha Trang and Đô Lát.
Even today, land use and development plans still confirm the central role of Hanoi in the North, the urban trio of HCM, Đà Nẵng and HCMC in the Centre, and HCMC in the South. Acting as the capitals of their regions, they can be a driving force for their territory. The inner suburbs of Hanoi benefit from increasing tourism, especially in some of its villages and remarkable pagodas. This phenomenon is also striking in the Mekong Delta, where ecotourism is now well developed in Bình Thạnh, Côn Chái, Sa Đéc, Vĩnh Long and Vĩnh Long. Tourism is in constant progression in the region of Long Xuyên and Chái Đô with the normalisation of the Cambodian border.

The State officially recognises a number of national tourism regions (Khú du lịch quốc gia [KDLQG]), these regions whose infrastructures have welcomed at least 1 million tourists per year, in an area larger than 1000 hectares. Today, there are 21 KDLQG (an estimated 39 by 2030), mostly located near big and medium-sized cities, because they have a recreational function for city-dwellers. The State recognition of these areas confirms the urban predominance.

Tourism contributes to the strengthening of the Vietnamese urban hierarchy: its flows, infrastructures and revenues are more concentrated in the East than in the West of the country, that is to say the most urbanised part of the country. While the provinces of Hanoi, Quảng Ninh and Phú Quốc alone account for 10% of all the visitors, the cities of Đà Nẵng, Vĩnh Tường and HCMC have over 18%. However, the Centre region is more fragmented, resulting from the dual influences of both Hanoi and HCMC. Hanoi and HCMC together account for over 80% of the five-star hotels in the country. It is also in these two metropolitan centres that the leading structures of tourism are concentrated: between 2000 and 2009, Hanoi and HCMC together accommodate 47% of the country’s total tourism turnover (see the map).

Tourism, a means of globalisation for Vietnamese cities

For Vietnamese cities, tourism is also a powerful means of integration into the global economy, since they are the main target of foreign direct investment. Global companies are established in the country, such as Accor, the world leader in hotel management, which has been authorised in the country since 1991. Less than 25 years later, it manages 16 hotels, representing more than 4000 rooms. However, this global capitalism follows a specific Vietnamese format, due to socialism. The State remains a strategic player in the tourism sphere. Rather than pulling out of business acumen for the sole benefit of the private sector, it has restructured its practices. It still oversees the development of tourism through laws, development plans and investments, especially in transport and training. The current investment plan, running until 2030 and amounting to 94.2 billion dollars, aims to deliver infrastructure upgrades, train the personnel according to international standards, and to align tourism with the discourse of sustainable development. Public actors are therefore essential, from the central to the local. Saigontourist, a company built in 1975 and revamped in 1999 under the control of the popular committee of the city, is a good example of the new modes of action of the State.

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Staging Vietnamese cities: tourism and the construction of national identity, modernity and authenticity

Finally, tourism contributes to the symbolic staging of the city. This function is primarily political, imposed by the socialist regime: regional and national capitals are privileged places for national building. It is there that one finds most of the museums, in particular those that specialise in history, war and national heroes. The most frequented museums are the HCMC Museum of Fine Arts and the Reunification Palace in HCMC, two hot spots for both domestic and international tourists.

Vietnamese cities also have a symbolic role in the country’s relation to today: they embody both modernity and heritage. They provide a spectacle of modernity that by itself justifies a visit, as evidenced by the phenomenon of sightseeing from tower-tops (like the Bitexco Tower in HCMC, or the Lotus Center Skyscraper in Hanoi), but also by the increasing popularity of rooftop bars and hotels with rooftop terraces. Shopping malls, as a quintessential urban activity, also constitute a destination for tourists. HCMC and Hanoi in particular guarantee access to goods and services, especially imported or luxurious ones that can’t be found elsewhere. Since 1997 and the opening of the Saigon Center (District 1), HCMC has added no less than 600000 hotel beds, all of them located in the city center (like Vincom Center in the Dong Kheii emblematic street, or Diamond Plaza, strategically located behind the cathedral) or in new facilities as Saigon South. Visiting new buildings and shopping is an experience of urban modernity both for tourists and city dwellers who participate in the globalised circulation of leisure models and consumption patterns.

At the same time, some cities in the country build on consensual Vietnamese tradition and identity. Vietnamese heritage are the subject of specific protection and care. Among the 8 properties inscribed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage in Vietnam, 4 are in cities: the Hanoi Monuments since 1993, HCMC, an ancient town since 1999, the imperial capital of Hanoi since 2010 and the citadel of Hs dynasty since 2011. Interestingly, HCMC is still struggling to play a significant role in the development of heritage in the country.

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After decades of war and destruction, followed by the reunification of the country in 1976, the new Socialist Republic of Vietnam gave right of way to social and economic reconstruction and development. Architectural and urban heritage preservation did not appear as a priority. However, in 1984 a first decree related to the preservation of historical and cultural relics was issued. This first step was followed during the 1990s by a broad inventory, led by the Ministry of Culture, to identify Vietnam’s heritage throughout the country. Eventually, the first law regarding cultural heritage was adopted in 2001 to protect monuments, notably in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). Through these key stages, the increasing interest for architectural and urban heritage matched the new urban dynamics that took place, namely the metropolisation process and the development of tourism. On the one hand, metropolisation implies the increase of private initiatives that contribute to reshaping the urban landscape. On the other hand, the development of the tourism industry pushed the authorities to think of ways to value places of interest, in order to attract visitors. These trends constitute a first step towards urban heritage thinking.

Clément Musli

Located at 190 Nguyễn Thị Minh Khai Street, this villa in a diaplated state is sandwiched between two towers. (Photo by Clément Musli).

TODAY, THE OUTCOMES of the heritage preservation policies are, however, contrasted between Hanoi and HCMC. Though both cities have urban heritage assets to value, especially traditional, religious and colonial heritage, the capital city Hanoi has received much more attention from the Government. The viewpoint of an international cooperation stakeholder Fanny Quertamp (Co-director of PADDI-HCM City Urban Development Management Support Centre), interviewed by Clément Musli.

In 2010, UNESCO inscribed Hanoi’s Imperial Citadel on its World Heritage list. Prior to that, numerous international organisations, namely Japanese and French bilateral cooperations, and especially the French decongregated cooperation of the city of Toulouse and the Île-de-France Region (Paris metropolitan area), had conducted joint projects with the Hanoi authorities to identify and preserve remarkable architecture and specific neighbourhoods. In HCMC, however, no international institutional organisations besides your own (PADDI) are engaged in the urban heritage field. How do you explain the singular position of your institute?

Originally, the cooperation between the Lyon metropolitan area, Rhône-Alpes Region (France) and HCMC, of which PADDI is today an operational instrument, started in the early 1990s and was initiated by urban heritage issues. At that time, the Lyon metropolitan area was providing technical support to the city to launch its first heritage inventory. Further to a request from the HCMC technical departments, and since 2010, PADDI provides specific expertise concerning inventory methods as well as the drawing up of urban heritage preservation policies and tools.

There are great differences between Hanoi, HCMC, and Hội An on one hand, and HCMC on the other, regarding their historical and architectural heritage. There are also differences concerning the measures adopted by the central and the local governments to preserve urban heritage. Hanoi is the capital of the country with a broad historicity, the city celebrated its millennium in 2010. HCMC was the imperial capital of the Nguyễn dynasty from the early 19th century and Hội An is a harbour that foreign sailors have visited since the 17th century. The urban fabric of these cities has been shaped by their administrative and political functions and also by external influences that they absorbed.

HCMC, unlike Hanoi’s technical departments, and since 2010, PADDI provides specific expertise concerning inventory methods as well as the drawing up of urban heritage preservation policies and tools. Today, the Lyon metropolitan area was providing technical support to the city to launch its first heritage inventory. Further to a request from the HCMC technical departments, and since 2010, PADDI provides specific expertise concerning inventory methods as well as the drawing up of urban heritage preservation policies and tools.

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Nguyễn Trọng Hậu (High-ranking official from Ho Chi Minh City, former director of the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning and former director of the HHD-Ho Chi Minh City Institute for Development Studies), interviewed by Clément Musli and translated by Đỗ Phượng Thùy.

In the context of Ho Chi Minh City’s rapid urbanisation, what does the notion of urban heritage mean for the municipality?

Whereas Ho Chi Minh City and other cities in Vietnam are developing rapidly, the notion of urban heritage is still under discussion and remains controversial. Currently, among the local and central authorities there is no consensus regarding this notion and there is clearly a lack of definition. For instance, some issues remain concerning the pool of villas built in HCMC before 1975, such as how to even determine the year of construction, because some villas have been modified and divided many times by the occupants, mostly after the reunification of the country.

As HCMC is driven by fast economic growth, the will persists to make room for modernity, which means replacing old buildings with modern ones. As preserving historic and architectural heritage is today a wish of the municipality, it is essential to extend the notion of heritage from a single building to its geo-
This visceral attachment to the land (and water way), and its multiple layers of histories, echoes the presence of the early Khmers (Saigon was once called Pray Nakhon or Isan, the early Vietnamese (nguoi khoi) and Chinese (nguoi hoa) settlers, the marks and scars left by later groups including the French, the Americans, the new Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants, but also followers of the Buddhist, Caodai, Catholic, Evangelist, Hoa-Hao and Muslim faiths, the Chams, the Indians, the Hindus, the post-1975 Vietnamese returnees, the new northern Vietnamese migrants, etc.

Somewhere, this need to nurture a distinctive Southern – Saigraphyens – way to be Vietnamese has been encapsulated in the words and acts of two revered former southern communist revolutionary figures from the first and second liberation wars: Trần Văn Giau (1915-2010), an early anticolonial activist and historian, and Trần Bạch Đằng (1926-2007), the leader of the Saigon resistance against the Republic of Vietnam and its American backers. For as long as these two figures of modern Vietnam were alive they continued to hold high the flame of a distinct southern Vietnamese cultural integrity and a desire to locate Saigon in its historical continuity. When I was a doctoral student in Saigon in the 1990s, I learned how these two major local figures, however complicated their past political actions had been, stood as protectors of free-minded southern intellectuals like Sơn Nam, and how they continuously supported micro initiatives aimed at uncovering and rehabilitating bits and pieces of the Saigon historical human puzzle. They stood firm, though they often found themselves powerless to oppose mindless urban projects put forward by the bureaucrats who controlled the city.

