Guest editor Michiel Baas offers a selection of examples of the confusing image painted by postcolonial dialogues, in which certain colonial pasts are celebrated, yet simultaneously recognised for the atrocities committed. The discussion brings us to the question of the post in postcolonial, and thus to the present day, because even though structures of inequality were put in place during colonial days, they often see their perpetuation and/or reinvention for many years after Independence.

The question that slowly bubbles up to the surface is: what is being communicated here?

What is being told, who is it that is talking?

Who is the audience imagined to be?
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Postcolonial dialogues

Postcolonial dialogues aim to help us come to terms with how both former coloniser and colonised deal with, understand and portray the past.

Contributing author Zheng Wang aptly concludes with the insight that “What individuals and countries remember and what they choose to forget are telling indicators of their current values, perceptions, and even their aspirations.”

Zheng Wang argues that although China is certainly no longer the weak and isolated state it once was, the Chinese have not really moved forward from what he describes as “their past humiliation”. Time does not always heal all wounds.
The Year of the Dragon is set to be another year rich in activities for IIAS, with the reinforcement of recently launched projects under our three thematic clusters. The last months of 2011 already saw a succession of defining events.

Philippe Peycam, Director of IIAS

ON 20-21 OCTOBER, IIAS and Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore, organized an experimental roundtable entitled “Science and Nature in Europe and Asia: Scientific Traditions and New Technologies”, in which 20 scholars and social practitioners met to discuss scientific knowledge traditions in Europe and Asia with a special focus on science in relation to nature and the environment. The variety of approaches toward issues ranging from food security, natural disasters, to medicine, their implications on the everyday lives of millions, called for a truly intercultural and multidisciplinary exchange. Thematic interactive sessions culminated into the shaping of what will hopefully become a long term collaborative programme. To assist the participants, a “framework document” was developed by PhD researcher Jan van der Moeg, and coordinated by the two conveners, Prof. Gerard Persoon (Leiden University) and Prof. Lui Hong (NTU) (page 16).

Similarly, on 21-22 November, IIAS and the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development (SEPHIS) organized what can best be described as a truly audacious feat: to bring together around the same table, scholars from the West Indies, Latin America, Africa, the Middle-East, Europe, central, southern, eastern and southeast Asia, all working on modes of hegemony, past and present, to openly explore the possibility of formulating a common “post-postcolonial” research agenda. Entitled “Postcolonial Dialogue(s): Crossed and Parallel Identities in Former Colonizing and Colonized Societies”, the meeting was symbolically held in the old VOC (Dutch East India Company) Board of Directors’ room in Amsterdam. The recent revolutions in the Arab world, the rise of the BRIC countries, and the relative decline of Europe and Northern America framed the discussion. The 26 participants succeeded in overcoming differences by laying out an ambitious research platform capable of mobilizing scholars from all ends of the world. Here too, discussions were facilitated by an excellent background report authored by two young Leiden University PhD students, Ariel Lopez and Yedda Palemeg, under the supervision of Dr Michiel Baas from IIAS (and guest editor for this issue’s Focus section).

Finally, on 14-15 December, IIAS and its three EUforAsia consortium partners - the Asia-Europe Foundation, the European Policy Centre and the Singapore Institute for International Affairs - in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, organized what was the final event of our EU-funded programme “EUForsia”. The conference, entitled “Re-engaging Europe with Asia”, was held at Clingendael’s headquarters in The Hague. The event was planned to take place on the eve of the preparation of the European Commission’s “Regional Programming for Asia (2013-2020) Strategy Paper”. By exploring topics such as economic integration, regional security, energy, and cooperation in higher education, it aimed to assist the EU in framing its strategy toward Asia. IIAS’s contribution was to ensure the inclusive format used for these three interactive events helped us draw a common “post-postcolonial” research agenda. Entitled “Postcolonial Dialogue(s): Crossed and Parallel Identities in Former Colonizing and Colonized Societies”, the meeting was symbolically held in the old VOC (Dutch East India Company) Board of Directors’ room in Amsterdam. The recent revolutions in the Arab world, the rise of the BRIC countries, and the relative decline of Europe and Northern America framed the discussion. The 26 participants succeeded in overcoming differences by laying out an ambitious research platform capable of mobilizing scholars from all ends of the world. Here too, discussions were facilitated by an excellent background report authored by two young Leiden University PhD students, Ariel Lopez and Yedda Palemeg, under the supervision of Dr Michiel Baas from IIAS (and guest editor for this issue’s Focus section).

The inclusive format used for these three interactive events helped us draw new research orientations for a more contextualized, shared, knowledge of Asia. Helping “Asianists” of all kinds to claim a sense of ownership over their field. Yet, these efforts can only succeed if they are supported by cohesive networks of individuals and institutions, something IIAS strives to achieve. On that last note, I am pleased to announce that the eighth International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS) will take place in Macao, 24-26 June 2013, in partnership with the University of Macau.

Philippe Peycam, Director of IIAS
Although some Cambodians would rather forget their French history, their towns are still scattered with colonial remnants: broad boulevards, fountains, French buildings. Among these buildings are covered markets, stylishly designed structures, vibrant with life. However, as time has passed, and war and poverty have stricken Cambodia, they have fallen into disrepair, becoming *Battered Beauties*. Something must be done; but why should Cambodia, a country struggling to provide even the most basic needs, be bothered with the preservation of its colonial heritage? And more precisely, which aspects of these old markets should be preserved?

**Simone Bijlard**

TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS, two themes were studied: the market’s history — both indigenous and French — and their present-day functioning. Both themes will be discussed here.

**Crowds from one end to the other – the indigenous market**

The original objectives of the *Voyage d’Exploration en Indo-Chine*, a French exploration of the Mekong between 1866 and 1868, were never met, as the Mekong appeared completely inadequate as a trading route between Saigon and the wealthy Chinese province of Yunnan. However, the exploration proved useful in other respects, as local scenes were registered in numerous illustrations and texts, informing us of how markets functioned at that time. The market of Laoï Luang Prabang was described as follows: “The grand avenue of Luang Prabang runs for two kilometres from the city gate to the Nam Hou river. On market days it is filled with crowds from one end to the other. Hawkers and customers come there from early morning, some in the open air, others under large umbrellas or in bamboo boats. Fishermen bring huge fish which they have kept alive in the river. Natives from the mountains, recognisable by their tanned skins, turbans, and striped dress, arrive with baskets full of game, poultry and upland produce. Some Burmese merchants sell cloth, needles and betel boxes. A small number of Chinese sell opium, haberdashery and gemstones.”

The market of pre-colonial days appears to be an informal meeting of both customers and vendors, conveniently taking place on the busiest road. Simple huts and pieces of cloth on the ground make up the market stall. Architectural elements serve solely as a protection from rain and sun. In Vietnam’s present-day countryside two types of markets can be recognised: the first type is very similar to the markets described by the French explorers; it consists of a collection of small huts made of local material, located along the village’s main street (fig. 1). Large trees provide the huts with protection from the elements. The second type consists of a collection of separate stalls at the front and rear of a large hall, a configuration originating from the market’s location in comparison to local infrastructure (fig. 2). This market type traditionally appeared at a junction of tracks between villages and a body of water. Farmland products are sold at the entrance of the market, directly where the produce is offloaded. Meat and, above all, fish is sold at the rear of the market, as it is closest to the river. Inside the market solely dry goods are sold, such as clothing, toiletries and household utensils.

The impact of the region’s climate on the market layout is evident, as it is directly influenced by tropical heat and rain. The comparison of the pre-colonial and present-day examples also reveals how even though goods and behaviour have changed over time, the village market has not changed significantly. However, we do see the introduction of the large hall, which can be attributed to French intervention.

**Building a France away from France – the French colonial market**

With the establishment of the French Protectorate over Cambodia in 1863 a new form of architecture and urban planning was introduced to the region. Preceding French intervention, Phnom Penh was just a string of huts on the bank of the Tonlé Sap River. The Mission Civilisatrice, however, obliged France to transform the city into a true Perle d’Orient, as it was after all her responsibility to share and spread her superior civilisation. This ambition was to be accomplished by architecture and urban planning. The colonial administration started to build a colonial infrastructure with the realisation of roads, railroads and public works. Covered markets were, just like city halls, prisons, post offices, police stations, schools and hospitals, part of these public works. At first, French colonial administrations approached their mission civilisatrice in a manner governed by the principle of assimilation, which subjected people to an administration shaped by French values. This approach led to a large number of French public works in Beaux-Arts style, varying from prisons and military barracks to post offices and municipal theatres; all fashioned after the latest style in l’Édifice Hôtelier.

After WWI a change in French colonial politics in Indochina appeared; assimilation was replaced by a policy of association, which gave more consideration to local traditions and culture. With this change a more context sensitive architecture surfaced, which is best described by the work of the architect Ernest Hédard, who introduced the Style Indochinois. This style derived its detailing and decoration from indigenous architecture and adapted more easily than the Beaux-Arts styled buildings to Cambodia’s tropical climate. Local culture became not only an example from which one could learn, but also the face of important public works. However, Hédard’s style still relied on formal principles of the Beaux-Arts tradition; his plans were often symmetrical and consisted of volumes arranged in a classical sequence. His style therefore did not differ essentially from the Beaux-Arts tradition. The Style Indochinois seems to have disappeared from the architectural stage in the early 1930s, whereupon a more abstract style arose. This style continued Hédard’s sensitivity towards local conditions, but it banned his literal citations of indigenous motifs and his formal references towards the Beaux-Arts tradition. Plans and sections responded primarily to their urban, social or cultural context, especially to the tropical climate. One could say that this last architectural style was most successful in unifying its French and Indochinese conditions.

Cambodia’s three still-standing covered markets from the French colonial period – Psar Thom Thmei in Phnom Penh (fig. 3), Psar Nath in Battambang (fig. 4) and Psar Thmei in Kompong Cham – are from this last period and architectural style.

When assessing how French administrations shaped their colonial towns through the years we see a growing indigenous influence as well. An examination of Battambang, Cambodia’s second largest city, exemplifies this. Battambang lies on the Stung Sangker, a river originating in the Cardamom Mountains and draining into the Tonlé Sap Lake. Its shores have been inhabited by farmers and fishermen for many centuries. Preceding French rule the town consisted of a string of pagodas and huts along the banks of the river, with an open-air market at the crossing of dirt tracks on the western bank. However, a plan for its expansion was drawn immediately after the arrival of the French in 1907; it was a radical change from the spontaneous growth the town had previously experienced. The plan consisted of a network of roads and blocks of houses standing parallel to the river, with the open-air market at its centre. In 1926, while the railway between Battambang and Phnom Penh was constructed, a second urban plan was made. The 1907 grid was extended towards the west and a number of diagonal streets were introduced, in an attempt to give the colonial town a more imposing and Parisian metropolitan look. The diagonal boulevards converged at the original open-air market, which was formalised by a covered market in 1937. The building was clearly a French conception; it was styled after the latest Parisian fashion – Art Déco – and built from ferro concrete, a material European architects extensively experimented with at that time. But, simultaneously, the design responded quite cleverly to its local setting and its tropical environment. It allowed the indigenous market to continue at its original location and a constant stream of fresh air that flowed through the plinth and the many roof openings resulted in a surprisingly pleasant interior climate. Colonial purposes were gracefully served by its erection; the market’s hygiene was improved for the benefit of the indigenous, whilst taxes were collected more easily for the benefit of the colonisers.

**2: Aerial view of Psar Thom Thmei in Phnom Penh in 1952**

(source: Heritage Mission, Phnom Penh).
Both the evolution of architectural styles and the growth of the colonial town are indicative of a highly centralised colonial administration that shifted from the self-centred approach of assimilation to the more worldly approach of association. But even though indigenous influences were more welcomed towards the end, colonial purposes were never abandoned. French administrations clung dearly to their colonial beliefs. It resulted, in the case of the market, in the introduction of the large concrete hall.

A problem with memory — on the relevance of architectural heritage

In Cambodia, in Phnom Penh especially, the preservation of built heritage proves to be of a precarious nature. Phnom Penh’s real-estate prices inflated during the United Nations Transitional Authority Cambodia (UNTAC) intervention, which took place in 1992-1993. The UNTAC’s objective was to ensure honesty and safety during Cambodia’s first elections after the Khmer Rouge regime. However, as a side effect the UNTAC’s wealth corrupted Phnom Penh’s real-estate prices, resulting in land speculation and demolition, which still continues today.

Heritage is especially vulnerable as it is often located at primary real-estate locations. The replacing developments are, most of the time, built with the simple objective to make money, sooner rather than later. Heritage does exist, but its ex-ecution is often jeopardised by economic and political interests.

One might say that a third-world country has the right to earn its money in any way possible, unless the site has been used for development purposes and is a site is owned by foreign investment companies, the average Cambodian is not likely to benefit from them.

Nonetheless, some buildings are being restored and Piar Thom Thmei is one of them. Its original structure has been reinforced and reprinted and looks splendid once again. New pavilions have been constructed, replacing the rickety self-built stalls that used to surround the market, new toilets, wash basins and waste facilities have improved hygiene conditions significantly. Nonetheless, the renovation also reveals the delicate question of how to balance aesthetics, preservation and functionality. For example, as the original market is now fully surrounded by new pavilions, the original view of a large, seemingly floating structure, can no longer be enjoyed. Furthermore, goods with a lower revenue, such as fresh produce, have disappeared from the original structure. Nowadays only luxury items are sold from these stalls. So, the future use of the market has been ensured, but the future of its aesthetics remains to be seen.

Although high real-estate prices explain the land speculations in Phnom Penh to some extent, a different kind of argument ensured, but the future of its aesthetics remains to be seen. For example, as the original market is now fully surrounded by new pavilions, the original view of a large, seemingly floating structure, can no longer be enjoyed. Furthermore, goods with a lower revenue, such as fresh produce, have disappeared from the original structure.

Nowadays only luxury items are sold from these stalls. So, the future use of the market has been ensured, but the future of its aesthetics remains to be seen.

Dealing with the past has become a painful experience for Cambodian people. Especially young Cambodians prefer to forget the past and deal with the present and future. This mentality results in an unconsciousness of the historical value of built heritage, French colonial structures included.

Luckily, just a couple hundred kilometres away from Phnom Penh, Battambang Municipality is actively protecting its built heritage. A team from the German Development Service and the Battambang Municipal Administration has had the opportunity to map, research and evaluate the built heritage of Battambang. The involvement of the municipality has proven to be the key to success, as they have the authority to implement the preservation, but also the resources. But even then, the research has resulted in a Future Land Use Plan for 2020 for Battambang city and district. Centrally located in this plan lies the ‘Heritage Protection Area’, Battambang’s culture. It is a large area which consists of about 800 historically relevant buildings. As more and more tourists visit Battambang for its colonial town centre, the preservation of built heritage has become interesting from both a historical and economical point of view, which makes it easier to convince private heritage-owners to preserve their buildings. It illustrates how administrative policy affects the future of heritage and how relatively quickly changes can be made.

Skinned frogs and stinging eels – on the present-day functioning of markets

Entering a market in Cambodia reveals a range of stimuli you have probably never experienced before. First of all are the pungent smells of dried shrimp and squid, of rotten vegetables and freshly grilled meat. But also the shocking sight of live fish being gutted and chopped into pieces, of neon carcasses covered in fat black flies, and of skinned frogs and stinging eels. Vendors, their aprons covered in blood, weld sharp knives and stand in piles of rotting organic waste. Children, barefoot and clothed in rags, pick through the waste in search of anything edible. The heat, already unbearable outside the market, is even denser inside. The aisles are cramped and the kiosks overflow with goods. The markets are clearly as busy as ever, but how do they function today? What is sold inside? Let’s take a closer look at the markets of Phnom Penh and Battambang.

Piar Thom Thmei (fig. 5) – “Big New Market” – lies in the centre of the French commercial area of Phnom Penh and was built between 1935 and 1937. It has always had an up-market quality for Cambodians; it’s the grandest and most special Piar. The original structure consists of a 26 meter high dome from which four identical aisles or wings radiate. The main entrance of the market lies to the east, facing the distant Tonlé Sap River. The many grills in the dome and the open plinth provide a constant stream of fresh air. It results in a surprisingly moderate temperature. Daylight is naturally filtered by the grills, casting an ever-changing pattern of shadows on the adjacent walls.

Before the large expanse stands a slender column supporting four clocks. Nearest to the column stand shops selling luxury items: watches, gemstones and jewellery. This area is quiet and spacious; vendors leisurely await their customers. In the wings non-perishable luxurious items are sold: electrical appliances, ready-made clothes, fabrics and tailored clothes. Fresh produce has moved out of the original structure into new large halls, placed at the rear of the original market. The new structures house, in addition to fresh produce, other day-to-day items: shoes, groceries, toiletries, household utensils, clothing and the more ordinary electrical appliances. Temperatures are much less pleasant in these pavilions than in the original structure; they can rise up to 35 °C, forcing vendors to lie lethargically before well-placed fans, waiting for the intense heat to pass. At primary commercial locations, such as the hall entrances, stalls sell handicrafts and souvenirs. As food is an important part of Cambodian life, snacks and drinks are sold at every location. And equal to the large number of food stalls, the multitude of shrines; the smell of incense is omnipresent.

Piar Noth (fig. 6) – “Meeting Market” – lies in the centre of the French quarter of Battambang and was built in 1937. The market consists of two separate buildings, similar to the other three Piairs, but here government presence is much more pronounced.

The smaller building lies on the Sangker River and contains the main entrance, marked by a clock tower. In practice, however, the entrance that is most commonly used lies at the rear of the market. It is the most active area of the market and it is where the fresh produce is sold: from baskets, baskets, pieces of cloth, banana leaves, and so forth. Vendors sit on stools or squat on the ground for hours at a time. Pieces of cloth and umbrellas provide the only protection against the sun. Banking benches – finished with what used to be white tiles – fresh produce is sold for a slightly higher price. Inside the market only non-perishable articles are sold: tinned food, staple food, toiletries, clothing, stationery, shoes, jewellery. There are even hair and nail salons, equipped with Hollywood-style styling tools to provide for both light and some glamour. One would expect a moderate temperature inside the market, as hot air can move out of the roof structure easily. The many stalls, however, seem to block the air current, resulting in a hot and dense interior climate. In the street that separates the two buildings, restaurants, which are not much more than a wok burner and some plastic furniture, make food to order. At the foot of the clock tower a small shrine awaits vendors’ prayers.

There are many similarities between the two markets. First of all, they are busy as ever. They date from the same period, are made from the same material and share an architectural language. Both markets reveal the difficulties of maintaining the original ventilation system when the market exceeds its original structure. The allocation of goods is similar at both markets; outside at the rear of the original structure is the fresh produce, inside at the front are the goods.

The market is slightly more up-market than the market of Battambang, but in essence both markets cater day-to-day articles to the average Cambodian.

Conclusion

What relevance does architectural heritage have for Cambodia, a country struggling with malnutrition, insufficient health care and inadequate schooling? The answer is obvious and simple: built heritage is a testimony of history and gives a city its identity. Markets reflect Cambodian culture particularly well, as they have been the focal point of society for years and years. So yes, there are clear reasons to preserve the covered markets of Cambodia.

But what has specifically defined the architecture of these markets; what is so exactly needs to be preserved? To understand the architecture of Cambodia’s markets, one has to understand the influence of its tropical climate. Both the pre-colonial and colonial markets reveal its dominance; their architecture would be significantly different were there no torrential rains or stifling temperatures. French colonial rule obviously influenced Cambodia’s markets, by formalising the pre-colonial open-air markets with large, concrete halls – a substantial difference from the original makeshift market stalls. They moved the markets away from the river and placed them in the centres of their colonial towns. They changed hands with their architectural ideas. But the French did not have a significant influence upon the functioning of the markets; fresh produce is still sold outside, dry inside. Outdoor stalls are still the same as those of the pre-colonial market. Even modern devices such as air-conditioning and refrigeration have made no significant difference. This shows that, in fact, the indigenous market, as an open-air meeting of vendors and customers at an intersection of streets, is what shaped the markets of today. And it is precisely this odd yet tremendously successful mixture of colonial beliefs and indigenous resilience that makes these markets so unique; that is what should be preserved.

Simone Bijlard is an independent architectural researcher and works for the Urban Knowledge Network Asia at the International Institute for Asian Studies (i-l.Bijlard@ias.nl).

Notes
Perso-Indica: a critical survey of Persian works on Indian learned traditions

Indo-Islamic rulers often pursued their political claims precisely through gathering knowledge about Indian sciences and literatures. Perhaps the greatest legacy of these projects is a vast cache of Persian texts that examine numerous aspects of South Asia’s deep intellectual traditions. Perso-Indica aims to produce a comprehensive survey of these writings that will be the first major reference work of its kind and will advance our understanding of Indian cultural processes across languages and traditions.

Audrey Truschke

Persian texts that investigate Indian learning constitute one of the most extensive and least studied cross-cultural endeavors in world history. Persian speakers came to South Asia beginning in the late twelfth century, with successive waves of Muslim dynasties that transformed the political landscape of the subcontinent. Different Muslim groups rose to power during the next seven centuries, and many of these polities patronized Persian as a language of literature and empire. Simultaneously, these rulers engaged with the variety of literary cultures claimed by their subjects, including Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Tamil, and other tongues.

Scope
The Persian texts addressed in this project include direct translations (frequently of Sanskrit texts), adaptations of Indic knowledge, and original treatises. When completed, the Critical Survey of Persian Works on Indian Learned Traditions will cover as many as three hundred texts produced over the course of seven hundred years, from the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries. The works address an astonishing array of subjects, such as religion, philosophy, mythology, astrology, astronomy, mysticism, history, sciences, arts, geography, flora, fauna, cuisine, etc. Muslim and Hindu scholars alike authored these probing inquiries, both under direct royal patronage and far beyond the confines of the court. Their treatments of Indian ideas are often remarkably sophisticated, in addition to frequently being tied with imperial objectives. Taken altogether, this body of literature enacted the most substantial importation of knowledge systems from a non-Islamic tradition since the adaptation of Greek knowledge into Arabic several centuries earlier. In-depth analyses of such a wide-ranging, long-lived translation movement promise to elucidate the nature of cross-cultural relations in India and the growth of Indo-Persian culture and power.

This literature can be divided into three eras that exhibit discernible intellectual trends and also loosely map onto political developments. The first phase coincides with the Delhi Sultanate, a series of dynasties that ruled parts of northern India from the early thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. During this period, intellectuals were largely concerned with the sciences, although poets such as Amir Khusraw participated in an emerging composite culture that fused Indic and Islamic ideas. Next, the advent of Mughal rule in 1526 inaugurated an explosion of Indo-Persian literary output devoted to a greater range of disciplines. During the next two hundred or so years, many authors undertook direct translations of Sanskrit texts under imperial orders, and Muslim authors explored how to incorporate Indian knowledge into their own thought worlds. The third era corresponds with the colonial period when the British elite often sought access to Indian texts through Persian translations and treatises. In these endeavors, the colonialists often employed Indian secretaries to help them locate and understand their desired materials, which added another cross-cultural layer to the transfer of knowledge. Perso-Indica hopes to add greater detail to this broad sketch of epochs and also to articulate the implications of these different stages for how we write the history of pre-modern, early modern, and colonial India.
In addition to contributing to our understanding of a largely forgotten aspect of India's past, Perso-Indica is relevant to modern South Asia as well. In many ways, India's present and future is being shaped in the context of debates about its past as people increasingly look to earlier ways of navigating a diverse cultural landscape. Multinomial dynasties such as the Mughals feature vividly in contemporary historical memory across the subcontinent and are frequently invoked in modern political, aesthetic, and social realms. In particular, Hindu-Muslim tensions over the past few decades have highlighted the need for serious, sustained work on other ways of negotiating cultural and religious differences. Perso-Indica will provide a firm historical basis for further scholarly work on these issues.

Vision and method
The survey is divided into different domains of study (e.g., literature, astrology, music, etc.). The sections then contain multiple entries arranged in ascending chronological order or, in the absence of a clear date, according to approximate time period. Each entry is devoted to an individual text or author/translator and is based on direct examination of primary sources, either published or in manuscript format, along with a review of secondary scholarship. All entries will convey pertinent biographical information about the author, a summary of the text, the Indian sources referenced therein, and printed editions of the work. In order to facilitate further academic work, entries may also list the extant manuscript(s), illustrated copies, and modern translations. Among the fundamental aims of the project is to develop an extensive system for acquiring metadata about texts, authors, translators, dedications, patrons, sources (manuscripts and lithographs), etc. This information can then be used to generate indexes and will facilitate quantitative and qualitative analyses. We hope that gathering such data will enable us to ascertain large scale trends and other types of information about this group of texts as a whole.

Despite the importance of these materials, many texts and authors addressed in the survey have been neglected and unstudied for decades. Perso-Indica hopes to renew academic interest by collecting information on these works and articulating each text's particular import. In accordance with its goal of raising the profile of these materials, the project strives to offer the widest possible access to its data, and so the format of the survey is electronic. While our envisioned audience is primarily the academic community, we also wish to serve any public interest in these topics, and all information will be freely available online.

Institutional structure
Perso-Indica is an international research and publishing project that brings together people and institutions from across the globe. The project is based in Paris at the University Sorbonne Nouvelle (Mixed Research Unit 7528 ‘Mondes iraniens et indiens’) and is directed by Fabrizio Speziale (University Sorbonne Nouvelle), Carl W. Ernst (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and Svevo D’Onofrio (University of Bologna). A team of international research scholars from Europe, North America, and Asia is editing the survey entries.

In addition to the online survey, Perso-Indica plans to foster direct intellectual exchanges by bringing scholars to Paris through visiting fellowships at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, offered with the support of the Fondation Colette Callat of the Institut de France. There are two month-long positions available during the 2011-2012 academic year that are open to exceptional scholars from any country currently conducting innovative research on subjects related to Perso-Indica.

In addition, the project is planning its first international conference 30-31 May 2012 in Paris, that will assemble many of the editors and contributors for the survey in an attempt to foster ongoing conversations about the role played by this movement of texts and knowledge systems from Indian traditions into Persian.

The website for Perso-Indica (www.perso-indica.net) was launched in 2010 with the support of the Institut Français de Recherche en Iran (Tehran) and the Iran Heritage Foundation (London). Additionally, from 2011 to 2016 it will receive support from the research funds of French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) Higher Education Chair in Iranian Studies at the University Sorbonne Nouvelle Mixed Research Unit 7528 ‘Mondes iraniens et indiens’, which comprises scholars from the CNRS, Sorbonne-Nouvelle, École Pratique des Hautes Études, and Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales. The database will be hosted by TGE Adonis (www.tge-adonis.fr), a platform run by the CNRS.

Audrey Truschke is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies of Columbia University, in New York. (audrey.truschke@gmail.com)
Chinese have been going abroad to study since at least the early 1840s. Some did so with private support, others with government funding. This brief account will concentrate on the second group. The history of Chinese studying abroad with government funding can be divided into five phases.

Edward J. M. Rhode

WORKING FORWARD IN TIME, the most recent (or fifth) phase began around 1879 with the initiation of Qiao Xingyong’s policy of “reform and opening out” (gaige kaifang) and continues into the present. During the past three decades over 1.2 million (1) Chinese students and scholars have gone overseas to study, to teach, or to do research, most of them going to the United States. Of these, perhaps 5-10% were sent by the government.

The fourth phase occurred in the 1950s, when an untold number of Chinese students went to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, at a time when China was cut off from the West. One of them was Li Peng, China’s Prime Minister in the 1990s; Li Peng was in Russia from 1948 to 1955 and studied hydro- electric engineering at the Moscow Power Engineering Institute.

The third phase comprised approximately two thousand Boxer Indemnity scholars, sent to the United States from the 1900s to the 1930s. The funding for their scholarships (Gongzi peikun jiaozheng) came from the remission of a portion of the indemnity that China had been forced to pay to the U.S. for damages and loss of life during the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion (1898-1900). Among these scholars was Hu Shi, who during the Second World War became the Chinese ambassador to the U.S.; he travelled to California in 1910 where he studied agriculture, and then philosophy at Columbia, earning a Ph.D. in 1917.

The second phase, in the 1860s until the last decade of the Qing dynasty, saw about ten thousand Chinese flocking to Japan to study. They were drawn there by Japan’s apparent success at modernization, as demonstrated by its military victory over China in 1895 and then over Russia in 1905. Among this group of students was the future writer, Lu Xun, who was in Japan from 1902 to 1909 and for a while attended a medical school in Sendai.

Finally, we get to the first group of Chinese government-funded students sent abroad, they travelled in the 1870s. By then China had been twice defeated by the British in the two Opium Wars (1839-42 and 1856-60), and the Qing dynasty had been nearly overthrown by the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64). China’s rulers realized that if the country and the dynasty were to survive, reforms were unavoidable. The result was the Self-Strengthening (jianghai Movement, which began in the 1860s and continued into the mid-1890s. Among the reforms of the Self-Strengthening Movement was the sending abroad of students. Thirty-eight students in three groups were sent to Europe in the mid-1870s to study naval and military matters. Among them was Yan Fu, who later popularized Social Darwinism in China; Yan Fu attended the Greenne Naval College in England from 1877 to 1879. An earlier — and larger — group of students, totaling 120, were sent to the United States beginning in 1872. This was the Chinese Educational Mission (Youyang chuanyi jie), the very first group of Chinese government-funded students studying abroad.

