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In this edition of the Focus

Textiles on the move, through time and space
Willem Vogelsang

Textiles and dress play a central role in social, economic, and spiritual interactions. They provide information on the power relations that define stratifications of class, wealth, and gender. Textiles are also repositories of techniques, for spinning, weaving, dyeing, printing, and embroidering, and they travel easily over time and space from one group of people to another, adopting new features and meanings.

This issue’s Focus articles reflect upon the changing roles of textiles in society. Some of the articles were discussed during an online conference in October 2020, organized by IIAS with the assistance of Sandra Sardjono of the Tracing Patterns Foundation in Los Angeles, Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood of the Textile Research Centre (TRC) in Leiden, and Chris Buckley, Oxford. The articles explore ever-present processes of adoption and adaption of ‘foreign’ elements into a local cultural context.

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 multisectoral 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 Network pages of each issue of The Newsletter.

In this issue
In July, IIAS welcomed Paramita Paul as the new Chief Editor of The Newsletter. We introduce her and Assistant Editor Benjamin Zweegers, who left IIAS in June after serving as the Managing Editor of The Newsletter for more than a decade. The second phase of the Humanities Across Borders (HAB) programme has now begun with the consortium partners to sign a curriculum development agreement. On pp. 50-51, you can read about HAB’s curriculum development and its vision, along with Tharaphi Than’s article ‘Ruptured space allows Myanmar youths to reimagine a new education system’. HAB’s vision aligns well with the proposed education model of the Virtual Federal University (VUJ), established in May 2021 in response to the 1 February Coup and led by members of the Yangon University Students’ Union (UYSU). They envision an alternative education site free from institutional bureaucracies, disciplinary hierarchies, and a gate-keeping mentality. Furthermore, we are excited to announce our new ‘IIAS Book Talk Series’, dedicated to new titles published in the three IIAS publication series, ‘Asian Heritages’, ‘Asian Cities’ and ‘Global Asia’. You will find the first four scheduled book talks, along with the new titles, on pp. 48-49, as well as other announcements, IIAS research programmes and other initiatives are described in brief on pp. 52-53; and on pp. 48-49, you will find information about the IIAS Fellowship programme and three ‘follows in the spotlight’.
Change is the nature of things, and the last months have been rich in new developments for IIAS. The main one was the decision to resort to an online ICAS event, set to commence alongside the publication of this edition of The Newsletter. The online format is something we initially thought could be avoided until it became clear that the world was still in the grips of the pandemic. Since the decision was made, our colleagues at the ICAS Secretariat (Martina Van den Haak, Wu Changyung, Nantad Rangkrual, Paul Van der Velde) have worked tirelessly with their counterparts at Kyoto Seika University to ensure that the event would remain the vibrant and inclusive experience that has always characterized ICAS conventions. All that is technically and logistically possible has been done to ensure maximum accessibility and unconstrained interactions. I know how much our colleagues have been working, and are still doing so, so I want to take this opportunity to thank them on behalf of the whole IIAS team. The event, which will take place from August 24-28, will display a vast array of activities, bringing together nearly 2,000 contributors for a period of five days.

Another internal development within IIAS has been the recruitment of a new editorial team for The Newsletter as part of an overhaul of the institute’s dissemination and communication strategy. For now, we are pleased to welcome Dr. Paramita Paul and Dr. Benjamin Linder as Newsletter Editor and Assistant Editor, respectively. Their task began almost immediately after Sonja Zweegers formally handed the responsibility over to them. With Paramita and Ben, we plan to make use of the Newsletter’s central visibility position to embed its production within a fluid series of online-based dissemination and communication instruments, from podcasts to the production of small films, while maintaining a strong textual component. The innovations developed by the ICAS team will certainly impact the way IIAS’s own communication and dissemination will be organized. For now, however, we want to ensure a minimum of disruption in all of the IIAS communication operations.

In this period of transformations, many of which were accelerated – if not triggered – by the pandemic, I want to stress IIAS’s unflinching determination to continue its work as promoter and facilitator of knowledge exchanges on, with and in Asia. We remain convinced that no academic endeavor which is not articulated in lived, experienced knowledge exchanges can really be considered as such. Whilst continuing to expand our capacities to offer new spaces for creative engagement, we still want to guarantee a high level of interactions, and that no one finds him/herself left behind in a new digital divide, or as a result of the restrictions that are being enforced in our respective environments. This point was reiterated in the way we have set the new implementation of the Humanities Across Borders (HAB) initiative to construct a humanist model of curricula development across a network of partners from different regions of the world. With the set of new objectives made in Chiang Mai in February 2020, and the enlarged consortium that has followed, with the renewed support of the Mellon Foundation, despite the new pandemics, constraints – or perhaps thanks to them – we set out to empower four partners in four continents to anchor the four syllabi tracks based on themes of universal meaning (food, craft-making, words-in-use, space/place).

These are the University of Ghana, Kenyatta Community College (Words), Ambardar University (Space), and Leiden University College (Food). These ‘anchor’ partners will be responsible for shaping a curricular framework with the other members of the Consortium. Already, coordinators and partners will be responsible for shaping a curricular framework with the other members of the Consortium. Already, coordinators and partners will be responsible for shaping a curricular framework with the other members of the Consortium. Already, coordinators and partners will be responsible for shaping a curricular framework with the other members of the Consortium. Already, coordinators and partners will be responsible for shaping a curricular framework with the other members of the Consortium. Already, coordinators and partners will be responsible for shaping a curricular framework with the other members of the Consortium.
On 8 May 2021, it was exactly 400 years since Jan Pietersz Coen (1587-1629) committed a massacre on the Banda Islands in the Moluccas (Maluku Province), the only place where nutmeg grew at the time. In anticipation of this commemoration, the 1893 statue of Coen in the Dutch city of Hoorn, which dominates the town’s central square (Roode Steen/Red Stone), was again the focus of much anger. In the nationalist-tinged late 19th century, people were looking for heroes from the past. The Aceh War had been raging hopelessly for years. The so-called “glory days” of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) were more than a century behind. As an exemplary figure who spearheaded Dutch entry into Asia, Coen was equated with his robust and determined gaze East. He was deemed to have paved the way for Dutch successes in the Spice Trade, and thus seemed ideally suited to fortify the continued belief in the Dutch colonial enterprise. Even when Coen’s statue was placed on its pedestal, many criticized the glorification of a man with such a blood-soaked legacy.

During a large protest near Hoorn’s train station in June 2020, speakers drew attention to persistent discrimination and racism in the Netherlands in a broader sense. Recent events in the United States – in particular, the increasingly prominent Black Lives Matter movement and the public’s reaction to the murder of George Floyd – were a source of inspiration.

The actions surrounding the image of JP Coen occur at a moment in which the Dutch colonial past and its disastrously brutal activities in the slave trade are increasingly under review. The Rijksmuseum recently opened a large-scale exhibition on slavery. A well-curated book that pays specific attention to the many slave-related objects in its collection has also been published. Related publications often draw a direct line between this violent past and the institutionalized presence of racism in Dutch society. These sorts of historical reckonings can count on strong opposing sentiments: the same day as the aforementioned protest in Hoorn, a pro-Coen counter-demonstration was also held. Clad in Dutch flags with the VOC logo embroidered on them, a limited group of sympathizers gathered nearby, claiming an emotional bond with ‘Their Coen’ and other Dutch colonial figures of an imaginary glorious past. The way in which Dutch colonial history is appropriated and employed in such protests is characterized by rather broad generalizations. Among the pro-Coen protesters, it seemed mainly about the idea that the Netherlands was built on the acquired riches of the Dutch Golden Age. Heroes of yesterday (e.g., Michiel de Ruyter (1607-1653), Piet Hein (1577-1629), JP Coen) were not to be dismissed as violent conquerors and slave traders. They should continue to be respected for the riches they brought home, the riches that continue to make the Netherlands one of the wealthiest nations on earth. On the other hand, “four hundred years of Dutch imperialist rule” – as Gloría Wekker calls it in White Innocence (2016: 2) – cannot simply be erased. The consequences of such imperialism are still felt.

A number of recently published books offer new perspectives on Dutch colonialism and how it developed. Two of these studies – Adam Clulow’s Ambonai, 1623 (2019) and Allison Games’ Inventing the English Massacre – are about a relatively small event that would have far-reaching consequences for the Dutch Republic’s relationship with England: the execution of 21 British East India Company (BEIC) employees and Japanese mercenaries by Dutch authorities on Ambon in 1623. Both books do more than describe the macabre events that unfolded on Ambon; they also try to explain how this massacre, as the English referred to the incident, should be viewed from both a regional and European perspective. Together with two other books – the first dealing with the Anglo-Dutch conflicts of 1652-1689, the second with how the different companies related to one another – a complex, nuanced picture emerges of the early colonial period. Such works encourage reflection about the violent and uncompromising way colonial stakeholders sought to carve out a piece of the spice trade for themselves. Indirectly, however, these studies also caution against an over-emphasis on the might and supremacy of early colonizers.

**Amboin, 1623**

Two years after JP Coen ‘punished’ the Banda islanders, a tragedy took place on Ambon that received far more attention in Europe. In 1623, Dutch authorities arrested a Japanese mercenary in service with the VOC for asking ‘suspicious’ questions about the local fort’s defense capabilities. When he could not explain why this was of interest to him, he was tortured to death. Ultimately, he admitted to being part of a plan organized by English traders to conquer the fort in question. Two weeks later, 21 men were executed on suspicion of involvement in the plot. Ten of these were traders employed by the British East India Company. When news reached London a year later, the ‘massacre’ not only became a symbol of Dutch aggressive, rude, and cruel behaviour, but also one explanation for why the English eventually began focusing on India as an alternative to present-day Indonesia. Previous studies of the so-called ‘Ambonaya Massacre’ mainly focus on the underlying cause—that is, the truth (or falsity) of the alleged conspiracy. In this, perspectives were rather divided along national lines. Dutch authors insisted that the English were scheming to take over the fort. In contrast, English authors were invariably convinced that, even if there had been a plot against the Dutch, the Ambonaya Massacre was nevertheless a miscarriage of justice. Both publications rather pleasingly avoid this question altogether. Clulow’s Ambonai, 1623 emphasizes the Asian regional context in which the Dutch operated at the time. This produces a history that counters narratives of the VOC reigning supreme from the start. Following in the footsteps of pathbreaking studies like J.C. Sharman’s Empires of the Weak, Clulow shows how the Dutch actually began in a much weaker position than previously assumed. Fear and paranoia prevailed, fueled by a lack of regional knowledge, ambiguity about previous agreements, and the imminent presence of potential competitors (such as the English). One could, therefore, interpret the torture and subsequent executions of 1623 as the result of a collective Dutch panic attack (though this should by no means be read as an excuse or explanation for other atrocities committed locally).

**Japanese mercenaries**

In the first part of his book, Adam Clulow returns to the period of JP Coen to show how the history of the Banda Islands and Ambon are intertwined. After discussing why the spices of the so-called Spice Islands were so sought-after in Europe, Clulow explores how the Dutch started to interfere in the trade of nutmeg.
A variety of treaties were supposed to guarantee the VOC's monoply position, but whether the local elites actually understood what was in these treaties is another matter. This signals an issue of communication and translation that we will return to when we encounter in Clulow's masterful account, The Dutch often had a rather limited overview of their situation. The example of Japanese mercenaries was regularly updated for the VOC on Amboina? According to Clulow, these Japanese mercenaries were part of an experiment to make convenient the use of surplus manpower in Asia. After the bloody Sengoku period (1477-1573), there were large numbers of unemployed men in southern Japan. Stationed in Hirado, the VOC saw an opportunity to replenish its short supply of men for its colonial outposts. For the mercenaries, for example, played a central role in the behind thes of the orangwaa on Banda Neira. Upon entering Nani’s only month by today, one is immediately greeted by a horrific depiction of these men decapitating locals on the spot. It is here that Ambaiao, 1623 reads like a sequel to Clulow’s earlier The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan, in which he presents a detailed analysis of that Dutch period in Hirado (1609-1610). The VOC, operating on an island close to the way the Japanese themselves determined the contours of the relationship and how limited the influence of the VOC on the island was. Particularly striking are the descriptions of the complex ‘prigorimes’ that the VOC understood and expected, and the massacres that ensued: ‘the shogun himself would never reveal himself to the man, instead remaining invisible behind a screen. After endless waiting in the palace, the VOC representative was ordered to pay respect to the shogun by prostrating himself on the floor. Countless gifts were exchanged, which made the VOC representative feel ‘the floor was his kingdom.’ In the ideal of the VOC, the British East India Company seemed well aware that the torture and executions did not actually have the character of a massacre like the Jamestown Wars. Indeed, the VOC, in which a quarter of the inhabitants perished at the hands of a local tribe. Nor was it comparable to the massacre associated with religious wars. The events of the so-called ‘Amboyna Massacre’ not only made the men in question martyrs, but also illustrated how much the English and Dutch differed from each other as a people. While recent books such as Shashi Tharoor’s Inglorious Empire, Willem Dalrymple’s The Anarchy, and Sathnam Sanghera’s Empireland have all fiercely argued against the idea of a civilising English Empire, it is not possible to apply the ‘massacre’ label to the happenings in Amboyna. Just as the VOC felt that it was a reason for the British East India Company to reflect on a much broader context. Through the Treaty of Tordesillas (1943), the Portuguese and Dutch divided the world among themselves hundreds of years later. Where the Spaniards would largely ignore Asia, Portugal with its base in Goa played an active role in the spice trade in the Indian Ocean for a long time. Before the Dutch and English set foot on Moluccan shores, the Portuguese had preceded them. Such a long durée view of history makes it possible to draw connections between, on which hand, shifts in (territorial) power in Europe itself, and, on the other, the way various companies operated under the mandates with which they had been bestowed.

**The negative image the English had of the Dutch would persist for centuries, not least because of the regularly published pamphlets which were circulated.**

**A massacre invented**

Already before 1621, the relationship between the Dutch Republic and England had known ups and downs. The conflict between the Habsburg (‘Spanish’) Empire and the English (‘Anglo’) Empire (and their Dutch ally) played a prominent role in this. During the Twelve Years’ Truce (1609-1621) there were significant concerns about the possibility of Anglo-Spanish alliance. This contrasted with the perspective of the English, who relied firmly on the assumption that the Republic would welcome the military support it had received from the English in the 17th Century. The term mainly referred to a violent death in which the deceased was beheaded by the shogun. In this analysis, the VOC/Republic and BEIC/ England, Outsourcing Empire and Empireland express the idea that the reader will reflect on a much broader context. Through the Treaty of Tordesillas (1943), the Portuguese and Dutch divided the world among themselves hundreds of years later. Where the Spaniards would largely ignore Asia, Portugal with its base in Goa played an active role in the spice trade in the Indian Ocean for a long time. Before the Dutch and English set foot on Moluccan shores, the Portuguese had preceded them. Such a long durée view of history makes it possible to draw connections between, on which hand, shifts in (territorial) power in Europe itself, and, on the other, the way various companies operated under the mandates with which they had been bestowed.

**Reframing ‘empire’**

The negative image the English had of the Dutch would persist for centuries, not least because of the regularly published pamphlets which were circulated. These three wars in terms of a historical continuum which contributed to the way the English understood their relationship with the Dutch and English. The small nutmeg-rich Banda Island of Run was used to regulate the status of a whole series of territories, including New Amsterdam (which became New York) and Suriname.

**Conclusion**

Of the Bandas, the islet of Run is still the hardest to reach. Although there are nutmeg plantations on the island, they no longer play any role of significance in trade of the spices. The story of the VOC on Amboina lost its status as the only place where nutmeg grew. Run plays a central role in Gilles Milton’s bestseller Nathaniel’s Nutmeg, which narrates the story of the heroic Nathaniel Goldthorpe (1585-1620) fighting a battle for GIS-American success in the Banda Islands against the Dutch. But that will never enjoy the merits of their British overlords.

Inventing the English Massacre particularly excites its analysis of the colonial wars. The book leaves an indelible impression of the contours of the relationship and how much the English and Dutch differed from each other as a people. While recent books such as Shashi Tharoor’s Inglorious Empire, Willem Dalrymple’s The Anarchy, and Sathnam Sanghera’s Empireland have all fiercely argued against the idea of a civilising English Empire, it is not possible to apply the ‘massacre’ label to the happenings in Amboyna. Just as the VOC felt that it was a reason for the British East India Company to reflect on a much broader context. Through the Treaty of Tordesillas (1943), the Portuguese and Dutch divided the world among themselves hundreds of years later. Where the Spaniards would largely ignore Asia, Portugal with its base in Goa played an active role in the spice trade in the Indian Ocean for a long time. Before the Dutch and English set foot on Moluccan shores, the Portuguese had preceded them. Such a long durée view of history makes it possible to draw connections between, on which hand, shifts in (territorial) power in Europe itself, and, on the other, the way various companies operated under the mandates with which they had been bestowed.

**Notes**

1. The author would like to thank Tristan Mostert for important input on this article. Antal-De Blaauw: Buffels: Briefed Edition appeared in De Nederlandse Boekengids, issue 3 (2019), pp. 140-144.

2. Rijkrommes, 2021, Slovaky, Amsterdam: Rijksdrukkerijen/Amsterdam City Council.


6. The Newsletter No. 89, Summer 2021

7. The Study

8. Drawing attention to the term mainly referred to a violent death in which the deceased was beheaded by the shogun. In this analysis, the VOC/Republic and BEIC/ England, Outsourcing Empire and Empireland express the idea that the reader will reflect on a much broader context. Through the Treaty of Tordesillas (1943), the Portuguese and Dutch divided the world among themselves hundreds of years later. Where the Spaniards would largely ignore Asia, Portugal with its base in Goa played an active role in the spice trade in the Indian Ocean for a long time. Before the Dutch and English set foot on Moluccan shores, the Portuguese had preceded them. Such a long durée view of history makes it possible to draw connections between, on which hand, shifts in (territorial) power in Europe itself, and, on the other, the way various companies operated under the mandates with which they had been bestowed.

9. ref: the status of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in Hoorn, Image reproduced under a Creative Commons licence courtesy of a WikiCommons user.

Contesting the Imagined preman

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ome months earlier, I took up a digital subscription with Kompas, a national Indonesian newspaper. I realized that there was little chance for fieldwork in the near future, and thus that I should be more disciplined in my reading of Indonesian-language media. The newspaper’s imagery and reportage contrasted greatly with my immediate surroundings, a practically Covid-free Melbourne. Instead, Kompas documented hospitals at capacity, the deaths of health workers, the rapidly filling graveyards in Jakarta, and the sudden need to build more on the city’s fringes. Such a stress on everyday urban needs spoke volumes against the relative vagueness of the nation’s statistics on Covid cases and deaths. But, of course, there were many similarities to my situation in Melbourne: the need to ‘flatten the curve’, the constant press-conferences against the relative vagueness of the nation’s statistics on Covid cases and deaths. But, of course, there were many similarities to my situation in Melbourne: the need to ‘flatten the curve’, the constant press-conferences from local politicians stating that everything was under control, the implementation of lockdowns, and the exhortations for everyone to wash their hands and practice social distancing.

Fig. 1 (above): Market alley in Jakarta, Indonesia. Image reproduced courtesy of Anthoni Astutin on Unsplash.
Fig. 2 (left): Poster for the 1949 film Lewat Djam Malam.

Some six months into the Covid pandemic, I took up a digital subscription with Kompas, a national Indonesian newspaper. I realized that there was little chance for fieldwork in the near future, and thus that I should be more disciplined in my reading of Indonesian-language media. The newspaper’s imagery and reportage contrasted greatly with my immediate surroundings, a practically Covid-free Melbourne. Instead, Kompas documented hospitals at capacity, the deaths of health workers, the rapidly filling graveyards in Jakarta, and the sudden need to build more on the city’s fringes. Such a stress on everyday urban needs spoke volumes against the relative vagueness of the nation’s statistics on Covid cases and deaths. But, of course, there were many similarities to my situation in Melbourne: the need to ‘flatten the curve’, the constant press-conferences from local politicians stating that everything was under control, the implementation of lockdowns, and the exhortations for everyone to wash their hands and practice social distancing.

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A 'quasi-official' ring. Being a preman as such meant having established a degree of moral authority, which may not have been afforded to the gali-gali, but which disgusted thugs.

The disciplined preman
Lewat Djam Malam (After the Curfew), a 1955 film by Umar Ismail set during the Revolution Era (1945-1949), depicts the fate of ex-fighters fighter Iskandar as he attempts to settle back into urban life in Bandung, having left the nearby mountains where he was fighting against the Dutch. Iskandar continues to suffer the trauma of the violence and his role in unwittingly killing civilians. Upon returning to civilian life, he attempts to resume his relationship with his fiancée. He is aided in finding a job in the governor’s office, yet finds himself ostracized. He quickly alienates himself through resorting to violence to solve his disputes with fellow government officials. Iskandar is in turn feted for his bravery and condemned for his reputation for violence.

Back in Bandung, he takes revenge against his former-fighter, who was fighting against the Dutch. Iskandar is caught for breaking the law and creating their own sense of justice. His story shows how the state has lost its monopoly on violence, the female preman not only fights against the extortionate acts of male preman, but also against the police who violate the rights and lives of local women. The preman, in this case, is viewed sympathetically, as a crusader for social justice, who is capable of circumventing police authority.

The closure connection between newspapers and literary production also saw a number of stories dealing with both the state-orchestrated killings of gali-gali/preman and the rise of preman-like literary figures. Seno Gumira Adjarna (b.1958), who started work as a journalist in Jakarta during the early 1980s, coming from Yogyakarta, was one of the first authors to rise to prominence on the back of sastra panas or the directly engage with chronicling the various forms of state violence of the Suharto-led New Order regime. Seno’s novel Penembak Misterius, published in the late 1980s, depicts a former conductor of urban poor as an outcaste and a concerted campaign against sastra koran (literature) – a literature, it is, with narratives, settings and contexts that relate immediately to contemporary events.

With their urban bases, these stories have a largely urban focus, often relegating rural, peripheral, and non-Jakarta/non-Javanese life to a kind of quaint afterthought. The disciplined preman as both victims of state violence as well as perpetrators of everyday low-level criminality and extortion. The targeted killings of accused preman between 1982-1985 in various Indonesian cities formed the context for Seno’s ‘Bunyi Hujan di Atas Genting’ (‘The Sound of Rain on Roof Tiles’). Here, Sawitri, a former-prostitute waits in a constant state of fear, realising that her partner (a local preman) has become a victim of the ‘mysterious killings’. After each rain storm passes, she looks out of her window into a narrow alley to see a corpse splashed out. The corpse is tattooed, and her neighbours crowd around, celebrating the killing of another preman: ‘now he knows how it feels’, they celebrate. Sawitri feels that the killers targeted the victim’s tattoos; disfiguring them deliberately. This materiality of the tattooed body identifies the victim irrevocably as a preman and in turn a potential target of the state’s campaign. Although the portrayal from Seno is sympathetic to the partner who is left behind, the preman is shown to be an outcaste and extortionist rather than a benevolent Robin Hood-esque brigand. Pamul, as a preman, is imagined in the sense of a ‘professional’ in ‘his line of work’. The preman may also stand for the ‘underclass’: he is a part of the same world as those he intimidates. As Fyter states, “preman, having nothing to sell but their own muscles, have a right to be cut in on the take given the lack of economic alternatives. Extortion is, in effect, their line of work.”

This sympathetic portrayal of the urban under-class is consistent with the current Covid pandemic, where he frequently depicts the agency of the urban poor in shaping their own livelihoods.

Contesting the imagined preman
The preman is a contested figure with origins in earlier iconic figures like the brigand and bandit. The preman, characterised as a vigilante, operating ‘outside of the law’ (di luar pemerintahan), is nonetheless frequently co-opted and embraced by the state. Such an embrace is fleeting and tenuous: as is evident through state sabotage to draw on their authority, while, at other times, seeking to have them wiped out (dibasmi) and at almost seasonally launch programs of eradication (pemberantasan). As such, I argue that the preman is an ambivalent and ambivalent figure: created through nationalist mythology and a variety of textual discourses, enabled through the conditions of Indonesia’s urbanism. The urban preman proves to be adaptable: becoming reconfigured at each moment of crisis, whether it be the time of the Revolution, the Massacre of the alleged communists from 1965-66, the reformasi movement and more recently in the post-Authoritarian era and the current Covid pandemic. Literary works by Seno Gumira Adjarna, amongst others, provide a vital resource for understanding how preman are imagined and contested.

