The Study

4-5 Dutch Colonial Film on our Laptops: A Hundred-Year Journey
Sandee Ray

6-7 On the Evacuation of Kabul and the Global Reach of America’s Wars
Noah Coburn

8-9 Selling Intimacy under Post-Industrial Capitalism: An Ethnography of Japanese Host Clubs
Ruby Fitzsimmons

10-11 Reaching Tibet: Anglphone Protestant Missionaries and the Chinese Civilizing Mission
Jeff Kyong-McCain

12-13 Some Personal Observations on the Western Échec in Afghanistan
Willem Vogelsang

14-15 Olympic Distance Trauma: Looking Back at Tokyo 2020
Torsten Weber

16 Environmental Governance and Activism in a Democratic Regime: Discourses from India
Abhishek Kudavagur Venkitaraman

The Region

17-19 News from Australia and the Pacific
20-21 News from Northeast Asia
22-26 News from the European Alliance for Asian Studies

The Review

27 Selected Reviews
28 New Titles Available for Review

The Focus

29-31 SEANNET: The First Five Years
Paul Rabé and Rita Padawangi

32-33 Understanding the City from Below: Kampung Peneleh, Surabaya
Adrian Perkasa

34-35 Shadow Neighbourhoods: The Street Dwellers and Vendors of Escolta Santa Cruz, Manila
Tessa Maria Guazon, Alma Quinto, and Nathalie Dagmang

36-37 Performing and ‘Rhythming’ the Neighbourhood: Zhi/7: Methodological Learnings from Ward 14, Phu Nhuyn, H¢ Chi Minh City
Marie Gibert-Flutre

38-39 Nang Loeng, Bangkok: Precarity of Heritage, Precarity as Heritage
Boonanan Natakun and Napong Tao Rukghapan

40 Collective Actions and Heritage of the Neighborhood: Wua-Lai, Chiang Mai
Pijika Pumketkao-Lecourt

41 An Architectural Approach to Studying the Neighbourhood: Wua-Lai, Chiang Mai
Komson Teeraparbowng

Jayde Lin Roberts

The Network

44-45 ICAS 12 Retrospective
46-47 Humanities Across Borders Programme
48-49 IIAS Research
50 Announcements
51 IIAS Call for Submissions
52 IIAS Publications
53 IIAS Fellowship Programme

The Portrait

54-55 Museum of Material Memory
Aanchal Malhotra

In this edition of the Focus

SEANNET: The First Five Years

The Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network SEANNET marks five years since its establishment at IIAS with core funding from the Henry Luce Foundation in New York. In this issue’s Focus, the principal investigators of the six SEANNET study sites, Surabaya, Manila, Ho Chi Minh City, Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Mandalay, reflect on what they have learned about their cities through the neighborhoods they have been studying in the past five years. Their research provides a different kind of epistemology of the city in Southeast Asia, through the methodological lens of what happens at the micro-urban, neighborhood level. Their findings will help to frame the development of a new urban pedagogy, based on the distinctiveness of urbanization and social life in Southeast Asia.

The Henry Luce Foundation has confirmed funding for a second and larger phase entitled “The Southeast Asia Neighborhoods 2.0: Communities of Learning, Research and Teaching Collaborative”, which will be led from the Singapore University of Social Sciences.

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.
W ith this note, I would like to share with our readers how IAS, as a team, is emerging from the COVID 'conglomeration' period to turn into a stronger and more capable organization than it was even before the pandemic struck.

In an earlier note, I stressed how the time of the strict confinement in the Netherlands was a period when all our colleagues were scattered in their respective homes, with no convivial space possible for them to meet or interact except for virtual online gatherings. During that trying time, we began to set about a new model of internal communication and discussions around thematic working groups. The system consisted in dispatching members of the team around a number of services’ divisions, based on their interests as follows: Communication & Dissemination, Research (facilitation), Education (facilitation), Network & Community Development, Capacity Building, and Civic Engagements.