The Chinese Educational Mission (or CEM) was the brainchild of Yung Wing. Born in 1828 to a farming family near Macau, Yung Wing (or, in Putonghua: Rong Hong) had attended a missionary school in Macau and Hong Kong. In 1847, the principal of the school, Rev. Samuel Robbins Brown, brought three of his students with him to the U.S. One of them was Yung Wing. Yung lived with the Brown family in Monson, Massachusetts, and attended the local academy. In 1850 he enrolled at Yale from which he graduated with a B.A. degree in 1854, becoming the first Chinese college graduate in the West. He returned to China in 1853 joined staff of the powerful provincial official Zeng Guofan, who was a vigorous promoter of Self-strengthening. Yung Wing’s idea was to replicate his own educational experience on a grand scale and with financial support from the government. He eventually persuaded Zeng Guofan to ask the qing court to authorize the Chinese Educational Mission. The court did so in 1871 and appointed Yung Wing an associate head of the mission.

The chief responsibility of the host families was to home-school the boys and prepare them for regular American schools. Within a couple of years of their arrival almost all were able to enroll in local schools; middle school and then secondary (or high) school. One feature of American schooling at the time helped ease their transition. According to education historian Theodore Sizer, “Recitation was the prevailing method of instruction: the pupil memorized a portion of a text and dutifully repeated it to the teacher.” This was a pedagogy with which the Chinese students were quite familiar from their Chinese studies and at which they could excel, as indeed some of them did.

While learning English and attending American schools, the CEM students were expected to keep up with their Chinese studies. When still being home-schooled, they were required to write two pages of Chinese every day and to go to the CEM headquarters in Hartford for additional Chinese lessons every three months (figure 2). Later, when attending school, they were to go to Hartford during their summer vacations for two or more weeks.

By the fall of 1881, half of the CEM students had advanced beyond secondary school into college; indeed, by then, three had even graduated from college. Most went to Yale, Yung Wing’s alma mater, the future Chinese prime minister. Li Peng attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. In college, as in high school, the students had to choose between two type of curriculum, the classical and the scientific. The time-honored classical curriculum emphasized Greek and Latin, while the scientific curriculum, a recent innovation, paid more attention to mathematics, science and engineering. The CEM students in college chose to study science or engineering; for example, the three who had graduated by 1881 had all attended the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale.

Conspicuously missing from the list of colleges that the CEM students attended were the U.S. Military Academy or the Naval Academy. Between 1869 and 1881 a dozen Japanese students were attending the U.S. Naval Academy, and according to the 1868 “Burlingame Treaty” Chinese students should also have been permitted to enroll in U.S. government schools. However, at a time of rising anti-Chinese sentiment, which was to culminate in the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, the American government disallowed their attendance.

The American refusal to permit CEM students to go to West Point and Annapolis was one reason why in 1881 the Chinese government decided to recall the students. Another reason was a change of leadership at the CEM headquarters in Hartford. By this time Yung Wing had been succeeded as director of the CEM by the Chinese legation in Washington, and a new commissioner, Wu Zideng, had been appointed. Upon his arrival, Wu Zideng was shocked by how Americanized the CEM students had become. They had cast off their Chinese dress, and though they still wore their hair in a queue they otherwise dressed in American clothes. They were members of American sports, especially baseball. They consorted easily and openly with young women of their own age. They attended church and many converted to the Christian faith. One student, at Williston even founded a missionary society. And they were forgetful of Chinese society. The CEM thus came to a premature end in the fall of 1881 (figure 3). When ordered to go home, two refused; six went home, but then made their way back to the U.S. shortly afterwards. Most of the others, on their return to China, were assigned various Self-strengthening projects, like the Fuzhou Navy Yard School, the Telegraph Administration, the Kaiping Naval School, and the Anhui Polytechnic institute. Those who had already achieved prominence during the decade of reform following the Boxer Rebellion. Several, for example, helped create the Chinese Communist party. One, Li Peng, became the first prime minister after the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912.

How did the Chinese Educational Mission contrast with the later groups of Chinese going abroad to study? First, they were relatively few in number: only 120. Secondly, they were all men. Thirdly, most were still in school. For example, Tang Shansui was 12 years old when he left China in 1874. By contrast, Yan Fu was 23 when he went to England in 1877; Lu Xun was 21 when he went to Japan in 1895; and Li Peng was 19 when he went to Russia in 1948. Because of their youth, the CEM students were less set in their ways and more open to new ideas. At the same time, though, they were more susceptible to the blandishments of foreign life, which is ultimately what led to the termination of this first government-funded effort at study abroad.

Edward JM Rhode holds a PhD from Harvard University, and is Professor Emeritus at the Department of History, University of Texas at Austin (rhoads@mail.utexas.edu)
How should we view contemporary Sino-African relations? Although the tendency is to view relations as either a departure from Western models or as continued exploitation of the continent, we suggest that the reality is far murkier.

Timothy S. Rich and Sterling Recker

Notes

WHAT ARE THE UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS for China-Africa relations? While relations have been built largely on ideological concerns tied to Cold War conditions, today relations appear to increasingly be built on economic foundations. China is now more active in Africa than ever, with trade increasing by 681% between 2001 and 2007, reaching $73 billion. Whether these relations promote mutual gain or African exploitation remains unclear. Certainly, few economic successes from the decades of Western aid to Africa are apparent, considering many African countries are net food importers, and aid into one category, distorting the image of Chinese influence. For example, Brautigam (2009) points out, the amount of Chinese aid reported is often wildly inaccurate, with a common failure to distinguish between Chinese remittances (RMK8) for US dollars. Within twenty-five years China moved from the eighth largest bilateral donor to Africa to second, with only the US ahead. In contrast to Western approaches, however, most development packages have been tied to trade instead of foreign aid and subsidized loans. In addition, unlike Western assistance programs that simply handed over projects to domestic officials with little oversight, China maintains a continued stake in joint projects. The result has been undeniable: discouraging increases in levels of debt among African countries.

Furthermore, while Western assistance seldom covers infrastructure, China views such projects as mutually beneficial economic development. Reisen argues that “there rarely has been such rapid and intense investment in African infrastructure as is going on today.” For example, of the $7 billion in credit and aid China granted Angola from 2002 to 2006, more than 5 billion was dedicated solely to infrastructural projects, including roads, railroads, and fiber optic networks. Foreign direct investment (FDI) follows a similar pattern. Whereas three-quarters of US FDI in Africa targets access to oil, nearly two-thirds (64%) of Chinese FDI in Africa has gone towards manufacturing ventures. These differences in priorities contribute to a growing view of a unique Chinese model.

More than resources?
China is the largest consumer of oil behind the US, moving from being a net exporter just twenty years ago. Eighty-five percent of African exports now go to China largely from five oil-rich countries (Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo, and Sudan). Despite this and warnings regarding China’s grab of national resources, China’s actual holdings remain rather limited, holding roughly two percent of known African oil reserves, and constitute only three percent of all companies invested in African oil wells! Even if Chinese companies desired a greater share, they face an uphill battle competing with other foreign companies with greater experience in the region. More broadly, China’s business interests are geographically concentrated and not restricted to oil-producing nations, with over 800 Chinese companies conducting business in 49 African countries as of 2007.

The African side of trade cannot be ignored either. From 2006 to 2008 alone, African exports to China increased by 110%, with thirty-two countries exhibiting a net gain in earnings. In addition, China’s exports do not simply undercut domestic production; machinery and high-tech products comprised nearly half of all exports to the continent in 2005! Overall, diversification away from resource-based industries and manufacturing in the oil industry to broader investment, often with Chinese acumen.

The negative side of relations
Growing Sino-African relations do create perverse incentives however. De Soyza argued that resources contribute to a “rentier state” where the production and sale of such resources fuel corruption due to underdeveloped political institutions. The result is the long term entrenchment of corruption centered around the exploitation of natural resources to serve political ambitions, often prolonging conflict. For example, Sierra Leone’s civil war was financed by the production and sale of “blood diamonds”, conflict in the DRC has been facilitated by the presence of mineral resources such as diamonds and coltan; and countries as diverse as Nigeria (oil), the Ivory Coast (cocoa), and Tanzania (a burgeoning fishing industry centered around Lake Victoria) have faced similar resource related problems.

Growing relations does not mean evenly distributed benefits within society. A popular argument among Africans is that when the Chinese enter their country they bring in their own workforce, leaving the domestic African workforce better off than they were prior to the arrival of the Chinese. While some of this importation may be due to expertise or a lack of trust in African partnerships, as a development strategy it remains short-sighted.

Concluding remarks
Chinese investment promotes both opportunities and challenges for African countries. While Chinese ventures grow in scope and depth, African countries are neither passive bystanders nor the recipients of unmitigated benefits. And new developments are no quick fixes for structural weaknesses across the continent. China faces similar constraints to other countries in terms of both the implicit and explicit notion of an African ‘property’. While the future of Sino-African relations thus requires the acknowledgment of both the agency of African actors and the Nationalists, Africa became a fertile ground for a communist Chinese government to recruit support and bolster their own sense of sovereignty.

While Taiwan initially held onto many African allies, by the end of the 1960s the tide had turned in favor of China. With African assistance in the United Nations coupled with America’s own willingness to warm relations with China, the PRC ascended into the United Nations in 1971. By 1979, forty-four African countries recognized China, compared to only five still recognizing Taiwan. While China’s external sovereignty concerns eased, Sino-African relations failed to live up to early expectations. Similarly, while China offered assistance to revolutionary movements on the continent to compete with Western and Soviet influence, by the mid 1980s, Chinese interest in the continent declined.

Only with the end of the Cold War and China’s rise as a superpower did a broader interest in Africa reemerge. While a few countries maintain relations with Taiwan, Chinese economic and political might has made switching diplomatic allegiance to China a cost effective way to receive foreign aid and broader assistance.

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Chinese investment promotes both opportunities and challenges for African countries. While Chinese ventures grow in scope and depth, African countries are neither passive bystanders nor the recipients of unmitigated benefits. And new developments are no quick fixes for structural weaknesses across the continent. China faces similar constraints to other countries in terms of both the implicit and explicit notion of an African ‘property’. While the future of Sino-African relations thus requires the acknowledgment of both the agency of African actors and the promotion of long-term mutually beneficial development.

Timothy S. Rich is a doctoral candidate in political science at Indiana University. His research focuses on comparative politics and international relations of East Asia. (tsrich@indiana.edu)

Sterling Recker is a doctoral candidate in political science at the University of Missouri - St. Louis. In the summer of 2011 he conducted field research in Rwanda pertaining to the impact of current agrarian reforms on the rural poor. (sdrm42@mail.indiana.edu)
The formation (and dissolution?) of a democratic politics in the Maldives

As an American Fulbright scholar affiliated with the Faculty of Shari'ah and Law at the only public institution of higher education in the Maldives – the Maldives College of Higher Education, on the island of Hulhumale in the Male Atoll – the Maldives College of Higher Education, on the island of Hulhumale in the Male Atoll – the Maldives College of Higher Education, on the island of Hulhumale in the Male Atoll – the Maldives College of Higher Education, on the island of Hulhumale in the Male Atoll – the Maldives College of Higher Education, on the island of Hulhumale in the Male Atoll.

Abbreviated history of the Maldives and the ancient regime

The Republic of the Maldives consists of just under 200 inhabited and 1000 uninhabited islands, distributed across 19 coral atolls in the Indian Ocean, southwest of India and Sri Lanka. Based on the most recent census, in 2006, the population is under 300,000 with approximately one-third living on the capital island Male1. Probably Buddhist prior to the introduction of Islam by Arab traders,2 and the official establishment of Islam in the mid-twelfth century,3 the Maldives was a hereditary sultunate (headed by sultans and at least six sultaneys) – across interactions of Portuguese, Dutch, and finally British (1887-1965) colonial interventions – until the first Republic was established, governed by President Amín Didi (1953-1954). The 94th and last sultan (Fareed Didi) resumed rule (1954-1967), finally giving way in 1968 to the existing Republic of the Maldives.

The original and all subsequent constitutions of the Republic, including the most recent in 2008,4 make the acceptance of Sunni Islam a citizenship requirement (chapter 1 article 9 of current constitution), no law inconsistent with ‘any tenet of Islam’ may be enacted (chapter 1 article 10a), and Islam is one basis among several for Maldivian law (chapter 1 article 10b). The legislative power resides in a unicameral People’s Majlis. However, constitutional and pratical restraints on the power of the President were weak or non-existent during the single-party state of the Dhivehi Nationalist (Dhivehi Rayyithunge) Party (the DRP); Dhivehi refers to the language and self-ascribed ethnicity of Maldivians. From the coup that brought President Gayoom to power in 1978, President Gayoom led the DRP and held the Presidency until 2008.

Geography and a rentier economy helped preserve a pluralist, autocratic regime under the single-party state. Foreign tourists were restricted to resort islands (uninhabited by Maldivians, unless they worked there), minimizing their contact with Maldivians, and ensuring a stream of revenue through island leases and a bed tax on tourist accommodation. The Maldives under President Gayoom typified a neo-patrimonial state,5 one in which informal patron-client relationships were incorporated into formal institutional polticals, such as parties, parliament, ministries, the civil service and departments of the state. President Gayoom used such strategies to expand and preserve his patron-client relationships, depending on personal and family networks, treating high offices as rewards for support – including the theft of sandbags from construction sites by normally law-abiding citizens – purportedly helped to motivate resistance and political opposition.

Six months later, in June 2005, the Gayoom administration lifted the ban on political opposition parties. Mohammad Nasheed (also known as ‘Nas’) promptly publicly declared the secret MDP, whose main mission had been to criticize and undermine President Gayoom and his regime, from the safety of exile in Salisbury, England, where Nasheed and his colleagues had been imprisoned and which was obviously not enough to win an election against the incumbent with his historic control over the poorer and less educated populations in the outer atolls.

The Gayoom administration did not grant the MDP any opportunity to rehearse for a campaign or index for any form of electoral contestation until August 2007, when the government proposed a referendum on the political system of the Maldives, with a choice offered between the existing presidential form, or conversion to a parliamentary electoral system. The referendum did not express candidates or political parties. President Gayoom called for this referendum as an item in his own ‘roadmap to reform,’ which he touted as a path that would guide the Maldives to liberal democracy. Arguably, he also advanced the referendum as an attempt to weaken the opposition and disarm any threat that had emerged in the relative turbulence of the preceding three years. An additional component of this reform package was a Special Majlis to consider revisions to the constitution and ultimately to amend it in its entirety, with the current constitution the result. To this observer, the intent of both constitutional revision and the referendum was to buttress the status quo, and to demobilize or mitigate the popuality of the MDP, as President Gayoom could reasonably have calculated that the electorate would opt for the familiarity of the presidential system.

It was evident from observations at the time that the stamina of the president or presidential systems were confusing to, if not lost altogether on, most Maldivians, even in Male’. The pro-Presidential camp consisted, unsurprisingly, of the MDP and the President’s Office, although the literature they distributed on the streets was couched as non-partisan and informational only, without any explicit party affiliation. By contrast the only active opposition party, forged into the parliamentary camp (as the only alternative to the President), more openly expressed a party identity, complete with a campaign color (yellow) and insignia in evidence (a thumbs-up sign with the words “barulamanee” – denoting the Parliamentary option – in caption). During the run up to the referendum, the MDP developed an elaborate block to block organization within Male’, and began to diffuse among outer islands using traditional Maldivian boats (dhoni) refashioned into campaign/boat parties. President Gayoom’s calculations were correct in that the presidental system prevailed, an apparent vote for status quo and for President Gayoom personally. Although this was a setback for the MDP, and many in Male’ expressed disappointment and frustration, the process was in retrospect a valuable rehearsal that allowed the party personnel and volunteers to gain organizational skills and develop greater contact with the electorate at large, albeit over a compressed time-frame.
With the exception losing its effort to escalate, on constitutional grounds, President Gayoom, and the office he had occupied for nearly three decades, the incumbent mounted his own attempts to rehabilitate himself, complete with the creation of a new campaign symbol: a hand, with palm facing outward. The meaning of this symbol was highly contested and ridiculed; was it the hand of Fatima, or a hand stopping change? President Gayoom made visits to many islands, adopted a theme song, and held rallies with live music and light shows. On voting day, 28 October 2008, there were some reports of fraud, although international observers were present. The turn-out was a remarkable 85% (with over 209,000 eligible voters). Six parties competed in the first round, only two, with the highest number of votes, would be allowed to proceed to the second round. The results were:

- Maldives Democratic Party (MDP): Hassan Saeed (46%)
- MDP: Dha'rahns (49.5%)
- MDP: Gasim Ibrahim (15%)
- MDP: Umar Naser (15.5%)
- MDP: Ismail (15%)

The second round thus involved the DRP and the MDP; it took place early the following month. The MDP entered into an alliance with the SLFP, the New Maldives, and the Republican Party, the IDP refused to support any other party and withdrew from the presidential race. The results were a significant victory for the MDP led by Mohamed Nasheed (54%); he and his running mate, Mohammad Waheed, were sworn in on 11 November 2008.

However, at time of press, President Nasheed resigned the Presidency, or was forced out in a coup executed by the police sworn in on 11 November 2008. (54%); he and his running mate, Mohammad Waheed, were sworn in on 11 November 2008.

The peaceful conduct of the campaign and the transfer of power in the Maldives is almost certainly that the MDP made a private or tacit bargain with Maumoon Gayoom, allowing him to remain in the Maldives, and to continue his leadership of the DRP in opposition. It is difficult to decipher what Gayoom’s own position and intentions were from his public statements. For his part, Nasheed consistently struck a forgiving and conciliatory tone, stating (against the wishes of many Maldivians) that Maumoon Gayoom would stay in the Maldives, and that his treatment was a test of the nascent middle class and democracy. Whether this Islamic dressing aided and sustained his regime is an unknowable counterfactual. However, the regime’s eventual defeat and the forms of resistance that it met reveal the oft-noted double-edged character of a religion-based state ideology. For example, President Gayoom was unusually and publicly criticized for supporting the legality of music, and allowing alcohol to be served on resort islands.

Unsurprisingly, following his electoral loss, President Gayoom never explained the motives behind his “roadmap to reform” or the apparent lack of respect for his downfall, beyond asserting the desirability of a style of “gilded” democracy for the Maldives. Was external influence or pressure on the regime a contributing factor? The Maldivian government and the MDP each maintained ties with British MPs, playing host to them during visits; the MDP and the larger democracy movement, of which it was a part, became a subject of discussion in the British Parliament, but the actual impact on the domestic political outcome of this most influential among international players, Britain, appears to have been limited. The U.S. made no public statements against the Gayoom regime and did not publicly promote democracy, nor did it encourage or aid the U.S. Ambassador Robert Blake stated that he met with both the government and opposition groups in 2007, although he did not publicly lend support to the democracy movement in the Maldives, seeking instead to maintain friendly ties with the current regime. Even though NGO’s (e.g., the Open Society Institute, various human rights organizations, the U.N., the Red Cross) maintained a presence in Male’ in the run up to the election, they made little impact and generally cooperated with the regime. President Gayoom did suffer some international pressure and criticism, mainly from foreign media (memorable, the BBC), for his human rights record and his apparent reluctance to hold elections earlier, or to allow spirited opposition and dissent. Whether or not such censure reduced his willingness to continue in government cannot be determined.

One central causal factor explaining the transfer of power in the Maldives is almost certainly that the MDP made a private or tacit bargain with Maumoon Gayoom, allowing him to remain in the Maldives, and to continue his leadership of the DRP in opposition. It is difficult to decipher what Gayoom’s own position and intentions were from his public statements. For his part, Nasheed consistently struck a forgiving and conciliatory tone, stating (against the wishes of many Maldivians) that Maumoon Gayoom would stay in the Maldives, and that his treatment was a test of the nascent Maldivian democracy, and that Gayoom could continue to be active in politics. However, the terms of the bargain between the MDP and then President Gayoom are not clear.

The peaceful conduct of the campaign and the transfer of power is consistent with the recent history of the Republic of the Maldives, where the populace has almost without exception not had recourse to violence, despite suffering a frankly oppressive political and legal order. Although gang and drug related violence and other low-level street crime is a perennial issue in the press, violence is rare and when it does occur it seldom involves weapons, and almost never firearms. A very rare exception was a bombing in Sultan’s Park in September 2007, which injured several foreign tourists. In addition, in December 2007, Gayoom was the target of an assassination attempt while campaigning at a DRP rally on Hoolafushi; the would-be assassin, concealing a knife under a Maldivian flag, lunged at the President only to be stopped, not by his security detail but by a Boy Scout who was standing nearby and who was subsequently celebrated as a minor celebrity and national hero.

The observed correlation between a substantial, growing middle class and democracy is a plausible component in the transition’s explanation. Relative to the rest of South Asia, the Maldives is comparatively wealthy, although its wealth is not evenly distributed and the prominence of resorts and high-end tourism preserves this status quo – with substantial revenue flowing directly to government rents and foreign companies, but paying few wages to Maldivians and foreign workers. The Gayoom regime was the victim of its own success; high literacy and economic development helped build a growing middle class that displayed a greater interest in politics and a capacity to organize than had been evident in the earlier decades of President Gayoom’s administration.

For instance, the political organizers of the MDP were disproportionately college educated, i.e., more educated than the average Maldivian, and their educational credentials implied that they were from relatively more prosperous families or beneficiaries of a government or other grant, which had allowed them to study abroad.

The Maldives, a rather obscure country due to its location and geography, is nevertheless known to the outside world, most likely for its tropical beaches and exclusive resorts, and perhaps also for its extreme exposure to rising sea levels and world climatic transformations. However, the politics of the country, while idiosyncratic and evolving with some detachment from the rest of the South Asian region and larger global context are, as the events of the last few years (and days) demonstrate, dynamic, unpredictable, and of not insignificant interest to the study of socio-political and democratic change.

Scott Morrison is an independent scholar, with a focus on Islamic studies (Middle Eastern Arab and Turkish political) studies in the modern era; Maldives; Muslim political thought. (smorrison@gmail.com)
At an international conference at a Chinese university in 2011, I sat next to a sixtyish year-old man who could not understand English, but was eager to follow foreign speakers’ presentations. He asked me to translate. Looking more like a businessman or retired official than an academic, this man, Shi Anda, turned out to be a so-called “grassroots scholar” (minjian xuezhe); a term applied to the growing number of individuals in China trying to assert themselves as researchers outside the university and academic institutional system.

As it turned out, Mr Shi was indeed both a businessman and a former official, as well as an amateur photographer and cultural activist. He was accompanied by the conference representatives of a China-based Kachin group called Jinghpaw-Land Cultural Exchange Committee (www.jinghpawland.org; accessed September 2011). They did not give a presentation, but distributed to participants a printed text that charged China, which had recently agreed with the Burmese junta to build several large dams in Kachin State, for ignoring the interests of the people. Mr Shi’s richly illustrated presentation focused on his past travels in Kachin State and – no doubt to the organisers’ relief – it eschewed politics. But he had brought along some of his own unpublished articles, which praise earlier Chinese help for the Kachin and other borderland insurgencies and criticise China’s recent marginalisation of these groups (e.g. Shi 1998).

Other articles (e.g. Shi 2006) told the story of Mr Shi’s family, a lineage of Chinese-appointed Lahu chiefs (tusi) in Lancang County on Yunnan Province’s border with Burma. According to these, his father, the last man, who had been educated in Japan and accorded to the title in 1937, liaised with British officers stationed in Yunnan on behalf of China’s Kuomintang government. After the Kuomintang’s defeat, he went to Taiwan, while both of his younger brothers served with the Kuomintang forces that remained in northern Thailand after their retreat from mainland China (see e.g. Chang 2001). Unlike family members of other Kuomintang officers, however, those of the tusi who remained on the mainland received privileged treatment as “key subjects of united front work” – until the Cultural Revolution, when they became the target of a struggle campaign directed by the provincial Revolutionary Committee.

In Lancang County, some 2300 households were raided in 1969 by a work team dispatched to root out class enemies and counterrevolutionaries (cf. Schoenhals 2004: 38-39). Mr Wang and his sister, however, had been resettled in Kunming and gone to university. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Mr Wang joined the Red Guards and travelled to Peking to see Chairman Mao. In his absence he was accused of crossing the border to defect to the enemy, and his Red Guard group declared a reactionary organisation. Later, he was rehabilitated and transferred to a remote area of northern Yunnan. Mr Shi went on to work at the provincial library and the cultural bureau while producing numerous writings on Burma and the Lahu. In the 1990s, he became an advocate of local Chinese governments’ cooperation with the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) splinter groups and their Kachin allies across the border to eradicate opium production and facilitate Chinese investment in their areas. In 1998, he produced a report for the provincial government praising these efforts, which were seen with ambivalence by the provincial and especially the central government. After retiring, Mr Shi remained active in advocating contacts with these special regions even as the central government shifted away from them. He also founded a number of associations promoting various aspects of “minority culture” and took up the fight to have his father rehabilitated as a patriot who had fought against the Japanese.

“Bad class backgrounds” and overseas connections

Compared to the Korean War, the assistance to the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, or the 1979 war with Vietnam, China’s armed intervention on the side of the Burmese People’s Army (BPA) between 1968 and 1975 is a relatively marginal, though protracted, instance of the Chinese Communists’ military engagements abroad. It is, however, distinctive in that it took place during the decade of the Cultural Revolution and subsequent mass repression, which is generally seen as the most self-isolating period of China’s modern history, but which also witnessed large-scale Chinese development projects in Africa (see Snow 1988, monson 2009). The engagement in Burma was unique during this period, in that it allowed individuals who had not been officially vetted, to leave the Chinese mainland in a way that was officially sanctioned or at least tolerated. The motivations of those volunteers who chose this path showed a complex mix of resentment against and support for the regime and its ideology.

According to a former fighter’s possibly inflated estimate, a total of some 30 thousand volunteers from China joined the BPA between 1968 and 1978 (Wang 2011:9). At first, in addition to military advisors from the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA), Chinese volunteers for the BPA were recruited at special stations in cities like Kunming and Nanning, in the two Chinese provinces nearest to Burma. In 1972, when there was a thaw in China’s relations with the Burmese government, official
recruitment stopped; but Chinese border guards continued to let young people volunteering for the BPA across the border. The beginning of recruitment coincided with the Chinese government’s decision to remove former Red Guards from the cities to be “re-educated” in mostly rural villages as a way to curb the chaotic and violent movement of the Cultural Revolution. In the administrative sections of the regions that succeeded it (Nyíri, forthcoming). Most of the surviving volunteers returned to their homes and were officially recalled, or in the early 1980s, when Maoist persecutions ended and China’s economy began to develop. Many of these returnees made use of their earlier contacts by becoming traders or business brokers engaging in the lucrative cross-border jade, timber, and presumably drug trade; but those without business acumen were often seen as less valuable, and still struggling to adjust to life in reform-era China and became embittered by the lack of social, political and financial recognition of the services they had rendered to the Chinese Communist Party’s former ally.

A forthcoming collection of essays (Toyoda, Xiang, and Yeoh) examines the return of the emigrant in the framework of nationalism. The return is important in its own right as an element of nationalistic discourse, but that there are also many instances in which society and politics have no place for returnees. Unwanted returnees, like war veterans, may then become loose cannons, uncontrollable sources of various grievances, some apparently supporting a democratic political transition.

Another participant Mr Shi brought to the conference was a silent, frail-looking Han Chinese man I will call Mr Zhang. During the Cultural Revolution, Mr Zhang’s father was imprisoned, so Mr Zhang, a Red Guard, and his sister were sent to the number 4 Special Region in Yunnan, from where they crossed into CPB territory. Mr Zhang says he did so “to survive. Survival can be difficult in two ways: physically and spiritually.” He added. Even so, he ended up fighting for the CPB: “Outside CPB territory we would have just been illegal immigrants,” while inside, “there was no point trying to be an ordinary dweller,” as that would have meant fighting for the “free world”, such people, according to the memoirs, generally despised (e.g. Wang 2011:416).

The large number of zhiqing with “bad” class backgrounds, as well as of fighters from borderland ethnic minorities, who were being subjected by the Yunnan provincial government to a targeted class-struggle campaign in 1969-70 (Schopenhauer 2004:40-44), among the volunteers of a communist guerrilla army held to the very powers at whose behalf they were being housed, is first of all, the CPB faithfully followed the rhetoric and, within its own ranks, the practice of China’s political campaigns. Indeed, its work was seen by the CPB as a contribution to the cause both at the outset of the Cultural Revolution and in its ensuing suppression, as well as the architect of Chinese support for the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Mr Zhang’s escape from Kunming—whose father had been arrested for his alleged Kuomintang connections—remembers, BPA officers were not interested in the volunteers’ class labels: “As long as you fought they didn’t bother you.” The possibility of getting away from the daily “struggle sessions” and achieve revolutionary “redemption”, or at least less harsh treatment, and the alternative possibility of flight, provided a plausible explanation for the preponderance of volunteers who, at first sight, had little reason to sacrifice themselves for the cause of world revolution.