Already in the 1990s, blatantly destructive projects were put forward. For instance, the neoclassical French-built Peugeot building behind the Cathedral, from where Vietnam’s Independence was proclaimed on 2 September 1945 (by Giau), was demolished by a coalition of interests involving the South Korean Cheaebol Pescos; and a Singaporean-Malaysian investor hoping to build a modern high-rise building in the historical heart of the city (the today the Sheraton Hotel) undermined the foundations of the adjacent 1930s Indian-built central Mosque. The ends of Giau and Đặng’s public lives were increasingly devoted to expressing public outcry against nonsensical projects that one after the other wiped out parts of old Saigon. Regrettably, they were already too frail to pick a fight when the banks of the Ché Loin (Chợ Lớn) Canal were benefitted of its original – sometimes three-stories high – Chinese shops houses, the highest in Southeast Asia. More was to come and the two men were no longer present when a new wave of unprecedented attacks on the historical fabric of the city was recently unleashed, such as the shaky Vincor real estate company project that pulled down the Eden cinema complex and its surrounding block on Đặng Khôi Street, a block that housed more than 200 families, rich and poor, including the legendary Gival café. Surely, there should have been ways to keep elements of this central memory-rich landscape of the city. The speculative interests of Vincor, allied with the murky practices of the city’s leaders, allowed to straight forwardly bulldozed the 231 Đặng Khôi Street building, the first concrete-built Art Deco high-rise in the Indochinese peninsula, still in good condition, was also wiped out along with a public park where so many of the city’s couples once spent their afternoons on a public bench in the shade of almost fifty-metre high trees. These landmarks of Saigon’s popular culture public have been demolished and replaced by half-empty shopping malls where exclusive luxury stores have replaced what were essentially public spaces – spaces where everyone was entitled to live and share the city. This list can easily be extended as no local memory- charged urban spaces have been spared.

Today, the old naval construction complex of Bảo Sơn, the most important site of anticolonial industrial struggle in the collective memory of the country, owned by the Vietnamese army, will soon be replaced by yet again another exclusive, mega project with a huge footprint that will have no connec- tion with the rest of Saigon’s urban landscape. In the words of urban sociologist Saída Sassen, these mega-projects not only “raise the density of the city, they actually de-urbanise it.”

What we now see is a systematic process of corporatisation of the metropolis’s urban landscape, which will “inevitably kill much urban tissue: little streets and squares, density of street-level shops and modest offices, and so on.”

Despite punctual efforts carried out by members of the municipality’s technical departments to classify elements of urban heritage, the questions that remain for everyone who love(?) this city are: why such a blindness on the part of the leaders? Can this be explained by a disconnecting lack of historical and cultural education? Or is it just basic, mediocre greed and collusion with big national and international corpo- rate interests at the expense of all other concerns? Or else, is there some naïve idea of ‘progress’ in their mind to think that Đặng Khôi Street should become the Orchard Road of Saigon – with, like so many leaders of Asia, a blind admiration for the top-down corporatised Singaporean state model?

In the Vietnamese context, one thing is certain: this state of mind does not just betray a surrender of responsibility to the forces of global corporate interests vis-à-vis the people the Party represents, it also serves a political purpose. It connects with a past when Saigon dared to be more than a simple economic empire for the country, when the city held the potential to represent an alternative way to ‘be and feel Vietnamese’. It leads indeed to the effective annihilation of the spirit of a rebellious city and its people; a city where people no longer are allowed to have roots and attachments. A city divided between those who have and those who don’t, of transient dwellers, of salary-men/women and consumers, of refugees in their own city; a corporate de-urbanisation in the service of a cultural erasure of Vietnam’s South. Is this what awaits Vietnam as a whole, forty years after winning her unification at the price of millions of lives?

Clémence Murli is a PhD Regional and City Planning, Associate researcher to IPRAUS (France) and PADDI (Vietnam) (musil.clement@gmail.com).

References
1. Founded in 2006, PADDI is an innovative decentralised cooperation project between the Lyon metropolitan area and the Rhône-Alpes Region (France), and Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam). Under the Ho Chi Minh City municipality supervision, its goal is to assist the city’s technical agencies in various fields of urban management.
Dealing with ancestor worship in a peri-urban context

Ancestor worship tends to take less time and occupy less space in urban areas today, whatever the category of urban population is concerned. Even indigenous dwellers tend to worship their ancestors in a less conventional manner than before. The most obvious changes with regard to the death anniversaries include the following: the altar has become smaller and simpler, and its votive objects less precious, although its location is still carefully chosen according to feng shui (Phong Thủy) precepts; while historically celebrated by sons in the context of a patrilineal cultural context, these ceremonies are now equally performed by daughters and daughters-in-law. Urban dwellers in Bình Tân district no longer feel it to be appropriate to invite neighbours to the ceremonies; and a lack of space in the urban context means that ceremonies are becoming increasingly modest, and more often than not are held indoors. Mr. Long, an elderly original inhabitant of Bình Tân district, explained that he sticks to some traditional roles, but tries to adapt others. “Every year we have to organise the nguy gio, but the way we are doing it is partially disconnected from our professional urban living practices. Only few guests are invited. We maintain the worship just to make sure that our kids do not forget our custom within the family”. The nguy gio is still considered an occasion for a family gathering, where adults can teach children how to worship the ancestors, but it is less and less a broader social and neighbourhood event. Only close neighbours are invited, those who have been family friends for a long while. Mr. Long revealed that he would be reluctant to invite his new neighbours, those who recently moved to the area. The sense of collectiveness in an increasingly socially divided place is challenged accordingly. The family cell has become the more appropriate unit with whom to perform worshiping rituals, reflecting the diminishing effect of the neighbourhood community as a social and cultural structuring factor. Not only the old, but also the new inhabitants and owners of Bình Tân’s tube houses display a high degree of simplicifcation in their worshiping practices, and most of the families never invite their neighbours. They wouldn’t want to ‘bother’ them and think it inappropriate in an urban context. Even the urban dweller, of an advanced age: “usually worship the anniversary of my husband’s death and my parents in the temple. However, next year, I will organise these celebrations together on one single day and I am not sure I will invite a lot of people. My children are too busy to help and so are my neighbours. Here it is not like in the countryside; if we do a celebration party, it will disturb the neighbours.” The organisation of a single worship day for all the family ancestors has become a matter of convenience and appropriate social behaviour in an urban context. A lack of space in the urban context may also play a role in the simplification of the worshipping practices. Without gardens or courtyards, and legal permits required for making use of public spaces, death anniversary ceremonies are increasingly often kept indoors, and thus celebrated with a reduced number of guests.

Migrant workers, who have recently settled in Bình Tân, generally continue to participate in ceremonies held in their rural hometowns, where worshiping remains quite a traditional practice. For celebrations, notably death anniversaries, large numbers of kin including those living in town are invited, together with people from the neighbourhood. Mrs Nga explained: “For every anniversary of one of my husband’s ancestors, we travel back to his hometown. It is very time-consuming because it involves inviting our kin, and the neighbours also. We have to prepare the celebration a few days in advance. This means baking cakes, preparing the chicken and all the others dishes for the guests. Very demanding and tiring! Especially because we come from far away now... it requires a great deal of organisation and leaving our workplace for a few days as well.” Despite her complaints, Mrs Nga still cares a lot about the proper organisation of her family’s ancestor worship and she explained that Bình Tân district is in no way her ‘heartland’, to worship her ancestors in HCMC would make no sense. Even though some migrants have now been settled in Bình Tân district for many years they still don’t embody their ‘sense of belonging’ through a too meaningful ancestor worship.

As a result, peri-urban areas such as Bình Tân district can be seen as a laboratory of transitional practices in the Vietnamese urban context. Family celebrations are still organised, but in a simplified manner because of the practical lack of space in an urban environment, an overall decrease in the links between the place of abode and the so-called ancestor lands, and a diminishing significance of belonging to a neighbourhood in an urban context.

Ngô Thị Thu Trang is an assistant-professor of Geography at the University of Social Scienes and Humanities in HCMC.

References
2. Our study of the specific evolution of ancestor worshipping in a peri-urban area is based on a large survey conducted between 2011 and 2012 in Bình Tân district, consisting of around 45 in-depth interviews and 300 questionnaires. We mainly focused on death anniversaries (nguy gio), which have the strongest social significance. See Thu Trang Ngô Thị, 2014. “La modernité dans l’espace pérurbain à Hô Chi Minh Ville”, Thèse d’état “Ancestor Veneration in Vietnamese Urban Context” (Bình Tân district), University of Pau and Pays de l’Adour.

Below. Worshipping ancestors in the home of a new dweller in Bình Tân District (HCMC). Located on the third floor, the ancestors’ room is dedicated to ceremonies, but is also used as a storage room (courtesy of Clement Musil).
The strong urban dynamics that have been occurring in Vietnam over the past two decades have led to a reshuffling of social practices, especially in the field of social exchanges and ritual activities. This paper gives a glimpse at evolving urban sociability through the lens of gift-giving practices during wedding ceremonies, both in Hanoi and in a rural commune of the Red River Delta, named Giao Tân.

Emmanuel Pannier

‘Non-commercial flows’ in Vietnam

Social exchanges, also called ‘non-commercial flows’, are understood as transactions (of goods and services) occurring outside the market and state channels. Because they are based on personal ties and affect social relationships, they also come under the category of sociability in the case we are looking at contemporary Vietnam. ‘Non-commercial flows’ encompass a wide variety of transactions, in various guises, with different ways of transference. Underlying this diversity, there are nonetheless common principles. A ‘typical system of non-commercial flows’ can be defined as a ceremonial gift-giving system based on mutual aid (giáp-dợp), reciprocity (cô-danh) and moral indebtedness (giúp-stłów). The system is embedded in strong moral and social obligations that bind the participants’ relationships. As far as they fulfill economic and social functions, social exchanges widely contribute to the production/reproduction process of communities at local levels. Hybridisation of practices and traditions surrounding wedding ceremonies in the Red River Delta is a meaningful indicator to apprehend the evolution of society, especially in urban contexts. According to a 2005 survey held in rural provinces (both in the Red River province of Bắc Ninh and in the Mekong Delta province of Long An), the expenses related to wedding gifts represent an average of 13% of a family’s income.4 A study conducted in Hanoi indicates that respondents participate in an average of 25 celebrations a year and spend A study conducted in Hanoi indicates that respondents participate in an average of 25 celebrations a year and spend

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Researching brokerage with visual methods – turning development into a category of practice

Nora Wildenauer

WHEN THE VOLCANO Gunung Rokatenda on the island Pulau Pake’i in eastern Indonesia erupted and caused five deaths in August 2013, some islanders were given shelter in temporary refugee camps in the district capital Maumere on Flores. The government of Sikka and local NGOs wanted to permanently relocate the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) to other places in the region. One of these relocation projects was planned on the neighbouring island Pulau Besar, supported by a local Christian NGO.

I entered this field to investigate how development brokers translate interests between different actors, entities and scales, and how these translations influence the brokers’ positioning towards the government. I included audio-visual methods in my research design to gain additional insights about relocation practices and performative translations. Since I had been in contact with the Christian NGO before my departure, my expectations and research proposal were based on the understanding that government and non-government organizations collaborated under clearly assigned responsibilities, and that the IDPs were about to be relocated to the island of Pulau Besar. However, when I arrived with my camera in Flores,

I soon discovered that this information was a reflection of global development discourses such as ‘good governance’, but not an appraisal of the actual situation. Instead, the relocation was heavily contested and constituted an area of conflict. There was little coordination within government departments, between different levels of government or between government and non-government actors. Moreover, farmers of the host community on Pulau Besar claimed the land to be theirs while the regional Forest Ministry declared that the site was situated within a conservation area and therefore belonged to the state. Furthermore, government money seemed to have disappeared and monitoring of the project was difficult. In short: the project was stagnating, and frustrated IDPs waited for the clearing of the land under bad conditions in temporary shelters. In this contested setting, my main informant, a Catholic priest and employee of the Christian NGO, negotiated the politics of relocation by creating networks out of heterogeneous actors, and by unifying supporters to push the project forward.