Andy Fuller is a member of the SAGACE research project and the SoCo research group of the Cultural Anthropology Department of the University of Pittsburgh. He also co-founded Reading Sideways Press. a.fuller@pitt.edu

Notes
4 The plight of ex-fighters is also explored in the 1952 film Embon (Daw), by D. Djyspiesiusiu, also produced by Perfini.
5 Azis served as Chief of the Indonesian National Police between 2019-2021.
6 In 2008, Amir Sukab, Kompol, Jatiblas.
7 Seno tells me the story is based on a real event, “I did see her passing by the gudang stall in Malang.”
realize the need to offer curricula that include marginalized areas such as Asia and Africa in Hispanic studies, most universities still face several challenges, including integrating Philippine literature into their programs. Despite the academic vitality on this subject, there are not yet enough professors who specialize on Philippine Literature in Spanish nor teaching materials on works that until recently had been neglected.

DigiPhiLit is an initiative that responds to these structural problems, aiming to fully put Philippine literature in Spanish on the map. It does so by taking advantage of the growth in Digital Humanities and the potential of distance learning didactics. Funded with an Erasmus Plus grant by the European Union (2020–2023), five universities, coordinated by the University of Antwerp (Belgium), constitute the knowledge network: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha (Spain), University Paris Nanterre (France), Universidad de Granada (Spain), and Ateneo de Manila University (Philippines).

The rationale is to create materials and train professionals in order to facilitate the integration of Philippine Literature in Spanish in the curricula of Higher Education institutions. For this purpose, the project plans several actions. One of the most outstanding is the creation of a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) on this subject. A free course that has been offered in January 2021. By now, most of us are used to “emergency” distant learning, but we would like this course to be just a start of a series of videos. On the contrary, we aim to improve interactivity in distant learning. Thus, we will be organizing some workshops on Philippine Literature in Spanish. These are mainly aimed at PhD students interested in the field, and at scholars specialized from related fields, so that they can include Philippine literature topics in their courses. As soon as our current pandemic work is left behind, we will organize teaching events in the campuses of the participating universities in Antwerp, Paris, Clermont- Ferrand, Madrid, and Manila.

Building upon the materials designed for the MOOC, DigiPhiLit will also publish an Introduction to Philippine Literature in Spanish, a volume that will cure from the expertise of some of the scholars involved in the project as well as from other specialists in the field at universities in Asia, Europe, and the United States. It has been a long while since a history of the Philippine literature in Spanish has been published. In 1993, Edgardo Tiamson published Filipino en castellano, a brief book published in Madrid by a diplomat of the Spanish Francist regime. Therefore, we view the companionship as a good opportunity to reassess the history of this literature, especially now that more documents are available for research. Some of these documents include such as the University of Santo Tomas, the University of Michigan, the Spanish National Library, and Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes. The availability of books comes hand-in-hand with the growing field of Digital Humanities, which provides new insights into texts through their digital analysis.

In this sense, DigiPhiLit will also publish recent and ongoing projects that use digital methodologies to preserve, provide visibility, and analyze Philippine Literature in Spanish. Previous efforts made from the University of Antwerp in partnership with the University of the Philippines in the project Digital Humanities for Filipinos (2017–2019) led to the creation of a platform for digitizing rare periodicals from the University of the Philippines Library and publishing them online in a freely accessible repository funded by the Flemish Agency for Academic Cooperation (VLIRUOS). The project also provides training in Digital Humanities to work with this repository. A connected initiative is FilipiLiterra, a database of Philippine literature in Spanish, and literature in the Philippines in the Spanish language.

The Philippines and beyond

Among the members of DigiPhiLit, there are outstanding academics in Philippine Studies, but also Literary scholars who specialize in areas such as Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The project was thus designed to avoid perpetuating the isolation of Philippine studies. This project highlights the connections of Philippine heritage with other literary and cultural productions in the global Hispanic world. The scope of DigiPhiLit is also global: it hopes to make Philippine literature available for a world audience, but it also provides methodologies and resources on how to take advantage of Digital Humanities for the teaching of literature in the Humanities. After the Education, Apart from concrete outputs on Philippine Literature, DigiPhiLit will also publish an open-source online guide about good practices in teaching literature in distance learning, several articles describing the pedagogy of setting up a MOOC, and a guide for the inclusion of Digital Humanities in the teaching of literature in Spanish.

We also need to take into account the evolution of the Philippines. As mentioned above, despite being a very valuable heritage, this corpus of works is no longer unique to the country. The association with Ateno de Manila will overcome this problem, as they will be responsible for translating the subtitles of the MOOC into both English and Filipino. In this way, the resource will be accessible for Filipinos interested in their own culture, even if they do not understand Spanish. There are also plans for translating some of the course through the use of automatic translation.

As part of its outreach objective, DigiPhiLit will organize a symposium on distance learning in higher education (December 2022) as well as two workshops on Digital Humanities in the teaching of literature. The first of these workshops took place between February 8–21 2021, offering six free workshops which target students from Spain, Latin America, and the United States covered a wide range of digital tools and applications to the study of literature: digital corpus creation, named entity tagging, text-mining, corpus linguistics applied to literary studies, network representation and topic modeling. More than 150 scholars registered for this first workshop. The presenters as well as the participants used a variety of literary sources, not just limited to Philippine literature in Spanish, but also participated in the MOOC and accessed outputs on Philippine Literature, DigiPhiLit intends to finally reverse the narrative, making Philippine studies in Spanish a truly globally upcoming field, but a consolidated study area that can set new models for the teaching of literature.

Fig. 1: José Rizal Monument, Rizal Park, Manila, Luzon, Philippines. Reproduced under a Creative Commons License courtesy of Gary Field on Flickr.

Notes
1. https://digiphilit.uantwerpen.be
6. DigiPhiLit at the University of Antwerp.
T

The ICAS Book Prize (IBP) was established in 2000 by the International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS). In addition to the English edition with which it all started, we included publications in Chinese, German, French, and Korean for the seventh edition and, for the eighth edition, a combined Spanish/Portuguese prize. The diversification of languages for the IBP is further extended by the addition of Japanese and Russian editions for this year’s edition. Thus, we have put together eight editions representing nine languages. If more languages will be added in the future, remains to be seen and is primarily dependent on a sizable output of Asian studies publications in a given language. With this multilingual approach, in cooperation with a host of partners and sponsors worldwide, ICAS is increasingly decolonizing the landscape of knowledge about and in Asia. With this approach in mind the ICAS Secretariat also founded the Asia-Asia Book Prize and organized two editions (2015/2016). The future editions will be coordinated by the Association for Asian Studies in Africa (A-Asia) in cooperation with the recently founded Centre for Asian Studies at the University of Ghana.

The IBP Partners

The following ten institutions in Asia, Latin America and Europe are the IBP Partners, covering the respective language editions. CATS, Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (German Edition); European Network on Asian Studies (French Edition), ICAS, IAS and the Asian Library at Leiden University (English Edition), Japan Foundation, IFES, Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences (Russian Edition), NCU, National Chengchi University (Chinese Edition); SEPHIS, The South-South Exchange Program for Research on the History of Development (Spanish/Portuguese Edition), Society for Hong Kong Studies (Hong Kong Article Prize Edition) and SUNAC, Seoul National University Asia Center (Korean Edition).

The secretariat of each edition, consisting of a secretary and an acting secretary, in cooperation with the IBP Secretariat at ICAS, puts together a Reading Committee consisting of scholars in diverse disciplines, focusing on various regions, working on and originating from different continents: a composition that reflects the transdisciplinary nature of knowledge. Each secretariat succeeded in finding enthusiastic members for their respective Reading Committees and has persuaded publishers and periodicals in the field of Asian studies to submit their publications. All their endeavours have resulted in nearly one thousand submissions (968) by more than a hundred publishers and periodicals worldwide fulfilling the promise stated when the prize was founded in 2003: “to create, by way of a global competition, an international focus for academic publications on Asia so as to increase their visibility worldwide, also beyond academic circles.”

The Prizes and The Accolades

Once the number of submitted books to a language edition reaches one hundred, two prizes are awarded, one in the Social Sciences and one in the Humanities. This is the case for the English Language Edition and the Dissertations Edition. Furthermore, in view of the large number of submissions we have, since the sixth edition (2012) put Accolades in place to highlight specific aspects of books and dissertations. Although these are only awarded to books and are not considered in the English Language Edition, other editions also started to award them or come up with their own Accolades. For example, the Chinese Language Edition (which doubled the number of submissions thanks to the work of its energetic Secretary Chau Haunan Liu) has put in place an Accolade for the Best Translation into the Chinese Language, and the Spanish/Portuguese Edition came up with the Outstanding Contribution to the Field of Asian Studies Accolade. It is not only the prize winners who are acknowledged but everyone who is on the longlists or shortlists or receives an accolade is a rightful winner. Roughly ten percent of all authors thus receive recognition and rightly so because we all know how much it takes to get published.

The Dissertations

ICAS prides itself to be the platform for young scholars and practitioners. Therefore from the first IBP onwards we put a lot of effort into the Dissertations’ Edition. The first time around, there was a record number of 176 dissertations submitted, including 99 in the Humanities and 77 in the Social Sciences. The predominance of Humanities submissions was notable. The two categories were almost equally represented at ICAS 11. At earlier ICAS, Social Science submissions predominated. Those submitting their dissertations came from 101 different universities in 21 countries, with a particularly strong component of American universities represented (38). This is indicative of a cultural difference, with particular merit awards being more commonly endowed by American institutions than those of most other countries, and their students thus being more accustomed to promoting their work in such manner. As for subjects, dissertations centred on China (51), on India (22), on Indonesia (18) and on Japan (17). But the classic model of a study of one region from within a single discipline is increasingly redundant, with a growing percentage of submissions being cross-disciplinary and/or concerned with cross-regional or cross-cultural issues. Thus enrols include such topics as studies of European millennials’ labour migration to Asian metropolises, or Discourses of English and Development at two Bangladesh rural madrasas. We are curious to see how these developments compare with dissertations written in other languages. We know there are networks, brain and craft parks, where ideas exchange without any restrictions.

There is a rapture on the lonely shore

Slowly it is sinking in that this will be my last IBP as General Secretary. I do that with a smile, convinced that my successor Martha van Hoek, who is IBP Acting Secretary from 2008 to 2013, will do so with much gusto. She will work in cooperation with the secretaries of the language editions and with Paraatra Paul, who has succeeded Jo Zwegers (many, many thanks Sonny!) as editor of The Newsletter and as Secretary of the IBP English Edition. A special thanks to Alex McKay who has been involved with the IBP almost from its inception and for the past four editions was the Chair of the Dissertations Reading Committee.

Needless to say I would like to thank all IBP Secretaries, Members of the Reading Committees, the authors who in the past have submitted their publications or dissertations, and the publishers who provided the copies of all these wonderful books. It will come as no surprise that I am eagerly looking forward to the tenth edition in 2023!
Emily Baum’s *The Invention of Madness* is a tour-de-force history of Western psychiatry in early twentieth-century China. Drawing on a rich and original source base, the book carefully delineates a number of transformations in mental health care between 1908, the year Peking University erected its first insane asylum, and 1937, when the Japanese invaded the city. The book rereads several historic milestones – from Riots and Nadir Shah’s invasion of Delhi in 1739 – to restore the wide variety of gestures and meanings, Uchiyama’s book impresses with its creativity and its historiographical innovation. It is a comprehensive study that integrates the relevance of non-Asian cultural contexts into the narrative of wartime meanings, Uchiyama’s book impresses with its creativity and its engagement with both scholarship and historical sources.

**IBP 2021 Humanities Winner**

**AUTHOR**

Stephanie Coo

**TITLE**

Clothing the Colony. Nineteenth Century Philippine Satirical Culture, 1820-1896

**PUBLISHER**

Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2019

Stephanie Coo’s *Clothing the Colony* is a beautiful book that studies the role of clothing in the relationship between the Spanish colonizers and the Philippine indigenas. It is a comprehensive study that includes all agents and aspects in this process, including children, workers, traders, race, class, gender, religion, economy. It is, most of all, a sociocultural history of clothing in the 19th century but it is also a history of the Philippines and of colonial life. Coo skilfully manages to explain how and why clothing the Colony in the Philippines was different from other colonial experiences, including Indian and Chinese clothing culture and trade. She locates the broad themes she covers in theoretical reflections, including that of "clothing as a social skin", and thereby provides insights that by far transcend the Philippine experience and the 19th century.

**IBP 2021 Humanities Shortlist**

**AUTHOR**

Emily Baum

**TITLE**

The Invention of Madness: State, Society, and the Insane in Modern China

**PUBLISHER**

The University of Chicago Press, 2018

Emily Baum’s *The Invention of Madness* is a tour-de-force history of Western psychiatry in early twentieth-century China. Drawing on a rich and original source base, the book carefully delineates a number of transformations in mental health care between 1908, the year Peking University erected its first insane asylum, and 1937, when the Japanese invaded the city. The Beijing Municipal Asylum’s detachment from the police force and reconfiguration under the auspices of Peking Union Medical College, Chinese families’ evolving strategies for managing their mentally ill relatives, the rise of a patient medicine industry that targeted the brain and nervous systems, the emergence of a neurasthenic identity embodied by the urban and nervous systems, the emergence of a medical pluralism, this gripping monograph shows how insanity served as the mirror reflection of those who sought a rational existence in the social and political turmoil of Republican China.

**AUTHOR**

Abhishek Kalicker

**TITLE**

The King and the People: Sovereignty and Popular Politics in Mughal Delhi

**PUBLISHER**

Oxford University Press, 2020

Abhishek Kalicker’s *The King and the People* is a remarkable study of how the masses of the urban Mughal imperium expressed their political agency through the language of Islamic practices. By mining a diverse range of Persianate sources, it transcends normative binary constructs in historiography, such as the oppositions between politics and religion, the sacred and the secular, elite hegemony and popular sovereignty, and economic rationality and cultural aspiration. This masterful urban history confirms the centrality of Delhil in early modern global history, especially as viewed through the lens of the city’s denizens who mobilized, challenged, but also defended the king’s authority in ordinary struggles. Along the way, the book rereads several historic episodes – including the 1729 Shoemakers’ Riots and Nahid Shah’s invasion of Delhi in 1739 – to restore the wide variety of gestures that marked the transgressive assertion of the lowest members of society in determinant political affairs.

**AUTHOR**

Kama Maclean

**TITLE**

British India, White Australia: Overseas Indians, Intercolonial Relations and the Empire

**PUBLISHER**

NewSouth Publishing, 2020

Kama Maclean’s *British India, White Australia* provides a unique and fascinating perspective on the relationship between the British empire, Australia and India. It takes a people-centred approach to explore and explain the complex history of Australia’s place in the negotiation of identity and independence from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. Focusing on racial issues, the author manages to write a history of Australia that goes far beyond a political history; it is a global, imperial, and people’s history and it also helps to understand today’s problems related to Whiteness, imperial nostalgia, and colonial-imperial relationship. The book is also a wonderful example of how Asian history can and maybe should be written in a way that integrates the relevance of non-Asian countries, empires, and people without decentering Asia.

**AUTHOR**

Benjamin Uchiyama

**TITLE**

Japan’s Carnival War: Mass Culture on the Home Front, 1937-1945

**PUBLISHER**

Cambridge University Press, 2020

Benjamin Uchiyama’s *Japan’s Carnival War* is a fascinating cultural history that changes the way we have come to understand Japan’s home front during World War Two. Through the lens of five protagonists, we gain new insights into Japan’s total war and learn that entertainment and consumption played an important role in mobilizing the people. The reporter, the munitions worker, the soldier, the movie star, and the youth aviator each disrupted the apparatus of wartime state repression and created new visions of pleasure and desire that connected Japanese consumer-subjects to trans-national trends of hedonism. Offering refreshing insights concerning power, identity, and the public mediation of wartime meanings, Uchiyama’s book impresses with its creativity and its engagement with both scholarship and historical sources.
It is an outstanding production for both specialists and a broader audience, impressing by the combination of accessible texts and fascinating paintings, 50 art works and clippings from newspapers and journals, this volume offers a comprehensive overview of the latest research trends, paradigms, and neutrality, this work, through close attention to the DMZ was not a static, regulated space of context of military conflict. Arguing that the story of the conflict and “race”. In so doing, it complicates the Western categories of “nation”, “ethnicity” and “race”. In so doing, it complicates the Western categories of “nation”, “ethnicity” and “race”. It persuasively demonstrates the rise of a people, and investigates how these categories became the part of the basis for modern ethnicization, priming them to understand modernity’s anticipation at the frantiers of political power.

**Specialist Publication Accolade**

**AUTHOR** Matthew W. King  
**TITLE** Ocean of Milk, Ocean of Blood: A Mongolian Monk in the Ruins of the Qing Empire  
**PUBLISHER** Columbia University Press, 2019

Exploring the intellectual legacy of the Mongolian monk Zava Damdin, *Ocean of Milk, Ocean of Blood* is an erudite study of an alternative historical universe grounded not in conventional categories of imperialism, revolution, and nationalism, but in the role of Buddhist monasticism in exceeding modernity’s anticipation at the frantiers of political power.

**Teaching Tool Accolade**

**AUTHOR** Timothy Brook, Michael van Walt, Miek Boltjes (eds)  
**TITLE** Sacred Mandates: Asian International Relations since Chinggkh Khan  
**PUBLISHER** The University of Chicago Press, 2018

Sacred Mandates offers a new framework for our understanding of the impact and legacies of the history of international relations in Inner and East Asia. Its breadth and accessibility make the book an outstanding additional to any international relations course syllabus.

**Ground-Breaking Subject Matter Accolade**

**AUTHOR** Michael Faler  
**TITLE** Angkor Wat: A Transcultural History of Heritage (2 vols)  
**PUBLISHER** De Gruyter, 2019

Angkor Wat is a multi-volume study of the modern history of this 12th-century temple complex from a transcultural and heritage-making perspective. This monumental study traces the transformation of Angkor Wat’s status from a site of French colonial heritage to a global symbol of Cambodian nationalism.

**Edited Volume Accolade**

**AUTHOR** Elizabeth Childs-Johnson (ed)  
**TITLE** The Oxford Handbook of Early China  
**PUBLISHER** Oxford University Press, 2020

Authoritative and multidisciplinary in scope, this landmark volume offers a comprehensive overview of the latest research trends, paradigms, and approaches in the study of early China, from the Neolithic era to the Warring States period.

**Best Art Publication**

**AUTHOR** Jelena Stojkovic  
**TITLE** Impossible Avant-Garde  
**PUBLISHER** Routledge / Taylor & Francis

Studying the surrealist inspiration to photography in Japan in the 1930s, Jelena Stojkovic’s excellently researched book adds a new perspective not only to the history of photography but also to Japanese history. Offering original analyses and reproductions of more than 50 art works and clippings from newspapers and journals, this volume is an outstanding art publication.

**Specialist Accolade**

**AUTHOR** Andrea Lorena Gutierrez  
**TITLE** A Gene of Its Own: A History of Pókaldasta and Other Culinary Writing of Early India  
**PUBLISHER** University of Texas at Austin, 2020

This dissertation delineates the history of recipe writing in South Asia through traditional treatises on cooking. It dispenses Pókaldasta from medical traditions, offers a brilliant technical analysis of these works and expands our understanding of courtly cultures in culinary development.

**Dissertation Prize 2021**

**AUTHOR** Hyoek Heon Kang  
**TITLE** Crafting Knowledge: Artisan, Officer, and the Culture of Making in Choson Korea, 1392-1910  
**PUBLISHER** Harvard University, 2020

This work examines craft knowledge as a site for knowledge-making, particularly in technology and science. It proposes that before the factory, manufactories taught craft by replicating goods; traces how artisan knowledge rippled out; and follows the creation and life of military objects made by artisans, showing the connections between rate learning and creativity, science and artisanship through the lens of vernacular science.

**IBP 2021 Dissertations in the Humanities Shortlist**

**AUTHOR** Kathleen Cruz Gutierrez  
**TITLE** The Region of Imperial Strategy: Regina García, Sebastián Vidal, Mary Chom and the Consolidation of International Botany in the Philippines  
**PUBLISHER** University of California-Berkeley, 2020

This dissertation traces the history of botany in the Philippines under two successive colonial regimes. Interrogating how Spain and the US asserted imperial dominance on a global stage, it shows that “scientific regionalism” preceded the political regionalism of World War 2 and that for from being apolitical, botany consolidated empires, and mapped a floristic region before a geo-military Southeast Asia.

**AUTHOR** Matthew Reeder  
**TITLE** Catoptrical Kingdoms: Innovations in Ethnic Labeling and Visions of Community States in Early Modern Japan  
**PUBLISHER** Cornell University, 2019

Using a variety of previously unstudied primary sources, Reeder uncovers early modern Japanese innovations on how to categorize people, and investigates how these categories became the part of the basis for modern ethnicization, priming them to understand modernity’s anticipation at the frantiers of political power.

**AUTHOR** Young Il Seo  
**TITLE** Constructing Frontier Villages: Human Habitation in the South Korean Borderlands after the Korean War  
**PUBLISHER** University of Cambridge, 2019

This dissertation examines the villages at the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea, which proved fertile ground to rethink concepts of borderlands in the context of military conflict. Arguing that the DMZ was not a static, regulated space of neutrality, this work, through close attention to architecture and spatiality, demonstrates dynamism on multiple fronts, especially in the transformation of space.

**AUTHOR** Suderv J. Smith  
**TITLE** Business Households, Financial Capital, and Public Authority in India, 1650-1818  
**PUBLISHER** University of Pennsylvania, 2018

This dissertation sheds light on Mughal histories using vernacular sources in Persian, Gujarati, Marathi and Sanskrit to write against the conventional narrative of Mughal decline in the long eighteenth century. It persuasively demonstrates the rise of a finance sector led by “business households,” on whom the Mughal court became reliant to finance the military conflict.

**AUTHOR** Jelena Stojkovic  
**TITLE** Impossible Avant-Garde  
**PUBLISHER** Routledge / Taylor & Francis

Studying the surrealist inspiration to photography in Japan in the 1930s, Jelena Stojkovic’s excellently researched book adds a new perspective not only to the history of photography but also to Japanese history. Offering original analyses and reproductions of more than 50 art works and clippings from newspapers and journals, this volume is an outstanding art publication.

**IBP 2021 Accolades for Dissertations in the Humanities**

**Chairman’s Accolade**

**AUTHOR** J. Eva Mehary  
**TITLE** Politics of the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism and Diplomacy in Afghanistan (1979–2001)  
**PUBLISHER** University of Cambridge, 2020

This dissertation examines the historical relationship between archaeology and nationalism in Afghanistan’s political sphere. It demonstrates how nationalist agendas shaped archaeology there, and how archaeology informed elite Afghan nationalist agendas. It is an important record and analysis of the archaeological discipline and its impact on modern Afghanistan.

**Specialist Accolade**

**AUTHOR** Astrid Moller Olsen  
**TITLE** Seven Senses of the City: Urban Spacetime and Sensory Memory in Contemporary Sinophone Fiction  
**PUBLISHER** Lund University, 2020

This dissertation investigates the narrative mechanisms and imagery that Sinophone fiction uses to narrate complex human experiences that were rooted in space, time and memory. It breaks new ground in engaging with sensory paradigms to show how this fiction creates civic histories.

**Most Accessible and Captivating Dissertation for the Non-Specialist Reader Accolade**

**AUTHOR** Jack Neubauer  
**TITLE** Adopted by the Women of China and the Rise of Global Intimacy  
**PUBLISHER** Columbia University, 2019

Neubauer examines the “intimate turn” in global humanism and China’s role in this development. Through an engaging narrative centered on “transnational adoptions” of Chinese children, it reveals the material and affective exchanges that went into building personal relationships in an international context.
of small things, like seeds, their circulation
capitalism through a nuanced ethnography
farmers suicide, sustainability, and cotton
cotton through the lens of farmers' every-day
timely, relevant and well-written book on
mass protests, Andrew Flachs offers us a
in Indian agriculture, provoking debate and
and alternative agriculture create possibilities
cotton farmers to ask how biotechnology
modified, or organic crops. This remarkable
motivate farmers to grow hybrid, genetically
in local markets, and the decisions that
expectations, gender roles and agency in the
stereotypes that position economic benefit,
contribution to studies on intimacy, migration,
in north-east Thailand, this book offers a real
European men
the aspirations of Thai women married to
flavours, and their families in north-east Thailand, this book offers a real
consequences of people collocated and analysed
over decades of patient, passionate and
medicinal scholarship. Sudipta Sen’s book
places the Ganges at the centre as a subject
and lived relationships of people, waters, and
interwoven history of the river Ganges that
includes mythology, ecology, literary texts
and inoculation campaigns. Through an excellent anthropology of zoonosis from an
interspecies perspective, Nadal argues for a One World One Health concept that centres
and inoculation campaigns. Through an excellent anthropology of zoonosis from an
interspecies perspective, Nadal argues for a One World One Health concept that centres
and discrimination and that there are
deeper implications in the process of (host and home) state formation itself.