The same logic may explain another striking feature of volunteer demographics: the presence of many youths who had returned to China from abroad, mostly Han Chinese, as children in the 1960s, and were, before the Cultural Revolution, afforded certain privileges—for example, according to zhiqing recollections, girls were allowed to wear make-up and miniskirts!—but who became the target of violent struggle in 1966-68 in Kunming (Wang 2010:15-16). Company 2 of Battalion 3033 of the BPA consisted mostly of such returned overseas Chinese zhiqing, with fighters born in Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Malaysia who largely came from special overseas Chinese schools (Khoog).

The history of Chinese BPA volunteers have yet to receive scholarly attention both in China, where the topic is more or less off-limits to researchers, and outside it. (The same applies to China’s better-known interventions in Korea, Vietnam, and Cambodia.) The last few years have witnessed a remarkable number of publications on this subject, excluding other notable works on the BPA (Wang 2011:422). They had a very high casualty rate, but those who returned made up the ranks and, after the BPA collapsed in 1989, came to occupy leading positions ignored, as if post-Taliban Afghanistan had only a “tribal” heritage to build on. Chinese volunteers in the BPA are seen as doubly “inauthentic”: as Communist fighters and as foreigners. Yet their experiences, and their later attempts to transform themselves into brokers of licit and illicit international trade and into pioneering modernization, attest to a neglected his-
In April 2011, the UN released a report on human rights violations during the last phase of the 26-year-long Sri Lankan civil war, in which 80,000 to 100,000 people were killed. While the document is comprehensive in its summary of the culmination of the war, its understanding would be incomplete without knowing the historical context of the conflict between the nation’s two major ethnic groups.

Anshuman Rawat

In 1972, the country became a republic and changed its name to Sri Lanka (from Ceylon). It also gave Buddhism the primary place as the nation’s religion—thereby antagonizing minority groups, especially Hindus and Tamils. Four years later in 1976, and as tensions increased in the Tamil-dominated north and east regions, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was born, setting out to fight a violent campaign to bring about an independent state for Tamil People.

The Newsletter

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Genesis, culmination and the UN report

As the war continued, thousands of Tamil civilians were caught between the government army and the LTTE – and were killed by both sides. In 2009, according to United Nations estimates, about twelve hundred non-combatants (Tamils) were being killed each month – eyewitness accounts talked of the use of cluster bombs, tanks, heavy artillery and even light aircraft across the LTTE stronghold during the last phase of the fight; even as United Nations political organs and bodies, by the UN’s own admission, “failed to take actions that might have protected civilians”.

In May 2009, government forces declared victory with the killing of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran, thus bringing an end to a 26-year-long insurgency. But the final round of military exercise received widespread global condemnation for alleged human rights violations on both sides. As evidence of serious human rights abuses and massive civilian casualties in the five-month offensive (which ended the war) kept mounting by the minute, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, under tremendous pressure from Human Rights activists and many government quarters, Down equally hard on the LTTE, the report alleges that the militia used civilians as human shields. It states:

“February 2009 onwards, the LTTE started point-blank shooting of civilians who attempted to escape the conflict zone, significantly adding to the death toll in the final stages of the war. It also fired artillery in proximity of large groups of internally displaced people (IDPs) and fired from or stored military equipment near IDP or civilian installations such as hospitals. Throughout the final stages of war, the LTTE continued its policy of suicide attacks outside conflict zone.”

The Panel, as stated in the report, found “credible allegations”, which if proven, indicate that a wide range of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law were committed, both by the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, some of which amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Here follow the respective indictments of the two warring sides, listed in the report:

Credible allegations that comprise five core categories of potential serious violations committed by the Government of Sri Lanka:

1. Killing of civilians through widespread shelling;
2. Shelling of hospitals and humanitarian objects;
3. Denial of humanitarian assistance;
4. Human rights violations suffered by victims and survivors of the conflict, including both IDPs and suspected LTTE cadre;
5. Human rights violations outside the conflict zone, including against the media and other critics of the Government.

Credible allegations against the LTTE associated with the final stages of the war reveal six core categories of potential serious violations:

1. Using civilians as a human buffer;
2. Killing civilians attempting to flee LTTE control;
3. Using military equipment in the proximity of civilians;
4. Forced recruitment of children;
5. Forcible labour; and

The panel also made some pointed recommendations to all concerned parties – principal aspects that include investiga- tions by an international panel into the alleged war crimes, short and long term accountability measures by the Sri Lankan government and even a comprehensive review of the actions (or the lack of them) by the world during the war after the after- math. Significantly, the panel also recommends reconsidera- tion of the Human Rights Council’s May 2009 Special Session Resolution (A/HRC/Res/12/23) that congratulated Sri Lanka for ending the war, rather than calling for an investigation into mass civilian casualties.

While the reaction from Sri Lanka, expectedly, was swift and resounding in its rejection of the report as being “biased and flawed”, Nan Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said she hoped that the “disturbing new information (carried in the report) will shock the conscience of the international community into finally taking serious action”.

Gordon Weiss, a former UN official in Sri Lanka, who has written a book on the conflict, said the report has exposed a “frontal assault on international law that demanded accountability”. Equating it with the globally-condemned killings in the Bosnian war, he asserted that “the UN didn’t do enough” and that the report makes the world body culpable of “failing to use the available casualty figures”.

With a view of taking the findings ahead, experts suggest that one option for Ban Ki Moon would be to set up a commission of inquiry either at the International Criminal Court or another judicial body – as a possible first step toward a war-crimes prosecution. But with China most certain to exercise its veto power on the matter, this may be unlikely to work. All the same, other experts consider there to be an array of other mechanisms still at Ban’s disposal, if he wishes to explore them. Read the complete 214-page UN report at http://bit.ly/eq3uZb

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QR code centre: Read the complete 214-page UN report at http://bit.ly/eq3uZb


Over the next 6 months, the panel’s primary task was to stay clear of partisan sources of information on incidents and casualties. An internal group, named the Crisis Operations Group took figures from the Regional Director of Health Services as the baseline. Simultaneously, information from National Staff of the United Nations and NGOs, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and other sources, were used to cross-check and verify the baseline.

Even the grave human tragedy brought by a massive Tsunami in December 2004, which killed over thirty thousand people, could not bring the warring factions together, as a row erupted over December 2004, which killed over thirty thousand people, could not bring the warring factions together, as a row erupted over

As the final phase of the conflict began to be said to be the period when a state of emergency was enforced after the assassination of Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister in August 2005. Then, in November, Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was Prime Minister at the time, won the presidential elections. Amidst failed peace talks in Geneva in 2006, and the pull-out in 2008 of an international panel invited by the government to monitor investigations into human rights, the Mahinda Rajapaksa government carried out a massive military onslaught against the LTTE.

One more round of peace negotiations took place after the victory of Sri Lanka Freedom Party’s (SLFP) Chandrika Kumaratunga on the poll plank of settlement of the insurgency issue. However, in April 1995, the LTTE sank two navy boats. It started a six-year cycle of mayhem in which the government launched a massive military campaign that retook the Jaffna peninsula, while the LTTE responded with widespread attacks on government army and sinhala civil targets. A raw nerve was touched when the LTTE also bombed Sri Lanka’s holiest Buddhist site.


In 2002, the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE signed a Norway-brokered ceasefire that saw the decommissioning of weapons and the opening of roads linking the Tamil stronghold of Jaffna with the rest of the nation. More significantly, the government lifted the ban on the LTTE, while the latter dropped its demand for an independent Tamil nation. But, a year later, the LTTE again withdrew from talks, citing a lack of government support – although the military ceasefire stayed in effect. But in March 2004, things became complicated for the government when the LTTE’s eastern military commander, Col. Karuna, split from the group. What followed were violent clashes between the two factions. Amidst the LTTE accusation of collaboration between the government and Col. Karuna, the ceasefire eventually collapsed when Colombo was hit by a suicide bomb blast, the first such incident since 2001.

The final phase of the military conflict can be said to be the period when a state of emergency was enforced after the assassination of Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister in August 2005. Then, in November, Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was Prime Minister at the time, won the presidential elections. Amidst failed peace talks in Geneva in 2006, and the pull-out in 2008 of an international panel invited by the government to monitor investigations into human rights, the Mahinda Rajapaksa government carried out a massive military onslaught against the LTTE.
In 1703 the Frenchman George Psalmanazar travelled to London and claimed to be a native from Formosa. A year later he published a scientific book entitled *An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa, an Island subject to the Emperor of Japan*, in which he gave an account of Formosan customs, language, geography and political economy.

In Formosa, according to Psalmanazar, crocodiles and lions were common, and people rode on camels and ate snakes. His book was an enormous success. It went through two English editions and was translated into French and German. He was invited to Oxford University to lecture on his ‘native’ country. Skeptics occasionally questioned Psalmanazar, for example, on his physical appearance, but he cleverly deflected criticism: his skin was pale because the upper classes of Formosa lived in underground houses. Only in 1706 did Psalmanazar confess his fraud (Keevan 2004).

Gerard A. Persoon & Jan van der Ploeg

IN 1977, EMANUEL ELIZALDE, the head of the Philippine government agency tasked to protect cultural minorities, announced the discovery of a Stone Age culture on the island of Mindanao. Senior anthropologists, linguists and ethno-botanists studied these primitive people and lent credibility to Elizalde’s claims. The Tasaday became world news when National Geographic Magazine published pictures of the peaceful, and strictly vegetarian, Tasaday in their caves. These iconic pictures were lent credibility to Elizalde’s claims. The magazine published pictures of the peaceful, and strictly vegetarian, Tasaday in their caves. These iconic pictures were published. These pictures were considered to be a key piece of evidence in a broader debate about the validity of science and its role in society.

Science has provided a phenomenal understanding of nature, and enabled people in Asia and Europe to master and manipulate the world. The benefits have been immense, particularly when considered collectively, we live a longer, happier and healthier life than ever before in history. Technological advances provide economic opportunities, healthcare, food, safety and pleasure for billions of people around the globe. Science and technology have become indispensable and inextricable parts of modern society. However, science can no longer count on the unquestioning public support that it once enjoyed in the past. Citizens in Europe and Asia increasingly question the environmental risks and social impacts of scientific progress (Wynne 2006). Scientific knowledge is now often greeted with skepticism, distrust and sometimes even hostility. This loss of public authority and legitimacy of science poses a major challenge for scientists and policy makers in Europe and Asia.

During a roundtable, jointly organized by HAS and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in October 2011 within the framework of Europe-Asia Policy Forum, scientists from various Asian and European countries discussed the changing relations between science and society. The discussion was initiated by a number of controversial cases from Asia and Europe that have eroded public trust in science and technology, for example, the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) crisis in the United Kingdom, the melamine milk poisoning scandal in China, and more recently the H1N1 pandemic in Europe and the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan. By bringing together Asian and European scholars from different academic disciplines, the roundtable intended to highlight various perspectives on the public mistrust in science problem. Countries in Europe and Asia vary substantially in the degree of autonomy of scientific research, in the need to focus on policy relevant themes, and in communications with the general public through the media.

Globalization, democratization and information technology are rapidly changing the way societies assess the validity of scientific claims. In the era of Google, YouTube and Facebook, George Psalmanazar and Emanuel Elizalde would perhaps be more easily exposed, but their claims would also find a much bigger audience. Science fails to respond to these new challenges. Societies have multiple ways of assessing the validity of scientific knowledge. This is no longer the exclusive domain of the academy. The media, industry, government and social movements play a role in shaping how people perceive and assess the quality of scientific knowledge and science. These changes have important consequences for how society regards and values science and scientists. In the 19th and 20th centuries, scientists were regarded as virtuous people, of a special moral character (Shapin 2008). But in the 21st century scientists are considered ordinary people (at best).

A much better understanding is needed about how different societies assess scientific knowledge, and which roles journalists, politicians, and public intellectuals play in shaping what Sheila Jasanoff (2007) has labeled ‘civic epistemologies’. Researchers have focused on the practical norms and values by which people test knowledge claims, especially when science helps underwrite significant collective choices. An analysis of these civic epistemologies can lead to a better understanding of science-society relations in different cultural contexts and contribute to the restoration of public trust in science.

NTU and HAS, hopefully in collaboration with other partners, intend to explore this complex field of relations between science, the public, politics and the media, in order to generate a better understanding of how society is informed, understands and eventually values science.

Gerard Persoon holds the BAF chair for Environment and Development, in particular in relation to indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia. His research focuses on human-environment interaction in various types of environments, but mainly of forest-dwelling peoples in Indonesia and the Philippines (persoong@fsw.leidenuniv.nl).

Jan van der Ploeg currently leads a research and conservation program for the critically endangered Philippine crocodile (the CROC project) and is writing his PhD dissertation, at Leiden University, on community-based wildlife management (ploegjanvd@fsw.leidenuniv.nl).

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In interpreting contemporary Asian American poetry, it is important to understand the cultural hybridity of Asian America identity, located at the interstices of the fixed identifications ‘American’, ‘Asian American’, and ‘Asian’. This rootedness in more than one culture exposes the inapplicability of binary concepts (foreigner/national, etc.). Hybridity, opposing essentialism and ‘the original’, favors multivocality and ambivalence. The exploration of Asian American cultural hybridity is linked both to material realities and poetic manifestations.

Asian American hybrid subjectivity is explored through in-depth interpretations of works from well-established contemporary poets such as Kimiko Hahn, Marilyn Chin, Li-Young Lee, and Arthur Sze, as well as that of many new talents and hitherto neglected writers.

This study examines how language and power interrelate, with translation and linguistic fusion being two approaches adopted by hybrid authors in their creation of diverse discourses. Globality hybrid subjectivity is independent of and at the same time transmuted with more than one culture, thus making innovative political and identitarian positions to be articulated. The manual is a rich treasure for both traditional poets and the reader, the social and the political, which continue to be seen through modernist and often subversive gaze. The textual literary space is invested as a source of women and identities rearticulating new forms and names and narratives in Asian American society, engaging other in understanding hybrid identities of racial, national and ethnic identities.

A further question posed is whether there are particular aesthetic modes and concepts that unite contemporary Asian American poetry when the allegiances of the practitioners are so disparate (geocultural provenience, poetic school, region, etc.). The rivaling interviews with Kimiko Hahn and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni on identity and roots, language and power, feminism, and the American poetry scene provide illuminating personal yet representative answers to this and other questions.

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The author, one of the most applauded authorities in the field of Sanskrit literature (particularly the great Hindu epic Mahābhārata), explores how the concept of dharma developed and was affirmed in South Asia. Alf Hiltebeitel is an authority in the study of dharma and this text confirms his erudition. (An encyclopaedic volume titled Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative has been announced for publication in 2011 by Oxford University Press.)


The volume is part of a series—Dimensions of Asian Spirituality—that targets a non-specialist readership and is therefore an introductory text. However, Dharma is not an introductory volume—accurate and well-written as it may be. A good deal of previous knowledge is assumed. Undergraduate students, as well as average readers with an interest in Asian spirituality will struggle reading this book. This is an academic product that requires either the support of an instructor or a certain familiarity with South Asian history, Vedic culture, Hindu and Buddhist scriptures and related philosophical systems. Explanatory notes could have been helpful, but the book lacks an apparatus of notes. Instead Hiltebeitel provides the neophyte with translation of Sanskrit terms, a short glossary, an index, and a carefully selected list of references which—I am sure—will encourage and support readers to deepen their knowledge of dharma.

The structure of Dharma is carefully explained, but it is question-able. Hiltebeitel, after an extremely useful etymological analysis of the term dharma (including its Vedic antecedent, dharma) and cognate key-words (moku, niraña, yoko), introduces the reader to primary sources. These are presented as ten ‘scriptures’ (or, one should say, bodies of scriptures) in Sanskrit and Pāli, and divided in two clusters. Cluster A includes: 1) early Buddhist texts; 2) Aṣṭāṅga Dharmasūtra (the edicts of Aiśka; 3) Gautama’s Dharmasūtras; and 5) Baudhāyana Dharmasūtras. Cluster B discusses dharma in 6) the Mahābhārata; 7) the Rāmāyana; 8) the Dharmaśāstra of Manus; 9) Dharmasūtras of Vaiṣṇava; and 10) the Buddhist treatise Atītavagha.

Hiltebeitel justifies such sequence by referring to historical data such as the reigns of selected dynasties and war campaigns. Yet most connections are—in fact—chronological. While this may sound obvious (or unavoidable) to the expert reader, the neophyte will find it confusing. For instance, Hiltebeitel begins with an examination of King Aiśka’s famous edicts (260-240 BCE), he goes back to Vedic culture (the Rig Veda is dated 1500-1000 BCE circa) and then jumps to the Mauryas (circa fourth century BCE) and Kusāna dynasties (second century CE). A chronological table would have been appropriate.

A further problem emerges when one considers the fact that dharma is explored only within (certain forms of) Hinduism and Buddhism. Why have other Hindu and Buddhist traditions (e.g. Tantric) not been considered? And what about South Asian indigenous religions such as Jainism and Sikhs and their understanding of dharma (or dharmottar)? Overall the book gives the idea that dharma is a strictly Hindu and Buddhist concept.

The marginalisation of minority faith communities extends to the exclusion of peripheral regions of South Asia. The book contributes to perpetuate the false equation that ‘India is South Asia’ as the two terms are used interchangeably. Hiltebeitel states that: ‘The Rigveda is India’s oldest textual source […]’ (19) while his geographical notion of South Asia (3) does not include Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and—by extension—Myanmar and Tibet. The spirituality, religious practices and scriptures of all these countries have, in one way or the other, absorbed the concept of dharma presented by Hiltebeitel, and contributed to its spread in surrounding areas, such as Central and Southeast Asia. In particular, given Hiltebeitel’s interest in Buddhism, it is surprising he fails to include contemporary Bangladesh, which together with West Bengal, hosts an important Buddhist tradition and has produced a rich literature in both Sanskrit and vernacular.

Beside the above mentioned problems, I would like to note that most of the central chapters revolve around characters of the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana. No doubt Hiltebeitel is in his element. The analysis of dharma as constructed in the narrative cycles of the great Sanskrit epics is of great value. The author makes a very clear summary of the main episodes of both texts and then engages with an enlightening critical reflection about ways in which dharma is lived and interpreted by the characters according to their role, gender, social position, skills and flaws. Hiltebeitel magisterially discusses both scriptures (though very different in nature) as actual manuals of dharma. This includes references to one of the most popular Hindu scriptures, the Bhagavad Gītā, and the dominant bhakti (devotional) tradition. It is therefore regretful that he does not feel the urge to mention other cultural contexts. In South Asia dharma is a living concept deeply embedded at all level of Indic societies. It insinuated itself across different religious traditions (from tribal cultures to non-indigenous minority faiths like Islam, Judaism and Christianity). Further to that, dharma is not confined to Sanskrit/Pāli scriptures, as the lay reader may believe. Vernacular literatures and oral narratives across the subcontinent have engaged with localised representations and exegeses of dharma. For instance, there is no analysis of gods linked to dharma (or deities actually called ‘Dharmes’), such as Yama, but also folk variants of Śīva, Viṣṇu and Šiva. (In Bengali folklore, Dharma is one of the most popular gods who is the object of several auspicious poems—the dharmamangalāyō.)

Hiltebeitel, in his last chapter, does mention the evolution of dharma in the twenty-first century, but this fails to meet expectations. He just refers to one short paragraph [164] to Jack Kerouac’s Dharma Bums, the US show Dharma and Greg, the acclaimed television series Lost and the documentary film Dharma Brothers. Colonial and post-colonial discourses on dharma are not discussed, as well as its globalisation and affirmation (also exploitation) in the most disparate contexts (e.g., politics, economics, health and support services, entertainment, visual arts, education, the World Wide Web, etc.). Hiltebeitel’s exploration of the ‘Dharma for the Twenty-First Century’ is inextricably bound to the Hindu and Buddhist classical scriptural traditions.

This book gives a partial introduction to dharma and the spirituality related to it. I am well aware that an introductory text could not possibly address all of the aspects of a multi-faceted founding concept of South Asian culture like dharma. Hiltebeitel’s Dharma—despite the problems I have highlighted—is an academic work, which wisely summarises important aspects of two Indic religious and cultural traditions. By reading the jacket, the editor’s preface and the introductory material (Ch.1), one might expect a somewhat different work than Dharma happens to be. Although key features are discussed with sufficient clarity, the author never feels the necessity to go beyond the limits established by the Sanskrit and Pāli classical traditions. This is, however, a compelling work, rich in instructive narrative and strategic in supporting teachers in their effort to foster the interest of future generations of students of South Asian cultures and religions.

Fabrizio M. Ferrari, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Chester (f.ferrari@chester.ac.uk)

The Night Banquet is a tenth century hand scroll attributed to the painter Gu Hongzhong. A well-known statesman Han Xizai [902-970] is the main character, depicted in a number of scenes on this scroll. Han was famous for his parties, as we can read in an imperial painting catalogue from around 1120: “Rumors circulated inside the court and [Southern Tang Emperor Li Yu] regretted not being able to see Han’s famous parties with his own eyes.” The emperor found a solution for his problem, and sent the painter Gu Hongzhong to act as his spy.

Lee starts her book with the question of the authenticity of the scroll. We can follow step by step her examination of textual evidence on the scroll, the external textual evidence and the visual evidence. The first chapter ends with a discussion of one final question. “We must consider whether a lost Southern Tang original is the basis for the extant Night Banquet.” Several options follow, some are in favor of the scrolls authenticity while others vote for the possibility that this is a later reproduction of an older original. Each hypothesis is presented with ample proof.

The following chapters almost read like a ‘detective’ story. The book is a real page turner, as it gives the reader an broad impression of how the painting has been appreciated by different viewers and owners over a long stretch of time. During its existence the scroll has grown in length, as it had several colophons attached. There is an anonymous early addition with a lively description of Han’s activities; the text is very clear in its critical view. Lee translates and carefully examines each colophon, to serve as a guide for the opinion or interpretation of the writer about the scenes as a whole, and of the story behind the imagery. A nice touch is the complete print out of these Chinese texts at the end of the book.

The focus in one of the chapters is called “The Confucian gaze”, which is mainly concerned with the more or less proper conduct of the people in the scene. This Confucian gaze represents the critical approach of a viewer as he sees the Night Banquet in light of virtue and conduct. Parallel to that is another view, the “vouyoiristic gaze”. The vouyoiristic gaze is equally strong, although now the viewer is attracted to and aroused by the scenes of worldly and sensual pleasure of music, wine and women. In a painting record, written in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, Tang Hou tells us that he had seen two versions of the Night Banquet, by Zhou Wenju and another by Gu Hongzhong, but he condemned the painting “not suitable for a scholars’ study”. There is one thing we can be sure of – only the high ranking and a well-educated elite was supposed to see, enjoy and understand such a painting.

For yet another point of view speaks a poem added in 1326 by Ban Wouh. In this poem Ban refers to several well-known historic examples of strange behavior as he expresses a more positive interpretation of the deeds of Han; although Han’s deeds look condemnable at first sight they may turn out to be of a very virtuous nature in the end.

In the anonymous colophon that was attached to the scroll in the early fourteenth century, the life of Han Xizai is described in detail, but the question remains how trustworthy this might be. The colophon’s author makes clear that Han shamefully wasted his talents. Lee concludes on page 55: “Whatever the viewer’s reactions to the Night Banquet may have been, the anonymous colophon effectively changes them.” She argues that the addition becomes part of the original work and it is almost impossible to see the painting without this influence.

Lee takes us through the next period in time with new changes in the appreciation of the scroll when we come to the connoisseur who sees the scroll with its additions as a whole. The whole extended scroll is measured in an entirely different way for its historical and cultural value. Aside from the colophons, every owner puts his seal on the scroll – often more than one – therefore ownership by emperors and collectors can be traced through time. This habit of the elite makes the scroll valuable as a historical record as much as it is as a painting.

One of the last examples in the book is Zhang Daqian, as he had the scroll for a period after it returned to the collection of what is now the Palace Museum in Beijing. Zhang added several seals and two of his friends added colophons and seals. They are in all likelihood the last persons to do so. Since every new era brings a different way of looking at the scroll, this can be recognized in the present time. Today, preservation and conservation of historic art treasures would forbid any further extensions to the scroll.

In the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing the scroll can seldom be seen by the general public. On one of these rare occasions in 2002, I was lucky enough to see it on display. It was part of an exhibition of Early Treasures of Chinese painting in the Shanghai museum, as one of the finest examples of the period. The exhibition was held in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Shanghai Museum with 72 art treasures of the Jin, Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties on display. The exhibition attracted large crowds of Chinese, who jumped at the opportunity to see the paintings they so far only knew from reproductions in books. The dim lighting of the exhibition halls are proof of the precautions that are taken with these precious works. For protection and conservation of the fragile works of art, only 500 visitors a day were allowed. Hence the total number of people that were able to see this exhibition was around 20000, among them a couple of hundred foreigners. I think that the limited access to this type of hand scroll places an important task in the hands of the publishers of books and reproductions of such a scroll.

This brings me to the only problem I have with this book, namely the poor quality reproduction of the painting on the scroll. The images are so small that it is hard to see the finer details of what Lee is describing in such a vigorous and lively manner. Not many of the readers are likely to ever see this painting in reality. For that reason alone the book should have given more attention to the visual underlining of the story unveiled. I would argue that if a scroll is worthy of this elaborate observation and meticulous study – which it surely is – one would at least expect a larger and better reproduction for the convenience of the reader.

As Lee followed the painting through time and encountered the various possible interpretations of the theme, she pointed out that without doubt the image represents a sensual situation and was not meant to be seen by the general public. Today, this painting and the other treasures of the past are known to the general public, an audience never intended for such an intimate image. As the story unfolds in the last chapter, she reminds us that paintings and the internet we can find reproductions in abundance and many partial images with more (or fewer) details. Overall, the book is more concerned with the historical evidence in the form of seals and colophons that have been added during its long existence. We are treated to an impressive amount of detail and precise observation of every aspect of the additions to the scroll. The question in the first line of the book, “who was the last owner?” still remains open: “by whom it was painted?” in the end we still do not know for sure. The one option that is not brought to the discussion by Lee is the possibility that, Zhang Daqian painted it – he was the last owner before the scroll was returned to the Palace Museum collection, and Zhang is widely known to have copied and reproduced old masters, just can’t help but wonder …

Lucien van Valen holds an MA in Fine Arts from the Gerrit Rietveld Academy and an MA in Chinese Languages and Cultures from Leiden University (1997). In 2005 she received her PhD from Leiden University, combining both fields of expertise in her thesis “The Matter of Chinese Painting” [info@lucienvanvalen.nl]
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Kay Schaffer and Xianlin Song, Women’s Writing in Post-Socialist China

For more information about the ASAA please visit our website at: [www.asaa.asn.au](http://www.asaa.asn.au)
What is your opinion of IIAS and its activities? What are our strengths?
Where could we make improvements? The IIAS survey findings are available in their entirety online at www.iias.nl/survey2011, but here we analyse and respond to some of the key points raised.

Thomas Voorter (Communications Coordinator IIAS)

Our Audience and the Way They See Us

As you can see in fig. 1, the majority of our audience work in academic circles (researcher, (retired) professor, student) and in the public, non-profit sector (NGOs, government departments). Age groups appear to be evenly distributed (fig. 2), and the division between fields of discipline well-balanced (fig. 3). This is less so for the distribution of men (62.6%) and women (37.4%).

Our audience truly lives all over the world, as shown proportionately in figure 4. Within this circle of global representation we inserted some illustrative comments collected through the survey, and a number of keywords that our audience associates with us. We received suggestions about ways to better divide our attention between different Asian regions and across age groups, ideas about new research ventures and about ways to better divide our attention between different Asian keywords that our audience associates with us. We received suggestions with being out of reach; keywords used included cliquish, distant, minded, comprehensive, academic research institute and a supportive answers we learned that our audience considers the IIAS to be an open-interesting tools that could be evenly distributed (fig. 2), and the division between fields of discipline circles (researcher, (retired) professor, student) and in the public, non-professional environment for doing research. About research staff and visiting scholars, I would like to underline that sharing ideas with Asian scholars about Asian Studies was very fulfilling and refreshing, Evelyne Micoller, IIAS' inclusion of Asian scholars as an integral part of its activities and research. The IIAS newsletter is very informative, well edited, and nicely produced. UNITED STATES

We need to get to know your institution here in Latin America. You have some very good and interesting tools that could improve our discussions on Asian Studies.