Methodology

Choosing an actor-centred and non-normative approach that used audio-visual methods to focus on relocation practices and acts of translation turned out to be a wise decision. I was able to connect with and understand the agendas of various important actors within the discursive arena of relocation without constructing and reinforcing homogeneous discursive categories. To acknowledge the individual agency of my informants within networks, while showing that those networks are connected with external power structures such as the discourse of ‘good governance’, I combined the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) promoted by Bruno Latour with Michel Foucault’s discourse analysis. Further, the combination of audio-visual methods with other modes of anthropological knowledge production allowed an understanding of brokerage that did not reduce contradictions, complexities and multiplicities. The use and analysis of audio-visual material also revealed that, whereas scholars might be able to distinguish rationales behind certain realms into dichotomous categories which then unfortunately are studied separately – such as development and religion – practices overlap and categories merge.

Consequently, by mapping various entry and exit points to my research through the insertion of sequences of the documentary film, additional clips, photographs, maps and emails in the text of the multimedia-PDF, I allow the user of my thesis to make circular, layered connections between multiple interpretations of the film, the topics, and historic and socio-political contexts and thus pay attention to points of connection and heterogeneity in the discursive arena of relocation.

The careful analysis of my material revealed important findings about brokerage in particular and development in general. My research showed that ambivalence between discourse and social ‘reality’ produces political actors who cannot claim fixed positions. Instead, positions are constantly fought over, assigned and denied. In his roles – broker and priest – my main informant and protagonist was able to tie together many diversely positioned actors, himself serving as an example for the capacity of brokers to operate between shifting, unset categories. The position of brokers is thus a tenuous and fluctuating one, and brokerage and translation processes do not entail a “coherent set of practices but a set of practices that fluctuate one, and brokerage and translation processes do not entail a “coherent set of practices but a set of practices that fluctuate one, and brokerage and translation processes do not entail a “coherent set of practices but a set of practices that fluctuate.”

Constrained by external, local and global discourses such as ‘good governance’, all actors – and not only brokers – within the development encounter are able to evade these constraints through a series of different translations, strategies and shifting identities. In other words, the agency of actors within networks is shaped by discourses but simultaneously reshapes these discourses by transforming them so that they fit their own objectives. Since development brokers are operating on the boundary between the grand discourses of governments or international agencies and the realities of life on the ground, focusing on their central role can provide some major insights into development. The good reception of my thesis proves that following an empirical pathway that recognizes and responds to the complex situations and positions brokers are entangled in, combined with audio-visual methods, provides a legitimate way to do so.

Nora Wildenauer

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For more about Nora Wildenauer’s work, see: www.visualdevelopment.eu
IIAS welcomes Professor Cheng-tian Kuo, latest incumbent of the Taiwan Chair of Chinese Studies

FROM FEBRUARY UNTIL JUNE 2016, IAS will be enjoying the company of Professor Cheng-tian Kuo, the latest incumbent of the Taiwan Chair of Chinese Studies. Prof. Kuo is teaching a course on religion and politics at Leiden University while working on his book manuscript on Democratic Theology of Ecology at IAS.

IAS supports professorial fellowships allowing Asian scholars to come to the Netherlands to teach in the Dutch BA and MA programmes in Asian Studies. IAS currently supports two chairs at the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (IUA). One of these is the Taiwan Chair of Chinese Studies, which is the result of an agreement between IAS and the Ministry of Education of Taiwan.

Teaching Religion and Politics in East Asia

Prof. Kuo is teaching a course for the third year of the Leiden BA in Chinese Studies, entitled ‘Religion and Politics in East Asia’. In addition, he will be convening a two-day international seminar in April 2016 under the title ‘New Religious Nationalism in Chinese Societies’ (see announcement on this page).

Researching Democratic Theology of Ecology

Prof. Kuo’s main research interests lie in the areas of Asian Political Economy and Asian Religious Politics. Currently, he is working on a three-year research project, entitled Democratic Theology of Ecology. This research combines theories of economics, sociology of religion, political religions, religious hermeneutics, and cognitive psychology, to challenge what he calls ‘three false consciousnesses’ (i.e., green economy, deliberative democracy, and green consumption) of contemporary ecological theories in economics, political science, and sociology. At IAS, Prof. Kuo is working on a book manuscript under the same title, which will include case studies of ecological religions from East Asia and Western Europe.

Cheng-tian Kuo, short bio

Professor Cheng-tian Kuo holds the position of Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and Joint Professor of the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies, at National Chengchi University in Taipei, Taiwan. In addition, he is currently serving as a Member of the Advisory Committee on Religious Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior.

Prof. Kuo’s research covers seven Asian Societies: Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and the Philippines. His research activities have resulted in more than one hundred conference papers, book chapters, and journal articles, as well as six single-authored books, including Religion and Democracy in Taiwan (Steele University of New York Press, 2008) and The Democratization of Nationalist Theologies: Taiwan and Democracy in Taiwan (National Chengchi University Press, 2014). Prof. Kuo holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago, an MA from the University of Texas at Austin, and a BA from National Taiwan University.

For more information see www.iias.asia/profile/cheng-tian-kuo

East Asian video frames: shades of urbanization

Exhibition dates: 12-24 August 2016
Venue: Pori Art Museum (www.poriartmuseum.ﬁ/avf)
Artists: Al Weiwei, Chih Pomp, Ham Yang Ah, Hayakawa Yumiko, Heng Xing, Kato Tsubasa, Man Pheobe, Miyahana Akih, Ookin Collective, Wu Maih

Curator: Minna Valjakka

In co-operation with The Tambo Curtain Studio (WU Mali)

URBANIZATION IN EAST ASIA has had a sweeping impact in all spheres of visual art. The repercussions are evident in agency, aesthetics, languages, themes, styles as well as in the policies, production, evaluation, and consumption of art. The reciprocal relationship between the city and the visual arts has provided new realities to interpret, envision and assess the city. Since the 1980s East Asian artists have actively engaged in investigating transformations of the urban space and issues associated with urbanization, such as dislocation, social discrepancy and environmental deterioration. The new artistic practices developed by artists and artist collectives, also in collaboration with NGOs, NPOs and urbanites, allow new forms of civic agency to emerge. At same time, the diversity of socially engaged art projects is reshaping and reclamining cityscapes through their critical commitment to the urban space and its communities. Engaging with the city through participatory and community art practices has been a common feature in Euro-American art scenes for decades. Such practices were less prominent in East Asian cities up to the end of 1990s, although the first experiments did emerge in Japan by the Gutai group already in the 1950s. The history, styles and forms of such engagement vary greatly from city to city. The focus of this exhibition, however, is on video works and documentaries created in the 21st century in order to demonstrate how artists are experimenting new ways to understand everyday life and its challenges today in a situation in which more than half of the world’s population lives in cities.

Balancing between the importance of solidarity for liveable cities and the threat of alienation and growing inequality, the artist addresses a variety of questions such as the horizontal vastness of Beijing, the vertical hierarchy of Hong Kong, the social norms of Tokyo, the competing needs of Taipei and Fukushima. The multiple perspectives resonate and complement each other, illuminating the shared concerns and hopes of urban dwellers and artists alike in the midst of the growing demands of globalisation. They respond to Henri Lefebvre’s (1996: 173) call for the capability of art to serve the city not by prettifying the urban space with works of art but by becoming ‘praxis and poetry on a social scale: the art of living in the city as work of art’. The exhibition elucidates the major themes of the previous three-year video project (started in January 2013) and is the final, additional part of it.

Language, power & identity in Asia: creating & crossing language boundaries

Conference dates: 14-16 March 2016
Venue: National Museum of Antiquities, Rapenburg 28, Leiden, the Netherlands
Organised by IAS in collaboration with LeidenGlobal and the Language Museum in Leiden.

THIS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE will explore the interrelations between language, power and identity in Asia. The conference aims to explore languages that impact related speech communities separated by national borders, and the role of policies and legislation in identity formation. It will also address such topics as the position of small-scale linguistic communities within larger empires and nation-states, and within a rapidly globalising world.

For more information and registration, see www.iias.nl/language

Heritage as aid & diplomacy in Asia

Conference dates: 26-28 May 2016
Venue: Leiden University Academy Building, Small Auditorium, Rapenburg 73, Leiden, the Netherlands

In May 2016, IAS will be hosting a conference focusing on the role of international organisations and global heritage activism. It will address the relevant international and transnational actors as objects of study and will engage in a threefold exploration:

1. Knowledge production: Geopolitics of heritage as diplomacy.
2. Ethnographies of international agents and ‘cultural experts’.
3. The politics of heritage conservation.

This conference will be the last in a series of three, jointly organised by IAS, Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan; and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore.

For more information and registration, see www.iias.nl/heritageaid

Indian medicine: between state & village

Workshop dates: 23-24 June 2016
Venue: Leiden University Faculty of Humanities, Lipius Building, room 146, Cleveringaplaats 1, Leiden, the Netherlands

This workshop takes the sensibilities of Indian medicine as its point of departure, focusing on themes such as Indian medicines as tangible and intangible heritage, Indian medicines as health security for the poor and Indian medicines as identity markers. The workshop is organised by IAS and convened by Dr Maarten Bode (University of Amsterdam and the Institute of Transdisciplinary Health Sciences and Technology, Bangalore, India).

For more information and registration, see www.iias.nl/indianmedicine

New religious nationalism in Chinese societies

Seminar dates: 21-22 April 2016
Venue: Pavilion, Museum of Ethnology, Steenstraat 1, Leiden, the Netherlands

ORGANISED BY Professor Cheng-tian Kuo (Taiwan Chair of Chinese Studies), IAS and Leiden University, and co-sponsored by the Chiang-Ching Kuo Foundation for Scholarly Exchanges (Taiwan). During the seminar, participants from various countries will apply philosophical, religious, historical, political, and cognitive approaches to explore the relationship between religion and national identity formation in Chinese societies (China, Taiwan and Hong Kong).

For more information and registration, see www.iias.asia/religious-nationalism

City & society: the care of the self

A comparative examination of Eastern & Western practices from Confucius to Foucault & beyond

Seminar dates: 18-19 May 2016
Venue: Wednesday 18 May: Leiden University, Gravensteen, Pieterskerkhof 6, Leiden, the Netherlands
Thursday 19 May: Pavilion, Museum of Ethnology, Steenstraat 1, Leiden, the Netherlands
This is the eighth annual seminar organised by IAS and the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at Delft University of Technology (Netherlands).