This powerful book is the result of participative, multispecies, and multisited
ethnography. Following cows, vaccinating dogs, interviewing slum children,
Nadal presents heart-breaking stories and a compelling study of a zoonotic
disease. This eye-opening book on the implications of rabies, its financial and human
costs, and the social and cultural reasons that make it a deadly and neglected disease, is particularly illuminating at a time when humanity is grappling with the Covid pandemic
and inoculation campaigns. Through an excellent anthropology of zoonosis from an
interspecies perspective, Nadal argues for a One World One Health concept that centres
and discrimination and that there are
deeper implications in the process of (host and home) state formation itself.

In view of the recent neoliberal changes in Indian agriculture, provoking debate and
mass protests, Andrew Flachs offers us a
 timely, relevant and well-written book on
cotton through the lens of farmers’ everyday
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This beautifully written study of politically engaged visual artists explores the history of art and politics in Calcutta, informing the local while resonating transnationally. A groundbreaking call to take a fascinating phase of the history of arts and politics in Calcutta, informing the everyday of Malaysian transgender men, navigating religious negotiations and embodied. Goh's chapters bring us into the fine grain of transient acts of speech. Her nuanced monograph is a product of long-term critical fieldwork, offering explorative and comprehensive anthropology of gangster politicians and violent criminality with analytical depth and ethnographic detail through and beyond medical transitioning as becoming, and down to state failure. In this excellent account, Goh takes the time to examine 'trans-colonial' male domestic labour. This dissertation relates poignant ethnographic stories of men who engage in volunteerism as a form of gendered, ethical self-making in a time of professional precariousness in China. The dissertation is original in providing a window into China's ongoing seismic shifts in economics and employment through people's unpaid labor and ethical engagements. This is a well-researched dissertation, which is theoretically articulated at the intersection of governmentality and an anthropological reading of science and technology. It explores the contexts in the technical implementation of the National Food Security Act, through a rich ethnography of the bureaucratically labyrinthine of the ration card system in different urban contexts of India. It is a rigorous exposition of the shortcomings of the commodity chain's production calculus and the labyrinths of the ration card system in different urban contexts of India. This is a thoughtful reading of thematics of the concept. This dissertation brings together machine learning with fascinating expert interviews to investigate the underlying motivations for China to designate autonomous ethnic regions. Finding that questions of particularization and center-periphery arrangements are more decisive than demands by ethnic minorities, it deepens our understanding of Chinese ethnic policy and suggests new directions for the study of ethnic management and authoritarianism beyond China. This dissertation is a thoughtful reading of thematics of the concept. This dissertation is a thoughtful reading of thematics of the concept. This dissertation is a thoughtful reading of thematics of the concept. This is a well-researched dissertation, which is theoretically articulated at the intersection of governmentality and an anthropological reading of science and technology. It explores the contexts in the technical implementation of the National Food Security Act, through a rich ethnography of the bureaucratically labyrinthine of the ration card system in different urban contexts of India. This dissertation is a thoughtful reading of thematics of the concept. This dissertation is a thoughtful reading of thematics of the concept.
History is usually the story of the men in the lime-light, not those in the shadows. The strength of the book lies in the art of introducing a seemingly lesser and long-forgotten historical figure. By telling the story of Gu Mengyu, a respected voice differed from the mainstream ideology of KMT led by Chiang Kai-shek, Huang takes the reader all the way back to Republican China, shining a light on the political scene, the internal dynamics of the KMT in the late 1920s and 30s, but also on the workings of academia and the professional world. By employing an extraordinarily wide range of sources such as public intellectuals, the author paints a rich picture of Republican China, shining a light on the political scene, the internal dynamics of the KMT in the late 1920s and 30s, but also on the workings of academia and the professional world.

The book fills a void in the historiography of Taiwanese cinema by telling the story of one sector of the Taiwanese film industry, reconstructed through intensive archival research and in-depth interviews. This book sheds a light on how political pressures in the post-war era impacted on local culture and how technical challenges influenced local filmmaking in particular. Not dwelling unduly on theory, the book’s witty and reader-friendly style throws light on a revealing aspect of Taiwan’s post-war cultural history while broadening its perspective to encompass political and economic transformations throughout East Asia as a whole, while nevertheless avoiding the pitfalls of political determinism. The book’s fluent style is both an inspiration and a rigorous attitude, Liu expounds the intricate relationship between diseases, individual groups, policies, and political systems. Under the two axes of time and topic, the book discusses the biopolitical representation in public health and epidemic prevention, as well as the personal and collective destiny under this power. Today our world is under the public health emergency of COVID pandemic, the global political and economic system is experimenting various social controls to combat the epidemic for rebuilding a “normal society.” The reflection and implication of this book on the collective interests and individual rights and interests are specially inspiring for us to contemplate.
Eudiste, extremely well documented and very well written, Aurelle Candier’s book about Burma in the nineteenth century is a major contribution to the knowledge of South East Asia political history. Perfectly constructed, the text explores this unique moment in the 19th century when part of Burma was still an independent kingdom while the other was annexed by the British Empire. Working with archives and sources in Burmese and English, the author traces this period not from a Eurocentric point of view, as too often, but by putting into perspective the vernacular and western sources. Shedding light on this period of political transition which will nourish the Burmese conception of political reform, this monograph is an essential source for understanding the current political and societal movements in Burma, but also in the region.

Corral’s book aims to decolonialize the study of a musical genre (or non-genre) that was built up in Japan from the 1990s onwards: Japanese noise music, or ‘Japanese’. This genre is a continuation of the explorations that began in the West and in Japan in the 1960s and 1970s, which sought a form of rupture, sometimes violent, with the ‘commercial’ or ‘mainstream’ musical genres. Characterized by different forms of extremism and ostensibly subversive, the Japanese phenomenon is interesting because of the contradictions at the heart of its creation, between a desire to break with the existing local scene and the affirmation of an autonomy from Western styles, a vision that is in turn nurtured by international representations and styles, a vision that is in turn nurtured by international representations and styles, a vision that is in turn nurtured by international representations and styles.

Gwennalla Gaëffric signs a fascinating work which describes the link between ecology and literature based on the work of Taiwanese writer Wu Ming Yi. Organized around six main themes – nature, waters, terroirs, species, catastrophes and ecotopias – the study is based on the theories of ecocriticism and on a deep knowledge of Taiwanese language and literature. The book is serious, well documented and provides a very good bibliography. The choice of having the translated version and the original version appear for each quotation is quite relevant since it allows Chinese-speaking readers to read at two levels. Beyond the importance of this book to enhance our knowledge of Taiwanese literature, this monograph on an author engaged in preservation of nature highlights a facet of the Taiwanese society facing the ecological emergency.

It is a remarkably original and innovative work, published by the Belgian publisher Zones Sensibles. Reworked from Marchina’s dissertation, it offers an analysis of the occupation and conception of space by Mongolian herdsmen based on a long-term ethnography and geographical analysis of nomadic routes, through diagrams and precise maps, some of which were made by GPS sensors attached to animals. The book offers all the qualities of a scholarly work but in an accessible format for a larger audience, and it is beautifully illustrated by the author’s photographs.

This book is also on the shortlist.
Author: Carles Prado-Fonts  
Title: Regresar a China / Returning to China  
Publisher: Editorial Trotta, 2019  

Returning to China is a fascinating book, produced by a senior researcher and gifted writer. Carlos Prado-Fonts portrays the experience of the return of Chinese intellectuals who left their country for studying in Europe, the United States and Japan in the first half of the 20th century. Prado-Fonts focuses on the trajectory of three renowned writers, Lu Xun (1881-1936), Lao She (1899-1966) and Qian Zhongshu (1910-1998), to address a much broader social, cultural and political context. This captivating work, endowed with a rich and sensitive narrative, does not avoid confronting clichés about China. The book articulates an analysis of macro processes and individual trajectories, observing the dilemmas of a society in vertiginous transformation of its political system, while observing individual trajectories of thousands of returned intellectuals, divided between different cultures and national experiences.

Author: Bruna Soalheiro  
Title: Viagem da Cruz ao Teto do Mundo: Encontros culturais e diálogo inter-religioso nas missões da Companhia de Jesus na Índia e no Tibete (séculos XVI a XVIII) / The travels of the Cross to the roof of the world: Cultural Encounters and Interreligious Dialogue in the Missions of the Society of Jesus in India and Tibet (16th-18th centuries)  
Publisher: Paco Editorial, 2018  

The product of serious and dedicated research, on the expansion of Christianity in a region with a shortage of academic analysis: the history of the connections between South Asia, the plateau of Asia and Central Asia. Bruna Soalheiro’s careful research on the Jesuit presence in India between the 16th and 18th centuries, focuses on the missions to the Mogul court (1579), and that to the Tibet (started in 1624), analyzing writings published and circulated by the Society of Jesus, as well as on letters and notebooks written by missionaries. Soalheiro explores reports on the complex dynamics of cultural transfers, ways of circulating ideas and political disputes that go beyond strictly religious readings and help “de-clerstiting” the history of religious orders. The book dialogues with a global, connected history that does not lose sight of the geopolitical dimension of religious missions, which need to be analyzed in the face of disputes with other religions present in the region, such as Buddhism and Islam. Another merit of this work is to show that even if the conversion intentions were not very successful with the Mogul court and in Tibet, the missions certainly left a mark in the political and cultural history of these spaces, ending up generating new fields of possibilities in religious terms and politicians.
The scholarship of Portuguese- or Spanish-speaking countries’ is not normally considered when we search for as specialists in the Middle East, near Asia or central Asia. This impressive and very detailed study conducted by Moises Garduño shows the accumulated scholarship in Latin America concerning these regions. The investigation deals with archival sources related to the contemporary history of Iran and the engagement of the Iran’s People’s Fighters (Moyahedin-e Jalq-e Iran) for decades. The scholarship of Portuguese- or Spanish-speaking countries’ is not normally considered when we search for as specialists in the Middle East, near Asia or central Asia. This impressive and very detailed study conducted by Moises Garduño shows the accumulated scholarship in Latin America concerning these regions. The investigation deals with archival sources related to the contemporary history of Iran and the engagement of the Iran’s People’s Fighters (Moyahedin-e Jalq-e Iran) for decades.

Paulina Machuca brings an important contribution to the study of Asia in Spanish language, presenting the Philippines as a space historically marked by the crossing of worlds and the circulation of cultures. In addition to emphasizing the archipelago’s connections with other territories in the Indian and Pacific Ocean over five centuries, the book takes an innovative look at the history of relations between the Philippines and Mexico. One of her main contributions is to propose a history of the Philippines that transcends the hegemonic national historiographical narratives essentially centered on the Manila region. Machuca highlights regions marginalized by the official historical narrative, such as the Muslim Mindanao, as well as dedicating itself to the intertwined relations between the islands of the vast Philippine archipelago. The work also stands out for its critical eye in relation to Spanish and American historiographies, which are still dominant, essentially based on colonial archives and reproducing stereotypes inherited from that period.

Daniel Sastre’s work concentrates on the role of the State in the construction of aesthetics, and of a consumption of the aesthetics of art in Japan in the second half of the 19th century. Although the connection between art and nation has been extensively explored over the past few decades for the case of Japan, Sastre’s work brings fresh innovations to the debate. The book shows that writings on aesthetics and historical-artistic narratives, anticipate the creation of museums, the consolidation of an artistic criticism and the formalization of the field of history of art in a vast geography of the Far East.

This book provides a historical synthesis of yoga as a cultural, philosophical and political practice. The questions that motivate the book are compelling: what is yoga? A philosophy, a religion, a physical exercise, a lifestyle? More than proposing an answer to these dilemmas, the authors intend to retrace a long and diverse history of yoga, always attentive to its transformations and impacts in different historical and social contexts. Its merit is to offer a holistic but accessible view of yoga, while challenging exotic or praxializing views of an old practice that has gained global contours and, consequently, new meanings. It is an important reading to introduce readers interested in a complex history, crossed by disputes of meaning, metamorphoses and full of symbolism.

This is the last book by one of the greatest Portuguese intellectuals, before his death. In this work, António Manuel Hespanha (1945-2019) opens up new research agendas, proposes new concepts and renew the historiographical debate about the Portuguese empire, paying special attention to subjects from communities of mixed identities that figure in images that circulate between the 16th and 19th centuries and between places as distant as Guinea, Angola or Morocco, constituting a vast empire in territorial and identity terms. Through concepts such as the empire of shadows and the informal empire, the detailed description of these communities on different continents, and the use of diverse demographic and socio-cultural data, Hespanha analyzes mechanisms of governance operating in these territories and discusses notions of identity in imperial contexts.
Yuka Shimooka’s work on Taiwanese author Lingzhi Huang and his prevailing work in Japanese in Taiwan brilliantly combine the way of authorship and postcolonial history in Taiwan. This work is also a convincing example on how one language, Japanese in this case, can present a potential to embrace various worlds and values without belonging to its own nation, nationality, ethnicity or culture. Long-running interview with Lingzhi Huang adds a rather exploratory dimension for the books’ overall compilation. Combining the art of being an author in Japanese out of Japan and response of the Taiwanese as well as the Japanese societies to this intercultural and linguistic experience provide a valuable and informing work for the Japanese scholarship.
The Newsletter

The Newsletter focuses on the interplay of (literary) narrative and (religious) doctrine, an approach seriously. Rüsch’s in-depth analysis of hagiographies from the fifteenth to the twentieth interaction and challenges to Sino-Russian relations. The most important issue is the forms and Russia as two forces in the system of Eurasian regional governance, as well as on strategic Economic Union in Chinese political science. The second part of the book focuses on China Russia in the light of the alternation of integration and disintegration cycles and the Eurasian China and the integration potential of the Silk Road Economic Belt for Central Asia. The book provides an in-depth account of the atrocities at the hands of US and South Vietnamese soldiers during the Vietnam war. In an extraordinarily vivid account, Marcel Berni relentlessly reveals the ‘communist’ prisoners’ experience of violence, and describes the life in prison, harassment and torture. This book stands out not only for its detailed and dense descriptions, but also for its thorough analysis of the ways in which violence and the enactment of power and control intersect. It also provides insights into how acts of violence are justified and normalised, how they unfold along the hierarchies within the military and how challenging not only the prosecution but also the reappraisal of these traumatising experiences continues to be.

Rüsch develops a methodology for analysing hagiographies that encompasses rhetorical strategies, paratexts, and narratological aspects. He also situates ‘the holy’ as an object of investigation in a way that is not theological but takes the inner religious logic of this concept seriously. Rüsch’s in-depth analysis of hagiographies from the fifteenth to the twentieth century focuses on the interplay of (literary) narrative and (religious) doctrine, an approach that promises to be fruitful for other regions and epochs.

The research contains a detailed description of the main stages and contemporary legal culture as well as a legal consciousness. The chapters of the book examine the influence of tradition on China and Russian national innovation systems (NIS) in Asia; peculiarities of NIS development in the context of growing uncertainty in the world economy; successful experience in the formation of NIS in Asia; and the increasing role of ASEAN in the world economy and politics, increasing rivalry between the United States, China, Japan, and India for influence in the region and the exploitation of its resources. The book’s main content is devoted to the foreign policy philosophy of China and the integration potential of the Silk Road Economic Belt for Central Asia. The book discusses the objective prerequisites of integration processes, as well as the Eurasian future of Russia in the light of the alternation of integration and disintegration cycles and the Eurasian Economic Union in Chinese political science. The second part of the book focuses on Germany and China; and Russia as two forces in the system of Eurasian regional governance, as well as on strategic interaction and challenges to Sino-Russian relations. The most important issue is the forms and prospects of interaction between Russia and China in different formats.

This is the first comprehensive book in Russian dedicated to the modern Chinese legal system. The book represents an in-depth study of the legal system of modern China through an analysis of the legislation, ancient (traditional) law, classical and contemporary legal culture as well as a legal consciousness. The research contains a detailed description of the main stages and contemporary legal culture as well as a legal consciousness. The chapters of the book examine the influence of tradition on China and Russia as two forces in the system of Eurasian regional governance, as well as on strategic interaction and challenges to Sino-Russian relations. The most important issue is the forms and prospects of interaction between Russia and China in different formats.

The book analyzes the impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on the global political and economic situation and also evaluates this initiative from the point of view of China’s national security. The book’s research is to draw up a strategic “road map” through which Armenia can be involved in the Chinese political and economic project, promoting political, military-technical, financial, and economic cooperation between China and Armenia. The book also discusses the possibility of using the Armenian community of China as a factor of Armenian “soft power” within the framework of the “Belt and Road” Initiative.

The book examines the theoretical foundations of the formation and functioning of national innovation systems (NIS) in Asia; peculiarities of NIS development in the context of growing uncertainty of the world economy; successful experience in the formation of NIS in foreign countries (Kazakhstan, China, South Africa), in which the period for the formation of their own innovative potential was comparatively shorter than the experience of the leading Western powers.
The article also provides opinions of the masses while preventing the government who tend to focus overly on the history generally neglected by historians of modernization. It explores in detail how the Chinese state has utilized the cultural identity of native-place associations to build up a pro-China network in Hong Kong, a phenomenon of which many people only know from the shock of 1982–1984, and rigorously argued article clearly demonstrates the rapid expansion of native-place associations and their cultural and political functions in the Hong Kong SAR, a phenomenon of which many people only have an impressionistic understanding at best. It explores in detail how the Chinese state has utilized the cultural identity of native-place associations to build up a pro-China network in Hong Kong. The findings fill an important gap in our understanding of brokerage politics under Chinese rule.

Sponsor of the IBP 2021 Hong Kong Article Prize: Society for Hong Kong Studies

Social Sciences Shortlist


Leka Lui & Sara Curran, 2020, “I wish I were a plumber!”, Transnational class reconstitutions across migrant experiences among Hong Kong’s professionals and managers”, Current Sociology 68(7):872-890.


Travis SK Kong, 2019, “Transnational queer sociological analysis of sexual identity and civic-political activism in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China”, British Journal of Sociology 70(3):1900-1925.

The author challenges squarely the traditional interpretation that explains the Meiji Revolution as a result of the modernist shock of the Western world prepared for the modernity of the Asian Age and the Meiji Revolution. Unlike Japan or China, the scholarly Confucian vision of samurai was the key driver of the Meiji Revolution. The book analyzes the unique features of the Meiji government of the “scholarly network” of public opinions including sending letters to illustrate the ‘political culture of the literati’. The author looked beyond the abstract and linear historical perspective and which other Japanese studies of the modernization of East Asia. This monograph is a monumental achievement of Korea’s tradition of studies in Asian history.

This book is an exceptional empirical study that thoroughly explains the structural mode of the neoliberal financial system that instigates protest in Korea. The author illuminates how the protest industry exceeds the scale of the private economic trade of prostitutes and becomes rationalized and legalized in the neoliberal financial system. The book boasts a practical research objective that allowed successful observation and analysis, as well as wide theoretical knowledge, thoughtful interviews, detailed narratives, and the informational strength that proved the financial economy of protest. It overcomes the limitations of the feminist perspective that criticizes the industry within the frameworks of human rights and ethics. Instead, this book offers a new perspective to reconfigure the prostitution problem as a problem of women in the era of financial capitalism.
In a recently published article, paper, and chemical manufacturing to away from polluting industries like cement, use of pesticides and fertilisers, farming bans drinking water of a high enough standard, car manufacturing base), urban domestic Transfer Project,” Technopolitics of China’s South-North Water industrial use.

northern China, mostly for urban and marginalised part of central China. The consume clean water from an economically massive South-North Water Transfer scheme, targets. The Danjiangkou region has suffered the Danjiangkou Dam height was raised, and then in pursuit of strict water quality impacts. With the inter-basin transfer scheme is reshaping local Hydropolitics in China

For the past three years, as part of an Australian Research Council grant “The Technopolitics of China’s South-North Water Transfer Project,” I have been studying the impacts of the South-North Water Transfer Project on the Danjiangkou region. With colleagues from the University of Melbourne, Nanjing’s Hehai University and Wuhan’s Changjiang Water Resources Protection Institute, I visited the Danjiangkou Reservoir itself (the source of the scheme’s Middle Route), surrounding counties in Henan Province, and upstream counties in Shaanxi Province to interview farmers and officials and to better understand how this massive inter-basin transfer scheme is reshaping local economies, livelihoods, and environments.

The counties that surround the reservoir, including Xichuan County in Henan Province, have experienced sustained impacts since the early 2000s; first in the need to resettle people and industries in advance of inundation as the Danjiangkou Dam height was raised, and then in pursuit of strict water quality targets. The Danjiangkou region has suffered entrenched problems of water pollution, from industrial runoff (nearby Shiyan City has since Mao’s Third Front been a major car manufacturing base), urban domestic runoff, and agricultural runoff. To achieve drinking water of a high enough standard, there are now strict controls in place for the use of pesticides and fertilisers, farming bans in the Reservoir’s “fluctuation zone”, as well as projects to improve wastewater treatment in towns and to restructure local economies away from polluting industries like cement, paper, and chemical manufacturing to tourism and organic agricultural production.

In a recently published article, my co-author and I begin to document some of these processes and the narratives of sacrifice and opportunity that go with them. With billions of RMB in lost GDP, the responsibility of supplying far-away cities with high quality water has clearly had a huge economic impact on what are quite poor counties in central China. Their successful transformation to “green” development paths is yet to be seen. In 2019 we began to examine how this prioritisation of water quality is impacting people’s livelihoods in Xichuan County. We travelled to several villages that had lost considerable farmland to inundation and where many residents had been resettled to towns in and beyond the county. Our interviews suggest that local smallholders are being squeezed by two powerful forces. The first is government farming bans on what used to be people’s contracted farmland (this highly fertile land is exposed for about half of the year when the Reservoir’s levels are low), instructions to pursue organic farming instead of using synthetic pesticides and fertilisers, forceful encouragement to plant cash crops instead of corn and wheat, and a ban on livestock close to the Reservoir. In an area where families’ landholdings were already very small and have been further constrained by inundation, these directives are coalescing to undermine viable smallholder livelihoods and push people to rely on off-farm wage employment. The second force is the preferential treatment given to agribusinesses by local government. Convinced that small farmers are polluting and “backward”, local authorities have mediated large-scale land transfers to outside enterprises to establish specialised, “organic” farms. In future these farms will not just produce fruit, but are also designed to attract city dwellers to pick, stay in rural guesthouses, and enjoy the local scenery. Where small farmers fit in this new rural future is unclear.

Measured in environmental terms, the interventions at the Danjiangkou Reservoir have been an outstanding success. Water quality in the Reservoir and its tributaries now consistently ranks as Grade I or Grade II, ensuring that the residents of Beijing and Tianjin are consuming water of the highest quality. Factories have mostly been closed, rubbish is regularly swept from the Reservoir’s quality. Factories have mostly been closed, rubbish is regularly swept from the Reservoir’s surface, intensive water quality monitoring is conducted, pollution spills are jumped on, and extensive reforestation is taking place to both beautify the local area and to filter the water flowing into the Reservoir. But much like earlier environmental projects of the Chinese state, the South-North Water Transfer Project is having long-lasting and deeply unequal environmental and socio-economic impacts.

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The Asia Institute The Asia Institute is The University of Melbourne’s key centre for studies in Asian languages, cultures and societies. Asia Institute academic staff have an array of research interests and specialisations, and strive to provide leadership in the study of the intellectual, legal, politico-economic, cultural and religious traditions and transformations of Asia and the Islamic world. The Institute is committed to community engagement and offers a dynamic program of academic and community-focused events and cultural exchanges that aim to promote dialogue and debate.

The hydropolitics of China’s latest mega water project

Sarah Rogers

Since 2019, the drinking water supply of Beijing and Tianjin has come almost exclusively from the Danjiangkou Reservoir 100km away. Thanks to the massive South-North Water Transfer scheme, which aims to provide Beijing’s and Tianjin’s residents with high-quality drinking water, the region’s GDP is expected to increase by $20 billion by 2020. The project has also been controversial, with farmers in the Danjiangkou region losing a significant amount of land to the construction of the reservoir. This has led to increased migration from rural areas to urban areas, particularly in Henan Province, where the Danjiangkou Reservoir is located.

In 2019, the Danjiangkou Reservoir was completed, and the project has since been hailed as a success. However, the project has also led to increased pollution in the Danjiangkou region, with factories being relocated to other areas in Henan Province.

The project has also impacted local communities, with many farmers losing their land and having to find new sources of income. In addition, the project has led to increased migration from rural areas to urban areas, particularly in Henan Province, where the Danjiangkou Reservoir is located.

