The Newsletter

ICAS 11
16-19 July 2019
Leiden, the Netherlands

The Focus
Informal connectivity in transnational shadow exchanges

International Institute for Asian Studies
Celebrating 25 years of the International Institute for Asian Studies
Informal connectivity in transnational shadow exchanges

Transnational networks play a key role in the global flow of resources. Yet the regulated activities of trade, foreign direct investment (FDI), migration, and related activities constitute only a portion of all transnational exchanges. The rest is undertaken in the shadows. Every day, vast networks of people and organizations shuffle goods, money, and humans across the globe’s borders. Unsurprisingly, owing to their obscure nature, the assortment of border exchanges, the diversities of brokering practices, and the variations in informality have not been fully studied. Our joint project, presented in this Focus section, seeks to address these issues by re-examining transnational informal exchanges across Asia and Eurasia from a bottom-up perspective.

The Newsletter is a free periodical published by the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS). As well as serving as a forum for scholars to share research, commentary and opinion with colleagues in academia and beyond, The Newsletter is also a window into the Institute.

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The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is a global Humanities and Social Sciences Institute and a knowledge exchange platform, based in Leiden, the Netherlands, with programmes that engage Asian and other international partners. IIAS takes a thematic and multi-sectoral approach to the study of Asia and actively involves scholars and experts from different disciplines and regions in its activities. Our current thematic research clusters are ‘Asian Heritages’, ‘Asian Cities’ and ‘Global Asia’.

Information about the programmes and activities of IIAS can be found in the Newsletter pages of each issue of The Newsletter.

In this issue
IIAS has been celebrating its 25th year of existence during this past year, and is wrapping up the ‘festivities’ with ICAS 11 (16-19 July), which is returning to the Netherlands where it had its first instalment in 1998. Reminisce about the first 10 editions of ICAS (pp.8-9) and be informed about this current 11th edition, including all the special events being organised during the week (pp.10-13). The ICAS Book Prize is bigger and better than ever; in addition to its existing 5 language prizes and English Dissertation Prize (p.13) it now includes yet another language edition: Spanish/Portuguese (pp.14-15).

On page 50, attention is given to the IIAS Winter School 2018, held at the Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City; ‘Delta cities: rethinking practices of the urban’; and on the following page you will find a report from our Humanities Across Border Initiative, an inter-community dialogue on rice as a site of knowledge and meaning’.

IIAS research programmes, networks and other initiatives are described in brief on pages 54-55. Information about the IIAS Fellowship programme can be found on page 53, and our latest announcements on page 52.
The IIAS Miracle

O n the eve of the 11th edition of ICAS, which is proving to be an exceptional event for all who are involved in Asia studies, and beyond, we are getting ready to receive nearly 2,500 participants, scheduled into nearly 150 parallel sessions and other forms of collaborations of all kinds. I cannot help but amazed at the huge contrast that exists between the tiny organisation of 20 or so members and the global-scale transformative initiatives that it produces. Since I have been working at IIAS I have regularly witnessed the surprised expressions of our visitors when they see the contrast for themselves. People always expect to encounter a much larger staff (and building) at the IIAS offices at Rapenburg 59. In addition, when in Asia, my interlocutors are often astonished to know that IIAS is actually headquartered in Europe, in the small city of Leiden, albeit surrounded by an academic environment of high significance, that of Leiden University. This is what I call the ‘IIAS miracle’. It is primarily built on two solid foundations: its highly committed staff and its unique institutional set-up.

One distinctive aspect of IIAS is the internal chemistry that prevails in its midst. Every one of us works on a specific task or project basis – editing the Newsletter, running the book reviews, coordinating the Urban Studies activities, managing the fellowship programme, overseeing the finances, running the secretariat, leading special initiatives like ICAS, the Humanities Across Borders or The Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network, etc. Yet, thanks to an open-door policy, not just limited to the people working in the Leiden building (we have colleagues actively collaborating elsewhere, especially in Asia), people at IIAS are used to some kind of fluidity and solidarity that makes each of us highly flexible and versatile. This is perhaps what the Dutch mean with the ‘polder spirit’, a culture in which highly independent people gather together around projects or ideas of larger, common significance. At IIAS, the common purpose is the life and growth of the institute itself. Everything of importance for the organisation must be at some point of its elaboration endorsed by the team. This environment, free from unnecessary hierarchies or formalities, makes it propitious to collective mobilisations and a spirit of shared responsibility. People of course retain their individuality, if not their idiosyncrasies. IIAS is in fact a collection of strong personalities.

The other ‘miracle’ aspect of IIAS has to do with its unique, hard-to-reproduce, institutional set-up. IAS in academic/institutional, established in the Netherlands in 1994 with funding from the Ministry of Education, designed to support a new generation of scholars, ‘experts’ and citizens aware of and interested in Asian developments, through a new model of collaboration in regional and international studies around themes transcending disciplinary, institutional and national boundaries. The birth of IIAS was indeed the result of an unusual convergence of interests and visions at a particular time. It corresponded to a period in the Netherlands when a number of intellectuals and scholars seeking to move beyond the colonial-era and cold-war style of Area Studies and its narrow, allo- shaped character, could convince their Ministry of the need to support a totally innovative model of operation. As an academic organisation, IIAS’s mandate is flexible so long as its can act as a facilitator and also as transformative agent in the processes of knowledge development in and with Asia, within a globally connected world.

A national-global programme with its own budget and agenda, IAS was primarily conceived as a research, teaching and public service facilitating mechanism. One that seeks to foster mutually beneficiary collaborations, recognising that Asia and the major trends emanating from this world region would have implications for the world over, and indeed for the Netherlands. The name of the institute itself - ‘International’ - shows an early desire to transcend boundaries, endowing the institute with an extraversed, versatile agenda. IIAS thus operates as a network-based platform equipped to engage with, and impact upon, contemporaneous Asian and global trends, enabling at the same time Dutch/European scholars and institutions to partake in them. IIAS’s main features are its adaptability and its capacity to work with very different partners. This has led to a few signature projects facilitating new research and pedagogical trends (rather than strict research), while promoting a cross-sector dissemination of knowledge and the constitution of unusual networks:

- An international postdoc fellowship programme framed by three interdisciplinary themes (Heritage, Cities, Global), facilitating dialogue between researchers working on different countries and regions of Asia (and beyond), in relation with advanced studies institutions.
- A free-of-charge periodical serving the Asia studies community globally: The Newsletter (with a global readership of over 50,000), containing editorial collaborations with Asian partners.
- International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS), a network-based multi-sector trans-disciplinary platform on ‘Asia Studies’ through biannual mega conferences and international-level regional platforms and events, like the Asian Association for Asian Studies (A-AIAS).
- A network of research and service initiatives under three clusters: Critical Heritage Study analysing the politics of culture and identity by state and non-state social actors, through: (a) in situ community-grounded roundtables; (b) a Double-Degree MA program on ‘Critical Heritage in Asia and Europe’, with Leiden University, National Taiwan University and Nenau University.

Urbanisation Processes in Asia and beyond, interaction urban-rural, through: (a) the coordination of the multi-annual Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA); (b) the support of the Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network (SEANNET) initiative recognising the role of urban communities in city-making processes (with support from the Henny Luxa Foundation).

A number of research-led educational and service initiatives under three clusters:

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- A European inter-institutional brainwashing and advocacy collaborative platform: European Alliance for Asian Studies (E-AIAS) - a network of research and service initiatives under three clusters: Critical Heritage Study analysing the politics of culture and identity by state and non-state social actors, through: (a) in situ community-grounded roundtables; (b) a Double-Degree MA program on ‘Critical Heritage in Asia and Europe’, with Leiden University, National Taiwan University and Nenau University.

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From the Director
Globalisation was the buzzword in the 1990s. From the first year of its creation in 1993, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) was a promoter of the internationalisation of Asian studies. Its periodical ‘The Newsletter’ (initially called the ‘IIAS Newsletter’) quickly established itself as the communication channel in the very fragmented field of Asian studies. We took 1500 copies with us to the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) annual meeting in Washington in 1995.

At the end of the meeting everybody was carrying our free tote bag plus the interdisciplinary, cross-regional message it carried. Clearly there was a new kid on the block.

It was not difficult to convince our European colleagues to join us at the next AAS meeting in Honolulu in 1996. We participated with a strong delegation of European Asia scholars and at a meeting of the AAS board we presented a preliminary copy of the Guide to Asian Studies in Europe. It was hard for them to believe that Western Europe had at least as many Asia scholars and institutions researching Asia as the US did. Then Secretary-Treasurer, John Campbell, concluded our conversation by saying: “For the first time we know whom to call in Europe”.

Since I was tasked to deepen IIAS’ contacts with the US I paid a visit to the AAS Secretariat in Ann Arbor. I pitched the idea of an international conference in Leiden in 1998 to further internationalise Asian studies in a cross-regional and multidisciplinary way. To make a long story short: the AAS, six European Associations for Asian Studies, and the European Science Foundation Asia Committee collaborated for the first edition of ICAS. It took place near Leiden in 1998.

The ICAS delegation learned a lot at the meeting. Amongst other things: we were practically the only non-Americans; the venue of the meeting was an anonymous chain hotel that lacked any connection to Asia; and the exhibition area was dominated by US publishers. However, the scale of the conference with 200 panels and a thousand participants was impressive, and so too were the manifold interactions and smooth organisation of the meeting. In sum, it worked well, but we missed the international aspect.

Quoting one of the participants: “The greatest value of ICAS was that it did allow a greater mixing of Asian, North American and European scholars than we have experienced at any previous such gathering. This was one of the aims of the convention and we hope that its unqualified success will be sufficient incentive to attempt a ‘repeat performance’ in future. We are all greatly alarmed everyone at that time. No less than 14 associations in the field of Asian studies were involved in its organisation, and it took place in five buildings of the Free University in the middle of Berlin. The IIAS enabled, with its ‘The IIAS Connects You’, conference participants the possibility to check their e-mail and provided free access to the Internet, which must have been a relief for many in the post-millennium era. By this time practically all academics were online, which certainly increased the connectivity amongst them.

If I had to single out one of the keynote speeches of all ICAS editions it would certainly be the one given by Wang Gungwu, one of Asia’s most important public intellectuals. He is best known for his explorations of Chinese history and for his writings on the Chinese Diaspora (albeit not a term he himself likes to use). His keynote was about ‘Divergence and Domination, Challenges to Asian Studies’. Wang characterised the development of Asian studies and mentioned the risks, but also the opportunities, of the different ways in which Asian studies is performed in present times. In 2018, in the first part of his autobiography Home is not Here (NUS University Press) he reflects on family, identity, and the ability of the individual to find a place amid historical currents that have shaped the world. He will certainly broach the topic of Asian studies in the second part of his autobiography (forthcoming) and he will doubtlessly evoke new horizons that will put the field of Asian studies in a new cyclical perspective.

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Wang Gungwu attended a meeting of all organising parties in Berlin, where two important decisions were made that had a decisive influence on the future development of ICAS. The first was the decision to organise ICAS in Asia, every two years, in cooperation with a local host. This not only to further increase Asian participation, but also to connect to the Asian city in which it was being held. The second decision was to establish a permanent ICAS Secretariat, to be hosted by IIAS in Leiden, in order to facilitate and safeguard the concept of a cross-disciplinary and cross-regional approach to Asian studies. In short, to guarantee the continuity of the ICAS process and assist the local hosts in the organisation of ICAS.
ICAS 3 brought ICAS to Asia for the first time. With a significant presence of scholars from Asia, it hopefully helped in a small way to break down a few silos and build new bridges for Asia research.

**Singapore 2003**

The organiser of ICAS 3, Alan Chan of the National University of Singapore, reminded us of another aspect of globalisation: “The planning of the Convention took an uncertain turn when SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) brought international travel almost to a complete standstill”. ICAS 3 at the Raffles City Convention Centre was the first big meeting allowed to take place in Singapore once SARS had abated. Attendance was fortunately barely affected. With more than a thousand participants, gathering in more than 250 panels, ICAS 3 not only showcased the vitality of Asian studies in Asia itself, but also proved that the intuitive decision to move ICAS to Asia was completely justifiable.

It enabled a direct connection to the Asian environment not only in the convention centre itself, but also to explore the many attractions of cultural Singapore has to offer. As Alan Chan noted: “ICAS serves an important function in promoting Asia research and in providing a forum for scholarly exchange and collaboration. We are indeed pleased that we are able to bring ICAS to Asia for the first time. It would not be the last time, as the next three editions also took place in Asia. Being there offers an ideal breeding ground to refine long-standing theories and to develop new, more Asia-informed ones.”

In particular, the time-space compression experienced in Asian countries in their radical reforms in the past decades offered a unique opportunity to study some of the most important present-day issues. These include questions of Institutional change, social transformation, market reforms, ethnic conflict, environmental hazard, national security, urbanisation, migration, political control and resistance, social marginalisation, inequality, to name but a few. All these questions were clearly present in the first book of abstracts, which the participants found in their newly designed ICAS 3 conference bag along with the programme book.

**ICAS 4, Shanghai, 20-24 August 2005**

At the end of the opening ceremony in Singapore, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) presented Shanghai as the venue for ICAS 4. This video presentation started a tradition, which goes on till the present day. The fact that Shanghai would be the next venue should be seen within the wider context of new developments in China at that time. The People’s Congress had decided that more should be invested in the humanities and social sciences, which had hitherto been dealt a step-motherly treatment.

ICAS 4 took place in the quadrants of the Communist Party in Shanghai, in a building that resembled an enormous cake, which had been a present from Stalin to the people of Shanghai (when I revisited the city in 2013 tall skyscrapers completely dwarfed the building). We used an annex with marble floors, with more than enough rooms to accommodate 250 panels. Wang Ronghua, the President of SASS, stressed the close cooperation with the municipal administration of Shanghai, which, translated itself in a state of the art dinner and a magnificent trip along the Huangpu River, passing the new Shanghai Bund. For the first time the convention was given a general theme, SASS fittingly chose ‘The Future of Asia’. Since it was a closed meeting, ‘sensitive’ topics such as ‘AIDS without Boundaries’ and ‘Bad Girl Writing’ could also be freely discussed. During the opening ceremony the winners of the first ICAS Book Prizes (IBP) were announced. This new initiative by the ICAS Secretariat was taken to create by way of a global competition both an international focus for publications on Asia (academic English-language books on Asia in the humanities and social sciences) while at the same time increasing their visibility worldwide.

In contrast to other prizes in the field of Asian studies the IBP is both trans-regional and trans-disciplinary with an international reading committee. The first edition of the IBP saw 40 submissions; its eighth edition in 2019 has just witnessed more than 400 contributions. ICAS 4 was also the site of the first ICAS supplement to the *IIAS Newsletter* (now *The Newsletter*). entitled ‘Publishing in Asian Studies’.

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**Kuala Lumpur 2007**

The Institute of Occidental Studies (IKON) and the Institute of The Malay World and Civilization (ATMA) of the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) teamed up to organise ICAS 5, for which the theme ‘Sharing a Future in Asia’ was selected. The Minister of Higher Education of Malaysia wrote in his welcome word: “The hosting of ICAS 5 is very timely, held on a new path and transforming the country’s higher education system to make Malaysia the regional centre for educational excellence”. ICAS 5 coincided with the celebration of 50 years of the Malaysian Malaysian Act 1957, which furthermore connected to the Visit Malaysia Year 2007. In cooperation with the city of Kuala Lumpur a circular bus line connecting places of cultural interest was launched, and still operates till this very day, famous Petronas Twin Towers. The Book Fair had already been a fixed feature of ICAS since the beginning, but in Kuala Lumpur it matured. The organiser of ICAS 5, Shamsul Amri Baharuddin summed it up perfectly: “ICAS 5 is the place where researchers of all categories, from various fields, coming from all over the world, but all interested in Asia, convene, interact and build networks to share their research findings and personal experience”. This was clear impetus for the ICAS Secretariat to keep ICAS travelling through Asia, each time drawing special attention to the local dynamics of the country and region in which the convention was held.

In Kuala Lumpur it was the first time that the number of grouped panels (individual abstracts that are thematically grouped by the organisers, on a trans-regional and trans-disciplinary basis) had been doubled then organised panels and roundtables. This combining of organised and grouped panels not only in an ideal mix of top-down and bottom-up contributions, but it also yielded an amalgamation of many different paradigmatic approaches, which give ICAS its signature vibe.

The second ICAS supplement to the *IIAS Newsletter, Academic Publishing Today* addressed the challenges and pitfalls of getting a book published. For the first time e-books were highlighted and a new initiative ‘New Books Asia’ was launched: an online platform to browse the latest Asian studies titles and read/contribute the latest book reviews (https://newbooksasia.org).
We have so far been too neglectful of the value of Asian identity. Time has come to re-evaluate the entire inheritance of all of humanity within the context of the Asian Continent Civilization as whole.

Young-Oak Kim, keynote speaker at ICAS 6

Both the AAS and the ICAS Secretariats had to work full speed to deal with the unprecedented number of submissions. AAS took care of all panel submissions, and ICAS put together no less than 350 panels based on an inflow of 2500 individual abstracts, mostly from Asia.

An impressive 50,000 participants gathered in the Honolulu Convention Center from 31 March to 3 April 2011 making it the biggest meeting in the field of Asian studies so far. The reception was sponsored by the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, the East-West Center and the Confucius Institute. It was a memorable meeting, which kicked off with the welcome reception on the Great Lawn at the Hilton Hawaiian Village and Beach Resort 6 Spa overlooking the Pacific. The Kenny Endo Taiko Ensemble on Japanese drums entertained the participants while a fireworks display further added lustre to the gathering.

The gaiety of the reception was understandably tempered by the 11 March Tōhoku earthquake and subsequent tsunami on the east coast of Japan. A Japanese princess was present at the official opening of the Joint meeting and thanked the inhabitants of Hawai‘i! and those present on behalf of the Japanese people for their support.

Nearly 800 panels were included in a programme book as thick as the phone book. It was more than triple the size of our regular conferences and a large number of them were in the category ‘Border Crossing and Inter-area’. A bewildering variety of topics were discussed ranging from ‘Literary Monsters and Demons’ to ‘Global Representation of China’ and ‘Women in Asia’ to ‘Media and the Messages’. In the main lobby of the Convention Center there were continuous musical performances, and for the first time a professional photographer was engaged who made a colourful impression of this meeting. A meeting, sending out a clear signal to the outside world that Asian studies is a thriving and vibrant community.

Our joint gathering was from the outset both a risk and a challenge but it paid off in many respects, foremost in terms of attendance. More than 2,000 scholars hailing from Asia sat in motion further internationalisation of Asian studies and triggered the annual AAS-in-Asia meetings, which started in 2015. The ICAS Book Prize received a massive 200 submissions, prompting the reading committee to put in place Accolades, so as to recognise a larger subset of titles, including ‘Publishers Accolade for Outstanding Production Value’, the ‘Edited Volume Accolade’ and ‘Teaching Tool Accolade’.

The hosting of ICAS 8 is testimony to our commitment of achieving excellence in higher learning.

Macao 2013

The rich cultural heritage and the strong historical legacies connecting East and West made Macao an ideal place to host ICAS 8. Who would have ever dreamed that ICAS would take place at The Venetian Macao, the fourth biggest structure in the world, primarily a casino, shopping mall and hotel.

ICAS 8 was organised by the University of Macau and the Macao Foundation. The 1200 participants representing 600 institutes of higher learning gathered in more than 350 panels. Within these panels, new ideas and research findings were discussed, not only among researchers who study Asia, but also among scholars who live in Asia. Holding the convention in Macao reminded us yet again of the importance of holding ICAS in Asia. The cultural legacies and the theoretical tools used in social sciences and humanities have derived almost exclusively from the West. Although these theories and methods have been applied throughout the world with considerable success, their limitations are increasingly apparent, especially in Asia, with its long traditions of organising social relations, its own norms about power and order, and its legacies of implementing rule. With Asian countries emerging to become prominent players, there comes a point when we recognise that the region has something to offer in the development of (social) knowledge. ICAS offers a platform to facilitate this process. The city of Macao played a central role in discussions on urbanism and heritage. The panels and roundtables on these subjects were attended not only by academicians, but also by government officials, museum curators, NGO activists, journalists, business leaders, and members of the general public. It was a rare opportunity during the meeting to discuss the scholarly and practitioners across different continents and regions gathered together to explore local and global problem.

ICAS 8 had several firsts. It witnessed the first meeting of the ICAS International Council, now a well-established advisory body composed of academicians, representatives from civil society and previous ICAS organisers from Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, Latin America and North America. From its inception ICAS benefitted from their inputs and it has certainly widened the global reach of ICAS. During its first meeting Lloyd Amoah, Secretary of the newly founded Knowledge’ which took place in Accra (Ghana) in September 2015 supported by the ICAS Secretariat and the University of Ghana. The second edition of the ‘Africa-Asia conference’ took place in September 2018 in Dar es Salaam with the University of Dar es Salaam acting as host (and a major selection of presentations from this 2018 conference presented in this current Newsletter issue). Nearly 100 researchers, craftspeople and artists gathered over 100 panels. Its next edition will be announced in the near future.

Another first was the reporting on the conference in cooperation with the Macau Daily Times. Every day Sanja Zivkovic, Editor of The Newsletter, cooperated with local journalists to produce a daily supplement reporting on what was taking place, and coming up, at ICAS 8 (https://issuu.com/iias/docs/icas8-newsletter).

A senior and junior editor were asked to supervise the process of collegial review. This meant that everybody had to read the contributions by all the other authors. It resulted in a very rigorous reviewing process, experienced by all contributors as an innovative and rewarding way to review books.

The ICAS 6 supplement to the IIAS Newsletter, “Choices in Academic Publishing”, opens with the following words by Maria Lenstrup: “All academics, by the nature of modern academia, must be both authors and readers. To this end we must convert ‘publish or perish’ to ‘publish or change’ or ‘publish and demand to be read or rot’ or as publishers might be tempted to put it, to ‘buy or be damned’.”

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This is the first time that interculturality has been given such prominence in Australia. ICAS 9 seeks to harness international expertise on interculturality in Asia (…) This will be another way in which Asia expertise can help shape public policy in unexpected and positive ways.

Gerry Groot and Purnendra Jain, organisers ICAS 9

ICAS 9, Adelaide, 5–9 July 2015

When the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) informed us that ICAS belonged to the top five percent of conferences world-wide in terms of numbers we decided on a franchise experiment. Four Australian cities showed an interest, but Adelaide’s bid was the most all-encompassing: three universities (the University of Adelaide, Flinders University and the University of South Australia), the city of Adelaide, the Adelaide Convention Bureau, the state of South Australia and the International Convention Management Services Company, had worked closely to bring the bid together. And so, the city on the southern coast of Australia, with a tradition of strong ties with Asia, was selected as the location for ICAS 9.

After negotiations with the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) during its meeting in Perth in 2015, several of its regional associations decided to have their biennial meetings coincide with ICAS 9. This was a way to guarantee sufficient numbers of participants in a place, not without reason, coined ‘down under’.

At ICAS 9 the ICAS Secretariat launched a new format: the Book and Dissertation Presentation Carousel, which gives participants the opportunity to present their research findings in a concise way for those interested in the topic. It proved to be a very fruitful format for both presenters and audience and it has become a popular fixed feature of the conventions. The young doctors pitching their dissertation ideas found an easy way to come into contact with interested publishers. The latter in turn were quite happy to get in touch with prospective authors. This win-win situation has brought and will bring about many happy marriages between publishers and authors.

The issue of The Newsletter published shortly after ICAS 9 asked the question: Who is the New Asia Scholar? Content was based on interviews conducted and contributions commissioned during the meeting in Adelaide. ICAS is a fitting platform to ask such a question because it has the greatest diversified cross-continental representation. One of the most obvious observations is that Asian studies is now more and more being produced in Asia. New ideas and research findings are discussed not only among researchers who study Asia, but also among Asia scholars who live in Asia. In approximately 20 articles ranging from ‘The new Asian scholar’s role in Asian area studies’ and ‘A China scholar working in China’, to ‘Navigating our culturally interconnected world’ and ‘Africa and the unmasking of Asia’, we are beginning to see the contours of this New Asia Scholar.

In retrospect, the meeting was an important one for Adelaide because it brought fresh knowledge and perspectives on Adelaide’s relations with Asia through the exchange with a wide range of top researchers in, to name but a few fields: urban development, social and economic transformation, migration and connectivity, history and cultural heritage. ‘Interculture Adelaide’ was one of the platforms where this was made specific. It brought together scholars, policymakers and other stakeholders to consider the idea of interculturality, broadly defined as a set of cultural skills supporting openness and adaptivity. Also from a financial point of view ICAS 9 was beneficial for Adelaide. The Adelaide Convention Bureau later estimated that ICAS 9 injected 5 million Australian Dollars into the Adelaide economy.

ICAS 10, Chiang Mai, 20–23 July 2017

After a decade it was high time to return to Southeast Asia. The RCSD at Chiang Mai University in Thailand requested the opportunity to organise the 10th edition of ICAS in connection with 50 years of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and to hold it back to back with their Thai Studies conference. According to the organiser of both conferences, Chayan Vaddhanaphuti: “The emergence of the ASEAN community in Asia is a hope for economic, political and socio-cultural connectivity as well as a challenge for policymakers and the grassroots. ASEAN in Asia is, thus, one of the central themes of this conference”. As a result, Surit Pitsuwan, former Secretary-General of ASEAN, was invited to speak at the opening ceremony, where he made a passionate plea for democratic values and academic freedom.

His speech closely connected with the ICAS Keynote Roundtable “Upholding Democratic values in Southeast Asia: Intellectual Freedom and Public Engagement”. Two Southeast Asian historians and a social rights activist from Thailand addressed the situation of democratic deficit prevailing in most Southeast Asian countries by focusing on the social and political roles they play as actors and witnesses of ASEAN’s recent history. More than three hundred participants joined in the lively discussions chaired by IAS Director Philippa Poucam. This format proved fruitful and is also planned for future editions of ICAS because it embraces a multitude of voices and views and is apt for a meeting such as ICAS.

This multitude of voices should also be present in the ICAS Book Prize (IBP). ICAS and the IBP can be regarded as one of the ways to facilitate the confluence of localised ‘connected knowledges’ and also the decolonising of the landscape of knowledge about Asia. From the start, the IBP has had a broad interdisciplinary basis - Social Sciences and Humanities - instead of the traditional geographic or disciplinary compartmentalisations. The diversification of the IBP’s language basis, in collaboration with partners and sponsors from other language areas than English, was realised at ICAS 10: the ICAS Book Prize was extended to Include Chinese, German, French and Korean language editions.

The Film Screenings organised by the Center of Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) of Kyoto University were a reflection of Southeast Asia’s rich ethnic and cultural landscape, and an outcome of CSEAS’ Visual Documentary Project, which aims at examining everyday life in Southeast Asian through documentary filmmaking and stimulating the dialogue with ASEAN countries. No less than thirty documentaries varying in length from 15 to 70 minutes were presented with titles ranging from Ageing in Bangkok to Bumsees in Thailand and Lives Under The Red Lights to Silence of the Summer.

ICAS 11 in Chiang Mai was memorable in so many ways. The venue was massively impressive, the RatiLanna Resort catered to the most beautiful and delicious Lanna-style receptions and lunches, and Akkanut Wontanasombut together with Rhinosmith Design co. created the most stunning overall design of any ICAS yet! Not to mention the twenty thematic exhibitions in traditional wooden structures, showcasing a wide variety of local projects, including, for example, ‘Salween Local Research Display: bringing the Village to the Conference’. Local researchers from villages along the Salween River, which flows through Thailand, Myanmar, and China, have been conducting research into the social and environmental issues related to the river; they displayed the outcomes of their research to start conversations with academics, professionals, activists and others from all over the world.

To finish it off a real market place with a wide variety of local quality produce stood at the entrance of the convention centre. Many participants took craft items home along with fond memories of an exceptional ICAS.
A nd that brings us to this year’s ICAS meeting. Nobody could have predicted that it would take 21 years before ICAS would return to its place of birth. Has it fully grown up? By no means. There is still a world and more to explore for this fledgling. Yet we have learned a lot over the past 2 decades and hope to bring our combined experiences to this meeting on our home ground.

Asia and Europe. Asia in Europe.

Considering the location, the theme of this year’s ICAS is ‘Asia and Europe. Asia in Europe’. And to make it more of a European affair, we reached out to some friends of ours who we have learned a lot from over the past 2 decades and more to explore for this fledgling. Yet we have learned a lot over the past 2 decades and hope to bring our combined experiences to this meeting on our home ground.

Asia and Europe. Asia in Europe.

As we do for every edition of ICAS, we like to connect with the city where it is being held. So too this time in Leiden. Leiden University is our local host, housing the event in its buildings and sponsoring the attendance of a very large number of scholars. The City of Leiden has also proven to be very generous; it is a main sponsor and has helped us deal with much of the bureaucratic elements of organising such an event. Many of the ICAS activities will take place outdoors or in other public venues, so that more of the city’s residents and business owners may enjoy and profit from this sudden influx of more than 2200 visitors. See more about these activities below.