From our respective homes, we began to hold meetings around those themes. As we got used to these new formats of exchange, we realized that what was at first a rather artificial mode of interaction became a new mode of inclusive participation in our Internal decision-making processes. To this end, we sought to mobilize everyone to become a key part in this new mode of engagement.

With the slow physical reopening of the Institute, we are continuing with that model, now strengthened by regular staff meetings. Within our team, there is now a common recognition of the critical importance of each of these broad functions of IAS. We also recognize a natural need to address them collectively, especially because of their close interconnection with each other. This function-based participatory model is now taking hold and is leading us to advance a new way to envision IAS’ future plans and operations.

One thing that transpired from our discussions is, indeed, the recognition that, as members of the team, we could not just operate in isolation and that some of IAS’ most known initiatives could serve as catalysts for other associated projects to follow. In fact, each of the Institute’s programmatic services or functions corresponds to one or two of what I would call “flagship project(s).” These include the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS), the Newsletter, the IAS International Fellowship Programme, the Humanities Across Borders (HAB) initiative, and many more.

The emergent working configuration is, therefore, built around autonomous yet overlapping programmatic and operational clusters with colleagues capable of functioning at their own tempo whilst exchanging with each other. All of this is done with the shared knowledge that each cluster is closely dependent on the others. For an Institute seeking to operate as an open clearing house for academic endeavors “on, in, and with Asia in the world,” this dynamic means that many of IAS’ traditional projects can consolidate whilst acquiring a broader spectrum of action. ICAS 12 played an important role in this evolution. The all online event, which ran for five days between August 23-28 and welcomed 1500 participants online served as the dynamizing occasion that helped IAS and its team lift themselves out of COVID. Of course, we all missed the chance to gather in the exceptional environment of Kyoto with our partners at Kyoto Seika University and the usual cohorts of ICAS contributors from the five continents. The energy and vibrancy found in every previous ICAS was nonetheless there, tangible. Not only was the event a success, proving that, even virtually, a remarkable number of colleagues and partners sought to take part in the unique ICAS experience. The event had another positive impact as well, this time for the IAS team. For one full week, all the Institute’s members were mobilized. They were inspired by the ICAS core team, who often sat at their desks from very early in the morning until very late at night. As a collective brought back to in-person group life, we felt the need to physically re-populate the office building, to work, and to be together.

On this occasion, the other IAS initiatives that had been virtually consolidating before the ICAS 12 event also came to light, showing how IAS was once again ready to embrace a new context, even when inter-regional travel remains very difficult. The Newsletter previous issue (RB9), which appeared right during ICAS, under the editorship of Paramita Paul and Benjamin Linder, is one example of IAS’ resilience. Following ICAS 12, an inspiring team-scale exchange over the role of the Newsletter and its multiple ancillary communication and dissemination activities was held. Paramita and Ben presented a number of new activities and communication formats that will be gradually introduced. A follow-up meeting, focusing this time on books – book prizes, book talks, book reviews, book series – is to be planned shortly. Likewise, we recently initiated a cross-section discussion on ways to revamp the IAS fellowship programmes to better respond to the changing academic scene. This development will also be gradual, but it will eventually be presented to all the IAS followers. In a similar vein, the experience of successfully running an ICAS convention online has become an occasion to collectively reflect on the model of these big academic events going forward. Last but not least, the Humanities Across Borders (HAB) and Southeast Asia Neighborhood Network (SEANNET) programmes, hampered for a long time by the impossibility for people to meet “on site,” benefited tremendously from the ICAS platform for advancing their agenda. In both cases, new steps have been or are being taken to further institutionalize their pedagogical model across their respective consortiums.

All of these internal IAS developments are very much works in progress. The collective self-assessment process they require will take the time that is needed to come to full fruition. Moreover, new layouts and consolidations not only call for discussions among IAS members but also with our partners in Asia, Europe, and beyond. Indeed, so much depends on our capacity to re-imagine “Asian Studies” together in an always more collaborative, locally situated, globally connected, multi-centered fashion.