What informs the thinking behind this multi-disciplinary seminar and project, is the awareness that cities are people and their networks of interaction. A healthy city should enjoy a symbiotic evolutionary relationship with those who inhabit it; a healthy city should embrace change. How to achieve this change, and make it beneficial, can best be determined by proper examination of the elements that go into the making of a city, and the society that inhabits it. During the seminar, contributors from various disciplines will present their papers, from which a selection will be gathered into a peer-reviewed publication. While the seminar is intended as a bottom-up research endeavour, people who take an interest in the subject matter are welcome to register as a listener.

For more information and registration, see http://www.iias.asia/city-society
On 26 December 2015 Mario Rutten, professor of Comparative Sociology and Anthropology of Asia at the University of Amsterdam, passed away. Mario was well-known for his extensive and long-term research involvement in Gujarat, with a particular interest in questions of labour relations, entrepreneurship and migration. Besides India he also conducted research in Indonesia (Central Java), Malaysia (Kedah State) and London. Mario was not only an incredible researcher whose relationship with some of his informants sometimes spanned decades and involved multiple generations, but also an exceptional colleague, supervisor and friend.

Michel Baas

Encountering Mario
Mid-2005 on a rather cold and grey day I picked up Mario from Tullamarine, Melbourne’s main airport. At the time I was doing PhD research among Indian student-migrants in Melbourne and he had come to visit me in the field for a week. He had flown in from India where he had visited another PhD candidate, Ward Bereczki, who at the time was doing research on political clientism in the capital of the state of Gujarat, Ahmadabad. By the time we got to the car Mario was already remarking about the repetitively switching between an account of the pol in which Ward was busy conducting fieldwork and the distinct architecture of Ward’s house, and stories of the latest developments at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam among which the recruitment of a new professor of anthropology that Mario was particularly excited about. When he entered our apartment just off Chapel Street on Dandenong Road, he enthusiastically shook hands with my partner as if he were an old friend (he had in fact never met him) and buoyantly pointed at the (fold-out) couch saying: is that where I will be sleeping the coming days? The following days Mario and I went on a whirlwind tour of the city and what I considered ‘the field’: for Dutch standards unusually large campuses, suburbs that had the nightmarish quality to disappear in the horizon, and all these spaces ‘in-between’ where informants might be doing to hang-out. Every time we met one of my informants Mario would vigorously shoot off some questions to get down the basics, conducting the kind of ‘mapping’ that struck me as vaguely Indian, making sure he knew where that person was from, what his background was, might he be married, just stopping himself short of asking for his ‘good’ name. Meanwhile Mario would nudge me as if to say: you know all this too, right? And indeed, deftly I had noted it all down during many lengthy interviews and conversations before, making sure I knew exactly ‘everything’ about my informants, as Mario had pressed upon me before I left for the field. It has now been more than ten years since I finished my fieldwork in Melbourne and have since moved onto different topics. However, in typical Mario-like fashion I remain in contact with quite a few of my informants. When I recently met up for dinner with one of them, now married, with a three year old daughter and firmly settled in one of Melbourne’s inestimable suburbs, he casually inquired how ‘my supervision’ was doing and if he was still asking so many questions. When I assured him that we ‘anthropologists’ rarely ever stop asking questions, my friend (I have long stopped thinking of him as an informant) started asking me if I still carried these silly black notebooks with me everywhere, and in which he assured I still dexterously scribbled down everything I learned. I had no doubt I would do the same after dinner had finished.

When I read Mario’s most recent book Anthropological Encounters (AAB publishers, 2015) I was struck by how much my own research had been influenced by his dedicated, long-term involvement in his informants’ lives. By means of short vignettes Mario discusses the way anthropological researchers become part of and at some point even an undeniable presence within their own research field. By the same token, spending time with informants, engaging in their daily lives and sharing worries, moments of happiness and otherwise, often has a tendency to impact the anthropologists personal life even back home as well; lives become intertwined, friendships cemented, and in some cases it almost feels like one has become family. As we learn from the first few chapters in the book, Mario considers some of his initial informants like family, though he admits that it is not without limitations giving his ‘adopted’ status (p. 2).
occasionally somewhat enigmatic fashion Mario was in the same time it is a happy memory: in habitual energetic and beer being opened, as the final one we would talk, but at the time chair of the anthropology department, was closely involved in documenting the process, by means of a documentary project.

It was at this building that I would meet Mario on a bright sunny summe day in 2014 for the last time. Setting on an old wooden bench next to the entrance of the ‘Spinhuis’ we would watch colleagues enter and exit the building, some carrying boxes, as it was what had come to be marked the final day of sociology and anthropology at this location; the department was moving out of the building and to a new faculty building on the east side of town. It was the end of an era but also the start of a new beginning and Mario, at the time chair of the anthropology department, was closely involved in documenting the process, by means of a documentary film, together with students and colleagues.

Nursing a mug of tea Mario inquired about my recent research projects and publications, but it wasn’t the place or time to go into much detail with a sound system being tested, former colleagues and students arriving on beaten-up bicycles, and a general somewhat celebratory atmosphere in the air, though thick with sweat and the distinct feeling that a somewhat elusive something would soon be lost forever. It is not easy to think of that moment in the summer sun, music drifting through the open doors into the courtyard, the first bottles of beer being opened, as the final one we would talk, but at the same time it is a happy memory: in habitual energetic and occasionally somewhat enigmatic fashion Mario was in conversation not just with me but with many arriving and departing at the same time, endlessly curious about what was going on, boisterously full of questions, and vivaciously full of plans, documentaries to make, publications to finish, and ideas for future research to share. Sure, the move was not ideal, the old building would be missed, but it also presented new opportunities and, in a sense, life would go on.

New beginnings

Ever since we learned that Mario did not have long to live he would frequently and often unexpectedly come up in conversations at conferences and otherwise across the globe. Having dinner with a friend in Brasilia in December 2015 I remarked that he must have heard that Mario wasn’t doing well, news which hadn’t reached him but which shook him visibly. Mario had been his thesis supervisor and he fondly recalled the many discussions he had had with him about oddities such as ‘non-western sociology’, a field of inquiry which was still taught in Amsterdam, and which he as a Brazilian could never quite reconcile himself with. It is therefore perhaps no surprise that when Anthropological Encounters was launched in November, in both a Dutch and English edition, with a riveting speech by Mario himself, over two hundred people were in attendance.

Mario was a true inspiration, a force of life who departed way too soon. He will not only be remembered for being an inspiring academic, with a very distinct vision and opinion about scholarly research and the academic profession, but also because he was a true friend to many. It resonates throughout Mario’s other work. Characterized by long-standing and intimate relations with his informants his work was quintessentially systemic and ideas for future research to share. Sure, the move was not ideal, the old building would be missed, but it also presented new opportunities and, in a sense, life would go on.

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This generalizing attitude is often wrapped in a development discourse communities that are equally important methodological approaches across many subjects on Africa-Asia, sixty years after the historic Afro-Asian Bandung Conference of 1955. Since Bandung, the Africa-Asia axis of knowledge has grown in relevance in today’s rapidly changing geopolitical and economic global landscape.

One of the main reasons for organizing this event was the realization that the current academic discourse on Africa-Asia relations seems to only exist as a research field for its contemporary ‘relevance’, primarily in geo-political and economic terms, with often little reference or knowledge of their deeper historical and cultural significance. In Accra, topics of current concerns indeed occupied an overwhelming place in all the discussions. For instance, issues related to China’s massive economic and political influence in Africa dominate the Africa-Asia academic landscape, and with it, questions related to migration, development aid, commercial competition, government-to-government relations, etc. Not surprisingly, there is an over dependency on macro rather than micro forms of knowledge with, as an epistemological consequence, an over-reliance on colonial and post-independence Western categories, such as those of the Nation-State model, with its ability to truncate human phenomena and borne out of the domination of the neo-liberal Northern sphere. And, within the academic level, the same narrow neo-liberal ideology prioritizes hard, ahistorical social sciences at the expense of long-term, reflexive, historically informed scholarship, ultimately leading to the marginalization and extinction of a gratuitous, speculative and potentially subversive knowledge tradition, in favour of a utilitarian, narrowly segmented field that can be filled with interchangeable “experts” whose works enable to the “Audit Culture” highlighted by some anthropologists. The highly number of scholars of African or Asian backgrounds studying in or working in contemporary ‘social sciences’ programmes at Western universities – in which no language skills are required and for which funding is usually attached to tightly delineated projects – makes it sure that the field remains a fundamentally ‘dominated’ one, in the West but also in most Asian or African universities when these scholars return to teach there.

The challenge to the sustainability of this institutional Africa-Asia ‘field’ and its capacity to test traditional hierarchies borne out of the domination of the neo-liberal Northern academic model therefore lies in the very structure of this model, with its ability to truncate phenomena and subject them to artificial epistemic, temporal, utilitarian agendas. These epistemological and institutional limitations offer little chance for interactions to flourish. As it is increasing the case, the ‘new field’ of Africa-Asia as it has established itself in a number of universities thus bears the risk of falling prey to a few self-serving circles, mainly in the West, with a few African and Asian antennae. The ‘field’ can continue to be artificially shaped with few alternative perspectives, and the absence of a critical mass of African and Asian participants from Africa and Asia – because their works or profiles may not fit into the narrow framework of the field, or simply because their countries or regions do not involve them, their home institutions are weak, their language ability limits them from accessing information, or from publishing in US and Europe-based periodicals, etc. – to just list a few of the usual barriers that ultimately bind an area of academic investigation.

No silo mentality
It is this tendency to crystallize subjects of study into institutionalized, formalized categories, without their generic sets of assumptions, references, their hierarchical structures, their ‘gurus’, their sociological economy of academic knowledge, that the Accra conference organisers sought to correct. In Africa, the main program, the organisers tried to incorporate the submitted abstracts and the discussions they entailed into broader thematic sessions, so as to try to open up segmented topics into a more complex texture of interfaced factors and genealogies. In this way, they sought to avoid a “silo mentality”. Six sessions were thereafter set up: Trans-continental Connections and Interactions; Economics, Aid and Development; Intellectual Encounters; Arts and Culture; Migration and Transnational, Asian Studies in Africa. When possible, debates were integrated into broader genealogies so that, even when framed for their contemporary relevance, they would open up segmented topics into a more complex texture of interfaced factors and genealogies.

The Newsletter
www.africas.asia

Towards an autonomous academic Africa-Asia framework
Philippe Poycyn (IIAS Director)

Looking back on the conference Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge, Ghana, 24-26 September 2015,

In September 2015, the Association for Asian Studies in Africa (A-Asia), in cooperation with BAS and the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS), organized what was the largest social sciences and humanities international conference on Asia-Africa, entitled ‘Africa-Asia. A New Axis of Knowledge’. The event brought together over three hundred participants from forty countries. Hosted by the University of Ghana (Legon, Accra) the conference included 55 panels and roundtables. The three-day meeting focused on the interactions between Asia and Africa. During the conference, participants from Africa, Asia and beyond, with different academic backgrounds in the humanities and social sciences, enjoyed the rare opportunity to exchange their ideas and approaches across many subjects on Africa-Asia, sixty years after the historic Afro-Asian Bandung Conference of 1955. Since Bandung, the Africa-Asia axis of knowledge has grown in relevance in today’s rapidly changing geopolitical and economic global landscape.