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The Chinese dam industry goes out
Xiao Han

China has built more than 23,000 dams at home, with the country’s installed hydropower capacity reaching 417 gigawatts in 2019. The most famous Chinese dam companies include Sinohydro, Gezhouba, and the Three Gorges Corporation. Since the turn of the century, these companies have been actively building large dams and other kinds of water-engineering projects in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. I will briefly characterize the Chinese dam industry and its role in the possible “resurgence” of concrete-heavy forms of water management across the world.2

Chinese dam companies are mostly state-owned enterprises (SOEs), corporatized from former government-affiliated organizations. Notably, Sinohydro can be traced back to the head bureau of the country’s major water engineering institutes and construction bureaus in the 1980s, including the Gezhouba Bureau. Then, through market-oriented reforms, the Gezhouba Group was established in 1999, independent from the Sinohydro system. All the remaining construction bureaus were corporatized in the 2000s as subsidiary companies of what became known as the Sinohydro Group. Water-related consulting agencies, equipment manufacturing plants, and smaller builders were corporatized too, becoming SOEs at central or provincial levels. The Three Gorges Corporation was created to manage the overall development of the Three Gorges Project— it did not do the actual construction (this was done by Gezhouba and bureau of Sinohydro) but gained significant experience in modern project management from planning to operation and maintenance.

While Chinese dam companies retain institutional ties to the Chinese government, the industry has gained technological, managerial, and commercial capacities through the building of domestic dams in collaboration with international financiers and peer companies. Since the 1980s, through implementing World Bank-funded projects like the Lubuwa and Xiaolangdi dams, Chinese dam players used international standards such as competitive bidding in contracting and adapted international norms for development-induced resettlement into domestic practices. The industry has also learned from international technical exchange and cooperation— for example, in order to build the Three Gorges Dam, Western companies and experts were invited to visit China, while Chinese officials and technicians also attended conferences and visited firms in Western countries.

An unexpected outcome of the international anti-dam campaign that intensified in the late 1990s against World Bank dam financing, is that it offered the Chinese dam industry an opportunity to turn overseas. At the time of its establishment in the 1990s, while focusing on domestic projects, the central government gave the Gezhouba Group approval to contract overseas projects and dispatch a workforce, as well as the right to import and export its products. Sinohydro, too, started bidding for foreign construction projects in the 1990s and first won a small contract in Bangladesh in 1998.

The Chinese dam industry has continued to respond to government calls, from the “Going-Out” strategy at the turn of the century to the more recent Belt and Road Initiative. Specifically, although the “Going-Out” strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative are sometimes understood as “strikingly similar,”3 the former is a national policy that encourages Chinese companies to invest overseas, while the latter represents a Chinese call for global actions to promote Inclusive globalisation.4 The 2004 United Nations Symposium on Hydropower and Sustainable Development marked a strong push—by Beijing and others— for hydroelectric dams. Subsequently, the Chinese government agreed to support the dam industry financially. The Chinese dam industry committed to take care of social and environmental governance within their jurisdictions. While the Water Conservation Department supervises and manages water resources in general and the Environmental Protection Department is responsible for water pollution control, several other departments— e.g., the Housing and Construction, Agriculture, Forestry, Development and Reform, Transportation, Marine and Fisheries—participate in the water-related management within their respective responsibilities.

This situation in which the responsibilities for water management are divided into various jurisdictional areas and engaged government agencies was termed as a “nine dragons ruling the waters” problem, but also shows the key expected outcomes of such a system: clean water, clean rivers, greener riverbanks, and a more beautiful landscape. The four cartoon figures represent different local departments as a lion dancing team following the River Chief’s rhythm and boats. The RCS allows the River Chief to maximise monetary and personal resources within their jurisdiction, particularly in mobilising all local officials and departments to work together as a joint force to manage the lakes and rivers, resulting in the “nine dragons” working for one immediate boss.

While the RCS lays the full responsibility of water pollution and other related issues with River Chiefs in their jurisdiction areas, the River Chiefs’ performance is managed by the top-down target responsibility system of China’s Party-state.5 The River Chief of the higher-level government evaluates the water quality along the river sections managed by the lower-level River Chiefs based on whether the water quality along the river sections meets predetermined targets. These “hard” targets and other accountability mechanisms are an important driving force for motivating River Chiefs to commit to water protection.

It is too soon to fully evaluate water quality improvements resulting from this system. However, an increasing number of rivers and lakes in China have improved their water quality grades, and since the implementation of the RCS, the proportion of water bodies with high water quality has increased. It also seems, however, that the RCS has had uneven results: wealthier regions and regions with stricter environmental restrictions have seen better outcomes from this system and more effective water pollution control.6

The RCS enables River Chiefs to mobilise extraordinary administrative resources in a short time, but the sustainability of these results is yet unknown. Local officials are clearly being made more accountable for local river management. River Chiefs themselves, however, can have limited knowledge about integrated river, catchment, and basin management. Such knowledge gaps may inhibit the RCS’s efficacy. The RCS is still in its early stage of development: ongoing evaluation is needed of its long-term results.
environmental issues and engage with other international actors for both domestic and foreign dam projects and governments of project host countries promised to conduct hydropower-related planning and provide appropriate local conditions.

In some cases this came to fruition: Ghana’s Bui Dam Project, built between 2008 and 2013 is one example. The China Exim Bank provided the majority of project funding through concessional loans and export credits; Sinohydro served as the Dam’s turnkey builder based on the internationally-accepted engineering-procurement-construction format; and the Ghanaian government established the Bui Power Authority as the project owner to manage the overall development of the Bui Dam Project. The Bui Power Authority in turn hired a British firm for the Dam’s impact assessments and resettlement planning, entrusted a French firm to supervise Sinohydro’s work, and executed all project-induced resettlement activities. However, in other cases, dam projects with Chinese involvement encountered serious protests against unnecessary social and environmental losses. In short, the Chinese dam industry is based on complex relations between government and corporations, and has gained considerable capacity through its involvement in dam projects, the global anti-dam campaign target the Chinese dam industry over specific projects, the global anti-dam campaign continues. All of these forces will continue to shape the future of Chinese dam exports.

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Notes
1. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41597-020-0332-2
4. The international anti-dam campaign started taking shape in the 1990s and was intensified in the mid-1990s. Remarkably, given massive dam-induced social and environmental impacts, in 1994, 326 civil society organisations from 144 countries signed the Manibeli Declaration: Calling for a Moratorium on World Bank Funding of Large Dams, and then in 1997, activists and dam-affected people from over 20 countries gathered and released the Curitiba Declaration, extending the Manibeli Declaration, urging the World Bank to stop funding big dam projects. The World Commission on Dams, established in 1998 and sponsored by ICN and the World Bank, features one of the major official responses to the campaign. Find more at: https://www.wri.org/publication/watered-global-governance-independent-assessment-world-bank-report
10. https://www.rivers4recovery.org/
Pauline Leong provides amusing anecdotes of how politicians in Malaysia use social media, some with more success than others, to influence public opinion, create policy change, and boost their standing. In Vietnam, however, Dien Nguyen An Luong shows that the state is still trying to censor what it deems to be anti-state content on the internet, even though it is slowly realizing that this is an impossible task.

Dien Nguyen An Luong

Vietnamese authorities have never ceased to fret over “toxic contents,” whose definition has been applied in varying degrees. In the 1990s, “toxic contents” were associated with pornography—so much so that in December 1996, to vouch for the arrival of the internet in Vietnam a year later, its crusaders reportedly had to prove to Vietnam’s top leaders that pornographic websites could be blocked effectively. The need to censor pornographic content, however, masked a greater concern of the powers that be: that the internet would unleash the floodgates of anti-government propaganda and facilitate a freer flow of information, which would end up destabilizing the internet and social media, they perceived as threats posed to social stability by the internet and social media, both inside and inside Vietnam. Then they used those threats exhaustively as a pretext to enforce tougher measures that had already been afoot or implemented in China.

For example, between 2005–2008, when the authorities formulated a number of broadly-worded and vague regulations on internet controls. During the 2001–2007 period, Vietnamese authorities publicly pointed their fingers at pornography and other sexually explicit content as a tool against state power. Yutan Sastramidjaja describes the uniqueness of youth digital protest in Indonesia and across the region, while Quinton Temby examines the pan-Asian activist network the “Milk Tea Alliance” and its influence on pro-democracy activism in the countries in Southeast Asia.

In this section, members of the Media, Technology and Society Programme at ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute address the question: how is the formal sphere of politics being shaped by social media and activist groups in Southeast Asia?

Together, these articles provide insights into the rapidly evolving impact of social media on government, politics, and everyday life in Southeast Asia, a sphere in which memes, humour, and diffusiveness challenge established forms of power.

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How Vietnam’s online censorship revolves around crackdown on anti-state content

Dien Nguyen An Luong

Internet regulators started reining in blogs and websites. Under the crackdown, bloggers and website owners were required to register their complete identities and block content deemed “unlawful” or “immoral.” This move was not lost on Vietnam’s censors. In August 2008, the Vietnamese government enacted Decree 98 on internet controls. This, along with subsequent circulars, required blogs to only publish personal content; blogging platforms, too, were asked to maintain records of their users to provide to the authorities. 2008 was a pivotal year for Facebook when it rolled out its Vietnamese site. Against that backdrop, China continued to provide Vietnam with a handy case study. In July 2009, China blacked out Facebook in the wake of the Ürümqi riots, in which Xinjiang activists used the social media platform to communicate and spread their messages. Just a month later, a supposedly draft regulation requiring internet service providers to block Facebook in Vietnam was leaked. Its authenticity remained in question, but access to Facebook, which boasted around 1 million users in Vietnam at that time, was indeed blocked later that year.

Perhaps the most prominent exhibit of the Vietnamese control model with Chinese characteristics is the 2018 Cybersecurity Law. This law appears to be dominantly dictated by the “Seven Bottom Lines,” a list of online behaviour guidelines Beijing coined in 2013 to govern Internet usage. The Vietnamese state’s formulation spells out seven barriers that social media posts must not transgress:

• the rules and laws of the country
• the socialist system
• the country’s national interests
• the legitimate interests of the citizens
• public order
• morality
• authentic information

These broad and vague dictums serve a dual purpose: to enable the authorities to bend the implementation of the law to their will and to perpetuate self-censorship among internet users. It would be overly simplistic, however, to frame the crackdown on high-profile and influential bloggers and activists as a sign of Vietnam tolerating little public criticism even in the online sphere. Vietnamese authorities have handled public political criticism, both online and in real life, with a calibrated mixture of
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digital media has become an essential communication channel for both the government and the opposition in Malaysia, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media is the platform where politicians and their parties use to issue press releases and to livestream their press conferences. Social media is a medium of public opinion as it facilitates reactions from netizens about current socio-political issues. Due to the digital landscape, younger Malaysians prefer other social media sites such as Twitter and Reddit, which is why the government must call itself Twitterjaya, a play on the word Putrajaya, which is the name of the seat of government in Malaysia.

Suhaydah Johan, a prominent lawyer who joined Twitter in 2009, wrote that “The social aspects of Twitter have evolved into a socio-political ‘goal of national sentiments’.” Indeed, public opinion on social media over certain government initiatives and the policies has resulted in reversals and apologies. For example, when the country was under a Movement Control Order (MCO) due to COVID-19 in 2020, the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development published a series of posters on Facebook and Instagram advising married women on how to manage their households and avoid domestic arguments. This included not nagging, not nagging, and speaking clearly with a feminine touch—mirroring the voice of Dorasam, a Japanese cartoon cat. Public backlash over the statements, especially on social media, led to its apology and delete the posts. The Higher Education Minister also received public criticism for suggesting a TikTok competition to persuade Malaysian youths to stay at home. Netizens pointed out that the minister should have focused on the welfare and learning of undergraduate students instead. Malaysian politicians are aware that their online reputation has an impact on their political fortunes. For example, the appointment of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as the Prime Minister of Malaysia, as a result of the political turmoil following the 2018 election, is also widely discussed on social media.

In fact, responsiveness and legitimacy are derived from netizens about current socio-political issues. The hashtag “#NotMyPM” saw more than 30 MPs defecting from the ruling party and the opposition in the MCO. These requests were compiled and immediately filled up the pothole. Critics, however, have raised arguments that the government may not have the finesse in navigating the possible potholes (pun intended) in the online environment. What public opinion on digital media may not represent the full spectrum and diversity of views in Malaysia, it is, to a significant extent, a barometer of public opinion, but it may lack the kind of depth and nuance that would make it a comprehensive representation of public sentiment.

In that context, it remains to be seen if the PWD should not just pay attention to the issue because of its status, but also to the kind of action the PWD can do to address it. He must make sure that the media can be trusted and that the online content is of high quality. The PWD must be careful not to let the online space be a breeding ground for misinformation and disinformation. It is crucial for the PWD to work closely with the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development to ensure that the online content is of high quality and that it is not spreading false information.

The PWD should also be aware of the potential risks of online activism. The online activists can be a source of inspiration for offline activism, but they can also be a source of division. The PWD must be careful not to let the online activists divide the country and lead to offline actions.

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Historically, youth have been at the forefront of democracy struggles in Southeast Asia. As their lifeworlds are no stranger to digitally-mediated action, especially since the rise of social media and relatively affordable smartphones in the late 2000s, cyberspace has become a popular vehicle for political expression. In Indonesia, young netizens began experimenting with online campaigns that were not confined to activist circles but invited the participation of the general public. In 2009, such two such campaigns against state corruption were not confined to activist circles but invited the participation of the general public. In 2009, two such campaigns against state corruption and injustice created a momentous impact, as thousands of young netizens took to Facebook, and YouTube to co-create, share, and discuss user-generated content to hold the authorities accountable. For a generation disillusioned by the outcome of the political reform initiated in 1998, the success of these youth movements in each country, today’s youth reflect the ‘rhizomatic’ nature of their protest. Rather than sprouting from the single ‘root’ of national histories of student activism in each country, today’s youth movements form a heterogeneous assemblage with multiple nodes that expand in multiple directions, much like the digital information and communication flows that shape their protest.

With its young demographics and rapid growth in digital connectivity, at least in urban centers, youth in Southeast Asia is no stranger to digitally-mediated action. Especially since the rise of social media and relatively affordable smartphones in the late 2000s, cyberspace has become a popular vehicle for political expression. In Indonesia, young netizens began experimenting with online campaigns that were not confined to activist circles but invited the participation of the general public. In 2009, two such campaigns against state corruption and injustice created a momentous impact, as thousands of young netizens took to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to co-create, share, and discuss user-generated content to hold the authorities accountable. For a generation disillusioned by the outcome of the political reform initiated in 1998, the success of these youth movements in each country, today’s youth reflect the ‘rhizomatic’ nature of their protest. Rather than sprouting from the single ‘root’ of national histories of student activism in each country, today’s youth movements form a heterogeneous assemblage with multiple nodes that expand in multiple directions, much like the digital information and communication flows that shape their protest.

In September 2019, tens of thousands of youth across Indonesia took to the streets to protest a set of controversial bills which, to them, symbolized the government’s increasing authoritarianism. While the majority of demonstrators were students, the protest brought together a heterogeneous crowd that included NGO-affiliated activist youth, masses of high-school youth mobilized through WhatsApp groups, and a multitude of young netizens that joined the protest online and on the streets – all united under the street banner and hashtag #ReformasiDikorupsi (reform corrupted). The participation of the ‘mem generation’, as young netizens were called, added a particularly novel flavor to the protest, which otherwise could have been mistaken (and frequently was) for a revival of Indonesia’s student movement. Although student representative bodies did help to mobilize student masses, they could not dictate the mood nor the message of the protest, which was created in the moment by the multitude of young participants, many of whom had never joined a protest before. One group that stood out amongst this multitude were the self-proclaimed ‘K-Poppers’, known for their massive engagement with Korean pop fandom on social media. Online, they helped to raise #ReformasiDikorupsi and associated hashtags on Twitter’s list of trending topics; on the streets, they contributed a unique type of protest imagery and slogans, for example: “[I] [heart] BTS [a popular Korean boyband] but I [heart] justice even more – #K-Poppers won’t remain silent!”

Although the streets protests subsided due to violent repression, minimal concessions from the government, and then the Covid-19 pandemic, the youth resistance continued unabated online, now focusing on the contested Omnibus Bill for job creation. Indeed, activist youth cleverly used the situation to engage an even broader multitude of young netizens through Twitter. For example, during a concerted Twitter action on 23 March 2020, the hashtag #TolakOmnibusBill (‘reject the Omnibus Bill’) topped the trending topics, as young netizens were especially charmed by the paired hashtags #LockdownParliament and #dirumahaja (‘just stay home’, also connoting ‘protest from home’). Similar actions followed over the next months. While such hashtag actions might not have the same public impact as street protest, it kept young participants attuned to a resistance that had the potential for further expansion into new participatory publics. The significance of nurturing the resistance online became clear in the first week of October 2020, when massive protests again erupted against the Parliament’s hastened ratification of the Omnibus Bill. Twitter exploded with anti-Omnibus Law hashtags, again largely pushed by K-Poppers, while students and high-school youth, together with labour unions and other disaffected groups, staged angry demonstrations using the same hashtags in their posters and banners. This time, however, the authorities not only repressed the protests on the streets, but also embarked on a targeted strategy of cyber-repression, utilizing cyber-laws, cyber-troops, and ‘counter-narratives’ spread on mainstream and social media to criminalize and delegitimize the protesters. This strategy seemed to work: the street protest quickly died out, and on social media, too, anti-government criticism was more or less stifled. Nonetheless, the resistance lived on in more subtle ways, not least inspired by similar youth-led struggles that have erupted elsewhere in the region.

Transnational solidarity and affinity

The blurring of boundaries between virtual and material spaces of protest was all the more evident in the youth resistance in Thailand, which took off in February 2020 following the regime’s disbandment of the popular Future Forward Party. While shunning Thailand’s polarized political landscape, this youth resistance was also long nurtured through online political criticisms, which has now consolidated into a generational call for systemic reform and curbs on the monarchy’s power. Here, too, the youth resistance developed in rhizomatic fashion along fluid networks that crossed online and offline spheres.

This protest strategy is clearly inspired by the ‘Be Water’ tactics developed by activist youth in Hong Kong. Indeed, activist youth in Thailand have maintained close contact with peers from Hong Kong as well as Taiwan’s Sunflower Student Movement since 2014, when they formed the Network of Young Democratic Asians. In a more recent reincarnation as the social media-based Milk Tea Alliance, this transnational network has steadily reached out to youth movements elsewhere in Asia. This includes Myanmar, where an intrepid youth resistance has risen following the military coup of February 2021. Meanwhile, youth across the region have staged solidarity actions online and offline, using the same hashtag format. #StandWithMyanmar and #WhatsHappeningInMyanmar, as initially used for Hong Kong and any subsequent youth-led struggle for democracy.

Through these digitally-mediated action, activist youth across the region have thus started to cross-promote and cross-pollinate their causes, recognizing that, at the core, they are part of the same rhizomatic resistance against entrenched authoritarianism. Digital technologies have facilitated the emergence of a shared citizen identity as Asian-activist-digital youth.
A former shock-election victory in 2018, the resurgent prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, banned foreigners from owning property in Forest City, a $900 billion (USD) “megacity” being built across four artificial islands located between Singapore and Indonesia, the southern tip of Johor. In October 2020, after the abrupt passage of a “job-crisis” law in Indonesia, labour activists led strikes in the capital and stormed the national parliament complex. In March 2021, amid escalating military violence in Myanmar following the February 1st coup, South Korean and Taiwanese businesses were urged to fly their national flags.1

On the face of it, these unpredictable events across Southeast Asia—the end of one-party rule in Malaysia, the coup of resistance in Myanmar—have nothing in common. They are disparate events, with local causes. But on closer inspection they share a common undercurrent. They all exhibit signs of anxiety about China and its rise as a hegemonic power in Southeast Asia. Look closely at protests and upheavals across the region and you are increasingly likely to find a China angle.

Anti-Chinese “sentiments”, to use the scholarly euphemism, has a deep history in Southeast Asia. And not just against the local ethnic Chinese. In the aftermath of the 1965 coup that brought General Suharto to power in Indonesia, the embassy of the People’s Republic of China was ransacked by a mob. But on China’s image sits itself as the lead economic partner for most countries of the region, and as it extends its military power down the South China Sea and up into the internet “cloud”, racial prejudice shades into geopolitical angst.

The lead indicator of this phenomenon is the Milk Tea Alliance, an online pan-Asian activist network. The alliance is the internet’s way of channeling the collective consciousness of a region that is famously diverse and defiant of collective action—as ASEAN can attest. It taps into discourses and the inherent decline of democracy and into fears about the rise of China.

At best, these fears sublimate into democratic debate; at worst, they dredge up historical prejudices and dangerous tracts. The latter occurred in Indonesia in 2019 during the post-election violence, when viral disinformation spread claiming that China sent soldiers to infiltrate the country to put down the protests and bolster the Jokowi government.2 The Indonesian police were forced to hold a press conference to debunk the claims, which had targeted several Indonesian police officers with unflattering Chinese features. The same trope emerged in Myanmar in March, with false claims made in viral posts on Facebook that Chinese soldiers had been flown in to repress the protest movement.3

Strategic thinkers in boardrooms with ancient maps and new flatscreens, in Beijing and in Washington, are unlikely to pay much heed to a movement calling itself the Milk Tea Alliance. But that would be a mistake. On the Internet, humor builds in-group identity, and it taps into disinformation campaigns that play on the inherent unpredictability of the internet, to shut down social media. It is inherently unpredictable.

The only way to stop this force is to unplug the Internet, to shut down social media. This was the first instinct of the generals in Myanmar. They occupied the internet service providers and hacked away at the cables. But this is not the best way to “break the internet” because, in turn, it breaks the economy.

The Milk Tea Alliance is the Internet’s way of channeling the collective consciousness of a region that is famously diverse and defiant of collective action—as ASEAN can attest. It taps into discourses and the inherent decline of democracy and into fears about the rise of China.

As China rises, we should expect anti-Chinese populism to grow, as old fears blend with new anxieties. Opinion polling by the Pew Research Centre indicates unfavourable views of China spiked globally even prior to the pandemic.4 The 2001 SEAS State of Southeast Asia survey of policymakers, academics, think tankers, and businesspeople shows that support for aligning with China versus the US has fallen, despite China’s intense pandemic diplomacy efforts.5

While most countries of Southeast Asia wish to benefit from economic ties with China, domestic populations are at best sceptical of China’s role. China thus faces a gap between its hard (military, economic) and soft (cultural) power in Southeast Asia. Leading indicators of this power gap can be detected in the protests that gather force online, where soft power is in the hands of digital natives, not political elites. To the extent that China’s power gap reflects an elite-popular divide, China is left vulnerable to populist politics in Southeast Asia. Insurgent politicians may seek to exploit anti-Chinese sentiment to gain office—a trend that has emerged most clearly in Indonesia among the Islamist opposition.

Time will tell whether protests in Southeast Asia cohere into democratic movements or devolve into anti-Chinese populism. Outcomes will be determined, in part, by how old institutions respond to the challenge of networked protest in the internet age.

This article is adapted from the Fulcrum article, “The Milk Tea Alliance Confronts China’s Weak Brew.”6

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Notes
1 https://www.aseanobserver.com/index.php/2021/02/26/south-korean-and-taiwanese-businesses-were-urged-to-fly-their-national-flags/
3 https://www.gwresearch.org/feature-2021/02/04/china-is-seen-as-a-top-spying-country-but-other-videos-are-a-threat
5 https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/14705c43f6bb
6 https://medium.com/world-wide-wtf/memetic-tribes-and-cultural-war-2-0-b7f1b94546
7 https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/state-of-southeast-asia-2021-commentaries/state-of-southeast-asia-2021-
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ISBN 9780674251229

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ISBN 97802520868212
The present Focus section of The Newsletter contains ten papers. Some were discussed during the conference, others were written afterwards. They all reflect upon the changing roles of textiles in society. Textiles and dress have a significance that transcends their practical function, namely to provide warmth and protection. They also play a central role in social, economic, and spiritual interactions. Textiles and clothing speak volumes about the hierarchy of power relations amongst their users, including power that defines stratifications of class, wealth, and gender. In most cases, these tangible and intangible values of textiles are culture-specific, and their unspoken functions are fully understood within a particular tradition. Textiles are also repositories of techniques, for spinning, weaving, dyeing, printing, and embroidery, and these techniques travel over time and space from one group of people to another. The history of textiles also reflects the history of animal husbandry and the growing of plants, in order to produce the fibres needed for the textiles. All these techniques travelled from one group to another, and in the process they changed and adopted new features and meanings. Textiles moved easily from one area to another because of their portability. Their measurable value (in the raw material, knowledge, and the time and effort of labour put into them) makes textiles a perfect medium for commercial exchange and as items of tribute. The Silk Route between East and West from the Roman period onwards is a good example. At the same time, their intangible cultural value (as a medium to

Textiles on the move, through time and space

In October 2020, IIAS in Leiden organised a week-long online conference about textile and dress traditions that develop through time and space, and thereby often change their role and meaning. The conference was organised with the assistance of Sandra Sardjono of the Tracing Patterns Foundation in Los Angeles, Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood of the Textile Research Centre (TRC) in Leiden, and Chris Buckley, Oxford. It replaced a ‘real’ conference that was planned to take place in Leiden, but which had to be postponed because of the corona pandemic.