In the end, I am confident that IAS will come out stronger from the COVID crisis, with its mission clearer and the instruments of its engagement more effective to reach always more people and partners. I will report again on these changes in due course.

Philipe Paycum, Director IAS

A Stronger Post-COVID IAS

Philipe Paycum
Today, students of Asian Studies, even those with a passing interest in colonial cinema, would know that the Dutch produced a staggering number of films in the Netherlands East Indies. Much of that cinematic footnoting took place during the second and third decades of the 20th century. It was meant for their public, far away, often unaware of ground realities, viewing the films in lecture halls and theatres in Amsterdam, Leiden, and Rotterdam. They received their government’s version of conditions and events in the colony. The issues covered in these short films ranged widely: agriculture, healthcare, urban planning, infrastructure, arts and crafts, transmigration, and religion, among others. The contents and depictions are often problematic, especially if we apply a contemporary lens. I use the term stagging without exaggeration. A rough tally will indicate that the several hundred films produced during this period is comparable to the number of productions by British colonial authorities in all of their colonies. We know much about those British colonial films, of course, thanks to colonialfilm.org.uk, that wonderful website established in 2010 that links films, archives, academic papers, and other useful information in one open, easy-to-use platform. In contrast, our knowledge of the Dutch films is limited, though this has gradually changed. Recent online access granted by archives in the Netherlands has brought much of their collections to our fingertips. These “dark treasures,” as archivist Nico de Klerk once called the short films, are finally seeing blue light.

About a decade after my initial exposure to the material, I looked for the original footage from which Mother Dao had been edited, but I hit a dead end. The material was hard to come by. Facebook groups like Indonesia Tempo Doeloe (“Indonesia’s Olden Days”) posted low-quality clips from time to time, often with a soundtrack dubbed over; the driving emotion seemed to be nostalgia, not colonial critique. If one bought the 2010 biography on J.C. Lamster—a dyed-in-the-wool colonialist army man turned pioneering filmmaker—one would get a DVD of several of his restored films with bonus narration tracks. But that was the extent of access from Singapore, where I was studying. To see more films, I had to travel to the archive, to two of them actually: the Eye Filmmuseum’s rustic research office in Vondelpark, Amsterdam and the newer gleaming Bérald en Geloud tower in Hilversum. Upon arriving, I had expected to get my hands dirty, rifle through dusty cans of old films and embark on an original, hitherto under-explored journey. But that was more wrong. Every film was available on their intranet systems. Grateful, I wrote the following notes, trying to unpack their historical and ethnographic significance. I spent a good part of 2012 and 2013 in those repositories.

It was a solitary, cavernous existence, sitting in rooms with monitors, viewing silent black and white footage produced by various agencies with different agendas. But the footage was mesmerizing. If Monnikendam had given us a sampler, I now saw that there were hundreds of titles covering a vast area—Sumatra, Java, Borneo, and several outer islands of eastern Indonesia. I learned that it was through a preservation and digitization program launched in 2007 called “Images for the Future” that a vast amount of footage from the original inflammable nitrate film was being made more widely accessible. But they still had to be seen and preserved.