A big challenge should be to make Asian Studies better known outside the US-SEA-Asia network. Latin America has connections and shares historical links with Asia, the representation of it within the field of Asian Studies is rather limited. Claudio Pinheiro, BRAZIL

IIAS should evolve better communication networks to widely publicise its various research and fellowship programmes. INDIA

IIAS needs to work on quality control for the ICAS conferences. SINGAPORE

IIAS is an innovative organization, but I’m still not sure how much you have permeated the consciousness of Asian scholars in North America. I would like to see more, and receive more information on your scholarly networks.

UNITED STATES

The Newsletter is one of the most important publications in Asian studies. Without it, I could not keep up with developments in Asian studies. I am glad that it is still in paper. UNITED STATES

Make your services to journalists more up to date, and be more active in this field. NETHERLANDS

IIAS is a wonderful institution which has served Asian Studies scholars very well over the years. The Newsletter is excellent and the ICAS conferences are something we really look forward to. I hope you can keep IIAS operating at the same level in future despite financial crises all around.

UNITED STATES

EUROPEAN

INTERDISCIPLINARY

BROAD

While I don’t mean to be US-centric, I would like to see more ways in which the IIAS could better incorporate scholars in the US, particularly with regard to their research grants.

UNITED STATES

O U R A U D I E N C E A N D T H E W A Y T H E Y S E E U S

We posed an open question in the survey, asking for images that come to mind when people think of the IIAS. From the approximately 1,200 answers we learned that our audience considers the IIAS to be an open-minded, comprehensive, academic research institute and a supportive network agency. The few negative attributes shared with us deal mostly with being out of reach, keywords used included cliquish, distant, and bureaucratic.

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Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

EAIRLE ThIS YEAIR, we sent out a personalised email invitation to 4,925 randomly selected individuals from our database and asked them to fill in a short questionnaire. Within a month we had received 1,464 high quality responses. A response rate of nearly 30%. We would like to thank everybody who took the time to complete the survey.
Postcolonial dialogues

In November 2011 IIAS hosted a two-day roundtable, tentatively titled The Postcolonial Dialogues. The idea was simple, yet we were well aware of the complexities that came with this so-called simplicity. In terms of the colonial experience and postcolonial realities, our task at hand was to explore what has been left unsaid, untouched upon, undocumented, unexplored or maybe even purposely ignored. What, in short, should our agenda be the coming years when speaking of ‘postcolonialism’? We were, however, all in agreement of one thing from the start: much has already been said. Another thing we firmly agreed on is that this does not mean there are no more issues to be dealt with.

Michel Baas
RENEWING DEBATES TAKING PLACE IN EUROPE concerning their colonial past often paint a confusing image, one that wishes to show that colonialism and its legacy are still relevant to contemporary discussions and events. This is because the occidental world has never really come to terms with its colonial past or the ramifications of its colonial policies.

In light of this, we can make the Dutch former prime-minister's call for more 'VOC mentality' with regards to the 50-year anniversary of independence of Indonesian languages, the prime-minister's call for more 'Voc mentality' with regards to the 50-year anniversary of independence of Indonesia. This is because the Dutch continued celebration of its colonial heyday stands in direct relationship to the rather marginalized role it plays on the world stage nowadays. There is a lingering memory of different times, of the Dutch occupation, and the atrocities committed, and what remains is that highly coloured memory and the very concrete Reminders of the Dutch colonial past.

The study of postcolonialism is characterized by a whole world of theoretical and interpretative discourses. The study of postcolonialism, by definition, does not do 'firm' justice to the postcolonial. We are still struggling with the definition of the term itself. The postcolonial (study) agenda is very much on purpose, as what is hoped to be accomplished is to trigger further thinking in terms of instances, and references; from which a certain (problematic, incomplete) narrative can be reproduced here in this article.

The postcolonial study agenda

The study of postcolonialism, by definition, does not do 'firm' justice to the postcolonial. We are still struggling with the definition of the term itself. The study of postcolonialism is primarily characterized by a whole plethora of differing voices giving firm voice to issues left unaddressed, unnoticed, swept under the carpet, or simply evaded. The end result is also a very defunct, or with nothing ever quite (full) in progress. And thus was the roundtable held without a firm agenda, adding the objective that what we were coming together for was actually to determine what the agenda for the coming years should be.

And not just that, the sheer mention of a possible agenda already denoted something important and something that we were desperately trying to avoid: that one would be to continue the discussion. In a sense postcolonialism, in both theory and practice, has no agenda or agenda of its own. It has always come with a particular plan to steer ‘things’ in a certain direction, it has always been imbued with and layered with meaning. And thus we come together without an agenda, but certainly not without having done our homework.

In a Background Document (available on the IAS website) a brief history of postcolonialism (as a field of study) was provided, after which a number of in-depth analyses were made of a number of possible topics for future research and, of course, discussion. The final chapter of this document was titled ‘Not Yet a Conclusion’ and took the reader on a ‘postcard from another country’ through the Philippines, the Caribbean, or wherever.

The scene is fast on postcolonialism is still relatively new, and thus we are still thinking of it as something that is evolving and changing. In this sense, the postcolonial is very much on purpose, as what is hoped to be accomplished is to trigger further thinking in terms of instances, and references; from which a certain (problematic, incomplete) narrative can be reproduced here in this article.

The scenes are based on experiences and observations, no scholarly research was conducted and thus they are somewhat ‘anecdotal’, almost ‘entertaining’, in their description. But this is very much on purpose, as what is hoped to be accomplished by this, is to trigger further thinking in terms of instances, situations, and references, from which a certain (problematic, contested, colonial) legacy emerges that we need to think through and talk about and that could form the basis for a future research agenda.

An Dutch issue: what do we think about Jan Pieterszoon Coen?

The statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen (8 January 1587 – 27 September 1626) stands in the historic city centre of Hoorn (the Netherlands) has been contested for decades (fig. 2). Coen was an officer of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), even holding two terms as its governor-general of the Dutch East Indies. Most Dutch have grown up with thinking that Coen was a national hero, one that the Dutch should be proud of; a representative of their colonial past in de vrede (‘in strange lands’), bringing home considerable wealth. However, (local) newspapers have often reported on various protests and initiatives raising awareness as to the tyrannical and abuse ‘qualities’ of this so-called hero. As a young boy myself, having grown up in provincial Netherlands, the VOC (East India Company) and Jan Pieterszoon Coen was mostly understood as a nuisance, something that rather left-wing revolutionary (Socialist) Community felt the need to bring up, but which nobody else really seemed too bothered about.

Coen’s appetite for (rather gruesome) violence is what stands out most in the historic accounts of his Company’s days, in particular relating to his extremely violent enlistment of Dutch monopoly on the nutmeg and mace trade, leading to the massacre Banda (Arab, Indonesia). By the time Coen arrived in, what is now, Indonesia the Dutch had already been trying to enforce such a monopoly for more than twenty years. Indeed, this is why the Dutch launched the so-called ‘Adriaan’s campaign’ in 1600 to capture the remnant of the nutmeg and mace trade, which nobody else really seemed too bothered about.

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Exploring a new research agenda

What is this the colonial, yet it also implies an undefined (endless?) period, in which the past, present and future are inseparably connect-
ed. As the case of Jan Pieterzoon Coen clearly illustrates, this post-
tinction to represent a struggle – a struggle of coming to terms with – a struggle to understand what (what happened, what led us to come to here, what will we do now). It may even represent a struggle of struggles – of having to do something with ‘it’. Colonialism cannot (ever) simply be put to rest. The
fluence of colonialism, on both sides of the divide (colonizer vs. colonized), is always there, one way or the other, having shaped our present and influencing that what is yet to come.

Politics and business

Politically it often makes sense to contest colonial remnants simply for what they symbolize or, as is often the case, made to be
symbolize in current ‘daily life’. But the postcolonial often also simply means business. The romantic, slightly intellectual aura that continues to cling to the good old colonial days continues as a good money-maker. The colonial ‘style’ is more popular than ever before. A recent visit to Sri Lanka, for example, showed how much the colonial can be celebrated for its infinite imaginary qualities. Gin and tones at Caffe Face Hotel on Sunday afternoon, right before sundown, is something that not only attracts foreign visitors but many Sri Lankan couples and families as well (fig. 1 page 23). The old British guesthouses on route to ancient sites such as Anuradhapura, Sipiyga, and Pollonarawu, have all been refurbished, brought back to their illustrious style of days long gone by, and generating a feeling of what it must have been like back then (fig. 5). It left a Sri Lankan friend to ponder openly that perhaps colonialism was not such a big deal for Sri Lanka… Whether or not this is actually so is not why it is worth reproducing this little scene here; on paper; a scene that was characterized by a fine Pekoe tea, served in beautifully decorated fine white porcelain cups, by an impeccably dressed waiter who seemed to have stepped straight off the set of a Merchant Ivory film. It is to draw our attention to the way the colonial – and whatever it is supposed with ‘it’. Colonialism cannot (ever) simply be put to rest. The influence of colonialism, on both sides of the divide (colonizer vs. colonized), is always there, one way or the other, having shaped our present and influencing that what is yet to come.

This focus on postcolonialism

The following articles in this focus section on postcolonialism deal, each in their own way, with the meaning of colonial pasts in current contexts and debates, bringing to the fore new and interesting cases which hitherto have received no, or only marginal, attention. What is striking in their analyses is the continued relevance and importance of the colonial experience to the way the state, in a sense, reflects on itself, and uses and negotiates these experiences to fit a certain economic/political agenda. But the articles also raise awareness for colonial remnants (‘cultural heritage’) and their continued and shifting meaning to the inhabitants of formerly colonized countries. These articles do not pretend to have the final word on the direction postcolonial studies need to take, but they do provide an interesting insight not just into individual cases, but also into the changing nature of the study of postcolonialism itself. Increasingly, cultural heritage, colonial memories, state projects and transnational relations, shape postcolonial inquiries.

While Lung-chih Chang and Min-chie Kay Chiang focus on Taiwanese postcolonial identity – explored through Japanese colonial heritage sites – the focus in Marieke Bloemmergen and Martijn Eickhoff’s article is very simply one object: an opulently carved teakwood room-screen, which was used in the early eighteenth century to furnish the Council Room of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Batavia. In both cases it becomes clear that a detailed analysis of the shifting meaning that is attached to such heritage sites, or even just one object, can reveal a vast world of knowledge with regards to how people relate to and reflect on a certain colonial past and postcolonial present. Even more so, it unveils the changing dimensions of such relations and reflections bringing a certain dynamics to the postcolonial exploration that studies so far often seemed to lack.

Tharapai Than’s analysis of postcolonial Burma reveals how the country engaged in a project of Burmanization in order to ‘resurrect’ Burmese ‘lost culture’ and by doing so had to distinguish itself from what it considered foreign. While even foreign businesses participated in this project, clearly keeping business interests in mind, the goal of the project was to remove that what was considered not-Burmese and thus foreign. Thailand never ventured off into such a project, as it was so ‘very clearly’ never colonized. However, Rachel Harrison places some very apparent questions marks to this commonly held perception in her article. She refers to scholarly work that demonstrates the extent to which Siam was in fact, in several respects, semi-colonial. In addition, she also refers to work that has demonstrated how the assertion of control over peripheral areas of the Siamese state was even strategized towards the Bangkok elite by adopting aspects of colonial policy. Not only does Harrison argue that such power relations continue to manifest themselves in contemporary politico-cultural discourses of the urban elite over rural provinces, but this also connects to recent political protests in Bangkok.

While a Thai colonial past reads like an oxymoron, China’s colonial past is an easily forgotten one in light of the country’s recent successes. Zheng Wang’s article, however, makes perfectly clear that the notion of time – and perhaps the very recent memories of economic success – healing all wounds, is unfortunately wrong. Wang argues that although China is certainly no longer the weak and isolated state it once was, the Chinese have not really moved forward from what he describes as ‘their past humiliation’. He concludes in a way that would have befitted the 2011 roundtable on Postcolonial Dialogues: “What individuals and countries remember and what they choose to forget are telling indicators of their current values, perceptions, and even their aspirations.”

Michiel Baas is coordinator with the International Institute for Asian Studies. His work is mainly on migration, transna-
tionalism and globalization and more in particular on the rapidly growing and developing Indian middle class. In 2010 Anthem Press (London) published his PhD dissertation titled: Imagined Mobility. Migration and Transnationalism among Indian Students in Australia. The Indian edition of the book will come out in August 2012.
As we suggested in *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand* (co-edited with Peter A. Jackson, 2010), the study of Siam/Thailand has remained largely isolated from critical analysis inflected by postcolonial theory. Only a handful of Thai scholars have been drawn to this field of inquiry in recent years, among them the late Nopphorn Prachakul, professor of French literature at Bangkok’s Thammasat University. Nopphorn warned his readers in an introductory text on postcolonialism for Thai MA students against the standard knee-jerk reaction: “That’s not relevant to us. We Thai have never been anyone’s colony.” (Nopphorn, n.d., 156, quoted in Jackson, 2010, 38).

From my own perspective of engagement with contemporary Thai cultural studies and comparative literature, there are several key projects which suggest themselves as a logical progression from the ground laid by *The Ambiguous Allure of the West*. One is the task, currently near completion, of bringing to the fore new frames of theoretically engaged analysis in the discussion of Thai literature – both traditional and modern. See Disturbing Conventions: New Frames of Analysis in Thai Literary Studies (forthcoming). This edited collection draws together the work of a younger generation of Thai scholars, for the most part trained abroad in English or comparative literature, who have returned to work in the Thai academy and to consider Thai literary texts in ways more commonly defined as inflected by “Western” theory. See, for example, Suradech Chutudompant on cosmopolitanism and its limits; Janit Feangfu on the negotiation of rural and urban identities; Soison Sakultrak on deconstruction and paratexts; Lakkhana Punwanchai’s exploration of deliberately subversive feminist analytical perspectives; and Chusak Pattarakulavant’s feminist reading of persecution in a modern literary classic *The Judgement*. Their chapters deliberately “read literature against the grain”, to quote a phrase (in Thai, งมขมพน) made popular by the collection’s most acclaimed Thai literary analyst, Chusak Pattarakulavant, from his book of the same title, published in 2002. These contributions effectively move beyond the traditionalist, conservative concerns of the academy of the sort cautioned against by Nopphorn Prachakul in his promotion of postcolonial analytical frameworks for concerns which have, until relatively recently, foreclosed the use of “Western” theory in the study of Thai literature.

In order to move this argument along, the concept and definition of theory as “Western” requires critical analysis. As with the Ambiguous Allure project, Disturbing Conventions queries what is fully implied by the term “Western” theory in the cultural studies context. As Homi Bhabha reminds us, “Western” theory is itself neither static nor uncontested. It is also not beyond being able to deconstruct its own premises, as Bhabha’s work on the limitations of Western thinkers to engage meaningfully with cultural Otherness keenly communicates in “The Commitment to Theory” (2004, 46). And given the hybrid nature of all cultural identities which postcolonial critics such as Bhabha and Said (1979) highlight so effectively, how can “Western” theory fail to be in some sense relevant to the study of cultural production in Siam/Thailand given the country’s semi-colonial relations with the West?

The impact of such cultural hybrids is clearly exemplified by the intense links between the development of modern Thai prose fiction in the early years of the twentieth century and the popularity of Victorian literature among Siamese authors and readers in a context where translation, reproduction and reinvention were intensively and inextricably intertwined in the production of the earliest examples of Thai novels and short stories. Thissaeng Chauchut’s chapter on Siamese literary entanglements with the imperial West in Disturbing Conventions discusses this crucial cultural trait,
Much work remains to be done in subsequent conference papers, articles, and future books (and urgently so) to perform the necessary incisive analysis of Thailand's recent protest movements, from the angle of their engagement with popular cultural forms. Here is the theoretical input of Mikhail Bakhtin on carnival, Bhavha on "the location of culture" and the complete edition of Derrida's seminars and lectures recently made available in English translation by Geoffrey Bennington (2009 and 2011) and provide fertile inspiration as a starting point from which to develop deeper understandings of the postcolonial significance of popular protest in contemporary Thailand.

Perhaps this is an intellectual project for which Nopphorn Prachakul, to whom the edited collection Disturbing Conventions is dedicated - might have had some sympathy. Nopphorn's piece in the volume, posthumously translated into English, deals with issues of ethnic culture in the modern novel Luk Iuan (A Child of the North East), by Khampun Buthawh. Nopphorn's is a timely reminder of the complexity of the relationship between the Isan (North Eastern) regional identity and its relevant others, be they Chinese, Vietnamese or (Bangkok) Thai.

Dr Rachel Harrison is a Reader of Thai Cultural Studies at the South East Asia Department of SOAS in London, where she teaches courses relating to Thai culture, literature, cinema and gender studies (rh6@soas.ac.uk).

The raw political struggles that have played out in Bangkok's street protests over the past five years reveal how demonstrators from Thailand's rural North and North Eastern regions express their sense of disenfranchisement through distinct cultural forms. Much work remains to be done in subsequent conference papers, articles, and future books (and urgently so) to perform the necessary incisive analysis of Thailand's recent protest movements, from the angle of their engagement with popular cultural forms. Here is the theoretical input of Mikhail Bakhtin on carnival, Bhavha on "the location of culture" and the complete edition of Derrida's seminars and lectures recently made available in English translation by Geoffrey Bennington (2009 and 2011) and provide fertile inspiration as a starting point from which to develop deeper understandings of the postcolonial significance of popular protest in contemporary Thailand.

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The island of Taiwan, formerly known as Formosa, is part of the chain of islands lying along the Asian continent in the Pacific Ocean. Originally inhabited by Austronesian indigenous peoples, Taiwan became a Chinese immigrant frontier in the seventeenth century and has since witnessed different regimes, including the Dutch (1624-61), the Koxinga (1662-83), the Qing (1684-1894) and the Japanese empire (1895-1945). Unlike many former colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America, Taiwan's decolonization process after the Second World War was first disrupted by the Chinese Civil War and then the Cold War.

Controversy over national identity was fueled in the 1990s, with debates either for Chinese reuniﬁcation or Taiwan independence, which split into different political alliances (i.e., Pan-Blue vs. Pan-Green camps). The domestic debate over constitutional reforms and Taiwanese nationalism was complicated by the changing cross-strait relations in the course of the island's growing economic ties with mainland China.

As the result of democratization of knowledge, in post-martial law Taiwan, the trend towards indigenization in the post-martial law era. In 1994, the KMT government under Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui promulgated the Integrated Community-Building Programme aiming for the creation of a new "living community". This new identity narrative of a "living community" was a strategy to incorporate ethnic groups, particularly the Chinese 1949 immigrants, with the Taiwanese people and local identity narratives.

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Rethinking postcolonialism and decolonization in Taiwan

Between international diplomacy and cultural tourism: situating Taiwan’s Japanese heritage in the global sphere
Symbolizing the search for a new collective identity in the post-martial law era, Taiwan’s cultural heritage movement reflects the changing state-society dynamics since the 1990s as well as the island’s political and cultural struggles in the post-Cold War world. Meanwhile, the lack of international recognition and the impact of the tourist industry offer interesting cases for us to better understand the heritageization of Japanese sites in contemporary Taiwan, from the viewpoint of globalization.

The global order was reconfigured after the dissolution of the Cold War structure in the 1990s. In addition to national schemes, there emerged new regional and local heritage projects. Following UNESCO’s emphasis on cultural diversity and universal value, many Asian sites have now been designated as world heritage. Once seen as embarrassing legacies, former colonial sites have been re-interpreting Japanese colonial heritage in Taiwan, as a result the transformation of former colonial sites and the quest for a new identity became the key feature in the era of localization in post-martial law Taiwan. The bond between memory and place indeed inspired grassroots initiatives of conservation and triggered a sense of community.

Heritage, memory and identity: rethinking decolonization in postcolonial Taiwan
Taiwan is a distinctive case in the issue of colonial heritage. Instead of being a passive partner in a so-called mutual relationship, the island has been an active actor in the heritageization of former colonial sites. The struggle over memory and the quest for a new identity became the key feature in the era of localization in post-martial law Taiwan. The bond between memory and place indeed inspired grassroots initiatives of conservation and triggered a sense of community.

The new collective identity is anchored in the multifaceted locality, which comprises dimensions of civil awareness, social welfare, environmental concern, and economic improvement. The two issues of ‘heritage’ and ‘locality’ are now awaiting new symbols of localism and grassroots activism aiming for a better future.

If heritage can mean more than political games, then the significance may lie in a better, equal platform for negotiations, within which local communities are respected and able to participate in the heritage-making process for the local community. This effort helps to explore and engage the once silenced, and to provide a platform for negotiation and meaning reformation. The memory project that works at a deeper and more nuanced level than that of the state and government, and continuously engages multiple actors of a local network, these new cultural heritages also become a field of empowerment.

Min-Chin Kay Chiang is a new Associate Fellowships for Doctoral Candidates in the Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. He has been postdoctoral fellow at Boston University, Cambridge University and Heidelberg University. His research interests include social and cultural history, comparative colonialism and contemporary historiography in Taiwan and East Asia (fkay@gt.e.sinica.edu.tw).

Lung-chih Chang is Associate Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. He has been postdoctoral fellow at Heidelberg University, Cambridge University and Heidelberg University. His research interests include social and cultural history, comparative colonialism and contemporary historiography in Taiwan and East Asia (fchang@gate.sinica.edu.tw).
This essay focuses on an impressive, almost 3 meter high, opulently carved teakwood room-screen with a human figure (probably Perseus) and two dragons, made by Chinese craftsmen in Java in the early eighteenth century, to furnish the Council Room of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Batavia (fig. 1). We will follow this object's travels through time and space. The aim is to gain insight into the multiple layers of heritage formation in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

At the V&A the screen illustrated, in the first place, that celebrated the founding of the city of Batavia in 1619, it hosted the exhibition of the VOC-furniture as a typical Dutch-colonial national style in the Museum Fatahillah in Jakarta, to the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) in London, where it was to be one of the masterpieces in the great exhibition 1620-1800 Baroque: Style in the Age of Magnificence (fig. 5). This did not go by unnoticed in the Netherlands.

In 2009, the teakwood screen, once a part of the VOC regalia after the demolition of this castle in 1809, bought by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1620, made headlines in the Dutch press. That year the screen was shipped from Indonesia to the United Kingdom; it travelled as a loan from the Museum Fatahillah, the historical museum in Jakarta, to the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) in London, where it was to be one of the masterpieces in the great exhibition 1620-1800 Baroque: Style in the Age of Magnificence (fig. 5). This did not go by unnoticed in the Netherlands.

In the Museum Fatahillah in Jakarta, visitors can see traces of this colonial style. Although the informational text accompanying the screen is mainly factual, it also mentions that the young man depicted on the screen has "rather short legs". This anatomical assessment originates from an observation provided by the architect Frederiks de Haan, in his book Ruimte en Bateijn: That celebrated the founding of the city of Batavia by the Dutch in 1619. De Haan's negative appraisal of the main figure on the screen may be explained by his conviction that it had been developed by a peripheral and mixed culture that was familiar with European standards only through second hand sources.

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From VOC-furniture with primarily a representational function, via Chinese and European influences, to a representation of a World Style; the travels of the VOC Council Room screen show us how and the same object has taken on different manifestations in time and in space and how it played many roles in relation to processes of identification – and it did so within and outside colonial situations, and before and after decolonisation.

By giving this specific case more background we ought to look at the process in which a specific corpus of material culture from early modern time came to be recognised and canonised as typical for the VOC in the Dutch East-Indies and Indonesia. The main elements of this corpus were: forts, country-houses, city centres (especially: houses, churches and grave stones) and furniture. Here we have only space to focus on a few aspects of this corpus. Since the end of the nineteenth century, and through the interaction of connoisseurs in the colony and the mother country, and of external parties, like the specialists from the South Kensington Museum in London and the Kunstgewerbe Museum in Berlin, the factory-company furniture as a typical Dutch-colonial national style in the Dutch East-Indies came to be defined. In the accompanying processes of identification, we can trace a mix of civic Batavian colonial and wider ‘Indisch’ nationalism, and Dutch imperial nationalism at work.

As stated above, the appropriation of the material culture of the early colonial past was problematic for such a long time in the Netherlands and the Dutch East-Indies, because of its hybridity. The character of this furniture, however, only became an object of discussion from the moment that curators of the Museum of the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences in Batavia started to consider collecting the furniture of the Company's era at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1898, the Baroque collection of C. J. Overvoorde published his essay 'Verzamelingen van oude Indische Meubelen' (Something about Old-Indies furniture) in the illustrated journal Elsevier. He described the style as a mixture of baroque, Dutch, and Indonesian elements, whereas Chinese craftsman often carved the objects. However, he emphasised: "For the Netherlands and for the Netherlands-Indies this furniture is of national importance." In subsequent years we see how this furniture transformed into a Dutch artefact. This happened in the process of collecting, publishing catalogues and organising exhibitions. In 1907, in the Dutch East-Indies, the Museum of the Batavian Society opened the 'Company Room'; and in 1919, in celebration of the founding of Batavia in 1619, it hosted the exhibition ‘Oud-Batavie’. In the Netherlands, the city of The Hague organised the exhibition Oud Indische Meubelen (Old Indies Furniture) in 1901, and in 1919 the Municipal Museum in Amsterdam exhibited this furniture in a comparable way. The 'nationalisation' of this furniture was completed in 1939 when Van der Vossen published his elaborate Het Hollandsche Koloniale bouwen (Dutch colonial baroque furniture).

When we compare the categorisation Overvoorde used in 1898, with those of Van der Vossen in 1939, we see a clear development: ‘oude-Indisch’ (Old-Indies) became ‘Hollandsche koloniale’ (Dutch-colonial). This nationalisation of an aspect of the VOC culture is not exceptional: the first edition of Van der Walls book was in 1919, hosted the exhibition os Old-Batavie. In the Netherlands, the city of The Hague organised the exhibition Oud Indische Meubelen (Old Indies Furniture) in 1901, and in 1919 the Municipal Museum in Amsterdam exhibited this furniture in a comparable way. The ‘nationalisation’ of this furniture was completed in 1939 when Van der Vossen published his elaborate Het Hollandsche Koloniale bouwen (Dutch colonial baroque furniture).

We see a similar process with regard to the archaeology of VOC-forts. In 1912 the Dutch art-historian and archaeological specialist J.C. Overvoorde wrote about his travels through America, Africa and Asia in 1910/11, in order to inventory what he called the ‘Monumenten van Nederlandersch Stamm’ (Monuments of the Dutch ‘tribe’). Overvoorde concluded that the colonial government of the Dutch East-Indies had strongly neglected the ‘stone archive’ of the VOC-time, and that it had an obligation to rescue this archive. Since the Hindu-monuments were already the object of state supported restorations, the time had now arrived for the government to turn its attention to the monuments of the ‘Hollandsche stam’ (the Dutch tribe). To Overvoorde such a VOC-heritage policy was important, because, in his eyes, it could strengthen the ties between the people who for many generations had lived in the Dutch Indies, with those in the ‘motherland’. Van der Vossen, who published his ‘De Nederlandse oudheden in de Molukken’ (Dutch antiquities on the Moluccas) in 1928, would, however, point to another political meaning of the VOC-past: the ‘uncivilized or unethical activities of the early colonials on the Moluccan islands. While he agreed that many people could see this as a sullied page of VOC history, he in the end emphasised that the company also formed the ‘foundation’ of our colonial authority.15
shared or conflicting interests. In other words, ‘shared heritage’ glosses over the supra-local and transnational dimensions of heritage, or those processes of identification that go beyond the boundaries of states and empire.

Marike Bloemern is a researcher at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies in Leiden (KITLV). Her research interests include the political dynamics of knowledge production, as well as post-colonial policing, in (post-)colonial Indonesia in a widening and trans-Asin context (bloemern@kitlv.nl)

Martijn Eickhoff is a cultural historian, specialized in the scholarly activities in dictatorial or colonial settings and the historical culture of times of war and regime change. He works as a researcher at the NIOD - Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam and is lecturer at the Radboud University Nijmegen (RfN) (m.eickhoff@ned.uu.nl)

After decolonisation, the material remains of the VOC-past would gain new meanings, both in the Netherlands and Indonesia. In Indonesia, the Lembaga Kebudayaan Indonesia (Indonesian Culture Council) started the colonial furniture collection in their deposits.14 This was the former Museum of the Batavian State, which was handed over to the Indonesian government in 1962, then becoming the Museum Pusat (Central Museum), and subsequently, in 1978, the Museum Nasional (National Museum). But nowadays the VOC-furniture is on display again in Jakarta, most notably in the Museum Fatahillah (located in the former Batavian city hall) that was opened in 1974 and is dedicated to the history of the city region.

In the Netherlands, perspectives on Company-furniture also adapted to the new postcolonial circumstances. The foundation organised the exhibition ‘Wonen in de Wijde Wereld, een expo over meubels in de voormalige Nederlandse koloniën Indonesië en Sri Lanka’ (Franswag 1985) 6-8. In Indonesia, the Lembaga Kebudayaan Indonesia (Indonesian Institute of Cultural Affairs) can serve as a good example here. In 1963/4 this exhibition depicted colonial society as multi-ancestors overseas’ with the help of texts, objects and drawings, paintings and photographs, and colonial furniture.