The academic programme of ICAS 11 is also bigger than ever; it includes close to 550 panel sessions, roundtables, and book /PhD presentations. The programme will commence on 16 July with a festive parade through the streets of Leiden, which will lead the participants to the Hooglandse Kerk where the convention’s opening will take place. The attendees will be greeted by music from the pipe organ as they file into the gothic church, after which they will be welcomed by a number of representatives of the university, organisers and the city. During the ceremony we will be announcing the winners of the ICAS Book and Dissertation Prizes, and presenting them with their awards.

Connecting to the host city (and country)

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The Book Prize is bigger and better than ever, and now includes yet one more language edition: Spanish/Portuguese. We will wrap up the formal procedures with an extraordinary performance, brought to us by Henri Tournier and Erkij/Arel Danidaaravanchig, in which they combine Western, Indian and Mongolian musical elements.

As you make your way between the two main ICAS venues, Kamerlingh Onnes and Lipsius, you may choose to take a short walk along the Rapenburg canal, or instead you could walk through the Pietersonkpluin (Pater’s Church Square) at the heart of the ICAS area, where you will come across our Food and Cultural Market. At this market, especially organised for ICAS, but open to the public as well, you will be able to enjoy a selection from Dutch and Asian cuisines, and be entertained by a number of artisans performing age-old Dutch traditions, such as clog crafting, liquorice making and ‘ship in bottle’ building. There will be musical elements such as a vinyl DJ on a bakfiets, and perhaps even a martial arts performance. The market will be operational everyday between 16-19 July, from 12pm-8pm (although we will wrap up earlier on the Tuesday when all ICAS participants will be making their way to the ICAS opening ceremony). This means that you can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel, can have lunch and dinner at the market if you choose, or at least a drink after the last panel.
ICAS can seriously change your orientation
Paul van der Velde, ICAS Secretary

The market will not be the only lunch venue during ICAS 11. Kamerlingh Onnes and Lipsius both house a university restaurant, and we have also teamed up with a large number of cafés and restaurants in the immediate vicinity, where ICAS participants will be made to feel welcome. Our decision to spread out the lunch options across various establishments fits in with our recurring wish to have as many local businesses as possible reap the benefits from ICAS.

Distances in the Netherlands are very small when compared to basically any other country in the world. Where most people would not bat an eye at commuting everyday for an hour or more, the Dutch just might. Commutes in the Netherlands are more commonly a 20-minute bike ride! But what this means is that you should not restrict your visit to Leiden, you can easily expand your experience into the rest of the country, where the furthest national destination is probably no more than a 2-hour train ride away. Think of all the world famous museums in the Randstad cities, not to mention the stunning gardens. Above left: Hortus Botanical Gardens. Above right: Textile Research Centre workshop.

Looking forward

For the first time ICAS will end with a blast – so make sure to stay till the very end! The grand closing party will take place at the City Auditorium (Stadhuis), a beautiful concert hall in the middle of Leiden. There will be live music, karaoke, drinks, bites, dancing, and hopefully some really good unwinding and celebrating after a productive and inspiring convention week.

The location of ICAS 12 (to be held in 2021) will be unveiled during the opening ceremony of this current convention. We will maintain the surprise for now, but rest assured we will again make sure to link the conference to the city/country in every way possible. ICAS is never simply a purely academic endeavour – it is creating, sharing and collecting knowledge, it is network building and facilitating new partnerships, it is learning from those beyond academia (such as civil society and practitioners), it is recognising great research, publications and effective projects, it is showcasing the arts, it is enjoying time spent with like-minded people, and it is so much more.

ICAS 11 curated visits to the Asian Library.
- Canal boat ride between the two main conference locations.
- Breakfast meeting and personal tour with curators at the National Museum of Ethnology.
- Introduction to Japanese painting conservation, visit to the Restorant studio at the National Museum of Ethnology.
- Asia in Leiden city walk, in conjunction with Brill publishers.
- Walking tours: Historical Leiden and Leiden’s Alms Houses’, by Cicerones.
- Lectures and workshops at the Textile Research Centre.
- Tour of ‘Me, Asian?!’ (see page 12) and a Chinese calligraphy demonstration followed by workshop.

Please be advised that you will have doors to all interested parties. Throughout the ICAS week there will be a number of exhibitions and demonstrations at the IAS building at Rapenburg 59. They include an ICAS Retrospective including a Book Prize Exhibition, the Photo Contest Exhibition “IAS 25 years”, a representation of “Me, Asian?!“ (see page 12) and a Chinese calligraphy demonstration followed by workshop.

Exclusive events for participants

For a complete list of all side-events organised for exclusively ICAS 11 participants please visit the conference site, but a quick overview includes:

- IAS 11 curated visits to the Asian Library.
- Canal boat ride between the two main conference locations.
- Breakfast meeting and personal tour with curators at the National Museum of Ethnology.
- Introduction to Japanese painting conservation, visit to the Restorant studio at the National Museum of Ethnology.
- Asia in Leiden city walk, in conjunction with Brill publishers.
- Walking tours: Historical Leiden and Leiden’s Alms Houses’, by Cicerones.
- Lectures and workshops at the Textile Research Centre.

Please be advised that you will have to register online for a few of these events: https://tinyurl.com/ICAS11CP
The French Academic Network for Asian Studies (GIS Asie)
International promotion of Asian studies

Myriam de Loenzien and Catherine Bastien-Ventura

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

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

A network based on sustainable relationships

In the French institutional landscape, the French Academic Network for Asian Studies is a “Groupement d’intérêt scientifique” (GIS), which is a formal agreement between public research institutions and higher education institutions. Based on this strong institutional basis, all relevant research centers can participate. GIS Asie brings together scholars from a variety of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences, working on all Asian countries. Currently, the 23 members of GIS Asie include 8 universities, 11 research and training institutions, 2 research institutes and one foundation. Learning on this institutional agreement, 29 research centers participate. Among them, 26 are located in France, 3 are in Asia and 1 in Belgium. Due to the specificity of the French institutional landscape, a large number of the research centers located in France are concentrated in Paris and surrounding region. However, GIS Asie is keen on promoting the activities of research centers located in various parts of the country, and includes members in the two big cities of Lyon and Marseille, as well as in smaller cities like Angers.

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

A network in Europe and in Asia

Established in 2013, in the French academic landscape, GIS Asie remains open to collaborations with other institutions from all countries active in the domain of Asian studies. Membership is open to universities and research institutes in France but also abroad, primarily to French-speaking institutions. The first and unique non-French full member to date is the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium, which joined the network in 2017. This high ranking university, with more than 30,000 students, teachers and permanent staff is active mainly through the activities of its East Asia Studies research center (EAST), established in 2015 and which benefits from a strong expertise in social anthropology. The network of GIS Asie extends beyond the boundaries of Europe, as it also includes 5 French research centers in Asia (Unité Mixte des Instituts Français de Recherche à l’ Étranger, UMIREF). They include the French Center for Research on Contemporary China (CEFC) located in Hong Kong (China), with two regional branches, one in Beijing (China) and one in Taipei (Taiwan); the Institut Français de Recherche sur la France en Asie (IFRAS) located in Paris (France); and the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC) in Bangkok (Thailand); the Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities (CSIR) in New Delhi (India); the French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP) in Puducherry (India). These centers work under the joint administrative supervision of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). They benefit from resources and permanent staff. They provide support to establish, maintain and develop collaborations with academic communities in Asia. They also host senior and junior researchers who attend on a short term basis.

Since 2018, and in collaboration with GIS Asie, these centers conduct a scientific research programme entitled “Sustain Asia”, which contributes to the reflection on social and environmental resilience in various national and local contexts characterized by rapid economic growth and limited resources, in countries such as China, India, Indonesia, Japan and Thailand. First results from this work in progress will be presented in several panels at ICAS 11. GIS Asia also participates in the European Alliance for Asian Studies, a cooperative platform which brings together competences and expertise on Asia and Asian studies in Europe. Currently, institutions from 14 countries participate in this Alliance, including other consortia such as the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) and the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS). An institutional roundtable at ICAS 11 will discuss the challenges facing these institutions.
whose sizes, means and historical contexts are heterogeneous. Through its participation, GIS Asie fosters collaborations between universities and research centers across Europe, discusses institutional programs and networking, facilitates cutting-edge projects and promotes the visibility of scholarly excellence. At ICAS 11, it will be convening roundtables on GIS Asie and showcasing numerous scholars to benefit from a funding scheme to supplement their resources in a period when financial means are scarce.

The involvement of GIS Asie in the preparation of ICAS 11 includes multiple scientific and organizational aspects. As members of the scientific committee, the director and the deputy director of GIS Asie evaluated all 394 panels and roundtables submitted, each of them including 3 to 6 presentations. The ICAS Book Prize involves publications in several languages. This year, for the second time, GIS Asie will be sponsor and secretariat of the ICAS–GIS Asie Book Prize, which will honor outstanding works in the French language. Among 36 submitted books, 7 have been shortlisted by the reading committee chaired by the GIS Asie director. The 1st edition of this prize took place in 2017 and the award was presented during ICAS 10 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. It honored Marina Carini’s book entitled “The Language of the Gods, Santal Ritual Discourse Between the Oral and the Written”. This book was a result of a thorough investigation into the history and culture of the Santals, a tribal group who live in India, and more broadly in Eastern South Asia.

GIS Asie, in collaboration with its partners participating in ICAS 11, will also seize the opportunity to enhance contacts between scholars, editors, journals and associations working on Asia. Besides scientific work, it will support the participation of prominent artists who share their love for Asia in their own peculiar way. This will be part of the enjoyable moments of what should become a memorable gathering.

Organizing major international events

The 11th edition of ICAS, inaugurated in 1997, will also be the 7th International Conference organized by the French Academic Network for Asian Studies since 2003. The organization of GIS Asie is at the forefront of GIS Asie’s activities, with the aim to increase visibility of Asian studies and foster connections between scholars.

GIS Asie benefits from an extensive experience in organizing large scale international conferences. Besides scientific work, it will support the participation of prominent artists who share their love for Asia in their own peculiar way. This will be part of the enjoyable moments of what should become a memorable gathering.

Preparing the future of Asian studies

Young scholars, including doctoral students, post-doctoral fellows and young researchers in search of a permanent position, not only hold invaluable and often firsthand knowledge of their area of specialization, but their work and career will also shape the future of Asian studies. For this reason, supporting and promoting their research work is at the forefront of GIS Asie’s goals and activities. It takes various forms.

Young scholars are encouraged to seize the opportunity of ICAS 11 to present and discuss their work with a large international audience. GIS Asie fosters their participation by offering financial support especially young scholars. In previous editions of GIS Asie’s international conference, young scholars have played a major role, taking part in panels and contests.

Besides financial support, special sessions will be organized to promote work done by doctoral students. Among them, the awardees of the GIS Asie 2018 PhD prize are delivered by Prof. Ben Kleinnon from Aarhus University. Overall, more than 60 candidates from all social sciences and humanities disciplines who defended their doctoral dissertations since 2016 or 2017 in France and Belgium participated. The selection committee chaired by GIS Asie’s deputy director included 106 reviewers. Twenty candidates were shortlisted and three joint prizes were awarded. The winning works illustrate a diversity of topics, including and geographical areas in Asian studies: David Serfass’ thesis “The Collaborating Government of Wang Jingwei: Aspects of the State of Occupation during the Sino-Japanese War, 1940-1945” is at the crossroads of China’s modernist narrative and Japan’s wartime rhetoric; Juliette Jullien’s thesis “From the Slum to Hospital: Anthropology of Reproductive Health in Rajasthan (India)” is based on an ethnographic fieldwork in a public hospital and several slums; Juliette Clauzot’s thesis on marriage and Re-marriages: Ritual, Gender and Kinship in Contemporary Tajikistan” explores social and ritual roles of women in urban and rural areas. Each winner received 2000 euros, earmarked for the publication of their work. The awards ceremony, which took place in the historical salons of the Maison de l’Asie in Paris, was preceded by a lecture by Prof. Ben Kleinnon from Aarhus University. In his brilliant presentation about “A World History of Genocide”, Prof. Kleinnon offered the audience a broad perspective on mass violence and crimes against humanity in Asia and in other regions.

Young scholars also initiated and organized one-day workshops in 2018. The first one was entitled “Young Researchers in the Publish or Perish Competition”: this workshop focused on “Networks, Exchanges and Interactions in Asia” and benefited from additional funding from the Campus Condorcet program. Each workshop gathered some forty scholars in Paris and was an opportunity for young researchers to present their work, express their views and concerns, and learn from each other and from senior researchers. In addition to these workshops, meetings with invited senior fellows are regularly organized to give young scholars the opportunity to present their ongoing work. In 2018, such meetings were organized with Prof. Sumathi Ramaswami, cultural historian of South Asia and the British Empire at Duke University in the United States, and Prof. Yoshida Toru, political scientist at Hokkaido University in Japan. Since 2013, young scholars also directly participate in GIS Asie’s governance. Their activities are coordinated by a specific steering committee, consisting of 6 to 8 young scholars who participate in the regular meetings of GIS Asie’s scientific committee. They therefore take part in the decision process regarding the activities of the network, and benefit from the support of GIS Asie administrative and technical staff.

Funding scholarly events and organizing specific meetings

GIS Asie membership provides full access to all activities and funding schemes, GIS Asie also supports major conferences organized by its member teams. In 2018, beneficiaries included the International Association for Tibetan Studies, whose 15th Conference is taking place in July 2019 in Paris; the 25th European Conference on South Asian Studies, which operates under the auspices of the European Association for South Asian Studies (EASAS); and the 12th Journées du Réseaux Moyen-Orient et Mondes Musulman, which gathers librarians and archivists specialized in Asia.

GIS Asie support of conferences is complemented by the dissemination of information regarding potential funding for scholars in the social sciences and humanities.

Throughout the year, GIS Asie broadcasts information on ongoing calls and support programs through its website. It participates in meetings with national, European or international funding agencies in order to advocate for Asian studies and to discuss possible orientations prior to launching calls. As an example, meetings were held in 2018 with the French National Research Agency (ANR), the main funding source for research activities in France, as well as with members of the European Union’s framework program for research and innovation (Horizon 2020). All this information is accessible through the website, which was renewed in January 2018, and the monthly newsletter sent to all interested parties.

Fostering area studies

Area studies have a specific place in the field of social sciences and humanities, to which the French Academic Network for Asian Studies aims to contribute by both focusing on Asian studies and also collaborating with consortia working on other geographic areas. Since 2016, thanks to the support of the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), GIS Asie has benefited from the expertise of a specialist in international relations who works simultaneously for 2 other consortia, one on Africa (GIS Afrique) and the other one on the Muslim Worlds and the Middle East (GIS Moyen-Orient et Mondes Musulman).

This creates a synergy and ‘good practices’ are replicated between the consortia. The 3 consortia on area studies also conduct some common activities. For instance they will organize a summer school in 2020 on digital humanities for the area studies, which will aim at exploring new technologies and skills, as well as their impact on research topics in various contexts.

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

As a major event embedded in a whole range of activities, ICAS 11 is therefore a great opportunity for the French Academic Network for Asian Studies and its partners, to advance and enhance the international promotion of Asian studies.
What happens when you open up the invited to moderate the events, adding a of Indonesian descent Gustaaf Peek was Gandhi, Jay Huang, Jyothi Thrivikraman, academics whose work and personal co-creation of agendas for community action rather than through their own. The event series Me, drawing attention. And if on rare occasions between Asians had taken place during that very first event, commonalities rather than disparities were discovered and emphasized. Across the events that followed, a keen sense of kinship developed between individuals from very different Asian backgrounds. Shared experiences came to the fore when we discussed cultural memories in small groups. The importance of language, family, and food in cherished memories that are tied to cultural heritage were unanimously acknowledged. Touching, funny, and poignant memories sometimes painful memories were shared that in their own way reflected what an Asian heritage means to people. Questions about the intergenerational transmission of Asian cultural identities were raised in various discussions. We tried to find our own perspective, and people were searching for a sense of being Asian? And to what extent do we want to maintain our Asian background for our children? Why do we sometimes care more about preserving our distinctiveness while we sometimes just want to blend in? Status of the Other Identity questions were also prominent in the events that included panel discussions, with Asian film-makers, Asian writers, Asian parents, and Asian visual artists. These events were among the more popular ones in terms of both attendance and rating in the online evaluation survey that was sent to all participants after the sixth event. The success of the panel-based events was most partly due to the interactive nature of these events, and personal stories shared by the panel members. These stories clearly resonated with the audience. Participation sparked lively discussions aimed at digging deeper into the nature of Asian identities. Various panel members reflected on the melancholy in which the ethnic majority imposes identities on the Asian minority that are sometimes perceived as ill-fitting and insincere. One writer raised an issue of making a compromise between what she would like to write about, and what her publisher thought the readership wanted. She related how her publisher had asked her to just write about her migrant parents. She thought that readers would only be interested in that part of her experience. Another writer decided to reject any possibility of making such compromises. One Asian visual artist objected to the idea of making a compromise with her heritage. This caused a lot of discussion, with the artist stating that she was only working with her heritage in the context of her personal life. Stereotypically Asian? The series title ‘Me, Asian?!’ was intended to reflect the wide variety of Asian identities that people might experience, including that of being Asian in the first place, ranging from not at all or hardly (Me, Asian?) to very strongly so (Me, Asian!). Indeed, identities are at the core of many of the discussions. During the first event, as a fun warm-up, we engaged the audience in a tongue-in-cheek ‘How Asian are you?’ test, featuring elements that actually or stereotypically distinguish Asians from others. Test items addressed things like rice and spicy food consumption, math abilities, physical height, the ability to do an ‘Asian squat’, and collectivistic interpretations of pictures. With a great deal of hilarity, but also a healthy dose of competitiveness, the participants rose to these challenges. When discussing the last test, it became clear that most participants had hoped to score high on ‘Asianness’. Some test items reflected certain Asian regions more than others, and these sparked some (light-hearted) objections in those who clearly felt more Asian than their test scores showed. The test items served as a fertile breeding ground for discussions about what is Asian and what it is not, and illustrated the heterogeneity of Asian populations. Interestingly, once those discussions about differences between Asians had taken place during that very first event, commonalities rather than disparities were discovered and emphasized. Across the events that followed, a keen sense of kinship developed between individuals from very different Asian backgrounds. Shared experiences came to the fore when we discussed cultural memories in small groups. The importance of language, family, and food in cherished memories that are tied to cultural heritage were unanimously acknowledged. 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The best of the best

The 2019 ICAS Book Prize (IBP) dissertation competition

Alex McKay

One of the many academic attractions at ICAS 11 will be the announcement of the winners of the International Convention of Asian Scholars Book Prize (IBP) and the IBP Dissertation Prize Awards. The aim of these Awards is to create an international focus for academic works on Asia, thus increasing their worldwide visibility, and since their inception in 2004 they have become probably the most prestigious publication prizes in the world of Asian studies. Both the Book and the Dissertation Awards are organised around broad interdisciplinary bases (Humanities and Social Sciences) rather than traditional geographic or disciplinary compartmentalisations.

The process

The Dissertation Prizes were open to all recent PhD candidates awarded doctorates after June 2016 (with a certain latitude to allow for previously awarded and who submitted their dissertations to the competition before October 2018. Since that time the Dissertation Judging Committee members, overseen by ICAS Secretary Dr Paul van der Velde and myself, have been assessing the qualities of each submission.

Longlists of 10 dissertations in each of the two categories, the Humanities and the Social Sciences, were posted online in March 2019. From those Longlists, Shortlists of five dissertations in each category have now been selected (see https://icas.asia/humanities-book-prize). The two category winners, selected from the Shortlists, will be announced at ICAS 11, as will the winners of Judging Committee Accolades in each category.

This Accolades draw attention to dissertations that, while not judged the best overall in their discipline, are none-the-less of considerable quality in important respects. At ICAS 11 in Leiden there will be four Accolades in each category, namely: a Specialist Accolade; a Ground-breaking Subject Matter Accolade; Most Accessible and Captivating Work for Students Accolade; and a Chairman’s Accolade. These dissertations chosen by the Committee for Accolades may or may not be featured on the Long or Shortlist and the Chairman’s Accolades in each category are specifically selected from outside the Longlist.

The achievement

Given that, according to Professor Google, less than 60% of doctoral candidates actually complete their PhD (within a decade), the award of a doctorate is a considerable achievement for any individual and their dissertations usually testify to the enormous amount of research work that has gone into them. Given the great variety of dissertation subjects within the Humanities and Social Sciences categories, comparing the quality of these works might seem almost impossible. But the best dissertations do stand out. They inform with their research, stimulate with their insights, and shine with their enthusiasm. While not all judges will ever entirely agree on the best dissertations in any subject area they will certainly recognise a dissertation with those qualities as being a contender for the Awards.

As I previously noted (The Newsletter 76, 2017, p.14), “the question of what is an award-winning dissertation is of course a matter of interpretation by the judges. But clearly the best dissertations will have the primary merit of originality, along with scholarly qualities such as depth (and breadth) of research, evidence of intellectual quality, clear and sophisticated arguments, good organisation and presentation of evidence leading to significant conclusions liable to be of interest to the wider field, a consistent and properly considered theoretical and/or methodological framework, and of course it must include due acknowledgement of sources and proper presentation of bibliography, notes and associated scholarly apparatus. They will also have the minimum of typographical errors and the standard of writing and use of English language will be of a good standard.” Where I should add that while the competition to date has been open only to dissertations in English, we hope to include at least French-language dissertations at ICAS 12 (2021). The IBP Awards for the best Dissertation in the Humanities and the best Dissertation in the Social Sciences were instituted with the intention of recognising outstanding doctoral dissertations; and just as the ICAS Best Book Awards in those categories recognise the work of established scholars (including private scholars), so do the Dissertation Awards recognise the best work of up-and-coming scholars. The Award winning dissertations – and many of those on the Long and Shortlists – invariably attract the attention of academic publishers, and in due course result in monographs based on the original theses. To be long or shortlisted, is in itself a considerable compliment, as it is to receive one of the Accolades that acknowledge dissertations with particular specific qualities worthy of recognition.

The submissions

The 2019 ICAS 11 Dissertation competition has attracted just over 150 submissions, almost evenly divided between the Humanities and the Social Sciences. That compares almost evenly divided between the Humanities and the Social Sciences has attracted just over 150 submissions, almost evenly divided between the Humanities and the Social Sciences. That compares almost evenly divided between the Humanities and the Social Sciences. That compares almost evenly divided between the Humanities and the Social Sciences. That compares almost evenly divided between the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Compared favourably with the 126 submissions to the Chiang Mai ICAS 10 competition two years ago. Again we have attracted dissertations from more than 90 universities in just over 20 countries. Around 20% of the submissions are recognised by inclusion in the Longlist and Accolades, with those shortlisted representing (approximately) 10% of submitted dissertations.

One aspect of the process is the insights it gives into areas and subjects that are currently the focus of cutting-edge doctoral research. In terms of nation states, 34 submissions primarily deal with China, 28 with India, 13 with Japan and 11 with Indonesia. Afghanistan, Oman, Vietnam, and perhaps surprisingly Singapore, were all the subject of only one dissertation. But more than a dozen submissions dealt with trans-national regions, cross-border issues between two or more states, or with diasporas and migrant labour. Furthermore there were nine dissertations concerning Asia as a wider region. Central Asian studies, however, were a notable omission, attracting only one submission, and with opportunities for research in the Central Asian ‘Stans’ rapidly improving, we can hope for an increase in dissertations on this region at ICAS 12.

In terms of subjects, there was a considerable breadth. The popularity of studies concerning more than one culture or nation pointed to recent tendencies in academia to recognise that nation-state borders do not demarcate precise boundaries between cultures and peoples. It also points, perhaps, to the growing Asian diaspora in the Western world and the increasing tendency of Asian students to carry out doctoral study in the West, and for Western students to be attracted to Asian universities. Such tendencies must surely lead to greater inter-cultural understanding, not least in its expression in academic works.

Along with that tendency to study wider cultural areas or areas of cultural interaction, studies relating to museums and to educational issues show a considerable growth. A number of dissertations analysing the impact of Christian missionaries in disparate contexts pointed to something of a revival of that field, albeit viewed through contemporary rather than ‘Orientalist’ lenses. Reflections on contemporary, or near contemporary issues – such as the 2011 Bangkok floods or the suicide of Tamil Nadu farmers – were also popular. The lack of environmental studies noted at ICAS 10 has been reversed, with the environment (in various contexts) being the subject of a number of submissions. Film studies are much reduced, but those in areas such as gender, organisational studies and the construction of national identities, remain constant.

Upholding standards

Naturally there are excellent dissertations that are not featured among those chosen for the various IBP Lists and final Awards/Accolades. That is a testament to the high standard of so many entries and there is no doubt that many of those not recognised by us will also be the basis for future monographs of considerable impact in their field. In an era where maintaining academic standards face enormous challenges, the IBP Awards are an important contribution to upholding and advancing those standards.

Alex McKay Chair of the IBP 2019 Dissertation Reading Committee

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Asia with salsa and samba
Asian studies publications in Portuguese and Spanish
Claudio Costa Pinheiro

“Participating in the jury of a book prize can be an enlightening and amusing experience!” Those were the words of ICAS Secretary, founder and General Secretary of the ICAS Book Prize (IBP), Paul van der Velde, which convinced me to join the jury for the IBP awarded in 2017. And he was not lying. It was thrilling to unpack the steady flow of packages coming in from all over the world and to slowly paint a picture of the international status of English language publications on Asia. In the end, I had a pile of 352 books standing in my office – including both Humanities and Social Sciences titles. Then I received the next invitation, for an even greater challenge: Can Sephis help ICAS to include Latin American publications on Asia in the IBP? We took on the challenge and succeeded! But in fact we went further than that, as you shall see below.

Diversifying voices
So, in 2019, the IBP for the first time included a prize for best publication on Asia in Spanish or Portuguese. Including this language prize was somewhat of a natural development for the ICAS Book Prize. The IBP was inaugurated in 2008; at that time it accepted only English-language titles, but in 2017 new language prizes were added to the list: Chinese, French, German, Korean. In 2021, Japanese and Russian publications will be the newcomers, and plans for 2023 include further language additions. This is part of a policy to amplify Asian voices, to decentre Asian studies and to show that there are also vibrant academic traditions in Asian studies alongside the one in the English-speaking academic world. ICAS-IAIS’ commitment to decentre Asian studies speaks to the heart of Sephis’ mandate to promote South-North-South academic linkages. This is not the first time Sephis-IAIS-ICAS have joined forces. In 2012 we together started developing the Asian studies in Africa network and association and its international status of English language publications on Asia. In the end, I had a pile of 352 books standing in my office – including both Humanities and Social Sciences titles. Then I received the next invitation, for an even greater challenge: Can Sephis help ICAS to include Latin American publications on Asia in the IBP? We took on the challenge and succeeded! But in fact we went further than that, as you shall see below.

Asian in Latin America
One year before launching the call for publications in Portuguese and Spanish, Sephis organised a survey to map Brazilian books and unpublished academic dissertations on Asia, released between 2013 and 2018. On the ground, two undergraduate students helped to identify all monographs, organized volumes, and unpublished PhD and Master Dissertations with Asia as an area of study or as a research theme. Though priority was given to the Humanities and Social Sciences, the survey was not blind to any work largely related to Asia – including fictional literature, publications of migrant communities, religion and spirituality, etc. This initiative had a clear focus and wide objectives: mapping part of the Latin American intellectual production on Asia was a strategy to access authors and publishers, and to connect academic communities separated by national, geographical and linguistic divides. The overall output of this survey revealed positive and negative aspects. It identified a very active scene, with almost 1500 publications and more than 330 dissertations addressing contemporary and historical issues in Human and Social Sciences, focusing on Asian regions and sub-regions, and their connections with Latin America and with the Global South. Eventually, logistical issues led us to decide to not include dissertations for the first edition of the Portuguese/Spanish IBP; nevertheless the process of comparing published books and unpublished academic writings proved useful: a) to understand priorities of the local publishing industry, b) to analyse how it diverges from the scientific production in the field, and c) to develop strategies for connecting Asian studies in Portuguese/Spanish and academic communities.

A negative conclusion was recognizing that the Brazilian publishing industry is helping to reinforce inequality. It largely ignores local and regional intellectual production on Asia, has limited participation in promoting science, and endorses gender imbalance. One-third of the Brazilian publications on Asia are translations; some are relevant works on history, economics and society of Asia, while a big chunk is made up of low-quality literature that frames Asia as a cultural asset, such as ‘the art of war for executives’ and the likes. A large proportion of the titles that are produced locally fall within the International Relations camp, which basically reproduce hegemonic itineraries of the field and are largely incapable of reflecting on the agendas of diplomacy, development and international cooperation concerning Asia are influenced by specificities of Brazilian (or Latin American) history and positionality. On yet another level, comparing ways in which Asia has been framed by the Brazilian publishing market and academia, gives a good sense of how Brazilian society ignores local intellectual thinking.