One of the main reasons for organizing this event was the realization that the current academic discourse on Africa-Asia relations seems to only exist as a research field for its contemporary ‘relevance’, primarily in geo-political and economic terms, with often little reference or knowledge of their deeper historical and cultural significance. In Accra, topics of current concerns indeed occupied an overwhelming place in all the discussions. For instance, issues related to China’s massive economic and political influence in Africa dominate the Africa-Asia academic landscape, and with it, questions related to migration, development aid, commercial competition, government-to-government relations, etc. Not surprisingly, there is an over dependency on macro rather than micro forms of knowledge with, as an epistemological consequence, an over-reliance on colonial and post-independence Western categories, such as those of the Nation-State model, with its ability to truncate human phenomena and borne out of the domination of the neo-liberal Northern sphere. And, within the academic level, the same narrow neo-liberal ideology prioritizes hard, ahistorical social sciences at the expense of long-term, reflexive, historically informed scholarship, ultimately leading to the marginalization and extinction of a gratuitous, speculative and potentially subversive knowledge tradition, in favour of a utilitarian, narrowly segmented field that can be filled with interchangeable “experts” whose works enable to the “Audit Culture” highlighted by some anthropologists. The highly number of scholars of African or Asian backgrounds studying in or working in contemporary ‘social sciences’ programmes at Western universities – in which no language skills are required and for which funding is usually attached to tightly delineated projects – makes it sure that the field remains a fundamentally ‘dominated’ one, in the West but also in most Asian or African universities when these scholars return to teach there.

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An axis of knowledge
It is this effort to historicize and culturally contextualize Asia-Africa that at the end may give the field its true intellectual legitimacy and its expanded potential to itself transform other areas, and to contribute to the inspiring mediation of those who already pioneered the (re-)discovery of numerous forms of Asia-Africa transcontinental connections, without compromising local contextualized knowledge of places, we can expect an increasing number of striking intellectual parallels, links or ‘bridges’ to be brought to light.

It is hoped that if humanistic area studies in their institutionalised, funded, academic also sought to contribute to different localized contextualized knowledge experiences. There were also two Leiden University-sponsored panels on ‘Political Agency and Global Conflicts and Convergences of Asian and African Contexts’, which saw historians confront their approaches and methodologies over the connected subject of colonialism as experienced in localized contexts in the two continents.

www.iias.asia/asia-studies-africa
www.africas.asia
The MOBILITY OF LAW across the Indian Ocean world is a relatively new field of research. Recent studies have greatly added to our knowledge of the cultural mechanisms of law within or beyond imperial and colonial structures in early-modern and modern times. The international conference ‘Ocean of Law: Intermixed Legal Systems across the Indian Ocean world, 1550-1950’ that we organized at Leiden University in December of 2015 brought together scholars from different fields and disciplines, interested in the cultural mobility of law.

The three-day-conference was generously funded by the Leiden University Institute for History, Leiden University Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (LUCIS), Asian Modernities and Traditions (AMT), Leiden University Fund, and the Royal Society’s Inaugural Fund. The first day of the conference started with a keynote speech by Prof. Paul Halliday (University of Virginia) who pointed out the importance of the tension between legal formalism and ‘longing for certainty’ on the one hand, and the uses of legal pluralities and the uncertain practice of law on the other. The second keynote speech, delivered by Prof. Engseng Ho (Duke University and National University of Singapore), demonstrated the cross-cultural specificities and hybridity of law in the making of Indian Ocean communities, especially of Islam.

The eight panels spread across three days were chaired by Nira Wiekramasinghe (LIAS), Petra Sijpsteijn (LUCIS), Egbert Koops (Leiden Law Faculty), Adriaan Bedner (Van Vollenhoven Institute), Jos Gommans, Manon van der Heijden, Esther Zwiwelk, and Alicia Schricker (all from the Leiden Institute for History). No particular themes were given to the panels, as all papers were closely connected to each other. We only kept a macro- and micro perspective in arranging the panels.

Many of the presentations and resulting conference discussions turned out to focus on the spatialization of law rather than on developments in time. In this spatial context, the papers explored the encounters of legal traditions, which often travelled long distances (by textual genealogies or personal encounters) and the consequences of this for the development of local practices and legal pluralities.

Theoretical frameworks and approaches originated from such diverse fields as law, history, area studies, philosophy, literature, and Islamic studies. Looking at the English legal device ‘Power of Attorney’ and its Dutch equivalent, Nurfadlizah Yahya volmacht literature, and Islamic studies.

The continuity in legal administration of Java between eighteenth and nineteenth century was articulated by Sanne Rabben (Leiden University). Looking into criminal justice, she argued that there was continuity in the practices of law despite repeated attempts to alter the system. Elizabeth Ghosh (University of Chicago) focused on the discontinuity in the function of qāḍi under the British rule of Bharuch in the nineteenth century. Nadeera Rupesinghe (Leiden University) articulated the everyday lives of pluralistic law introduced by the Dutch in eighteenth century Ceylon where the Dutch legal regime had to encounter not only acceptance, but also rejection and manipulation. Similar cases of rejection of and resistances against Islamic law were portrayed by Kirsty Walker (Harvard University) by focusing on moral policing cases from early-twentieth century British Malaya related to khulwat ( khulwat intimacy). Nathan Perl-Rosenthal (University of Southern California) also presented the everyday intersections of law by offering a compelling case related to the pillage of British East Indian Osterley at French Mauritius.

Such issues of maritime law had a long history. Hassan S. Khalilieh (University of Haifa) examined the influence of Prophet Muhammad’s and Quran’s conceptions of freedom of navigation and free sea on the early modern approaches of Southeast Asian Muslim rulers towards the sea. Arthur Weststeijn (Koninklijk Nederlands Instituut te Rome) spoke about the possibility of provincializing Grotius in the historiography of international maritime law by looking at a Malay treatise titled Tilj al-Salāṭīn of Būḥārī al-Jauharī, a contemporary of Grotius. The reflections on the maritime codes of the Dutch East India Company ( VOC) in 1750, juxtaposing it with the Islamic and Jewish legal texts in order to question the legitimacy of assumed ‘Muhammadan law-book’. The Dutch scholarly attempts to construct a Shari‘a law canon since the middle-moderne were also discussed in the contribution by Léon Buskens (Leiden University), who surveyed numerous handbooks and translations produced by Dutch professors.

An earlier case of Islamic legal pluralism as expressed through the trajectory of Shī‘a/Islamic law was presented by M. Moosa, an Assistant Professor (University of Saskatchewan), who argued that the canonisation of the school happened later than was previously thought. He looked at the works of Yahya al-Sharaf al-Kanawi, who lived not so long after Gratian, the canonist. Taking the examples of canonists like Gratian and Islamic scholars together with early modern Protestant authors, Gjs Kruipije (Vrije Universiteit) illustrated the common-suitability and shared routes of legal encounters between the Islamic and Christian worlds. Stewart Motha (University of London) presented the symbols and banners of sovereignty in which sovereign solitude (like the fantasy of ‘No human footprint’) is a recurrent theme in law’s archives as it is exemplified in a series of cases from the Chagos Islands. In a similar vein, Seán Donlan and Mathilda Twomey (University of Limerick) demonstrated the legal métissage of the Seychelles, which once were uninhabited and thus lacking an ‘indigenous’ legal system. The three-day-conference was generously funded by the Leiden University Institute for History, Leiden University Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (LUCIS), Asian Modernities and Traditions (AMT), Leiden University Fund, and the Royal Society’s Inaugural Fund. The first day of the conference started with a keynote speech by Prof. Paul Halliday (University of Virginia) who pointed out the importance of the tension between legal formalism and ‘longing for certainty’ on the one hand, and the uses of legal pluralities and the uncertain practice of law on the other. The second keynote speech, delivered by Prof. Engseng Ho (Duke University and National University of Singapore), demonstrated the cross-cultural specificities and hybridity of law in the making of Indian Ocean communities, especially of Islam.

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New perspectives on late Tang maritime trade?

Roderick Orlina and Eva Stroeber

A collection of storage jars in the Princessehof Museum, the Netherlands

WITH MORE THAN 120 storage jars, the collection at the Princessehof Museum, Leeuwarden, is one of the most important and varied worldwide. Most of the jars were found in Indonesia during the first half of the 20th century, when Indonesia was a Dutch colony. Nanne Ottema (1874-1955), a notary from Leeuwarden and founding director of the Princessehof Museum, collected Chinese ceramics and built up a very important collection, particularly of Ming export wares. But it was his friend and partner, Anne Tjibbes van der Meulen (1862-1934), who acquired these jars. Even after the death of Ottama, jars continued to be added to the collection, collected mostly by the Ottema-Kingma Foundation. From 1977-1987, Barbara Harrisson (1922-2015) served as the director of the Princessehof Museum. Her pioneering work on jars, Pusula. Neveljes Jars on Bones, was published in 1986.

The oldest jars in the collection date from the Tang dynasty (618-907), these were made in kilns in southern China. Later, groups of jars include those from the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1279-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. The Princessehof collection also includes jars from Cambodia from the 13th century, a number of jars made in kilns in Thailand, Vietnam, and Burmese made in the kilns of Burma, now Myanmar. This traditional term for storage jars refers to the old harbour of Martaban, Myanmar, from where many of these jars, used on ships, were exported.

A group of Tang jars and the ‘Maritime Silk Road’

A group of around 20 jars from the Princessehof collection dates from the 8th-10th century, the late Tang dynasty. Many of these jars were excavated in Central Java near Borobudur, an important Buddhist centre, and acquired there by van der Meulen in the early 20th century. They are thickly potted with features prominently, overshadowing a smaller unidentified letter, Manichaeism script, read from right to left, was devised in the 3rd century and was used exclusively by the followers of Manichaeism, a Persian religion, up until the 10th century. The other jar, of about 40 cm high, has a whitish glaze. It contains an inscription that has yet to be deciphered. The inscriptions on the Princessehof jars are not the only ones in known existence. Hundreds of jars of the olive brown glazed type were recovered from the Belitung shipwreck, and two of those also have inscriptions. How do we relate the epigraphical information on the Princessehof and other jars found on the Maritime Silk Road to the historical context of Tang international trade in the 9th to 10th century?

Trade on the Maritime Silk Road

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Trade on the Maritime Silk Road

The Maritime Silk Road leads to two questions. The first refers to the historical sites on Java, close to Borobudur, holy territory, where some of the jars were found. Was it a coincidence? It is reported that metal vessels were inside the jars when they were excavated. Why? Could there be a connection with ritual use in Buddhist ceremonies, depicted on the stone reliefs of Buddhist or Buddhist-Hindu temples of Southeast Asia, like the Borobudur on Java, Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Pagan in Myanmar (Burma)? Second, and in reference to the inscriptions on the jars: was the late Tang international seaborne trade between China and West Asia still dominated by the trade network of Persians and the Central Asian trade by the Sogdians?