Willem Vogelsang
On these journeys textiles would lose their old values, acquire new significance, or distort in their new environments. The second paper, by Lee Talbot from Washington, takes us to the ancient Silk Route between China and the West, which not only transported silk, but also textiles from East to West and vice versa. This movement introduced new motifs, materials, and techniques in the West, but also in the East. Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, Director of the Textile Research Centre (TRC) in Leiden, elaborates on the global popularity of an originally Iranian motif, the butch, which in the early 19th century was copied in the Scottish town of Paisley and hence became known world-wide as the paisley motif. It can now be found all over the world, on stylish gowns and on punk T-shirts, on men’s underwear and on Tanzanian kanzas.

Anna Jackson, from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, writes about two remarkable 18th-century garments. One of them was made in Japan from a silk fabric originally produced in France; the other was made in Europe from a material produced in Japan. Contacts between Europe and Japan are also discussed by Ariane Fennetaux from Paris. On the basis of a garment now in the Fries Museum in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, she stresses the likelihood that India played an important role in the manufacture of ‘Japanese’ garments for the European market.

Dale Gluckman from Los Angeles writes about an Indonesian batik collection now in Bangkok, which was collected during three trips made by the Thai king Rama V to the former Dutch East Indies. He made a collection that is marked by its diversity and the information that was added to each piece. Niaz Zaman from Bangladesh and the Canadian filmmaker Cathy Stavulak report on the development of a typical textile product from Bangladesh and neighbouring West Bengal in India. This is the kantha, which has in recent years been given a new lease of life and is now used not only for the traditional quilts, but also for large wall hangings.

A paper by Nuning Y Damayanti Adisasmito from Bandung deals with a ‘typical’ Japanese garment from the post-war period, namely the sukajan, which is a garment that originates from the bomber jackets worn by American airmen stationed in Japan, and indirectly from the so-called letterman jackets that were worn since the mid-19th century by students at American universities. The sukajan becomes the characteristic garment of Japanese ‘bad boys’ in the 1950s and 1960s, and has since become a popular garment in Japan, which is often produced in China.

The final paper is by Caroline Stone from Cambridge, who presents a number of examples of decorative motifs sometimes very unexpectedly finding their way to other countries and continents. Compare in this context with a traditional Mongolian kaftan, a kaftan made from Japanese material originally produced for an obi, or kimono sash [fig. 2]. The examples show how concepts of ‘static local tradition’ and ‘authenticity’ are often hard to substantiate.
This paper discusses two textiles from the Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection. What makes these two textiles fascinating is their link with Japan, one entitled “Japannland” by the Wiener Werkstätte artist Felice Rix Ueno (1893-1967) [fig.1]; the other, entitled and depicting bamboos, which had been attributed to the Wiener Werkstätte until 2015, when it was re-attributed to Japan [fig.2].
The earliest fragments in the collection date to the Zhou dynasty. From the Zhou through the Han dynasties, the most prized textiles were patterned silks called jin (錦), which at the time were warp-faced compound plain weaves. In weaving jin, alternate picks separate the series of warp ends so that one shows on the face of the fabric, and the others remain on the reverse. The front surface is covered by warp floats, which hide the weft and create the pattern. During the Zhou dynasty, jin typically featured geometric designs, but the finest examples included bird and animal motifs. The example in Figure 1, radiocarbon dated to 308-207 BCE, is patterned with a lozenge-shaped cup and trees, paired phoenixes and birds, the sun and stars, confronted beasts, and a small band of dragons. While the dyes derived from plant sources do not survive well, the red pattern, created with the sulfide mineral cinnabar, remains vibrant. Silks woven with colourful designs were exceedingly costly symbols of wealth and high status at the time. China alone possessed the secret of sericulture during the Zhou dynasty, but silks were exchanged internationally along trade routes sometimes called the “Grassland Silk Road,” particularly active from the 5th to the 3rd centuries BCE. Chinese silks made their way across the Altai Mountains and over the Mongolian plateau into the steppes, as evidenced by Chinese fabrics excavated at archeological sites such as the Pazyryk tombs in Siberia.

The Han period saw the development of the westward, “desert-and-oasis” Silk Road, which carried Chinese textiles as far as the Roman Empire and Europe.
Jin remained one of the most prized fabrics, and improvements in silk weaving technology led to finer, more detailed designs. Jin production was largely under state control, and the state often presented these luxury goods as tokens of favour to individuals and neighbouring entities. The most typical Han jin were patterned with clouds, animals, and inscriptions. While some jin featured auspicious words and phrases, others bore inscriptions that referenced the receiver and their relationship to the imperial court. One such example depicts clouds, deer, and tigers along with the Chinese characters ene (進, bounty, benefit received from above), a phrase that implied a special favour granted from the emperor or a high official.

As illustrated by the jin in Figure 2, inscriptions can offer insight into the preoccupations of the imperial state and its fashionable imports in China. The Cotson collection includes four fragments of a complicated jin with clouds, a flying immortal, tigers, qilin, deer, rabbits, and the inscription zhonggong daochang xiju fu le anning xing tianwu jiang (中原大常道常安天下揚), which can be translated roughly as “China will prosper greatly, the four kinds of barbarions will be defeated, the people will be happy and safe, the glorious days will have no end.”

Clouds were perhaps the most widespread motifs on Han luxury textiles. Contemporary literature reveals that clouds were auspicious symbols associated with immortality. Perceived as exceedingly good omens, clouds were thought to serve as vehicles for the immortals. The well-preserved glove in Figure 3 features clouds rendered in embroidery, another highly prized textile patterning technique at the time. Jin and embroidery were so highly esteemed that the combination of these two words, jin xiu (紗紗), came to refer to the best and finest of all things.

Luxury silks flowed into and out of China along the Silk Road. Textiles from the Central Asian region of Sogdiana, around present-day Uzbekistan, were particularly fashionable imports in China. Popular patterns on Sogdian silks, such as confronted animals in pearl-bordered rounds, eventually were incorporated into the Chinese design vocabulary. The ornament of the sixth- to eighth-century Chinese silk shown in Figure 4 shows clear influence from cultures to the west, with new motifs such as lions and peacocks arranged in a design format of pearl chevrons. The culture in China became quite cosmopolitan from the Han through the Tang dynasties, and large cities such as Chang’an and Luoyang were home to foreign merchants and settlers who introduced new styles and skills. The text Beishi (北史), one of the official histories of the Northern Dynasties (386-581), relates the biography of He Chou (何稠), a third-generation member of a family that had immigrated from Central Asia, whom the emperor asked to make copies of Persian silks that were said to surpass the originals.1 Fabrics imported from the West influenced Chinese weaving techniques as well as textile design. Whereas earlier Chinese silks were warp-faced, during the Tang dynasty weft-faced compound twill, a structure originating in the West, became the favoured weave for Chinese luxury silks. The adoption of weft-faced patterning permitted weavers to create more complex designs, and to produce larger motifs and wider lengths of silk since this new technology allowed the expansion ofloom width. As evidenced by the fragment in Figure 5, a new style emerged in the eighth century, featuring large floral medallions, often with floral devices in the interstices. Medallions of a central flower or cluster of flowers circled by rings of flowers became the most common motif on Chinese luxury silks of the eighth century and were widely used in other decorative arts. By the midails of the eighth century, floral medallions had largely replaced the Sogdian-style roundel patterns in popularity. Chinese textiles with floral medallions were widely exported and emulated throughout East Asia.

Another technique that arrived in China along the Silk Road was tapestry weave. The tapestry weave technique seems to have originated in ancient Mesopotamia and spread eastward over the centuries. The earliest tapestries in Central Asia were made of wool, but by the Tang dynasty, weavers in this region were producing tapestry-woven cloths made of silk. Woven around the 13th century in eastern Central Asia (present-day western China), the example in Figure 6 features a blue tiger, gold bird, and multicoloured flower blossoms and leaves. The pattern reveals the international exchange influences from cultures to the east and west. Tapestry-woven silks made in Central Asia at this time often featured brightly coloured animal and floral motifs. During the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), workshops in China began to emulate a fine, low relief tapestry technique, typically patterned with animals and birds on a floral ground. The lack of precedent for this weave structure and ornamental scheme in China suggests that perhaps Uighurs from the west played a role in introducing the technique and patterning of silk tapestry.

International exchange intensified during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), when the Mongol empire spread from China all the way to eastern Europe. This political unification of disparate peoples such as weavers, and they relocated artists from many different regions to work together in administrative centres across the empire. Silks were traded extensively across Europe and Asia thanks to the expansion of international commerce under the Pax Mongolica. As evidenced by the fragment in Figure 7, showing phoenixes with five-glomed tails flying among peonies, birds and flower scrolls remained popular in the design of tapestry-woven silks. The birds and the birds are woven in gold, with gold leaf applied to an animal skin substrate. Silks woven with gold yarns became particularly popular under the patronage of the previously nomadic Mongols, who valued textiles woven with gold because of its store of wealth.

Although small and fragmentary, the ancient and indigenous Chinese silks in the Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection provide a valuable resource for scholarship. These texts analyze the origins of the motifs and techniques used in the manufacture of Chinese luxury textiles over a long period of time, focusing on the methods that their study illuminates formative aesthetic and technical developments arising from trade and cross-cultural exchange along the Silk Road.

Suggested reading


Notes

1. https://museum.gwu.edu/cotsen-textile-traces-study-collection

Lee Talbot is curator at The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum, Washington, DC, USA, where he specializes in East Asian textile history.
Napoleon Bonaparte, for example, is said to have imported c. 1526-1857. It was used especially on the kanga. In addition, household items such as prayer mats, wall hangings, and towels were often decorated with the buteh. By the end of the 20th century, buteh remained a popular motif and was used for both urban and regional clothing in Iran. It is regarded by the Japanese as being a typically British or Scottish pattern. In contrast to many other regions, the motif does not appear to have been so popular in the Arab Middle East, where it is sometimes simply called buteh. This minimal use of the motif may be due to a preference for geometric, rather than ‘organic’ designs. The buteh motif occurs mainly in areas where there was a strong European influence, such as in Algeria, Egypt, and Lebanon, which had access to imported European materials, ribbons, and bands.

From buteh to paisley: the story of a global motif

Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood

The buteh or paisley motif is actually one of the few non-geometric design forms that can be found throughout the world. It is worn by men, women and children of all ages, literally from the cradle to the grave. Moreover, it is worn by people of many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This contribution presents an overview of the buteh and its development as a motif, with a focus on its geographic spread and cultural significance.

History of the Paisley Motif

There are various theories about the early history of the paisley motif, and it would appear that it originated in Iran during the early first millennium AD. At this date it was a bulbous, almond shaped form, which was often floreted and without the prominent hook so common in later examples. This motif is specifically known as a buteh. The end of the 17th century saw the hooked buteh becoming a popular motif in neighbouring Moghol India (c. 1526-1857). It was used especially on the fine woollen shawls that were hand woven in northern India.

The motif travelled from India to Africa, Southeast and East Asia, but in particular to Europe. In the late eighteenth century, the buteh became even more popular as it was featured on the Khamir shawls that were being exported in vast quantities to Europe. In the late eighteenth century, South and Southwest Asia
The use of the buteh motif started in Iran and spread to India, so it is not surprising that it remained so popular in these and neighbouring countries. There are numerous examples of 19th-century Qajar paintings from Iran, for instance, which include depictions of members of the various royal courts wearing garments with the buteh motif. In addition, household items such as prayer mats, wall hangings, and towels were often decorated with the buteh.

By the end of the 20th century, buteh remained a popular motif and was used for both urban and regional clothing in Iran and India (fig. 2). It was used among urban, village, and nomadic groups for both men’s and women’s clothing, including headwear, saris, and a variety of shawls and head coverings.

The buteh motif can also be found in Afghanistan and Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan – again, it was, and still is, popular for both men’s and women’s clothing. In particular, it was used for headwear and items such as jackets and coats.

Southeast Asia
The paisley motif appears to have arrived in East and Southeast Asia by at least the 19th century and came mainly via Indian textiles. It has remained a feature of various East and Southeast Asian countries, notably Japan and Indonesia.

The paisley motif has been popular in Japan for at least two hundred years. It appears to have been introduced by European and Indian merchants, especially those dealing in textiles and garments. It is regarded by the Japanese as being a typically British or Scottish pattern. By the end of the 20th century the paisley motif was used for a variety of garments, including the kimono and obi (sash). In some cases, the motifs are small and discreet; on other cases, they may be large, ornate forms.

For several hundred years, the buteh motif has been a popular form in Indonesia, especially in Java. It can be found on batiks and take on ornate forms. In Indonesia, the buteh has become very popular among the Indian community. With the resurgence of Islam in the early 21st century, wearing the buteh motif declined as it was seen as a typically Hindu motif, although, ironically, it originally derived from Iran, a Muslim country.

Turkey and the Middle East
The paisley motif can be found in both Turkey and the Middle East. It was popular in Turkey during the 19th century and later, and it has survived in various parts of the country as part of regional dress, particularly as decoration on headscarves and the resist-dyed aprons of eastern Anatolia.

In contrast to many other regions, the motif does not appear to have been so popular in the Arab Middle East, where it is sometimes simply called buteh. This minimal use of the motif may be due to a preference for geometric, rather than ‘organic’ designs. The paisley motif occurs mainly in areas where there was a strong European influence, such as in Algeria, Egypt, and Lebanon, which had access to imported European materials, ribbons, and bands.

We all know the motif: that cone-shaped, curvy form which is so pleasant to look at and feels so peaceful (fig. 1). The eye is taken from the side to the top and down again, all with a feeling of balance. It is so well-known that it is generally accepted as just being one of those patterns that have always been there.
Africa

The paisley motif can be found on a variety of West and East African objects, including the wrap-around garments for women known as kanga from East Africa [fig. 3], and printed women’s headwear in West Africa. Many of these pieces used to be made in Europe and western India for the local markets, but more and more are being made in Tanzania and China.

In West Africa the situation is more complicated, as by the end of the 20th century, many textiles were designed in Europe that consisted of different pieces of the shawl being woven on machines and then stitched together.

Much of the cloth used to make these garments comes from Russia.

Kashmir and European Paisley Shawls

By the beginning of the 19th century, Kashmir-style shawls started to be copied on handlooms and later on mechanical looms – especially the Jacquard loom in France and Britain, although the Europeans never managed to mechanically reproduce the striking number of colour combinations of the ‘original’ Kashmir shawls.

Paisley, which lies just south of Glasgow, became particularly noted for the production of ‘Kashmir’ shawls. For the next 70 years, it was an important producer of shawls for domestic and export purposes. By 1850, for example, there were over 7,000 weavers producing shawls [fig. 4]. In addition, other versions of the Kashmir shawl were being woven in Paisley and elsewhere in northern Europe that consisted of different pieces of the shawl being woven on machines and then stitched together.

‘Paisley’ became a successful print called cachemire siciliano, a successful print called cachemire siciliano, a successful print called cachemire siciliano, a successful print called cachemire siciliano, a successful print called cachemire siciliano, a successful print called cachemire siciliano, a successful print called cachemire siciliano, a successful print called cachemire siciliano, a successful print called cachemire siciliano, a successful print called cachemire siciliano, a successful print called cachemire siciliano, a successful print called cachemire siciliano. As a result, the paisley motif can take on a Chinese yin-yang design.

Paisley and European Regional Textiles and Dress

Given the popularity of the motif, it is not surprising that it can be found on various forms of European regional dress. It occurs on Russian head coverings and shawls for the babushka (‘grannies’) [fig. 5], and on garments and textiles in Scandinavia, Germany, and the Netherlands [fig. 6]. It is a popular motif among the clothes worn by women on the Dutch island of Marken, where it occurs on both children’s and women’s garments [fig. 7]. Paisley motifs can also be found on some women’s bodices from Staphorst, also in the Netherlands. The motif features prominently among the regional dress of the island of Kihnu in Estonia [fig. 8]. It is used for aprons, jackets, and headscarves worn by women. Much of the cloth used to make these garments is woven in Paisley and elsewhere in northern Europe that consisted of different pieces of the shawl being woven on machines and then stitched together.

Much of the cloth used to make these garments comes from Russia.

Is Paisley Out of Fashion?

Famous figures such as Chuck Berry, Cliff Richard, and David Bowie have worn paisley, while designers and designer firms, such as Yves Saint Laurent, Burberry, Gucci, and Dolce & Gabbana, as well as well-known textile groups such as Liberty’s of London, have all produced ranges of paisley fabrics.

In Italy during the 1950’s and 1960’s, the Italian designer Emilia Pucci created a successful print called cachemire siciliano, which mixed symbols of Sicily with the paisley motif. In addition, in the 1980s the Italian fashion brand ETRO made the paisley pattern into its iconic motif and it remains widely used by them to the present day, especially in Italian prêt-à-porter.

Steampunk is a ‘retro-futuristic’ fictional genre and form of cult clothing that developed in the late 1980s. It is based on the concept of 19th-century industrial and steam-powered technology, mixed in with modern science fiction and horror. The associated fashion scene is a mixture of 19th-century retro-fashion and fantasy. Not surprisingly, paisley is a popular motif of this group and is worn by both men and women [figs. 9 and 10]. Finally, the front cover of a recent issue of Vanity Fair (March 2021) depicted a model wearing paisley, and the recent Dior (Spring 2021) fashion show also featured many models in garments embellished with the paisley motif.

To answer the question above: no, for the last two hundred years, this originally Iranian /Indian motif has never gone out of fashion, and is not likely to vanish in the near future.
A tale of two silks

Anna Jackson

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has one of the most significant collections of Japanese textiles and dress in Europe. One recent acquisition is an Edo-period (1615–1868) outer kimono (uchikake) [fig. 1]. What makes the garment so unusual is that it is made from silk brocade woven in Lyon in the mid-18th century. Such fabric was typically used to make suits for stylish and wealthy European men. Instead, this silk found its way to Japan, where it was made into a kimono for a high-ranking woman from Japan’s ruling military (samurai) class.


Fig 2 (above): ‘Fashion for the Foreigner’ display in Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk, V&A 2020 © Victoria and Albert Museum.

Just as the Dutch gifted cloth, they were presented with kimonos. Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1729), doctor at the VOC base in Dejima from 1690–1692, recorded the garments that the Dutch received when they travelled to Edo. On his second visit to the capital, Kaempfer reported that “on the 25th of April, we had ten fine gowns sent to us by Bingo, 5 as good as any woven with flowers, by the young Prince of Frando [Hiroyo], ... and a couple of sorry ones by the second Governor of Jedo [Edo]. Whether with these given by the shōgun, Kaempfer noted that a total of 123 garments were received on this occasion. The Dutch shipped the kimono they received to the VOC headquarters in Batavia for there to be made into new garments, where they fetched high prices at the East India Company’s auctions.

A tale of two silks was already part of the European wardrobe, being worn for informal gatherings or to provide extra warmth in the growing colder evenings. However, the arrival of Japanese silk garments with their colourful patterning and intricate designs increasingly blurred the boundaries between the foreign and the familiar. Such garments were known as night gowns in Britain. They were not worn in bed, but informally at home. It was perfectly respectable to receive your guests, and even to have your portrait painted, while wearing one. Indeed, such apparel signified your wealth compared with your contemporaries. In the Newhailes robe, the length of the collar and the way it is attached, the front overlap (the fabric brought to Japan to cover its Japanese origin. The pattern on the exterior is of Japanese parsley, created with a stencil paste-resist dyeing technique (katagami). Parsley is known as one of the Seven Spring Herbs and was an auspicious symbol that marked the first month of the lunar calendar. Such a reference would have been lost on the Scottish owner of the robe, who no doubt enjoyed it as a useful pattern as much as the samurai woman did the design of the Lynnsilk silk. A unique feature of the Newhailes robe is the family crest (mon) similar to those seen on formal Japanese kimonos [fig. 5]. This crest is not one used in Japan, however, and was probably invented just for export. It is tempting to link the garment with the Janus habutais silk kimono with family crests’ noted in the registers of the 70ban kamotusho (Europe, List of Chinese and European Ships) as being loaded on to a Dutch ship on the 21st of the ninth month of Shōtoku’s reign.

Hopefully, further research can uncover more about the history of these fascinating examples of cross-cultural exchange. What this tale of two silks certainly does reveal is the way in which fashion can transcend borders and, through a process of translation and assimilation, serve to blur boundaries between the foreign and the familiar.

Anna Jackson is Keeper of the Asian Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A specialist in Japanese textiles and dress, she was the curator of the 2020 exhibition at the V&A: ‘Kimonos: From Ahs to Catwalk, and editor of the accompanying publication.

Lyon was the main centre for silk weaving in Europe, and here Europe’s most fashionable fabrics were designed and manufactured. The marketing and distribution of Lyons’s silk was carried out by commissionaires who would travel widely through Europe, carrying samples and which to demonstrate both the high quality and the innovative designs of the forthcoming seasonal collections. As socially adept as they were commercially skilled, these dedicated salesmen would cultivate a rich clientele in major cities such as Amsterdam. It was presumably here that an order was placed for a roll of silk with a small-scale pattern in blue, pink, yellow, and black on a white ground, perhaps by a leading member of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC) [fig. 2]. Whether the silk was originally purchased to tailor domestic garments or specifically to take to Asia is not known, but such an expensive item would certainly not have been left unused. So, soon after its creation in Lyon, it was placed on a VOC ship bound for Japan.

—Nabeshima daimyō, to the wife of the Nabeshima

Anna Jackson was restricted foreign trade and relations during most of the Edo period. The Dutch were, however, permitted to maintain a trading base on Dejima, a small artificial island in Nagasaki harbour. Their movements and activities were heavily constrained, but the Dutch were accorded the honour of regular audiences with the shōgun. Once a year, the VOC chief, secretary, and physician would make the long journey to Edo to pay their respects, present gifts, and give thanks for the continuation of trade. Cloth was a major commercial commodity as well as an important article of diplomatic exchange, and there was a major shift to cottons from South and Southeast Asia. The latter became highly fashionable and there are a number of extant kimonos made from imported cotton. The VOC’s uchikake is, as yet, the only known Edo-period garment to be made from European silk. Given its high quality, the fabric was certainly a diplomatic gift. Testimony from the private collector who donated the kimono to the museum revealed that the garment had probably belonged to the wife of the Nabashima daimyō, who ruled the Saga domain in south-east Japan. The domain was largely responsible for the military defence of nearby Nagasaki. It also had strong links with Dutch trade: the export porcelain centre of Arita, from which the pottery was shipped, was both located in Saga. The Dutch party also passed through Hizen, the castle town, on their journey to Edo. It is not known whether the French fabric was a gift that resulted from this close connection or whether it came to Nabeshima via the shogunate, nor indeed when it was made into a garment.

What is clear is that wearing a kimono of such rare and exotic cloth would have been an indicator of both status and style. The uchikake was featured in the V&A exhibition Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk, staged in 2020, in the section that explored the sartorial interaction between Japan and Europe in the Edo period [fig. 3]. Also displayed was a recently discovered robe of Japanese indigo-dyed plain weave silk (habutae) worn in Britain in the early 18th century [fig. 4].
The Fries Museum in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, holds a late 17th-century chintz night gown [fig. 1]. The gown uses distinctive Indian technologies of mordanted fast-colour painting and dyeing, and features the traditional Japanese motif of pine, plum blossom, and bamboo, known as shōchikubai (松竹梅). While its design is apparently inspired by the Japanese kimono, detailed analysis shows that this garment was made for European rather than Japanese consumption. With a palampore-style tree on the back, a vibrant red shōchikubai motif, and a front that bears some resemblance with Japanese kimono, the gown is a culturally hybrid garment.

Ariane Fennetaux

Terms abound, starting with the word ‘kimono’, acquired from the Japanese term for a traditional garment, which was also a name given to the distinctive pen used in painting, the ‘shōchikubai’ (松竹梅) motif, and a front that perhaps contributed to the idea of a European woman wearing a kimono as a garment

This further reverses the vision of Europeans single-handedly orchestrating global material circulations. Not only do the resulting gowns testify to much more complex trade networks and a longer chronology than that defined by Europe’s involvement in Asian trade, but they also illustrate Europeans’ relative subsidiary position in Asia — in India as much as in Japan.

