In this article, we explore these challenges and opportunities. They include first and foremost the bringing together of Asia scholars. To attain this goal, GIS Asie establishes strong and sustainable relationships between institutions. It organizes major international conferences every two years, but also more frequent meetings and regular activities. In line with this general orientation, specific actions are carried out in favor of and with the active participation of young scholars, who are expected to play a key role in the future of Asian studies. Through these multiple activities, GIS Asie intends to act as a significant operator in area studies.

A network based on sustainable relationships

In the French institutional landscape, the French Academic Network for Asian Studies is a “Groupement d’intérêt scientifique” (GIS), which is a formal agreement between public research institutions and higher education institutions. Based on this strong institutional basis, all relevant research centers can participate. GIS Asie brings together scholars from a variety of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences, working on all Asian countries. Currently, the 23 members of GIS Asie include 8 universities, 11 research and training institutions, 2 research institutes and one foundation. Learning on this institutional agreement, 29 research centers participate. Among them, 26 are located in France, 5 are in Asia and 1 in Belgium. Due to the specificity of the French institutional landscape, a large number of the research centers located in France are concentrated in Paris and surrounding region. However, GIS Asie is keen on promoting the activities of research centers located in various parts of the country, and includes members in the two big cities of Lyon and Marseille, as well as in smaller cities like Angers.

We estimate that the French Academic Network for Asian Studies includes approximately 80% of all scholars interested in the field, representing more than 1,000 individuals. There is a great diversity of their profiles regarding their topics, disciplines and geographical region of interest. Their works concern all social sciences and humanities, ranging from history, literature, anthropology, and linguistics to geography, economics, demography, geography and political sciences. Their research potentially concerns all areas of Northeast, Southeast, South and Central Asia. This network is supported by a technical and administrative team from the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), which plays a crucial role in the preparation, management and organization of all activities. CNRS is the largest governmental research organization in France, and the main stakeholder of GIS Asie.

A network in Europe and in Asia

Established in 2013, in the French academic landscape, GIS Asie remains open to collaborations with institutions from other countries active in the domain of Asian studies.

Membership is open to universities and research institutes in France but also abroad, primarily to French-speaking institutions. The first and unique non-French full member to date is the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium, which joined the network in 2017. This high ranking university, with more than 30,000 students, teachers and permanent staff is active mainly through the activities of its East Asian Studies research center (EAST), established in 2016 and which benefits from a strong expertise in social anthropology.

The network of GIS Asie extends beyond the boundaries of Europe, as it also includes 5 French research centers in Asia (Unité Mixte des Instituts Français de Recherche à l’Etranger, UMRIFRE). They include the French Center for Research on Contemporary China (CEFC) located in Hong Kong (China), with two regional branches, one in Beijing (China) and one in Taipei (Taiwan); the Institut Français de Recherche sur la Japan at the Maison Franco-Japonaise in Tokyo (Japan); the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC) in Bangkok (Thailand); the Centre for Social sciences and Humanities (CSIR) in New Delhi (India); the French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP) in Puducherry (India). These centers work under the joint administrative supervision of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). They benefit from resources and permanent staff. They provide support to establish, maintain and develop collaborations with academic communities in Asia. They also host senior and junior researchers who attend on a short term basis.

Since 2018, and in collaboration with GIS Asia, these centers conduct a scientific research programme entitled “Sustain Asia”, which contributes to the reflection on social and environmental resilience in various national and local contexts characterized by rapid economic growth and limited resources, in countries such as China, India, Indonesia, Japan and Thailand. First results from this work in progress will be presented in several panels at ICAS 11. GIS Asia also participates in the European Alliance for Asian Studies, a cooperative platform which brings together competences and expertise on Asia and Asian studies in Europe. Currently, institutions from 14 countries participate in this Alliance, including other consortia such as the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) and the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS). An institutional roundtable at ICAS 11 will discuss the challenges facing these institutions.

This summer, the French Academic Network for Asian Studies (GIS Asie) will be co-organizer of the 11th International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS), together with the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) who hosts the ICAS Secretariat at its offices in Leiden, and Leiden University, this edition’s local hosts. This major event will offer scholars an opportunity to gather and share their research, publications, and projects. It will enable them to meet with other scholars, publishers, specialists, and members of civil society. In many respects, the involvement of GIS Asie in this convention reflects the current challenges and opportunities faced by the promotion of Asian studies in the French and broader European context.
Preparing the future of Asian studies

Young scholars, including doctoral students, post-doctoral fellows and young researchers attending ICAS 11, will have the opportunity to enhance their work with a large international audience. GIS Asia fosters their participation by offering financial support specifically geared towards young scholars. In previous editions of GIS Asia’s international conference, young scholars have occupied a major role, taking part in panels and contests.

Besides financial support, special sessions will be organized to promote work done by doctoral students. Among them, the awards of the GIS Asia 2018 PhD prize are offered by Prof. Ben Klenman from Yale University. Overall, more than 60 candidates from all social sciences and humanities disciplines who defended their doctoral dissertations in 2017 or 2018 in France and Belgium participated. The selection committee chaired by GIS Asia’s deputy director included 100 reviewers. Twenty candidates were shortlisted and three joint prizes were awarded. The winning works illustrate a variety of topics, including geographical and historical aspects in Asian studies: David Serfass’ thesis “The Collaborating Government of War and Peace: Aspects of the Japanese Occupation during the Sino-Japanese War, 1939–1945” is at the crossroads of China’s modernity, Japan’s war, and the world. Yoshida Toru’s thesis “From the Slum to Hospital: Anthropology of Reproductive Health in Rajasthan (India)” is based on an ethnographic study of women’s health in India. Julie Jullien’s thesis “From the Slum to Hospital: Anthropology of Reproductive Health in Rajasthan (India)” is based on an ethnographic study of women’s health in India.