While Brazilian scientific production on Asia displays diversity and inclusiveness, actual publications tend to reinforce repetitiveness and exclusion. Unpublished research texts cover a large variety of themes, historical periods, regions (including Laos, Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, ASEAN etc., and comparisons and connections with Africa and Latin America), and show a balanced gender of authors (78% female vs. 53% male authors). Unfortunately, most of these works remain unpublished – exceptions are by universities or small publishers dependent on public funding. The Brazilian publishing market, on the contrary, continues gender imbalance (39% female versus 65% male authors), shows disregard for scientific production as a source of autonomous thinking, and concentrates on a narrow set of themes/regions (China, the BRICS countries, and emerging development).

The submissions
Although this survey can only show a partial picture of Latin America’s thinking about Asia, it is still very enlightening, especially when contrasted with the books submitted to the IBP 2019 Portuguese/Spanish. It helped to develop strategies for making the prize more visible to a large audience of publishers and authors. The Call for Submissions circulated widely through websites, social media platforms, web lists etc. The main universities, research clusters, journals, gatekeepers dealing with Asia in the Portuguese and Spanish speaking academic circles were proactively contacted, sometimes even by telephone. The process involved the intensive participation of scholars and institutions from Latin America, Europe, Asia, Africa and the US. Interestingly, though not surprising, we received more responses from Latin American scholars and institutions after circulating the call through European and North-American networks. The call on the Sephis page of one particular social media platform received six thousand views in three weeks.

The gratifying reward for this huge amount of work was, firstly, that the IBP 2019 Portuguese/Spanish collected the second highest number of submissions – second only to English! We received almost 70 books from 12 different countries (from Latin America, Europe, Asia and Oceania). Secondly, the
process of mapping this literature made more visible the peculiarities of Portuguese and Spanish academic environments concerned with Asian studies.

The submitted books reveal that there is still a way to go for consolidating a field of Asian studies in Spanish and Portuguese-speaking academic environments, including the promotion of intra-lingual and inter-lingual intellectual communities. Publications sooner tend to display national (or regional) isolated calls of Asian studies, scattered through Latin America, Europe and Asia itself, than an of Asian studies, scattered through Latin America, Europe and Asia itself, than an of Asian studies, scattered through Latin America, Europe and Asia itself, than an of Asian studies, scattered through Latin America, Europe and Asia itself, than an of Asian studies, scattered through Latin America, Europe and Asia itself, than an of Asian studies, scattered through Latin America, Europe and Asia itself, than an of Asian studies, scattered through Latin America, Europe and Asia itself, than an of Asia, especially in Latin America, show the progressive tendency to dissociate ‘expertise on Asia’ from an ‘Asian background’. This is significantly remarkable compared to publications and the field of Asian studies at large, where an ‘ethnophilic paradigm’ still operates very strongly. Take, for example, the growing presence of students of afro-descent in Brazil engaging with Asian studies. A number of challenges stand ahead of us in our attempts to better integrate Portuguese and Spanish speaking academic communities in the field of Asian studies. This is particularly challenging for peripheral academic circles of East Timor, Ecuador, Suriname, the Caribbean, etc., where publications face difficulties in circulation due to the costs. In fact, Sephis was approached by several authors and publishers with interesting titles for the prize, but not enough resources to meet the postal costs. So how do we boost and give visibility to small publishers? How do we create better mechanisms of visibility and distribution of Spanish/Portuguese language publications on Asia? Can we develop concrete strategies to face the disconnectedness of students of afro-descent in Brazil engaging with Asian studies.

To confront some of these challenges, Sephis is joining ALADAA and other academic institutions in Latin America and Europe – Braz observes the disconnections between Sephis and Portuguese speaking academic literature and Marçal analyses the Lusophone academic communities in Brazil and Portugal. Both are finishing their undergraduate studies on History at Rio de Janeiro Federal University. Both conduct autothorical research on political processes of mapping this literature made more visible the peculiarities of Portuguese and Spanish academic environments concerned with Asian studies. Even in Inter-lingual and inter-lingual intellectual communities, the debate is largely restricted to themes connected to Portuguese colonialism. The lack of dialogue is even more remarkable if we look at inter-lingual academic communities: Brazilians do not refer to Mexican literature, Colombians to Macanese, and so on. The submissions reveal that Portuguese and Spanish exhibiting an interesting distinction. Spanish language books find themselves in a solid scenario, not at all Spanish speaking national and regional institutions are well connected, yet the situation does display a stable scenario with high quality publications. Books are produced by established universities (such as El Colegio de Mexico, the Autonomous University of Mexico, or the Autonomous University of Madrid) or commercial publishers with a focus on Asia (such as Bellaterra in Barcelona). In comparison, Portuguese-language language publications reveal a much more scattered scene with not one big publisher concentrating on Asia; for example, the IBP 2019 submissions in Portuguese were limited to up to three books per publisher. Contrary to Spanish titles, the works in Portuguese show a remarkable geographical range: we received books from Brazil, Portugal, East Timor, India, and Macau. This does suggest that the Portuguese-speaking academic community of Asian studies emulates the Lusophone community and the Portuguese colonial past – in terms of its structure and most popular themes.

Judging the prize

Sephir effectively took the curatorship of the prize as an opportunity to promote connections in the field of Asian studies in Portuguese and Spanish languages and academic environments. These efforts were in line with the development of the intellectual capacity of students, with promoting dialogue between scholars, including building a shared curriculum for giving consistency to Latin American capacity on Asian studies. We developed strategies to reduce the disconnectedness between (and within) these academic communities. First, we opted for a single bilingual capacity, able to evaluate works in both Portuguese and Spanish, in Human and Social Sciences. Our reading committee consisted of Prof. Dr. Lía Rodrigo de la Vega, Professor at the National University of Lomas de Zamora and at the University of Palermo (Buenos Aires), and recently appointed international president of the Latin American Association of Asian Studies, ALADAA; and Prof. Dr. Patricia Souza de Faria, Professor at Rio de Janeiro Federal Rural University and president of ALADAA Brazil. The committee was well aware of the lack of integration between and within Spanish and Portuguese academic communities and helped to conceptualize strategies to promote inter-lingual dialogues between disconnected academic communities of Asian studies.

As for awarded prizes, one of the main preoccupations was to identify which publications best reflected the potency and peculiarities of the intellectual production of those academies of Asian studies. The reading committee was given total autonomy to decide which publications to review and together with the President of the Book Prize, they generated a list of categories and framed this award publications that helped to strengthen connections between Asia and Portuguese and Spanish-speaking academic institutions. Being shortlisted or even winning a prize brings attention and visibility to the global platform of Asian studies offered by the multilingual ICAS Book Prizes. Specialists and the interested public can find all the ICAS Book Prize submissions for all languages online (https://icas.asia/en/icas-book-prize) and in the IBP 2019 publication, which were opened on the ICAS website and distributed in hardcopy after the Book Prize ceremony on 16 July during ICAS 11.

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Notes

1 I produced an analytical article about the IBP 2019 publications on Asia, published between 2015 and 2017, on the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking academic environments concerned with Asian studies. Even in Inter-lingual and inter-lingual intellectual communities, the debate is largely restricted to themes connected to Portuguese colonialism. The lack of dialogue is even more remarkable if we look at inter-lingual academic communities: Brazilians do not refer to Mexican literature, Colombians to Macanese, and so on.

2 Scholarly and institutional scholarship from all over Latin America, Europe and Asia, were very supportive of this initiative and helped to attract the call for submissions and encouraged colleagues and friends to apply and engage.

3 It include promoting dialogue between scholars, including building a shared curriculum for giving consistency to Latin American capacity on Asian studies. We developed strategies to reduce the disconnectedness between (and within) these academic communities.

4 The process of mapping this literature made more visible the peculiarities of Portuguese and Spanish academic environments concerned with Asian studies.


6 A self-organized forum of publishers, authors and librarians working to provide access to books published in small presses and regional publishers, and give visibility to small publishers. How do we boost and give visibility to small publishers? How do we create better mechanisms of visibility and distribution of Spanish/Portuguese language publications on Asia? Can we develop concrete strategies to face the disconnectedness of students of afro-descent in Brazil engaging with Asian studies.

7 Judging the prize effectively took the curatorship of the prize as an opportunity to promote connections in the field of Asian studies in Portuguese and Spanish languages and academic environments. These efforts were in line with the development of the intellectual capacity of students, with promoting dialogue between scholars, including building a shared curriculum for giving consistency to Latin American capacity on Asian studies.
A n increase in awareness for women's liberation, and changes in practices concerning family relations (domestic violence), education, and media advocacy with respect to the representation of women, have as yet failed to yield the desired results in Africa and Asia, mainly because of the resistance to change that is firmly entrenched in patriarchal ideologies handed down through socialization as an undокументed memory of the people. This reality for the vast majority of women in Africa and Asia was described by Lynne as “the timeless truth of women’s lives”.1

Socialist feminists argue that oppression of women is rooted in class structure, unpaid labour, sex and reproduction. African women have always been noted for their salient activities such as procreation, child care and collective preparation of the young ones for communal co-existence. Oppong identified seven roles played by women in Asia: parental, occupational, conjugal, domestic, kin, community and individual.2 Yet, specific economic and cultural issues leave most women at the mercy of men. These women are in many cases confined to the four walls of the family home, in which their activities are restricted to precreation and household chores. Within African and Asian societies, being married is a sign of respectability, whilst single mothers, unmarried and divorced women are stigmatized. Many women struggle to attain economic independence, and socio-cultural and political encumbrances steeped in patriarchal put women in a position of bondage. In a patriarchal, authority is exercised by the male head of the family and inheritance occurs through the male children. Patriarchies define the constructs of masculinity and femininity, and as a practice they foster the political differences between freedom and subjugation. This paper, presented at the second ‘Africa-Asia’ conference (Dar es Salaam, 2019), explores issues raised in the memoir by Mukhtar Mai, In The Name of Honour, in the biography Woman at Point Zero by Nawal el Saadawi, and in Emecheta’s autobiographical Head Above Water.3 It looks at how women are represented and treated, and at the values that are placed on the girl child. The discourse is foregrounded in Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial theory and post modernism within a patriarchal and socio-cultural context. Female subordination in Africa takes intricate forms grounded in patriarchal tradition and culture. Though education is accessible to women in Nigeria, culture still subordinates women. After her father’s death, Emecheta’s brother sold their mother to a relative, so he could afford a ‘khato siliki’ head scarf for his new wife.4 Under this regimen, the father will beat the mother, eat her up and go to bed, whilst the death of a male child ascribes her survival value.5 Firdaus was beaten for the death of a male child, as she had no rights.6 In despair, and as tradition would expect from her to restore her family’s honour, Mukhtar was ready to commit suicide.7

The conference was an extraordinary event, enjoyed by so many, both new and familiar participants, and supported by first-time and long-standing partners. The cooperation provided by our local hosts at USDM was truly exceptional, and the conference would not have been quite so gratifying, let alone possible, without them. More information about the previous two conferences, including programmes, speakers, the platform, organisers, etc. can be found on our website (https://africaasia.org). The previous issue of The Newsletter included a small selection of commentaries sent to us by attendees, who like us agreed that the meeting in Tanzania was a uniquely stimulating and thought-provoking collaborative event. This issue presents you with an assortment of papers presented at the conference, just to give you a glimpse of the great range of topics discussed. We hope you will join us and present your research at the third ‘Africa-Asia’ conference. Dates and location will be announced soon!

Notes
Nigerian medicine entrepreneurs: Field encounters in Guangzhou

Kudus Oluwatoyin Adebayo

The growing presence of Africans in China has received much scholarly attention, with most agreeing that the city of Guangzhou attracts the greatest number of African migrants. Despite the unresolved debate about the size of this population, there is nonetheless the shared view that Nigerians are in the majority. According to the Nigerian Consulate in Guangzhou, there were approximately 70,000 short visits from Nigeria to China in 2014, and a slightly higher number in 2015. Close to 400 Nigerians had a residence permit in Guangzhou in 2017. However, the official figure is most likely an underestimate because the vast majority of Nigerians residing in the city are undocumented, and many do not register with the Nigerian Consulate.

This article, previously presented at the Asia-Africa conference in Dor es Salam, describes my field encounters with two undocumented Nigerian medicine entrepreneurs in China, which took place during my doctoral research. Their experiences as medicine traders in Guangzhou is uniquely useful in providing a lens through which to observe how migrant entrepreneurship is being deployed to survive and negotiate the intersecting problems of unemployment and healthcare inaccessibility in China.

Healthcare inaccessibility facing Africans

African migrants experience poor access to healthcare services in Guangzhou. The barriers they encounter have institutional, economic, social and cultural dimensions. Some empirical studies documented that racism and visa issues are involved. Other scholars explored the problem of distrust that Africans have for Chinese physicians. In comparison with internal Chinese migrants, Africans in Guangzhou experience more problems, including longer waiting hours, high cost of care, poor treatment and a lack of trust towards healthcare workers. Extant studies suggest that in response to the problems faced by Nigerian migrants to strategies such as self-medication, obtaining healthcare from in-training African doctors, recruiting the help of friends with Chinese language competency when visiting the hospital or merely seeking medical attention in the country of origin or a third country.

In reaction to the poor accessibility to healthcare, two Nigerian migrants established a medicine trade business. With claims that they were answering a “divine call” to help co-migrants solve, provide a living and/or survive in a context where economic, social and cultural dimensions are commonplace. However, I did not expect the same practice in faraway China.

Encountering Nigerian medicine traders


The first time I met Mr. A., a 42-year-old Nigerian, it was at Guangyuan Xi Lu (market), where he was delivering a medicinal concoction to Nigerians late at night, for the price of RMB 20 (US$2.89) per small cup. In many major markets and motor parks in Nigerian cities, the sale of this medicinal concoction, known locally as paraope, is commonplace. However, I did not expect to find the same practice in faraway China. I introduced myself and Mr. A. agreed to meet me later, at some location outside Yide District, which is where I also met Mr. B. for the first time. Unlike Mr. A., Mr. B. trades in a wide array of Nigeria-imported daily needs goods and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, alongside herbal concoctions. Mr. B. dispenses herbal mixtures from large bottles that contain roots, leaves and fruits. Some of the mixtures, which Mr. B. called “wash” because of their potency to cure “everything unhealthy inside the human body”, were laced with alcohol.

Along with many other undocumented Nigerians in the city, both medicine traders established a base outside Guangyuan Xi Lu because of the deepening intensity of police crackdowns on undocumented foreigners in African-dominated sections of Guangzhou. According to the two medicine traders, it has become “less safe to live and work” in Bajiazi and Xuexiu Districts.

‘Divine call’, livelihood and modes of medicine trade

Both Mr. A. and Mr. B. traced their livelihood to a prophesy that a Nigerian “Man of God” (one of “the most popular priest in Nigeria”) had delivered to both of them. Both interpreted the prophecies as “divine calls” meant to redirect them towards the medicine trade business. Concealed beneath the divine calls, however, were other push factors into medicine trade. One, both of them have previously failed to establish successful businesses, including in transnational trade, which is a major livelihood path for many Africans in Guangzhou. Two, they identified a gap to fill with regard to the healthcare situation of Africans in Guangzhou. They recognised a lack of culturally appropriate healthcare services in the city and felt that Nigerians were experiencing poor health as a result. Besides, they believed that the cost of healthcare was prohibitive for many Nigerians, so a business that provided cheaper alternatives became necessary. Mr. A. and Mr. B. operate in both similar and different ways. Two main points of similarities: reliance on ‘flyers’ and client selectivity. Both entrepreneurs rely on ‘flyers’, circular migrants who make regular trips between Nigerian and China, transporting ingredients and other goods needed to sustain the medicine business in Guangzhou. On client selectivity, Nigerians are their main customers, but they also service other African migrants. Chinese people are excluded from their clientele, as selling to them could lead to trouble. Avoiding trouble is crucial to self-preservation for an undocumented migrant.

Their modes of practice also differ in many ways. Firstly, as mentioned before, Mr. A. only sells traditional medicines (single item model), while Mr. B. incorporates OTC drugs and daily needs goods (plural item model). Secondly, the previous experience they bring to the medicine trade, differs quite a bit. Before arriving in China, Mr. A. had sold traditional medicines in Nigeria and had learned about herbs from his grandmother whom he claimed was a healer. Conversely, Mr. B. brought no prior knowledge of herbs or healing to his medicine trade. Thirdly, unlike Mr. B., who relies on instinct to give prescriptions, Mr. A. emphasises diagnosis before prescription. As I observed while at his shop, Mr. A. asks diagnostic questions and sometimes even directs clients to go for laboratory tests to ascertain the problem. Insisting on a diagnosis is how he legitimises himself as a professional. Finally, Mr. B. usually offers a one-off service, where clients buy whatever drug they need in normal exchange relations. Mr. A.’s approach, on the other hand, is more personalised and intimate. Depending on the ailment and the amount involved in the curing process, Mr. A. may begin by referring a client to the medical lab for a test, respect his Chinese girlfriend to translate the lab report, pray over medicinal concoction, using Christian and African traditional symbols and materials. He might take the client to the famous Sacred Heart Catholic church in Yida Lu for a special prayer, after which he delivers to his client. This is clearly a more complex modality of healing practice when compared with the one-off approach of Mr. B.

Conclusion

The involvement of African migrants in trade-related activities is preeminent in the transnational sphere of trade in, and exportation of, ‘Africans in China’ studies. In Guangzhou specifically, the range of livelihoods that characterise the entrepreneurial engagements of Africans is not well known. Beyond the sphere of trade in, and exportation of, manufactured commodities, scholars have not beamed a spotlight on the medicine trade that caters to the needs of fellow migrants. This is what I have attempted with the two medicine traders that I met in Guangzhou, while researching the settlement experiences of Nigerians in the city.

More research should be done to understand the extent and context of African migrant medicine trade in China. Considering how the instrumentalisation of religion shows a pathway to entrepreneurial success, we have an opportunity to explore the concept of ‘health entrepreneurship’ in the transnational moment. The prospect of linking migrant health entrepreneurship to the issue of syrnxic healing is also enormous. Overall, despite the structural and legal impediments they experience, the stories of Nigerian medicine entrepreneurs demonstrate the willingness of undocumented African migrants in China to integrate in their adopted community, while also improving their socioeconomic situation.

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Left: Mr. A. stands by his medicine display shelf. Above: The provision store where Mr B sells O-T-C medicine and other items.

Notes


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Africa-Asia

Oluwatoyin Adebayo

Left: Mr. A. stands by his medicine display shelf. Above: The provision store where Mr B sells O-T-C medicine and other items.
With more and more Chinese heading to East Africa to live and work, many of them are puzzled by Swahili appellations. For example, the Chinese are often referred to as ‘Mzungu’, which in Swahili means ‘white’ people or ‘person who is lost’. The use of the term closely relates to the historical and sociocultural changes in East Africa, and is thus of interest to Chinese anthropologists, especially those engaged in ethnographic research in East Africa.

My identity in East Africa

When I was conducting fieldwork in Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda, local people would always call me Mzungu, especially in rural areas. For example, when my German friend and I visited Rwanda in March 2017, a Rwandan friend said: “you are both Mzungu”. My German friend quickly responded: “You are wrong, Gao is not Mzungu at all, right? Gao is from China”. The Rwandan friend was astonished and stated: “You are both Mzungu and both whites!”

The Swahili word Mzungu has two meanings. First, the term refers to European whites, especially European colonizers and settlers. Second, Mzungu means people who get lost in the village. In the beginning, I thought I fell into the second category, but later I learned that locals called me Mzungu because they viewed me as white. During and after the colonial era, local people came to adopt the black and white dualism to identify outsiders’ identities. Based on this historical context, some East Africans, especially in rural areas, call anyone with a skin colour different from their own, a Mzungu.

On the other hand, the historical context also dictates that Asians are as a group generally referred to as ‘Indians’. In the 19th century AD and earlier, ‘Indians’ living in East Africa were not just from India, but also from Pakistan and Sri Lanka. As India was a British colony before independence in 1947, many Indians came to East Africa with the colonizer during the colonial era. Because Indians proved to be good at business, local people would often call them Dukawalla, which in Swahili means shopkeeper. Clearly, ‘the Indian’ in the history of East Africa cannot represent ‘the Asian’. Nowadays, Asian people living in East Africa also include Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, etc. Interestingly, the Chinese community in East Africa call local Pakistanis and Indians: the Yin-Ba people (YBA: Yin: Indian, Ba: Pakistan).

We have not really been able to identify a Swahili word for specifically the Chinese who are living and working in East Africa. Although Tanzania and China forged a friendship in the 1970s, communications between the countries have always been primarily political and limited to high-level contacts. In the 1960s, communications between the countries have always been primarily political and limited to high-level contacts; interactions on a more personal level have been scarce. Only in recent years have we noticed locals start to use the word Mchina to refer to the Chinese.

Encounters in Africa: who is the Other?

Chinese-East African interactions have been growing in recent years, especially in the trade area; not just between governments, but also face-to-face on a more personal level. With these new connections many new issues are inevitably emerging, and previous narrative models cannot address these kinds of challenges. For example, even though the Chinese in Tanzania are neither Mzungu nor ‘the Asian’ people of East African history, Tanzanians do still frequently refer to them in this manner. This remains an example of a lack of mutual understanding, and obviously does not match with the level of economic activity between China and Africa. Simultaneously, the Chinese are also frequently considered to be neo-colonialists in Africa.2 This short essay uses the key anthropological concept of ‘the Other’ to explore this question further.

The concept of the Other was introduced by anthropologists who worked in the service of colonial projects. In the colonial context, some anthropologists directly served the colonists and did their research in order to satisfy the European curiosity toward the colonial world. Although Western anthropology has in the meantime already criticized the concept, it has really never satisfied Chinese anthropologists like myself who conduct research in Africa or other developing countries, because Chinese anthropology has always been based on a very different premise.

Most of the early Chinese anthropologists did their research in only China; certainly none ventured into Africa. Even now those numbers are limited. They faced much criticism by their European and Japanese colleagues. Edmund Leach, for example, claimed that endogenous research is not anthropology, since anthropologists ‘should go abroad’.3 However, anthropologists like Edmund Leach, originated from countries such as Great Britain, with relatively small geographical areas and biodiversity, mostly homogeneous culture and ethnicity, and a history of colonial interactions in Asia and Africa. The concept of ‘the Other’ came quite naturally for them.

On the other hand, Chinese anthropologists found within their own borders a huge biodiversity and geographical expanse, with no history of colonising other lands, housing a vast heterogenous population. In all, this gave them little impetus for foreign travel. Fei Xiaotang, a well-known Chinese anthropologist, famously put forward the concept of Diversity in Unity (多元一体) in China’s cultural context.4 Some of his peers conducting their research in Africa and other developing countries than worked with ideas of We/Us (我们). Together (在一起) and a community of common destiny (人类命运共同体). Clearly, the concept of the Other was not relevant for their epistemology.

Further possibilities: from the Other to cultural sharing

I would suggest, for these reasons, that Chinese anthropologists adopt the value orientation of ‘cultural sharing’ rather than ‘the Other’. First, China has never colonized any country, but some areas of China have been colonized by many western countries in the past. Chinese people can understand deeply the tremendous suffering caused by colonialism and poverty. Second, both of the concepts, Diversity in Unity and community of common destiny, are rooted in Chinese culture. These two concepts have shaped Chinese people’s ways of communicating with other people. Third, anthropologists always acknowledge and value the cultural diversity and cultural relativism of communities. The idea of cultural sharing aligns well with this anthropological tradition. By adopting the idea of cultural sharing, I believe that the future of China-Africa relations will be bright, with a lot of possibilities for cooperation.

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African topographies in India: (in)visible heritages, African prints and contemporary art across the Indian Ocean

Pedro Pombo

Triggering conversations across geographies and times, African presences in India become visible through three interconnected conceptual frames: Carto/graphies (mnemonic traces, geographies and their uses and meanings), Archiving/material-traces, representations of past and future heritages, and Cartoographies (visual traces, artistic expressions).

Carto/graphies - mnemonic traces

This conceptual frame investigates spatial and temporal mutations of centuries old networks of circulations and interactions. If Asian presences and complicate concepts of Afro-Asian circulations.

Archiving/material-traces

Material and visual heritages are powerful repositories of history and culture. One of the possible searches for African presences in India, and broadly in South Asia, is to interconnect scattered traces of different contexts and forms, as well as the lexicons and representations of past heritages, in order to think what, and how, can be perceived as future legacies. One of the advantages of this conceptual frame is to circulate among diverse materialities: small scale shrines for spirits of deceased African slaves in Kochi, the Kappiri Muthapan, the impresive Janja Fort, on the coast of Maharashtra. Sufi dargahs and devotion rituals performed by Siddi communities, representative buildings as the Siddi Sajjudi Mosque in Ahmadabad, urban aesthetic languages of port cities as Surat, Diu or Kochi or materialities as mobile cotton textiles.

As contemporary inheritances of centuries of trade that sustained Western India’s textile production, ‘African prints’ are being produced in Ahmadabad, Surat or Bombay exclusively for African consumption. The long history of Indian textiles in Africa, commonly disconnected from this contemporary production through an excessive focus on the late colonial period, is alive in India, one of oldest production centers, as well as in the more recent production centers in China, mainly Guangzhou province, where African migrants build communities and businesses. Titled as Mazambique Fabric or Caputolu, Dashiki, Kappiri Muthapan, a concept or simply as cotton textiles, these African textiles made in Asia prove that cotton cloths are not material traces of past histories but as medium where future heritages are literally drawn. The African continent, as a center of decision and consumption, has an active role in Asian economies while Afro-Asian circulations translate the contemporary mutations of centuries old networks of aesthetics in material and visual cultures. African prints made in India constitute an archive that will discuss with other material testimonies, as decorative arts across the Indian Ocean and architectures and urbanities of port cities that embody disparate “elsewhere”, that constitute the Indian Ocean landscapes as archives of Afro-Asian circulations.

Possible mappings

Instead of focusing on one particular field, connecting diverse layers where links between the African continent and India have been made and used to image and to understand relations and frictions among modernity, visual cultures, and discourses. In a broader sense, these dialogues with larger geographies of Afro-African relations may contribute to build new cartographies of Africa in India while knitting apparent disjunctures between the past and the present. This conceptual frame also translates the permanence of circulations of memory that inhabit the Asian space in order to think what future heritages can be imagined depending on the field of inquiry and the conceptual frame.

Notes

4 On Kaffirs in Sri Lanka, see Kaffir Culture, a Certain Grace, the Siddi: Indians of African Descent, New Delhi: Photosynk. For documentaries see Afro-Asian communities see the documentaries by Behnaz Mirzai (http://www.africanindianlines.com) and Dingmango, documenting by Kamran Heidari from 2007 and 2009 in area and the Indian Ocean World, organized by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the New York Public Library.

Kangas in the Chavda store, Stone Town, Zanzibar. Chavda kangs are among the most famous in Zanzibar and are produced in Bombay, India. Photo by the author, 2018.
In South Africa, as in India, the first generation of ‘struggle’ historians focused on lawyers as liberation leaders. Nelson Mandela being the most obvious example. In writing histories of liberation movements in South Africa we may have neglected other stories about the law. Work on South Asia suggests the possibilities for writing histories of black lawyers. South Asia has served as figures who translated between various forms of vernacular law and colonial law – and also vice versa. Sharafi’s work raises another interesting point, which she herself acknowledged: “How did lawyers present the outside actor (state, business etc.) to their own communities, in a context where we get plenty of sources on how these players presented communities to the state, but not the other way around.”

This problem requires a different methodologically. It might involve looking at vernacular sources or oral histories, in addition to legal records. It might also involve a difference in attention and scale. It might need to center certain actors – like the land buyers in Piesia ka Seme’s schemes – and decenter others, such as Seme himself.

Other legal historians of capital in Africa do the sort we see on South Asia or the Indian Ocean – histories of intermediaries, transnational markets, legal or merchant intermediaries? Part of the reason may be that African economic histories are part of the narrative. Another explanation may be that there remains a strong (and important) inclination within African historiography to hold capitalist or property wealth to be more significant than visions of inequality they have wrought. There seems less space for the stories of figures who, like Seme, qualify as neither ‘hero’ nor villain. Yet newer work by African scholars, who have taken up similar themes to their South Asian counterparts, can redress this.

In South Africa, as in India, there is a challenge: an example from South Africa

The challenge: an example from South Africa

‘Communal land’, ‘private property’, ‘quintessential tenure’, ‘land in trust’, ‘shiefs’ land’ and ‘Crown land’. These are all terms associated with the history of land conquest, acquisition, dispossession and reclamation in 20th century South Africa – and in many other former colonies. But do they capture how black South Africans conceptualized, managed and regulated land over the course of the last century? Anthropologist Marilyn Strathern asks what we see and conclude when we use only conceptual categories developed from histories of Euro-American property. Here is an example to illustrate the challenge.

Founded by lawyer and African National Congress stalwart Piesia ka Seme, the Native Farmers Association (NFA) bought and sold land to hundreds of black farmers in South Africa in the early 20th century. The NFA purchased land in 1912, one year before South Africa’s ratification 1913 Land Act, which made it much more difficult for black South Africans to own land in the form of titles. In promoting the NFA, Seme encouraged black land buyers to see “the importance of economic interests in land and the advantage of individual land tenure over and above communal or tribal tenure.”