Ariane Fennetaux is Associate Professor at Université de Paris. Her research focuses on material culture with a particular emphasis on textiles and dress. She co-edited The Afterlife of Textiles, Things, Ideas: The Dutch East India Company in Long Eighteenth Century (Routledge 2019) and, together with Barbara Burnum, is the author of The Pocket A Hidden History of Women’s Lives 1960-2010 (Yale UP, 2019).

Notes
3 Ariane Fennetaux, ‘Imitation […] so that it has a complete likeness.’
4 Several European prints have been suggested as possible sources for the shōchikubai chintz gowns. However, if we observe how the Japanese motifs imitate the traditional lace-and-dye technique of kanoko shibori (鹿の子絞). It seems more likely that Indian artisans had direct access to actual Japanese textiles. This technique, which creates small diaper patterns, was sometimes used to represent pine boughs on Edo-period kimono, indigenous to Japan and specific to textile.
5 The Fries Museum gown does not include bamboo. The painted flowers, which are depicted on leaf-bearing branches with slightly indented petals, also resemble cherry rather than the plum blossoms associated with shōchikubai. Clearly, if the Japanese motif was copied, it was not done in Indian cotton which could come in large widths than the traditional style — a pleat would still be made in the middle to replicate the traditional back seam.

The term in use for Europe for this type of garment is chintz night gown or ‘night gown’ in Dutch, ‘India Gown’ or ‘Borang’ in English, or ‘Indienna’ and ‘roba d’Arménien’ in French; the latter indicates the traditionally multi-layered patterns of appropriation. Kimono first arrived in Europe as gifts from the shōgun and various officials to the Dutch factors when they were allowed, once a year, to go to Edo and ask for trading rights to be renewed. However, the gown in the Fries Museum is not a Japanese garment, not even the name given to the distinctive pen used to paint on cotton. And if the kimono is often cited as the origin of the fashion for loose night gowns in Europe, the influence of the cultural contact between the Arab and Persian qaba is also essential. Both were worn across the Middle East and beyond, sometimes by diasporic populations present in India and actively involved in trade, long before Europe’s involvement in Eurasian or Inter-Asian mercantile contacts.

the Focus

The Fries Museum on the move, through time and space

The Fries Museum, Textiles on the move, through time and space

Shōchikubai on the Coromandel

Textiles, techniques and trends in transit

If we are to believe European observers, Indian calico artisans were working from musters ‘lying at their sides’ which they ‘imitate […] so that it has a complete likeness.’

We know models were sent from Europe for copying and that artists were delegated to India by the VOC to create textile designs. Several European prints have been suggested as possible sources for the shōchikubai chintz gowns. However, if we observe how the Japanese motifs imitate the traditional lace-and-dye technique of kanoko shibori (鹿の子絞). It seems more likely that Indian artisans had direct access to actual Japanese textiles. This technique, which creates small diaper patterns, was sometimes used to represent pine boughs on Edo-period kimono, indigenous to Japan and specific to textile.

Moreover, the Fries Museum gown does not include bamboo. The painted flowers, which are depicted on leaf-bearing branches with slightly indented petals, also resemble cherry rather than the plum blossoms associated with shōchikubai. Clearly, if the Japanese motif was copied, it was not done in Indian cotton which could come in large widths than the traditional style — a pleat would still be made in the middle to replicate the traditional back seam.

A later gown is an example of a partly ready-made kit. Its sides remain unsewn and its sleeves detached, ready to be assembled. A comment in the VOC-archives shows that the front and the back were made from one piece of fabric without a shoulder seam, which means that the garment was made from fabric that received its motif specifically to be made into this type of dress. Certain items in the VOC-archives also show that the pattern was painted onto the garment after assembly. The stitches used to assemble the garment reveals that the thread used took on the red dye (probably chong), while the inside of the seams remained uncoloured, which shows that the seam existed when the partly assembled garment received its colour. This technique of applying decoration post-assembly is key to other night gowns made on the Coromandel coast and may have been a widespread practice. The many references to ready-made night gowns in European capsules such as Amsterdam have usually been interpreted as an indication of the advent of ready-made production in the West. Our evidence suggests that India produced ready-made or partly ready-made garments for export from the end of the 17th century.

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Unexpected Consequences

The Javanese batik collection of Thailand’s King Rama V (r. 1868-1910)

Dale Carolyn Gluckman

In 2009, during the course of seeking inspiration for the opening exhibitions, that the curatorial team was permitted access to the inner court of the Grand Palace. Textiles and clothing belonging to King Rama V had sat in locked storage there, undisturbed since his passing in 1910. During the course of looking at a variety of Thai court textiles and a few Indian saris from two of the king’s short visits to India, suddenly Javanese batik sarongs were placed on our worktable. Why were Javanese batiks in the Grand Palace in Bangkok? We learned that King Rama V had traveled to Java in 1871, 1896, and 1901. Since 1910, however, no one outside of two or three Palace intimates had ever seen the collection.

Time, war, and the environment are often hard on objects as fragile as textiles. As a result, although there are examples of Javanese batik dating before the dawn of the 20th century, they are relatively rare and many have little or no documentation regarding their date and circumstances of production. This is an important find for the history of Thailand and Thai-Indonesian relations as well as for the study of Indonesian batik. Accordingly, those present at this rediscovery were encouraged to remember the collection for a future exhibition and publication.

Like the museum itself, the batik project was an international team effort requiring years of planning and research. In October 2018, our collective dream became reality with the opening of the exhibition, A Royal Treasure: The Javanese Batik Collection of King Chulalongkorn of Siam. This short essay presents highlights both of the collection and significant discoveries made along the way, as well as a brief outline of the king’s travels in Java.

King Chulalongkorn was dedicated to keeping Siam independent of colonial domination, as well as modernising the country. Visiting Singapore and Java, therefore, was a way to see recent innovations such as streetcars and railroads the Dutch and English were bringing to their colonies. The visit was also intended to impress upon Europeans that the king was, in fact, a legitimate head of state, not a local chieftain, and an educated, English-speaking, progressive monarch in his own right [fig. 1].

Primary sources for the king’s visits are his personal diaries of the 1896 and 1901 trips; expense accounts of the second visit — including batik purchases; a hand-written photograph translation of descriptive text from the 1896 visit in local Dutch newspapers on Java; and female entrepreneur. Her pieces are distinctive (palace) …

Possibly the most important workshop visited by the king was on 3 July: “In the afternoon, I went to see the sarong production at [in Garut] and saw the sarong production workshop owned by Carolina Josephina von Franquemont (1817-1867), the earliest known Eurasian female entrepreneur. Her pieces are distinctive and were highly prized for decades after her workshop was destroyed in 1867 by a volcanic eruption in which she is believed to have perished. The sarongs (hip wrappers) attributed to her workshop in the collection all have their ends sewn together, indicating they had already been worn when acquired; sarongs purchased new would be unseen. It could not be determined how the king acquired these pieces and whether it was on the first trip or a later one. But they are among the rarest pieces in any batik collection. Nota the rich green dye, for which von Franquemont was famous [fig. 2].

An official visit: 9 March-15 April 1871

No photographs are extant from this brief, 11-day visit of the 17-year-old king. We do know that he rode a tram in Batavia (modern Jakarta) — a great novelty — and stopped in only one other city, Semarang. There, at a local official’s home, the king witnessed “the dyeing and printing of sarongs and benevolently accepted a finished sari.” Unfortunately, it was impossible to identify this piece in the surviving collection — if it still exists.

Five pieces in the collection, however, came from a famous batik workshop owned by Carolina Josephina von Franquemont (1817-1867), the earliest known Eurasian female entrepreneur. Her pieces are distinctive and were highly prized for decades after her workshop was destroyed in 1867 by a volcanic eruption in which she is believed to have perished. The sarongs (hip wrappers) attributed to her workshop in the collection all have their ends sewn together, indicating they had already been worn when acquired; sarongs purchased new would be unseen. It could not be determined how the king acquired these pieces and whether it was on the first trip or a later one. But they are among the rarest pieces in any batik collection. Nota the rich green dye, for which von Franquemont was famous [fig. 2].

A private journey, 9 May-12 August 1896.

Although this was a ‘private’ visit for the king’s health, it was avidly followed by the local Dutch-language press, and he was granted by both Colonial and Javanese officials throughout his time there. The Sultan of Yogyakarta, HRH Hamangubuwono VII (r. 1879-1921), assigned the first professional Javanese photographer, Kassian Céphas, to photograph the royal party during their entire visit [fig. 3].

It was on this visit that His Majesty’s interest in Javanese art and culture, particularly batik, is most evident: the king’s diaries mention visiting batik workshops and local markets and purchasing from itinerant sellers. For example: “Went to the residence of the Raden Adjapati [in Garut] and saw the sarong production process [batik] and I tried my hand at it.” Possibly the most important workshop visited by the king was on 3 July: “In the afternoon, I went to see kain making at the Western woman’s house … there are 100 workers … This workshop is one of the best in the city except for the keraton (palace) … each finished piece was sold for 25 guilders.” Ultimately the king bought at least 41 pieces from this workshop (which he visited again in 1901).

The Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles (QSMT) opened in Bangkok on the grounds of the Grand Palace in 2012. The museum is housed in an 1870s building by an Italian architect. It had been unoccupied for several decades when it was granted to Her Majesty Queen Sirikit in 2004 by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej (r. 1947-2016) for the creation of a state-of-the-art textile museum. The museum then became a sub-cabinet-level ministry within the Royal Office for the Arts and Culture.

The Focus
Accompanying the collection are inventory cards handwritten in Thai and English with such annotations as places of purchase, function (a head cloth or sarong, for example), the name of the pattern, and the price in Dutch guilders. This practice probably began in 1895, when the bulk of the collection was purchased. These alone are rare survivals, all but unavailable for historical textiles. But pieces of lined note paper in a different, classic European hand accompanied many of these cards, reading “W. L. van Lackwijk Pabst” ([fig. 4b]). This author’s research revealed that they were “signature papers” used by Indian-European batik entre-preneurs before 1900, when waxed signatures on the cloth itself became the norm. Nowhere, however, has an example of one of these papers been published until now.

But who was this person, whose name was mentioned only once in the literature? Author Sandra Niessen did an outstanding job identifying the fascinating story behind those initials: Wilhelmina Frederikka van Lackwijk van Pabst was, in fact, two women with the same name, a mother (1827-1905) and a daughter (1856-1909), who produced some of the finest batik in Central Java. They were members of a famous aristocratic family with deep roots in the Indies and high-level connections in both Java and the Netherlands. Despite the fame of their production from the latter half of the 19th century to the death of the daughter in 1909, as well as the existence of batik process and pattern samples from the Dutch East Indies pavilion of the 1900 Paris Exposition Internationale (now in the collection of the Tropenmuseum), the workshop and its owners were all but forgotten by the mid-20th century ([fig. 5]).

For His Majesty’s health, 5 March – 24 July 2001

During this third and last trip, one of the king’s sons, Prince Askadong, became ill in Bandung. As a result, the king and queen stayed with their son for over a month. The king’s diary tells us that on a rainy 12 June, 1909, “A “signature paper” with a large foreign population and establishments selling fashionable batik, many made in towns along the north coast of the island. There are eight pieces in the collection from the workshop of the famous batik entrepreneur, Mr. J. Jans, based in Pekalongan. They were almost certainly purchased on 12 June. One piece ([fig. 6a and 6b]) is signed “Weduwe Jan” (weduwe, “widow”), a signature that she seems to have used from 1885 when her husband died until around 1900, as it is the only one with this signature in the group purchased by the king; the other pieces of hers are simply signed “J. Jans” or unsigned. There is also an Art Nouveau feel to the somewhat trapazoidal transverse panel which would have been very “Avant Garde” in 1901. Her pieces were expensive and fashionable, her clients the wives of Dutch officials, either Dutch (as she was) or Indo-European (their status as wives of those officials entitled them to identify as Dutch). The feminine colours and motifs of her sarong would have made them perfectly fine for at-home wear. The clean white or cream backgrounds and predominately floral patterns echoed Dutch printed cottons (inspired by the famous Indian chintz manufacture for the European market), while the romantic lacey border designs were similar to the last trim worn by European women in that era.

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Notes
1 The author wishes to acknowledge QSMT colleagues: Piyavararn Teekwara Naranjo, director; Sarttarat Muddin, curator; Piyawan Petchsaranwut, editor; catalogue co-authors: S. Muddin, Judit Achjodi and Dr. Sandra Niessen, and Project Advisor: Dr. Marsha Waworuntu. Some information in this article is drawn from the excellent catalogue contributions of Dr. Muddin and Judi Achjodi. Lack of space prevents acknowledging all those who contributed to this multi-year project.
2 The exhibition is accompanied by a 320-page, full colour catalogue. A Royal Treasure: The Javanese Batik Collection of King Chulalongkorn of Siam, Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok: 2019.
3 Sandeepa, Rambana. A True Hero: King Chulalongkorn of Siam’s Visit to Singapore and Java in 1876-1877, no. 63, Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2008.
4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
5 Kassan, Capheo. The largest archive of photographs of batik, including those of the 1896 visit to Java, are in the collection of KITLV and now housed in the Leiden University Libraries.
6 Hill King Chulalongkorn, Rayayath (three chasse kwa song dun) (Narrative of a Journey to Java of Over Two Months in Batavia in 1896), Cremation Volume. Bangkok, B.E. 2518 (1955), p. 90. (In Thai, translated by S. Muddin). This is the king’s diary from the 1956 trip, National Archives of Thailand, Bangkok.
7 Lee, cit., p. 265.
9 Crafts of the Netherlands East Indies were the focus of the Dutch government’s pavilion at the Exposition Internationale. Dutch processes were particularly highlighted. A handful of the sample patterns were hung from the ceiling of the workshop in the Tropenmuseum match full-size batik in the king’s collection. There is no doubt all were produced in the same workshop.
10 See Sandra Niessen, “Kam making at the Western Women’s House,” “Van Looick van Pabst Story,” in Dale Gluckmann and Sarttarat Muddin (eds. and co-authors), A Royal Treasure. The Javanese Batik Collection of King Chulalongkorn of Siam, 2018, Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok, Chapter 2, pp. 57-75.
Kantha forms and transformations

Niaz Zamen and Cathy Stevulok

With these transformations, the kantha can now be found worldwide, not only in museums, but also in fashion models on runways, and worn by fashion models on runways. Ceremonial kanthas, made by artisans of Kumudini, are put together and reconstituted by artisans of Kumudini. The empty spaces were stitched with white yarn to create a ripple effect [Fig. 1].

How kanthas are made

Traditionally, layers of old saris, lungis, or dhotis were put together and reconstituted into objects of functional, ritual, or ceremonial use. Borders and motifs were embroidered in variations of the running stitch with coloured yarns. Thicker yarns today are purchased separately and used. Most of the stitching and embroidery kanthas are made of soft, old cloth, are used to wrap babies. Husbands or sons who leave home to work almost always carry with them a kantha made by their wives or mothers. The kantha symbolises the affection of the maker for the recipient and, being made of rags, is also believed to grant protection from the evil eye. Kanthas also form part of the dowry of brides in certain parts of Bangladesh and West Bengal.

Brief history

Quilts made of multiple layers of cloth are common all over the South Asian subcontinent. However, the kantha, with its running stitch embroidery, seems to have its roots in Bengal. Known sometimes as sari – from the word for stitch or needle – it is also related in form to the suzani of Central Asia. The finest 19th-century kanthas come from the Jessore, Faridpur, and Khulna regions of Bangladesh, bordering what is now the State of West Bengal. Embroidery designs related in form to the suzani of Central Asia.

The early years of the twentieth century saw the rise of the swadeshi movement for independence from Britain. It also saw an interest in recovering the past traditions of Bengal. The Bengali educator, writer, and folklorist Dinesh Chandra Sen (1866–1939) began at the beginning of the process, women would spread layers of the cloth on the packed-earth ground of the courtyard. The edges would be pinned to the ground with thorns from date trees. The cloths would then be folded in and stitched. Long running stitches at intervals down the length of the cloth would be worked to keep the layers together. The kantha could then be folded and put away to be further worked and embroidered when convenient. Typically, a large lotus would be worked in the centre. Following this, corner motifs and then numerous other motifs or scenes would be added, depending on the time and artistic ability of the kantha artist. Some very fine 19th-century kanthas relate scenes from the story of Radha and Krishna. Decorative kanthas are stitched through the layers of cloth or through a surface layer of silk and lower layers of cotton. Embroidery yarn in the past was taken from the borders of saris and would be generally blue, red, or black.

The finest 19th-century kanthas relate scenes from the story of Radha and Krishna. Decorative kanthas are stitched through the layers of cloth or through a surface layer of silk and lower layers of cotton. Embroidery yarn in the past was taken from the borders of saris and would be generally blue, red, or black. The finest 19th-century kanthas relate scenes from the story of Radha and Krishna. Decorative kanthas are stitched through the layers of cloth or through a surface layer of silk and lower layers of cotton. Embroidery yarn in the past was taken from the borders of saris and would be generally blue, red, or black. Today, old saris are replaced by new cotton fabrics. As this material is normally thicker, two layers of cloth may be sufficient for a kantha. Most of the stitching and embroidery yarns today are purchased separately and are available in multiple colours. While cotton yarn is still in general use, nowadays bamboo, rayon, or silk threads are also used, especially for commercial kanthas.
kanthas, however, are worked with the herringbone stitch, which helps create large areas of solid color. This stitch is also used to embellish silk saris and is very different from the type of kantha made in Bangladesh.

In East Pakistan, growing economic awareness, cultural domination by West Pakistan arose together with the language movement, especially after the police shooting on a peaceful procession demanding Bengali as a state language on 21st February 1952. This also helped promote the survival of the kantha craft in Bangladesh. The real revival of the kanthas started with the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, when artists such as Quamrul Hassan (1921-1988) started with the marriage scene and Suraiya Kantha (1974-1998) created elaborate story-telling kanthas.

Kantha revival

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, famine and food shortages ravaged the newly-born nation, and many women were widowed in the preceding war or separated from their families. In an attempt to rehabilitate destitute women, kantha-making was promoted as an economic activity, particularly in Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur, and Rajshahi, parts of Bangladesh with strong kantha traditions. Karika, a handicraft cooperative, was set up and helped to promote kanthas by using its motifs and embroidery on household goods and garments. Karika was followed by Aarong – the outlet for the Menonnette Central Committee (MCC) and then for the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) – and Kumudini, another NGO. However, the catalyst for the kantha revival was, strangely enough, the opening of the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka, in 1981.

Suraajah Rahman (1932-2018), an artist who worked with the Voluntary Artisans’ Organisation, was invited by BRAC to design a kantha wall-hanging for the new hotel, based on photographs from the Stella Kramrisch Collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Fig. 2). BRAC, which had been working with kanthas and had produced a sample wall hanging, was, for various reasons, unable to embroider the large textile artwork for the hotel. As a result, Suraajah Rahman’s design was embroidered by artisans at Kumudini. [Fig. 3].

Apart from Suraajah Rahman, Zainul Abedin (1914-1976) initiated artists such as Quamrul Hassan (1921-1988) and Farah Khan has been making high-end diportes and scrapping the type of kantha used for the royal wedding piece designed by Razia Quadir for Hotel Sonargaon and popularised by Banusha Shukla, a Jessore-based NGO (Fig. 6).

Artists are also exploring the kantha for inspiration. The New York-based artist, Shah Abdu Shokor (1947-), paints kantha stitches on his pictures based on Mymensingh ballads. The late Indian artist, Meera Mukherjee (1923-1998), drew upon the kantha for her embroidered designs, called “stitched paintings,” whereby children and women from the rural areas and the kantha artisans did the embroidery.

Global movement of kanthas

Foreigners visiting Bangladesh and India – where antique pieces find purchasers acquiring traditional kanthas – now worked kantha wall hangings to take home, raising an awareness of the fineness of the handwork of this region. Exhibitions of kanthas have been hosted in prestigious museums, such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Japanese collector Hiroko Iwatate has established the Iwatate Folk Textile Museum in Tokyo, which has a large collection of kanthas. Kantha quilts and kantha-embellished garments can be found on the Internet, in shops selling handmade crafts, and in department stores in Bangladesh and around the world. As the kantha becomes appreciated worldwide, with more attention paid to sustainability, slow fashion, and folk arts, it also has the potential to inspire new generations of artists, craftpeople, and designers.

Works Cited


Batik Tulis production has gone through a period of decline, due to the penetration and application of new printing techniques, which are commercially more attractive, being less time consuming and more efficient in quantities of production. Yet, batik tulis has proved to be a technique that can adapt to changing areas. It has even become an exclusive, and highly appreciated product, and has its own economic value that continues to increase. Batik also received world recognition as a Masterpiece of Intangible World Heritage by UNESCO on 2 October 2009.

Early development of Batik Kompeni

In 1799 the position of the VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) in the Dutch East Indies was taken over by the Dutch state. This transfer of power led many Dutch people to migrate to Indonesia, and most of them settled in Java. At that time, the importation of Indian textiles to the Dutch East Indies had stopped due to various unfavourable conditions. Due to this development, the Dutch switched to local workshops for producing textile fabrics, and became an opportunity for batik craftsmen in Java to increase production and widen the market for batik products.

At that time, the batik in Java were grouped into two main commodity styles, namely “Batik Pesisir” / “Batik Istana” (produced in the center of Java) and “Batik Peselit” (produced along the northern coast of Java). Batik Istana, also known as Batik Vorstenlanden, was made mainly for the aristocracy in Solo and Yogyakarta. Batik istana is characterised by the standard patterns and symbols that were often used for traditional ritual occasions. Coastal batik or Batik Peselit was more widely used by ordinary people. It was more diverse and more likely to change over time.

The Batik Kompeni style was developed from the Batik Peselit that includes new motifs developed to meet the tastes of the Dutch. Several local batik craftsmen cooperated in making batik and started to join business groups, many of whom were led by Indo-Dutch (women) entrepreneurs. The Batik Kompeni style is unique because it often reflects popular European folk tales, such as “Snow White”, “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Cinderella.” (Fig. 2) Batik Kompeni also depicts the lives of the Kompeni soldiers armed with rifles, as well as the lives of Dutch settlers. (Fig. 3)

The Batik Kompeni style and the role of Dutch batik entrepreneurs (1800-1900s)

From the early nineteenth century, European art and culture were massively introduced in Java. Local Indonesian artists and craftsmen have studied Western drawing techniques, such as the use of perspective and realism. This development led to a hybrid style of Javanese and Western traditions, which can clearly be seen in the Batik Kompeni style that was worked by Cirebon artists and craftsmen (Fig. 4).

The production of the Batik Kompeni style soon spread across Central Java and East Java, but especially along the coastal areas of North Java. This was clearly the golden period of Dutch-style batik. Indo-Dutch entrepreneurs were collaborating with batik craftsmen to develop their businesses in various cities in the north of Java. Batik centres were developed and built in Semarang, Ungaran, Banyumas, Pacitan, Surakarta, and Yogyakarta. In 1910, the Javanese Batik Kompeni also appeared in Banjumas, in southern Java. Pelalongan was an important centre for the batik industry of Central and North Java. In this city, the batik craftsmen and entrepreneurs came up with the labels and names of specific Batik Kompeni motifs, that were often named after themselves, such as the Vansalong/Zulien motif (from the name Van Zulien) and the Paranastrom motif (from the name Van Osteroom). In addition, the so-called Frankemon batik also became famous for the “green colour Frankemon” (from the name van Franquemont).

Dutch batik entrepreneurs have also produced batik with animal and plant motifs, such as storks that appeared in the midst of water plants. In addition, traditional patterns were also enriched with European or, specifically, Dutch nuances and decorative patterns.

Apart from the Dutch’s, Chinese and Arab batik entrepreneurs have also appeared, and they played a huge role in the development of Batik Kompeni to meet the ever growing demands of the market. Initially, the batik business was still an indigenous home industry, but the production process was later then transformed into industrial scale by the batik entrepreneurs. However, by 1942, when the Japanese occupied Java, most of the Dutch in Indonesia had either returned to the Netherlands or were interned by the Japanese, so that almost all of the Dutch batik companies in Java stopped their production.

Challenges and opportunities for Batik Kompeni

Modern batik production in Indonesia adheres to various styles and traditions, with different motifs, materials, techniques, and functions. Creativity in the production of modern batik designs is very diverse and functional. The diversity of product creations and batik motifs today has made it hard to recognise the roots of the cultural traditions. In the past, batik products were sacred, functional, and valued collectively. Whereas now, the making of batik has increasingly responded to market imperatives like consumer demand and profit margins.

In the current situation, various aspects of cultures are in a crisis caused by the meeting of local and foreign influences. However, many artists and craftsmen, especially those producing traditional batik, have become engaged in the preservation and promotion of their own culture. Creativity and persistence of batik designers and craftsmen will always be needed in facing many challenges.

