

IIAS Fellowship Programme

In the Spotlight

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



Elizabeth Smithrosser

IIAS Research Cluster: Asian Heritages
1 February – 31 July 2022

www.iias.asia/profile/elizabeth-smithrosser

Written Traditions of Jokes and Humour in Pre-Modern China

I am first using my Fellowship with IIAS to finish an annotated translation of three pre-modern Chinese jokebooks for Oxford University Press. After that, I will revise my PhD thesis into a monograph while preparing several accepted conference papers on humour publishing in late imperial China and

methodologies for utilising humorous material to the advantage of historical research.

My Fellowship at IIAS began in February 2022, a few months after graduating from my PhD in the United Kingdom. At that point in time, there were a lot of different tasks on my plate: several conference papers, a thesis to revise into a monograph, keeping up with my regular column for *Medievalists.net*, a book-length translation of pre-modern Chinese jokebooks, not to mention job applications.

My time at the Institute so far has provided me with the space and facilities to work towards all of these projects. As an IIAS Fellow, I have access to a physical office overlooking the picturesque Rapenburg canal. The community of staff and Fellows that gather in the building are working on different topics and regions at a variety of career stages and come with a range of life experiences, which has led to fruitful conversations and new friendships. I have especially appreciated the community feel of IIAS after two years of quarantine and working from home.

The first three months of my Fellowship have mostly been a rush to hand my book manuscript in by the deadline. Nevertheless, I did have the chance to soak in the sights of Leiden while walking to and from the University Library. Leiden is a city which confronts you with waterways, trees, old houses, and windmills from every angle. It is especially beautiful in the Spring. The

different kinds of trees flowering one after the other ensures that there is always a spark of colour in every direction. The area in front of the National Museum of Ethnology (Museum Volkenkunde), a short walk from the IIAS office and the University Library, is home to nine cherry blossom trees which explode into bloom for a brief period in April. It makes for an excellent lunch spot. Within the bounds of the original city walls, there are lots of secret *hofjes* to explore. These are quaint courtyard-style residential areas complete with trees and gardens, accessed by an inconspicuous door in a wall, which often allow visitors if they explore quietly. Each *hofje* has its own story, with most having started out as almshouses for widows or religious communities.

Now that I have submitted my book manuscript, I am looking forward to visiting the different sights around Leiden as well as the rest of the Netherlands before focusing on the next stage of my Fellowship.



Srirupa Bhattacharya

IIAS Research Cluster: Asian Heritages, Global Asia
15 September 2021 – 15 July 2022

www.iias.asia/profile/srirupa-bhattacharya

Hindu Religious Organisations in Neo-Liberal India

Unlike most other fellows at IIAS, this is my first academic experience outside my home country, India, and I am overwhelmed by the opportunity extended to me by the Institute. The objective of my research fellowship at IIAS is to convert my doctoral thesis into a book. After five years of rigorous teaching at Delhi University, I have once again been able

to revisit my research and get back to reading and writing. Surrounded by colleagues at different stages of their careers, coming from different parts of the world, and working on diverse geographical and thematic areas, I am filled with excitement and anticipation for new research possibilities. Coming from the developing world, I am thrilled to be able to access resources that were never within my reach. I am honoured to be able to discuss my research with established scholars in my field in the Netherlands and elsewhere in

Europe. So far, it has been a very fulfilling journey indeed.

The idea behind my book is to look at neo-liberalism through the window of Hindu organisations that have come up in India since the 1980s. Based on ethnography in three states in India (Uttarakhand, Delhi, and Karnataka), the manuscript traces the growth of two of the largest religious organisations in India and their deepening nexus with corporate interests, state agencies, and international governing and funding organisations. The manuscript also looks at the visibility of godmen in media and the role they play in developmental projects, political propaganda, and mass mobilisations. Last but not the least, I study the internal structure of the religious organisations reflected in the changing caste-class-educational-gender profile of followers and members.

So far, I have contributed a chapter to an edited volume (*Gurus and Media*), which is likely to be published later this year by UCL Press. The chapter, titled 'Doing-Seeing,'

traces the rise of guru Baba Ramdev, who taught yoga through television. It describes how the popularity of these programmes contributed to the Hindu-nationalist identity consolidation and activism in the new millennium. The chapter shows how live interactive yoga camps converted passive television viewers into empowered subjects, the ramifications of which are evident in the optics of majoritarian politics in India in the last decade. I have presented my conclusions at the 5th Ireland India Conference in April and in an invited lecture at Krea University, India, in May.

I am touched by the friendship and camaraderie of the other fellows during the pandemic restrictions that existed until recently. I have rarely felt alone, from lessons on using a washing machine to warnings about grey winters, wine-tasting to travel, sickness to sunny days, and potlucks to political discussions. I cannot imagine a better ending to a global lockdown or beginning of a new chapter of my life.

IIAS Fellowship Possibilities and Requirements



Apply for an IIAS fellowship

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



Combine your IIAS fellowship with two extra months of research in Paris

When applying for an IIAS Fellowship, you have the option of simultaneously submitting an application for an additional two months of research at the Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme (FMSH), in Paris, France, immediately after your stay in Leiden.



Apply for a Gonda fellowship

For promising young Indologists at the post-doctorate level it is possible to apply for funding with the J. Gonda Foundation of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) to spend three to six months doing research at IIAS.



Information and application forms: www.iias.asia/fellowships