Scrupulous documentation notwithstanding, scholarship on this specific collection was limited. I looked elsewhere, reading up on the broader discourse on non-fiction film from the colonial era. The historiography of colonial propaganda cinema, a substantial global undertaking in the early 20th century, has come to be recognized as an area of study only in recent decades. Most film scholars, it turns out, were simply not interested in early modern colonial film—colonial or otherwise. Deploring this state of affairs, a new, exciting body of work emerged from academics who crisscrossed the disciplines of film studies, history, and anthropology. Books on British, French, and German colonial cinematic efforts were published. Yet these particular Dutch colonial films remained under the radar. Even the arresting comment by Susan Sontag after watching Mother Dao—“Who would have thought that out of anonymous documentary footage from Indonesia in the first decades of this century, taken by the Dutch authorities, a contemporary Dutch filmmaker could make a film that is both a searing reflection on the ravages of colonialism and a noble work of art?”—did not send researchers rushing to the Netherlands. Sontag was incorrect in calling these films came from different backgrounds and not worth studying? While a touch pessimistic, it is not unreasonable to ask. Having looked at them, were they perhaps similar to other films of the same genre and not worth studying? There are two key differences between the Dutch East Indies films and films produced by other colonial systems. Although colonial production in the East Indies began in 1912, well after filming had already started in Africa by German and French operators, and in the Philipines by American camaramen, the scale and scope of the Dutch production was colossal—significantly higher than from any other colony. The Dutch colonial government and its corporate affiliates continued the funding of informational films about the colony for almost two full decades. It is noteworthy that even though the makers of these films were often disconnected from other colonial systems: government workers, private production companies, independents, and evangelists—a general uniformity in their styles over the two decades (1920-1930s). This was
documentary films. My conjecture is that the – that gave rise to the structure of post-war narratives conducive to effective propaganda nations, it was the heightened cinematic push that in the United States and many European during World War I. Scholars have pointed out be that the Netherlands had remained neutral societal depiction might 'pushy' approach of different? An important factor contributing to this unhurried, less 'pushy' approach of societal depiction might be that the Netherlands had remained neutral during World War I. Scholars have pointed out that in the United States and many European nations, it was the heightened cinematic push during World War I – to create compelling narratives conducive to effective propaganda – that gave rise to the structure of post-war documentary films. My conjecture is that the aim to make documentaries in order to create a more dramatized narrative that would have wider appeal, is precisely what took away from the ethnographic strength of American-influenced documentaries in the 1920s. Staying outside this narrative propaganda ‘loop,’ the Dutch became better ethnographers.

This austerity with the Dutch Colonial Institute’s (Vereeniging Koloniale Instituut) simple instructions to not make “populär” films produced an untempered authenticity. Even though Dutch cameramen did not capture a comprehensive image of their colony, and there were huge omissions in their depictions of society, class, and politics, the films were rarely embellished or sensationalized. They tended to be slower and had non-complicated or absent moments and sequences that were perhaps richer in cultural texture. Additionally, some of the Dutch colonial filmmakers may arguably have been somewhat anti-propagandistic in their filming, uncovering aspects of colonial rule that did not flatter the Dutch government. This makes for unique archival documentation in the context of the colonial encounter. The Ethical Policy of 1901 set into motion programs to document the efforts towards “the elevation of the people.” The Colonial Institute in Amsterdam saw film as a useful way of providing both evidence of the state of the colony, as well as a means to persuade civilians in the Netherlands to take pride in developing the East Indies. While this is not unlike the contents of the several propagandistic films European filmmakers made in response to their “civilizing mission,” considering the level of detail in the Dutch material, one is clearly exposed to a far more descriptive, intimate, and somber side of colonialism. The Dutch cinematic simulacrum of the colony, often motivated by either a liberal-political or a paternal-evangelistic outlook, resulted in the need to be somewhat introspective and expository. The scenes are often meant to generate sympathy as much as they are meant to show progress. We are exposed to a more detailed impression of native life. While some have value in what they preserve of lost ways, much of it helps us glimpse into the hardships created by colonial systems. While I argue for their value in helping us to reimagine and better understand the colonial encounter, I warn viewers that there are no smoking gun scenes, no unusual indictment of colonial rule. One must consider, however, that much of the colonial oppression was systemic and widespread and not limited to acute violence. This material reveals that. Thus two broad factors, the sheer abundance and diversity, along with a markedly different approach to filmmaking, make this footage worth the deep dive. I can only assume that it was the prior lack of access to this material that had prevented scholars from researching them. This archive, which we can view on our smartphones today, has survived a century of atmospheric exposure, remained undamaged through two world wars, and been relocated several times. Most are from completed works, some from outtakes preserved in different archives over the decades. Starting around 2016, the films have been made available online. Logging onto the Eye Museum’s website can take viewers to a very troubling, subjective, yet rich viewing of Indonesia’s colonial past. There is something there for everyone – nostalgists, art historians, anthropologists, and dyed-in-the-wool anti-colonialists.