The authors, Roderick Orlina, an epigraphist and historian, and Eva Stroeber, sinologist and art historian working as curator for Asian ceramics at the Princessehof Museum, Leeuwarden, will develop this inter-disciplinary project into a more comprehensive article, to be published by the end of 2016.

The powerful and the powerless

13th Annual Conference of the European Association of Taiwan Studies (EATS)

Prague, Czech Republic, 30 March–1 April 2016

POWER RELATIONSHIPS, broadly understood, pervade society on many levels and in many guises. They may be explicit or implicit, acknowledged or hidden, based on outright coercion or, instead, on more subtle forms of co-opting, manipulation, and indoctrination. They can involve individuals as well as collectives. In different contexts such as faith, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation, they can render people susceptible to the effects of power in different ways. Participants will engage with the phenomenon of power in their respective area of research, be it social sciences or in the humanities, and focus on the relationship between those who wield power on the one hand and those who are affected by the decisions of the powerful on the other. By investigating the strategies, conventions, and tensions underlying the interactions between the two sides, we hope the papers of this conference will offer novel insights into such issues as persistence and change in power relations over time; the shifting positions and multiple roles individuals as well as groups can assume in different contexts and vis-à-vis different counterparts; the significance of symbolic representations of power; historical, moral, religious, and political justifications of inequality; strategies employed in contesting existing power relationships; formal and informal structures established with the purpose to create, enforce or perpetuate hierarchical relationships; the scope of individual and collective agency in the face of the limiting effects of power. In this way, we hope to expand our knowledge of powerful and powerless in Taiwan and to enrich the discipline of Taiwan Studies.

For further information about the EATS Conference and EATS, please check the website: http://eats-taiwan.eu
An Asianist’s eye on the digital

Jacqueline Hicks

The deeper the internet infiltrates our daily lives, the more interesting it becomes to study. With universities now introducing courses in Internet Studies and Digital Culture, they are effectively defining a new digital ‘place’ that requires a unique set of skills and knowledge to understand it. But if the online environment really is a new place, where does that leave area studies specialists interested in the digital? Does it make our region-specific knowledge redundant? Or is it precisely the careful attention to power and place which defines area studies scholarship that this growing field needs?

These same platform technologies are also key to changes in the global marketplace for labour. ‘Crowd-work’ labour platforms, such as Amazon Mechanical Turk and ClickWorker, mediate the buying and selling of labour for very small tasks like matching images and product descriptions on commercial websites. As Asians find such opportunities to transcend their local labour markets, the implications for workers’ rights as well as Asian states are at yet poorly understood. Do such platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for workers in different parts of the world? Or do they represent a continuation of global patterns of exploitation? How do they impact the ability of national states to collect taxes or protect workers’ rights? Such questions can only be answered with reference to careful offline context-specific ethnographic research of the type that area studies scholars are trained to perform.

There is also scope for looking at the ways the internet catalyses social change, entrenches power asymmetries or shapes cultural practices in our region. How people construct their religious identities online or what we can learn from the internet about the development of language are all proving fruitful avenues of enquiry. But there is also room for an Asianist eye on a more esoteric field of enquiry that is specific to careful offline context-specific ethnographic research of the type that area studies scholars are trained to perform.

Political and economic disruption

What internet-related topics may be relevant for Asianists? The most prominent research has so far been about online political discourse. Calculating the level of Chinese government censorship on Twitter and Facebook, for example, argues that it is best seen as embedded in other social spaces, rather than parts of the world. Miller and Slater, for example, argue that the way the internet is assimilated and understood in different parts of the world, specifically in Asia, is not as clear as some people have argued. In research has shown, there is much promise in an approach set of skills and knowledge to understand it. But if the online environment really is a new place, where does that leave area studies specialists interested in the digital? Does it make our region-specific knowledge redundant? Or is it precisely the careful attention to power and place which defines area studies scholarship that this growing field needs?

Above: Presentation of ‘Good Morning Mr. Orwell’ at the Kitchen Gallery, New York, 8 December 1983. Photograph Copyright Lorenzo Bianda. Reproduced with permission of the Nam June Paik estate.

Conference date: 24 May 2016
More information: www.kitlv.nl/digitalasia

ASIAN STUDIES AND THE DIGITAL are in some ways strange bedfellows. While the internet is sometimes described as a ‘new internet world’, with its own global culture,2 Asians trade in references to local and specific cultures. But, as recent research has shown, there is much promise in an approach that looks at the interaction of these two ‘worlds’. Investigating how the internet is assimilated and understood in different parts of the world, Miller and Slater, for example, argue that it is best seen as embedded in other social spaces, rather than parts of the world. Miller and Slater, for example, argue that the way the internet is assimilated and understood in different parts of the world, specifically in Asia, is not as clear as some people have argued. In research has shown, there is much promise in an approach set of skills and knowledge to understand it. But if the online environment really is a new place, where does that leave area studies specialists interested in the digital? Does it make our region-specific knowledge redundant? Or is it precisely the careful attention to power and place which defines area studies scholarship that this growing field needs?

The deeper the internet infiltrates our daily lives, the more interesting it becomes to study. With universities now introducing courses in Internet Studies and Digital Culture, they are effectively defining a new digital ‘place’ that requires a unique set of skills and knowledge to understand it. But if the online environment really is a new place, where does that leave area studies specialists interested in the digital? Does it make our region-specific knowledge redundant? Or is it precisely the careful attention to power and place which defines area studies scholarship that this growing field needs?

These same platform technologies are also key to changes in the global marketplace for labour. ‘Crowd-work’ labour platforms, such as Amazon Mechanical Turk and ClickWorker, mediate the buying and selling of labour for very small tasks like matching images and product descriptions on commercial websites. As Asians find such opportunities to transcend their local labour markets, the implications for workers’ rights as well as Asian states are at yet poorly understood. Do such platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for workers in different parts of the world? Or do they represent a continuation of global patterns of exploitation? How do they impact the ability of national states to collect taxes or protect workers’ rights? Such questions can only be answered with reference to careful offline context-specific ethnographic research of the type that area studies scholars are trained to perform.

There is also scope for looking at the ways the internet catalyses social change, entrenches power asymmetries or shapes cultural practices in our region. How people construct their religious identities online or what we can learn from the internet about the development of language are all proving fruitful avenues of enquiry. But there is also room for an Asianist eye on a more esoteric field of enquiry that is specific to careful offline context-specific ethnographic research of the type that area studies scholars are trained to perform.

Information politics

As we increasingly turn to the internet to understand the world, we rely more on the computational techniques that lift, summarise and otherwise prioritise the information we seek. If we introduce a concern with the diversity of voices that are found using these techniques, information retrieval techniques become political.

As an Asianist who has worked for the past few years on a ‘digital humanities’ project, I have frequently attended some very technical talks. One presented an established web service that automatically summaries news content from across the web and the world primarily for European Commission officials and policymakers. It is a great service with a host of useful tools and I often encourage those interested in such techniques to visit and play around. (mm.expansive.london) Some of the features of this service use a computational technique called ‘named entity recognition’, which automatically extracts names from the news for further analysis. But people’s names are messier than you might imagine, and depending on the source can be spit differently, use different parts of a multi-word name, or the same name can refer to two different people. So, to help resolve some of these ambiguities, this web service excludes names that only use one word.

This makes sense technically, and has no effect in cultures where most people have at least two words in their name. But in Indonesia, parts of South India, and elsewhere around the world, it is common to use just one name (mononym), which means that such people are automatically excluded. So, news summaries that the people using this website receive.

The implications of this particular example are small, and there are much more significant barriers to the representation of non-Western or minority voices in the internet as language and source selection. But it illustrates the point that a seemingly innocuous and largely invisible technical decision can have real effects on the diversity of voices that show up in the information we receive. More broadly, it points to a role for the knowledge of non-Western language specialists in the development of computational techniques.

More frequently, the politics of information retrieval concerns the function of search engines, and here too there is scope for an area studies perspective. The Oxford Internet Institute, for example, has produced some interesting research on the ‘information geographies’ of the internet that looks at how different areas of the world are represented in google searches or on Wikipedia (geography.oii.ox.ac.uk).

A concern with the diversity of information available on the internet can also work the other way: to consider structural influences on the internet as experienced by those living in Asia. Censorship by national governments is one element of this type of research, but as Facebook’s internet.org is rolled out in Asia, questions are also beginning to be asked about the influence of corporations.

With its vision of connecting people in less developed countries to the internet for free, internet.org’s Free Basics programme offers users of some telecom companies a limited number of websites and apps without charging data fees. Its critics say that it violates the tenets of net neutrality – that no matter where you are in the world, you should be able to access, or provide content online, without discrimination. At the time of writing, this is a serious enough concern to warrant the Indian Telecom Regulatory Authority to temporarily block Free Basics in India.

The fear that corporate interests may dictate access to information is compounded by the fact that large numbers of people, particularly in developing countries, believe that Facebook is the internet.3

An emerging research agenda

As with all technological developments, there is a discourse of novelty surrounding the internet and related digital methods that sometimes sounds like overtstatement. Are digital technologies unique enough to warrant a new area of study? Or are they just another change to the medium, like the printing press before it? But all medium have their own particular character, affecting our lives and behaviour in very particular ways that need further enquiry to understand.

I have presented here a very small selection of issues for Asianists interested in the digital – ones that particularly reflect my own interests in political and economic power. Until now, there has not been this newly developing research agenda to take up in skills-based projects and general internet focused institutes. But this is changing. Books are now being released (Asian Perspective on Digital Cultures, 2016), journals established (Asianascape: Digital Asia), and even degree programs set up (Emerging Digital Cultures in Asia and Africa at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London), bringing a concern with the digital into area studies departments.

Fig 1: Internet users in the World by World Bank, 2015 Source: www.internetworldstats.com

Asia (48.1%)
Europe (18.1%)
Latin America/Caribbean (10.1%)
Africa (9.8%)
North America (9.4%)
Middle East (9.2%)
Australia/Oceania (0.8%)

References
I was working on a text called *Niśvāsamukha* for my PhD thesis. To work on this text itself was a challenging job as we had only a single surviving manuscript, and the language, Sanskrit, employed to write the text is different from the standard one. On top of that, the text was also unpublished. For these reasons, it was taking a long time. Most of the preparatory work for my thesis was already completed during a research stay (2008-2010) at Pondicherry under the direction of Prof. Dominic Goodall (EFEO, Paris/Pondicherry) and at home in Kathmandu. When I came to IIAS it was all about a final revision and writing a proper introduction and conclusion under the joint direction of Prof. Peter Bisschop (Leiden) and Prof. Goodall. I had already prepared the critical edition, annotated translation of and basic introduction to the *Niśvāsamukha*, and an edition of the five chapters (chapters five to nine) of the *Śivadharmasaṅgraha* for an appendix. In addition to this, I had prepared verse indices of both texts, and bibliography.