One group of black farmers who bought land from the NFA comprised 25 people from the Free State province, accompanied by Chief Malise Moloi. For several years Seme had known the group members, all of whom had put money towards the purchase. But Seme signed the deed in the name of Chief Moloi alone. When Moloi defaulted on the payment, the contract was broken, as he had been the sole purchaser listed. Everyone lost out on land. Some argued that the land buyers were all members of Chief Moloi’s tribe, stating “I know that an individual member of a tribe has no right to land, there is no individual tenure.” The land buyers opposed this interpretation, arguing they had bought their land in the name of a group, not in the name of Chief Moloi – and all the other group members had paid up. Seme’s approach seems to contradict his earlier advocacy of individual land tenure. When it suited him he was sympathetic to a narrow view of African land tenure, common to colonial administrators and anthropologists of the time: communal land under a chief. There was no room for forms of land tenure that complicated the binary of individual titles and communal land.

From biographies and newspaper editorials we know about Seme’s approach to land. But what about those who bought or rented from the NFA? What debates took place about land amongst NFA members? The broader question, which animates my work as well as other legal historians, is how we can reconstruct a history of political thought about land law and property.

African legal history as social history

Writing against histories of colonial legal ‘amnesia’ vs. local ‘tribalism’, the peculiarities from the 1980s onwards, historians of Africa have portrayed law as an arena of struggle, where power and inequalities were played out and/or contested. Legal histories of Africa have focused on the rich insights into everyday life provided by court records. This scholarship has revealed the social engineering behind colonial legal regimes and foregrounded the legacy of colonial violence and colonialism.

However, African legal history based on court records has been a little constrained by debates about oral vs. written law (playing a dichotomy entrenched during the colonial era). How do we write histories of what people understand and imagined beyond the binaries of individual vs. communal, written vs. oral, official vs. customary? If we fail to tell the whole story, Partha Chatterjee’s words will ring true: “If the rest of the world have to choose their interests from between the logics that have been the official/folk, written/oral, or tribal tenure.”

One way out of this impasse has been to study political thought through traditions that are diasporic, diasporically oriented. This has involved focusing on the moral economy of civic virtue and policing the community that Africans have debated in vernacular language texts. Another attempt to move beyond the dichotomy of the ‘colonized’ and the ‘colonizer’, has been to focus on ‘intermediaries’ who served as direct employees of the colonial state. But what about ‘intermediaries’ who were not only ‘colonized’ and the ‘colonizer’, but also members of a whole group of economic and social ‘entrepreneurs’? Here studies from South Asia on intermediaries and economic legal history might be useful.

Intermediaries and political economy in South Asian and African legal history

Fascinating work is emerging in South Asian legal history on intermediaries and capital, tied to colonial and postcolonial economic history.3 Just two examples: Fahad Bishara’s work on Parsi legal culture and Ritu Birla’s study of Marwari family firms. There is also recent African scholarship which intersects with this approach – for example, Fahad Bishara’s Bianca Murillo, Parker Sharafi, Benjamin Lawrence, Thor Thomsen and Bonny Iwahow. Bishara argues that colonial administrators, like some legal historians, tried to impose a story of ‘status’ to ‘contract’ on the Parsi community, firms in India, in those (supposed ‘contract’) moments of legal regulation of family firms, the colonial government was forced to acknowledge and incorporate aspects of indigenous capitalisms into the colonial economy. By doing so, the government legitimated a space in which rich family firms could negotiate for the interests of practices that served their interests.”

Sharafi argues that just because Parsi litigants and legal professionals become ‘consumers of colonial law’ does not mean that they automatically absorbed a colonial mentality about law. Without downplaying the violence of colonial law, Sharafi offers a complex picture: though Parsis who engaged the colonial legal system conceded at times to colonial frameworks of law, they then went on to work amending, and at times deconstructing those frameworks.4

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6 See for example, Steven Feierman, John Done, Digna denker and Emma Hunter on East Africa; Crisilyn Hamilton and Isabel Hofmayr on South Africa. Bishara, Fahad. Language, Law, Culture, and Market Governance in Late Colonial India. Duke University Press.


8 Sharafi, M. 20th. personal communication.
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development experts have suggested that we rethink the conventional economic growth model. One of the reasons for this may be that economic growth does not necessarily assure the increase in people’s subjective well-being. Another is related to growing concern over the environment and social issues, yet it won’t provide us with solutions to tackle these social and economic systems influenced so forth. However, solutions to tackle these ethnic conflicts and discrimination, and

Adverse effects of the conventional development model and natural catastrophes led to the world agreeing on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs consist of seventeen goals including economic well-being, education, health, gender, diversity, and a wide range of environmental aspects. SDG-11 sets targets on the realization of sustainable cities and communities. Thus, we need to find a practical approach and prompt action at the community level to accomplish this goal. In this study, we focus on sustainable community development. Mainly, we pay close attention to a unique tool called Jimotogaku created in Minamata, Japan, to revitalize rural communities. We explain the background, concept, and process of the Jimotogaku method and share a collaborative action research project applying the method in a community mapping program for youth in Bhutan. We discuss the potential use of both the Jimotogaku method and collaborative action research to make more rural communities viable and sustainable across Asia and Africa, meeting the overarching goals laid out by the SDGs.

Creation of the Jimotogaku Method to Revitalize Local Community in Japan

Minamata Disease involves an organic mercury poisoning; it was first discovered in and named after Minamata city (Kumamoto prefecture, Japan) in 1956. It was caused by industrial wastewater discharged from a chemical factory (Chisso) into the ocean. Minamata city’s reputation was tainted by the disease, and further depopulation occurred due to a rapid increase in rural-urban migration incurred by modernization. Local people simply perceived the demise of their communities as ‘fate’. A former city officer in Minamata was concerned for the future of the local communities, and in the 1990s he invented the Jimotogaku method to change local people’s mindsets toward their communities from a negative to a positive. He tested the method by bringing visitors from big cities to Kagumashi, a rural community in Minamata, and asked local people to guide them. While walking through the neighborhood, the visitors enjoyed discovering things they had not seen or heard before and were impressed with the local way of life, shown to them by the local guides. Conversely, the local guides were surprised to learn that the visitors from urban areas were ‘positively impressed’ with local resources, traditions, and culture, which they simply took for granted. The local guides gradually recognized that they had not been ‘left behind’ and they enjoyed revitalizing their community. The adoption of the Jimotogaku method, motivated the residents to start thinking how to make use of the valuable resources to sustain their well-being. For instance, a local women’s group was formed, and this group started a food-catering business based on a philosophy of local products for local consumption. The Kagumashi village received the highest recognition as a rural community in Minamata, and asked to participate in the pilot program. On the second day, using the photos taken and information gathered during the community walk, hand-made local resource guides were presented to government officers in charge of local development from Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia to improve their positive perception of rural communities as old-fashioned, when compared to urban communities. With a growing negative perception of their own community, the Jimotogaku method can be a powerful mindset-change tool. It could even create a chance for local people to be creative in designing the community’s future by interacting with visitors from outside.

The Jimotogaku method, an action research tool, has some potential to empower stakeholders. As for the potential, it could change the mindset of both visitors and stakeholders by discovering their social, economic, cultural, political and environmental resources. The method can be regarded as a practical method to create a positive impression on local people’s knowledge, but also encourages them to maintain and cultivate a locally sustainable way of life.

A unique feature of the Jimotogaku community mapping program is to have a two-way interaction between the student participants and local. In Kuzhugchen village, after the student presentation, the residents were highly motivated and wanted the local communities to become active in viable and sustainable community development.

Potential of Collaborative Action Research Across Asia and Africa

In the context of sustainable community development, conventional one-directional development approach tends to look down on rural communities as old-fashioned, when in fact they are increasingly growing perception of their own community, the Jimotogaku method can be a powerful mindset-change tool. It could even create a chance for local people to be creative in designing the community’s future by interacting with visitors from outside.

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4. Yoshimoto, T. 2008. ‘Jimotogaku community mapping program: A unique feature of the Jimotogaku method, an action research tool, has some potential to empower stakeholders. As for the potential, it could change the mindset of both visitors and stakeholders by discovering their social, economic, cultural, political and environmental resources. The method can be regarded as a practical method to create a positive impression on local people’s knowledge, but also encourages them to maintain and cultivate a locally sustainable way of life.

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In 1945, with the horrors of the Second World War still very much around him, George Orwell made the following observation in his essay Notes on Nationalism: “It is important not to confuse nationalism with mere worship of success. The nationalist does not go on the principle of simply gaining up with the strongest side. On the contrary, having picked his side, he persuades himself that it is the strongest, and is able to stick to his belief even when the facts are overwhelmingly against him.”

**Parindra’s loyal cadres**

**Fascism and anticolonial nationalism in late colonial Indonesia, 1935-1942**

*Yannick Langkiew*
Parindrist and, like Thamrin, a member of the Colonial Council – marching through ranks of Surya Wirawan members performing the Nazi salute (see fig. 1). Additional newspaper material shows that not only the party’s youth organization, but also the upper ranks of the party used this particular salute deliberately.8 Two years earlier, in 1939, a similar bizarre large-scale ritual was performed during Parindra’s second party congress in Bandung (see fig. 2). Since a range of honorable Dutch guests, among them the chief adviser for Indonesian Zaken [Governor-General’s advisor for ‘native’ affairs], O.S. Pijl, attended the event, we can say with absolute certainty that this newly acquired ‘taste’ for fascist imagery did not go unnoticed. However, Dutch colonial authorities did not see any reason to be concerned. The official reports commented that it all could somehow be tolerated as an expression of the ‘colonial state’ and the Dutch, most notably the Politieke Inlichtingen Dienst [Political Intelligence Department], show no traces of concern about this fascist-style demonstration. The colonial press seemed to be more on the alert, but it was only in 1941 that the Dutch colonial government finally banned the salute in response to the German invasion of the Netherlands a year earlier. All along the way, Parindra maintained that the party “did not adopt [the salute] out of a particular sympathy for Hitler and his Nazis.”

Anticolonial nationalism, fascism, and the global context of the interwar period

What does the use of this salute tell us about the party’s attitude towards fascism? And what role did Parindra’s youth organization, Surya Wirawan, play in the party’s first phases as a fascist ‘role-model’ in an article written for the Indonesian-language newspaper Soeara Oameam. Complaining about the lack of character of his fellow nationalists, he urged his compatriots to get inspired by European men of ‘great character’, including Hitler and Mussolini. After quoting one of Soetomo’s letters and praising the virtues of self-sacrifice, he concluded that the ‘Surya Wirawan’ was a regular scout organization, but a defense unit, based on the future BAT.

Another influential Parindrist, the journalist Soedjarto Tjokrosiwoara, shared these ideas and espoused militaristic ideas shaped by the fascist ‘role-model’ in an article written for the Indonesian-language newspaper Soeara Oameam. Commenting about the lack of character of his fellow nationalists, he urged his compatriots to get inspired by European men of ‘great character’, including Hitler and Mussolini. After quoting one of Soetomo’s letters and praising the virtues of self-sacrifice, he concluded that the ‘Surya Wirawan’ was a regular scout organization, but a defense unit, based on the future BAT.

The ‘birth pangs’ of paramilitarism

Fascism, very much like the contemporary far-right, had a grand appeal and took root in the most diverse geographical and sociocultural settings. While it was generally understood as a social and political movement in Europe, it became an instrument of yet another foreign oppressor. Fascism, very much like the contemporary far-right, had a grand appeal and took root in the most diverse geographical and sociocultural settings. While it was generally understood as a social and political movement in Europe, it became an instrument of yet another foreign oppressor.

References


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Notes

Down and Out in Late Meiji Japan

Martha Chaiklin

The word ‘muckraking’ does not appear once in Down and Out in Late Meiji Japan. This is somewhat surprising, given that James Huffman’s earlier books focused on the press in Japan and the time period denoted in the book title aligns exactly with the American Progress Movement, whereas the inspiration for the title, George Orwell’s Down and Out in London and Paris (Victor Gollancz, 1933) relates events from 1928. Muckraker was a term used (in reference to a character in John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress) to label journalists devoted to exposing the corruption of politics and the social ills of industrialization. Although in use since the 1870s as a pejorative to the press rather than the agricultural compost raker of its origins, it was popularized in a speech by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 and taken as a badge of honor by those so designated. It would have been interesting to know if Lincoln Steffens, Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair, and their ilk influenced the efforts of Yokogawa Gonnosuke, Suzuki Umeshirō, Matsubara Iwagorō and the other journalists Huffman references for insight into the poor, or poor person (p. 2) and explore how success was achieved. Huffman seeks ‘to bring a fresh perspective, but an important one to fully evaluate just how that industrial success was achieved. Huffman seeks ‘to understand how it felt to live the life of a hirimi, or poor person’ (p. 2) and explore how modernity impacted their lives. To examine the lives of those made ‘voiceless’ (p. 2) through illiteracy and indifference, Huffman relies heavily on the muckrakers, or as he prefers, ‘poverty journalists’ of late Meiji Japan, heavily supplemented with literary diaries, government papers, social commentaries and academic analyses. The results of Huffman’s explorations have shone light on those underexposed parts of Meiji society. Importantly, he shows that these people did not fit neatly into stereotypes such as victim or criminal, that they were not entirely defined by their poverty but lived in constant ‘tension between visibility and invisibility’ (p. 97). Where he really departs from the views of muckraking journalists is in the way that he seeks not just to document the misery, crime, and disease of poverty but also to show the joy the destitute managed to make even in their difficult circumstances because there were not always powerless victims without agency.

In order to accomplish this, Huffman likens the muckrakers, largely focuses on the urban poor, which he suggests made up between 12 and 20 per cent of urban populations. As the author explains, many of these poor are migrants from rural villages. He therefore does not spend too much time parsing where they came from and while he acknowledges the presence of buraku (an outcaste class), he does not dwell on these kinds of differences, instead narrating as many individualized stories as possible to emphasize the humanity of subjects that are often equated with animals.

The down and out of Meiji Japan are examined in eight content chapters, of which the first six focus on the city, and the last two on the country. In Chapter 1, the scene is set by describing the pull of the poor to the city and the built environment in which they resided. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the working lives (because even beggars do work as a sort of) of the underclass looking at the labor through the manufacture of, for example, textiles and matches, and those in the building and service professions like carpenters, rickshaw pullers and masseurs. Chapter 4 is on family life, noting that the perception in the Japanese media and among the public of the nuclear family unit as the norm was not born out in the reality because the largest number of migrant workers were men, and divorce and disease were prevalent. Written as a comparison, Huffman’s description of rural poor is admittedly skeletal and sweeping rather than specific, because its true intent is to elucidate the urban poor rather than ponder the conditions of the countryside. Huffman argues that the strong community ties extent in the countryside alleviated some of the harshest aspects of poverty. The final content chapter completes the sweeping pattern to cities in which, the migration was largely of single men but diverge because the emigrants were able to improve their economic status much more rapidly.

Clearly and objectively written, the book only falls in being accessible to a general audience through Huffman’s decision to use Japanese terms like hirimi (the poor) or kasai shokai (underclass) for ideas that can adequately be expressed in English. Huffman clearly has deep empathy for his subjects and is well aware of both the privileges and limitations of his research position as insider and outsider when he was in conversation with queer communities in China, conversation that took place primarily during his field trips to the countryside between the years 2007 and 2009 period. With his distinctive and sometimes witty writing style, Bao illustrates the ‘structure of feelings’ of the kaleidoscopic

Queer Comrades

Travis Kong

Reviewed title:
Queer Comrades: Gay Identity and Tongzhi Activism in Postsocialist China
Hongwei Bao. 2018.
Copenhagen: NIAS Press ISBN 9788779092942

Hongwei Bao’s monograph offers an excellent example of an examination of gay identity and activism in contemporary China from a cultural studies perspective. It draws from queer theory, feminism, Marxism, and postcolonial and critical race studies for its theoretical lens.

Queer Comrades advances the project of exploring the fluidity of gender and sexual identity formations in China. The book’s geographic focus is China’s nascent capitalism, neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism.

As Chris King’s review of Queer Comrades for New Books Asia notes, Bao brings queer theory and Marxism into dialogue to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexity and fluidity of non-normative male sexual identities: tongzhi (同志), tongzhi ku’er (酷儿), MSM. He examines the challenges and potential of a radical gay politics against the backdrop of China’s nascent capitalism, neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism.

Inspired by Judith Halberstam’s ‘queer methodology’, which uses various methods to produce knowledge on subjects who have been excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour, Bao brings together medical records, published diaries and films, as well as interviews, ethnographic accounts and personal anecdotes in his analysis. Moreover, he is no detached researcher, but rather a passionate and engaged ethnographer. Bao was born and grew up in China, self-identifies as gay, studied in Australia for his PhD, and has taught at various universities in China and Europe. He is now teaching in the United Kingdom. He was well aware of both the privileges and limitations of his research position as insider and outsider when he was in conversation with queer communities in China, conversation that took place primarily during his field trips to the countryside between the 2007 and 2009 period. With his distinctive and sometimes witty writing style, Bao illustrates the ‘structure of feelings’ of the kaleidoscopic

More specifically, driven by a leftist politics, Bao brings queer theory and Marxism into dialogue to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexity and fluidity of non-normative male sexual identities: tongzhi (同志), tongzhi ku’er (酷儿), MSM. He examines the challenges and potential of a radical gay politics against the backdrop of China’s nascent capitalism, neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism.

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It is very rare that a book is published which, rather than presenting new material, is an old topic, actually presents and defines a new topic. Mark Bender’s The Borderlands of Asia is such a book. It seeks, for the first time in, I suspect, any language, to present the poetic traditions of the peoples who live at the edges of Asia, in Northeast India, Myanmar, Mongolia, and the areas of southwestern China, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia and Guangxi. In so doing, Bender and his translators have produced a book of vital cultural importance, a gateway to cultures which are too frequently passed over in favor of the dominant cultures of the region.

As an expert on China’s minorities, and a translator from the Nuoia dialect of Yi, Bender is well placed to guide the reader on this most unusual journey. In his long and detailed introduction, he divides his comments into three sections. The first, “Landscapes and Lifeforms” addresses the interaction of human beings with the environment they inhabit, through brief historical and topographical observations. The differences between these four key areas may be great, but it is the relationships which exist and change with each other, with the environment of the book, as those who are guided with the power to voice, to the land and its inhabitants, which individuals charged with a responsibility and a calling, and not as the kind of ‘figure’ to which they are used in other parts of Asia. I should declare my own professional interest in this book. I have been translating Mongolian literature for more than ten years, and over that time have developed connections with many of the country’s leading writers. So it was with particular interest that I read the poems by Mongolian and other Asian writers. The work of three Inner Mongolian and six Mongolian poets represented in the book show well the primary themes of environment and culture which form the kernel of much Mongolian poetry. Although I initially felt the lack of Mongolian-language poems by Inner Mongolia poets, I realised that this omission brings up the necessary question of sainfiction, as it does elsewhere among the many texts and figures which I think of as poems written originally in Chinese feel Mongolian (at least to me) to challenge my own assumptions regarding the often fraught and difficult dynamic between the sometimes fraught and difficult dynamic between the West and the region, and its inhabitants.

Bender has enlisted a fine team of translators to assist with this book and, while readers (and fellow translators like myself) may wonder sometimes where criticism to which we are more used in the west. The book’s second major contribution is to give voice to the land and its inhabitants, as much from the physical and spiritual environments in which their writes write, as from the minds of the writers themselves. The book’s second major contribution is to give voice to the land and its inhabitants, as much from the physical and spiritual environments in which their writes write, as from the minds of the writers themselves. The book’s second major contribution is to give voice to the land and its inhabitants, as much from the physical and spiritual environments in which their writes write, as from the minds of the writers themselves. The book’s second major contribution is to give voice to the land and its inhabitants, as much from the physical and spiritual environments in which their writes write, as from the minds of the writers themselves.
African-Asian Encounters draws readers’ attention to a broad range of engagements between African and Asian countries, addressing the monopolization of China-in-Africa narratives in both media and scholarship. With a range of studies examining previously obscured interactions, activities, and migration flows – including linkages between Vietnam and Angola, South Korea and Rwanda, and Asian artisanal gold mining in Cameroon, as well as African student and professional athletes in Malaysia and the Philippines – the volume spans new doors of insight into the effects of continued global encounters.

A much needed antidote

African-Asian Encounters offers a number of new publications and broader research endeavors, which aim to address and counter the dominance of ‘China-Africa’ on the academic landscape. This book and another forthcoming edited volume originate from a series of conferences organized by the Africa’s Asian Options (AFRASO) research project of Goethe University in Frankfurt in partnership with local host universities. The book is based on a selection of papers from the first AFRASO conference, which was held in connection with the Africa-Asia Development University Network and the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue at the University of Malaya, and focuses on the establishment and evaluation of new forms of African-Asian cooperation.

In addition to the AFRASO publications, Routledge has also recently published The Routledge Handbook of Asia-Africa Relations (Raposo, Arase, and Cornelissen, 2018) and Migration and Mine)-led efforts; and by the Association of Asian Studies (A-ASIA) group with support from the Leverhulme Trust. These mostly young African travelers are looking beyond the dominance of the ‘China-in-Africa’ narratives and bringing our gaze to a multiplicity of smaller but nonetheless important new Asian actors and engagements with a range of African countries.

Some unevenness

As with most edited volumes there is some unevenness. In a volume such as this, which is based on a global conference of international participants from a wide range of scholarly disciplines (and attendant research methodologies) writing about a diverse number of topics, one has the sense of strolling through a large art museum with various types of art (Impressionist, Abstract, Portraits, Still Lifes, Landscapes, etc.) from different periods. As with the art museum, some pieces are more to one’s taste than others; some resonate, while others are not as approachable or comprehensible. One small example of the latter, for me, would be the tables in chapter two, which, for anyone without some statistics background, are essentially useless. Edited volumes such as this really depend on the introductory and concluding chapters to really tie the book together thematically and/or conceptually. In my view, this is unfortunately the greatest downfall of the book. The introduction is a missed opportunity to really lay out all of the Africa-Asian scholarly activities recently undertaken – by AFRASO; by the Stellenbosch/Doshisha (Cornelissen and Mine)-led efforts; and by the Association of Asian Studies in Africa (A-ASIA) group with support from the Leverhulme Trust. These mostly young African travelers are looking beyond the dominance of the ‘China-in-Africa’ narratives and bringing our gaze to a multiplicity of smaller but nonetheless important new Asian actors and engagements with a range of African countries.

One section of the book does, in fact, cover the ‘China Factor’, which I had heard of the Vietnamese contract workers in Angola. Part of my ignorance of these other Asian actors in Africa may well stem from the very dominance of the ‘China-in-Africa narratives’ that this volume addresses. Confusion also serves as a reminder that the narrow focus of China-Africa, African-Asian Encounters

New Co-operations and New Dependencies


Notes

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Contending connectivities

In recent years, the most eye-catching politico-spatial project seeking to re-define the historical geography of global capitalism is the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative put forward by the Chinese government. OBOR is a state-initiated project aiming to construct cross-continental and cross-regional connectivity. This intriguingly compares with neoliberalism, which has hitherto been the main driving force of globalization. Unlike the neoliberal, market- and firm-driven logic, OBOR ascribes a transformative role to statal and inter-statal institutions in fostering regionalism; up to now, most mega-scale cooperative projects have been initiated by states or state-owned enterprises. Yet long before China promulgated the OBOR project, vast networks of cross-border exchanges had already been established across Asia, Eurasia, and Africa. Such exchanges in the form of trade and resource flow were largely carried out beyond state control, and are hence seen as belonging to the realm of the shadow/informal economy. The scale and scope of these shadow operations are no less breath-taking than OBOR. The reach of the networks is equally mind-boggling. They stretch from Guangzhou to Bangkok, Dubai, Istanbul, Nairobi, and Accra; from Yiwu to Khorgos, Almaty, Dordoi, and Cairo; from Kashgar to Sost, Gilgit, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Peshawar, and Kabul. They are formed by a vast number of entrepreneurs, money brokers, and migrant labourers sojourning between different productive and distributive centres. Our comparative studies find that shadow exchanges differ in their type of networks, degree of coordination, and nature of transaction. There is a rich diversity of operations that extends beyond our available conceptual categories.

These transnational shadow exchanges constitute a kind of globalization from below. Ironically, when challenging the market-driven logic of neoliberalism, OBOR’s state-led approach to high-end globalization is in itself confronted by informal connectivity created by rhizomatic networks of individuals and groups. How the three logics of globalization – firm-driven, state-led, and network-based connectivities – interact, therefore opens a new agenda for scholarly enquiry.
Characterizing shadow exchanges and informality

Unlike the regulated, legally enforceable, contractual exchange in the formal economy, shadow exchanges are based on inter-personal networks and trust. Because of that, there is a tendency to characterize cross-border exchanges on the basis of informal activity. While we agree with the informal nature of shadow exchanges, our findings suggest that this requires some qualifications if informality connectivity exhibits several distinctive characteristics.

First, the nature of actors. In contrast to neoliberalism and OBR0I regionalization, the activity in this context is informal in nature. In other words, the problem of marginality. Shadow traders are not necessarily people who live in the social margins. Rather than having no choice but to take up unprotected work, they often engage in informal operations with deliberate intention. They do so because state regulations oblige them to conduct their trading activities informally in order to take advantage of the grey areas in the border control.

Third, organizational sophistication. The activities carried out by traders are often described as ‘petty’ or ‘shadow’. In such description conveys a connotation of something casual, haphazard, and small scale. The informal exchange practices or so-called petty/shadow activities are highly organized, routinized, commercialized, and monopolized. A variety of informal organizational mechanisms can be found in adapting to local circumstances. In the most extreme cases, networks and organizations take a form of a cartel. Such networks and organizations exhibit an exceptionally high degree of sophistication in co-ordination. They oversee the informal exchange networks and take the form of a cartel. Co-ordinating networks and distribution, organize transportation, and co-opt/manipulate border control. In essence, they behave like well-established business firms, but remain informal in the sense that they rely on networks and trust rather than legally binding contracts in their transactions.

Fourth, resilience. While individual traders have only limited mobility, financial resources, and market awareness, they can be co-ordinated and organized in a manner and act in a coordinated way. Within this network, individual traders can come and go, and exit the network in case of a change or crisis. But the network itself is stable and resilient, with an elaborate division of labour. Finally, political and economic networks are embedded in formal inter-connections. Transnational exchanges typically link state and non-state actors. Since official discretion in the border control plays a key part in the shadow trade, reciprocity between border guards and traders becomes less significant. Smugglers/rackets extracted from local checkpoint networks are allocated to higher authorities, and even go to the ruling parties in some regimes.

checkpoints have received little scholarly attention. This is surprising given the expansion of crime networks, which allows traders and local officials to monetize their access in the form of ‘administrative rent’. In the next essay, Haydn Karrar discusses the proliferating role of informal regulations in Central Asia. The proliferation of the border economy is predicated upon the mobility of merchants, merchandise, and capital across international borders. Korrer reminds us that during this globalization from below, borders form a pivotal point in constructing trade networks, maintaining elite ownership in rent-generating marketplaces, and revealing the trajectories of global capital flows. In a similar vein, Alessandra Rippa reflects on the idea of the ‘market’ in his study of the trans-Karakoram trade. In contrast to the realpolitik of the market under neoliberalism, the Karakoram market is constructed through repeated encounters among traders, border guards, and government officials. Through the ongoing aspiration about contending connectivities, Rippa’s research seeks to explore how processes of state expansion, incorporation, and consolidation can occur in a transnational context in which illegal, illicit, or informal practices are at the same time sanctioned and protected locally.

The next three essays explore the nature of informal networks and their relations to global capitalism. Eva Hung engages in shuttle trades in southern and north-western China. She discovers major variations in the way that state and market are related to each other. Local variations in turn lead to the different organizations of shuttle trade in Shenzhen and Xigang, which Hung identifies as regulated, regulated as ‘organized crime’, and ‘institutionalized informality’ respectively. In her case study of the Cambod-Vietnam borderland, Sango Mahapatra examines the similarities as well as differences in the organization of illicit transactions for two commodities: cassava and timber. She shows that shadow exchanges are actively facilitated by state actors, including local authorities, the military, and state-connected elites. While performing a regulatory role, checkpoint staff receive routine payments from traders, which are then distributed to various stakeholders through established mechanisms and not just the ones aiming the focus on extra-continental connections. Heidi Haugen talks about her group project in studying the role of entrepreneurial brokers who navigate between formal and informal institutions across China and Africa. In particular, she finds that informal export to Africa is intimately linked to formalized trade from China to other parts of the world.

Finally, the essay by Samuel Barthet takes a closer look at the history of transnational connectivity. In his case study of the Northern Bay of Bengal, he finds the place to be a multi-centered space where multiple negotiations and intermediations took place. In the centuries-long history of trade and exchanges, the networks, pathways, and paths had to be renegotiated every year. In his words, the cyclic shapes the topography, local transport technologies, and exchanges in the political economy underlie the co-production of global modernity, modern, and contemporary history in a non-linear and non-sequential manner.