**Fig. 4**: Still from whole hunting filmed by Willy Rush in 1923.

**Fig. 5**: Poster for Ria Rago, “a film of actually” (Courtesy of University of Westminster Archive).

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**Notes**

2. This institute is known today as the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (KIT), or Royal Tropical Institute.
On the Evacuation of Kabul and the Global Reach of America’s Wars

Much of the world watched in horror in late August as the U.S. military evacuated over 125,000 civilians in the period between the collapse of the Ghani administration and the final departure of the last American troops on August 30. During this period, the scenes of chaos from Kabul airport were shocking for many. Thousands of Afghans, along with American citizens and other internationals, crowded airport gates, waving documents. Nearly 200 were killed in a suicide bomb attack on August 26.

There are sure to be many analyses written in the coming years about how the Taliban advanced so quickly, how the Afghan government seemed to crumble overnight, and how the United States was so poorly prepared diplomatically for the events that preceded the evacuation. Yet, a simpler question remains which helps illuminate the nature of the U.S. war in Afghanistan: how was it that the United States government seemed unaware of the number of people who needed to be – and were qualified to be – evacuated? As the New York Times asked in the middle of the evacuation, “Given the resources and risk the United States is putting into the evacuation, how can the government not know how many people it is planning to fly out?”

On one hand, there were far more U.S. citizens in the country than the embassy seemed to expect, but the far greater number of those looking to be evacuated were Afghans who had worked with the international community. These included people who had worked either directly for the U.S. government, as sub-contractors with companies receiving U.S. government funds, as well as on grants or programs receiving U.S. funding. However, there was no clear picture of how many of these contractors and others existed. This is despite the fact that the U.S. approach to war has become increasingly contractor-centric. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Defense Department has spent $14 trillion dollars, half of which has gone directly to contractors. In the most recent years of the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. government has employed three contractors for every single U.S. military personnel on the ground in the country.

Despite this, the U.S. government does not maintain a database of contractors that work for it every quarter, which is more than most of the other departments in the U.S. government that were involved in the war in Afghanistan, including the Department of State and USAID. Even the Department of Defense numbers, however, are not particularly helpful because while they track the number of contractors that work for it every quarter, they do not consider how many of those contractors were hired or fired during a specific period. So when the Department of Defense reports 10,000 contractors one quarter and 10,000 the next, it does not actually consider whether these are the same 10,000 contractors or if they are actually 20,000 contractors.
Nepali subcontractors and the global war

Even without a central database, there were ways to create better estimates, and these are illustrative of what the war in Afghanistan became. Consider a perhaps similar case, the number of Nepali contractors in Afghanistan. Nepal was not directly involved in the conflict, but still sent contractors to work in Afghanistan.

Nepalis recruited into the British Imperial Army since the beginning of the 19th century, now play a pivotal role in the provision of private security around the world. Major international compounds in Kabul, including the American and British embassies, but also small, local NGOs relied primarily on Nepalis to support their local security presence. Despite this, however, the Nepali government made real effort to track the number of Nepalis in Afghanistan. There was no Nepali embassy in Afghanistan, and while Nepalis were asked by the government to register before going to Afghanistan, this was routinely avoided by Nepalis who would travel first to the United Arab Emirates or another Gulf country and transfer onto a flight to Afghanistan. Even counting the number of visas handed out to Nepalis by the Afghan government is not helpful, since many Nepalis were flown on private contracted flights directly into U.S. bases, bypassing Afghan immigration.