The selection committee chaired by GIS Asia’s deputy director included 100 reviewers. Twenty candidates were shortlisted and three joint prizes were awarded. The winning works illustrate a variety of topics, including geographical and historical aspects in Asian studies: David Serfass’ thesis “The Collaborating Government of War and Peace: Aspects of the Japanese Occupation during the Sino-Japanese War, 1939–1945” is at the crossroads of China’s modernity, Japan’s war, and the world. Yoshida Toru’s thesis “From the Slum to Hospital: Anthropology of Reproductive Health in Rajasthan (India)” is based on an ethnographic study of women’s health in India. Julie Jullien’s thesis “From the Slum to Hospital: Anthropology of Reproductive Health in Rajasthan (India)” is based on an ethnographic study of women’s health in India.

Funding scholarly events and organizing specific meetings

GIS Asia membership provides full access to all activities and funding schemes, GIS Asia also supports major conferences organized by its member teams. In 2018, beneficiaries included the International Association for Tibetan Studies, whose 15th Conference is taking place in July 2019 in Paris; the 25th European Conference on South Asian Studies, which the French Academic Network for Asian Studies aims to contribute by both focusing on the 15th Conference and the Middle East (GIS Moyen-Orient et Mondes Musulman). This creates a synergy and ‘good practices’ replication between the consortia. The 3 consortia on area studies also conduct some common activities. For instance they will organize a summer school in 2020 in digital humanities for the areas studies, which will aim at exploring new technologies and skills, as well as their impact on research topics in various contexts.

This dynamic across area studies is expected to develop, as GIS Asia will install itself at the new Condorcet Campus in the northern part of Paris in September 2019. This new location dedicated to research and training in research in humanities and social sciences will be home to 100 research teams, including the GIS Institut des Amériques, another consortium that is a prominent institution for American area studies in France. Our network will also benefit from the many services and equipment offered by this brand new infrastructure.

As a major event embedded in a whole range of activities, ICAS 11 is therefore a great opportunity for the French Academic Network for Asian Studies and its partners, to advance and enhance the international promotion of Asian studies.

The Newsletter No. 83 Summer 2019

Preventing New Technologies and Skills

GIS Asia fosters their participation by offering financial support specifically geared towards young scholars. In previous editions of GIS Asia’s international conference, young scholars have occupied a major role, taking part in panels and contests.

Besides financial support, special sessions will be organized to promote work done by doctoral students. Among them, the awards of the GIS Asia 2018 PhD prize are offered by Prof. Ben Klenman from Yale University. Overall, more than 60 candidates from all social sciences and humanities disciplines who defended their doctoral dissertations in 2017 or 2018 in France and Belgium participated. The selection committee chaired by GIS Asia’s deputy director included 100 reviewers. Twenty candidates were shortlisted and three joint prizes were awarded. The winning works illustrate a variety of topics, including geographical and historical aspects in Asian studies: David Serfass’ thesis “The Collaborating Government of War and Peace: Aspects of the Japanese Occupation during the Sino-Japanese War, 1939–1945” is at the crossroads of China’s modernity, Japan’s war, and the world. Yoshida Toru’s thesis “From the Slum to Hospital: Anthropology of Reproductive Health in Rajasthan (India)” is based on an ethnographic study of women’s health in India. Julie Jullien’s thesis “From the Slum to Hospital: Anthropology of Reproductive Health in Rajasthan (India)” is based on an ethnographic study of women’s health in India.

The selection committee chaired by GIS Asia’s deputy director included 100 reviewers. Twenty candidates were shortlisted and three joint prizes were awarded. The winning works illustrate a variety of topics, including geographical and historical aspects in Asian studies: David Serfass’ thesis “The Collaborating Government of War and Peace: Aspects of the Japanese Occupation during the Sino-Japanese War, 1939–1945” is at the crossroads of China’s modernity, Japan’s war, and the world. Yoshida Toru’s thesis “From the Slum to Hospital: Anthropology of Reproductive Health in Rajasthan (India)” is based on an ethnographic study of women’s health in India. Julie Jullien’s thesis “From the Slum to Hospital: Anthropology of Reproductive Health in Rajasthan (India)” is based on an ethnographic study of women’s health in India.

Funding scholarly events and organizing specific meetings

GIS Asia membership provides full access to all activities and funding schemes, GIS Asia also supports major conferences organized by its member teams. In 2018, beneficiaries included the International Association for Tibetan Studies, whose 15th Conference is taking place in July 2019 in Paris; the 25th European Conference on South Asian Studies, which the French Academic Network for Asian Studies aims to contribute by both focusing on the 15th Conference and the Middle East (GIS Moyen-Orient et Mondes Musulman). This creates a synergy and ‘good practices’ replication between the consortia. The 3 consortia on area studies also conduct some common activities. For instance they will organize a summer school in 2020 in digital humanities for the areas studies, which will aim at exploring new technologies and skills, as well as their impact on research topics in various contexts.

This dynamic across area studies is expected to develop, as GIS Asia will install itself at the new Condorcet Campus in the northern part of Paris in September 2019. This new location dedicated to research and training in research in humanities and social sciences will be home to 100 research teams, including the GIS Institut des Amériques, another consortium that is a prominent institution for American area studies in France. Our network will also benefit from the many services and equipment offered by this brand new infrastructure.

As a major event embedded in a whole range of activities, ICAS 11 is therefore a great opportunity for the French Academic Network for Asian Studies and its partners, to advance and enhance the international promotion of Asian studies.

Myriam de Loenzien
Deputy Director of GIS Asia

Catherine Bastien-Ventura
International Cooperation Officer of GIS Asia