Evolution of The Newsletter

The IIAS Newsletter, later simply re-named The Newsletter, was created along with the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in 1993 and is an embodiment of the institute’s ideals. This is clear from the inaugural issue of The Newsletter, in which its first managing editor, Paul van der Velde, explained how IIAS “was expected to play a stimulating and integrating role in the field of Asian studies in Europe through organizing international workshops, conferences, a database and by publishing a newsletter.” IIAS was founded to give coherence to a fragmented Asian Studies world and The Newsletter was to be a partner in that endeavour. It took on that role from its very inception by assimilating the already existing South Asia Newsletter, which was in itself a collaborative effort by CASA (Amsterdam) and the Kern Institute (Leiden). The Newsletter was thus from its very initial conception meant to be much more than the dictionary definition of a periodical bulletin of institutional news and events.

Rituparna Roy

Promoting and connecting others

In earlier issues of the IAS Newsletter, contributions were sorted into three main sections – South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia – each with news about institutes, conference reports, calls for papers, lectures, awards and events. The issues also included a general section on Asian Studies. But in everything it reported on, it was used as a vehicle to provide exhaustive information about other institutions rather than exclusively listing its own institutional news. There was a conscious effort to build networks and to sketch the larger picture. Hence, it would frequently profile new, as well as established, institutions devoted to Asian Studies – both nationally and internationally.

While heavy on news, The Newsletter never forgot people. Right from the beginning, along with the reports and agendas, readers were given interviews and profiles of people who contributed to Asian Studies in varying capacities. They included not only scholarly stalwarts, such as Peter J.M. Nas, the Leiden ‘godfather’ of urban studies (issue #7), but also others contributing to research, such as librarian Roger Tol, who established the Malaysian Resource Centre at the KITLV (issue #8).

Supplements

Another interesting feature of The Newsletter are its occasional special supplements – which make the already hefty Newsletter even heavier! An early example is issue #6, which in addition to its 76 pages, had a 16-page Special Supplement on ‘Dutch Museums with Asian Collections’.

Redesigns – going full colour!

Issue #6 witnessed the first introduction of colour into the publication, but this concerned only the front and back pages. There were two major redesigns over the course of the next 14 years. In issue #47 (2002), The Newsletter was given a face-lift, and the layout was changed “by dropping the regional designations and categorizing articles according to type”. It was also the point at which The Newsletter became fully available online. Prior to that, only the back part of selected essays were published online. Issue #50 was a milestone: the publication went from being the ‘IIAS Newsletter’ to ‘The Newsletter’. It also went full colour, and involved planning out the layout changes of the previous years, it was given five distinct sections: ‘The Study’, ‘The Review’, ‘The Focus’, ‘The Network’ and ‘The Portrait’.

The ‘Study’ includes research articles by both IIAS Fellows as well as other Asian scholars. Reviews are an important vehicle for the dissemination of new research, and ‘The Review’ section covers this aspect in an innovative way. It works in sync with ‘New Asia Books’, an initiative of IAS that aims for the greater visibility of new books on Asia worldwide (see page 36 of this issue). ‘The Focus’ is compiled by a Guest Editor, and consists of various coordinated articles on one theme. ‘The Network’ includes the pages on all things institutional: fellows and fellowships, alumni, events, reports, grants, calls for papers, etc. ‘The Portrait’ can be found on the back cover of each issue; it is devoted to some aspect of visual culture in Asia. This is in addition to the bounty of images found in each issue of The Newsletter, which are always worth a look.

The future

The Newsletter is exploring the possibility of putting together an International Council (similar to ICAS, see p21). This Council would not be an editorial board, but rather function as an advisory council of global members – giving global input in the ever expanding field of Asian Studies. It would reflect the global institutionalisation of IAS, and reinforce our global networks.

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