Although the exhibition depicted colonial society as multi-ethnic, the focus was still on Dutchmen overseas. Nationalism – common in those early Cold War Years – was almost hidden; one of the initiators concluded that ‘this colonial past makes us “more world citizens than most of the other Europeans”.’15

It is tempting to compare this category of European world citizens to the category of Baroque as a World Style, as brought forward by the V&A in London. The description of the screen from the VOC Head Quarters in Batavia, as an example of Baroque as a World Style, certainly could fit in the self-image of the V&A as a centre of the world. The V&A description differs, however, from the Dutch appropriations of this VOC culture as typical for the Dutch Overseas, and as a specific Dutch way – rooted in VOC-history – of being a world citizen, because it leaves space for alternative ways of regarding the corpus of material culture of the VOC. And it is at this last point where there is a significant link with contemporary discussions on heritage politics towards the material remains of colonial pasts.

In recent years we have seen a shift from the use of the term ‘colonial heritage’ to ‘shared heritage’.16 The intention was to go beyond the colonial hierarchy and surpass (post)colonial sensibilities when heritage organisations in the former colonised and colonizing countries collaborated. The hope was for the possibility to manage ‘sensitive heritage’ on a more equal base. Ironically, however, ‘shared heritage’ often has the effect of disregarding still-existing hierarchies and inequalities. Our research, for example, when we followed the travels of the VOC screen, made us increasingly aware that the notion is problematic in itself, since it implies that the selected forms of ‘shared heritage’ can only be estimated, valued, conserved, etc., within the framework of two postcolonial states and their

Notes
2 Hulkm Verwey, Inrichting Batavisch Genootschap 8 maart 1868, 19.
4 Bernard Hulman, ‘Barok was de eerste globale stijl voor kunst. Tentoonstelling Victoria & Albertmuseum werpt nieuw licht op de barokke stijl’, ANR, 24-6-2009.
5 J. Terwen-de Loos, Het Nederlands koloniale meubel: Studie over meubel en de vooroorlogse Nederlands koloniale vloei van de VOC in Java en Sri Lanka (Franswag 1985) 6-8.
7 Gert Jan van Toorrell, ‘Overdacht de verouderd soort soberheid’, De Volkskundist, 10-4-2009.
8 F. de Haan, Oud Bataviaans Platenalbum drit II (Bandoeng 1935) C23.
11 M. Serrurier ten Kate, De Compagnie’s Kamer van het Museum van het Batavisch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen (Batavia 1907), L. van Vouren, Catalogus der historische tentoonstelling ter gelegenheid der herdenking van het driehonderd jaar bestaan (Nieuwvdeen 1919).
13 J.W. Ifferman, Catalogus der tentoonstelling ter herdenking van het driehonderd jaar bestaan van Batavia, georganiseerd in het Oudheidkundig Museum in Amsterdam, juni-juli 1899 (Amsterdam 1919).
14 V. de van de Wall, Het Hollandsche koloniale barokmeubel. Bijdrage tot de kennis van het ebbenhouten meubel omstreeks het midden der XVIIIe en het begin der XVIIIe eeuw (Antwerpen 1899).
15 V. de van de Wall, Het Hollandsche koloniale barokmeubel. Bijdrage tot de kennis van het ebbenhouten meubel omstreeks het midden der XVIIIe en het begin der XVIIIe eeuw (Antwerpen 1899).
17 MAR. De Nederlandse oudheden in de Molukken (‘S-Gravenhage 1928).
19 W.P. Cossham, ‘‘Indelings’’. Women in the Wilde Wereld, een Tentoonstelling van de Stichting Cultuurgeschiedenis van de Nederlanders Oversea – Troepenmuseum, Amsterdam (1964) 23-12, there 12.
“Never forget national humiliation”

While the whole world is talking about China’s rise, all focus has been placed on understanding China’s present policies and future orientations. However, very little attention is still devoted to examining China’s colonial past and how the post-colonial consciousness affects present China. For many people, especially those from the countries of China’s “ex-colonial aggressors,” the notion that time heals all wounds is often taken for granted. Many also assume that China’s recent successes have provided healing for its historical wounds. Unfortunately, this assumption is wrong.

Zheng Wang

OVER THE PAST THREE DECADES, it is true that China has undergone a tremendous transformation; no longer weak and isolated, it is now a strong state that has the power to impact global affairs. However, the Chinese have not really moved forward from their past humiliation. Chinese historical consciousness of the so-called Bainian guochi (a century of national humiliation) still plays a powerful role, affecting Chinese politics, foreign relations, and national psyche. Bainian guochi is a term the Chinese have used to refer to the period from the outbreak of the first Opium War in 1839 until the end of World War II in 1945. In this century, China was attacked, bullied, and torn asunder by imperialists.

In fact, China’s new accomplishments and growing confidence have actually often served to strengthen this historical consciousness. They have, at times, served to activate, not assuage, people’s memory of the past humiliation. This is why it is very important for today’s people to understand the Chinese historical consciousness. China’s rise should not be understood through a single lens like economics or military growth, but rather viewed through a more comprehensive lens which takes national identity and domestic discourse into account. In this article, I will report on Chinese discourse of its colonial past by introducing a sculpture, a textbook and a poem.

Never forget: a sculpture

Museums and public monuments have played very important roles in the formation of a national memory and identity in different societies. Today, the Chinese people are living in a forest of monuments, all of which are used to represent the past to its citizens.

September 18 Historical Museum was built in Shenyang, a city in northeast China, in 1991. 18 September 1931 is an important date in the Chinese collective memory. On this day, the Japanese army, which had been occupying parts of Manchuria since the first Sino-Japanese War, launched a surprise attack on Shenyang and began its full-scale invasion of China. Within a week, the Japanese had conquered most of Manchuria. According to Chinese historical narrative, the fourteen years from 1931 to 1945 under Japanese occupation were the darkest period of Chinese history and the most painful memory for many Chinese.

To commemorate this incident, the Chinese constructed this museum, located on the exact site where the attack occurred in 1931. As depicted in figure 1, the outer appearance of the museum depicts a large, very impressive sculpture designed to look like an open calendar. This calendar is inscribed with the date 18 September, as the Chinese hoped that through this particular construction, future generations would not forget this historic date. The sculpture serves as a permanent reminder of this humiliating piece of history.

On the other side of the museum, a huge bronze bell engraved with the four Chinese characters Wuwang Guochi (勿忘國恥), meaning “Never Forget National Humiliation”, has been erected. In figure 2, a group of students are listening to a senior citizen, a victim of the Japanese invasion, telling her stories. Not far from the bell, there is a huge marble stone inscribed on former Chinese President Jiang Zemin’s dedication “Never forget September 18” (Wuwang 9-18).

Although people all over the world cherish their own memorials, the special effort made by the Chinese government to construct memory sites and use them for ideological reeducation is unparalleled. As part of the contents of the “Patriotic Education Campaign” beginning in 1991, Beijing required local governments of all levels to establish “patriotic education bases.” Visiting these memory sites has become a regular part of school curriculum.

Although people all over the world cherish their own memorials, the special effort made by the Chinese government to construct memory sites and use them for ideological reeducation is unparalleled.
Postcolonial consciousness and China’s rise

Lest you forget: a textbook

On 5 April 2005, the Japanese Education Ministry approved a new junior high school textbook titled Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho (new history textbook), written by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform. This move ignited immediate outrage among some Asian countries, especially China and South Korea. Critics have charged that this organization has been revising history textbooks to minimize Japan’s culpability for its wartime actions.

According to critics, the textbook provides a distorted and self-serving account of Japan’s colonial and wartime activities. For example, you will find no mention of the “Nanjing Massacre.” Indeed, there is only one sentence that refers to this event: “they [the Japanese troops] occupied that city in December.” The editors of the book added a footnote here, which makes the first, and only, direct reference to the Nanjing/Nanking Incident: “At this time, many Chinese soldiers and civilians were killed or wounded by Japanese troops (the Nanking Incident).” Documentary evidence has raised doubts about the actual number of victims claimed by the incident. The debate continues even today.”

On 9 April 2005, an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 Chinese demonstrators marched to the Japanese Embassy in Beijing, throwing stones at the facility. The next day, 20,000 protesters demonstrated in two cities in southern Guangdong Province (see figure 3), and protesters attacked a Japanese department store in Shenzhen. Two weeks after the approval of the textbook, anti-Japanese protests broke out in more than ten Chinese cities. In each case, protesters chanted slogans and burned Japanese flags. People carried banners with slogans reading: “Japan must apologize to China,” “Never forget national humiliation,” and “Boycott Japanese goods.”

Anybody who has visited the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall will have a better understanding of why the Chinese are so angry over this Japanese textbook. A huge stone wall at the entrance of the Memorial Hall has the death toll inscribed as “Victims: 300,000.” The word “victim” is engraved in Chinese, English, and Japanese. The decision to make this figure recognizable in three different languages indicates the Chinese insistence on the number of casualties. Visitors will also notice that another monument at the memorial depicts the same number of 300,000 casualties, but in eleven different languages (see figure 4). These two monuments are testaments to historical controversy, as they highlight how a group of people chooses to remember their historical narrative.

One may wonder why history education and history textbooks in particular are important enough to fight over. For countries like China and Korea, while they teach their younger generation to never forget their traumatic past, they cannot accept their “ex-colonial aggressors” hiding this part of history from their own youth. History textbooks thus become a source of conflict in East Asia.

What do you want from us: a poem

In an article in Forbes Magazine in 2008, Lee Kuan Yew, the former Premier of Singapore, quoted a Chinese poem (see left). Reading this poem, Lee, as one of the few world leaders knowledgeable of both Western and Eastern culture, said that he was glad to see “the gulf in understanding” between Chinese and Westerners. This poem illustrates the obvious Chinese frustration at not being understood, and the great perceptional divide between Chinese and Westerners.

The poem is striking in its simplicity in understanding history. Some statements are also based on myths. For example, the phrase, “Sick Man of Asia,” is actually the Chinese people’s imagined perception, as it was intended to utilize the description of the weak and corrupt condition of the Qing Empire, with no actual reference to the health or physique of the Chinese people. However, this anonymous Chinese poem represents a typical postcolonial discourse. It has been widely distributed and discussed in Internet chat rooms, and many conclude that this poem aptly reflects Chinese sentiment. Westerners may perceive the incidents described in this poem as independent and incomparable events that happened over an extended period of time. Many Chinese, however, view these events as current, and feel closely connected with what happened one hundred years ago. The “century of humiliation” has provided the Chinese with plenty of historical analogies to use, and they often draw parallels between current and historical events. The legacy of history has provided the Chinese with the lens that they use to interpret current issues. Without understanding this special postcolonial sentiment, it is impossible for the West to fully understand current Chinese behaviors and its future intentions.

“Never Forget”: national ideas

According to Jeffrey Legro, many societies have “dominant ideas” or “national ideas,” which he defined as “the collective beliefs of societies and organizations about how to act.” I believe that Chinese people’s historical consciousness of their colonial past is in fact a national belief that China must “never forget national humiliation” are the dominant ideas in China’s public rhetoric. National ideas are difficult to change, as they become ingrained in public rhetoric and bureaucratic procedures that make them resilient like all traditions that are institutionally entrenched. These ideas often unconsciously but profoundly influence people’s perceptions and actions. One cannot understand China’s current situation without knowing China’s past. Historical memory is the most useful key to unlocking the inner mystery of the Chinese, as it is the prime raw material for constructing China’s national identity.

Looking at historical memory is not just a look at the past; instead, uncovering historical memory is a progressive look forward in understanding where China is trying to go. If we want to understand China’s intentions we must first understand the building blocks of Chinese intentions. Who we think we are defines what we think we want. Understanding Chinese history and looking at China’s identity from this perspective can give insight into who China is seeking to become as it makes its rapid rise. For example, while people in the world are talking about China’s rise, the Chinese like to use another word: rejuvenation (fuxing). By choosing the word “rejuvenation” (复兴), the Chinese emphasize their determination to wipe out past humiliations and to restore themselves to their former glory. The word “rejuvenation” is deeply rooted in China’s historical memory.

For the purpose of understanding a country, the orthodox research approach focuses on collecting political, socioeconomic, and security data, and then conducting macro-analysis of institutions, policies, and decision-making. Such an approach, however, has critical limitations for understanding the deep structure and dynamics of the country. I would suggest that to understand a country, one should visit the country’s memory sites and primary schools, and read their history textbooks. A nation’s history is not merely a recounting of its past; what individuals and countries remember and what they choose to forget are telling indicators of their current values, perceptions, and even their aspirations.

Zeng Wang is associate professor at the John C. Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations, Seton Hall University, in New Jersey, United States. His forthcoming book “Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations” will be published by Columbia University Press in 2012.

Notes
Burma gained independence on 4 January 1948. Immediately after independence, Burmese media launched a campaign to ‘resurrect’ the country’s ‘lost’ culture. Bamakhit newspaper argued that the building of a new nation must be based upon customs, religion, and traditions that were indigenous.1 The new Burma needed to be built upon the foundations of Buddhism and cultures unique to the country. Indeed Burma not only had to recover its own customs, but also needed to distinguish, with the aim of discarding, cultures that were foreign to the country. In this article, I discuss how the (British-owned) Burmah Oil Company (BOC) used ‘authentically’ Burmese images in postcolonial Burma to promote their products.

The wording suggests that the two industries share the same interests – the interests of Burma’s rice industry and therefore the interests of the Burmese themselves. The title of the advertisement, “Burma’s Grace”, is also striking, promoting BOC alongside a happy farm girl as Burma’s grace. Whether the creative idea behind the ad was the imagination of the BOC,2 or the artist himself raised another question. The ad seems to have responded to the popular message, at least in the media, to promote Burmese culture and traditions. By using the innocent image of the farm girl as well as linking the company’s interest closely to Burma’s interests, BOC was also able to circumscribe a rising tide of economic nationalism in the 1950s, during which foreign owned companies and foreigners were blamed for Burma’s economic woes.

Another advertisement by BOC (figure 2), using a female wearer, also captured the postcolonial imagination, i.e., to reclaim the Burmese culture. The second ad reads: “As Amarapura near Mandalay distributes delicate and beautiful (like formations of clouds) silk fabric, BOC, from centrally located Mandalay, distributes kerosene, petroleum, engine oil and candles nationwide including Chin, Kachin, Pa-lao and Shan.” In this ad, BOC provokes the cultural reminiscence of the last Kingdom of Konbaung – Mandalay – and even included different minority groups in its ad. The title of the ad is the same as the first one: “Burma’s Grace”. These two ads were both part of BOC’s advertising campaign in 1953. More research is needed to ascertain who commissioned the BOC advertisement campaign and what the rationale was behind these “Burmanized” ads.

After independence, a reverse cultural reclamation process started taking shape. During the early colonial days, the Burmese saw the British flag substituting the Burmese King’s peacock banner in official buildings; missionary schools and Anglo-vernacular schools instead of monasteries becoming the centres of learning; Chinese and Indians catering the needs of the Burmese; Indian labourers cleaning the streets of Rangoon and toiling across the agricultural districts – these scenes dominated the Burmese minds from 1824 (the end of the first Anglo-Burmese war, after which Arakan and Tenasserim were annexed to India as part of the British Empire) to independence in 1948.

Perhaps the government felt that strong counter-cultural forces were needed to help instil a sense of ownership, not least the cultural ownership, of the country. And many newspapers and magazines rallied around this cause. The commercial world seemed to have joined this cause, as shown by the adverts of the BOC company. Independence also reignited hostility towards foreign culture, and heralded the reconstruction of racial and class barriers.

MANY NATIONALISTS UNDER THE NU-LED GOVERNMENT appear to have felt that now that the British were gone and resistance against imperialism was over, only the battle against ideologies that threatened the Burmese way of life could unite the different political groups and the people in general. Indeed, public reformers voiced their concern that since the physical enemy, that is the colonial government, was gone, the people would relax and could be taken by surprise by the moral enemy, that is modernity.3 The physical challenge that had dominated the struggle against the diminishing British presence in the period 1945-48 was now substituted by an ideological struggle against Western moral influence.

One of Burma’s finest poets and writers, Zawgyi, has argued that during colonialism, some Burmese regarded their culture as the only identity that the British could not stifle, and therefore a determination to defend and promote Burma’s cultural distinctiveness inspired nationalist literature.4 Such a determination continues in postcolonial Burma. And the tendency to promote Burmese culture spills over to the commercial world. Many businesses – both local and foreign – began to use ‘uniquely’ Burmese symbols and pictures to represent and promote their goods.

The advertisement (figure 1) promotes different types of oils from Burmah Oil Company, and the advertisement appeared in Bamakhit, a Rangoon-based newspaper, in 1953. Using the sketch of a female farmer or Bamakhit wearing a traditional bamboo-woven raincoat (pa-tha), the company not only ties its business to the main economic sector of the country, i.e., agriculture, but it also ties its image to the traditional, hardworking and innocent symbol of rural Burma: a farm girl.

The ad reads “Burma’s rice industry and our oil distribution industry are always interconnected. As kerosene is used for lighting on the farm, our engine oil and lubricating oil are used by the rice mills and rice cargo ships.” Unlike the rice industry, the oil industry is essentially the preserve of European interests,5 and to promote the British company’s interests with an entirely Burmese image, including terms promoting friendship, was a clever promotional tactic of BOC.

The commercial world seemed to have joined this cause, as shown by the adverts of the BOC company. Independence also reignited hostility towards foreign culture, and heralded the reconstruction of racial and class barriers.

The new Burmese, women in particular, were branded opportunists and exploiters. A vision was promoted of a society that was economically self-sufficient, with natives enjoying the fruits of their hard work. It was also a vision of a country that was culturally independent, promoted especially by nationalist writers who strove to inculcate the same vision in their readers. To such writers, Western culture was not needed to ‘modernize’ Burma, since the country had its own ways to participate in modernity. A new nationalist movement was embodied in the progress of ‘Burmanization’, undertaken by the state. BOC advertisements clearly showed that foreign businesses participated in this ‘Burmanization’ project, perhaps under the threat of losing sales and revenues if they could not attract state support, and more importantly, Burmese customers.

Dr Tharapi Than is a Teaching Fellow and Lector in Business at SOAS. Her PhD was entitled Work, Fighters and Prostitutes: Women and Burma’s Modernity, 1942-1962. She is currently preparing her first monograph on the social history of Burmese women, and is the co-founder and pro-bono director of Link Emergency and Development (LEAD), a Burmese charity based in Rangoon.

Notes
1 Bamakhit, 13 July 1955, p. 3.
2 Bamakhit, 13 August 1956, p. 3.
5 In the mid 1950s, the British and Europeans owned only 60% of the company before it was completely nationalized by the Burma Socialist Programme Party Government, led by Ne Win. In 1963.
6 The initials B.K. at the lower right (first ad) and left (second ad) hand corners of the ads, suggest that the artist for the ad series could have been Kapy, one of the well-known artists trained in Paris and Pennsylvania. He was well-known for his paintings of jotte and life histories of Buddhas. BOC could not have commissioned a better artist to capture the Burmese culture in arts, again suggesting that the company thought carefully of making ‘Burma’ and ‘Burmese’ the overriding message of their ads, promoting their ‘Burmese-friendly’ image more than their products.
7 A columnist of Bamakhit argued that every Buddhist Burmese woman should scrutinize her lifestyle closely, and by doing so, pay respect to their religion, custom and traditions. Bamakhit, 10 October 1955, p. 3.
NEW MEDIA, OLD MEDIA?

We asked our audience how they stay up-to-date on developments in their fields of expertise (fig. 5), and through which media they know IIAS, by activity (fig. 6). Although the use of social media is not yet widespread amongst Asianists, we envision more use of these platforms in the near future, which is why we also publish all our institutional news through the most popular social media platforms. We have created separate Facebook pages and groups for different IIAS programmes and initiatives, such as News Asia Books, ICAS, our Summer Programmes and research networks.

Interesting fact: most of our Facebook friends live in Indonesia. Please also join us on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Not only to read what we have to say, but also to talk to us and our network.

RELEVANCE AND RATING

Our perceived relevance to Asian studies is perhaps the most important of gauges (fig. 9). It is our aim and continuous ambition to be relevant for individual scholars and research communities worldwide, not only in Europe. We also asked respondents to rate our academic services. The percentage of our audience that rates us, per activity, as good or excellent gives us a clear indication of where we need to improve (fig. 8).

Overall, IIAS is best known for its quarterly publication, The Newsletter, and for the large number of conferences and seminars it organises. The survey has made it clear that we, however, need to advertise our fellowship programme, research networks, publication series and outreach activities more actively, and to a much wider audience.

OUTER CLUSTERS, OUR STRATEGY

Last year we started channeling all our research activities through three thematic clusters: Asian Cities, Global Asia, and Asian Heritages. While it is still a relatively new development, we were encouraged to see that many of our audience members are aware of our research clusters (fig. 7). Our future communication efforts will nevertheless be geared towards the further branding of these clusters. Find out more at www.iias.nl/research.
Never Forget National Humiliation


Never Forget National Humiliation

In the wake of the Tiananmen Square crackdown of 1989, popular sentiment turned toward anti-imperial nationalism despite the internally-driven, anti-dictatorship democratic movements of the 1980s, and China has shown more assertion toward the United States and Japan in matters of foreign policy, while, at the same time, acting relatively conciliatory toward smaller countries in conflict.

Offering an explanation for these unusual events, Zheng Wang follows the communist government’s ideological reeducation of the public through the exploitation of China’s humiliating modern history. Beginning in the early 1990s, a national “Patriotic Education Campaign” relentlessly portrayed China as the victim of foreign imperialist interference. From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, the narrative goes, outside forces have attacked, bullied, and torn China apart, while, at the same time, acting relatively conciliatory toward smaller countries in conflict.

There are few names among academic journals focused on Asia as rich in history and as evocative as Pacific Affairs. We explore contemporary issues that face a complex and interdependent Asia. Our international editorial board ensures articles are edited to the highest standard. Pacific Affairs’ book reviews are a must for any busy scholar or librarian to keep abreast of the latest literature in the field.

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Rumah Abu Han, a historic ancestral house in Surabaya

More than a decade after the fall of Soeharto in 1998, with the waning of political discriminatory policy and cultural bias against Chinese Indonesians, a number of films dealing with the issue of Chinese Indonesian culture and experience have been publicly released.

Kathleen Azali


TO NAME A FEW, we have Ge Bao Kin (Nia Dinata, 2002), Babi Buta yang Ingin Terbang (Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly, Edwin, 2008), The Anniversaries (Ariani Darmawana, 2006), Anak Nego Bencol Nego (Dragons Begot Dragons, Arani Darmawana, 2006). A Trip to the Wound (Edwin, 2007), Sugaharti Holm (Ariani Darmawana, 2008), and Ciel(Toy) (Sarmima Smanjutak, 2009). These films tell the Chinese migration integration of “Chineseness”, the dynamics of Chinese discrimination and assimilation, usually through the narrations of their ideas, experiences, dialogues and ideas. Compared to other ancestral houses in Indonesia. Due to the difficulties in screening them through mainstream cinema, most of them are screened in festivals and local communities.

Rumah Abu Han (The Han’s Ancestral House) documentary, then, is noteworthy for retelling the stories of Chinese assimilation and integration within its surrounding environment and communities by focusing on a physical, tangible heritage, and for its method of distribution through the social video-sharing websites, Vimeo. This short, 22-minute documentary was released in 2011, directed by Kevin Reinaldo Affandy, a recent graduate from Petra Christian University, Surabaya, for his final year assignment, and produced under his independent production house, Ranting Pohon production.

In Surabaya, Indonesia, there are three well-known Chinese ancestral houses, owned by the clans of Han, The and Tjia (Ongshikham, 2005). The Han’s ancestral house is perhaps the best known since it is the biggest, the oldest, still well-maintained and is relatively accessible to the public. The documentary attempts to show the integration of Chinese, Dutch and javanesse cultures by tracing the architecture and the interior elements through narrated descriptions and interviews with the owner (Robert Roshan), the caretaker (Karno), local heritage community (Freddy Istanto) and a lecturer from Petra Christian University specialising in Chinese heritage (Hanny Kwartanti).

The film opens with a general overview of Surabaya as a bustling, modernising city with common urban problems, and here the filmmaker laments how the rapid urban growth has led to the indifference and disregard for the own cultural heritage and history. Through an interview with Freddy Istanto, a well-known media campaigner from the Surabaya Heritage Society, the film attempts to promote the importance of preserving cultural heritage in establishing the city’s sense of place and identity – the ‘spirit’ of the city.

Before focusing on the ancestral house, the film briefly explains how the old town area of Surabaya near the Kalimas river and Jembatan Merah bridge was divided by the Dutch colonial administration into two ethnic groups – the Melanesian Comp for the Malays, the Chineseen Comp for the Chinese, and Arab Comp for the Arabs. This division has contributed in shaping the readings of everyday life, the patterns of settlement, and the physical environment.

The film then turns to the house, highlighting the interior elements and the history of the Han’s family through interviews with the owner, Robert Roshan. Located on Jalan Karet, the Han’s ancestral house was the first ancestral house in Surabaya, built circa 18th century by Han Bwee Koo, the 6th generation of the Han family first arriving in the city of Surabaya in 1673. Although rumoh ubu literally means a house of ashes, it is not a mausoleum (even though, confusingly, that is the term used in Surabaya for a mausoleum). The family’s preservation of its ‘authentic’ use and elements, despite the lack of governmental and other external support, is highly commended.

The main feature of the house highlighted in this film is its iconic blend of Chinese, Dutch colonial and javanesse architectural and interior elements, reflecting the history, the Han’s assimilation, and the local influence. It is a well-championed – if perhaps slightly romanticised – interpretation of the Han’s ancestral house, also proposed by Hedy C. Indrani and Maria Elvira Prasoliday (2005) in Tipologi Organisasi Ruang dan Elemen Interior Rumah Abu Han di Surabaya, an article Affandy most likely called on, when making this documentary.

There are two main areas in the house: the prayer area and the living area. The prayer area is divided into the inner face, the guest hall, the family hall, and the prayer hall, while the living area contains bedrooms, bathrooms and the kitchen. To describe this interior of the house, the film uses 3D floor plan renderings and lingering shots of the Chinese interior elements like wooden carvings, floor tiles and window patterns. Hanny Kwartanti is interviewed to elaborate on symbolic interpretations of the Chinese interior elements. The film then scans and briefly describes the rooms, the origins of some architectural elements (pallars imported from Glasgow, decorative carvings from China), the furniture (Dutch-style chairs, Chinese marble tables), as well as the Han’s family portraits and their genealogy chart.

A particular attention is given to the prayer hall, which is indeed originally designed as the most important area of the house. This is where the ancestral tablets (sinci) are stored and where the family burns incense at the altar and prays to their ancestors.

The film then describes the current use of the house through interviews with the owner and the one of the caretakers, Kardo. The owner elaborates that the house has been opened for public on numerous occasions for educational purposes, including research, school trips, book discussions, and batik encim exhibitions. What is sadly missing in this film, however, is the description of the surrounding environment, which has made, thus far, regular public functions and opening hours, impossible.

Fortunately, we had the privilege of organizing a public screening and lecture at C2O Library, supported by a Surabaya historic community called Surabaya Tempo Dulu, and the Centre for Chinese Indonesian Studies from Petra Christian University. The panelists were Affandy himself, Robert Roshan, and Lukito Kartono, a lecturer specialising in Chinese and Indonesian architecture. This public event prompted questions, dialogues and ideas. Compared to other ancestral houses in Surabaya, the Han’s as a privately-owned heritage building is the most open and accessible and relatively well-maintained, but it is still admittedly in dismal condition on the brink of disuse. The standard idea to turn it into a museum, a café, or other utilisation of a global, far-reaching video-sharing website, will prompt greater interests in the ancestral house, and other, off-fogetted heritage of Surabaya.

Kathleen Azali is a web contributor to the C2O Library in Surabaya, Indonesia (k.azali@2o-library.net; http://2o-library.net)

References

With his focus on the interior elements, Affandy only gives us a relatively superficial overview of the Han’s ancestral house. Graduated with a degree in Visual Communication and Design, Affandy has directed and produced a visually appealing documentary with a particular focus on visual elements and forms of the house, but fails to put it within historical and cultural contexts. The emphasis is placed on obvious symbols such as dragons, lions, ancestral tablets, and the readings of visual elements from the interviews are rather restricted to Chinese symbols, with little effort to link them to various influences. Granted, this lack of exhaustive information perhaps can also be attributed to the paucity of accessible and credible historical information about Surabaya. Indeed, aside from the films by Arani Darmawana, most films dealing with the issue of ‘Chineseness’ mentioned above usually remain within ambiguous questions of identities, ideas and experiences. This is where a venue for public screening and forum is necessary for the filmmakers to garner feedback for their works.