Research activities

A series of activities, including workshops, conference panels, and joint publications have been organized to explore different issues relating to the research theme. They have taken (or will take) place in different parts of the world, including:

- Conference panel on ‘Politics of Gateway’ at the 11th International Workshop ‘In the Shadow of the New Silk Road’, to be held during the 11th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 11), Leiden, 16-19 July 2015
- Third and forthcoming international workshop ‘In the Shadow of the New Silk Road’, to be held during the 11th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 11), Leiden, 16-19 July 2015

During the forthcoming workshop at ICAS 11, further conference panels will take place on 18 July while an expert meeting involving business leaders, diplomats, and other practitioners will take place in the morning of 19 July 2019. The workshop will be organized under the title ‘The Shadow of the New Silk Road’. It will address the issues of securing trade routes, regulating transnational exchanges, and institutionalizing grey governance for shadow activities.

Some initial findings can be found in Tak-Wing Ngo and Eva P.W. Hung (eds) 2016, Special issue on ‘Checkpoint Politics in Cross-border Exchanges’, Journal of Contemporary Asia (WQ2). Further findings will be published in Eva P.W. Hung (eds) Shadow Economies across the New Silk Road, Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming; and Eva P.W. Hung and Tak-Wing Ngo, The Shadow Economy in Greater China, Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming.

Below: Market in Kashgar, Xinjiang, West China. Image reproduced under a Creative Commons License courtesy of Chendunj on (301).
Central Asia is, in sum, a multi­everything region. Multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, certainly multi-cultural. Almost any interaction here for centuries has been inter-cultural, inter­civilizational even. Ethnically and culturally diverse, it has for centuries practiced what today is termed intercultural communication, if not always willingly. Here nomadic and settled (oasis) cultural types communicated, cooperated and clashed. Temporalities and ‘spatiality’ as analytical concepts are now actively introduced into traditional International Relations theories. However, surprisingly, they are not new for Central Asia. The nexus of two above-mentioned major cultural types has been providing the backdrop for development of this vast area for thousands of years, and temporality and spatiality were the basic principles upon which development there was based.

Consdering this and the longstanding cooperation on the sidelines of global international systems, artificial separating of space has not been in great demand in Central Asia. The interconnectivity, cooperation, mutual accommodation and frequent flare-ups were all played out in an area where the concept of borders – artificial managing of spatiality – was a late arrival, introduced by external and often hostile forces. Resources crucial for survival – fresh water, fertile soil and abundant grasslands – were in inconsistent supply. The two socio-cultural organizations reached differently: the former explored the vast expanses of the steppes, including the high-altitude meadows that eventually became integral parts of seasonal destinations for some nomadic tribes (Dzungar, Kazakh, Kyrgyz). The basis mentally, urged people to ‘stay put’ and find ways to accommodate if not assimilate newcomers, acculturating to ethnic diversity and, over time, developing elaborate ways to stockpile against hard times. The Emirate of Bukhara, the Khanate of Khiva – flourishing theocracies – developed versatile cities, science and literature. Nomadic societies – ‘nom­sedentary polities’, which were more limited in their economic development since they were dependent on biologically restricted means, i.e., their livestock – experimented with more fluid social structures, a more precise configuration of which is still a subject of debate among specialists, especially with new archeological discoveries that present evidence of much more elaborate forms of economic and social relationships that previously thought. The fabled Silk Road traversed thousands of miles over inhospitable terrain from one populated settled area to another, passing thousands of kilometers (or miles) of steppes or desert with travelers hoping for a respite and recharge at yet another stop where they might have to navigate yet another set of customs utilizing all their practical diplomatic skills. This approach is now undergoing a revival with Eurasianism as its philosophical core. While it refers to the original trade routes’ experiences in connecting diverse locations and peoples, its modern version has to deal with a multitude of new issues.

Spatial and temporal characteristics of Central Asian life were interrupted in the modern times with introducing the concept of borders. The ‘Great Game’ of the 19th century, waged between the Russian and British empires, brought outside interests – and accompanying military forces – to Central Asia. Suddenly, things that previously mattered little – like formally defined borders – were introduced. This spatial separation was further reinforced by the Russian empire’s expansion into Kazakh steppes and establishment of farming outposts. ‘For the first time in the history of Central Asia, a sedentary farming civilization pushed into the realm of nomadic culture’ (in 20th century). Afterward another farming culture’s realm – in Tashkent and Ferghana oasis1. In the early 20th century, newcomers’ presence became formalized with the establishment of a new socio-political configuration, the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics – that once again brought major changes to the region’s differing lifestyles. Centrally planned economic relationships were propelled into the realm of impersonal and detached from tradition (at least in theory) social connections of a new type. Together with unifying and leveling off the cultural differences the Soviet period disrupted intraregional spatial features. The new republics’ borders – even though they were more of symbolic (‘administrative’) nature – cut through established communities and patterns of exchange. For over 70 years there have been three actors in any cross-border exchange – two (or more) local participants and ‘the Union’s center’ serving as a middleman and arbitrator. Sometimes this framework functioned reasonably smoothly, if only at keeping problems under control rather than looking for sustainable solutions (i.e., the Ferghana Valley at the junction of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), but oftentimes decisions were made without paying much attention to ‘local conditions’. This created issues that would come to the fore after the fall of the Soviet Union, and independent republics as actors in the new supra-regional system of international relationships would have to start looking for solutions. The Aral Sea ecological disaster provides one example. The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 was another traumatic event. The accumulated experience and adjustments made for ‘Soviet’ conditions became irrelevant, and re-establishing communications between neighbors – now newly independent – proved to be a formidable challenge. With economic woes, nationalist and xenophobic flare-ups threatening to engulf the whole area in armed conflict, one of the solutions suggested by Kazakhstan’s first President Nazarbayev in the mid-1990s was the Eurasian theory. It was first developed in the early 20th century by an eclectic group of thinkers who explored the links between geographic conditions, ethnic composition and cultural patterns. The doctrine remains contested, and nowadays is prone to political manipulation. However, Mr Nazarbayev proposed it as a platform for “cooperation of the equal partners to reach the shared goals of economic prosperity” within the region. The perceived attempts by Russia – a participant in the Eurasian Economic Union, and seen by many, as its “anchor” – to widen the agenda to include issues ‘adjacent’ to purely economic tasks, are treated with skepticism, and at times like this dialogue slows down. The Eurasian approach is not ideal, but it has been instrumental for tentatively addressing supra-national and state-specific development goals. Successful communication across borders remains crucially important in present-day Central Asia. It is illustrated by the fact that Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a Department of All-Asia Cooperation and a Department of Eurasian Integration. Many a transborder issue in Central Asia has multiple actors and contradicting interests at play, as illustrated by the demarcation of the Caspian Sea borders (tentative agreement reached in 2018 after 26 years of negotiations), so finding a way to balance them is crucially important. This balance is bound to increase in importance as the ‘One Belt-One Road’ strategy is beginning to advance. An uncounted and transparent flow of goods launched as a hallmark of the OBOR approach depends a lot on Central Asian inter­state cooperation in building cordial enough relations and the necessary infrastructure for that flow, and addressing the ‘shadowy’ issues of cross-border exchanges. The Republic of Kazakhstan’s Military Doctrine points out “the potential for conflicts in Central Asia due to variety of factors: Instability in Afghanistan, tense socio-political situation in the region, unresolved border and water-sharing issues, economic, religious and other contradictions with the mechanisms for their rectifying still lacking. Drug trafficking and illegal migration have gained transnational character”. A few recent examples – such as closing down Kazakhtan-Kyrgyz border crossing points for a few weeks in the fall of 2018 or continuing tensions on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border (portions of which remain riddled with land mines) – illustrate the difficulties in finding common ground. According to “The Diplomat”, “the regional integration promised by the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) – Nazarbayev’s idea in the first place – is discredited by the perception that relationships between its Central Asian members can turn on a dime”. The Law on ‘State Borders of the Republic of Kazakhstan’ – one of the first ones promulgated in the early days of independence – states that “establishing and maintaining relations with neighboring states, regulating the activities in border areas (including related to water resources) and in the international transborder logistics areas within Kazakhstan’s territory is governed by the security goals of the Republic of Kazakhstan and international security, mutually beneficial all-round cooperation with neighboring states, principles of peaceful, non-violent resolution of border issues”. Four other Central Asian states have something similar in their codes of law. The legal foundation is here, but opening and maintaining a dialogue on cross-border issues requires visionaries, indeed. Considering that, besides their function as formal ‘dividers’, borders may very well be lines that separate what is different, but not incompatible, this task – shared by the whole community of Central Asian states – is bound to increase in importance.

Notes
Eurasian integration at borders between China and post-Soviet countries

Ivan Zuenko

At our current stage of world history where the dominant trend is towards global economic development, we see the paradoxical coexistence of two divisive tendencies: first, further international cooperation and integration, and second, anti-globalism and protectionism. This state of affairs bears particular significance for post-Soviet countries, even towards those who are still regarded in public opinion as a threat, such as China. Moreover, governments in post-Soviet countries conduct concrete integrative measures, including forming of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and participating in China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Therefore, a complicated picture emerges of cross-border activities (both formal and informal) that is yet to be fully explored.

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The ‘birth’ of a new border
Integration processes really do change the dynamics and characteristics of cross-border activities. A good example can be witnessed in the case of the border between China and EAEU. The Union was founded in 2015 on the basis of a special treaty – the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, with enlargement by adding Kyrgyzstan and Armenia the same year. It formed a 7000-km border between China and three EAEU countries (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan), which at the same time became the border between just two custom spaces. There are no customs between EAEU members, and the cargo from China shipped into EAEU via any checkpoint on the border can be transited to the Russian or the European market without any customs procedures in EAEU territory. However, because the EAEU does not possess a singular customs body, the customs clearance is conducted by different customs services of individual EAEU-member states. This coexists with the fact that conditions of economic and institutional development of, for example, Russia and Kyrgyzstan are very different as well. This has created a situation for shippers of Chinese cargos where they can choose the route for shipment (via Western China and Kazakhstan or via the Sino-Russian border and then via Trans-Siberian Railway), as well as to ‘choose’ a customs service: Russian or Central Asian (Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan). Of course, they choose the more profitable and easiest way. The border on the Eastern flank, which is the only one between China and Central Asia became a key corridor for transcontinental traffic, because of its geographical location and its commitment to developing logistical infrastructure. As a result, the amount of transit traffic from Asia to Europe, via Kazakhstan, has already exceeded analogous traffic via the Russian Far East. A similar trend has emerged with regard to Chinese goods for the Russian market. Private traders are now buying goods from China and Kyrgyzstan in order to move via the borders of Eastern Russia. Kazakhstan’s central government has now seen the preferential border checkpoints moving to the west, on the border between China and Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan. Some commodities are officially intended to transit Asian goods to Europe, via Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Of course, these operations are facilitated by the fact that, according to the statistics, an increase in imports from China to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan surpass its needs. For example, the current volume of imports of Chinese clothing and footwear to two Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), with a total population of 23.5 million people, is close to the volume for imports to Russia with a population of 146 million people.

Shadow Silk Road
How does this happen? Central Asia’s increasing connectedness and its rising role in transiting Asian goods to European markets seems to be regarded as an example of how the ‘New Silk Road’ linked to China’s Belt and Road Initiative works. However, analysis of customs statistics of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan shows that there are critical divergences, so that one of the main (or maybe the most important) reasons for cargo shippers’ choices to opt for alternative routes to China instead of Russia is increasing possibilities for implementing various illegal, semi-legal, or informal schemes. (In Russian, which is a lingua franca for all EAEU countries, they are called ‘black’ or ‘grey schemes’). It became possible due to the weak political institutions in Central Asia and specific conjugation of circumstances, according to which Central Asian countries received a flow of goods much bigger than they could expect judging by local economic development.

What kind of shadow practices can be witnessed on this ‘new border’? In the case of ‘black schemes’, we speak about smuggling when commodities enter the country without customs clearance or paying fees, and when customs service officers accept bribes for turning a blind eye. In the case of ‘grey schemes’, the most widespread practice is when commodities with a high tax ratio (for example, clothing, footwear and leather goods) are cleared as cheap commodities. Cargo shippers cut their expenses and officials receive kickbacks, whilst the national budget suffers a loss. There are also a vast quantity of various informal practices of moving cargo across the border, which help cargo shippers to avoid paying custom duties. These practices are common among so-called ‘shuttle traders’ and people who are hired to move the commercial cargo across the border under the pretext of their personal belongings. These people are called ‘shuttle traders’ or informally (in English ‘camels’ or kirpich) and travel across the various parts of the border between Russian-speaking post-Soviet countries and China. This participation of ordinary people in trade activities is indefensible, albeit minimal due to the lack of leverage of officials when (and if) formal rules are broken. Payment for the service is based on the practice of shuttle trade, where people living on the borderlands routinely travel to the nearest foreign town to buy cheaper things for themselves, which the state cannot bar. We can see it in the case of the free trade zone Korora, presently the most successful hub for shuttle trade using these informal practices on the EAEU-China border. It lies on the Sino-Kazakhstani border, and gives visitors from both countries visa-free access to duty-free shops. Of course, all these schemes did not suddenly appear when the EAEU was formed; they were pre-existing. But the Eurasian integration processes in the framework of the Union created conditions in which these shadow practices began to flourish in the EAEU countries with a common border with China.

How cooperationism can coexist with protectionism
The main beneficiaries of these practices are shippers and local officials who monetize protectionism. But locals are against this ‘new border’. In the case of ‘black schemes’, we speak about smuggling when commodities enter the country without customs clearance or paying fees, and when customs service officers accept bribes for turning a blind eye. In the case of ‘grey schemes’, the most widespread practice is when commodities with a high tax ratio (for example, clothing, footwear and leather goods) are cleared as cheap commodities. Cargo shippers cut their expenses and officials receive kickbacks, whilst the national budget suffers a loss. There are also a vast quantity of various informal practices of moving cargo across the border, which help cargo shippers to avoid paying custom duties. These practices are common among so-called ‘shuttle traders’ and people who are hired to move the commercial cargo across the border under the pretext of their personal belongings. These people are called ‘shuttle traders’ or informally (in English ‘camels’ or kirpich) and travel across the various parts of the border between Russian-speaking post-Soviet countries and China. This participation of ordinary people in trade activities is indefensible, albeit minimal due to the lack of leverage of officials when (and if) formal rules are broken. Payment for the service is based on the practice of shuttle trade, where people living on the borderlands routinely travel to the nearest foreign town to buy cheaper things for themselves, which the state cannot bar. We can see it in the case of the free trade zone Korora, presently the most successful hub for shuttle trade using these informal practices on the EAEU-China border. It lies on the Sino-Kazakhstani border, and gives visitors from both countries visa-free access to duty-free shops. Of course, all these schemes did not suddenly appear when the EAEU was formed; they were pre-existing. But the Eurasian integration processes in the framework of the Union created conditions in which these shadow practices began to flourish in the EAEU countries with a common border with China.
Bazaars at crossroads
What they reveal about informality, globalization and capital mobility
Hassan K. Karrar

Bazaars were once considered particular to so-called traditional societies, especially in Asia, and were expected to transition to modern markets as national economies developed. But despite steady economic growth in the latter half of the twentieth century, bazaars have continued to proliferate. That they continue to do so makes them uniquely suited to study state-society dynamics. My fieldwork in Central Asia—and the Karakoram high mountain region of north Pakistan—illustrates how bazaars reveal informal relations in the commercial realm, elite ownership of rent-generating marketplaces, and horizontal networks between traders. Bazaars also offer a window into globalization, both what and how borders are negotiated by traders to navigate their understanding of transnationalism. Finally, bazaars offer unique perspectives on how global and regional political economies manifest at the grassroots level.

Geographic crossroads
The onset of Anglo-Russian rivalry in the mid-nineteenth century, popularly known as the Great Game, took many forms. One of them was a shifting category—variously comprising regions that today fall within Afghanistan, Central Asia, as well as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—Central Asia was seen as a geographic region. Western explorers and Russia on the one hand, and the Qing and British Indian Empire, on the other. Many European sojourners left detailed accounts of their travels through the region. A central feature of their accounts was the bazaar, which was both a ubiquitous public space, and accessible to visitors (some of whom only had a faint understanding of the communities they were visiting). Unsurprisingly, in these writings, the bazaar was a place of curiosity, and uniquely characteristic of local, Asian societies. By the middle of the twentieth century, however, the Asian bazaar had lost most of its earlier exotic appeal. This was specifically the case in Central Asia, which saw the imposition of regional political economies manifest at the grassroots level.

Decolonization
1

Capital mobility
Finally, besides what they reveal about informality and globalization, bazaars illustrate trajectories of global capital flows. Consider Afiyatabad, a non-descript border market in Pakistan's Karakoram mountains. The Karakoram Highway runs through Afiyatabad, and 75 kilometers later it joins the Chinese road network at the Pakistan-China border. After 2013, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor was mapped onto the Karakoram Highway, creating subsequently six economic corridors under the Belt and Road Initiative, and its flagship project. While the volume of cargo from Cazgan passing through Afiyatabad has increased sharply since 2015—container trucks barrel through Afiyatabad, border checks point, and they are worse off now. The reason: a new border regime clamping down on local cross-border activities. People who engaged in cross-border commerce in the past have been substantially banned from the small bazaar and injected small volumes of cash into local households; trading was conducted amidst closed shops as containers roll past, the bazaar suggests that the Belt and Road Initiative moves investment capital between increasing distant locales—or ‘pivot cities’, in China’s policy lexicon—thus transforming bordering for commerce into an economically cross-border mobility was essential. Hence, what is promised as benefit-for-all or win-win in Belt and Road globalizing narratives ends up bypassing the very people on the frontlines of the new geographies of connectivity.

Notes
Pakistan traders in China’s Xinjiang often carry trading goods on the daily bus between Tashkurgan (China) and Sost (Pakistan). Far from informal, this form of un-taxed suitcase trade is rooted in trans-national networks of traders, relations with border guards, and a profound understanding of the rules governing ‘the market’ in this context. But what is this ‘market’ to which small-scale Pakistani traders often refer to? I argue that for Pakistani traders in China the market is neither simply based on trust, social relations and the continuous flow of information, nor does it correspond to the global, culture-free market economy. Those two models do not exist in separation, but rather both contribute to the construction of an idea of market that is inevitably trans-local and transnational, but that is also rooted in a set of relations that must be continuously performed on the two sides of the border. This whole context, therefore, is analytically more useful in the analysis of small-scale cross-border trade than any attempt to individuate different topologies of trade, or any analytical framework that revolves around notions of formality and informality.

The big mosque: small-scale Pakistani traders in Kashgar

It was Ali who introduced me to the big mosque, shortly after he arrived in Kashgar for the second time late in the summer of 2012. The big mosque was the nickname that Ali and his fellow traders from Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan’s northernmost region, had given to the Sahar Hotel. The Sahar was a cheap hotel in a central part of Kashgar, Xinjiang, where many Pakistani traders – mostly Pashtun and Punjabi from ‘down country’ – stayed. Sahar Hotel was a place where traders wear their shalwar kameez, always pray,” Ali told me as we walked into the hotel. “There’s even a mosque in the hotel, it’s like being in Pakistan”. The Sahar hotel was, indeed, quite an interesting discovery for me, and became a frequent destination for my daily strolls through Kashgar during the following months of fieldwork. Several rooms of the hotel were permanently occupied by import-export companies advertising fast and secure shipment of goods between Pakistan and China, either via the Karakoram Highway or via sea, through Karachi and Guangzhou or Shanghai. As we sat in his room, Ali walked me through the different stages involved in his business. In the following days, and over his next visits to Kashgar and a couple of meetings in Rawalpindi, this network was far from stable. Not only because players, commodities, regulations and technologies that constitute this network varied relentlessly, but also because the relations between these different actors were in constant evolution. ‘The market’, as I came to understand it, was always taking different shapes. Shadow economy, infrastructure, and checkpoint politics

It is an established anthropological argument that patterns of exchange, by establishing and reinforcing relationships between different actors, are also generative of particular communities and of the boundaries that constitute the market. For Ali and his fellow traders along the Karakoram Highway thus make it their business to keep themselves well-informed: from season to season they follow the fluctuations of the prices of goods in the bazaars of Kashgar and Rawalpindi. They are always quick to relay news to their friends through Skype or WeChat, and good relations with local officials ensure that they get wind of any new regulation that might soon be implemented. These particularly unstable relations, between traders, commodities, and the regulatory landscapes through which they operate, are defining elements of the lives of traders along the Karakoram Highway that I described through the local notion of ‘the market’ in a Special Issue of the Journal of Contemporary Asia, based on an IASS workshop held in Leiden in December 2015. This ‘market’, I have argued, is productive of social as well as spatial relationships, and contributive to various forms of politics. Let me now quickly explore some of the literature upon which the article was based. Inquiries into illicit economies have often looked at borderlands as prominent spaces of lawlessness and shadow economies. Abraham El van Schendel;5 in their seminal work on the subject, identify the borderlands as spaces where activities that are legally banned but socially accepted often take place. They term such activities ‘licit’ and as opposed to what states consider to be legitimate or ‘legal’. Recent works on everyday life at the borders of China have indeed remarked on the fluidity of such categories in the context of cross-border exchanges.6 This literature emphasises how the state is often complicit in the emergence of particular shadow economies in trans-national contexts, partly through its investment in particular infrastructures through which such exchanges take place. There is a vast and varied collection of literature that looks at infrastructures as technologies of state territorialisation, that is, the ways in which state power claims and extends control over its national space through a number of ordering practices and technologies. A powerful example, in the Chinese context, is Emily Yeoh’s work on the ‘the market’, as I came to understand it, was always taking different shapes.

Notes
Shuttle trade at China’s borders

Eva P. W. HUNG

Shuttle trade is ubiquitous along state borders all over the world. Since the Chinese government has relaxed its border control to allow its citizens to travel to other countries relatively freely, hundreds and sometimes thousands of petty traders can be seen shuttling goods across the borders between mainland China and its neighbouring regions. While shuttle trade is generally conducted on a small scale by individual traders, mostly based on friendship or family networks, and hence characterized by informality, the entire chain of operation is effectively organized. We differentiate between shuttle trade in Southern versus North-western China: the former exhibits ‘organized informality’, the latter ‘institutionalized informality’, owing to the configuration of checkpoints.

Organized informality and shuttle trade in Southern China

On a bright sunny morning in March, a group of elderly gathered under the footbridge outside Fanling train station. Cartons of a variety of packaged foods piled up on the sidewalk: packs of ramen and kimchi, tins of cookies, bottled juices, and the like. A middle-aged woman was busy giving instructions on dispatching the goods. She helped one elderly man to stuff his backpack full, gave him a note and ordered him to go. Others chattered among themselves while waiting patiently for the woman’s order to do the same.

The woman’s husband sat farther down the street, keeping an eye on the group’s activities as well as the loads of cartons stored at the open space nearby. When he noticed that the cartons on the sidewalk were all emptied, he quickly unloaded more cartons from the open storage for the woman to distribute. The woman, meanwhile, made frequent phone calls to check on those who set off earlier. Upon receiving their messages, she ordered the others to stuff their trolleys and backpacks with various types of goods and one by one they sent them off. Almost two hours passed and the first elderly man came back. He rested for a while and packed his backpack for a second time. A day’s work ended in the afternoon when all the goods had been dispatched. (March 2015, Hong Kong)

Everyday a colossal flow of people can be seen shuttling goods across the border from Hong Kong to Shenzhen, the special economic zone of China. At the height of 20th, the Shenzhen Customs estimated that there were more than 20,000 shuttle traders crossing the Shenzhen-Hong Kong border daily. As a special administrative region, Hong Kong practises ‘Two Systems’, distinguishable from the ‘One Country’ of China in both political and economic arenas. What is often unheeded in this formula, however, is that the territory also maintains a different customs statute. Fais the that of China, Hong Kong, as well as neighbouring Macao, is a free port. There is no customs tariff imposed on imported goods, and hence any import duties and excise, on excise duty on only a few items. Under the existing regulatory regime on the Hong Kong side, as long as the goods are not contraband, counterfeit items or taxable commodities such as petroleum, liquor, and cigarettes, traders are free to take any quantity across the border. On the Chinese side, by contrast, incoming items are subject to duties and excise, unless they are meant for ‘personal use’ and within a reasonable amount. It is this provision that presents a grey area for the proliferation of shuttle trade. In principle, a whole container of goods can be split up and delivered by numerous carriers, each carrying an amount below the dutiable limit. A form of ‘crowdsmuggling’ thus results. While each individual transaction is isolated and based on loose connections, the entire chain of operations is indeed well co-ordinated in terms of sourcing, couriering, distribution, and so on. We characterize this complex form of shuttle trading as ‘organized informality’, which exhibits a combination of organizational competence and informal networks.

Checkpoint politics

Because of the sheer number of people crossing the Hong Kong-Shenzhen border daily, it is highly methodical. At the Hong Kong side, border checks are minimal, if not nominal: border guards mostly look to see if the traders are actually residing in the adjacent city. For every trip they could thus ‘go’ to Hong Kong and back to China, ‘Hard-earned money’, he said. Compared to the shuttle trade in Hong Kong, which exhibits a form of organized informality, the operation in Khorgos is not only organized but also institutionalized, as can be seen in the checkpoint arrangements.

Informal connectivity in transnational shadow exchanges

The Khorgos free trade zone, located at the border between Xinjiang and Kazakhstan, officially opened in 2012, has built itself as a key link on the new Silk Road between China and Central Asia. It is designed as a visa-free zone – visitors from Kazakhstan and Asia, and through Kazakh border controls, while those from China pass through Chinese checkpoints at different times. These shops inside the zone are mostly operated by Chinese businessmen selling cheap Chinese products, catering mostly to the Chinese shoppers. According to regulations, visitors to the zone can purchase duty-free products up to 8,000 yuan (US$1,272) per day. An informal shuttle trade in the form of ‘crowdsmuggling’, which aims to circumvent checkpoint controls and evade duties and taxes, is imposed on by this government, is similarly organized here.

A young officer patrolling right outside the immigration building occasionally stops the border-crossers to act as occasional traders. Of infant formula carried by anyone leaving Hong Kong provides the opportunity for any traders – those who ‘buy’ the goods and ‘sell’ them across the border. They carry a whole carton of goods to the zone can purchase duty-free products to the border checkpoint indeed hard line, the border checkpoint indeed hard line, the border checkpoint indeed hard line, the border checkpoint indeed hard line.

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shadow economies are networked, economic exchanges that fall outside formal state regulation. Although we often focus on the illegality or criminality of specific shadow economies, I have found that illicit transactions are commonplace across a wide range of resource-based commodities in frontier regions such as the Cambodia-Vietnam borderland (see map below). I compared the commodity networks that circulate cassava (Manihot esculenta) and illegally harvested timber. Developed for their large volume of trade and economic significance, I traced these commodities from their production in Cambodia through border crossings to buyers in Vietnam. In both networks, state actors are crucial in mediating resource access and are endemic to diverse facilitating cross-border trade. Furthermore, state actors are instrumental in governing borderland transactions. In this network, the role of state actors can be represented at particular checkpoints. Border officials and checkpoint staff are an integral cost of doing business, and are managed, albeit grudgingly, as part of trading practices and service fees. For example, one Vietnamese timber trader said that he regularly under-reports his timber sales to avoid the costs associated with declaring his lost revenue.

His account shows that timber traders perceive and deal with payments to checkpoint staff as an operating cost, rather than a barrier to the movement of goods. Similarly, to transport cassava, traders consistently reported payment fees at checkpoints. In this way, shadow economies are actively facilitated within the network. Their opportunities for rent seeking has been enhanced by land insecurity and the absence of effective regulation and interventions to strengthen trans-border trade. Finally, there was evidence that rents not only enrich border officials, but also flow upward to senior officials and, in Vietnam, to provincial governments, highlighting the broader and systemic political-economic role of these networks.

The Focus

Cassava and timber trade along the Cambodia-Vietnam border

Sango Mahanty

While cassava cultivation in Cambodia and Vietnam is keenly promoted by governments and donors, timber is usually illegally sourced and transported. When we calibrate commodities according to their legality, however, we can overlook similarities between frontier market networks. In this piece, I share some insights from my recent paper in the Journal of Contemporary Asia about shadow economies and how they operate in borderland frontiers. By comparing networks for two commodities that are usually placed at very different positions on the legality spectrum — cassava and timber — I show that networks for resource-based commodities can have as many similarities as differences. By grasping these ambiguities, we can better understand the opportunities and constraints for intervention in frontier markets.

