In the Spotlight

IIAS Fellowship Programme

The International Institute for Asian Studies annually hosts a large number of visiting researchers (research 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. Meet our fellows at www.iias.asia/fellows

Hannah Klepeis
IIAS Research Clusters: Asian Cities, Global Asia
1 October – 31 July 2022
www.iias.asia/profile/hannah-rasa-klepeis

Trude Renwick
IIAS Research Clusters: Asian Cities, Global Asia
12 March – 12 May 2022
Home Institute: The University of Hong Kong
www.iias.asia/profile/trude-renwick

(Re)imagining social transformations in and beyond China

The purpose of my research fellowship at IAS is to turn my doctoral thesis into a book manuscript. In spite of the restrictions in place since my arrival (most of my time in Leiden has been spent in lockdown or quarantine!), I have managed to spend a lot of time in a very different world, returning to my field site in my thoughts.

My time at the IAS allows me to think more deeply about parts of my research that I had to sideline during the writing of my dissertation, such as the social, spatial and economic consequences of urbanisation in China’s western regions, local governance, and the role of trans-local connectivities with the Tibetan diaspora in shaping people’s social worlds and informing discourses and processes of identity-making.

The research fellowship has so far been inspiring, allowing for a form of productivity that is hard to measure quantitatively but which has allowed me to think in new directions more freely and openly. It is an invaluable experience for a young academic. It’s great to forge connections with scholars from different fields and career stages. I hope to be able to engage with scholars at Dutch universities and the various research initiatives and networks in the region during the remaining months of my stay.

I am thrilled to begin my research period in Leiden this March. My work examines the intersection of commercial, infrastructural, and spiritual practice in Thailand and the world and how they inform notions of periphery and frontier in Thai and Lao national imagination.

My doctoral research is based on long-term fieldwork conducted in Gyiathang, a multiethnic borderland region in southwest China that was officially renamed Shangri-La 20 years ago to further ethnic tourism. Focusing upon its Tibetan Buddhist monastery and monastics and how they inform notions of Tibetan identity and moral personhood, my research explores how spirituality fuels debates surrounding the development of the commercial landscape, how spiritualities mediate the development of this region’s tourism sector, and how spirituality fuels debates surrounding the development of this region’s tourism sector, and how spirituality fuels debates surrounding the development of this region’s tourism sector, and how spirituality fuels debates surrounding the development of this region’s tourism sector.

I am grateful to have the resources and stimulating academic environment in Leiden to further develop this work.

In addition to developing the above book proposal and manuscript, at IAS, I will perform preliminary archival research for my next project, Peripheries Mobilized. This research examines the impact of the Chinese-sponsored Pan Asia Railway on conceptions of periphery and frontier in Thai and Lao cities along its central route. Beginning with the case of Khon Kaen, I will look at how, as key nodes along this new railway network, previously “peripheral” urban outskirts of these nation-states have become the central focal point for the Thai and Lao governments, as well as the private sector. State-led investments in the creative industries in urban agricultural centers like Khon Kaen have paved the way for an influx of “creatives.” This research reverses the traditional movement of labor out of this city as they reshape its image. I am therefore especially interested in exploring early images, writings, and drawings of creatives and officials in this region in the mid-19th century.

The large community of scholars at IAS doing work on urban studies in Asia and the BRI drew me to Leiden. As a result, I have confidence that my time spent here will foster collaborations with scholars engaged in the Asian Cities and Global Asia clusters and push my research in new and unexpected directions. I am especially excited at the opportunity to spend time exploring Leiden with my partner Felice and our dog Raa Paw, who will be joining me for the duration of my stay. We look forward to ambulating about nearby cities, visiting my grandmother’s hometown just outside of Dusseldorf, and, as an avid sailor, I hope to find myself on a sailboat at some point during our stay in the Netherlands.