When I first attempted to do a survey of the number of Nepalis who had been to Afghanistan in 2015-2016, several experts estimated that there were around 5,000 Nepalis who had worked there. However, as I conducted interviews with Nepali security contractors and others, I attempted to develop a more accurate accounting. To do this, I took the list of the top contracting companies in Afghanistan and, through my interviews, developed an estimate for the number of Nepalis working for each company at one time. There were dozens of companies on the list, with the companies at the top of the list employing 300 or more Nepalis at a single time. This did not include the several hundred unemployed Nepalis living in labor camps in Kabul who were actively seeking employment. In fact, when tallying these numbers, it became clear that at any one point between 2009 and 2013 there had been over 10,000 Nepalis in Afghanistan. While the number in the country decreased after 2013, the turnover rate of many workers who spent between three and six years in the country, so ultimately at least 50,000 Nepalis had participated in the war in Afghanistan.

Failures of accounting, failures of accountability?

The fact that the war in Afghanistan became an increasingly contracted affair helps disguise both the scope and scale of the human impact of the war. Tens of thousands of civilians came to Afghanistan to participate as contractors, and tens of thousands more Afghans were hired as subcontractors. During the height of the U.S. surge in Afghanistan (2010-2011), there were 100,000 contractors working just for the Department of Defense and a similar number of U.S. military personnel for a one contractor to one soldier ratio. However, when U.S. troop levels began to decline, contractor numbers dropped more slowly, resulting in a ratio of three contractors for every soldier in recent years.

When the Ghani government collapsed, many of these contractors turned to the U.S., hoping to be evacuated. The most recent publicly available data in early 2021 show that at that point there were 18,000 Afghans who had applied for and were waiting for U.S. Special Immigrant Visas. The evacuation seemed scaled to support this number of Afghans. However, this number did not take into account the fact that in recent years, it took three to six years for a SIV to be processed. This meant that the Afghan contractors who were most at risk were unlikely to apply for the visa, since it was unlikely that it would be processed in time to save them. At the same time, others felt that other opportunities might arise: why spend three years waiting for a visa that might not come? All this resulted in the fact that tens of thousands of Afghans were technically eligible for the SIV, but had not applied for it, and the U.S. government had no good way of actually tracking this number. The shifting visa requirements further complicated the issue. In August, just two weeks before the collapse of the Afghan government, a new designation was announced by the Department of State called “Priority 2.” This included “Afghans who are or were employed in Afghanistan by a U.S.-based media organization or non-governmental organization.” Additionally, U.S. politicians, activists, and others rightly put pressure on the U.S. military to also consider evacuating those Afghan activists, journalists, scholars, and others who had worked on human rights issues.

All of this resulted in the thousands of Afghans who crowded the Kabul airport and felt they were eligible for evacuation, and a U.S. government that seemed incredibly unprepared for the scale of the evacuation. Most ended up left behind, and this included international contractors as well. By late August, the New York Times reported that over 350 Nepalis were seeking to be evacuated from Afghanistan still.

The U.S. war in Afghanistan was no small affair. The U.S. government attempted to minimize the costs of the war, both economically and in terms of the number of U.S. soldiers killed, by essentially outsourcing much of this work to both Afghan and international contractors. The long-term result was that the war in Afghanistan became a global war, including not just members of the NATO coalition but contractors from countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and dozens of other countries. Much of this was invisible since these contractors were quietly hired and fired. Many are now moving on, searching for new wars to work on.” But for most of the Afghan contractors, who did the actual work of the war, they remain left behind.

And in those chaotic, violent moments of the evacuation at Kabul airport, a war that has largely been invisible, became, briefly, visible.

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Notes

1. See “War of America’s Global Wars
Selling Intimacy under Post-Industrial Capitalism

An Ethnography of Japanese Host Clubs

Ruby Fitzsimmons

There are over 15,000 hosts in Japan, who bring millions of yen a year into the ailing economy by providing emotional and physical (but not sexual) intimacy to women — you can feel like a princess for the night, if you have the means. According to both domestic and foreign media, they are all conniving, exploitative low-lives, conning naïve women out of sometimes tens of thousands of yen, and even forcing some into prostitution. What follows is a snapshot of how Japan has responded to the changing needs of female consumers in today’s post-industrial capitalist economy, which has come to rely increasingly on the sale and purchase of emotion, feeling, and affect. Host clubs are but one — lucrative — player in the global traffic of sex and sex-related work.