Comparing timber and cassava networks

Timber and cassava have some distinctive features in this border landscape. Access to Cambodian timber is mediated by diverse state actors, such as local authorities and the military, as well as state-connected elites. Cutting and transporting timber out of still-forested regions of Mondulkiri involves a range of local actors as well as migrant labour from other parts of Cambodia. Once extracted, the timber is transported in trucks and through a range of checkpoints across the Vietnamese border, a process that involves Vietnamese middlemen, as well as Cambodian and Vietnamese state authority. Once it is across the border, timber is shipped to domestic workshops in Vietnam, authorities. Once it is across the border, timber is transported in cars and trucks through a range of checkpoints under the Asian Development Bank’s Greater Mekong sub-region initiative, which involves the pay of the personnel. Importantly, these checkpoints play an influential role in these transactions. Those most cited in this study were the Vietnamese military, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), and the Cambodian border police, who facilitated cross-border timber flows in return for personal benefits, and who also channelled revenues to higher levels of government in both countries. In contrast with timber, cassava has a more recent history in this border region, experiencing a boom since the early 2000s. This has led to a variety of cassava uses: it has a high starch and cyanide content, which suits processing rather than local consumption. Cassava production has targeted Vietnam’s processing industries, which in turn service Chinese markets for stock feed, starch and biofuels. Though these industries have few assets and/or insecure landholdings, it requires low capital investment to commence the practice. Its cultivation methods are easily learned and the stems readily shared and planted. At the time of my research, the crop was widely cultivated by smallholders in Mondulkiri and Tbong Khmum, targeting the cross-border market. In this network, local officials and state-connected elites are influential in mediating land access. Middlemen and transporters are also well connected, given their role in moving cassava in a locality and organising cross-border transport. As with timber, border officials on both the Vietnamese and Cambodian side mediate cross-border flows. The network analysis also revealed that Vietnamese traders and processing factories have an influential role in driving trade. Although the two networks differ in many specifics, the frontier setting of Mondulkiri means that cassava and timber have some important intersections. Cassava is often the first crop planted on newly-clear cut areas (see Fig.3), creating an inescapable link between forest clearance and cassava. Instead, an important end game in the case of both timber and cassava, beyond the immediate revenues associated with the commodities themselves, is the securing of land. Certain shared categories of actors — particularly state actors — are therefore significant at the initial stages of both networks, notably village, commune, district and provincial authorities and connected elite landholders.

The second point of intersection is at border checkpoints, where Vietnamese military and Cambodian border police are crucial actors. These checkpoints staff receive routine payments from traders taking timber or cassava through their posts, which are then distributed through established mechanisms and practices among the different agencies represented at particular checkpoints. Border payments of this kind are explained by well-connected timber and cassava traders as an integral cost of doing business, and are managed, albeit grudgingly, as part of trading practices and service fees. For example, one Vietnamese timber trader said that he regularly under-reports his timber sales to avoid the costs associated with declaring his lost revenue.

Notes
Chinese transnational engagements represent one of the most far-reaching socioeconomic developments of our times. Chinese global engagements have been studied mainly through features of their input (high labor supply, capital surplus, quest for international recognition, etc.) and output (foreign direct investments, trade, diplomatic achievements, etc.). Considerably less is known about the processes between these end-points—the distinct ways incentives translate into concrete transnational linkages. The ERC Starting Grant project BROKEX: Brokering China’s Extraversion, launched this year, will fill specific gaps in knowledge concerning how China’s international integration advances. We use brokerage as an opening wedge for examining the diverse logics that produce informal and formal, licit and illicit transnational connections from China.

Corporate brokers as frontline workers

Corporate brokers, such as KPMG, Deloitte, and McKinsey, commonly present the following narrative about Africa and China: Westerners show up to exploit opportunities on the continent before the Chinese get it all. “Africa is the world’s last frontier market, and Western firms need to start taking advantage of its tremendous potential, as Chinese firms already are,” Signè states. The quote depicts the African continent as a frontier to be capitalized on by outsiders, void of indigenous actors, its internal diversity and long history of global integration neglected. Against this problematic geopolitical representation, the multinational consultancy firms offer Western companies guidance to operate in markets characterized by informality.

A quintessential broker

The interaction between China and African countries alluded to above commonly advances through recruitment by transnationally connected individuals. One such broker was a Chinese man who had taken the name Mike. He solicited customers among the many Africans who had moved to the Pearl River Delta for short or longer periods. Mike displayed none of the aloofness in dealing with different groups commonly associate with brokers. Skillful brokers are often able to deflect tense situations by employing humor, display empathy with several parties in a transaction, and identify creative ways to resolve entrenched conflicts. Mike, by contrast, seemed ill at ease both when interacting with other Chinese people and with African clients. Short, balding, and dressed in the kind of dark clothes typically worn by middle-aged Chinese men, his looks were inconspicuous. Yet, his presence was easily noticed because he smiled profusely and seemed constantly flustered. Furthermore, he was prone to wantonly delivering provocative and inappropriate statements. While socially awkward, Mike was an agile businessman. As he navigated between formal and informal institutions, he expected opportunities for profit to be fleeting. Upon getting to know African traders through his employment in a logistics company in 2001, he started to offer them surplus stocks of shoes from manufacturers in the Pearl River Delta. The factories produced for European and North American markets, but deliberately manufactured surplus stocks for sales to other parts of the world. After the 2008 financial crisis, Mike also saw European and North American companies default at greater rates than before. Mike helped them sell products these companies failed to pay for, bridging formal and informal economies. The shutting of surplus stocks was tiring and yielded dwindling profits. When I first met Mike in 2010, he had largely abandoned this trade. Instead, he brokered between undocumented immigrants in China, local landlords, and the Public Security Bureau. He assisted migrants with expired visas in leaving China, charging hefty fees. As China’s immigration control tightened, the risks he faced increased and the work got more difficult. He explored a range of other options, including brokerage of marriages and escorts. In 2015, he told me he had found a brokerage opportunity that suited him perfectly: helping clients from Central Asia and Eastern Europe illegally export wealth via China. His workdays were spent in the air-conditioned interiors of banks alongside a handful of foreigners who like him facilitated informal and illegal transactions. Knowing how slow the wheels of academic publishing turn, he comfortably imparted details about the currency exchange with me. He reckoned that the business would soon be cracked down upon, and he was already scouting for new brokerage opportunities in the interstices between the legal and illegal.

Dilettante brokers and social networks

As brokers, multinational consultancy firms and people like Mike have in common that they are professional brokers—their core business is to find and fill spaces between other actors. However, many brokers, if not most, connect others only occasionally and under particular circumstances. As Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh remark in relation to migration brokerage: “While some are professional brokers, others are dilettantes—amateurs who become involved in recruitment by accident or as an effect of their social position. As such, a broker is not a fixed identity and must be considered in relation to location, time and power.” Social science research on brokerage commonly takes the shape of social networks at its starting point, and focuses on how actors positioned at the intersection between groups operate. This is the perspective adopted by the most cited scholar on brokers, Ronald Burt. Some people are ‘bridges’ in social networks, positioned to create connections between otherwise separate groups. Burt asserts that when there are few bridges across a gap between groups, actors in the middle have much to gain from taking on a brokerage role. Effective brokers create new connections between groups and profit from trust within them. This analysis takes sets of social relations as its point of departure. Scholars who study social relations in China, by contrast, have focused as much on how relationships are forged as how they are utilized. This provides analytical tools for understanding brokerage as contingent events, as discussed next.

Relationships understood from China studies

Studies of guanxi, i.e., connections or interpersonal relations, place the formation of strategic connections at the center of analysis (e.g., the so-called ‘guanxi Gong [orig. 1994]’; a classic text in the Chinese social sciences—analyzes how people work to achieve their desired agendas through social connectivity). Descriptions of guanxi emphasize that flows of wealth and feelings in relationships are often mutually enabling: material obligations and material exchanges incite feelings. The commonly used expression ‘pulling strings’ articulates the mediated nature of social influence, whereby a chain of relationships is activated until it reaches the person one intends to influence. As favors are extended, they induce debts that are repaid with future favors. Familiarity must be established before resources can be exchanged for mutual benefit. Such familiarity may be bred where no prior foundation exists, or it can be supported through shared characteristics, such as kinship, place of origin, and educational history. Irrespective of their bases, relationships can only subsist by being actively cultivated and maintained.

The literature on guanxi has been focused on China and the Chinese diaspora, but the relevance of its methods and conceptual frameworks is potentially broader and extends to transnational brokerage across ethnic boundaries. The BROKEX project approaches guanxi practices as historical and cultural adaptations to broader contextual circumstances. Accounts from China in the post-reform era document how guanxi networks have proliferated in some domains, yet declined in others. The ways guanxi practices emerge, transform, and disappear suggest that they are historically specific—they are not some quintessentially Chinese phenomenon that can be pitted against detached individualized Western relations.

Notes

1 ERC research project Brokering China’s Extraversion: An Ethnographic Analysis of Transnational Arbitration (funding ID 8200275).
Circulation against borders

Falling in line with, or in reaction against, the contemporary political situation, scholarship has sought to reinforce the political discourses of ethno-nationalism. Focusing on transport technology and mobility, forced and free, allows us to look across and beyond present political borders and periodization. These are a precondition to study the active participation of a space, in the Brahui sense, in the making of world-systems. Rather than marginal, the Northern Bay of Bengal appeared as a multi-centered space where various levels of negotiations and intermediations took place, triggering a dense knowledge network of connected segments with loose and changing, but compatible ends. The study of mobility and exchange in the NBB draws a continuum of multi-directional circulation, branching out and in, cutting across topography and polities, dotted with disputed nodes, often at the intersection of rivers or waterways and land itineraries, rather than linear routes and borders drawing orderly cells distinctly delineated with repelling edges.

The design and implementation of linear borders in the NBB was complemented by a coastal land regime and social engineering via the census in British India-Burma. It ascribed a non-sustainable fertility and monolith identity to both land and people. These aspects have been scrutinized, documented and theorized in an expanding academic corpus. The role of circulation linking the hilly regions to the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean, allows a wider reading beyond the ethno-nationalist discourse.

Roadless tracks

In 1915, after the Abhor expedition, Sidney Burrard, former surveyor general for India, wrote: "The Karakoram and the Hindu Kush have presented great difficulties to earlier surveyors and their forms have only been represented on maps by field workers after much hardship and privation. But in some ways the mountains of the North-East Frontier are more difficult than those of the North-West. They are pathless, tractless and covered in places by thick jungle." Portuguese cartographer Pedro Rainal published a portulán map of the African coast (c.1571), the Red Sea, Sri Lanka Indonesia, and the southern tip of the Malaysian peninsula, north and south of Malacca. The coastline of the Bay of Bengal remained outlined, bare of any mention of ports. Six years earlier the Portuguese Estado da India seized Malacca and started sending expeditions to Bengal to ensure the continuance of rice supply for their newly conquered empire. Bengal supplied rice across South Asia, but also to the main emporium between the Bay of Bengal and further east to the islands of Sunda and even the Malaccas. The ships set sail from Chittagong, called Porto Grande by the Portuguese. After his visit in 1506, Pyrard de Laval considered Chittagong to be the wealthiest port of the Orient. The dresses of its inhabitants tell about a highly affluent lifestyle. During the seventeenth century, duties were estimated to amount to a third of the value of the goods entering Bengal, largely compensated by the profits to be made.

Studies of trade in Bengal focused on the Ganges, underlining or bypassing the one which transited from the Brahmaputra-Meghna river system, and the Karnaphuli. The former is well documented (vernacular, Persian and European sources). The latter is known indirectly, but drew a very important volume of the trade from the kingdoms of the Himalayan regions, the foothills and the adjacent plains. In the early years of the twentieth century, Thomas Pirès noted that the rich kingdoms Island such as Tripura, Koch and Assam depended on Bengal as an outlet to ensure the continuance of rice supply for their rich "eastern twin to the Mansarovar lake."

The eastern part of the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system remained vaguely depicted in European cartography. Well into the eighteenth century, the confluent of the main South East Asian rivers and the Lohit-Zayu (still considered by upper Assam's communities as the main tributary of the Brahmaputra) remained symbolized by a mythical Chirakmo lake. It sat in the eastern edge of the Himalaya, in a manner of an eastern twin to the Mansarovar lake.

In 2004, the ‘10 Truck Arms and Ammunition Haull’ in Chittagong exposed the smuggling activities between the Bay of Bengal and North East India. The similitudes with the earlier case of weapon smuggling reported by the British administration during the mid-nineteenth century is telling of the continuity of circulations outlawed by changing political and economic regimes, in the shadow of both states’ borders and international agencies’ interventions. Trade from South West China to the Indian Ocean, Nicobar and Maldives islands and further, has always been part of the social and cultural fabric of the Northern Bay of Bengal (NBB). Vernacular songs, stories, architecture, food and dress, lifestyles and languages, are witness to mutual and multiple borrowings, in which circulation has played a central role.

Global trade and circulations in the Northern Bay of Bengal

In 1915, after the Abhor expedition, Sidney Burrard, former surveyor general for India, wrote: "The Karakoram and the Hindu Kush have presented great difficulties to earlier surveyors and their forms have only been represented on maps by field workers after much hardship and privation. But in some ways the mountains of the North-East Frontier are more difficult than those of the North-West. They are pathless, tractless and covered in places by thick jungle." Portuguese cartographer Pedro Rainal published a portulán map of the African coast (c.1571), the Red Sea, Sri Lanka Indonesia, and the southern tip of the Malaysian peninsula, north and south of Malacca. The coastline of the Bay of Bengal remained outlined, bare of any mention of ports. Six years earlier the Portuguese Estado da India seized Malacca and started sending expeditions to Bengal to ensure the continuance of rice supply for their newly conquered empire. Bengal supplied rice across South Asia, but also to the main emporium between the Bay of Bengal and further east to the islands of Sunda and even the Malaccas. The ships set sail from Chittagong, called Porto Grande by the Portuguese. After his visit in 1506, Pyrard de Laval considered Chittagong to be the wealthiest port of the Orient. The dresses of its inhabitants tell about a highly affluent lifestyle. During the seventeenth century, duties were estimated to amount to a third of the value of the goods entering Bengal, largely compensated by the profits to be made.

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Overlapping circulation regime

After the East India Company gained administrative powers over provinces of Bengal, a gigantic tax evasion set in, using an advanced network of smuggling agreements. During the nineteenth century, the development of steel shipbuilding started to make the scene. Some companies also favored steel over wood. Vernacular ships were decommissioned, only to almost immediately resurface as a smuggling medium in networks still linking the interiors of the Patkai Hills with the Bay of Bengal, further to the Andaman seas, and even to the Chao Phraya delta. The fleet of shallow draft vessels with the capacity to sail to the coast along, up estuaries, and to land directly on the beaches, retained their advantage. They played a pivotal role both in the domestic economy, particularly for fishing, and in networks still active in the NBB: cross-border exchanges where drugs, weapons, and human traffickers operated, significant dimensions.

The slave trade in Arakan, Bengal and Manipur originates from at least the early seventeenth century, reflected in folk literature and culture. The new focus on land routes, including opium and other policies as the Belt Road Initiative, and the geo-political instability on the Bangladeshi-Burma border, have favored its revival. Hunting, fishing, and traditional navigation of wooden waders and according to patterns of circulation established earlier than shipping lines. Prior to the latest Rohingya crisis, around fifty thousand people were believed to be trafficked every year just from the South-East Bengal coast alone, mainly between Cox’s Bazar and Teknaf, towards Thailand. Shallow corridors appear as the continuation of former circulations in a new political and economic regime.

The focus on transnational projects such as the BRI, the history of mobility and circulations sheds a different light on coastal regions and supposed to be marginal. The BRI, the history of mobility and circulations sheds a different light on coastal regions and supposed to be marginal. The BRI, the history of mobility and circulations sheds a different light on coastal regions and supposed to be marginal. The BRI, the history of mobility and circulations sheds a different light on coastal regions and supposed to be marginal.

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Above: Fishing boats south of Cox’s Bazar. (c) Nazir Uddin Mahmud Liton.
Special issue on marginalization in China (vol. 33, no. 2)
Guest edited by Lida V. Nedilsty and Joseph Tse-Hei Lee

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For News from Australia and the Pacific, we ask contributors to reflect on their own research interests and the broader academic field in Australia and the Pacific of which it is a part. We focus on current, recent or upcoming projects, books, articles, conferences and teaching, while identifying related interests and activities of fellow academics in the field. Our contributions aim to give a broad overview of Asia-related studies in Australia and beyond, and to highlight exciting intellectual debates on and with Asia in the region. Our preferred style is subjective and conversational. Rather than offering fully-fledged research reports, our contributions give insight into the motivations behind and directions of various types of conversations between Asia and the region. In the current edition, we explore history, human value and place-making in Timor-Leste.

Articles are edited by Edwin Jurriëns edwin.jurriens@unimelb.edu.au and Andy Fuller fuller.aa@unimelb.edu.au, from the Asia Institute in Melbourne arts.unimelb.edu.au/asiainstitute

Why destination marketing matters. Reflections on tourism in Timor-Leste

Sara Currie

Between 2011 and 2016 I conducted my doctoral research in Timor-Leste. During my final year in-country, I worked as a consultant for The Asia Foundation, where I implemented the findings of my research to develop Timor-Leste’s tourism marketing strategy and new destination brand. Across those five years, I was asked about the tourism questions, their nature dependent upon the experience of the asker. Those who had spent only weeks or months in the country asked questions, their nature dependent upon the five years, I was asked the usual tourism strategy and new destination brand. Across the tourism product are significant – cost, climate. It’s only a one-and-a-half hour flight from Denpasar, Bali. At the same time, the weaknesses in the tourism product are significant – cost, accessibility, poor infrastructure and a hospitality industry that is still in its infancy. Access to medical facilities, mosquito-borne disease and crocodiles add further problems, while the nation’s poor destination image such as Sri Lanka or Cambodia. However, the challenges to tourism in Timor-Leste are not entirely dissimilar to other Asian nations, certainly those with a post-conflict history such as Iceland, Spain and Italy struggling with tourism that’s a big number for us. Let’s say to Thailand. If I can get 5%-10% of Thailand tourists per year and strong tourism revenue, the ‘Ball model’ of development was seen as undesirable. As one local stakeholder, working for an environmental NGO told me: “We are afraid that the complaints of the Balinese will repeat here in the future. The real owner of the resources will become the everlasting observer, watching other people come and take their resources and leaving them with nothing.” Destination marketers hold considerable power, not only over tourists, but also over the destinations they promote and the people living there. Responsible destination marketing creates a representation that includes expectations about the nation and its people, and the larger volume of tourists it may seek to attract. For young nations such as Timor-Leste, tourism marketing represents both an opportunity and a risk. The tourism marketing strategy and destination brand we developed for Timor-Leste, with its focus on sustainability and an honest representation of the country, was well received by all stakeholders. It is now up to Timor-Leste, its leaders and its people, to decide the manner in which they proceed. I still ponder the question I’ve been so often asked, “Can tourism in Timor-Leste succeed?” and grapple with the need to balance honesty with optimism, or hope, in answering it. If the government can turn words into action, than most definitely it can. But this requires those at the top, who currently hold the power, to truly invest and support sustainable tourism, and to start taking concrete, well-planned action towards developing it. Timor-Leste does have considerable potential as a destination for tourism. But realising that potential requires strong leadership, sound policy and, most importantly, coordination between government and the many diverse stakeholders who can contribute so much to the destination’s future. Can tourism grow? Definitely. Can this be done in a way that benefits the people of Timor-Leste and respects its environment? Only time will tell.

Sara Currie is a marketing consultant, and former advisor to the Ministry of Tourism and the Office of the President. Timor-Leste. She is an Adjunct Research Fellow at Swinburne University.

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Notes
1. Find the 2017 Survey of International Travellers from The Asia Foundation online at https://tinyurl.com/js6r1f5, the survey, the 2017 survey, is available from The Asia Foundation upon request.
3. A mocked brand presentation can be viewed at https://tinyurl.com/mooc1t5, which provided the basis for Timor-Leste’s new destination brand.
resulting in extensive fieldwork in public and private archives. While Portuguese sources assessed their role as representative of exotic indigenous warfare practices in which Portugal played no part, Roque’s research demonstrates the complicity of the Portuguese colonial administration. She shows how a shift towards a more international and academic narratives that pit pro-integrationist and pro-independence supporters against each other can overlook the two-sided nature of how allegiances and alliances came into being. Neves reflects on the challenges faced by Timorese scholars researching their own society, including issues related to access and never ‘exit[ing] the field’. He demonstrates how a level of engagement with state politics is not restricted to urban elites, as remote rural communities are also intensely involved in state politics and the politics of international aid. Rothschild’s analysis highlights the tensions surrounding Timorese history-making and also examines notions of ownership among foreigners working in Timor-Leste. The starting point of her analysis was her failure to gain access to a field site she had hoped would shed light on Timorese memories of violence during the occupation. She not only raises the question of who has the right to grant or disallow access to particular sites, but also demonstrates how ‘local’ projects of history-making in a new nation such as Timor-Leste are intensely entangled with International ones. Timor-Leste has been marked as much by contestation and rupture as it has been by consensus and continuity. The emerging areas of ‘story-telling’ by the nation’s elite do not simply replace ‘continuity’ with a focus on ‘rupture’, but rather highlight the ambivalences that have characterised Timorese engagements with, for instance, tradition, foreign influences, and colonial heritage and emphasises the heterogeneous ways in which these different agendas relate to those. Through focusing on moments of crises, claims to community and the social production of historical, social and territorial categories, researchers are inspiring analytical engagements of how the nation has been socially produced, contested and understood and continue to question the categories through which we have come to understand Timor-Leste.

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In October 2017, Timor-Leste’s National Centre of Memory (Centro Nacional Chega, CNC) designated sites of historical memory in Dili, the country’s capital, as part of a project titled ‘Dili City of History’ (Sidades Istori). The CNC was formed in 2017 to deal with the legacies of past violence and human rights abuses, mostly committed during Indonesian rule from 1975 to 1999, that were documented by the country’s truth commissions. Many of the sites are former military and police headquarters where the Indonesian security forces detained and tortured East Timorese accused of supporting the Indonesian army and a network of informers, and expressed their dissatisfaction through low-level harassment and intimidation of Indonesian settlers and public servants. Despite the threat of repeated détentes, political leaders threw stones at Indonesian security forces and kept a close eye on the town, a term used locally to refer to pro-Indonesian East Timorese spokespeople. Yet, such is still currently underway, but these life stories seem to suggest that, in their activism, youths inherited the mantle of their parents. There was much advantage of certain characteristics of the city. High population density and mobility in Dili enabled the network to move unnoticed, and they monitored the security situation by hanging out in public places. Secrecy and protection of the troops of the Indonesian army and East Timorese militias contributed to the rapid change and high population mobility, interviews with the city’s residents, past and present, for a better understanding of the urban setting provided opportunities for youth to come together and become politically active.

Vanneessa Neerman is a historian and senior lecturer in Indonesian Studies at Charles Darwin University, Australia.

Notes
6 In some instances, buildings have been repurposed, rather than destroyed, as were many other buildings of the Portuguese East Timor and Indonesian Integration Monument and its surroundings were turned into the 5 May Park, considered as the political and diplomatic boundary between Indonesia, Portugal and the UN to hold the independence ballot. The CNC has prioritized projects showing its historical sites and conducts tours for students, such as to Gomaa’s former hideout in Cacaulidu. The East Timorese non-government organisation, Youth for National Development (JDN) runs historical lectures, as does the National Directorate of Cultural Heritage (DPRC)’s recording of Portuguese era architectural sites and memorialises the rapid change and high population mobility, interviews with the city’s residents, past and present, for a better understanding of the urban setting provided opportunities for youth to come together and become politically active.

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Gender equality and its feminist rationale are based on individual human rights while in customary or communal societies, status and rights are relational to others in their community. Communities are made up of ‘paribahen’ persons or ‘dividuals’ without individual interests or rights. Women or men cannot have equal rights and their privileges depend on their social roles. The idea of the paribahen person in customary societies has been challenged by the long-term influence of colonialism, Christianity and capitalism. It does go some way to explaining the lack of traction for gender equality in customary societies.1

The island of Timor is a bridge between the West and the Orient, marking the original languages and cultures in Timor reflect both forms of sociality. This diversity, and the mixing of matrilineal and patrilineal ethnonationalist groups makes understanding gender relations in Timor-Leste more complex. External influences make this more so. Centuries of Portuguese colonialism and Catholic proselytising was abruptly replaced by a brutal 24-year military occupation by neighbouring Indonesia (1975-1999), which was immediately followed by the interventions of UN peacekeepers and the international aid sector. Each regime imposed gender values and relations with little recognition of what previously existed because of an assumption of cultural superiority.2

In my research, I have sought to discover how gender relations of the indigenous societies of Timor shifted and adapted to foreign occupation and displacement to neighbouring Indonesia, especially in the case of precolonial Timor. While gender relations have been perceived as incompatible with introduced, modern ideas of citizenship, democracy and equality, yet, “the complex entanglement of social relations based in precolonial systems with those of colonialism, Western education, new economic forms and Christian adherence belies this simplistic division into intrinsic and introduced.”3

Violence against women or sanctioned relational violence? A Malayan woman is imagined as acting in terms of the interests of others rather than her own individual ones. Strongly, it explains that Malayan women were willing and even convivial “to go against their own interests” because of their outlook as “elegant or dilettante”. This provides insight into women around the world tolerating domestic violence; limiting their individual welfare for the sake of keeping families together and not creating further discord in extended families or clan networks. There are other reasons too, but this is a central concern. Domestic or gendered violence can be explained in this complex way everywhere in the world, but particularly in customary societies where individual rights cannot be assumed, such as in Timor-Leste.

Indigenous gift exchange or trading in women? In customary Timorese society marriage exchange and relations between the families of clans or clans of the bride and groom are regulated by relationships referred to as barlak, which today feature in an estimated half of all marriages.4 A series of gift exchanges which signify the formal transfer of a bride spiritually to the clan house of her husband’s family, or delineated in Timorese as a downy and bride price, are described by feminists as dehumanizing to the level of a purchasable commodity or enigmatically manifesting in the control and abuse of women.5 Today, barlak is often blamed for the high levels of domestic violence in Timor-Leste. In pre-1975 Portuguese Timor condemnation of barlak was not from feminists, but the Catholic Church. Using a similar rationale, they preached that the human soul transcended the material world and that a soul and a gift could never be equal or exchanged.6 One of the major issues in the debate over barlak is the nature of the gifts exchanged and whether they can be considered a payment for the bride. Writing about Malayan society in Papua New Guinea, Strathern describes similar exchange practices that mediate gender relations where gifts embody the labour and personhood of the maker. Exchange gifts are not mere material, like a commodity, but the embodiment of those offering it. Keane explores the ontological assumptions that underpin the conflicting understandings of ritual gift exchanges in nearby Eastern Indonesia.7 He argues that in Timorese society barlak takes this one step further, arguing that even if unable to provide the gifts cannot achieve full personhood and therefore can be traded for dowry. Labour and labour for them in particular is the nature of a gift.8 This explains why in customary societies support barlak as their only claim to personhood or human values, with rights to recourse if they are treated unfairly or abused in husband’s household.9 This can be construed as a customary custom or regulation of a regime of human rights based on “citizenship” of a clan society, although state agents remain relational. The dark side of this is the treatment of those unable to gain status as slaves, which has a long history in Timor. The informal adopion of poor children among extended families who are treated like indentured servants has resulted in contemporary cases of the physical abuse of children.10 The local Timorese women’s movement members are the only ones fully equipped to work in this ‘gap’ between cultures because they are the only ones who know how to navigate between the modern and customary. These are the women who oversee the inclusion of the gender equality clause in the constitution and the institution of the domestic violence law with the collaboration of international feminists. These acts of solidarity are the foundation on which they build gender equality.
The Tumen River Area. Building a new paradigm of multiculturalism and cooperation for Northeast Asia is its borderlands

The Tumen River Area has a dual identity. Located where the borders of China, North Korea, and Russia meet, the area’s peripheral nature played an active role in the establishment of ethnic Korean communities in the region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the 21st century, the area has gained a new identity. It acts as a gateway between China and South Korea, and China and North Korea, and is therefore one of the few places in the world where ordinary Koreans from the North and South may unknowingly brush shoulders with one another. This dual identity, as both the borderlands and a key hub of Northeast Asia, provides the Tumen River Area with an ideal background against which a new paradigm of multiculturalism and cooperation in Northeast Asia can emerge.

In this issue of News from Northeast Asia, we examine the efforts that are taking place in the Tumen River Area to establish such an atmosphere of multiculturalism and cooperation.

In ‘Tumen River Forum: providing a platform for peace, prosperity, and harmony in East Asia’, Xu Yulan of Yanbian University introduces the goals of this forum and its outline. The role of the Tumen River Area in establishing new strategies for multilateral economic cooperation is addressed by Yanbian University’s Quan Zhenan in ‘New opportunities and strategies for multilateral economic cooperation in the Northeast Asia region’. Finally, the way in which the ethnic Korean authors of the Tumen River Area have found a way to arrive at true multiculturalism and reconciliation is examined by Jin Hu Xiong, of Yanbian University, in ‘Contradictions, communication, and reconciliation between the ethnic Koreans of the Tumen River Area and the South Korean people’.

Tumen River Forum: providing a platform for peace, prosperity, and harmony in East Asia

Xu Yulan

The Tumen River Forum, launched in 2008, is an international academic forum co-hosted by China’s Yanbian University and the Republic of Korea’s Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies. The purpose of this forum, which will usher in its twelfth annual session this year, is to uphold multiculturalism in East Asia, by focusing on practical issues, by seeking consensus, and by enhancing cooperation. The forum endeavors to build up a collaborative and innovative platform where intellectuals, political leaders, and business elites can come together to discuss international cooperation in the Tumen River Area.