When at the Nepal Research Centre/Nepal German Manuscript Project (NRC/NGMCP), from 2011-2014, I was engaged in cataloguing Nepalese manuscripts and reading Sanskrit texts. This was a very good position for work and reading experience, but my PhD thesis was put on hold. Prof. Dominic Goodall then put me in touch with Prof. Peter Bisschop at Leiden University. Prof. Bisschop showed a keen interest to take me on as his doctoral student and helped me enrol at the University. Although we started our cooperation through Skype, it soon became clear we would need to meet in person. And so he suggested that I apply for the Gonda Fund. I did so, and fortunately the scholarship was granted.

As soon as I received this news, I prepared for my journey, travelling from the highest mountain to the lowest country, the Netherlands.

As I prepared the necessary documents for my visa, my wife collapsed and lost consciousness. The doctors could find no immediate explanation and declared that she would be fine – but I was hesitant to leave the next day. But in the end, of course we decided to go. Our visit to the embassy in Delhi was successful, and after seeing a bit of the city we headed to the Netherlands.

As soon as we reached Leiden, via Schiphol Airport, we forgot all the troubles and complications that we had gone through. Leiden is such a small, clean and beautiful city, without much traffic, crowds or noise. Parts of the city are interned with tree-lined canals. It was the month of September when we arrived and the trees were full of autumn's yellow leaves. This made the city even more beautiful.

We arrived on a Sunday. IIAS was officially closed, but the institute had kindly arranged the apartment keys for us. On that first day I also went to the IIAS building on the Kerkstraat to meet Mr. Tijani. I was intrigued by the building, which seemed to have been built in the 1930s. The building was a place to meet many international scholars. Every month there would be a lecture, giving scholars the opportunity to present their work. I was particularly helped by the training session that IIAS organized for its fellows, to help them present their own research to a large audience. As I had never before received such training in my life, it was very interesting and helpful for my academic life. I highly praise this innovative activity. Every so often, excursions to the museums in Leiden and Amsterdam were arranged. For me, this sort of event provided much knowledge about the history and culture of the Dutch people.

After the first week of reading the *Skandopurāṇa*, I also started meeting with Prof. Bisschop to read my thesis. During my 6-month stay in Leiden we met on a regular basis. We went through, patiently and carefully, my entire thesis with a terse dedication and made many insightful changes to the text. In particular he devoted special care to the arrangement and argument of the introduction. As a result of which, I was able to submit my thesis to Leiden University in June 2015. I later returned to Leiden to defend my thesis. IIAS financially helped me to make this visit, and many staff members attended the event. I am extremely grateful to IIAS and its staff, from whom I acquired much more than I had ever expected.

Looking back on my stay in Leiden, I can certainly say that it was an amazing experience, academically, socially, socially and culturally. Leiden University’s excellent library facilities are lacking in my country Nepal, where I would never have been able to complete my thesis. I am now looking forward to my next challenge: working again with Prof. Bisschop on his new project called ‘From universe of Visnu to universe of Siva’. I am already looking forward to going back to Leiden.
IIAS Research and Projects

IIAS research and other initiatives are carried out within a number of thematic clusters in phase with contemporary Asian currents—all built around the notion of social agency. The aim of this approach is to cultivate synergies and coherence between people and projects. IIAS also welcomes research for the open cluster, so as not to exclude potentially significant and interesting topics. Visit www.iias.nl for more information.

Global Asia

THE GLOBAL ASIA CLUSTER addresses contemporary issues related to trans-national interactions within the Asian region as well as Asia’s projection into the world, through the movement of goods, people, ideas, knowledge, ideologies and so forth. Past and present trends are addressed. The cluster aims to expand the understanding of the processes of globalisation by considering the various ways Asian and other world regions are interconnected within a long-term historical framework. Acknowledging the central role of Asia as an agent of global transformations, it challenges western perspectives that underlie much of the current literature and explores new forms of non-hegemonic intellectual interactions in the form of ‘south-south-north’ and ‘east-west’ dialogue models. In principle, any research dealing with Asian global interactions is of interest.

Asian Borders Research Network (www.asianborders.net)
The Asian Borders Research Network focuses particularly on the border regions between South Asia, Central Asia and Southeast Asia. The concerns of the ABNN are varied, ranging from migratory movements, transformations in cultural, linguistic and religious practices, to ethnic mobilization and conflict, and development motivations of communities. The ABNN organizes a conference in one of these border regions every two years in co-operation with a local partner. Next conference: Dynamic Borders: Livelihoods, Communities and Flows; Kathmandu, Nepal, 12-14 December 2016.
Coordinator: Eric de Maaker (maaker@fsw.leidenuniv.nl)

Energy Programme Asia (EPA)
The EPA-research programme is designed to study the effects of global geopolitics of energy security on the one hand, and policy to increase energy efficiency and estimate the prospects for the exploitation of renewable energy resources on the other. EPA’s current and second joint comparative research programme with the Institute of West Asian and African Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is entitled The Transformation of China’s Oil Industry: company strategies, embedded projects, and relations with institutions and stakeholders in resource-rich countries (2013-2017). In 2012, a roundtable in Chisamba, Zambia, led to the establishment of a regional network, AFRICA-ASIA: A New Axis of Knowledge. It was the first attempt to sustain a humanities-informed South-South network on Asian studies.

Coordinator: Titia van der Maas (t.van.der.maas@iias.nl)

IIAS Centre for Regulation and Governance in Asia, is engaged in innovative and comparative research on theories and practices – focusing on emerging economies. This programme is sponsored by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and IAS.

Asian Cities

WITH A SPECIAL EYE on contemporary developments, the Asian Cities cluster aims to explore the longstanding Asian urban “traditions”, by exploring the origins of urbanism and urban culture in different parts of Asia and linking the various elements of city cultures and societies, from ancient to modern (colonial and post-colonial) times. Through an international knowledge-network of experts, cities and research institutes it seeks to encourage social scientists and scholars in the humanities to interact with contemporary actors including artists, activists, planners and architects, educators, and policy makers. By bringing together science and practice, IIAS aims to create a platform for scholars and urban practitioners focussing on Asian cities ‘in context’ and beyond traditional western norms of knowledge.

Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA)
Consisting of over 100 researchers with affiliations at 17 institutes in Europe, China, India and the United States, the Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA) represents the largest global academic network on Asian cities. UKNA’s objective is to nurture contextualised and policy-relevant knowledge on Asian cities, seeking to influence policy by contributing insights that put people at the centre of urban governance and development strategies. To this aim, the programme hosts a variety of research projects through the exchange of researchers of the participating institutions, focusing on the three research themes:

1. Cities of the past, present and future;
2. Cities by and for the people; and
3. Future of the cities.

The UKNA has been awarded by a grant awarded by the EU and runs from April 2012 until April 2016. IAS is the coordinating institute in the network and administrator of the programme.

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Asian Heritages

THE ASIAN HERITAGES CLUSTER critically addresses cultural heritage practices in Asia. It explores the notion of heritage as it has evolved from a European-originated concept associated with architecture and monumental archaeology to incorporate a broader diversity of cultural forms and values. This includes the contested distinctions of ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ heritages, and the importance of cultural heritage in defining one’s own identity or identities vis-à-vis those of others. It addresses the variety of definitions associated with heritage and their implications for social agency. It aims to engage with the concepts of ‘authenticity’, ‘national heritage’ and ‘shared heritage’ and issues pertaining to the political economy of heritage. Attention is also given to the dangers of commodification of perceived endangered local cultures/heritages, languages, religious practices, crafts and art forms, as well as material vernacular heritage.

Graduate Programme In Critical Heritage Studies

Over the last few years, IAS has been intensively engaged with the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (IUS) and targeted Asian partners, in the development of a special MA track in the world of Crisis and Heritage Studies. The uniqueness of this initiative is that the MA in Leiden is combined with a parallel set of courses at a number of Asian universities, allowing for the students to obtain a double degree at the end of their training. To date, the Asian partners involved are National Taiwan University in Taiwan and Yonsei University in South Korea, and contacts with other possible Asian partner institutes have been established. Students can already opt for the focus on ‘Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe’ within the MA in Asian Studies, but can also engage in a Double Degree, offered by Leiden University and one of the Asian partners. The programme is supervised by Dr Elena Paskaleva (IAS/IUS). Prof. Michael Herff (Humanities Research Centre, ANU) is Senior Advisor to the IAS Critical Heritage Studies Initiative.

Coordinator: Elena Paskaleva (e.p.paskaleva@hum.leidenuniv.nl) or Willem Vogelsang (w.j.vogelsang@ias.nl)
Website: www.iias.nl/critical-heritage-studies

Indian Medical Heritage Research Network

The Indian Medical Heritage Research Network wants to stimulate social-cultural and social-historical research on Indian medical traditions such as Ayurveda, Unani-Tibb, Siddha, Yoga and Sowa Rigpa. Of special interest is the integration of Indian medicine in Indian public health and its role as second resort for middle class Indians and Europeans. The network offers a virtual space on Facebook (www.facebook.com/IndianMedicalHeritage) for collating research findings and other information about India’s medical heritage covering diverse perspectives, interests and backgrounds. A workshop, entitled ‘Indian medicine: Between state and village’ will take place in Leiden, The Netherlands on 23-24 June 2016. See: www.ias.nl/indiamedical

Coordinator: Maarten Bode (m.bode@uva.nl)

Rethinking Asian Studies in a Global Context

A research network supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Objectives of Reshaping the Field of Asian Studies, the three-year pilot programme (2014-2016) ‘Rethinking Asian Studies in a Global Context’ seeks to foster new humanities-focused research. In practice, this means adapting Asian Studies to an interconnected global environment built on a network of academics and practitioners from Asia, the Americas, Europe and Africa.

Educational opportunities are created by selecting cross-disciplinary methodological questions likely to shift scholarly paradigms as they pertain to Asia. In the process, the initiative seeks to shape academic communities around new themes of research, employing and building on the interests of young and aspiring scholars from the four world regions and beyond.

The initiative is coordinated by IAS, in collaboration with numerous institutions in Asia, the United States, Europe and Africa, and is funded with a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in New York. The pilot programme includes a range of scholarly activities such as workshops, conferences and summer schools in five topical areas, or foci, that cut across regions and disciplines:

1. Artistic Interventions: Histories, Cartographies and Politics in Asia
2. Uses of Culture and Cultural Heritage
4. Idea of the City in Asian Contexts
5. Views of Asia from Africa

Rethinking Asian Studies in a Global Context

Website: www.ias.nl/indiamedical
IIAS Fellowship Programme

Along with the research fellows who are attached to one of the IIAS research programmes, the Institute yearly hosts a large number of visiting researchers (affiliated fellows) who come to Leiden to work on their own individual research project. In addition, IIAS also facilitates the teaching and research by various professorial fellows as part of agreements with Dutch universities, foreign ministries and funding organisations.