The growing regional autonomy in Indonesia has lent support to the preservation of traditional local arts and crafts. Information is being collected, and local potential is being developed as an asset for the future. Batik production is also changing, answering market demands, and new batik designs are being developed with the help of artists and designers creativity. Batik that contains of ethnic values has also emerged, with a new face and forms that most people call modern and contemporary.

Globalisation is a challenge that must be faced with care in order to maintain local values and local identity. Indonesian batik designs are based on norms, values, traditions, and innovations that have developed over centuries. The Batik Kompeni style, which has the potential to further inspire the development of batik, tells a nuanced story that is simultaneously global and Indonesian. The development of new motifs, especially in the contemporary Batik Kompeni style, has become a great success because of the excellent quality and high economic value of the product.

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Sukajan: crossing cultures

Francesco Montuori

A
other example of a garment that has
blurred such imaginary lines, and
travelled across the globe is the sukajan
from Japan. This is a short jacket open
down the front (with either zips or buttons),
long sleeves, and a low, upright collar. These jackets are
often lined in the same or a contrasting material.
The main feature of the sukajan jacket is the embroidery that
decorates the front, back, and sleeves of the garment.
Yet, the shape of such jackets is not originally
from Japan. Instead, it is an adaptation of
American military and sportswear.

American bomber and letterman jackets
There are two comparable American
garments that have influenced the sukajan
jacket. The first is the bomber jacket worn
by US aircrews. These were originally made
from leather lined with wool fleece, which
was intended to keep the wearers warm
when flying at high altitudes. There was also
another version of the bomber jacket, lighter
and cooler since it was produced without the
flexible padding and the leather. Here the sleeves were of the same material and colour.
The second American garment is the
so-called letterman jacket, which has been
popular with university athletes since the
1860s. These garments usually have a large letter on them, which indicated the school,
college, or university with which the wearer was affiliated. The letterman jackets are
classified by having sleeves in either a different
colour from the main body of the garment, or sometimes in a different material
but in the same colour as the main garment.
Another form developed from the letterman
jacket, namely the baseball jacket, which is
very similar, but lacks the big letter.
Neither the bomber jacket nor the letterman
jacket, apart from the large letter, normally has
any decoration on it. In contrast, the Japanese
sukajan jacket has social, political, military,
as well as personal and cultural
connotations. It is often associated with
a certain style or group. These elements which were common in all of East
Asia, as in Korea or in Vietnam, making these not
Japanese jackets. Therefore, sukajan jackets were initially born in Japan, they merge
as possible. They would appear as ‘inherently’
Japanese to the American military.
Natural symbols do, however, appear also elsewhere in
East Asian embroidery or art in general, such as
in Korea or in Vietnam, making these not exclusively Japanese. Thus, although sukajan
jackets were initially born in Japan, they merge
elements which were common in all of East
Asia, making them ‘Asian-style jackets’ rather
than simply Japanese jackets.

Development of the sukajan jacket
The origins of the sukajan jacket can be
pinpointed to the years immediately following
the end of World War II (1939–1945) in Japan,
and more specifically to the military base of
Yokosuka (a city in the Kanagawa Prefecture, in
the proximity of Tokyo), then under the control
of the American Navy. In fact, the term sukajan is
derived from Suka (from Yokosuka) and Jan,
short for the Japanese term Janpan (mutated
from the English word jumper), to indicate the
place where this type of garment originated.
The personnel on the Yokosuka base would have worn both the military bomber jacket
when on duty and the letterman-style jackets
when off-duty. Sukajans were developed as a result of US navy personnel starting to have their
(off-duty) jackets customised and decorated by
local Japanese tailors, using machine embroidery and elements initially
associated with Japan. As a result, sukajan
jackets started to represent a type of garment
shared by the American military community
stationed in the country, and at the same time they became a symbol of the Japanese who
embroidered and wore them.

More and more American servicemen started
wearing sukajan jackets when off-duty, but
with decoration on it that reflected their military
affiliations (fig. 2). In this way, they provided
inspiration for a new Japanese fashion line
that has continued to the present day.

Furthermore, the wearing of sukajan jackets
quickly expanded to other countries where
US soldiers were stationed. In this way, the
community wearing this type of jacket became
bigger, including soldiers stationed in other
military bases in East Asia, such as those in
Korea or Vietnam (fig. 3).

From the 1950s onwards, this type of
garment crossed the borders of the US military
bases and started being used by various
Japanese groups. It is notable, however, that at
this time it was mostly worn by and associated with
yakuza (criminal gangs) members. This
development was at the beginning of a shift
in the association of sukajan jackets, from
American soldiers to Japanese ‘bad boys.’
The embroidered subjects on ‘Japanese’
sukajan jackets may vary considerably,
but there are some general trends that can be
identified. Some, for example, represent
elements usually associated with Japan, such as
animals indicating power and leadership
(e.g., dragons, tigers) (fig. 4). Such elements
would then strengthen the association between
the group wearing it and the qualities usually
attributed to such animals, mostly strength,
thus highlighting the ‘bad boys’ narrative. These
animals are also very common in Japanese
traditional tattoos, irezumi, another practice
very common amongst yakuza members.
Other nature-inspired forms included birds,
butterflies, and floral motifs, such as cherry
trees and wisteria, as well as Japanese icons
such as Mount Fuji. Overall, these motifs and
embroidered subjects already appeared in
traditional garments, including the kimono,
possibly the source that gave the original
inspiration for the selection of such elements.
Yet, kimono decorations are often seasonal,
meaning that the elements embroidered should match with the season when they were worn,
whereas the same could probably not be said
for sukajan. Matching with the season was not
the point of wearing these jackets; more so,
such garments aimed to look like ‘Japanese’
as possible. They would appear as ‘inherently’
Japanese to the American military.
Natural symbols do, however, appear also elsewhere in
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Other examples of sukajan jackets would appear to highlight the ‘souvenir’ nature of this
type of jacket, with embroideries that do not
highlight any sense of belonging to a particular
place or group. Instead, they were keepsakes of a
moment in time, with memories highlighted through the
embroidered elements (fig. 5).

From the 1990s onwards, certain Western
brands (such as Diesel and H&M) started to
actively promote sukajan jackets in their own
collections. One result of this is that more and more Japanese girls and women have started to
wear sukajan jackets. Another result is that
a cheaper line of sukajan has appeared,
amongst those with printed designs. This form
is often associated with Chinese-produced
garments.

Today, sukajan jackets are spread all over
the world and are becoming more and more
popular. Furthermore, the origins of these garments have a strong connection with
the community where they were created –
namely the US military in Japan, or later
among yakuza members – nowadays they have lost any specific military or
gang connotations. Instead, their meaning and
identity have been renegotiated. They
have become garments whose ‘Asian-like’ features are still recognised, but they cannot
be classed as distinctly or even typically
American or Asian. Instead, they have become
global objects.

Francesco Montuori is an MA student at
Leiden University and an intern at the
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a deep interest in Japanese culture. He is
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textiles (katagami), planned to open in January
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Since people first started wearing a feather or a bead, dress
and identity have played an important role. Sometimes
ideas and designs were swapped and exchanged (the global
buteh/paisley motif is a good example of this), while on other
occasions it is the garment itself that has travelled from one
culture to another. The pajamas of India became sleepwear
in the West, and the kimono from Japan became an indoor
garment for elite men in The Netherlands from the 18th century.
Even that global fashion statement – namely the pair of jeans
(USA in origin), made from denim (originally from France) –
was originally workmen’s clothing and is now worn by men,
women, and children across the world in every social group.
Or how about the suit worn by many men (with or without a
tie) and some women to stress their social status, place, and
knowledge of the business or professional world? All of these,
and many more garments, have travelled, been adopted and
adapted to the needs of other people and cultures.

Fig. 1: A black sukajan jacket by tailor Tokie, in the
bomber jacket style (early 1950s-style; early 21st century,
see fig. 4, courtesy of the Textile Research Centre,
Leiden, TRC 2021.0423). Fig. 2: A sukajan (bomber) jacket
by Schott, belonging to the 13th Airborne Division, stationed in
Yokosuka (1942-1945), courtesy of the Textile Research Centre,
Leiden, TRC 2021.0429). Fig. 3: A sukajan (bomber) jacket from the 1960s with a
relevant map of Vietnam embroidered on the back - Phu
Hoa BRV Dong is the name of a district north of Ho
Chi Minh City, courtesy of the Textile Research Centre,
Leiden, TRC 2021.0428.

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Textiles with a Dual Heritage

Working for a number of years with the Civilizations in Contact Project at Cambridge University, I became fascinated by textiles that are the product of these contacts and which have, if you like, two parents or elements from different parts of the world.

This could be design, in the case of a very moving child’s cap from Afghanistan, embroidered with military helicopters, probably Russian [fig. 1]. Did the boy ask for that pattern? More likely, it was embroidered by a mother hoping to protect her child, as more traditional textiles feature snakes and scorpions. Planes are occasionally found on North African kelims, scorpions. Planes are occasionally found on North African kelims, scorpions. Planes are occasionally found on North African kelims, scorpions. Planes are occasionally found on North African kelims, scorpions.

Another example, this time stretching across millennia as well as miles, is the motif of two peacocks drinking at a fountain, symbolising the water of life. It was probably borrowed from a Palaeo-Christian sarcophagus, of which there are many in this region, before entering a Palaeo-Christian sarcophagus, of which there are many in this region, before entering a Palaeo-Christian sarcophagus, of which there are many in this region, before entering a Palaeo-Christian sarcophagus, of which there are many in this region.

Again, there is the garment itself. In Guatemala, for example, there is no tradition of decorative aprons, so common in the Slavic world. The elaborate ones worn today with traditional dress in Guatemala are borrowed from Europe, or perhaps North America. The decoration can be in the local style or, as here, hybrid [fig. 4]. It could also be technique. The standard skirt material for Guatemalan Indian women, particularly from El Quiche, is a kind of ikat known as jaspe. The technique seems not to have been in use in Central America before the Conquest, nor does it come from Spain or elsewhere in Europe. It is, however, well known in the Philippines. Many things were brought from there to the Americas by the Spaniards. Could ikat have travelled as well?

Given the enormous trade in textiles at all periods of history, it is not surprising to find all kinds of combinations. To give one example: a marriage curtain, acquired in Rabat and embroidered in the traditional local manner, but using as its base material Indian white-on-white embroidered muslin [fig. 5]. A similar example used a chikankari sari, probably from Lucknow. As an additional twist, according to one theory, this type of work is thought to have originated in Shiraz, imported into India by the Mughals.

Or, again, a 17th century kimono with panels of Indian chintz, introduced to Japan by the Portuguese and usually too costly to be used for anything but small bags and purses. The Japanese soon learned to imitate these cotton fabrics – saraço – although the designs could never be mistaken for the Indian originals. A comparable example might be the Russian cottons exported in vast quantities to Central Asia and used as linings for robes, furnishings, etc. Eventually, they were produced there, mainly in Uzbekistan, although imports continued, later from farther afield (e.g., Japan and China).

I became especially interested in this question of dual heritage when working on the development and travels of the embroidered silk Chinese shawls, commonly known in English as Canton shawls, because of the region where they were made (now Guangzhou). They are known in Spanish as mantones de Manila, because Manila is where they were trans-shiped. Shawls were a standard item across Europe for centuries, worn for warmth or for decoration, but in the early 19th century Chinese shawls began to appear in great numbers – especially, but not exclusively, in the Hispanic world, where they became an element in the national dress of various regions. In China, however, the square fringed shawl has never been a standard article of clothing, although stoles were worn at an earlier period, as seen in paintings from the Tang dynasty (618–906). The Canton shawl is therefore itself an East-West hybrid.

Since part of the appeal of these shawls was their exoticism, although they were commissioned by Western merchants (the Spanish author Perez Galdos has a wonderful and accurate description of the trade in his novel Fortunata y Jacinta), the designs were almost always Chinese. Some of the earliest examples, however, have clearly Western motifs, especially a nosegay tied up with a ribbon. This was a very fashionable pattern around 1800, which made its way not only to...
China, but also to the Ottoman Empire, where it begins to appear in domestic embroideries, probably copied from imported French silks.

The vast majority of the motifs, however, were the kind the embroideresses would have been used to working on their own clothes, or pieces they were commissioned to make for local use. Each element would have had a meaning, usually prophylactic or wishing 'good luck' — as is the case with almost all traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not traditional weaving and embroidery. Outside China, the symbolism was, of course, not tradition
The International Institute for Asian Studies annually hosts a large number of visiting researchers (research fellows) who come to Leiden to work on their own individual research project. In addition, IIAS also facilitates the teaching and research by various professorial fellows as part of agreements with Dutch universities, foreign ministries and funding organisations. Meet our fellows at www.iias.asia/fellows

**Joel Bordeaux**

**"Without going out the door, know the world"**

IIAS Research Clusters: Asian Heritage; Global Asia
1 Nov 2020 – 31 Oct 2021

The country was already under partial lockdown when I arrived in November, so I wasn’t entirely sure what to expect. The university was basically closed, too, but if one must studiously avoid the office and public transport, Leiden is a lovely place to do so. Here I have at least been given the opportunity to migrate a not-insignificant number of the library’s impressive South Asia collections to my apartment. In fact, considering my own largely speculative sense of what life at the IIAS is like normally like, it seems fitting to settle into a project about imaginary journeys and lost locations here. My research, you see, concerns representations of ‘China’ and ‘Chinese’ ritual in Hindu sources, but I have come to suspect that the majority of the premodern Indian authors I have been reading were likely also ‘working from home’. It is doubtful whether many of them ever left the subcontinent, or for that matter, whether they share a consistent understanding of the geography of the places they refer to in Sanskrit as Cīna (China) or Mahācīna (‘Greater China’) other than locating them beyond the Himalayas.

What they do generally agree on is that the esoteric, so-called Chinese form of ritual taught by the Buddha in this foreign land ignores many of the regulations around purity and auspicious timing that typically structure Hindu rites – and indeed, there is evidence in the earliest sources of ‘pious plagiarism’ from early 2nd-millennium Indian Buddhist tantric traditions that do just that. Presently, I am looking at how some early modern commentators (known to have travelled to Nepal at least, where they may well have encountered living Buddhist traditions long since extinct in India) attempted to assimilate or indigenize these supposedly imported practices. My hope is that this will yield clues as to what was considered essentially ‘Chinese’ about them.

**Samia Kotele**

From the quest for religious authority to the development of a new gender theology: the history of female ulema in Indonesia since the 20th century
IIAS Research Cluster: Global Asia

My research stay at IIAS has been an outstanding chance to continue my research despite Covid-19 restrictions. Having the opportunity to work in the Special Collections of Leiden University led me to look into the intellectual history of female ulema throughout the 20th century. The access to relevant and indispensable sources like correspondence, press, and manuscripts encouraged me to rethink my approach and methodology while my ethnographic research field in Indonesia was put on hold. Beyond studying the nexus between Islam, gender, and knowledge production in a comparative perspective, this body of sources invited me to place female thought at the core of my study. Through a study of concepts and ideas, my research aims not only to depict connections between reform and the condition of women, but also aims to understand the constant interactions between everyday life and the reflected life of female ulema in Indonesia. The richness of the sources pushed me to not only focus on moments of historical ruptures, but also to pay attention to the micro-evolutions occurring in various domains such as religion, education, politics and philanthropy, in which female ulema played a public and/or private role. The IIAS fellowship has given me the chance to discuss and widen my perspectives by giving me the tools to decipher the contexts of production and reception of the discourses of pioneer woman since the beginning of the 20th century. The extraordinary access of a wide range of sources from a diverse set of geographical locations allowed me to question the exceptionality of the engagement of women, both in the religious field and its contribution to the evolution of ideas through the process of human circulation. Leiden’s vibrant community of researchers keeps inspiring me to enrich my visions and situate the historiographical stakes of this issue at the crossroads of Islamic and Asian studies. This serene and fascinating environment, together with its historical significance, has been an exceptional chance for me to develop my thought. I hope I can continue in the future to contribute to the intellectual and cultural scene.

**IIAS Fellowship possibilities and requirements**

**Apply for an IIAS fellowship**

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands, invites outstanding researchers to apply for an IIAS fellowship to work on a relevant piece of research in the social sciences and humanities. The next application deadline is 1 October 2021.

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

When applying for an IIAS Fellowship, you have the option of simultaneously submitting an application for an additional two months of research at the Collège de France mandat of the Fondation Maison des sciences de l’Homme (CEM-FMSH), in Paris, France, immediately after your stay in Leiden. The next application deadline is 1 October 2021.

**Apply for a Gonda fellowship**

For promising youngologists 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. The next application deadline is 1 April 2022.
I was born and raised in Zeeland, the southwestern tip of what is known in the Netherlands as the ‘Bible Belt’, a zone of orthodox reformed church communities. Here, the smallest towns and suburbs could have multiple churches that each could hold a fair part of the population. This never diminished the apparent need for further searches for Christian authenticity, resulting in continuing religious splits and building plans. To me – at least back then – those in the process of being constructed seemed to have nothing to do with the older churches that typically formed the historical village centres. I remember living around the corner of a new suburban church that struck me, as a boy, as some sort of circus tent (Fig. 1).

I studied African law and cultural anthropology in Leiden, and I spent time in Senegal to do research on tradition and innovation among agricultural communities. I noticed that different Sufi brotherhoods built all kinds of mosques, harbouring colourful domes and spires that appeared utterly fanciful and out of place among the abode traditions of Islamic West Africa (Fig. 2). As with modern churches in the Netherlands, I could not relate these contemporary buildings to anything that I thought I knew about typical church or mosque architecture. It somehow felt as if all stylistic rules had been broken, and, concomitantly, all historical and regional ties.

This changed when I decided to pursue my studies in the field of art history. At Leiden University, a curriculum in non-Western art piqued my interest. Professor Aart Mekking, who had earlier introduced the methodology of iconography, or the ‘content’ of architecture, into the study of churches in the Low Countries, was Head of the section of architectural history. He was now in the process of turning it into a more comparative field along the lines of a theory of reality representation, within a research program called Comparative World Architecture Studies, or COMWAS. In its wake, a number of master’s and PhD theses would be produced by students with backgrounds in art history, design and anthropology, covering multiple regions, periods and religions, testing and developing their shared perspective in a coordinated effort.

As it appeared, the existence of historical and regional styles had largely been conceived in a colonial context, positioning Western aesthetics at the top of an evolutionary ladder. In the 19th century, these imagined styles were referred to in a search for design improvement, leading to a multiplicity of ‘neo-styles’. In the 20th century, a countercurrent of modernism led to seeking the use of such references as ‘backward’ and as something that eventually could, and should, be abandoned. However, through a more iconographic lens, religious architecture throughout the world was in a continuous process of transformation, related to a process of religious politics that continuously transformed religion itself. Cult buildings could be seen as constellations of creatively recombined aspects from strategically selected heavenly and earthly prototypes, architecturally representing the ever-changing political realities of religious patrons vying for legitimacy among their desired constituencies. In addition, as I would later find out, the method of iconography had been introduced into the study of Islamic, Jewish and Hindu architectural history as well. This had been done separately and by equally authoritative scholars in their own fields, who apparently had also become dissatisfied with the explanatory value of a stylistic perspective.

My own PhD, conducted within the multidisciplinary setting of the Leiden-based International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, or ISIM, was about the new mosques in the West, with in-depth case studies conducted in the Netherlands. I uncovered that, architecturally, patrons represented diverging visions of Islamic authenticity, creatively mixing notions of true theology with recombined references to physical and metaphorical buildings imbued with the correct sacred values. Among other things, I found references to the Koubobio Minaret, the House of the Prophet, the Mosque of the Prophet, the Tomb of the Prophet, the Kaaba Mosque, the Wapaus Mosque, the Edine mosque, modern mosques in Izmir, the Mosque and Minaret of the Messiah in Qadian, the Taj Mahal and several other Sufi shrine complexes (Fig. 3), each specifically chosen and transposed for its appropriate religious connotations. And I now learned that the supposedly fantastical mosques in Senegal could actually be seen as computing representations of paradise that creatively recombined localised Sufi notions with a variety of venerated shrine complexes in India, Pakistan and other Sufi shrines.

After my PhD, I was offered a postdoctoral fellowship at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, or AISSR, allowing me to minutely reconstruct half a century of building efforts among Inayatani Sufi patrons in the Netherlands and France. With this project, I was able to show how religious and architectural transformations are the result of ongoing competition for spiritual leadership and legitimacy in order to attract potential followers. With each added claimant came a new search for the authenticity of the original Message, to be appropriately represented in a newly devised building and in a rejetion of rivaling theological and designs. This led to some quite diverging iconographic desires, from an Islamic dargah to a fourfold meditating Buddha, with the end result in Katwijk as a wondrously shaped compromise (Fig. 4). After this project, I decided to look for a comparative and multidisciplinary setting and reconnected with Leiden University – first, as an affiliate to Area Studies, and then to COMWAS again, which had continued as an informal research group around its retired initiator.

My focus then shifted to modern Christian and Jewish architecture, starting with postwar specimens. These were considered standards of modern religious architecture to which all non-Western religious architecture had to measure up. I soon found out that references to prototypes had been just as important for patrons as they had been in the past. The only difference was that modernist architects had started to compete with each other by using abstraction and essentialisation. For more and more religious patrons, in their continuous search for legitimacy and authenticity, this appeared perfectly usable as long as selected aspects from their physical and metaphorical prototypes would remain recognisable. I thus found, among other things, architectural references to divine mountains; tabernacles; tents; Solomonic and Herodian temples; fire altars; forecourts; sheep barns; Noah’s arks; Heavenly Jerusalem; Roman theaters around Christ; and ever more creative recombinations of these. My bushy association with the circus tent in Zeeland turned out to be a lot less off the mark than I thought.

Interestingly enough, a variegated series of Dutch church patrons have recently started to react to recent architectural developments in the Netherlands (Fig. 5), as well as by a recent international tendency to ‘explain’ modern Hindu temples as ’halted in their evolution’ compared to other cult buildings, I decided to connect to the Critical Heritages cluster of the IAS. Based in Leiden, IAS is the ideal multidisciplinary setting for me. In the coming year, I will be conducting a study of Dutch mandirs embodied in my ongoing research on church, synagouge and recent mosque design. I will be giving guest lectures on the subject, and I look forward to attending lectures touching on cultural and religious fields.
This book explores the politics of heritage in the Malaysian historical city of Melaka. Already celebrated as the most glorious Malay kingdom and busy entrepôt, Melaka has been on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2008, on the strength of its multi-ethnic and multicultural urban fabric. Yet, contrary to the expectations of heritage experts and aficionados, the global mission of safeguarding cultural heritage has become a tumultuous issue on the ground.

**Title:** World Heritage and Urban Politics in Melaka, Malaysia: A Cityscape below the Winds  
**Author:** Pierpio Di Domenico  
**ISBN:** 978 96 6372 502 6  
**Publication date:** 1 July 2021 | Series: Asian Heritages

This book traces the emergence of the South Indian city of Kanchi as a major royal capital and multireligious pilgrimage destination during the era of the Pallava and Chola dynasties (circa seventh through thirteenth centuries). It presents the first-ever comprehensive picture of historical Kanchi, locating the city and its more than 100 spectacular Hindu temples at the heart of commercial and artistic exchange that spanned India, Southeast Asia, and China. The author demonstrates that Kanchi was structured with a hidden urban plan which determined the placement and orientation of temples around a central thoroughfare that was also a burgeoning pilgrimage route. Moving outwards from the city, she shows how the transportation networks, river systems, residential enclaves, and agrarian estates all contributed to the vibrancy of Kanchi’s temple life. The construction and ongoing renovation of temples in and around the city, she concludes, has enabled Kanchi to thrive continuously from at least the eighth century, through the colonial period, and up until the present.

**Title:** Constructing Kanchi: City of Infinite Temples  
**Author:** Emma Natalya Stein  
**ISBN:** 978 96 6372 912 3  
**Publication date:** 15 Oct 2021 | Series: Asian Cities

This book analyses what Myanmar’s struggle for democracy has signified to Burmese activists and democratic leaders, and to their international allies. In doing so, it explores how understanding contested meanings of democracy helps make sense of the country’s tortuous path since Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy won historic elections in 2010. Using Burmese and English language sources, Narrating Democracy in Myanmar reveals how the country’s ongoing struggles for democracy exist in opposition to Burmese military elites, but also within networks of local activists and democratic leaders, and international aid workers.