As the geographical center of Northeast Asia and a nexus of its cultures, the Tumen River Area is greatly important in terms of its geographical advantages and potential for significant development. Regional joint efforts are essential in order to utilize the area’s advantages and potential for increased competitiveness. It is believed that by enhancing mutual understanding, the countries of the wider region will be able to build up an environment of sound cooperation, characterized by win-win cooperation and openness, and construct a community of shared cultures and economy marked by harmony, economic integration, and cultural inclusiveness, which features the Tumen River Area at its core.

Over the past decade, the Tumen River Forum has played a key role in boosting cultural exchanges in this distinctive region, creating a peaceful and collaborative environment, and promoting regional harmony and common prosperity. The forum’s eleven successful annual sessions have been attended by many distinguished scholars from China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Japan, the United States, Russia, and Mongolia. Buoyed by the multicultural atmosphere that characterizes the forum, these scholars have freely exchanged the results of their research and have engaged in extensive, in-depth discussions over the pressing problems concerning regional cooperation and development in the area. In addition to providing perspectives and advice for the overall development of the area, the key themes for the forum in 2017 and 2018 were, respectively, ‘International exchanges and cooperation in the Tumen River Area: towards a community of a shared future’ and ‘Review and outlook: pathways to common prosperity in the Tumen River Area’.

The forum has also set up close strategic partnerships with participating universities and research institutions from the above mentioned countries.

’Tumen River Forum has come to exert an increasing academic and social impact. It is now an important platform supporting and enhancing regional collaboration and exchanges, featuring sub-forums on philosophy, economy, literature, culture, etc. To expand the scale and scope of regional collaboration, the forum has also recently set up two roundtables. One is a roundtable for officials, entrepreneurs, and scholars, focusing on regional economic cooperation; the topic in 2018 was ‘The Development of Wangqing in the New Era’. The other roundtable, entitled ‘China-DPRK scholar’s dialogue’, centers on regional political cooperation and is attended exclusively by scholars from China and the DPRK. In 2018, the two topics addressed at this roundtable were ‘DPRK’s tourism and China-DPRK tourism cooperation’ and ‘China-DPRK cooperation and peaceful development of Northeast Asia’. The 2018 roundtable was attended by five scholars from China and five scholars from the DPRK, the latter of whom were all based at Kim Il-sung University.

The Tumen River Area, bordered by China, DPRK, and Russia, and acting as an important hub of exchange in human resources between China and South Korea, provides an ideal background against which discourse on multiculturalism in Northeast Asia can develop. Ultimately, the Tumen River Forum aims to provide a platform where a new paradigm of ‘Northeast Asian multiculturalism’ can emerge and concrete efforts for its continuation can be shared.

Above: Participants of one of the sub-forums of the 2018 Tumen River Forum (Image provided by the organizers of the Tumen River Forum). Below: Official photograph of the participants of the 2018 Tumen River Forum. Image provided by the organizers of the Tumen River Forum.

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Asian Journal of Social Science

The Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC) is a research and international exchange institute based in Seoul, South Korea. The SNUAC’s most distinctive feature is its cooperative approach in fostering research projects and international exchange program through close interactions between regional and thematic research programs about Asia and the world. To pursue its mission to become a hub of Asian Studies, SNUAC research centers and programs are closely integrated, providing a solid foundation for deeper analysis of Asian society.

The Seoul National University Asia Center

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Notes

1. The key themes and session themes of the Tumen River Forum from 2008 to 2016 can be found at the Korean Foundation for Advanced Studies (KFAS) webpage: https://tinyurl.com/kfasSFT

Regional Editor Ilhong Ko

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Due to geographical proximity and rapid changes in the economic development and endowed resources, the interdependence of elements of production (such as resources, labor, capital, and technology) is considerable in the Northeast Asia region, with its huge market and great potential for further development. In other words, the economic conditions for multilateral economic cooperation are clearly present. Economic cooperation in the region, however, continues to be led by bilateral investment and exchange (China-Japan, China-Republic of Korea (ROK), China-Russia, and China-Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)); multilateral economic cooperation is extremely limited.

One of the key elements responsible for this weak multilateral economic cooperation has been the Cold War structure that continues to leave its mark on the region, the conflict between the Korea and Japan is the main reason for the continuation of this Cold War structure. Since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in 1953, the Korean peninsula has continuously witnessed conflict between the DPRK and the US-ROK Military Alliance and the US-Japan Security Alliance. As the result of these conflicts between China and Korea, Japan and Russia, and Japan and Russia, along with differing viewpoints on historical issues (such as the Japanese colonial occupation of the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese invasion of China) have also resulted in discord within the region. As a result, security arrangements have yet to be made to ensure that the economic development of the ROK and Japan have on the US economy, to maintain its strong influence in the region.

Recently, however, the region seems to experience significant changes. In April 2018, the DPRK government proclaimed that its “Economy-Nuclear Parallel Development Policy” had fulfilled its historic task, and that the capabilities of the party and the entire state would now be focused on an “Economic Development Policy.” The aim of which is to establish a socialist economic system. Based on economic theory, the examples of successful economic development by developing countries, and the nature of the endowed resources, it is clear that in order for the DPRK, with its small-scale economic system, to achieve sustainable economic development, the nuclear issue must first be resolved. UN sanctions must be lifted through improvement of international relations, and exchange and cooperation with the global economic system must be strengthened. Given that the DPRK’s motivation for nuclear development is to ensure security of the regime, there is plenty of reason to believe that once the regime’s security has been ensured, the DPRK will achieve denuclearization and focus on economic development. Indeed, following Kim Jong Un’s New Year’s address, attempts were made to improve international relations by holding summit meetings with China, the US, and the ROK.

Bordering the Tumen River area, the DPRK is located in the center of Northeast Asia. In the past, it has not been possible to fulfill economic relations with the ROK, and the US. Ultimately, this might also lead to the development of the region’s small businesses. Ultimately, it is possible to argue that the Tumen River area may be one of the places where the key to long-term peace, prosperity, and multilateralism in Northeast Asia may be found.

Several new opportunities and strategies for multilateral economic cooperation in the Northeast Asia region have been created in recent years. The North Korean city of Hamyang, located on the other side of the Tumen River from the Chinese city of Tumen, can be seen through a tourist monocle. Picture taken by Shao Ke.

The integration of China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI) and the ROK’s ‘New Economic Cooperation and Coordination Initiative’ can be an example of this, resulting in the formation of a Trans-Eurasia trade route. It can facilitate a smooth exchange of elements of production and goods. Multilateral economic cooperation should particularly be focused on that which is beneficial to all parties involved, such as tourism, energy, regional development, environmental protection, and sustainable growth.

The Tumen River area, due to its geographic significance as the entrepot of Northeast Asian countries, presents an ideal prospect for both new efforts to link economies of the Northeast Asian region, which are also dependent on the formation of a new type of cooperation, and the development of a platform for commerce that may contribute to the development of the region’s small businesses. Ultimately, it is possible to argue that the Tumen River area may be one of the places where the key to long-term peace, prosperity, and multilateralism in Northeast Asia may be found.

Confrontations, communication, and reconciliation between the ethnic Koreans of the Tumen River area and the South Korean people

In many ethnic Koreans from the Tumen River area have made a second home for themselves in South Korea. In 2019, there were approximately 400 thousand ethnic Koreans from China residing in South Korea. Prior to 1988, they mainly came to South Korea as places where money could be made by selling illegally smuggled traditional medicinal ingredients. This phase, from 1988 to 1990, is known as the ‘medicinal peddlers’ phase’ of ethnic Korean migration. Following this phase, the ethnic Koreans from Tumen began to (illegally) provide much needed labor for the South Korean economy, but it is only from September of 2003 that they gained the right to remain in Korea as legal economic migrants. This is, in short, the historical background of the ‘Korean Dream’.

The experiences of these ethnic Koreans in South Korea are represented in the novels of authors from the Tumen River area, published in literary journals such as Yalan Literature, Doraji, and Jiangbaesan. The early novels that deal with the ‘Korean Dream’ present a relatively negative view of South Korea, as a place responsible for taking away wives and breaking down happy and peaceful families, eventually bringing about misfortune to the local community. In reality, however, much more has been achieved than lost through the ‘Korean Dream’. So what may have led to the formation of such a demonic image of South Korea?

The theoreticians, novelists, and many ethnic Koreans of the Tumen River area have come to arrive at the understanding that both groups share a mutual agency and are now able to show sympathy for the South Korean people as well. In particular, through reflections upon their own ethnic community, the ethnic Koreans have come to form a philosophy that maintains that only self-esteem, self-love, and self-reinforcement will it be possible to reach true equality and frank dialogue, and co-exist based on self-esteem, self-love, and self-reinforcement.

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The Kindle Edition of the News from Northeast Asia is now available. This is an essential improvement for international relations and military relations throughout the wider regional sphere, as well as economic integration. As such, the DPRK’s efforts towards change represent a valuable opportunity that must not be wasted; the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the replacement of the armistice agreement with a peace treaty must be achieved in order to ensure the stability of the region and to open the doors for multilateral economic cooperation.

In addition to this, attempts must also be made to establish the framework and institutional expectations for multilateral economic cooperation to take place. The integration of China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI) and the ROK’s ‘New Economic Cooperation and Coordination Initiative’ can be an example of this, resulting in the formation of a Trans-Eurasia trade route. It can facilitate a smooth exchange of elements of production and goods. Multilateral economic cooperation should particularly be focused on that which is beneficial to all parties involved, such as tourism, energy, regional development, environmental protection, and sustainable growth.
Asian studies in China's academy of social sciences: an introduction

Welin Pan

In his progressive vision of a general Chinese history, the phenomenal Chinese intellectual Liang Qichao in 1901 claimed the modern period of China would be characterized by a transition from ‘China of Asia’ [yazhou zhi zhongguo] when “the Chinese intensively engaged and competed with various peoples of Asia” to “China of the world” [shijie zhi zhongguo] when “the Chinese united with all the Asian peoples in their negotiation and competition with the Westerners”. It came as no surprise that the Chinese President Xi Jinping quoted Liang in his recent keynote speech at the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations.

As argued by contemporary scholars, regions are imagined constructs that have historical specificity and reflect the existing international structures. In the case of Asia, it was first created as a tool to construct to rethink political action and organization during the twentieth century course of anti-imperialism and nation-state formation in the West Pacific and Indian Ocean. The rise of the modern scholarship of Asia in China was a response to China’s frontier and identity crises from the mid nineteenth century to the WWII era. After 1949, Asian studies in China also bore as much strategic importance as the area studies in other countries. The best example is the development of Asian studies in the Chinese academies of social sciences.

Although modeled on the Soviet-style Academy, the Chinese academies of social sciences were established after 1978, when the Soviet influence had faded away and China re-embraced the world. Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China’s reform and opening up, underlined the significance of academic achievements to China’s course of modernization. Under his leadership, state and provincial level academies were established in the capital and each provincial seat. As government affiliated research institutes, all academies play both roles of academic research and advising function to the party-state. Hence, their research agendas are tightly bound to the missions of particular ministries, and the foreign analysts have learnt to observe China’s policy-making system through these ‘important windows’. This also smoothens their recent transformation into ‘think tanks with Chinese characteristics’.

In addition to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 7 out of 29 provincial-level academies have specialized institutes for Asian studies, largely in response to their geographical proximity to relevant Asian countries and sub-regions. As a result, the academic definition and scope of Asia and its sub-regions reflect the geopolitical dynamics as well as China’s interests and concerns. Prior to 1978, attention was given to Asian countries with either historical ties with China or belonging to the Communist bloc. In the 1980s, country surveys and comparative studies of economic development were emphasized, as China endeavored to learn from the ‘East Asian Miracle’. Since the 1990s, regional security and cooperation as well as sustainable development have become the common themes for the pursuit of a more integrated Asia. As China strives for a more substantial role in Asia, more academic resources have been poured into the studies of China’s national strategies and new regional and sub-regional orders.

Besides this introductory piece, three different academic traditions are invited to reflect on the development of their own institutes and their own research. It is the editors’ hope that these articles will offer the audience ‘windows’ to how China envisions herself in Asia and the world.

When Premier Zhou Enlai and Prime Minister Nehru met for the first time in 1954, they discussed the possibilities of opening airlines and motorways between China and India. The YASS scholars are the successors, practitioners and innovators of their ideas. As early as the 1960s, scholars at YASS started to conduct research on India and South Asia. In the late 1990s, China and India called for regional cooperation among Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) and met with positive responses of the other two. The four countries later signed and put it into action the ‘Kunning Initiative’. After rounds of Track-II conversations, this cooperative mechanism was upgraded to Track-I channel, known subsequently as ‘The Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM EC)’. In 2013 in both Joint Statements of China and India and Bangladesh.

Responding to the constant changes both in perspective, we have also expanded our work in the region. The Research Association of South Asian studies knowledge silos. It will take the lead in drawing comprehensive conclusions between the existing fields of Asian studies, and stimulating new ways of understanding Asia in a globalized world.

Notes
1 The English translation of Xi’s sentence is “China today is more than the country itself; it is very much a part of Asia and the world”. See “Full text of Xi’s speech at opening of CDAC”, 16 May 2019, https://www.gov.cn/2019-05/16/content_5397695.htm (retrieved 29 May 2019).

South Asian Studies at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences

Lan Deng

I joined the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (YASS) in 2000, when the YASS Institute of South Asian Studies was formally established and the then President of India, K. R. Narayanan, visited us. In the initial stage of my career, I was awarded a valuable opportunity and granted a scholarship to pursue my further studies and conduct fieldwork at the School of International Studies (SIS) and the Center of Economic Studies and Planning (CESP) of the School of Social Sciences (SSS) in Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, as visiting fellow and full-time student from 2002 to 2005. Yet, my own career pursuit is in alignment with the overall commitment of YASS to become a high-end think tank with international influence especially in the fields of South Asian and Southeast Asian studies.

In 2000, three years after its launching, the Center of South Asian Studies was upgraded to the Institute of South Asian Studies. In 2003, the Yunnan Society of South Asian Studies was established. As the first local-level academic body of South Asian studies in China, it is built on the capacities and research administration of the Institute. In 2005, YASS was rebranded as the Yunnan Academy of Southeast and South Asian Studies. The newest addition to its research faculty is the establishment of the Chinese (Kunming) Academy of South and Southeast Asian Studies in 2015. The state-level institutes such as Institute of Indian Studies and Institute of Bangladesh Studies came out of the shell as well. I was transferred to the Institute of Indian Studies and served as its deputy director since 2016.

Compared with other research institutions of South Asian studies in China, the strengths of YASS have lain in the regional and sub-regional comparative studies. Apart from our long-term focus on the BCIM cooperation, we have widened our research scope by monitoring other multilateral sub-regional cooperative mechanisms, such as ‘The Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Initiative’, ‘The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation’ (BIMSTEC), ‘The Regional Cooperation in Economic Partnership’ (RECP) and emerging free trade zones in the region. Considering Yunnan’s geographical proximity to and historical links with the region in perspective, we have also expanded our work into Indian Ocean studies. A number of books are published and a few state and province sponsored projects are conducted on such topics as the geopolitics and geo-economics, maritime and non-traditional securities as well as the economic and social development in the region. The Research Association of Indian Ocean has been set up to facilitate the network of China’s South Asia and South Ocean.

On the one hand, focusing on the national strategies and hosted issues, our institutes have carried out research on regional consultation, on such topics as relationships among South Asian countries and major powers, regional security, the dynamics as well as China’s major interests and concerns. Prior to 1978, attention was given to Asian countries with either historical ties with China or belonging to the Communist bloc. In the 1980s, country surveys and comparative studies of economic development were emphasized, as China endeavored to learn from the ‘East Asian Miracle’. Since the 1990s, regional security and cooperation as well as sustainable development have become the common themes for the pursuit of a more integrated Asia. As China strives for a more substantial role in Asia, more academic resources have been poured into the studies of China’s national strategies and new regional and sub-regional orders.

Last but not least, YASS has been seeking for active engagement and partnership in the region by hosting the China-South and Southeast Asia Think Tank Forum (2013-2019) and signing Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with major South Asian research institutions, as well as launching joint projects.
Asian studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: a retrospective

Lei Tang

In the winter of 1963, before visiting the African countries, Premier Zhou Enlai submitted a Report on Strengthening Research about Foreign Countries’ to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which had been formerly endorsed by the Central Foreign Affairs Leading Group. In the report, Zhou proposed to strengthen research on foreign affairs by establishing institutes to study regional issues in response to the changed international status of China as a big country with the world’s attention. This report was approved by Chairman Mao on 31 December 1963. After that, area studies in China took off.

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) is a case in point. It was originally the Philosophy and Social Sciences Division under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, formed in June 1955. It was during the 1960s and 1970s that CASS gradually took shape and developed its capacities in Asian studies. The main body of Asian studies at CASS today is composed of a number of administrative offices and institutes founded prior to its very own establishment and now generally associated with international studies. For example, the Institute of West Asian and African Studies was established in 1951. In 1962, the Research Institute for World Union was established and later became part of the CPC Central Foreign Liaison Department and finally absorbed into CASS in the early 1980s. After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the Chinese government resumed its promotion of academic restoration and established numerous social sciences and proposed new development agendas of area studies. A number of new institutes were added after the establishment of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 1977. They included the Institute of Japanese Studies (1970); the Institute of Central Asian Studies (1978), renamed the Institute of South Asian and Southeast Asian Studies in 1986; as well as the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies. In 2006, CASS restored the Academic Division system (jiaju zuzhi piying) and established five divisions to cover Literature, History and Philosophy, Marxism, Economics (jingji 经济), Sociology, Politics and Law (shehui zhefa 针对政策), International Studies (guoji yanjiu 国际研究) as well as Marxism Studies (maozhu zhiyuan 马克思主义研究). While bits of Asian studies can be found across all the divisions, the main institutes are in the Academic Division of International studies, namely the Institute of Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies, the Institute of Asian Pacific Studies (renamed as the Institute of International Strategy in 2011), the Institute of West Asian and African Studies, as well as the Institute of Japanese Studies. These institutes cover the regions North, South, Southeast, West, East and Northeast Asia. Besides the research institutes, there are more than a dozen non-entity research centers of Asian studies, which coordinate in disciplinary and institutional research. The latter includes the Gulf Research Center, the Research Center of Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific Areas, and the Korea Research Center. In March 2002, with the support of the Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies, the CASS Center for Asian Studies was established to promote Asian studies at CASS through funding projects and international exchanges. The CASS Center is one of the 18 Asian research centers the KFAS has sponsored in Asia with two thirds of them in China. Today, CASS has become China’s largest, most influential and comprehensive academic organization. It undertakes the role of academic research and governmental think tank. Hundreds of researchers here are engaged in research on regional and international issues, and about one hundred of them are engaged in Asian studies, with 60 scholars in the Institute of Japanese Studies alone. On the one hand, the researchers are engaged in basic academic research, including organizing and compiling comprehensive introductions to the latest developments in different areas in Asia on a large scale (all Asian countries have their respective introductions), and hosting such research reports as Central Asian Yellow Book, Annual Report on Development in the Middle East and Africa and Japan Blue Book. On the other hand, they also provide policy advice to the government and write reports for international CASS has more than 80 national academic journals. The ones related to Asian studies are World Economics and Politics, West Asia and Africa, Journal of Contemporary Asia Pacific Studies, Russian, East European & Central Asian Studies, Japan Studies, Contemporary Korea. It supervises more than 100 national-level academic associations, including the Chinese Association for West Asian and African Studies, Chinese Association of Asia Pacific Studies, Chinese Association for South Asian Studies, etc. It owns five national-level publishing houses. Through these academic institutions and platforms, CASS also plays the important role of organizing and promoting Asian studies across the country.

Building global cities in Asia. Shared experiences and challenges.

Wei Tang

In order to explain the global influence of cities such as New York, London and Tokyo, the theory of global city is proposed, which in turn becomes the developmental vision and reference point for leading cities in major developing countries. The rapid moving up of the Chinese cities in the global city rankings has aroused great interest among studying researchers. It becomes a focus of attention at my home institute, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, to comprehend the logic and developmental path of the global cities in China, especially in comparison with the archetypical ones and the other emerging ones.

Recently, I have begun to examine the strategic planning and related policy instruments of the leading cities in the BRICS countries, namely Shanghai, Johannesburg, Mumbai, Sao Paulo and Moscow. I started my field study in Mumbai and New Delhi, because I think India and China share the most common experiences and challenges among all BRICS countries. When comparing the development process of the global cities in China and India, I couldn’t help noticing their similar trajectory of development: to reform the domestic system in accordance with the requirements of the globalization, which is particularly promoted as world-class influence, emerging world cities need to not only rethink the profound implications of globalization for their own development stage, but also to examine their own development strategies from the perspective of internal integration and complexity.

Unfortunately, with the outbreak of the financial crisis and the reversal of the world economic cycle, the emerging global cities, as they are dependent on the world market, become more vulnerable. Thus, when seeking world-class influence, emerging world cities need to not only rethink the profound implications of globalization for their own development, but also to examine their own development strategies from the perspective of internal integration and complexity. Compared with other emerging global cities in the BRICS, especially India, Shanghai has achieved considerable success in becoming a global city under the national reform and opening-up strategy. It is the rising node in the global city system. It also serves as the engine of China’s modernization and the bridgehead for China’s going out strategy. In the global city theory, Asia’s global cities like Tokyo and Seoul are considered as nation-led while Western cities like New York and London are market-led. It is well known that Shanghai falls into the nation-led type, and even more so than Tokyo and Seoul. Efficient public services supplied by the state, such as labor, healthcare and education, matter much in the process. Besides that, the informal governance based on a household registration system and local social network, which are indeed of Chinese characteristics, has not only mitigated the negative impact of global city practices. Thus, for any emerging global city in the BRICS to succeed in its global city journey, it must appropriately deal with the inherent complexity of its own development stage.
The European Alliance for Asian Studies is a co-operative platform of European Institutions specialising in the study of Asia. The aim of the Alliance, established in 1997, has been to foster and support research, teaching, and public outreach in Asia expertise across European universities, and to promote collaborative research projects. The Alliance brings together the variety of approaches, expertise, and institutional and disciplinary boundaries. It encourages collaborations, synergies and intellectual emulation among European academic institutions involved in Asian Studies and in collaboration with partners from Asia and the rest of the world.

The Alliance seeks to build high-quality interdisciplinary research, teaching and public services, including scholarly networks within Europe and beyond. It also encourages linkage between academic and non-academic actors, aiming to develop a model of how Asian studies in European academia could correspond to political, economic and heuristic shifts and contexts.

The Alliance is not intended to merge the respective institutions, or blur their individual strengths, but rather to provide a framework for co-operation. Partners in the Alliance use the specificity of approaches, expertise and connectivities present in the network to strengthen research, teaching, collaboration and outreach. Such a dynamic network works on various scales of expertise: (1) institutions based on policy-oriented research and expertise; (2) institutions that seek to apply their expertise beyond single locations and university frameworks, and (3) institutions combining research and teaching Asian studies with an emphasis on humanistic and linguistic knowledge.

Members of the Alliance
As of 1 July 2019, the European Alliance for Asian Studies includes:

- the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS), Heidelberg;
- the Center for East Asian Studies at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (CEASAO);
- the Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies (CESSEA), Lund University;
- the Centre in Rede de Investigação em Antropologia (CRIA), Lisbon;
- the Department of Asian Studies, Academia Sinica, University of Oulu;
- the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne;
- the Faculty of Economics, University of Coimbra;
- the European Institute of Global and Area Studies (EIGA), Hamburg;
- the Groupement d’Intérêt Scientifique des Sciences de l’Asie (GISSA), Paris;
- the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden;
- the Institut Roman de Studi Euro-Asiatic (IRSEA), Bucharest;
- the Institute of the Middle and Far East, Jagiellonian University, Krakow;
- the Institut of Studies on Asia, University of Turin;
- the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NAOS), Copenhagen;
- the School of Oriental and African Studies, London;
- the Università degli Studi di Napoli ‘L’Orientale’;
- the University of Vienna.

Website
The new Alliance website, www.asiascholars.eu intends to mirror the spirit of participation and sharing of its members, including information on open access, enabling members and the public at large to construct and share knowledge and data. It is a unique vehicle to learn from the partners’ developments, their plans and their expertise.

Secretariat
The contact address for the Alliance is the International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden.

Please contact Dr. Willem Vogelsang, w.vogelsang@iaso.eu for further information.

The year 2019 has seen the launch of two collaborative projects financed by the European Research Council, both of which will study still largely unwritten aspects of the institutional, social and religious histories of medieval South and South-East Asia. These are the ERC Starting Grant project ‘Translocal Identities: The Śivadharma and the Making of Regional Religious Traditions in Premodern South Asia’ (SHIVADHARMAs) and the Synergy Grant project ‘The Domestication of Hindu Asceticism and the Religious Making of South and South-East Asia’ (DHARMAs). As the titles themselves strongly suggest, the two projects are deeply interrelated with respect to their methods and chronological focus, while also sharing some of the sources on which their research is founded. At the same time, they both entail, at various levels, the involvement of a new member of the European Alliance for Asian Studies (EAAS), namely the Università degli Studi di Napoli ‘L’Orientale’, which in the coming years will thus be among the most active research centres for the study of the medieval history of South Asia in Europe.

Trends in historical research
Recent decades have seen the emergence of different trends of scholarship that are radically changing our understanding of the premodern history of South and South-East Asia, a macro-region that has had important economic, political and cultural ties starting from the fourth century CE. The multiple conceptual change perhaps lies in the acknowledgement, as straightforward as it has been controversial, that history and a historical consciousness also existed in those areas before the colonial era, and that ancient and medieval textual traditions in India and South-East Asian languages, in whatever literary form they come, can and must also be studied as historical sources, even though we have nothing that closely resembles the genre of historiography as it has been defined in the European scholarly tradition. As Daud Ali wrote in 1202, such a premise — namely that what we call ‘medieval India’ (roughly the sixth to the fourteenth century) has a tradition of historical writing — would have been “barely thinkable just fifty years ago”.

The academic study of such history started more than 150 years ago, mainly with the pioneering efforts of mid-nineteenth century scholars who embarked on an enterprise to survey, collect and publish the voluminous bodies of inscriptions from that vast geographic area that Pollock has recently called the “Sanskrit cosmopolis,” which spans twelve modern countries in South and South-East Asia and encompasses a wide range of regional languages. Inscriptions from these areas are often the primary if not the sole means to investigate the history of the institutions, administration and economic systems of the medieval states, as well as the their processes of state formation. Yet scholars are still far from achieving a comprehensive understanding of these factors, which have often been disregarded in light of the greater emphasis that has traditionally been placed on the study of the philosophical, literary and doctrinal facets of these cultures. Moreover, the objective difficulties encountered in the surveying and editing of inscriptions — due to their number,
The Region

Dominic Goodall, have been hired to work through primary materials on the spread of the Śiva cult in the South of India, as well as on the Sanskrit tradition of those sources. The dissemination of EFEO centres in South and South-East Asia, together with EFEO’s support for research in Cambodia and Indonesia, with the EFEO centres of Siam Reap and Jakarta as the time, it becomes tempting to think that it is possible for the DHARMA project to extend its network beyond the European consortium and establish a means to obtaining a deeper understanding of their disciplines as well as securing a greater relevance of their work within the wider academic discourse. Some voices have already raised this issue, but we are still far from a solution on how to address the problem of reducing reliance on ‘global histories’, we still see too little effort being made to get ‘the other side of the story’. This is done through education and awareness-raising in academic contexts, as well as through the work of EFEO centres, which aim to establish a framework for the integration of various types of expertise and reinforce ties between centres and scholars.

Future challenges

The recent experiences of these and other projects indicate that, in the contemporary academic milieu, collaborative research on medieval South and South-East Asia offers a number of attractive options for pursuing ambitious scholarly achievements and attracting consistent grants. Collaboration on projects such as ‘Traditions that made Indian History — and the Humanities in general’ is also a means to obtaining a deeper understanding of the disciplines as well as securing a greater relevance of their work within the wider academic discourse. Some voices have already raised this issue, but we are still far from a solution on how to address the problem of reducing reliance on ‘global histories’, we still see too little effort being made to get ‘the other side of the story’. This is done through education and awareness-raising in academic contexts, as well as through the work of EFEO centres, which aim to establish a framework for the integration of various types of expertise and reinforce ties between centres and scholars.