Overall, Rumah Abu Han Documentary with its attractive visuals and photography serves as an appealing audio-visual introduction, much-needed to promote a relatively obscure heritage building of Surabaya. Even in Surabaya, not too many people know of its existence; a fate that has befallen numerous other old buildings of this city. Hopefully, the creation of this documentary by a young Indonesian filmmaker, with its utilisation of a global, far-reaching video-sharing website, will prompt greater interests in the ancestral house, and other off-forgotten heritage of Surabaya.
Politics, off the agendas of both public life and research in Indonesia for thirty years, has returned with a vengeance in Indonesia since the end of the Suharto regime in 1998. Within Indonesia there is lively debate of politics in the media every day and this has been mirrored internationally by a growing stream of academic studies.¹ Do we need more? Is there anything new or interesting to say? These two recent publications address themes already well-established, but also reflect substantive changes in Indonesia as well as the benefits of a longer-term view of complex processes unfolding over time.

³⁸ | The Review

Graeme MacRae

Above and far right: Protesters caught on camera in Jakarta. Images courtesy of Prazz on flickr.

Deepening and decentralising the study of politics in Indonesia

Politics, off the agendas of both public life and research in Indonesia for thirty years, has returned with a vengeance in Indonesia since the end of the Suharto regime in 1998. Within Indonesia there is lively debate of politics in the media every day and this has been mirrored internationally by a growing stream of academic studies.¹ Do we need more? Is there anything new or interesting to say? These two recent publications address themes already well-established, but also reflect substantive changes in Indonesia as well as the benefits of a longer-term view of complex processes unfolding over time.

¹ Of the central political projects of the Indonesian state, since even before independence, has been the containment and management of its staggering cultural, linguistic and religious diversity into a coherent and unified national form. The first president, Sukarno, was ultimately undone by other factors, but the inherent contradictions of his own way of managing diversity contributed to this. A major factor in the success of his successor Suharto, was his ability to create an illusion of national unity, preferably by ideological means, and if necessary by military ones. Both regimes achieved their aims of national integration at the price of democratic representation, civil liberties and recognition of diversity of local, social, cultural and political traditions.

Since Suharto’s spectacular slide from grace and then fall from power in 1998, this preoccupation has remained, but with a radical change of direction – essentially a huge experiment in finding a way out of half-a-century of increasingly centralised and authoritarian rule. The foci, and indeed the titles of works already published, reflect these themes in various combinations. Very broadly, the trend of these works has been a gradual movement from national-level perceptions of disorder and “disintegration” and the persistence of established “oligarchies” of power, to more locally grounded studies that increasingly reflect the diversity of emergent “democratic” forms and processes.

The two major planks of this reversal have been decentralisation (desentralisasi) of budgets and government, and democratisation (demokratisasi) of political representation, via free elections. The two books reviewed here, both published a decade into the process, represent the state of the art of study of reformasi. They begin, as do most of their predecessors, from the fundamental dilemma of the state and its twin projects, but each focuses on one of the two aspects of the process. Deepening Democracy focuses closely on the mechanics and dynamics of one of the key mechanisms of both demokratisasi and desentralisasi: the elections of the heads of local levels of government (Pilkada). Decentralisation and Regional Autonomy builds on an earlier book by one of its editors in retention of a focus on reform and regionalisation of governance structures.

Both begin with general/theoretical chapters, but at their cores are series of case-studies and these span the length and breadth of the archipelago. There are sixteen chapters in Deepening Democracy and fifteen in Decentralisation and Regional Autonomy. Together their authors reflect a wide range of viewpoints: Indonesian and foreign, academics and others, from World Bank officials to development advisors to think-tank researchers. Rather than listing and summarising this multitude of chapters, I think it is more useful here to discuss the main themes that run throughout and the directions of thought that emerge from them.

Deepening Democracy

A number of observers have followed, analysed and written about Pilkada, mostly in the form of journal articles.² These studies have tended to be at the level of individual elections, or local series of them. Key issues and themes emerging from these discussions include the pervasiveness of “money politics”, the roles of political parties, the personal profiles and reputations of candidates, the influence of the media, the “return” or “re-emergence” of traditional aristocracies and the use of signs, symbols and practices derived from “tradition” into the formal political arena, the survival and regrouping of elites entrenched during the New Order period, and the related practices of “collusion” and the consequent formation of “cartels” and “oligarchies”. The bottom line of most of these studies is the practical concern as to whether the reforms have made a difference at the levels of public participation and representation – whether democracy is, as the title of this book asks, really “deepening” or not.

While there is little explicit consensus in these studies, there is at the same time at least an implicit impression of a national pattern that the democracy developing is at best shallow and is little more than a front for the continuation of elite oligarchy supported by various combinations of money politics, inter-party collusion and more or less direct control over the media.³ Deepening Democracy provides (to my knowledge) the first detailed account of the history, legislation and technologies of the reformed election system in Indonesia as well as a set of comparative studies of actual elections from all over the archipelago. This combination of overview and comparison, along with the benefit of some hindsight, has enabled the authors and editors to address the issues listed above in a more comprehensive, balanced and systematic way than has occurred previously. The result is a more nuanced picture in which any national-level generalisations are balanced by a growing awareness of the diversity of local variations and the complex interactions of factors that influence these.

The overwhelming message repeated in various ways and from various locations throughout the book is (not surprisingly) that these are local elections, conducted in distinctly local styles, and in which the results tend to reflect local factors and influences. These observations are often accompanied by warnings against the analytic dangers of top-down national level generalisations (e.g by Subiyantoro on p.191, Lindsey on p.213). However, they also consistently recognise a series of recurrent patterns that interest in various ways with the national-level themes identified in previous studies.

One such pattern is the role of political parties, which despite significant local variations, is quite different to what we are accustomed to in western democracies. Parties, besides those defined in religious terms, generally do not represent any particular, let alone consistent constituency, point of view or policies. They are instead pragmatic political machines with distinct histories and usually focused around powerful individuals. As such they are, unlike their predecessors in the 1950s, virtually free of consistent policy, let alone philosophy. Pratikno (ch.3) does attempt to map patterns of ideological

² About a dozen of the chapters in Deepening Democracy feature on Pilkada, mostly in the form of journal articles. These include contributions from both the editors, from Pratikno (ch.3) does attempt to map patterns of ideological
and cultural similarity of parties, but even he admits that they mean little in practice, especially when it comes to the pragmatic business of making coalitions or alliances.

As a consequence, parties command little loyalty on the part of members and candidates. Candidates shop around for parties to nominate them, often paying for the privilege, but also hop from party to party in response to internal conflicts and according to what they see as their best interests. Choi (ch.14) argues that this “weakening” of the role of parties in fact results in them being little more than gatekeepers to candidacy, resulting in advantage to existing elites (of which more later). Parties do, however, have distinctive, if changing, local styles that usually reflect existing local formations of power and traditional allegiances. Ironically voters, unlike candidates, do seem to have a degree of allegiance to parties, with some areas being seen as PDI-P or Golkar “strongholds”.

A reflex of this weak and, from a western point of view, inverted role of parties, is that electoral campaigns tend to focus overwhelmingly on the personalities of candidates, sometimes almost to the exclusion of their parties (Choi ch.4, Lindy ch.10). Perceptions of “personality” are themselves, sometimes almost to the exclusion of their parties (Choi ch.4, inverted role of parties, is that electoral campaigns tend with some areas being seen as PDI-P or Golkar “strongholds”. candidates, do seem to have a degree of allegiance to parties, more later). Parties do, however, have distinctive, if changing, candidacies, resulting in advantage to existing elites (of which fact results in them being little more than gatekeepers to politicians). Choi (ch.4) argues that this “weakening” of the role of parties in fact results in them being little more than gatekeepers to candidacy, resulting in advantage to existing elites (of which more later). Parties do, however, have distinctive, if changing, local styles that usually reflect existing local formations of power and traditional allegiances. Ironically voters, unlike candidates, do seem to have a degree of allegiance to parties, with some areas being seen as PDI-P or Golkar “strongholds”.

The overview chapters consist of summaries of monitoring activities that the size, complexity and diversity of Indonesia is made a difference to whether or not public participation matters and representa-

Decentralisation and Regional Autonomy

This book focuses on the other main aspect of the reform process – the decentralisation of regional government structures and budgets. It begins with a long introductory chapter in which one of the editors (Holtzapperl) reviews, in considerable detail, the reform process which has been rolled out in the form of a series of complex laws and regulations since 1999. The remainder of the book is divided into two parts: first a series of national overviews of different aspects of the process followed by a series of local case studies.

The overview chapters consist of summaries of monitoring reports prepared by various agencies for the Indonesian government during the early years of reform, as well as other similar reports prepared specially for this volume. They vary considerably in length and depth and the topics covered range from surveys of experiences at different levels (province, district, village), regional parliaments (DPDID), effects on business, small enterprises and economic development, as well as a somewhat misplaced but interesting historical chapter on the development of urban municipalities.

The longest chapter (by Endi Rukimo et al) is a comparative study of the early functioning of new DPDIDs (regional parliaments) in five pairs of provinces and districts from across the country. It reveals considerable variation but frequently significant difficulties in getting to grips with the technical and managerial realities involved in the new system. That this is particularly so in the (mainly eastern) region, more remote from Java, reflects the extent of their marginalisation under, and lack of participation in, the previous regime. Anecdotal evidence that we have heard since suggests that these problems remain in 2011.

Another very important chapter is one on corruption, based on a World Bank report in 2003. Dealing with corruption remains a major challenge for the present Yudhoyono administration and this report, despite being based on evidence several years old, clearly conforms the widespread popular perception that corruption has neither increased nor decreased, but has simply been “democratised” and “decentralised” along with the reform process.

The highly specialised and technical nature of many of these chapters means that they will be of interest largely to specialists or people seeking fairly specific information. Consequently, the only one on which I feel well qualified to comment (by virtue of my own specialist knowledge) is the one on Bali, which happens also to be (besides Holtzapperl’s introduction) the longest and most detailed, and written by Martin Ramstedt, the other editor. It is a summary of the first seven years or so of the reform period in Bali. There have been other such summaries, but this is one of the most comprehensive, providing details of the governance reform process of which few Bali specialists would be aware. But most interesting of all are the ways in which Ramstedt links these processes with better-known social changes and public culture, and especially the subtleties of developments in Balinese religion, in which he is particularly expert.

Few of the other chapters are as rich and detailed as Ramstedt’s, but to the various extents in which they approach this, they provide valuable documentation of processes that few of us have the opportunity to study in detail. The spread of case-studies is from (central and south) Sulawesi, West Sumatra, Riau, Java, and Bali and B...
John Clark’s most recent publication contributes to a growing body of work that responds to the still perplexing issue of how to expand our understanding of modernity as expressed through art and visual culture. In particular, he attempts to complicate the notion of a modernity that has conventionally been presented as a process originating from the West and then transmitted to other parts of the world, most notably those countries that experienced colonialism.

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Reviewed publication:
John Clark. 2011.


Sydney: Power Publications.

CLARK'S TEXT IS INDEED A VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION, in its comprehensive and dense accumulation of empirical data garnered over an extensive research period of some ten years, and given Clark’s in-depth knowledge of the Asian region and its numerous art histories. If one traces Clark’s work back to Modern Asian Art (University of Hawaii, 1998) and through his other numerous articles and texts, it is evident that he continues to be preoccupied with the project of finding a methodology applicable to studying modern Asian art – one that distinguishes itself from the seemingly universal theoretical tools and paradigms on which the discipline of art history is founded, which is primarily in response to the canon of Euro-American art. It is for this reason that many of his articles and books have focused on comparative studies, and that he has endeavored to establish structural models and specific languages to attempt to characterize the kinds of artistic developments and cultural transactions that have taken place within Asia, and in particular, the various forms of artistic encounters Asian cultures have had with the West. To counter institutionalized conceptions of what constitutes artistic modernity (as something only too truly tangible through European and American examples), Clark has spent much of his career attempting to map a type of genealogy or system of interlinked trajectories of modernity in Asian Art. This text, comparing developments in Thai and Chinese art between 1980 to 1999, therefore continues his project of establishing comparable systems of mapping modernity and therefore “mapping a space in the art discourse” (64) in order to find parallel dimensions of the modern. Ultimately this is an effort to disrupt what is commonly portrayed as a select few linear developmental model, from which Euro-American modernism is the primary agent of transformation in various Asian artistic contexts.

One principle question that has to be addressed initially is Clark’s choice of comparing China and Thailand. This is perhaps an unusual comparison, given the critical and commercial attention Chinese contemporary art has received since the 1990s, and its high demand on the global art circuit, in comparison with Thai art, which – along with its neighboring countries in Southeast Asia – is perhaps only known for a handful of artists who have attained a reputation on the international contemporary art stage. One might question the merit of comparing two such distinct cultural and social systems, we have very little in common in terms of state-social relations, economic political systems, types of institutional apparatchiks, and perhaps most centrally, their sheer scale of population, geography, and economy. To make a compelling argument for comparative study and his particular methodology, Clark argues that Thailand and China “present like sets of phenomena, from unlike historical contexts, with few endogenous links before the year 2000. If similarities exist, they will focus attention on the endogenous nature of Chinese, and not because China has followed Thailand, or visa versa...” (21-22).

Here some explanation is needed in terms of how Clark has chosen to articulate his methodology and framework for mapping genealogies of modernity in specific contexts and historical junctures. His introduction goes heavily into methodological explanation, and this is where the reader may find it most challenging to follow Clark’s argumentation. In this particular text, Clark has taken a slight departure from the language of structuralist analyses of Modern Art and has now borrowed from scientific terminology to describe how “other” modernities come into being, transform, mutate, hybridize, etc. Such language is characteristic of evolutionary theory, species identification, and genetic models – all of which build on the language of biological and cultural sign systems to explicate – via scientific models of causation – a tale of two art histories.

This usage of scientific vocabulary in an art historical study is not as objectionable as its potential ramifications for a project that attempts to problematize the standard narrative of progress as embodied in the traditional canon of modern art history. What makes Clark’s methodology and argument tendentious is the repeated usage of terms like “other modernity,” endogenous/exogenous, two-way “othering” process, hybridity, evolutionary theory, amongst others. “By admittedy very distant analogy we could interpret modernity as a kind of species adaptation to a situation of a rapid and widely distributed series of relativisations. The question arises as to whether these are to be necessarily seen as adaptive traits of a species-like set of cultural forms, or some initial set of conditions for modernity which then takes specific developmental routes within different cultural “clades.” Unfortunately, the reiteration of these terms throughout the text only serves to reinforce the sense that what we are grappling with is another study emphasizing a linear developmental model of modernity, which further concretizes the opposition between the West and the rest. The overuse of such dichotomous categories is detrimental to Clark’s project of attempting to render the term “modernity” more open and inclusive, this being the chief objective of his text. At this point, studies of comparative modernities have come quite far, and it is now generally understood that modernity is often the result of an encounter with an “other” (especially in artistic modernism), and is inherently a “hybrid” phenomenon to begin with. It is a shame that the semiotic rhetoric and scientific vernacular takes away from the compelling nature of the stories, history, and visual material with which Clark can only briefly engage.

However, one can attribute this cursory engagement and the lack, or near absence, of artists’ voices in Clark’s account to his theoretical formation, whether it shaped discourses or practices in the spirit of or against the academic and the official, makes his hermeneutic hegemony, the basic resemblance between China and Thailand the presumption of a set of values defining the state and nation” (251). Clark does make a compelling argument for understanding the distinctive differences between Chinese and Southeast Asian worldviews in terms of state-cultural models and how these shape the changing concept of the nation. Artistic production in China has always been imbued in discourses tied to political ideology and historical conditions, with artists highly engaged in sophisticated discourses along with a strong sense of historical consciousness. A key theme in these discourses was the China/West divide, which would appear to have resulted in more concerted efforts to establish distinctive artistic styles to represent China at global exhibitions and events, the most recognizable style being political pop or what Clark refers to as “cyphal pop manirism” (233). On the other hand, Thailand’s historical socio-political trajectory as a semi-feudal, semi-colonial state until the mid-twentieth century resulted in a very different set of cultural and historical discourses compared to China. How do we then account for the more fraught and ambivalent. The mutually-implicated trio of state, king, and Buddhism has governed a set of universal values in Thailand that also manifested itself in artistic production, with less of a drive for Thai artists to assert themselves in the global arena of contemporary art: “...the distinguishing feature of many Thai artists was their lack of concern with the artistic conquest of the world or even much overseas recognition. This artistic silence did not owe the historically intense wish for acceptance by the West seen in China” (139).

The great contribution of Clark’s text is the degree to which he attempts to investigate the various interfaces between institutional artistic formation and the multiple sources of what he terms ‘exogenous’ or external influence in the late twentieth century, a period that can generally be understood as the era of globalization in the contemporary period. He maintains throughout the book that “The distinguishing feature of Chinese and Thai modernity was that the propagation of styles was reinforced by what were in different ways highly controlled and motivated social institutions found in art curricula, art schools and art competitions” (168); this is certainly not a phenomena found throughout contemporary art in Asia, especially elsewhere in Southeast Asia. At the same time, these institutionally-driven artistic styles and movements are rendered problematic by the blurring of categories among non-official with different sense of historical consciousness. A key theme in these discourses was the China/West divide, which would appear to have resulted in more concerted efforts to establish distinctive artistic styles to represent China at global exhibitions and events, the most recognizable style being political pop or what Clark refers to as “cyphal pop manirism” (233). On the other hand, Thailand’s historical socio-political trajectory as a semi-feudal, semi-colonial state until the mid-twentieth century resulted in a very different set of cultural and historical discourses compared to China. How do we then account for the more fraught and ambivalent. The mutually-implicated trio of state, king, and Buddhism has governed a set of universal values in Thailand that also manifested itself in artistic production, with less of a drive for Thai artists to assert themselves in the global arena of contemporary art: “...the distinguishing feature of many Thai artists was their lack of concern with the artistic conquest of the world or even much overseas recognition. This artistic silence did not owe the historically intense wish for acceptance by the West seen in China” (139).

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Trees for the wood

Niels Mulder


Populism

Whereas the notion of populism has a relatively long history to describe leadership in Latin America, its use to label such political personalities is coloured by his own style of variegated environments, resulting in a whole bouquet of populisms. Even so, through stretching the notion to include Estrada is to get beyond the bounds of the idea and unnecessarily obscures the wood for the trees.

Any vote-hungry politician worth his salt would appeal to the people. Megawati did it as the daughter of Sukarno; Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was shown listening to fishermen, labours and farmers; all-chake hands, project concern, and cuddle babies. This doesn’t make them ‘populist’. The only thing that was ‘populist’ about Estrada Estrada was his campaign slogan Erap vs mga mehigr, ‘Erap for the Poor’. He had little to offer in the form of programmes, policies, plans or ideas. He needed them.

He banked on his immense popularity as a movie hero with a Robin-Hood image and on the appeal of his macho lifestyle (openly womanising, gambling, boozing) that set him apart from the out-of-reach oligarchs. He was felt to be ‘one of us’ that people unthinkingly equated with his movie roles. In brief, he was popular, a popularity that flowed from the common man up to him. As far as he himself was concerned, politics was business, first of all for himself, secondly for his cronies. Even after his fall, because of gross abuse of office and blatant incompetence as a president, nine years later he still garnered over 26% of the vote, which is, as such in the enduring appeal of Thaksin as a hero of the underclass, the real thing to explain.

The collection conveys the impression that populism is a quality of certain political personalities who ‘commune’ with the people’. I think the concept to be more encompassing and even less specific than the bouquet of individual trees we are presented with. In the eventful 1970s in Thailand, the internal security police were behind a plethora of gangs and vigilante groups whose ruffianism was sanctified in the defence of a nation under attack by ‘communists’. More respectable were the Village Scouts whose loyalty could be activated through appealing to the mystique of nationalism. Elites who talked to the ‘people’ as an undifferentiated nation, the Scouts passed over class and political divisions, with the demonised Reds – ‘scum of the earth’ – as their adversary.

Other, more persistent populist movements may arise in the name of anti-colonial or anti-dICTadoral demands that the powers that be respond to with suppression. Through annihilating organised class-consciousness and foregrounding its political channels, Suhrato, in spite of his distrust of it, mobilised the populist appeal of Islam. In the course of his relative success as the Father of Development, the Islamic petty bourgeoisie felt increasingly marginalised and ambitiously responded. This movement towards Islamic populism, Islam as the palliative to worldly woe – did not centre on overall leaders, in the same way as politicised Islam did not in the days of Islamic awakening (Nakatul Islam, 1912). And didn’t comparable factors – Islamic groundswell temporarily even in coalition with the Leftist underground – spell the undoing of the Shah and currently roll through the whole of the Arab world, from the Maghreb up to Yemen and the Gulf? Consequently, it is far to talk about the populist mobilisation potential that is restricted to radical, religion, and especially the inequities of power and wealth.

In Asia

On the western tip of the immense Eurasian continent and in Asia, we find Institutes of Asian Studies. In view of the distance from where their action presumably is, the label is appropriate, even as, generally, the Islamic pan is the west and the vast expanse are excluded. Be this as it may, I feel uneasy with the spate of books that relate about abortion, gender, populism, and other things in Asia. Few are the people who will accept my answer as to where I live as ‘in Asia’. The same may be asked about populism, as it is restricted to Latin-American, and South-East and North-East Asian leaders.

In my generation, we developed the idea of South-East Asian Studies and found that there are enough commonalities among the populations to warrant our putting the idea to a literal to roughly consider South-East Asia a culture area next to the sinicised region of China and the Middle East as the palliative to worldly woe – did not centre on overall leaders, in the same way as politicised Islam did not in the days of Islamic awakening (Nakatul Islam, 1912). And didn’t comparable factors – Islamic groundswell temporarily even in coalition with the Leftist underground – spell the undoing of the Shah and currently roll through the whole of the Arab world, from the Maghreb up to Yemen and the Gulf? Consequently, it is far to talk about the populist mobilisation potential that is restricted to radical, religion, and especially the inequities of power and wealth.

Populism in Asia is a publication of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University. It comprises a lucid introduction by the editors (respectively Director of said Center and the Chair of the Political Economy Centre at Chulalongkorn University), six contributions by Japanese scholars on populism in Latin America, Thailand, the Gorontalo Province of Indonesia, and Northeast Asia (Korea, Taiwan, Japan). The further chapters on populism in the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia have been written by local scholars. The collection closes with a 4-page Afterword by Ben Anderson. Of the 173 pages devoted to country case studies, 70 focus on the Thaksin-Shinawatra phenomenon – and one would have liked to see that saga extended into the present to get a better feel for the populist mobilisation potential.

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Niels Mulder

Niels Mulder has retired to the southern slope of the mystical potent Mt. Bawang, Philippines, where he stays in touch through (niels_mulder201935@yahoo.com.ph)

Notes


interests, which created room for the indispensable enemy and the spirit of nationalism communism. Once in power, he forewarned a corporatist state through the use of collective action (acting in concert) and the party- backed political order. Gradually, he became the unquestioned, authoritarian leader necessary to streamline diversity as is to his whims. Like Quezon of the Philippines in his heyday, Sukarno embodied both nation and state.

It may be surmised that, as a child of his day, he consciously or unconsciously emulated the 20th-century populist par excellence, Adolf Hitler, who took his inspiration from, and who manipulated, die gesunde Volksempfindung, “the healthy sentiment of the ordinary people.” In parallel with Hitler, Sukarno raised national pride and xenophobia, but, in contrast, failed to deliver on his message of the suffering people (rakyat).

Listening to and responding to popular sentiments and felt needs, business tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra built a strong rural base of electoral support, especially in the North-East. Through redistributive policies and running the country as his enterprise, he alienated the established oligarchy that, through a military coup, ousted him in the second year of his second term as prime minister. Even so, when elections were held again, his proxy, political survivor Samak Sundaravej, won the prime-minister-ship until he too – on a flimsy pretext – was unseated by the reaction under Abhisit (‘Privilege’ (sic) Vejjajiva. Despite redistributive policies and after two years of confrontation by the red-shirted supporters of Thaksin, the conservatives were solidly defeated in the June 2011 election. It brought another proxy of exiled Thaksin to head the government, his sister and the first Thai lady premier, Yingluck Shinawatra. In other words, whereas the Thaksin discussed in Populism is overthrown in 2006 – so confirming the general short-lived-ness of populist leaders – he is still very much alive and kicking.

In various combinations we see the component factors of populism at work in the rise and undoing of politicians as far apart as Mahathir Mohamad (Malaysia), Joseph Estrap Estrada (the Philippines), Jon’shiro Koizumi (Japan), Rito Moo-Young (South Korea), Chen Shui-bian (Taiwan), and business-main politician Fadel Muhammad (Gorontalo, Indonesia). Each of these political personalities is coloured by his own style in variegated environments, resulting in a whole bouquet of populisms. Even so, through stretching the notion to include Estrada is to get beyond the bounds of the idea and unnecessarily obscures the wood for the trees.

The collection conveys the impression that populism is a quality of certain political personalities who ‘commune’ with the people’. I think the concept to be more encompassing and even less specific than the bouquet of individual trees we are presented with. In the eventful 1970s in Thailand, the internal security police were behind a plethora of gangs and vigilante groups whose ruffianism was sanctified in the defence of the first president, Sukarno, we can only conclude that he was an archetypical populist, speaking in name of the hardworking first president, Sukarno, we can only conclude that he was an archetypical populist, speaking in name of the hardworking
As a child growing up in Australia, I was made aware of the country’s frontiers from an early age. The shape of Australia’s landmass was printed on the covers of my schoolbooks and as I rubbed out pencil marks, I eroded the coastline of my Australia-shaped eraser. As with many young nation-states, the use of representations of Australia’s land-based territory is part of the country’s nationalist project that fosters a sense of belonging among its people. At the same time, this naturalising of clearly defined state boundaries disguises the porous nature of those boundaries, their significance for national development and the experience of the people residing along them.

Olivia Swift

Reviewed publication:


WHILE STUDIES of globalisation and transnationalism have attended to the interplay between states, they rarely question the way in which the state’s territoriality is recognised and the national space arranged. Instead these processes have tended to be conflated with historical accounts of treaty ratification within global politics. Between Frontiers: Nation and Identity in a Southeast Asian Borderland highlights and addresses this neglect. As its title suggests, the book’s focus is the ‘in-between’, the liminal place where nations join and the domestic encounters the foreign.

The frontier in question is the borderland between Malaysian Sarawak and Indonesian Borneo, where ethnically homogenous and culturally similar communities are divided by different historical, economic and political circumstances on either side of the national border. Using archival and ethnographic research methods, Noboru Ishikawa provides a rich account of how the state actualises and maintains its territory and the kind of national order that emerges in response, as people strategically situate themselves as members of local community, nation and ethnic group simultaneously. In so doing, he brings the study of nationalism ‘down to earth’, focusing not on the nation-state as something imagined, disseminated or worshipped, but on its concrete reality and presence underfoot.

Ishikawa and his wife, Mayumi, conducted fieldwork in the Sarawak community of Telok Melano, where the village boundary coincides with the national border. The oral histories they collected connect ancestors of present-day residents with events described in the archival documents that constitute the record of local and national history, which the author draws upon extensively. While scholars have struggled to accurately study processes of transnationalism and globalisation using multi-sited ethnography following flows of people and goods, Ishikawa provides a dynamic account of the dialectic between states using traditional methodologies in a single site, to great effect.

The macro history Ishikawa describes echoes that of the wider Southeast Asian colonial experience. The author begins by tracing how the state deliberately incorporated the hinterlands of the Sarawak colony and the subsequent process of boundary making. This he situates within the wider political-economic context of the 1920s rubber boom, related international regulation and illicit trans-border trade, as an example of the imperial enclosing of economic space and the response of people living on state borders. Ishikawa then examines how the Telok Melano peasantry have been simultaneously drawn into and excluded from the national space from the 1880s, and discusses the issue of ethnic displacement. Using a historical account of the mixing boundary, he explores how social identities are formed in relation to local recognition of space by examining the interplay between nationalism and village communism.

In the latter, more ethnographic parts of the book, Ishikawa describes daily interactions and flows of goods, people, desires, ideas, practices, technologies, institutional and organisational forms, between Telok Melano and an Indonesian migrant community across the border, demonstrating how the structural osmotic pressure between the two changes the value of labour, commodities and personhood as people and goods move across the border. He also chronicles a recent widening of the economic gap between Malaysia and Indonesia that has changed the nature of frontier relations, with the Indonesian side of the border abandoning its own economic community and selling labour, agricultural products and natural resources into Malaysia.

The book’s concluding discussion concentrates on the dialectical relationship between transnationalism and the space of the nation-state. Counter the Weberian notion of the nation-state as a fixed territory, Ishikawa demonstrates how the flow of people and goods into and out of national space, and the policies and practices related to these flows, provide the very basis for the construction and evolution of the national space. As state boundaries become more rigid, socio-economic differences (particularly in the value of labour and currency) become more marked, stimulating movement of labour and commodities across them, and making the border significant in the lives of those living within and along it.