Host clubs: where romance and capitalism collide

Otoya, a 22-year-old who had been in the host club industry since he was 19, pursued his childish lips in concentration, flicking his dyed brown hair off his face and fiddling with the sparkling stud in his ear. Dance music pulsed around us, making it all but impossible to hear — all the better to make a spectacle of love. His childish lips in concentration, flicking his dyed brown hair off his face and fiddling with the sparkling stud in his ear. Dance music pulsed around us, making it all but impossible to hear — all the better to make a spectacle of love. His

Consumption of the “chivalrous” West

Few countries consume the West with as much ardour as Japan. One of the most successful imports has been romance, along with baseball, Disney, and Tommy Lee Jones. From the hordes of mainly white male English teachers teaching the Hollywood-produced rom-coms showing across the country’s cinemas and televisions, the message is clear: romantic relationships are about sentiment, declarations of love, and “the chase.” Western notions of what heteronormative intimacy entails have particularly struck a chord with young women, who have had more time and inclination to engage with the West through foreign travel, language learning, and interacial relationships.

The 1990s saw a considerable proportion of women entering into the workforce for the first time. For thoughtless observers it was less about necessity and more for the sake of new affluence, both monetary and in terms of personal growth, led to a “profound questioning of domestic roles and the relationship between the state and the family.” The general consensus is that Japanese women, sex workers, and all others, desperately need respite from the subjugation and chauvinism of their male partners. Host clubs are presented as a simple case of role reversal, where women can finally be the beneficiaries of the servitude they are expected to provide. During my month of fieldwork in Osaka, almost all of my informants, not only hosts but men and women who were employed in other parts of the sprawling adult entertainment industry, were quick to correct my assumption that women’s interactions with hosts were just an escape from the emotional and physical tolls of their jobs as hostesses and sex workers. It was, they argued, much more nuanced.

“A woman [who doesn’t go to host clubs] goes for the first time. She ends up getting really into it, but doesn’t have enough money, so she ends up working in the sex industry so she can see her host and make him the highest ranking in the club.”

“I set out armed with a research question: why do women go to these clubs? What emerged was a commodity chain, where women and men exploiting and being exploited, all under the watchful eye of post-industrial capitalism, created by the coupling of affective labour with the commodification of care and intimacy.

Fig. 1: A host club decked out for Valentine’s Day. (Image by the author.)
Japanese expectations concerning the female life course, as many began to interact with the West further than 10 years of compulsory English language education would take them. We can frame this within the so-called ‘convergence of lifestyles’ in which the dogged desire for stay-at-home wives, whereas women increasingly wish for a “partner” with whom to share “esential, collectivest, and values. The felitisation of (white) Western men is a mainstay of Japanese media, whereas they are said to be sensitive, kind, first, and being the club when you leave, are a breath of fresh air – or smoke-filled, cologne-laden air – for women, particularly those in the adult entertainment industry, who not only provide the same service to men, but are romantically sexualised while doing so. If given a blanket so people cannot peak at your underwear is likely to mean a lot to a woman who has spent the evening with a handsome young man come to (the club). You can’t come tonight? When can I see you? These are some things hosts have said to me in person and over text messages. They do not relate directly to the exchange of intimacy: especially the connotations of my doing them a favour by visiting the club, but they are ongoing and not unique to the current host. Host clubs – where acts of what for many Japanese women represent non-Japanese aspects of ‘difference and intimacy’ are replicated to an almost comical degree (I am after all capable of having a taint myself) – can therefore be seen as being born from a desire for clichéd romance that alludes to a posture of working for the consumption of men. “I don’t think host clubs would be so popular if Japanese men were more into this sort of [kind] treatment.”

Romatic consumption in the service economy

I want to see you. I had so much fun with you tonight! You’d be the perfect companion for a walk home. Mr. Harada, seemingly baffled by my entire project, took a door in his cigarette. I was conducting our interview in a busy family restaurant, but he was unconcerned with the noise. I was conducting our interview in a busy family restaurant, but he was unconcerned with the noise.