**Title:** Narrating Democracy in Myanmar: The Struggle Between Activists, Democratic Leaders and Aid Workers  
**Author:** Tamas Wells  
**ISBN:** 978 96 6372 015 3  
**Publication date:** 1st quarter 2021 | Series: Asian Cities

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic is nearly fifty years old, and one of the few surviving one-party socialist states. Nearly five decades on from its revolutionary birth, the Lao population continues to build futures in and around a political landscape that maintains socialist rhetoric on one hand and capitalist economics on the other. Contemporary Lao politics is marked by the use of cultural heritage as a source of political legitimacy. Researched through long term detailed ethnography in the former royal capital of Luang Prabang, this book reveals how the World Heritage ‘label’ is being used by different actors – individuals, groups, local authorities, and state and society at large – to generate new economic revenues as well as to attract tourists and investment for large-scale real estate development projects. In doing so, it reveals the complex and often contradictory stories behind heritage designations in urban milieus.

**Title:** World Heritage and Urban Politics in Luang Prabang, Laos: The Past and Present of the Lao Nation  
**Author:** Phill Wilcox  
**ISBN:** 978 96 6372 702 0  
**Publication date:** 1 Oct 2021 | Series: Asian Heritages

IIAS runs a book publication programme in cooperation with Amsterdam University Press (AUP). IIAS currently publishes monographs and edited volumes in three series, namely Global Asia, Asian Cities, and Asian Heritages. Each series has its own editor and editorial board. If you are interested in publishing a book in one of our series, please do not hesitate to contact the editors. [https://www.iias.asia/books](https://www.iias.asia/books)
A hearty farewell to Sonja Zweegers, Managing Editor of The Newsletter (2011-2021)

It has been already a decade since Sonja joined the IAS to take on the task of managing the institute’s flagship The Newsletter. During her tenure, Sonja managed to considerably reinforce the periodical, not only by considerably expanding its readership - now above 60,000, with two-three online - but also by strengthening its editorial portfolio through a number of regular sections that make The Newsletter an essential vector of exchanges and scholarship in the realm of Asia Studies. I would like to draw attention to one point in particular, for which I worked with Sonja, namely, the journal’s capacity to host works from other players in the field by enabling regular contributions from partner institutions in different regions of Asia, and beyond, to promote work to local scholars there. Sometimes translated from other languages than English, these thematic dossiers have contributed significantly to IAS’s public service sense of mission ‘beyond borders’, coming from Southeast Asia with the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies; from North-East Asia with Seoul National University Asia Centre; from China with New York University Shanghai and Fudan University; from Oceania with the University of Melbourne; or, more recently, from our partners in the European Alliance for Asian Studies. Sonja was very diligent in maintaining close personal connections with the partners, ensuring a steady flow of subjects being discussed in every issue.

Sonja helped transform The Newsletter into the highly professional specialised periodical it is today. She can confidently contemplate looking forward to doing so in many other domains of her work.

Philippa Pigozzi, Director

Meet Paramita Paul, Chief Editor of The Newsletter from July 2021

Paramita Paul is a Sinologist and art historian and holds a PhD (2009) from Leiden University. Her dissertation for the University of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). Her research interests include premodern and modern Chinese art, Buddhist art, and issues of art, heritage, and cultural identity.

Prior to joining IAS, Paramita taught courses in language, art history and visual culture at Leiden University, Leiden University College and Amsterdam University College. She has worked for cultural organisations, including the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. She will continue to serve as a member of the Editorial Board of Asian Kunst, the Journal of the Royal Asian Art Society in the Netherlands (KVRAK). As Chief Editor, and in collaboration with the editorial team, Paramita is excited about further developing The Newsletter into a more hybrid platform in order to enhance its role as an essential site for the Asian Studies community. What are Asian Studies today? How do we define the field? And who is the Asianist? With these questions in mind, she is looking forward to cooperating with current and prospective authors.

Benjamin Linder is an anthropologist by training, with particular interests in cultural geography, urbanism, cosmopolitanism, and mobilities in South Asia. In 2019, he completed his PhD from the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he also received MA degrees in Anthropology (2013) and Environmental & Urban Geography (2018). His dissertation research focused on place-making, identity performance, and transnationalism in the urban enclaves of Thamel (Kathmandu, Nepal). In October 2020, he moved to London as a Research Fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), and he is very pleased to continue on as a member of the IIAS staff.

As Assistant Editor, Benjamin will primarily work on The Newsletter under the guidance of its new Chief Editor, Paramita Paul. He will also focus on book reviews for NewBooks.Asia, which will soon be merged and integrated with the IAS website. Additionally, Benjamin is exploring the possibility of launching a podcast series for the Institute in an effort to expand the reach and reception of our various cross-disciplinary research and policy-driven essays in each of the three areas – governance, security and development.

IIAS/Rijksmuseum Amsterdam annual lecture and masterclass

IIAS collaborates with the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam to hold an annual public lecture, given by an invited expert, on Asian material art in the context of broader Asian history. In addition, the speaker gives a masterclass for advanced students, going deeper into the scientific context and meaning.

This year’s lecture and masterclass will be delivered by Dr Christian Luczanits, the David L. Snellgrove Senior Lecturer in Tibetan and Buddhist Art at the Department of History of Art and Archaeology, SOAS, University of London.

Meet Benjamin Linder, Assistant Editor of The Newsletter and NewBooks.Asia from June 2021

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Other editors

The two other editors involved in The Newsletter are Sandra Dehue, who, as editor of the Network Pages, takes care of the news about the initiatives of IAS, and Thomas Voorter, editor of The Newsletter online.

Frontiers of Gentrification: Perspectives from Asia

On 1 September 2021, Professor Hyun Bang Shin will deliver the keynote address to the UKNA symposium “Neighborhood Transformation in East Asian Cities: Is ‘Gentrification’ the right frame of reference?” This keynote speech is an open pre-event for the otherwise closed symposium.

Hyun Bang Shin is Professor of Geography and Urban Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and Director of the Bow Swee Hook Southeast Asia Centre in LSE. His research centres on the critical analysis of the political economy of urbanisation; politics of displacement; gentrification; housing; the right to the city; urban spectacles; speculative urbanism, with particular attention to cities in Asian countries such as China, South Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore. His most recent projects on circulating urbanism and Asian capital involve field research in Quito, Manila, Jakarta, Saigon, Kuala Lumpur and London. His recent books include Global Gentrification: Unravelling Development and Displacement (2018, Policy Press), Planetary Gentrification (2016, Policy Press), Neoliberal Urbanism, Contested Cities and Housing in Asia (2019, Polity Press), and Exporting Urban Korea? Reconsidering the Korean Urban Development Experience (2020, Routledge). He is currently working on two book manuscripts, Making China Urban (for Routledge) and another on the making of the speculative city of Seoul.

For further information go to: https://jgss.city-bgd.com

The Journal solicits manuscripts (research-based articles, review articles, research notes, and book reviews) for its forthcoming issues. Submissions must be original and must not be under consideration by any other journal. All manuscripts must be prepared in accordance with the APA referencing style. Manuscripts will be blind-reviewed and checked for originality.

The Newsletter: farewell Sonja, welcome Paramita and Benjamin

A letter ten years of serving as managing editor of The Newsletter, Sonja Zweegers has decided it is time to explore new challenges. We wish her all the best! Paramita Paul takes over as the new Chief Editor of The Newsletter. We also welcome Benjamin Linder as Assistant Editor of The Newsletter & NewBooks.Asia.
Ruptured space allows Myanmar youths to reimagine a new education system

Since the February coup, students in Myanmar have emerged as the invisible leaders of the resistance. They are boycotting the prevailing university education system and envisioning an alternative education site, free from institutional bureaucracies, disciplinary hierarchies, and a gate-keeping mentality. One proposed model is the Virtual Federal University (VFU), led by members of the Yangon University Students’ Union (UYSU), which aligns well with the decolonial methodologies, the new thematic curriculum development, and collaborative education model of the IIAS Humanities Across Borders (HAB) program.

The February 1st coup in Myanmar is the single most destructive force in recent years. Plucked from the opportunity of the open space of rupture, the old and corrupt system, by daring to seize youth are showing us how to collectively reset things. Nevertheless, the coup teaches both exercise to extol the coup as a harbinger of new romanticism and even an insensitive intellectual arrived a ruptured space, like a fertile ground feelings, many also have realized that there hopelessness. Amidst all this mix of intense misery and shame; bewilderment and heartlands and minorities’ highlands, towards towards stability for both Bamar-dominated towards unity between Bamars and minorities, democracy endorsed by the army, is the path towards stability for both Bamar-dominated heartlands and minorities’ highlands, towards equity for all and prosperity for both elites and the oppressed. The military tends to portray youth activists as naïve and easily influenced by the political parties, particularly by the leftists. The NLD, on the other hand, treats youth activists as troublemakers, constantly challenging the authority and the status quo. The international community frame them as ‘the unrealistic’, daring to challenge the unchallengeable. Nevertheless, it is the youth who dare to talk back to the military, the NLD, and the international community. As drivers of the revolution, they have unfettered hopes for the country. Their goals are not means-adjusted, nor is their vision limited by material resources or available international support. The many unpopular slogans they created in February have captured the public’s imagination since June. Radical claims such as ‘Uproot the Fascist Army’, ‘Rise up when oppressed’, ‘Strike back when attacked’ set the tone of the resistance and showed the country the tenor of self-defence and the options for protest and resistance. Always ahead of the general public, young people, particularly union members of different universities across the country, are gradually emerging as the invisible leaders of the resistance. One of the powerful tools they employ against the coup regime is mobilizing their fellow students to boycott the prevailing university education system.

Reimagining education
Education systems around the world are often centralized and hierarchical. Governments take a paternalistic role to decide for their young generations what is best for them. In Myanmar, historically, the first and foremost goal of the education system has been to produce skilled and good citizens for the State. Education in this context and philosophy is rather like a factory assembly line to reproduce the status quo that benefits a few. Conformity and a lack of deviation are the principles behind the state-controlled education system. Outside schools across the country, green and white words ‘Attitude, Discipline, Knowledge’ greet every student. Knowledge is neither objective, nor is it to serve individuals. It is subject to the State’s project to divide and rule between Bamars and minorities. As Aung Py writes in Mawkun, minority students face everyday discrimination and a sense of powerlessness in state schools, be they in Bamars’ heartlands or minorities’ highlands. Schools with politicized curricula cannot provide a safe space for children, and minorities are reminded of their un-belonging in society.

These structural injustices reinforced by institutions such as schools and universities have been invisible to the public. Because curricula and everyday interactions with students and teachers normalize the exclusionary policies and practices of the...
State, different values are attached to different individuals based on their race, ethnicity, religion, ability, and sexual orientation. Such practices are generally accepted as standards to protect the interests of social groups and institutions. However, there have always been critical of governments. From the independence time through the Socialist era to the current revolutionary period, union students pressed for reforms to make education public rather than the State. Today, as never before, the education system is on the brink of collapse or has the biggest potential for seismic change, depending on how one interprets the current situation. Students’ movements for education reforms in the United States from the internet shutdown to the defence of the genie at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for the educational reforms in 2019, have largely been justified. The coup proved that students were right to be critical of the government that conceded to the army without making many political gains. When the general public was seen to be replies students’ demands, the coup proved that the former had now won public support, and that their movement was gaining ground as a force of resistance.

What next for the students?

University students have formed Interim Education Councils to reimagine education. There are often discussions on how to bring students online to envision a federal education to support federal democracy. Federalism is a political idea of multiple miniatures, 96% of independence, for which a few groups such as Karen National Union have been fighting through their ‘Free Karen State’ or ‘Kawthoolei’.

HAB at ICAS

To further advance syllabi creation, the network will leverage its participation at ICAS12. Although the partners cannot be physically reunited like in 2019 during ICAS9, the network will reconvene remotely from August 24th-28th. ICAS is convening the following roundtables to discuss methodologies along the themes of rice, indigo, food, and place-making:

Rice as method: a humanities across borders syllabus In-the-making

The discussion intends to explore rice related legacies, resistances and revivals in a trans-regional context. It will be an occasion to discuss how to archive memories, biographies and narratives around rice – techniques, seed conservation, varieties, irrigation, crop cycle, rice varieties, – towards a repopulation of agrarian ecologies through cartographies where community-based knowledge of rice and other staples forms an integral part of the network’s syllabi participating communities.

Place, nature and indigo

We take the case of the indigo production process to see how the nexus of an object, process, practices, and places can shape the weight of politics (be it in environmental movements, in heritage-making or sustaining livelihoods) in specific contexts. The ideas is to develop a set of parameters towards a teaching method and pedagogy beyond the confines of textbooks.

The most urgent of revolutions: the food issue as decolonisation

The principle of continuity of life and the social value of food is increasingly becoming the core of resistance to the world’s capitalist order. We see the emergence of multiple communities seeking to reapportion their food sovereignty. These communities are the crux of relevant decolonisation experiences as well as spaces for caring for the commons. They can be found in various forms, from one continent to another, waltting between ingenious innovations, revitalisation of culinary heritageac, and conservation of gardens, and popular restaurants, but also engaged, confronted, with repression of various kinds. On this basis of the first session, the goal is to attempt the collective and trans-regional writing of syllabi in the form of textbooks.

Pedagogies of Intersectnality

This additional HAB roundtable brings together scholars interested in intersectntality not only as an analytical framework but also as critical pedagogies of the present. We have been witnessing a multitude of injustices and acts of hatred and apology that defy interpretation. We ask participants to reflect upon how they have responded in their teaching and research practice to the violence and volatility of identity-based precarity exacerbated by the pandemic the world over. There is an urgent need to bring the overlapping experiences of oppression, both overt and covert, into the curriculum.

Notes

1 For more on dichronic arrangement and youth-led movement, see Jordt, Ingrid, Tham, Than, Thanawee, Suu Win, How Generation 2 galvanised a revolutionary movement against Myanmar’s 2021 military coup, Singapore: East-Asian Institute of Asian Studies, May 2021.


3 https://www.iias.asia/programmes/hab
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.

Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA)

The Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA) is an inclusive network that brings together concerned scholars and practitioners engaged in collaborative research and events on cities in Asia. It seeks to influence policy by contributing insights that put people at the centre of urban governance and development strategies. The UKNA Secretariat is at IIAS, but the network comprises universities and planning institutions across China, India, Southeast Asia and Europe. Its current flagship project is the Southeast Asia Neighbourhoods Network (SEANNET).

SEANNET is a community of scholars and practitioners with an interest in cities in Southeast Asia through the prism of the neighborhood. Supported by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, NY (2017-2021), case studies are carried out in six selected cities in Southeast Asia (Mandalay, Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Manila, Surabaya). In the second phase (2022-2027, also supported by the Henry Luce Foundation), SEANNET will be led by Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), and the number of case studies and activities will be expanded. SEANNET seeks to engage the humanistic social sciences in a dialogue with urban stake-holders as co-contributors of alternative knowledge about cities. This is done through a combination of participatory field-research, in-situ roundtables, workshops, conferences, publications and new forms of pedagogy developed in collaboration with local institutions of learning. Our second ambition is to help shape and empower a community of early-career scholars and practitioners working on and from Southeast Asia. The SEANNET research teams comprise international and local scholars, students from local universities, and civil society representatives, all working together with the neighbourhood residents.

Southeast Asia Neighbourhoods Network (SEANNET)

The Forum on Health, Environment and Development (FORHEAD)

The Forum on Health, Environment and Development (FORHEAD) is an interdisciplinary network that brings together natural, medical and social scientists to explore the implications of environmental and social change for public health in China and beyond.

FORHEAD is a programme of the Forum on Health, Environment and Development (FORHEAD) is an interdisciplinary network that brings together natural, medical and social scientists to explore the implications of environmental and social change for public health in China and beyond.

www.iias.asia/programmes/forhead
Coordinator: Jennifer Holdaway
j.a.holdaway.2@iias.nl
Cluster: Global Asia

Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe

Initiated by IIAS, this programme involves Leiden University in the Netherlands, two Institutes at National Taiwan University in Taiwan and one at Yonsei University in South Korea. Discussions with other possible partners in Asia are ongoing. The programme offers selected students the opportunity to follow a full year study at one of the partner institutes with full credits and a double degree. The curriculum at Leiden University benefits from the contributions of Prof Michael Herzfeld (Harvard) as a guest teacher and the Senior Advisor to the Critical Heritage Studies Initiative of IIAS.

www.iias.asia/programmes/critical-heritage-studies
Coordinator: Elena Paskaleva
e.p.paskaleva@hum.leidenuniv.nl
Cluster: Asian Heritages

The Network

Research

Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA)

Syposium

‘Neighborhood Transformation in East Asian Cities: Is “Gentrification” the Right Frame of Reference?’, 7-9 Nov 2021, Chiba, Japan.


www.ukna.asia
Coordinator: Paul Rabé
p.e.rabe@iias.nl
Clusters: Asian Cities, Asian Heritages

Southeast Asia Neighbourhoods Network (SEANNET)

www.ukna.asia/seannet
Coordinators: Paul Rabé p.e.rabe@iias.nl and Rita Padawangi Singapore University of Social Sciences rita.padawangi@suus.edu.sg
Cluster: Asian Cities

The Forum on Health, Environment and Development (FORHEAD)

www.iias.asia/programmes/forhead
Coordinator: Jennifer Holdaway
j.a.holdaway.2@iias.nl
Cluster: Global Asia

Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe

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Cluster: Asian Heritages
S
supported by another five-year grant cycle from The
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, we plan to institutionalise
Humanities Across Borders’ (HAB) as a collaborative model
of higher education within our network of university partners
in parts of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas. We are now
in the process of signing a Consortium Member’s Agreement
to further the vision set out in the jointly drafted pedagogical
Manifesto, whose preamble is as follows:
“We envision a university that realises its rightful civic role
and responsibility as a confluence of multiple nodes of knowledge
exchange. Our goal, as educators and institutions, is to identify
and explore the expansive variety of modes and contexts of acting
in, and on, the world. We propose to create border-crossing
spaces within and outside universities where academics, students,
and communities learn from, and act and work with, each other,
in an atmosphere of mutual respect and recognition.”

In the coming years, we will organise ourselves into
a membership-based consortium, expand the programme’s outreach,
and formalise and apply HAB’s in situ or place-based methodologies to real-world societal and ecological concerns by developing a common curriculum, implemented in a trans-regional setting. By disseminating HAB’s locally situated yet globally connected approach to teaching and learning - through the consortium’s website and online repositories, publications, conferences, and pedagogical events - we hope to encourage other institutions in the global South and North to join our efforts.

In this issue see page 51 Humanities Across Borders Curriculum Development.

Follow the stories on the Humanities Across Borders Blog
humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog

Africa, Asia,
A New Axis of Knowledge

Africa, Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge’ is 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-originated fields of Asian and
African area studies—something that would benefit
Asian, African and Western scholars alike.

www.iias.asia/networks/africa-asia
Cluster: Global Asia

The Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN)

T
his network focuses particularly on the border regions
between South Asia, Central/East and Southeast Asia.
The concerns are varied, ranging from migratory move-
ments, 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 co-operation
with a local partner.

The 7th ABRN conference, ‘Borderland Futures: Technologies,
Zones, Co-existences’, has been postponed until June 2022.

www.asianborderlands.net
Coordinator: Erik de Maaker
maaker@fsw.leidenuniv.nl
Cluster: Global Asia

The Energy Programme Asia (EPA)

T
he current joint research programme between IIAS-EPA
and the Institute of World Politics and Economy of the
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing is entitled
The Political Economy of the Belt & Road Initiative and Its
Reflections. It aims to investigate the policy, policy tools,
and impacts of China’s Belt and Road Initiative. By focusing
on China’s involvement with governments, local institutions,
and local stakeholders, it aims to examine the subsequent
responses to China’s activities from the local to the global-
geopolitical level in the following countries: Kazakhstan,
Turkmenistan, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ethiopia,
Hungary, the West Balkons, and Russia.

www.iias.asia/programmes/energy-programme-asia
Coordinator: M. Aminah
m.a.aminah@uoe.ac.uk, m.a.aminah@iias.nl
Cluster: Global Asia

International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS)

W
ith its biennial conferences, 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 organises

www.iias.asia/icas


The New Silk Road. China’s Belt and Road Initiative in Context

T
he International Institute for Asian 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/new-silk-road
Cluster: Global Asia

The Network

The Newsletter

The Network

The Newsletter

Research

Leiden Centre for Indian Ocean Studies

T
he 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

The Newsletter

The Network
Exhibition: Fleeing the Dark
A conversation with Issam Kourbaj

2021 marks ten years since the Syrian uprising. On March 15, 2011, protesters took to the streets of Damascus to demand democratic reforms from the Syrian government. The protests turned into a massive nationwide movement that was soon countered by extreme violence from the government, police, and security forces. Ever since, millions of Syrians have been forced to flee their homes. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Syrian crisis is currently the largest displacement crisis in the world, with 13.4 million people in need of humanitarian protection and assistance in Syria, and 6.6 million refugees worldwide.

In his exhibition “Fleeing the Dark” at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, Syrian-born artist Issam Kourbaj draws attention to the experience of tragedy, destruction, and forced migration through an intervention with objects from the Tropenmuseum, the National Museum of Antiquities (Leiden), and the Naturalis Biodiversity Center (Leiden). This issue’s Portrait section introduces Kourbaj and his work, and includes an interview with the artist, in which we discussed his reflections on the exhibition, on some of its objects, and on questions of trauma and hope.

Issam Kourbaj

Issam Kourbaj was born in Suweida in Southern Syria in 1963. He trained at the Institute of Fine Arts in Damascus, the Repin Institute of Fine Arts in Leningrad, and the Wimbledon School of Art in London. Kourbaj...
is a Lecturer in Art at Christ’s College, and has lived and worked in Cambridge since the 1990s. Since 2011, Kourbaj has been dedicated to raising awareness and money for projects and aid in Syria through exhibitions, installations, and performances in the UK and abroad.

**Intervention**

At the Tropenmuseum, Kourbaj’s intervention starts with the installation Scaling the Dark: Seeds, Sand, Moons in the museum’s grand central atrium (Fig. 1). The installation features small boats made of recycled material and placed on a platform. The biggest 122 boats, one for every month lost to the Syrian conflict, carry spent matchsticks that reflect the trauma that many Syrians carry with them. The 3727 small boats, one for every day lost to the conflict, carry sackcloth that once belonged to the destroyed Seed Bank in Aleppo. Compared to the size of the atrium, Scaling the Dark is monumental.

**Herbarium**

Through the Near East. Pages from the German physician and botanist Leonhard Roemer’s herbarium, which grows on rough terrain, is a metaphor for the Syrian people.

Isam Kourbaj (IK): I am interested in responding to objects and in how objects send out stimuli and invite different kinds of responses. When I came to Berlin in November 2019, I saw the Rauwolf Herbarium. I was also introduced to the collections of the Near East. Pages from the museum’s collection from the medieval period is placed next to one made by Kourbaj that inspired you to design this exhibition and what inspired you to design this exhibition and why you decided on an intervention?

**Interview**

On July 15, 2021, Isam Kourbaj and I met for an interview. I asked Kourbaj about his reasons for an exhibition in the form of an intervention, about objects and bigger stories, and about connections between language, seeds, and violent displacement. Sarah Johnson, curator of the Middle East and North Africa collections, could not be present in the exhibition, but she answered the first question via e-mail.

Paramita Paul (PP): Isam Kourbaj and Sarah Johnson. I am curious to know what inspired you to design this exhibition and why you decided on an intervention?

Isam Kourbaj (IK): My final question concerns the seeds that are present throughout the exhibition. In your transcriptions of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish’s (1941–2008) poem, they are connected to words. Darwish says that both seeds and language are difficult to bring with you when you are forcibly displaced. What, then, do the seeds represent to you? Are they a source of hope or loss?

IK: In my childhood, I was taught calligraphy from my brother. Arabs use lots of dots, but this is a recent development. In earlier forms of Arabic, the same word can mean many things because of the absence of dots. I made a connection between missing seeds and missing dots, and in my poem Leave to Remain: A Single Syrian Grain, Airborne, I use Arabic without dots. In the Herbarium Room, I wanted to emphasize the relation between seeds, words, and healing. At the end of the exhibition, you are asked to go outside and see the seeds from Syria that have been planted on the museum’s terrace and are living objects in the exhibition. I am interested in different media, and words and seeds are part of that, too. The seeds have become part of the war: wheat fields were destroyed in Syria and the Seed Bank in Aleppo was bombed. ICARDA, the International Center for Agriculture Research in the Dry Areas, has now planted ancient Syrian seeds kept in the Seed Vault in Norway in Lebanon and Morocco and this is something I wanted to honor and celebrate. Still, the seeds do not represent either a “noize hope” or “loss” to me. Hope is an overused word. I prefer “the possibility of a different future”.

For more information on the artist, please see: http://issamkourbaj.co.uk
I thank Isam Kourbaj and Sarah Johnson for their cooperation.

Paramita Paul is a Chief Editor of The Newsletter. p.paul@iias.nl

Notes

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