The main, early form of transnationalism in the region was mercantile trade between the Malays and Chinese. Under capitalism, transnational flows of labour and natural resources were initially tolerated, given they posed no threat to national interests, but in recent decades, the Malaysian state has increased its control of the borderland niches for developmental purposes, establishing checkpoints and sponsoring improved transportation networks that facilitate timber-related industries and agro-plantation businesses. Such investment marks borderlands as a new site supporting national projects and state-controlled transnationalism – and not only in this region. As states have increasing mobilized and managed social and natural resources, state-led capitalism is increasing rolling into borderlands in search of economic growth. Ishikawa wonders how residents of borderlands, the world over will react to this expansion of controlled transnationalism, noting the potential to learn from borderland populations that entered transnational modernity ahead of the majority of humanity living within single nation-states.

The value of the book is the skill with which Ishikawa entwines thorough archival and ethnographic research into a rich account of the social, economic and political processes in the making and maintaining of national space and societal responses to it. With its clear signposting and systematic analysis, the book retains the rawness of its origins as a PhD thesis. The choice of field site reflects Ishikawa’s fascination with the liminality of borderlands, which he describes in the book’s early pages as ‘zones in which things are no longer what they were but not yet what they will be’ (p.5). Such mystical language promises a more experiential, subjective account of borderland life than the resulting text provides, with its ethnographic material emerging only a hundred pages in. However, without the structural leaming of the book’s analysis, Ishikawa would be unable to ‘ground’ the study of nationalism away from the trend towards treating it as an abstraction, as he admirably sets out to do. Ishikawa’s project in this regard is not ground-breaking. Leach’s work on highland Burma comes to mind as an earlier proponent of the porous nature of the nation space. What Beyond Frontiers provides, however, is an important counter to the existing literature on the nation-state, state and nationalism – concepts at the heart of a many a degree course – that takes fixed territory as a given. In anthropology, much of the classic literature regarding the state stems from African ethnographies. How different the discipline’s approach to the state might look if students were taught as much about maritime Southeast Asia, where states have always been ‘weak’, as they were about the Nuer or African Political Systems. Given that national-space on land accounts for a fraction of the earth’s surface, with oceans covering its majority in which hundreds and thousands of people live and work, one wonders why anthropology and other disciplines fail to draw more on the approach of French historian Braudel in their explorations of the nation-state. Braudel’s epic, La Mediterranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II au XIXe siècle charts the creation and development of societies by the sea that connects them and positions seafaring people as the links between shores. Equally, when students are asked to discuss whether the state’s power is in decline, they might draw on the likes of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s Empire to argue that transnational corporations and international governance have usurped the power of all but a ‘monarchy’ (USA and G8 countries) of individual nation-states. They would do well to also attend to Ishikawa’s quiet ethnography of people for whom the question of state power is age old.

Olivia Swift is an anthropologist and Senior Research Fellow at Greenwich Maritime Institute in London. Her interests include maritime trade unionism, maritime piracy, welfare, the state, and Philippine Studies. (olviaswift@gmail.com)
Inverted state-building and local resource politics in Eastern Indonesia

Compared to Java, Eastern Indonesia (East Nusa Tenggara, Maluku and Papua) is poor. Average per capita income in these three regions is about half of that in Java and is not expected to catch up in the foreseeable future. Levels of life expectancy are even more depressing. Papua stands out as it is richest in terms of natural resources but poorest when it comes to human development and governance. In Papua life expectancy rose only 8.5 years between 1975 and 2002, compared to Java’s 20.5. Similar trends are reported for infant mortality. Interestingly if the Jakarta metropolitan region were to be left out of these calculations, life expectancy figures as well as those for education would be about equal to those for Java in the 1980s. What explains these differences, what kind of solutions may be offered, and what are the social and environment trade-offs if poverty is alleviated through facilitating and stimulating natural resource extraction?

Jaap Timmer

The exemplary study by Chris Ballard and Glenn Banks of the corporate strategy at the Freeport mine in Papua details the series of events since the establishment of the mine in 1967. The Freeport gold and copper mine complex is one of the world’s richest mining operations and is of great value to the economy of Papua and Indonesia as a whole. Over the years, Freeport built a reputation for being unable to establish good relations with the communities in the region and for being careless about the environment. It became renowned, however, for its effectiveness in managing the political environment at national and international levels. At the same time the government is careful not to allow much criticism of Freeport because of what it might signal to foreign investors in Indonesia.

In a series of chapters on economic development Ressouardrmo, Udi Nauptupuli, Richard Manning and Felix Wanggai provide a good overview of the problems of governance in Papua and Maluku. While Papua receives most funding and assistance from the central government, it performs less well than neighboring regions. The grimmest factor here is political instability – the people of Papua have not seen much consistency in Jakarta policies towards their region while many in Papua are involved in conflicts over funds, power, and access to resources. In particular the scheming of new provinces and districts became the center of the day with the advent of the devolution of power and new state physical assets. On top of that, the factoring implementation of Special Autonomy regulations, which were to give Papua more sovereignty for designing and implementing regulations in the area, has been leading to tensions. Current news on Papua is also heavily coloured by unsettling reports on misappropriation of government funds and state actor involvement in land grabbing and legalising unsustainable resource extraction.

Maluku is economically not doing well because of less income and almost no assistance from the central government. This is particularly painful for a region that is recovering from a conflict that began in 1999 and killed thousands and demolished much infrastructure. The chapter by Craig Thorburn on this conflict provides a useful scholarly overview of the dynamics of the wars and makes the general point that with decentralization after the fall of the New Order regime, local politicians were quick to take advantage of rent-seeking opportunities in the management of natural resources and other sources of revenue. The related establishment of new provinces and new districts increased tensions over access to resources and formed a major trigger to the conflict.

Thorburn’s piece becomes particularly interesting in the section that discusses the post-conflict local government reform (pp. 295-300). These reforms have led to a process that may be labelled as inverted state building. The provision of the new regional government laws of 1999 and 2004 that give more power to local communities and regions to govern their communities and manage their natural resources, effectively revoked the infamous Law No. 5 of 1979. Law No. 5 posed difficulties for Maluku’s customary communities as traditional institutions (such as waru councils) were unable to control over customary affairs and access to and regulation of natural resources. On top of that, top-down development programs for local development often instantiated control over natural resources and at the same time traditional leaders. The possibility of a 188-degrees reform and the concurrent revival of custom is offered by the new laws.

Local communities throughout Maluku and a number of NGOs in the region, such as Baileo Malaku, are seeing this as an opportunity to develop local government structures and regulations, which carry the suggestion that they are more in accordance with local social structures and cultural norms. During a recent visit to Ambon and Haruiki I observed that the formation of such state building. The provision of the new variety of reflections on past ways of doing things and generally enthuses people to make custom read like laws and state regulations. People emulate aspects of the governmentality of the state with which they are remarkably familiar. At the same time modern negori constitution is a process that is guided by the government, while it may increase rather than reduce legal pluralism and does not guarantee that those involved acknowledge the state’s ideal of the rule of law or will properly care for the natural environment. It should be interesting to see how this process evolves, also in neighbouring regions.

Working with Nature Against Poverty goes good for future debates about the management of natural resources in Eastern Indonesia. It is a must-read for policy-makers, NGOs activists, and international donors. They should read this cut out a case for their own advice, but as a guide to further learn about the complexities of local situations and to build ever more awareness about the need for tailor-made solutions and flexible approaches.

Jaap Timmer is lecturer and director, Master of Applied Anthropology at Macquarie University, Sydney (jaap.timmer@mq.edu.au)
One early morning, I flew from Jakarta to Hong Kong expecting it, for some reason, to be similar to Singapore. Yet while the center of Singapore is basically one huge mall, Hong Kong has plenty of exciting small places: cafes, restaurants, antique shops and art galleries. I spent a week walking around and taking buses, trams and metros in this skyscraper city (there are more skyscrapers in Hong Kong than on Manhattan). And as we know, traveling can offer opportunities to meet the unexpected.

Roy Voragen

FOR ME, ART IS A GATEWAY to sheer endless possibilities, and Hong Kong has plentiful art galleries. Many are commercial places, of which Gagosian Gallery is one. This gallery has eleven exhibition spaces around the globe and at their Hong Kong branch there was a show with work by well-known painter Zeng Fanzhi from Mainland China. Extremely skillful, yet not necessarily very interesting an exhibition.

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This might not be a very relevant question for most Chinese is relevant and valuable to that of the Western world remains How much more cosmopolitan is the contemporary outside the West. modernism without respecting the otherness of art practiced widespread dissatisfaction with the universal pretensions of happens in Asia, while an artist from Bandung has to familiarize is more parochial; an artist living and working in London of value dependent on the generosity of the West. There is no reason, though, to make final judgments head-of AAA claims that the "AAA cannot rely on existing models of AAA, therefore, aims to collaborate with archival projects". As the Indonesian Visual Art Archive in Yokagura.

I left this city I only knew from the cinema – especially the Wong Kar-wai movies, including Chungking Express (set in the city's concrete jungle) and Happy Together – but now I also know it as the city that can love the arts passionately and ambitiously. Roy Voragen is a Bandung-based writer, art critic and co-founder of Roma ARTS. He can be contacted at fatumbrutum.blogspot.com. For more information on Asia Art Archive see www.aaa.org.uk

Why do we hardly ever speak of contemporary Western art (or American or Belgian) art, while we do often speak of contemporary Asian (or Chinese or Korean) art? It's a good way to keep non-Western artists in their place, a subcategory for subaltern art.

AAA is more than an archive, it is a place to meet and exchange thoughts about contemporary art. AAA sees itself as "a platform for discussion: what are the relationships between an archive as 'discursive space' and actual art practices across Asia? Or, to put it another way, how does the archive influence or inform the development of material on contemporary art in Asia relative to, on the other hand, the many different practices of visual arts in Asia? Perhaps the relationship could be viewed as – potentially – supporting processes of validation of contemporary art practices in Hong Kong in particular, and across Asia in general, in the absence of art museums, which traditionally perform that role in the West (such as MoMA in New York). So writes Claire Hsu that AAA "has evolved into a space that offers the tools to enrich and complicate the way in which [...] local and regional [art] histories are told and accessed." And, the continues, AAA "has an important role to play in enriching, complicating, and challenging prevailing global narratives about contemporary Asian art." 31

AAA, though, does not have the ambition to have a complete archive on contemporary art in Asia. As indicated above, a living record cannot be completed. But the archive also has practical reasons for this ambition; firstly, its own spatial constraints (real estate is extremely expensive in Hong Kong); secondly, AAA does not want to duplicate what has been collected elsewhere. AAA, therefore, aims to collaborate with archival projects in the region, such as the Indonesian Visual Art Archive in Yogyakarta. 32

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Floating on water

Indonesia is an interesting country. On the one hand, it tries to maintain its traditional folk culture and arts and is keen on having its cultural assets acknowledged by the international community. It does so by entering proposals to a variety of UNESCO programs and by accepting international funds from donor agencies to preserve its cultural heritage. Its heritage is also an object of keen discussions, especially if Indonesia is convinced that Malaysia is appropriating part of what Indonesia sees as its own national cultural heritage, and not that of Malaysia, despite the large numbers of ethnic Indonesians who have lived in Malaysia for generations.

Dick van der Meij

The museum collection contains about 230 puppets from this collection and some from Ki Enthus Susmono, a very modern puppet player from Sukoharjo, Central Java. It transpired that performances given in Central Java have staged shadow play theater performances (wayang) in the outskirts of the town of Sukoharjo, Central Java. It transpired that performances given by less well-known dhalang (puppet players) in off-places were threatened. Apparently, these hard-line groups shied away from doing the same with famous players who performed in larger venues, but the trend is threatening enough, as it is, to be a cause for alarm. More recent still was the disturbing news that statues portraying wayang puppets in the town of Parawakarta, West Java, were destroyed by the towns inhabitants at the instigation of Muslims who want to do away with these pre-Islamic artifacts.

Weyang or Shadow Play Theater is an iconic Indonesian traditional art form. It is just as Indonesian as the tulip is Dutch and the Eifel Tower is French. It is inconceivable that this art is already under threat.

ON THE OTHER HAND, groups in the country are keen to do away with traditional culture. The Indonesian and international community in Indonesia was shocked to learn a few months ago that hard line Islamic groups disturbed shadow play theater performances (wayang) in the outskirts of the town of Sukoharjo, Central Java. It transpired that performances given by less well-known dhalang (puppet players) in off-places were threatened. Apparently, these hard-line groups shied away from doing the same with famous players who performed in larger venues, but the trend is threatening enough, as it is, to be a cause for alarm. More recent still was the disturbing news that statues portraying wayang puppets in the town of Parawakarta, West Java, were destroyed by the towns inhabitants at the instigation of Muslims who want to do away with these pre-Islamic artifacts.

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News from Asia

Riverbeds of Sumatra: the latest target of treasure hunters

John N. Miksic

At the Asian Academy for Heritage Management’s Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Underwater Cultural Heritage, held in Manila several months ago, I presented a paper on a new form of looting that is destroying Southeast Asia’s archaeological heritage. This involves the looting from beds of rivers that have been important centers of habitation, trade, and industry for centuries.

Shipwreck archaeology in Southeast Asia has experienced major advances in the last 15 years. The archaeology of ports is underdeveloped by comparison. This is especially ironic since much of Southeast Asia’s cultural development took place along major rivers. Most major ports in the region were not located on the sea coast, but upstream, sometimes 100 km or more from the river mouths. We know much about the transport of artifacts, but little about their destinations. If we could discover the locations where the consumers of these items lived, we could reconstruct the economic and political situation in the region in much finer detail than is possible at present.

The Musi River in southeast Sumatra has been a major artery of commerce for over 2,000 years. Much of the remaining archaeological evidence of the kingdom of Sriwijaya probably lies beneath the Musi River in modern Palembang. Whereas the nobility of Sriwijaya lived on dry land, much of its population lived either on stilts houses or on rafts. Evidence of their existence as well as port activity, such as warehousing and transshipping of cargo, lies in the mud beneath the river. The head of the archaeological office for South Sumatra has established a website devoted to the development of Wetland Archaeology (http://nurhadirangkuti.blogspot.com). This website gives important recognition to the locations where the consumers of these items lived, we could reconstruct the economic and political situation in the region in much finer detail than is possible at present.

Looting of the Musi riverbed has greatly accelerated in the last few years. Two locations on the Batang Hari, which flows from West Sumatra province to the sea in Jambi, are being subjected to the same treatment. In some areas fishermen use hoses filled with air from compressors to enable them to dive to the river beds, a similar technique to that used to loot shipwrecks in the open sea. They probe the muddy bottom with iron rods, often causing serious damage to, for example, Chinese porcelain. In the upper reaches of the Batang Hari, others use suction devices operated from boats called dompeng to scour the riverbed.

A wide range of artifacts is still within easy reach on the riverbed, but the supply is diminishing. Valuable items are probably disposed of through networks leading to Jakarta, where the majority of collectors live. What remain behind for the fishermen to sell on their own are probably the dregs of the treasures lying under 20 metres of water and a metre of river mud, yet even these include objects that hold the potential to clarify many details of early Southeast Asia.

Small gold items include coins, cylindrical amulet containers meant to be suspended from strings hung around the neck, and pieces of jewellery, including mirrors, and bells with vajra handles for use in esoteric Buddhist rituals. Rolled sheets of heavy metal appear to be tiśśa or lead votive objects inscribed with mantras. Utilitarian objects include scale weights. Porcelains span a wide range of Chinese export wares, from Tang Yue bowls through to middle Ming cobalt blue wares. Earthenware, both local coarse ware and fine wares from south Thailand, is also in the assemblage. Probably many more examples lie on the riverbed, but they are not easily sold and thus not often brought to the surface.

Archaeologists rarely undertake excavations in rivers. Such research faces considerable technical and financial challenges. Conventional marine archaeologists would lay out a grid on the riverbed and excavate using an airlift. Whether this would be feasible in the Musi River needs to be investigated. An alternative might be to adopt salvage archaeology methods, using mechanical excavation employing dredging equipment to expedite the recovery of artifacts.

About the Conference

The inaugural Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Underwater Cultural Heritage was held by the Asian Academy for Heritage Management, from 8 to 12 November 2011 in Manila, Philippines. The conference was hosted by the National Museum of Philippines. A total of 128 delegates from 35 nations attended the conference.

The conference aimed to exchange and disseminate information about underwater cultural heritage in Asia and the countries of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, facilitate professional development for underwater archaeologists and underwater cultural heritage managers in the Asia-Pacific region, provide a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas and approaches to underwater cultural heritage and underwater archaeology and to publish the proceedings both online and in print to a wide audience. The conference proceedings are available at the Museum of Underwater Archaeology (MUA) Online: www.mua.org/collection/items/browse?collection=2

John N. Miksic, National University of Singapore and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (seajnmn@nus.edu.sg)

Right: Map showing Early Southeast Asian Ports (drawn by Dr. G.Y. Goh).
All Photos courtesy John N. Miksic.
Penang Story: a history of connections

Aparajita Basu

From the outset it was clear that the conference was predicated on two objectives. The first was to break the traditional boundaries of area studies between the geographical zones conventionally divided into South and Southeast Asia. The second goal was to emphasize Penang’s significant connections with South Asia, which have been overlooked in favor of links with Chinese maritime exchanges in the Indian Ocean.

A subsequent panel on early Chinese migrations debated the notion that comparisons were vital, establishing the longevity of trade links between South India and the west coast of peninsular Malaysia, stretching back to the first millennium of the Common Era. The panelists Supanin Sabath and Yong Qiong Lian of the University of California, Berkeley (apbasu@berkeley.edu) and Barbara Mattheis of the University of California, Berkeley (yqlian@berkeley.edu) adapted in the temple structures of the Bujang Valley. Barbara Mattheis’s keynote lecture “Penang and Bombay: Indian Ocean Port Cities in the 19th Century” was a case in point. Presenting Bombay and Penang comparatively as sister cities of colonial cosmopolitan modernity, she argued that both shared a maritime culture of inclusiveness, and mercantile elites (Paris, Peranakan Babas and Jane Penk) in each formed the backbone of colonial civil society.

Meeting the Mummies of the Tarim Basin: the Bronze Age and early Iron Age mummies of Eastern Central Asia

Victor H. Mair

THE MUMMIES OF EASTERN CENTRAL ASIA first entered my consciousness in the summer of 1998. I had vaguely heard about them from the end of the 70s, but until I came face to face with the mummies in the late 80s, I did not have a real sense of their enormous importance for the study of Eurasian prehistory and history. I had been to the regional museum in Urumchi many times before, but when I returned for yet another visit that summer, I was stunned. I was leading a group from the Smithsonian Institution, and was totally unprepared for the newly opened exhibition of Bronze Age and Early Iron Age mummies that we encountered on that occasion. I should perhaps add by way of disclaimer that I am not only to the “disciplinary” knowledge in the class, but also to firmly ground knowledge into practice.

Anjana Sharma, Nalanda University

Anjana Sharma

The newsletter that is virtual from the ancient ruins of Nalanda. Photo courtesy Nalanda University.
Rubanisation as a vision for the Nalanda campus region:
an academic design project by NUS architecture students

Tay Kheng Soon

Rubanisation—reconceptualizes the urban and the rural as one space not two. It is a compound word coined from the words ‘rubal’ and ‘urban’. The Ruban is therefore a form of human settlement that has both rural and urban characteristics in which to work, live, play, farm and heal.

Rubanisation as a means of rebalancing local production and consumption is not an easy task. The need for huge investments in infrastructure, education, support for small and medium enterprises, and the viability of family-based small-plot agriculture have to be addressed. Clearly the time for a paradigm change has come and a new imagination is needed.

The establishment of Nalanda University gives us an opportunity to address this paradigm shift. The challenge is to move towards defining a new civilizational direction away from the exclusively materialist model of development inherited from the industrial age. Nalanda will be intimately linked to the region which sustains it and will learn from it, while the region will contribute towards defining Nalanda’s local and global scholastic mission within a conception of environmental sustainability.

It is in this context that 4th-year students of the National University of Singapore Architecture School will spend twelve weeks, starting January 2012, thinking about the issues of networked settlements in the form of the Rubanisation of the region and taking this perspective to the design of the Nalanda Master Plan. Each student will focus on the architectural design of a building or group of buildings within the master plan to express the new paradigm and image of how life would be or should be in the future campus.

Students will make a site visit to Nalanda, meet with relevant university and local officials, and examine the historical and geographical settings. In collaboration with other Singapore institutions, it will select the three best designs for presentation in Singapore and India. Indeed, this project underscores the mission of collaborative educational experiences inherent in the Nalanda initiative under the East Asia Summit forum and demonstrates Singapore’s ongoing support for the project.

Tay Kheng Soon, Adjunct Professor at National University of Singapore (khengsoon@akitektenggara.com)

Rubanisation

Perpetuated to drum up tourism.
Yet the labels claimed the mummies dated to the first and second millennium B.C. The artifacts accompanying them were also remarkably well-preserved and, in many instances, technologically and culturally advanced for the time. For example, these people had bronze, wheat, and the wheel before these appeared in the Central Plains of China, and their woolen textiles were of extraordinarily fine quality.

The longer I stayed in that room and carefully observed the mummies and their associated artifacts, however, the less doubt I had that they were real. I was particularly struck by one of the mummies who bore a striking resemblance to my second oldest brother (I later called him Ur-David). Consequently, I told my Smithsonian specialist on medieval Buddhist literature that I had seen one of the mummies that they were real. I was particularly struck by how many researchers were involved in all aspects of the investigation of this one bronze age person. At some point as I was taking in this flood of astonishing information, this Chinese expeditions burst into my mind: “Hu going-ping!” (It’s not fair!). I instantaneously recalled the mummies I had encountered in the Trumchi Museum three years earlier and reflected that, not only were they virtually unknown to the world outside of Urumchi, there was next to no cutting-edge research being done on them.

That very afternoon, I began to organize an international conference on the mummies at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, which constituted a watershed in research on Eurasian prehistory and history.

To this day, more than two decades after that fateful encounter in the summer of 1988, I am actively engaged in investigations on the ‘Trumchi mummies’. To use another Chinese expression, the mummies of Eastern Central Asia and ‘youquxian’ (have an affinity). A deeper level of kinship results from the fact that, as a boy, my father pastured his family’s animals high up in the same mountains where Ötzi passed into eternity. These are questions that I will be working on for the rest of my life, but they are not merely matters of personal interest, since they have implications for human relationships in Eurasia from the late Neolithic to the present.

Victor H. Mair, Professor of Chinese Language and Literature University of Pennsylvania (vmair@sas.upenn.edu)
On a small island about 5 kilometres south of Singapore, the enduring power of myth manifests itself in the form of an annual pilgrimage, for which tens of thousands of devotees undertake a journey to a place said to be inhabited by deities dating back centuries. Over time, a fusion of religious practices occurred as believers of different faiths gathered to pray at a Chinese temple or Malay shrines (keramat) on the island, a phenomenon that is none too surprising in a place like Singapore, where people of diverse cultures and religions share the limited physical space of this city-state.

Named for its turtle-like shape, Kusu (Turtle Island in the Hokkien dialect) is one of the most visited of some 60 offshore islands belonging to, and a rare instance of undisturbed sanctity in, development-driven Singapore. Numerous stories surround its origins, most popular among which is the story of a giant turtle rescuing shipwrecked fishermen by transforming into the island.

The Kusu pilgrimage takes place throughout the ninth month of the Chinese lunar calendar, falling between the months of September and November. This is when Kusu awakes from its slumber as ferry loads of mainly ethnic Chinese devotees arrive. Many devotees first visit the temple of Tua Pek Kong (Daboangong, 大寶洪, literally meaning Grand Uncle), a popular deity among the Southeast Asian Chinese. Also seen as the God of Prosperity, Merchant God and the patron god of seafarers, the origins of this deity remain debatable, with some identifying him as the local representation of the Chinese Earth God (Tudogong, 土地公), and others seeing him as symbolic of early Chinese pioneers in the region.

After praying to Tua Pek Kong, some pilgrims climb 152 steps up a hillock to pray at the shrines of Syed Abdul Rahman, Negi Hakib and Puteri Fatimah, three Malay saints who lived in the 19th century. Most accounts generally relate how Syed Abdul Rahman came to the island, while the other two are said to be his mother and sister respectively. This form of saint worship or keramat worship — a legacy of early Sufi Islam and pre-Islamic belief — has similarities with Tua Pek Kong worship. As some Southeast Asian Chinese have also adopted the practice, the Malay saints too acquired the Sino-Malay honorific of Datuk Kong, a combination of the Malay term “Datuk” and the Chinese title “Kong”. Syed Abdul Rahman is thus simply referred to as “Datuk Kong”.

No one seems to know with any certainty when or how the Kusu pilgrimage began. Although no archival records kept by the Chinese temple or Malay shrines, memories fade as the devotees are passed down from generation to generation. By the Chinese temple or Malay shrines, memories fade as the devotees are passed down from generation to generation. By the Chinese temple or Malay shrines, memories fade as the devotees are passed down from generation to generation. By the Chinese temple or Malay shrines, memories fade as the devotees are passed down from generation to generation. By the Chinese temple or Malay shrines, memories fade as the devotees are passed down from generation to generation. By the Chinese temple or Malay shrines, memories fade as the devotees are passed down from generation to generation. By the Chinese temple or Malay shrines, memories fade as the devotees are passed down from generation to generation. 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According to some local English newspaper articles published in the 1940s and 50s, pilgrimage to Kusu began as early as 1813, the year of Syed Abdul Rahman’s death, before Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles’ arrival in 1819. A petition notice published on 14 August 1875 in the Singapore English daily The Straits Times further suggests that it was a fairly nondescript story in which some fishermen brought holy images to the island. This is unrelated to the legend of the giant turtle. Instead, it was thus simply referred to as “Datuk Kong”.

Receiving prayers for peace, health, wealth and prosperity. Both places also offer “fertility trees” on which those wanting children hang stones and other items to make their wishes come true, while gamblers pray to both Chinese and Malay deities for winning lottery numbers. It is not unusual to see followers of different religions visiting the temple and shrines. Professing to “believe in all gods”, Selvi M., 48, nurse, an Indian Hindu, visited Kusu with her Chinese Taotist colleagues during the pilgrimage season and prayed at both the Chinese temple and Malay shrines. Both Taotist and Buddhist pilgrims make offerings at Tua Pek Kong temple, which also houses the Guanyin (觀音, Goddess of Mercy), revered by followers of both religions.

Given the twin attractions of a mystical origin and idyllic surroundings, Kusu has been marketed as a tourist attraction, with mixed results. Many tourist guidebooks on Singapore include information on Kusu and it is described in official tourism literature as a “holiday resort” with “blue lagoons, pristine beaches and tranquil settings.” Since the 1970s, Singapore tourism authorities have been keen to develop a cluster of islands south of Singapore (Southern Islands) — which Kusu was a part of — into a recreational resort. This spurred an ambitious project for which $550 million was spent to beautify these islands. Since then, Kusu has been enlarged to nearly 6 times its original size (from 1.5 hectares...
A few years ago, I wrote a paper on Tua Pek Kong’s cult in the Chinese Diaspora. The paper was submitted in the spring of 1998 for consideration for publication in a special issue of *Perspectives in Southeast Asian Research* on the cult of Tua Pek Kong, aiming to explore the complexity of this religious movement in Southeast Asia.

In the late 1990s, the Tua Pek Kong temple became the central focus of a number of scholarly studies. However, the cult’s origin and identity are still subject to ongoing research.

Tua Pek Kong, a Sino-Malay deity, is venerated in many Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. The cult is associated with fertility and prosperity, and is particularly popular among the Chinese diaspora.

In the 1990s, further plans to develop the temple were announced, with the aim of attracting more tourists and increasing the cult’s popularity. The temple is situated on the island of Kusu, which was originally used as a dumping ground for waste and is now a popular destination for tourists.

The Tua Pek Kong temple is a place of worship and tourism. It is a place where the local community comes together to celebrate the cult’s annual pilgrimage. The temple is also a place where visitors can learn about the history and culture of the cult.

In the late 1990s, the temple was renovated, and the island was redeveloped to attract more tourists. The temple now hosts various events and activities, including musical performances and cultural events.

In the 2000s, the temple’s popularity continued to grow, with more visitors coming to worship and to learn about the cult. The temple is now a popular destination for tourists and a place of pilgrimage for people from all over the world.

In the 2010s, the temple continued to be a focus of scholarly research, with many studies being published on the cult and its history.