CURRENT FELLOWS

Rosalina Abu Bakr
Social interaction in the Malay manuscripts

Hajime Akitomi
The comparative study of labor, employment & globalization labor between the Netherlands and Japan
1 Apr 2015 – 1 Apr 2016

Mehdi Aminesh
Coordinator ‘Energy Programme Asia (EPA)’
Domestic & geopolitical challenges to energy security for the European Union
1 Sept 2007 – 31 Mar 2017

Nachiket Chanchani
The construction of sexuality in the Central Himalayas
10 Jan – 10 Jul 2016

Manuela Ciotti
1 Mar – 31 Jul 2016

Daniela De Simone
Mauyar antiquities of Pātāliputra
1 Sept 2015 – 30 Apr 2016

Maria Helene Gorisse
Indology
1 Apr – 30 Sep 2016

Hanqun Gong
Practising (Pitabod) Buddhism: Body techniques & religious publicity in urban Thailand
1 Aug 2015 – 20 Jun 2016

Nur Hidayah
Islamic feminism in contemporary Indonesia: Past, present, & future trajectory
1 Dec 2015 – 28 Feb 2016

APPLICATION FORM: www.knaw.nl/en/awards/subsidies/gonda-fund
Application deadline: 1 April and 1 October every year

ASC-IIAS Fellowship Programme

A joint fellowship offered by the African Studies Centre and the International Institute for Asian Studies

THIS FELLOWSHIP is intended for researchers specialising in Asian-African interactions. It aims to attract researchers whose work is informed by current theoretical debates, in the social sciences and humanities, on global connectivities and who are able to critically engage with shifting paradigms in ‘area studies’ beyond the ways in which these have traditionally been conceived in the West. We are particularly interested in receiving fellowship proposals that go beyond a mere analysis of current issues associated with African-Asian comparative economic developments or Chinese investments in Africa – although none of these themes, if appraised critically and for their societal consequences, will of course be excluded. Our definition of Asia and Africa is broad and inclusive, Asia ranging from the Middle-East to the Pacific Coast, and Africa from North-Africa to the southern tip of the continent.

Application deadline: 15 March and 15 September each year. For more information and application form, go to: www.iasa.nl/page/asc-iias-fellowship-programme

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Daniela De Simone

Mauyar antiquities of Pātāliputra

MY RESEARCH PROJECT AT IAS deals with Indian archaeology of the Early Historic period. I am compiling a catalogue of the antiquities of the Mauyar period (121-185 BCE) found during excavations at Pātāliputra (modern Patna). This study is a follow-up to my PhD research ‘Mauyā Pātālpurā: An Assessment of the Archaeological Evidence’, which focused on the emergence of the Mauyar state in the 3rd century BCE.

Pātāliputra was the capital of the first Indian empire and the seat of the Mauyar dynasty, of which Asoka, the first Buddhist king, was the most famous member. Excavations began at Patna in the 19th and went on, discontinuously, until the end of the 20th century. Remains of wooden structures (a defensive wall and a stupa, the earliest monument of the Pātāliputra) were unearthed at different sites around Patna, along with a stone-piled hall that was discovered at Kumharā, a residential area of the modern city.

Several antiquities, including elaborated terracotta figurines, were unearthed at different sites around Patna, along with a stone-piled hall that was discovered at Kumharā, a residential area of the modern city. Several antiquities, including elaborated terracotta figurines, were unearthed at different sites around Patna, along with a stone-piled hall that was discovered at Kumharā, a residential area of the modern city. Several antiquities, including elaborated terracotta figurines, were unearthed at different sites around Patna, along with a stone-piled hall that was discovered at Kumharā, a residential area of the modern city. Several antiquities, including elaborated terracotta figurines, were unearthed at different sites around Patna, along with a stone-piled hall that was discovered at Kumharā, a residential area of the modern city. Several antiquities, including elaborated terracotta figurines, were unearthed at different sites around Patna, along with a stone-piled hall that was discovered at Kumharā, a residential area of the modern city.
Minna Valjakka

Seeds for hope: the power of aesthetics for urban creativity in Hong Kong

I AM WORKING ON A MONOGRAPH, Seeds for Hope: the power of aesthetics for urban creativity in Hong Kong. Through an interdisciplinary research at the nexus of Asian Studies, Art Studies and Urban Studies, I examine the intricacies of the reciprocal relationship between the city and urban creativity. Even if the wave of urban creativity made to support the ‘Occupy Central with Love and Peace’ movement in 2014 is the most well-known example of Hongkongers’ ability to voice their concerns through artistic methods, various other projects and initiatives reshaping the urban public space have occurred before and after the movement too.

The forms of urban creativity are extremely varied and they tend toward new manifestations, agencies, motivations and aesthetics. In Hong Kong the evolution of urban creativity is intertwined with the discourses of post-colonialism in its specific forms of de/recolonization and mainlandization. However, the socio-spatial practices along with the global trends in alternative artistic and creative practices are also reflected in urban creativity. As a result, urban creativity is not only responding to the transformations but is inevitably modifying the cityscapes.

To analyze the particularities between different nations, cities and neighborhoods, I propose a comparative approach based on site-responsiveness, which takes into account the local, regional, national and global discourses and trends.

My study derives from a broader research question: the impact of urbanization on visual arts. I am also co-editing a volume, Visual Arts, Representations and Interventions in Contemporary China: Urbanized Interfaces, with Dr Meiqin Wang, submitted to the Asian Cities series of IAS/NUP (Amsterdam University Press). The ten papers examine in detail the interrelations of urbanization on official propaganda, contemporary art, artistic interventions, films, and documentaries in mainland China.

I greatly enjoy the interdisciplinary working environment RAS provides. The continuous exchange with the staff and visiting scholars offers new perceptions and helps me to elaborate the theoretical frameworks. Similarly, the interaction with the scholars working on Asian arts and on ‘arts in society’ at Leiden University, offers a fruitful sounding board. Especially inspiring have been the programs organized by the Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA). Even before my fellowship, I had the pleasure to join the ‘Asian Cities: Colonial to Global’ seminar and contribute to the resulting book with the same title, edited by Dr Gregory Bracken. Later this year, I will continue with a new project as Research Fellow at the Asian Research Institute of the National University of Singapore. My aim is then to develop new initiatives for both UKNA and RAS in terms of research on alternative artistic and creative practices in East and South East Asia.

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands, invites outstanding researchers to apply for a fellowship to work on a relevant piece of research in the social sciences and humanities.

WE ARE PARTICULARLY interested in researchers focusing on one of the Institute’s three thematic clusters. However, some positions will be reserved for outstanding projects in any area outside of those listed.

Asian Heritages

This cluster focuses on the politics of culture and cultural heritages in Asia. It addresses a variety of definitions associated with cultural heritage and their implications for social agency. In general, the cluster engages with a broad range of concepts and issues related to culture and cultural heritage, and their importance in defining one’s identity vis-à-vis others of those.

Global Asia

The Global Asia cluster examines examples of and issues related to multiple, transnational intra-Asian interactions as well as Asia’s projection in the world. Historical experiences as well as more contemporary trends are addressed.

Research projects that can contribute to new, historically contextualised, multidisciplinary knowledge, with the capacity of translating this into social and policy relevant initiatives, will be privileged.

For information on the research clusters and application form visit our website:

www.iias.nl
and their appreciation of various painting techniques. Some at Dunhuang reflect the Los’ broad interests in unusual scripts adds immeasurably to our deeper understanding of Dunhuang. Reminded of how the unwavering commitment of two people Dunhuang with current technological sophistication, we are painted a decade later by young artists whom the Los inspired manuscripts, and life-size reproductions of the Mogao murals selection of their photographs, their collection of Dunhuang cave temples through the eyes of James and Lucy Lo, with a unusual artistic importance and reflect the Los’ remarkable of the views recorded no longer exist today. They are also of unusual artistic importance and reflect the Los’ remarkable aesthetic sensibilities (fig. 1 & 2). This exhibition brings us the visual splendors of Dunhuang’s cave temples through the eyes of James and Lucy Lo, with a selection of their photographs, their collection of Dunhuang manuscripts, and life-size reproductions of the Mogao murals painted a decade later by young artists whom the Los inspired in Taiwan. While color publications and 3D digital models record Dunhuang with current technological sophistication, we are reminded of how the unwavering commitment of two people adds irreversibly to our deeper understanding of Dunhuang. Manuscripts and Zhang Daqian The ancient documents that James and Lucy lo collected while at Dunhuang reflect the Los’ broad interests in unusual scripts and their appreciation of various painting techniques. Some are a direct result of their meeting famed Chinese painter – and infamous forger – Zhang Daqian 張大千 (1899-1983), who visited Dunhuang repairing and making replicas of Mogao murals. He helped the Los form their collection of manuscript fragments and a few carry both their seals. For Zhang, Dunhuang represented a pure Chinese past and was key to reenergizing the Guozu (National Essence) group. Zhang’s copies of the Mogao murals were exhibited on a world tour in Paris and at other venues. He even mined Dunhuang imagery to create a master forgery that he sold to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, as an ancient work. Multicultural Dunhuang Located at the convergence of the northern and southern routes of the Silk Road, Dunhuang was a multicultural desert oasis. Many languages were spoken there, including Chinese, Tibetan, Uyghur, Tangut and Hebrew. Several multilingual texts in the Lo collection attest to this diversity. They include two Yuan-dynasty sutras on display written in Old Uyghur (Old Turkic) language and script, interspersed with Chinese; and printed in Tangut, a near extinct Sino-Tibetan language of northwestern China’s Xi Xia dynasty (1038–1227). Impressed on the latter is the Chinese seal of monk Guanzhuba 墜主巴 (Tibetan: bKa’ ‘gyur pa, active 1302), an official of either Tangut or Tibetan descent who oversaw the printing of Buddhist texts in Chinese, Tangut, and Tibetan scripts. Two manuscripts in the exhibition demonstrate a connection between Dunhuang and Chang’an, the capital of China in the Tang. They are text pages on the Confucian classics, likely from a local school in Dunhuang or Turfan. They represent aspirations to sit for the official examinations: the military conquests of Emperor Taizong 唐太宗 (r. 626–649) made it possible after the mid-7th century for the cultural values of central China to be transmitted to the western frontier through Confucian education. Since paper was precious, the manuscripts were later recut into a distinctive U-shape to form the upper part of a burial shoe (fig. 3). Artist renditions and recording damage, old and new After moving to Taiwan in the 1950s, the Los became part of a community of artists and scholars. They invited a group of young artists to produce life-size copies of the Dunhuang murals, based on the Los’ slides and Lucy’s meticulous notes (fig. 4). Some were displayed at the 1964-65 World’s Fair at Flushing Meadows in Queens, New York, at the China pavilion. These facsimiles are indeed comparable to Zhang Daqian’s celebrated copies, and similar in their impulse to perpetuate knowledge of the ancient past through acts of reproduction.