A network of European centres — and far beyond

The institutional networks established to pursue this endeavour go far beyond that of the official Host Institutions of the two Projects. The DHARMA project, though located at only one Host Institution, is at the same time based on a consortia that include the University of Naples ‘L’Orientale’ and two other important agents of trans-locality in medieval India. The DHARMA project, however, is also the corresponding Host Institution; the second, nestled at the University ‘L’Orientale’ will also contribute a survey of the entire Barind region (north-western Bangladesh) and thus cooperate with the archaeological campaigns that are already underway at the site of Mahasthan (Bangladesh). The University ‘L’Orientale’ project, entitled Task Force B, with research on medieval Kannada inscriptions, Task Force C, on medieval South-East Asia, directed by Arlo Griffis, will cover the publication of inscriptions from the Kaveri basin corresponding to modern Cambodia and Indonesia. The work of this task force will also include archaeological campaigns at the sites of Prasat Neak Bun and Prasat Xina, in north-eastern Cambodia, and at the site of Bumlag in South Sumatra, while at the same time involving the investigation of prescriptive literature in Old Javanese. The only regional task force is Task Force D, ‘Other textual sources’, coordinated by Florinda De Simini, which will study textual sources in Sanskrit—mainly the Tripitaka and Sanskrit translations relevant for the history of medieval religious institutions, as well as the testimony of court poetry (kavya) in Sanskrit and Old Javanese.

The DHARMA and SHIVADHAMA projects

Hinging and expanding on these trends in research, the SHIVADHAMA and DHARMA projects are at present implementing some of the histories of medieval institutions and societies. Each project does so by promoting better ties between the different schools of thought and their material and archaeological counterparts, as well as the systematic study and editing of inscriptions, both as a means to obtain a better understanding of regional developments and interaction with trans-regional phenomena. The final goal is not only that of putting together a corpus of information that will include the histories of the regions under investigation, but also the testimony of court poetry and the expertise involved. The historical questions that will be addressed in the project concern the complex interplay of state, society and religious institutions in the period spanning from the second to the thirteenth century in selected regions of South and South-East Asia. In order to tackle this issue, the project will focus on the emergence of ‘Hindu’ ecclesiastical foundations known in Sanskrit as śāramas and mathas, monastic establishments that also evolved into centres that offered services to the community and participated in the administration of local resources. The research will be based on the study of Brahmanical settlements and the patronage offered by elites for the foundation or maintenance of temples. The project will cover the publication of inscriptions from various sources corresponding to modern Cambodia and Indonesia. The work of this task force will also include archaeological campaigns at the sites of Prasat Neak Bun and Prasat Xina, in north-eastern Cambodia, and at the site of Bumlag in South Sumatra, while at the same time involving the investigation of prescriptive literature in Old Javanese. The only regional task force is Task Force D, ‘Other textual sources’, coordinated by Florinda De Simini, which will study textual sources in Sanskrit—mainly the Tripitaka and Sanskrit translations relevant for the history of medieval religious institutions, as well as the testimony of court poetry (kavya) in Sanskrit and Old Javanese.

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Note


5. As for the late mediaeval period, in Einaudi, F. (ed) Genesis and Development of Tantrism, Oxford University Press.

6. As for the late mediaeval period, in Einaudi, F. (ed) Genesis and Development of Tantrism, Oxford University Press.


8. As for the late mediaeval period, in Einaudi, F. (ed) Genesis and Development of Tantrism, Oxford University Press.


In article this is a revised version of a presentations given at the last meeting of the European Alliance for Asian Studies, 30–31 May 2019, Jagiellonian University, Kraków.

Notes


The group was invited to ponder as they the water-land divide by adopting a ‘watery’ space what had originally been malleable, cement, thus solidifying and fixing in time and fortification and resilience, with dykes and especially in countries of the Global South. of resources and economic opportunities, the world, and they concentrate the majority most vulnerable to sea level rise, yet they or in estuaries. These regions are considered of the world’s population live in either deltas to protect themselves. Meanwhile, two-thirds come to be conceptualized first and foremost global context of climate change, water has ‘ground’ for rethinking urban practices. In the in-situ graduate school was to make water the in-in-situ graduate school; and Dr John Abgbonifo, Sociology professor at Ogun State University (Nigeria), author of Environment and Conflict: Place and the Logic of Collective Action in the Niger Delta.

Water as the ‘ground’ for rethinking urbanism

The conceptual challenge driving the in-situ graduate school was to make water the ‘ground’ for rethinking urban practices. In the global context of climate change, water has come to be conceptualized first and foremost as a threat against which human beings have to protect themselves. Meanwhile, two-thirds of the world’s population live in either deltas or in estuaries. These regions are considered most vulnerable to sea-level rise, yet they have the highest urban development rates in the world, and they concentrate the majority of resources and economic opportunities, especially in countries of the Global South. Architects and engineers transform water-based landscapes with an imperative of fortification and resilience, with dykes and cement, thus solidifying and fixing in time and space what had originally been mutable, fluid, and constantly changing at the rhythm of seasons and tides. How can we change our approach to human settlements and urban development in light of delta cities’ experiences, where people and places thrive in a relationship with – and not against – water? Can we bridge the water-land divide by adopting a ‘watery’ perspective? These are some of the questions the group was invited to ponder as they discovered the Mekong Delta together.

Understanding space by traveling through it

Any tourist would have envied the students’ program. They first traveled to Long Xuyen, capital of An Giang province, in the heart of the Mekong Delta. Over the course of three days and four nights, their journey also brought them to the cities of Chau Doc and Can Tho. They had a chance to visit several Khmer pagodas, one Muslim mosque and many Buddhist temples, as well as the Oe Eo archeological site, Can Tho’s floating market, and an industrial zone. They drove between places, walked through villages, climbed up the Nui Sam mountain, and went on boat explorations in the maze of canals. They tasted the finest fish specialties the region has to offer and let the sounds, smells, and rhythms of the delta shape their experience. However, one should not underestimate the educational value of traveling with a group of specialists from a range of disciplines – urban planning, environmental studies, history, anthropology, sociology – reading the same landscape, but with different lenses. Every meal was a chance to learn from each other’s research and background while sharing observations, experiences, and knowledge. Every bus ride was an opportunity to raise questions as they came to mind. Why are some canals straighter, longer, or higher than others? Why are some houses on stilts while others are not? Every field trip was an invitation to discuss and reflect on the readings the conveners had carefully selected prior to the school, and on the occasional lectures delivered throughout the trip – sometimes on hilltops, at pagodas, on buses, or at conference halls. The collaborative nature of learning was emphasized throughout, as participants were encouraged to learn from people they met on the road or from guest speakers.

Themes and learnings

The convenors exposed the students to the theoretical frameworks they had developed in their research. Dr Biggs suggested reading the Mekong Delta’s landscape as the Vietnamese people conceive it, i.e., as neither human made nor natural: “nature is what you make of it”. Dr Bhattacharyya suggested a framework he has developed and used extensively in her research in the Bengal delta – that of property rights – to understand the slipperiness of making property claims in a context where the lines between land and sea are continually shifting. Based on his research in the oil-rich and conflict-ridden Niger delta, Dr Abgbonifo’s approach was to pay attention to the power dynamics embedded in the different ways in which people access the delta’s resources. Three major recurring themes emerged from these frameworks. The first theme was seeing and perceiving water as a constitutive part of the landscape. Common understandings of human settlement and nature are fraught and ignored, whereas its presence can be perceived everywhere in an environment such as the Mekong Delta: in the rust on the corrugated metal of the stilt houses; in the humidity in the air; in the wetness of the clay on the riverbeds; and so on. Why have we forgotten to see water around us? How might we stay attuned to its presence? Such questions allowed participants to experiment with the concept of wet ontologies.

Secondly, delta-based thinking is a way to stay attentive to the continuities between land and water as opposed to seeing them as distinct entities. In other words, a recurring theme of this workshop was to develop a sensibility that takes the blurry lines and boundaries between land and water seriously. To ‘think with the delta’ means being able to surface the continuities between the seemingly fixed categories of rural/urban, land/water, flexibility/mobility, river/ocean, industrial/natural, and so on. Ultimately, it means being open to seeing newer rhythms and orders that would otherwise be cast away as unplanned, chaotic or illegal. Thirdly, it soon became apparent that the landscape is a layered palimpsest, where each layer has multiple sets of meanings, at times in contradiction with each other. A seemingly peaceful stretch of rice paddy fields is in fact highly political. It is the result of centuries of conflict and negotiations: between indigenous populations and colonizers; between different ethnic and religious groups; between different countries fighting for the border; between agriculture- and industry-based approaches to economic development. Altogether, the themes that emerged from the graduate school shed light on the importance of interdisciplinary thinking about the connections between land, water, and people – by definition a multidimensional issue.

Creative learning

The in-situ graduate school ended where it started, at HCMUSSH in Ho Chi Minh City, for a one-day workshop. In groups of three or four, the students presented a number of structured outcomes of their visits and observations to their peers, the instructors, and a few outside guests. While the choice of presentation topic was entirely open, the groups had to comply with one strict presentation rule: no PowerPoint. The final workshop was in the same spirit as everything else in this in-situ graduate school from its inception: lively and cheerful, yet intellectually ambitious and creative. At the end of the week, both students and professors had humbly learnt from each other outside conventional academic formats. What made the learning process unique was the fact that the graduate school allowed each participant to develop their observations in a collaborative and experiential manner. In the end, the participants had become collegial peers with overlapping research interests, if not friends. None of this would have been possible without the discrete, but infallible, organizational support from Mrs Martina van den Haak from IIAS and Dr Hoang Ngoc Minh Chau from HCMUSSH. Everyone went back to their research sites – ranging from an industrial landscape in India, to heavily urbanized Shenzhen, to the streets of Saigon – with new perspectives on delta cities, climate change, and social relations as shaped by water. They also brought back with them sweet memories of a unique learning experience.
The two-day workshop in Kokrajhar (5–6 January 2019), organised by Ambedkar University Delhi in collaboration with IAS and INTACH (Delhi), initiated a dialogue between (four) different communities on the tradition and experience of growing rice. This workshop was planned in the context of the IAS initiative Humanities Across Borders (HaB) that aims to share human experiences, with an objective to document and record the changing aspects of contemporary societies, and to use them as pedagogical tools.

Background
My best memories associated with rice from childhood include walking through the lush green paddy fields to catch fish in the shallow waters, collecting leftover paddy strings post-harvest for keepsake and jumping on the mounds of rice in the winter sun. But the first opportunity to ‘think’ about rice in a concrete way came when Hali accepted the two panel proposals on rice submitted by me along with two colleagues, Sunarjit Sarkar and Erik de Mooker, to the Ambedkar University Delhi’s project under the HaB network. Vernacular naming and recording of rice varieties introduced by state and market agencies with cultivating indigenous rice varieties by scholars and community members, who are in community-based knowledge practices, can resist being subsumed under discourses of ‘culture’ or ‘sustainable development’ only when communities themselves value rice as self.

Context and intent
While ‘rice as food’ brings rice growing communities together, the complexity lies not just in the cultivation of rice, but also in the ways in which rice figures as a vehicle of shared meaning and self-identification. The crucial role rice has played historically in building civilizations and in the formation of powerful states cannot be overlooked, even as the colonial perception of rice as a food-crop continues to dominate the global narrative on rice. In the influence of science and technology on agricultural practices, particularly in the western world, the importance of ‘embedded knowledge’ still prevalent among rice-growing communities across the world has gained new significance, calling for new histories focusing on cartographies of rice in a global context.

The workshop aimed to help community members realize the significance of sharing knowledge about rice, and its relevance in sustaining livelihoods in the region. Reflecting on Japanese self-identity construction through rice over time, in her book Rice as Self (1993), Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney says that rice, used as a metaphor to think about oneself, often prompts people to think about who they are in relation to other peoples. Significantly, the workshop in Kokrajhar explored lesser-known aspects of the socio-cultural dynamics of rice cultivation in Assam and the relevance of an inter-community dialogue mediated by scholars and policy makers local stakeholders in 2018. The panel participants shared their experiences of working with rice in Northern Thailand, West Africa, Central and Northeast India; It inspired the subsequent Kokrajhar workshop, intended to initiate a dialogue on rice as a site of knowledge and meaning.

Setting the stage
The most challenging task was to bring different community members onto a single platform, considering the sensitive atmosphere in and around the district of Kokrajhar. Fortunately, it was made possible as an insider, as much as I was an outsider of having lived outside, to identify with objectively. Of the four communities (Boro/anglicised Bodo, Rabha, Rajbongshi and Santhali) invited, the Santhali participants failed to show up (even after confirming). All participants worked as full-time farmers, except for one retired government employee, who continued to be engaged with rice cultivation. There were two local (female) observers invited, one a physics teacher at the Kokrajhar Science School and the other a state government employee.

The format of the workshop was kept informal, with the auditorium of the Kokrajhar Science College, with plastic chairs arranged in a semi-circle, provided the desired ambience to be received for a friendly discussion. Displayed in front of the group were tools and implements used for rice cultivation, along with samples of paddy seeds collected during the pre-workshop field visit. This is where I saw the long stemmed baodhan (also called Bora) for the first time, having heard of it innumerable times in folktales during my childhood. Not grown on a large scale anymore, baodhan is unique in its height and considered important due to its height. This mode of interaction instantly generated the required interest to engage the participants. The first day of the workshop focussed on the material artefacts of rice, their names in different dialects, specific and local knowledge about rice and local rice varieties. The second day of the Workshop began with a visit to the house of the Rajbongshi resource person, Debashwar Rall, just 10 minutes from the venue. The aim of the visit was to see the way in which rice plays a central role in the everyday life of women in a rice-farming household. This is more so during harvest time (winter), which is celebrated in that esteemed bihu festival (domul) for the Boro) by preparing varieties of sweet and savoury rice treats. The visit was most rewarding in terms of first hand engagement and collective organisational spirit that plays a crucial role in the transmission of knowledge. The take away from the visit was that rice is central to knowledge production at a familial and community level, and the meanings associated with rice articulate the socio-cultural nuances not directly evident to the outsider.

Note
The Umbrella Movement. Civil Resistance and Contentional Space in Hong Kong

Ngok Ma and Edmund W. Cheng (eds)
Amsterdam University Press
Series: Global Asia / ISBN: 9789462985561
Release date: 2nd May 2019


This volume examines the most spectacular struggle for democracy in post-handover Hong Kong. Bringing together scholars with different disciplinary focuses and comparative perspectives from mainland China, Taiwan and Macau, one common thread that stitches the chapters is the use of first-hand data collected through on-site fieldwork. This study unveils how trajectories can create favourable conditions for the spontaneous civil resistance despite the absence of political opportunities and surveys the dynamics through which the protestors, the regime and the wider public responds differently to the prolonged contentious space. The book offers an informed analysis of the political future of Hong Kong and its relations with the authoritarian sovereignty as well as sheds light on the methodological challenges and promises in studying modern-day protests.

Ngok Ma is Associate Professor at the Department of Government and Public Administration, Chinese University of Hong Kong.
Edmund W. Cheng is Associate Professor at the Department of Public Policy, City University of Hong Kong.

We warmly invites submissions from scholars working on borderlands in Asia from various disciplines and career stages. The 7th Asian Borderland Research Network (ABRN) conference focuses on three key themes: Technologies, Zones, and Co-existences.

In the past decade, Asian borderlands have experienced intense ruptures and unparalleled connectivity across diverse socio-political and geographical frontiers. The re-opening of frontiers has unleashed a development frenzy, evident in new railways, road networks, import/export zones, trading ports, markets and casinos. At the same time, peace building has opened new possibilities for reconciliation, resolution, and readiness for shared futures. Bonds can be strengthened across borders to make space for respect, recognition, and co-existence. Nevertheless, anxieties over security and sovereignty trigger concerns over unregulated mobilities, the prevalence of shadow economies, the abuse of military force, and race and trade wars. Borders are thus being reconsidered and reinvented in parts of Asia, creating new uncertainties and precarities for communities living in borderlands.

Parallel programme

In addition, the 7th ABRN marks the historic occasion of the 70th Korean War commemoration, which offers a unique opportunity for scholars to discuss a future of peaceful co-existence across the Korean Peninsula and beyond through a parallel programme.
IIAS Fellowship Programme

In the spotlight

The International Institute for Asian Studies annually hosts a large number of visiting researchers (affiliated fellows) who come to Leiden to work on their own individual research project. In addition, IIAS also facilitates the teaching and research by various professorial fellows as part of agreements with Dutch universities, foreign ministries and funding organisations. Meet our fellows at www.iias.asia/fellows

Cha-Hsuan Liu

The Absolute Sincerity

Currently I teach Multicultural Society, Health in Society, and Generations of Youth study at Utrecht University. This year, I am spending part of my time at IIAS as an affiliate fellow on the development of a research project. My previous research investigated the adequacy of healthcare provision for migrant groups and minorities, with a special focus on the Chinese minority in the Netherlands. It contributes to the development of theory and knowledge to mitigate health inequalities between ethnic or social-cultural groups in a multicultural society. The ancient Chinese physician, SUN Simiao (581–682AD), emphasised that a great physician should provide appropriate care to all with no discrimination. This ideology of the Absolute Sincerity has inspired me to further support healthcare professionals gain awareness of the discrepancy between the majority and the vulnerable groups.

Theara Thun

Bangladesh: the evolution of historiographical genres in colonial and post-independence Cambodia

I have spent almost seven years collecting and studying Khmer texts, especially the chronicle manuscripts (bangadavat), which were popularly used prior to the 1970s by Cambodian scholars and Buddhist monks to recount their collective past events. These manuscripts, particularly those produced between the second half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, represent ideas and perspectives related to cultural and political values, intellectual exchanges, and clashes of knowledge among French and Cambodian scholars during those years. A monograph based on my PhD dissertation, the project is the first critical study and clashes of knowledge among French and political values, intellectual exchanges, ideas and perspectives related to cultural and first half of the 20th century, represent

IIAS Fellowship possibilities and requirements

Apply for an IIAS fellowship

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

When applying for an IIAS Fellowship, you have the option of simultaneously submitting an application for an additional two months of research at the Collège d’études mondiales of the Fondation Maison des sciences de l’Homme (CEM-FMSH), in Paris, France, immediately after your stay in Leiden.

Application deadlines: 1 March & 1 October

Apply for an IIAS–ASCL fellowship

The IIAS-ASCL joint fellowship is intended for researchers specialising in Asian-African interactions.

Application deadlines: 15 March & 15 September

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

Apply for a Gonda fellowship

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

Application deadlines: 1 April & 1 October

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

Studying the diversity and disparity in healthcare involves multi- and inter-disciplinary knowledge, such as modern medicine and healthcare provisions, public health, health psychology, health/medical anthropology, social policies, and cultural sociology. Despite the different types of research conducted, western researchers often tend to cite ‘cultural differences’ as the cause when health services cannot meet the needs of members of a minority. This proposition of ‘culture as excuse’ has motivated me to take a closer look at the subject matter, from three angles: the non-culture-specific factors at play, health beliefs, and the ‘cultural healing’. The concept of ‘cultural healing’ is especially interesting for further research. Supported by IIAS, I am cooperating with a senior researcher at Academia Sinica Taiwan to explore the opportunities of developing an international research group for the study of ‘cultural healing’ within the IIAS cultural heritage theme.

While modern medicine is generally accepted as the main healing method for mental and physical illnesses, many members of our societies still rely on ‘cultural healing practices’ in daily lives. Throughout history, cultures and societies have developed practices and attitudes that support individual wellbeing and social harmony. These ‘informal’ healing practices and attitudes towards health and treatments reflect both individual and collective beliefs on health and wellbeing. They are part of the culture of a society that shapes the relationship between people, as well as that with ourselves. In this context, a healthy life means not only the absence of illness, but also a balance with the self, society and the environment. Researchers in the health care arena often overlook this dimension, which is especially important within the polyethnic societies or states. The absences of knowledge on this issue means not only the absence of illness, but also a balance with the self, society and the environment. Researchers in the health care arena often overlook this dimension, which is especially important within the polyethnic societies or states. The hours I spend at IIAS – away from the intensity of teaching obligations – help me greatly to work out dissimilar ideas for such research, even though it is currently still in its conception phase. The stimulating IIAS lectures and activities open unexpected windows and doors, helping me to understand the world from different lenses. My resolution for the coming year is to link scholars worldwide and to write articles on the topic of the cultural healing under the inspiration and the support of IIAS fellows and staff.
IIAS research and other initiatives are carried out within a number of thematic, partially overlapping research clusters in phase with contemporary Asian currents and built around the notion of social agency. In addition, IIAS remains open to other potentially significant topics. More information: www.iias.asia

IIAS research clusters

Asian Cities
This cluster deals with cities and urban cultures with their issues of flows and fluxes, ideas and goods, and cosmopolitan and connectivity at their core, framing the existence of vibrant ‘civil societies’ and political micro-cultures. Through an international knowledge network, IIAS aims to create a platform for scholars and urban practitioners focusing on Asian cities ‘in context’ and beyond traditional western norms of knowledge.

Asian Heritages
This cluster focuses on the uses of culture and cultural heritage practices in Asia. In particular, it addresses a variety of definitions associated with cultural heritage and their implications for social agency. The cluster engages with a broad range of related concepts and issues, including the contested assertions of ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’, concepts such as ‘authenticity’, ‘national heritage’ and ‘shared heritage’, and, in general, with issues pertaining to the political economy of heritage.

Global Asia
Asia has a long history of transnational linkages with other parts of the world, thereby shaping the global order, as much as the world at large continues to shape Asia. The Global Asia Cluster addresses contemporary issues related to Asia’s projection into the world as well as trans-national interactions within the Asian region itself. In addition IIAS aims to help develop a more evenly balanced field of Asian Studies by collaborating in trans-regional capacity building initiatives and by working on new types of methodological approaches that encourage synergies and interactions between disciplines, regions and practices.
**Asiatica, A New Axis of Knowledge**

An inclusive transnational platform that convenes scholars, artists, intellectuals, and educators from Africa, Asia, Europe, and beyond to study, discuss, and share knowledge on the intricate connections and entanglements between the African and Asian world regions. Our aim is to contribute to the long-term establishment of an autonomous, intellectual and academic community of individuals and institutions between two of the world’s most vibrant continents. We aspire to facilitate the development of research and educational infrastructures in African and Asian universities, capable of delivering foundational knowledge in the two regions about one another’s cultures and societies. This exchange, we believe, is a prerequisite for a sustainable and balanced socio-economic progress of the two continents. It is also an opportunity to move beyond the Western-originate fields of Asian and African area studies—something that would benefit Asian, African and Western scholars alike.

WRI the biennial conferences, the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) is the largest global forum for academics and civil society exchange on Asia. Founded in 1997 at the initiative of IIAS, ICAS serves as a platform for scholars, social and cultural leaders, and institutions focusing on issues critical to Asia, and, by implication, the rest of the world. The ICAS biennial conferences are organised in cooperation with local universities, cities and institutions and attended by scholars and other experts, institutions and publishers from 60 countries. ICAS also organizes the biennial `ICAS Book Prize` (IBP), which awards the most prestigious prizes in the fields of Asian Studies for books and PhD theses in English, Korean, Chinese, French and German (more language editions are planned for the future).

Ten conventions have been held since 1997 (Leiden, Berlin, Singapore, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Daegu, Honolulu, Macau, Adelaide, and Chiang Mai). ICAS 11 will be held in Leiden, the Netherlands, 16-19 July 2019.

Website: [http://www.icas.asia](http://www.icas.asia)

IIAS/ICAS International
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The Network

**Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN)**

This network focuses particularly on the border regions between South Asia, Central/East and Southeast Asia. The concerns are varied, ranging from migratory movements, transformations in cultural, linguistic and religious practices, to ethnic mobilisation and conflict, marginalisation, and environmental concerns. ABRN organises a conference in one of these border regions every two years in cooperation with a local partner. The 7th ABRN conference, Borderland Futures: Technologies, Zones, Co-existences, will take place in Seoul, South Korea, 6-27 June 2020. The Call for papers deadline is 30 Sept. 2019. See page 52 of this issue.

www.asianborderlands.net

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Cluster: Global Asia

Leiden Centre for Indian Ocean Studies

The Leiden Centre for Indian Ocean Studies brings together people and methods to study the “Indian Ocean World”, aiming to co-organize conferences, workshops and academic exchanges with Institutions from the region. Together with IIAS, the Centre facilitates an inclusive and global platform bringing together scholars and institutions working on connections and comparisons across the axis of human interaction with an interest in scholarship that cuts across borders of places, periods and disciplines.

www.iias.asia/programmes/leiden-centre-indian-ocean-studies

Cluster: Global Asia
Dress is a silent language, full of meaning and nuances that come in all shapes and sizes, colours and textures. It is a language with many variant forms of different vocabularies and sometimes complicated grammatical rules, which are all, as with every language, constantly changing. Dress is a language that we all speak, but communicating with dress is not always straightforward and may lead to misunderstandings. We do not all speak the same dialect!

And dress is not limited to garments. It also includes hairstyle, body modifications, footwear, jewellery, make-up and so much more. Dress is a highly diverse field of study that helps to explain how we communicate, not with words, but with our appearance. What does it mean when a man wears a suit and a necklace, or when a woman covers her face with a veil? Why has there been a recent surge in tattoos? And how do people react when they see a man with a set of nose-rings?

Dress is a language that helps to explain how we communicate, not with words, but with our appearance. What does it mean when a man wears a suit and a necklace, or when a woman covers her face with a veil? Why has there been a recent surge in tattoos? And how do people react when they see a man with a set of nose-rings?

As part of its collaboration with the London based publishing house of Bloomsbury, the TRC is expanding its collection of hand and machine embroidery, which forms the basis of a special TRC project, namely the Encyclopaedia of Embroidery series. The first volume was The Encyclopaedia of Embroidery from the Arab World (published in 2016 and the recipient of various awards). The second volume, The Encyclopaedia of Embroidery from Central Asia, the Indian Subcontinent and the Middle East will be published in late 2019, followed by other volumes on European, sub-Saharan African, American and East and Southeast Asian embroidery.

The TRC Collection

The TRC Collection is one of the few public collections that looks at the whole world of textiles and dress, rather than, for example, focusing on (Western) high fashion items, art historical aspects, or the ‘ethnic’ garments from one particular part of the world. Instead it takes a more holistic approach. It looks at textiles and dress from a wide range of angles inherent to the objects themselves, within the framework of the basic question as to why people use or wear the garments that they wear. In other words, the collection focusses on the basic elements of the ‘Language of dress’: the fibres and dyes used, the production methods, the cut and shape of the garments, their decoration, the producers and the wearers, and how these items link in with each other and with different groups around the globe. The TRC has been actively engaged in collecting and studying and presenting a wide range of textiles and garments from Asia. Some sub-collections stand out. The TRC houses a wide and very diverse collection of items from Afghanistan: a large part of the collection was assembled during various fieldtrips in the country between 1978 and 2011. Most of these items date to the latter half of the 20th century and represent the main groups living in the country, including Balouch, Hazara, Nuristani, Pashhtun, Tajik, Turkman and Uzbek groups. Many of the TRC’s Afghan items were on display in a TRC exhibition entitled Well-Dressed Afghanistan, which was held at the TRC in 2010/2011. The same display is also one of a series of TRC online exhibitions.

Another Asian/Middle Eastern sub-collection is that of boda. This name refers to the use of a narrow, flat metal thread (plate, lamella) to create various knotted effects. It can be found, with different names, in India, southern Iran and Egypt. The Indian pieces in the TRC collection include items made for the home market (notably saris) and for export, such as a boda dress for an Omani Bedouin woman. In the TRC boda collection there is also a special item, namely a 1920s European flapper dress made from two Egyptian shawls decorated in the boda manner.

A third sub-collection that should be mentioned is that of Chinese lotus shoes. Since 2007 the TRC has been building up an assemblage of these minute shoes worn by mainly Han Chinese women up to the early 20th century. The collection not only includes a range of shoes from different parts of the country, but they also represent different occasions, such as weddings, funerals, burials, and so forth. In addition, items relating to the production of lotus shoes, including a range of tools, are included in the collection. Many of these shoes were on display in a TRC exhibition (2012/2013) about decorative and protective footwear, and are also included in yet another TRC online exhibition.

TRC exhibitions

Apart from expanding its range of online exhibitions, the TRC also organises two to three temporary and actual exhibitions per year, and for the organisation of many of these the assistance is given by interns and students from a range of educational institutions, who in this way acquire practical experience in handling textiles and setting up displays. Exhibitions in the TRC Gallery have ranged from African kanga (2009), decorative footwear, including the Chinese lotus shoes (2010), Afghan dress (2010), through Chinese cheongsam (2011), African dress (2011), and garments from Yemen (2015), to more technical exhibitions, about the history of embroidery, about weaving and about textile printing.

In addition, exhibitions from outside are set up at the TRC to encourage textile crafts in general. These exhibitions covered the subjects of lace (2014) and that of weaving with 16-shaft (also 2014), and also displays and workshops set up together with Taiwanese indigo dyers and weavers (2016), with Indonesian weavers (2017), with Taiwanese basketry weavers (2018) and with the UNESCO indigo printer, Georg Stark (2018). The craftpeople are encouraged to sell items at the TRC during the exhibitions in order to support and publicise their work.

This year the TRC set up an exhibition about 500 years of velvet production and velvet clothing, and is based on the TRC’s extensive collection of fifteenth century (and later) velvets and velvet garments. In the summer of 2019 the TRC is organising the Out of Asia: 2000 Years of Textiles exhibition, to coincide with the 11th International Convention of Asia Scholars. There is, in sum, plenty to talk about, with the silent language of dress.

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