The example of Tua Pek Kong illustrates the changing nature and trend of the Kusu pilgrimage. What was a family affair is now mainly observed by the older generation, in shrinking numbers. According to statistics from the Sentosa Development Corporation – the agency responsible for managing Kusu – pilgrimage numbers have decreased yearly since 2001. Compared to more than 200,000 visitors to the hilltop in 2001, less than half (about 52,000) did so last year. This was in stark contrast to the three decades ago when a record number of pilgrims (well over 23,000) thronged the island, less than half (about 52,000) did so last year. This was in stark contrast to the three decades ago when a record number of pilgrims (well over 23,000) thronged the island.

Caretakers and pilgrims who were interviewed attributed the decline to several factors. One reason was that few from the younger generation still followed religious traditions. Other more prosaic reasons given included the shifting of ferry services to a new but relatively inaccessible pier in 2006. Several interviewees opined that this prevented the trail and aged from making the pilgrimage. Although the ferry journey was shortened by half (from 30 minutes to 15 minutes each way), more effort was needed to get to the pier.

Some pilgrims also felt that ferry fares were becoming too costly at $15 (about US$11) for a return trip. For many years prior, pilgrims could choose between taking privately-operated bumboat services (water taxi) or a ferry service operated by the former Port of Singapore Authority (PSA). Yap Kok Chuan recalls, “Bumboat riders to the island cost only 30 to 50 cents in the 1960s and 70s. Even during the oil crisis, ticket prices did not go up.” In the late 1970s, the PSA declined to increase fares despite pressure from bumboat operators, stating that it was providing a public service. It relented in 1981, citing heavy losses, and eventually relinquished this responsibility. Today, a single private company provides the ferry service.

Although pilgrimage numbers have fallen sharply over the past decade, those interviewed hope that the Kusu pilgrimage will see a revival. The Siong Leng Musical Association – a traditional arts group formed in 1941 to preserve, develop, and promote Nan Yin (literally meaning “The Music of the South”) and Li Yuan operas – stages a musical performance on Kusu every year during pilgrimage season, a practice started by its late chairman Teng Mah Seng in the 1970s. Over the years, this event has garnered more attention and the number of participants and observers has increased from dozens to hundreds.

Cecilia Seet hopes that more people will visit Kusu when a new subway station opens at the pier – next to a new international cruise terminal – in two years’ time. Meanwhile, the pilgrimage is gaining new followers among the migrant community. She describes it as “a Chinese Fujian native – went on her first pilgrimage five years ago after hearing about the supposed efficacy of the Kusu deity. Far away from home, her prayers are for safety and good luck, both for herself and her family in Fujian. Continually fuelled by the hopes and wishes of those who reach its shores, the Kusu pilgrimage survives the times.”

Lu Ciuxia, research associate at the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, ISEAS Singapore and regional editor for *The Newsletter* (www.iseasia.iseas.edu.sg).

Tua Pek Kong’s cult is a fascinating example of how religious practices have evolved over time. It demonstrates how the cult’s origin and identity are still subject to ongoing research. The temple is a place of worship and tourism, attracting visitors from all over the world.

The temple is situated on the island of Kusu, which was originally used as a dumping ground for waste and is now a popular destination for tourists. The temple hosts various events and activities, including musical performances and cultural events.

The example of Tua Pek Kong illustrates the changing nature and trend of the Kusu pilgrimage. What was a family affair is now mainly observed by the older generation, in shrinking numbers. According to statistics from the Sentosa Development Corporation – the agency responsible for managing Kusu – pilgrimage numbers have decreased yearly since 2001. Compared to more than 200,000 visitors to the hilltop in 2001, less than half (about 52,000) did so last year. This was in stark contrast to the three decades ago when a record number of pilgrims (well over 23,000) thronged the island.

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Rapenburg 59
Willem Vogelsang, Institute Manager IIAS

In September of last year, during the Open Monuments Weekend, the beautiful and historic building that houses the International Institute for Asian Studies, along the Rapenburg canal in Leiden, was opened to the general public. On a Sunday afternoon, for some three hours, more than 900 people came to have a look inside our premises. Why were people so curious, and what is the story behind the house?

Not surprisingly, over the years the furnishings have changed a lot. But an inventory dating to the early eighteenth century notes that there was a large wall cabinet in one of the rooms, amazingly, that same cabinet can still be found in my own little office. From later auction inventories, also dating to the eighteenth century, it is made clear that the walls of the house were decorated with a number of paintings, including a series by the famous Leiden artist, Jan Steen. In fact, one of the Jan Steen paintings from the Rapenburg 59 is now hanging in the Philadelphia Museum in the USA. The auctions also included many statuettes of wood, ivory and marble. Some of those survive and are now housed in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. There was also cut-glass of the highest quality, some of which is also still extant. And what to say of the reference that the house included a chimney decoration by another famous painter from Leiden, Rembrandt van Rijn? Alas, the painting is no longer there. But both Jan Steen and Rembrandt van Rijn must have often passed the Rapenburg 59, if only on their way to school, the Latin School that can still be seen standing a few hundred metres from our building.

One of the first to live at Rapenburg 59 was Jean Nicolas (de) Parival. He came from Verdun in France, and bought the house in 1647. He may have come to Leiden as a wine vendor; in the city archives he is described as coming from ‘schaampagne’. He taught French in Leiden, and made quite a name for himself. But he also made sure that the immortal words of his neighbour, Professor Johannes Polyander, who lived at Rapenburg 61, were published:

‘Of all the four continents Europe is the most beautiful; of all European countries, The Netherlands are the most beautiful; of the dutch provinces, Holland is the most beautiful; of all towns in Holland, Leiden is the most beautiful, and in Leiden, the Rapenburg is the most beautiful street.’

The history of our Office building dates back to at least the late fifteenth century. In those days it formed part of a larger estate that included what are now the houses Rapenburg 61 and 63. In the early seventeenth century Rapenburg 59 became a separate building, and since then it has housed a number of illustrious and famous people. It even provided private offices to Princess Beatrix, now Queen of the Netherlands, who was a student at Leiden University between 1956 and 1961, living nearby at Rapenburg 45.

Admirers certainly also included the patients of doctors Bruining and Voorst, at his home on numerous occasions – at least every few days to vacate the house, which held not only his own belongings, but also those of Jewish friends. In 1949, after a few days to vacate the house, which held not only his own belongings, but also those of Jewish friends. In 1949, after the war, he sold the house to the State and since 1956 it has been in continuous use by Leiden University.

The last private occupants of the building were general practitioners, namely Johannes Bruining (1906) and Warner Johannes Bruins Slot (1932). The latter was forced to leave the house in 1945 when it was commandeered by the German occupying forces. Regrettably, Bruins Slot was given just a few days to vacate the house, which held not only his own belongings, but also those of Jewish friends. In 1949, after the war, he sold the house to the State and since 1956 it has been in continuous use by Leiden University.

In 1956, the interior of the house was slightly altered to accommodate offices (including for Princess Beatrix), but the basic layout remained unchanged. It still boasts many early-eighteenth century features, such as the beautifully carved stairway. The ‘Kelderkamer’ (Cellar Room), named for the simple reason that it is located above the cellar, is also noteworthy. The wall cabinet noted in the early-eighteenth century inventory still resides in this Cellar Room – which I am now honoured to call my office and I sometimes wonder how many other people over the centuries have had the pleasure to look upon this cabinet with their own eyes. Admirers certainly also included the patients of doctors Bruining and Bruins Slot, who used the Kelderkamer as a waiting room.

I also sometimes wonder about other secrets this house may still be hiding?

A message for all IIAS alumni
Helleen van der Mijn

During the past eighteen years, ever since its foundation, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IASS) has enjoyed the attendance of over a thousand fellows and affiliated scholars. The IAS would like to invite all past and present fellows and affiliated scholars to join our Alumni Programme, which aims to coordinate the many existing contacts and networks amongst our scholars, facilitate interactions between all its members, past and present, and to strengthen the institute’s global visibility so as to help shape a vibrant transnational Asian studies community that reflects the spirit of IAS.

In the recent IAS online survey (see page 22) members indicated their wish for more opportunities to become involved with IAS and its activities, to make better use of IAS resources and to have higher levels of interaction between IAS scholars. Our past and present scholars already know the value of the IAS network, and now welcome new ways of working with others in their field. This is what our Alumni Programme will offer.

The responses we received through the survey indeed reflect the central aim of IAS: to be a worldwide scientific platform and research network in the field of Asian Studies. The IAS has enjoyed the attendance of over a thousand Asia researchers from all over the world, and has developed into a scientific hub in the field of Asian studies for a multitude of scholars.

IAS has supported and promoted young and eager researchers just embarking on their careers, as well as the most excellent globally known scientists. The many contacts these scholars developed through their association with IAS have proven essential for their professional opportunities and advancement, and for their valued contribution to the field of Asian studies.

IAS is a true research community, and will soon receive an Alumni Programme to match.

IAS is currently strengthening the existing networks and investing in new ones, which will act as the tools to keep all IAS contacts up-to-date, and to offer fellows and alumni the opportunity of services. The new IAS Alumni Programme hopes to offer new means and facilities, enabling IAS relations to operate in a more structured way, more focussed and flexible, such as:

- An online IAS profile page and directory to find fellow alumni
- An extended use of social media such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook
- Discussion groups/forums for a diversity of subjects (regionally and thematically), and an opportunity to announce new research and publications
- Special alumni events

Connect
We cordially invite you to become an (even more) active IASS community member – become and stay connected with the IAS Alumni Programmel The Alumni Programme is an online community and enable you to respond to and discuss all kinds of developments in the field of Asian studies. We would kindly like to ask you to fill in the online form on www.iias.nl/alumni-form so that we may complete our database with any information we are possibly missing. Thank you very much in advance for your cooperation, and we look forward to receiving you in the IAS Alumni Programme.

First Alumni Event
IAS Alumni are invited to attend a drinks reception at the AAS conference in Toronto, to meet old friends and new opportunities. The place and time of the event is yet to be confirmed. We look forward to seeing many of you there!

Helleen van der Mine, IAS Project manager events & projects (h.m.van.der.minne@iias.nl)
The Europe-Asia Policy Forum (EUforAsia; http://www.euforasia.org) was convened by the European Commission, the EUforAsia consortium consisted of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the Asian University for Policy Studies (AUPS) and the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). Over the last three years, EUforAsia organised roundtables, briefings and conferences with the aim of enabling EU-Africa cooperation and awareness on issues of mutual interest, in areas such as sustainable development, regional integration, and governance.

The final conference of the Europe-Asia Policy Forum, entitled Re-engaging Europe with Asia, was held at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael. The conference was attended by more than forty European and Asian experts and opinion leaders, from academia, think tanks, who discussed emerging global and regional economic, political and security issues of common concern. Four main issues were discussed, namely the impact of the financial crises on regional economic integration, the challenges of new security dialogues in Asia, the EU's role in the Caspian region, to simultaneously satisfy the resource needs of both Europe and Asia. Increasingly, shared environmental concerns constitute a window through which to observe fundamental changes and concomitant inter-dependerences between the two continents, as much as a missed cultural opportunity as it is a missed cultural one. Given the increased economic interdependence between the two continents, the EU is relevant to play a more active role in this area, also building on its experience in combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden. This could be pursued through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEM process.

Cooperation in higher education

The EU’s cooperation in higher education with Asia dates back over two decades. On the flow from Europe to Asia, these activities range from the creation of EU Studies Centres in Asian countries to the promotion and finance of joint university cooperation and research. In addition, it encourages scientific dialogue across the two academic communities. European universities are also active in recruiting Asian students from BA through to PhD levels. The traffic in the other direction is more limited, whether the promotion of Asian studies and languages in European universities, or facilitating European students to study there. Given the increased economic interdependence between the two continents, it is as much a missed economic opportunity as it is a missed cultural one. Strong political will is needed to increase cooperation in higher education. The overall goal is to share knowledge, improve mutual understanding, reduce misperception, and the exchange of culture and values.

Cooperation in energy policy and sustainability

Energy security is one of the major global challenges of the 21st century. Intensified competition for increasingly scarce forms of conventional energy sources is causing significant tensions in the global system. Asia’s burgeoning energy growth, spurred on principally by China, has a profound effect on global energy security. Asian newly-industrialized countries increasingly affect the EU’s energy security position, especially in terms of “supply security”. Asia’s growth in energy demand increases pressures on common resources, e.g., from the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caspian region, to simultaneously satisfy the resource needs of both Europe and Asia. Increasingly, shared environmental concerns constitute a window through which to observe fundamental changes and concomitant inter-dependerences between the two major worlds. The EU’s energy policy, its presence in the Caspian region and its relationship with the Caspian Sea Lanes of Communication (SLC). Hence the EU must seek to play a more active role in this area, also building on its experience in combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden. This could be pursued through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEM process.

The relevance of Asia’s security for the EU and the question how the EU can remain relevant for Asia are interlinked. Asia stability concerns the world and the EU. Both are integrated in the EU’s external relations policy and play a key role in the regional economy without being an active participant in global politics. This means that the EU must be present in Asia where the latter’s political and economic influence is rapidly increasing, e.g., in relation to global governance issues. The EU can provide useful experiences from its region-building efforts and management of various non-traditional security issues. With regard to priority areas the EU should focus on engaging Asia in the area of non-traditional security issues. This is where the EU’s strengths lie, namely in areas like peace-building, peace-keeping and conflict management. The EU must be able to understand the essence of the Afghan Monitoring Mission and develop a more systematic way of engaging Asia in the Afghan peace process, in conflict resolution and peace building. Dealing effectively with human trafficking, disaster relief and pandemics needs to be further developed.

As a global trading power the EU has a vital interest in an uninterrupted flow of goods and therefore the EU aims to deepen its economic relations with Asia. The EU is looking for different options to shape their integration framework in a way that it becomes increasingly necessary to focus on priority areas in EU-Asia relations namely: energy security, climate change and other environmental issues; food and water security; closing development divides – development capacity-building; social equity and economic justice; resource competition, coping with economic globalization and strengthening regional inter-regional and global governance.

Civil society and business have key stakeholder roles to play in addressing these challenges, not least because non-state actors have an important role to play in understanding and supporting the role played by cities in Regional Cooperation and Integration (RCI) processes generally. The rise of cities in the global system will be a key political, economic and governance trend as the 21st century unfolds.

New security dialogues in Asia: declining relevance?

Both Asia and Europe have experienced major financial crises challenging the ability of regional integration frameworks to respond effectively. These crises raise the issue of developing further new regional integration frameworks in order to respond better to future challenges. Given the different patterns of integration, Europe and Asia are likely to look to different models as they pursue their integration framework. On the other hand, the challenges facing them, such as the role of global financial markets, the need for economic growth, the role of actors too big to fail, as well as the imperatives of sustainable national budgets, are comparable.

A central factor in developing the processes and institutions of integration is the interdependence between Europe and Asia. Interdependencies are becoming increasingly apparent in a broader range of sectors, e.g., finance, energy, environment and resource security. In the past multi-sector management approach is therefore required. It also means that economic interdependence is moving beyond trade and investment relations, to the heart of the EU-Asia relationship in the early post-Cold War period of the 1990s. In order to respond adequately to the impact of financial crises on regional economic integration, the EU and Asia need to recognize the complex multi-sector interdependence and the need for greater coherence and coordination amongst EU countries. Furthermore, it becomes increasingly necessary to focus on priority areas in EU-Asia relations namely: energy security, climate change and other environmental issues; food and water security; closing development divides – development capacity-building; social equity and economic justice; resource competition, coping with economic globalization and strengthening regional inter-regional and global governance.

The present-day forms of intensive relationships of capital investments, commercial, political alliances and cultural exchanges have increasingly come to systematically engage with the past and present of Asian and African realities. An essential prerequisite for sustainable economic progress in African societies is the development of institutional and academic infrastructures that will improve the global knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. The access to knowledge of a world region that is as culturally diverse and economically powerful as Asia, will enable countries and citizens of both regions to develop a youth inter-continental relationship and to benefit fully from all its offers.

Informed by years of experience in Asia and Africa, the initiators recognise the need for a solid and critical infrastructure of human and social sciences in order to lead the discussion and research, of which a focus on Asian Studies in Africans and European and African institutions can play a positive role as the “relay” in a new triangular transcontinental configuration.

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IAAS Research Projects

Science and History in Asia
First, one can focus on the ways in which the actors have perceived the complex links between science and history in Asian civilizations; how, on the one hand, they have used disciplines that we now categorise as sciences, such as astronomy, for a better understanding of their own past; and, on the other hand, how they have constructed the history of these disciplines, giving them cultural legitimacy. Secondly, one can reflect on how the sciences can be incorporated into historical narratives of Asian civilizations. This question is crucial in the 19th and 20th century view that science is an European invention, and that it has somehow failed to take root in Asia.
IIAS Fellows

IIAS hosts a large number of affiliated fellows (independent postdoctoral scholars), IIAS research fellows (PhD/postdoctoral scholars working on an IIAS research project), and fellows nominated and supported by partner institutions. Fellows are selected by an academic committee on the basis of merit, quality, and available resources. For extensive information on IIAS fellowships and current fellows please refer to the IIAS website.

Hikaru Sugawara
The Dutch Utilitarian

As I clarified in my book, one reason is the influence of Ogyu Sorai, who was the greatest Confucian in seventeenth century Japan. Ogyu thought that Confucianism was a philosophy that told rulers how to govern the country and how to lead people so they could understand it. Nishi Amane, who learned Ogyu's influence, Nishi came toview Utilitarianism not as a measure of private conduct, but as a public philosophy. Robert E. Goddin wrote Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy in 1995 – Nishi already understood Utilitarianism in the same way that Goddin would later come to do. Moreover, I think it is possible that his Utilitarian view was influenced by his studies in Leiden. To examine this, I have investigated the influence of Simon Vissering and C.W. Opzoomer on Nishi Amane. Nishi regarded Opzoomer as the greatest philosopher of late nineteenth century Netherlands and avidly studied his works while in the Netherlands. However, so far, I have been unable to find clear sources to corroborate my hypothesis.

Incidentally, Nishi was a great gourmet. He loved food very much and often organized dinner parties in his home. He especially enjoyed trying rare dishes, and would, with his family, visit newly opened Western restaurants as soon as he could. It was also obvious that he drank beer for the first time on the ship bringing him to the Netherlands – and he loved it. He must have enjoyed Dutch food and Dutch beer during his stay. I too enjoy Dutch food, Dutch beer and Leiden life very much.

Malays with Muslims has encouraged the establishment of Chinese-style mosques, and even rejected it in some cases. Yet, recently, there are some positive developments, witnessed by the construction of the Beijing Mosque in Kuala Lumpur. The Kelantan state government, led by the Islamic PAS, initiated and funded the establishment of the Beijing Mosque for at least three reasons. First, the mosque fits well with the PAS motto – PAS for all – reflecting how the Islamic party respects different cultural expressions and ethnic identities. Second, PAS aims to promote tourism in Kelantan, as well as to provide the state government a niche to build business networks with mainland China. Third, the mosque is a subtle way of preaching Islam to non-Muslim Chinese, showing that Islam is a universal religion.

My research will also explore two broader issues. First, it examines the discourse and practice of Islamic pluralism in both Malaysia and Indonesia, by examining the recent development of Chinese archetypal mosques. Second, it investigates the possibility of Chinese-Muslim diaspora, represented by the cultivation of Nieh of Chinese Muslims in Southeast Asia to New Muslims in China, the promotion of the role of Admiral Cheng Hoo in Islamic propagation, and the building of Chinese-style mosques in both countries.

I greatly appreciate being awarded a five-month postdoctoral fellowship at the IIAS in Leiden, as I now have access to the rich library collections and archival materials of the KITLV and Leiden University, as well as ample opportunity to discuss my research findings with scholars and students in the Netherlands (hewwaiweng@gmail.com).

Hew Wai Weng
Translocal and Cosmopolitan Islam

Since the collapse of the Suharto regime, at least five Chinese-style mosques have been built across Indonesia. The first one is the Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya, its Temple-like-style which is inspired by an old mosque in Beijing, even as its activities are reconfigured within the local context. With the support of both Chinese and Muslim organizations in Surabaya, the mosque was established to declare that there can be a Chinese way of being Muslim and to reassure people that Indonesian Islam is tolerant of various cultural traditions. Given that Chinese Muslim identities in Indonesia are diverse and fluid, the construction of Chinese-style mosque is important in manifesting and preserving their cultural identities and in showcasing the religious and tangibility of mosques makes Chinese Muslim culture unequivocally ‘real’ and ‘enduring’, at least symbolically.

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the combination of a state-controlled Islamic bureaucracy and an ethnicized Islam that equates

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IIAS Projects

In 2007, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands, invited outstanding researchers to work on an important piece of research in the social sciences and humanities with a postdoctoral fellowship. The deadlines for applications are 1 April and 1 October.

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

Asian Cities

The Asian Cities cluster deals with cities and urban cultures with related issues of flows of ideas and goods, cosmopolitanism, métissage and connectivity. Framing the existence of vibrant ‘civil societies’ and political urban microcultures. It also deals with such issues as urban development in the light of the diversity of urban societies.

Asian Heritages

Asian Heritages and Social Agency in Asia cluster explores the notion of heritage as it evolved from a Europe-originated concept associated with architecture to incorporate a broader diversity of cultures and values.

Global Asia

The Global Asia cluster addresses Asia’s role in the various globalization processes. It 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 will be addressed.

Research projects that can contribute to new, historically contextualized, multidisciplinary research, with the capacity of translating this into social and policy relevant initiatives, will be privileged.
The remarkable Dong Bo Zhai Collection, brought together by a Chinese business man from Hong Kong, covers three emblematic fields of the Chinese cultural heritage. Discussed here are the important archaic bronzes reflecting the evolution of these remarkable sumptuary vessels, from the Shang (circa 1550-1050 BC) to the Han dynasty (206 BC-221 AD), and an ensemble of worked gold presenting a panorama of imperial wares and gold jewellery from the 13th to the 18th century. The collection also includes a white marble statue of the Buddha, which still bears traces of coloured paint, exemplifying the heights achieved in Buddhist sculpture in the 6th century.

Monique Gric

The Dong Bo Zhai Collection
Loan exhibition at the Baur Foundation, Geneva
Until 1 April 2012

THREE OF THE TEMPORARY EXHIBITION ROOMS are devoted to the ritual bronzes. Thanks to an abundance of raw materials, the formation of an early state in China and the discovery of jade, were the symbols and attributes of power. The religious and political activities of state, and bronze vessels, as well as jade, were the symbols and attributes of power. Limited to the aristocratic elite, bronze vessels were used to present offerings of food and water as well as libations of alcoholic drinks. The formation of an early state in China and the discovery of bronze metallurgy are traditionally dated to the mythical Xia dynasty (c. 2070-1600 BC), but the earliest bronzes date to the Erlitou culture, located in the north of the country, near Luoyang (Henan). The Shang dynasty (c. 1550-1050 BC), which followed, is divided into two periods, distinguished by the shape and decor of its bronzes: the Erligang culture (c. 1500-1300 BC) and the Yin Yu phase, at Anyang (c. 1300-1050 BC). The earliest works of art in the Dong Bo Zhai collection date from the last phase and include vessels for holding alcoholic drinks, yao, jia, jue, jue (fig. 1) and for offering food, ding and jang (fig. 2). The ritual vessels are decorated with relief lines of stylized zoomorphic ornaments, which become denser and more vigorous towards the end of the period. Amongst these are a myriad beasts known as taotie, shown as a frontal animal mask with large, raised eyes, ku dragons, cicadas, birds and other animals, often placed on a background of square spirals (lowen). Many of these vessels bear simple inscriptions indicating the clan name of their owner.

Towards the middle of the 11th century BC, the Zhou overthrew the Shang and founded their own dynasty, with its capital located near the present-day city of Xi’an. For a century, the bronze vessels were created with the shapes and motifs of the Shang models. Inscriptions now became longer and frequently commemorated non-ritual events such as military campaigns or royal gifts. Important changes are apparent in the bronzes of the middle (975-875 BC) and final (late 9th-early 8th BC) periods, which are more massive, with high relief ornaments. Vessels for offerings of food become more numerous, while the earlier jia and jiong vessels disappear almost completely. The round vessels are decorated with relief lines of stylized zoomorphic ornaments, which become denser and more vigorous towards the end of the period. Amongst these are a myriad beasts known as taotie, shown as a frontal animal mask with large, raised eyes, ku dragons, cicadas, birds and other animals, often placed on a background of square spirals (lowen). Many of these vessels bear simple inscriptions indicating the clan name of their owner.

In 771, driven from their homeland by a nomadic group sweep- ing down from the North-Western steppes, the considerably weakened Zhou abandoned their ancestral tombs, thus losing their legitimacy among their vassals, and set up a new capital further east, at Luoyang. As the Zhou feudal system broke down, rivalry between clans led to incessant warfare and the formation of a multistate system with increasingly regional ties. Gradually, the larger states outgrew their weaker neighbours, even declaring their independence from the Zhou. During this period known as the Spring and Autumn Period, or Chunqiu (770-481 BC), bronze vessels slowly lost their previous religious function to become symbols of local aristocratic wealth. Of the ornaments inherited from the Western Zhou, the dragon became a major source of inspiration. The taotie mask loses its dominant position and frequently gives way to crested birds and dragons.

Bodies. From the 7th century on, several distinct regional styles developed. The bronzes often take on extravagant forms, with a richly textured surface effect created by raised decorative elements, characteristic of those regions that fell under the influence of the great state of Chu. Intended mainly for burial purposes, some bronzes were low-quality replicas (mengqi) of the vessels used in temples and showed little originality in design as shown by the almost complete contents of a tomb from Southern China, dated to the 6th-5th century BC.

From the middle of the 5th century BC, seven major political centres emerged in China. This marked the beginning of a new era, called the Warring States Period, or Qianhan (481-221 BC), during which conflicts grew in intensity due to the use of iron weapons and crossbows. Despite the political instability, the rival courts made an ostentatious display of their wealth. Bell chimes were played during official banquets or ceremonies held in honour of the ancestors (fig. 2). The southern culture of Chu was to maintain a distinct identity well into the Western Han dynasty (206 BC-9 AD) and was also an important production centre for lacquered wooden sculpture and vessels. These would in turn inspire new designs for bronzes, frequently decorated with birds, flowers and inlaid stones. Gold vessels were used at court, but these pieces, probably recycled after becoming a sign of wealth from 6th century BC onwards. The first gold vessels did not appear until the Warring States period (481-221 BC). A country’s political expansion and the opening of the Silk Roads also stimulated a taste for the exotic, and encouraged the development of a sophisticated and luxurious court art (fig. 3).

The great originality of the Dong Bo Zhai Collection is that it includes exceptional examples of luxury ware and gold adornments, dating from the Southern Song (1127-1279) to the Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, presented in the last exhibition room. In ancient China, gold was mainly used for ornaments before becoming a sign of wealth from 6th century BC onwards. The first gold vessels did not appear until the Warring States period (481-221 BC). The country’s political expansion and the opening of the Silk Roads also stimulated a taste for the exotic, and encouraged the development of a sophisticated and luxurious court art (fig. 3).

The great originality of the Dong Bo Zhai Collection is that it includes exceptional examples of luxury ware and gold adornments, dating from the Southern Song (1127-1279) to the Qing (1644-1911). The Ming dynasty (1368-1644) was an important period for the production of gold vessels, which became more common in the Eastern Han (25-220 AD), reaching a highpoint in the Tang dynasty (618-907). From the Song dynasty (960-1279) on, the use of gold and silver ware spread both geographically and socially. Gold wares remained the prerogative of the imperial family and high dignitaries. Dishes and bowls took on lobed, floral shapes, and the calligraphic fluidity of the incised or repoussé decoration reflects the sophisticated taste of the scholar. Under the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), large quantities of gold and silver ware in a variety of shapes and designs inspired by Song styles were used at court, but these pieces, probably recycled later, have only rarely survived to this day. During the Chinese Ming dynasty (1368-1644), gold became one of the most prestigious materials alongside jade and silk, as well as an important symbol of rank and wealth. Gold was the favourite metal used for the jewellery of the aristocracy (fig. 6). The use of gold vessels was reserved for the emperor and his family (fig. 3). A new taste for rich and colourful decoration encouraged the widespread use of inlaid stones, such as diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, amethysts, and opals, as well as pearls and jade. Several of the pieces of the Dong Bo Zhai collection belonged to the same tomb and bear inscriptions dating to the year 1601, to the reign of Emperor Wanli (1573-1620). Many of these were made in gold filigree (fig. 6), a technique originally intended for the aristocracy but which was also much appreciated by the European courts.

China of bronze and gold: The Dong Bo Zhai collection

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The Baer Foundation, Museum of Far Eastern Art, is a private museum housed in an elegant late 19th century town house in Geneva. The collections comprise some 9000 Chinese and Japanese art objects. Acquired by the Swiss collector Alfred Baur (1865-1951) over a period of some 45 years, these works of art include Chinese jades, snuff bottles and imperial ceramic ware from the Ming (1368-1644) and the Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, as well as Japanese prints, lacquer, ceramics, netsuke and sword fittings. Since 1995, several donations have further enriched the museum’s holdings. (http://www.fondation-baur.ch)