What is the effect of all this affect?

What is the effect of all this affect? It is of a common form to be emotionally manipulated by the pseudo-romance the host makes her think she has reached the decision of to come. I see this group of women as being motivated by the affective commodity chain comes into play. Romantically, the home for the affective services previously inside it. Much of the work done on affective labour is centred on the idea that women are the only ones expelled to provide emotional labour for the consumption of men. Hosts not only found this assessment but complicate the situation by relying heavily on gokoku (male female sex workers) to make money. Emotional labour is consumed in a political lens through which to view the intimate performative acts of hosts. A broader approach which encompasses the multitude of affective services on offer in today’s economy comes from Mr. Harada, who use the term affective labour to describe labour practices and manipulates emotions. He sees affective labour as one face of immaterial labour. Its products are not tangible goods, but “a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement – even a sense of connectedness or community.”

When can I see you? I had so much fun with you tonight! You’d be the perfect companion for a walk home. Mr. Harada, seemingly baffled by my entire project, took a door in his cigarette. I was conducting our interview in a busy family restaurant, but he was unconcerned with the noise. I was conducting our interview in a busy family restaurant, but he was unconcerned with the noise.

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of blame for the lawlessness was put at the feet of the "Tamos." As one missionary put it, the lamas were "a low, demoralized, sensual, avaricious class, whose only care is to think out ways and means to get the possessions of the laity turned into the monasteries for their own use." In light of perceived lama depravity, the author goes on to say that God is using the Chinese generals to "open up this country, not only to Chinese rule and commerce, but also to the preaching of the gospel." Here we see clearly articulated the view that Providence was leading China to rule the region, and that Chinese authorities were delivering the "self-destruction" of the lamas of Tibetan Buddhism and bringing in their place Chinese "civilization, order, and progress.

A similar take is articulated a few months later in the WCMN by China Inland Missionary Robert Ekvall (1868-1940), who managed a congregation in Kangding. Cunningham likewise celebrated the advent of Chinese rule in eastern Tibet, suggesting that the Chinese government armies were nobly fighting against savages. Further, according to Cunningham, in contrast to the superstitious people of China, the Chinese officials modeled modern secular authority. He noted, for instance, the "entire absence of all false worship ... not a single stick of incense" when Chinese authorities established government offices in the region. The WCMN, therefore, from Cunningham and other missionary observers writing for the WCMN, the strengthening of Chinese authority in the region was obviouly to be welcomed.

Missionary scholars consider the case

In 1922, a group of southwest China-based missionary scholars and explorers gathered in Chengdu to form the West China Border Research Society and publish its eponymous Journal (JWCRS). Eventually, the JWCRS gained international attention and was distributed to most major university libraries in the Anglophone world. The first issue of the JWCRS articulated the Society's goal: to promote all types of academic research "in the hill country and among the tribes of West China" and to offer "a service for ourselves, for the Chinese, for the world" (noticably, not for the "tribes" themselves). Although many articles involving Tibet were without overt political or religious implications (for example, there are frequent essays on geological features, though these too might imply future mineral extraction), those that did touch on these issues suggested that, overall, Tibet would be "the last land—before the Lord returns," thus putting a target on it for Alliance missionaries.

In J.H. Edgar's (1872-1936) essay, "Geographic Control and Human Reactions in Tibet," Edgar (who lived longer than most missionaries in eastern Tibet) fulsomely praises the Tibetan people for their "enlightened world conscience," notes that the region can be quite pleasant, and in need of Chinese civilizing rule, the Chinese government armies were nobly fighting against savages. Further, according to Cunningham, in contrast to the superstitious people of China, the Chinese officials modeled modern secular authority. He noted, for instance, the "entire absence of all false worship ... not a single stick of incense" when Chinese authorities established government offices in the region. The WCMN, therefore, from Cunningham and other missionary observers writing for the WCMN, the strengthening of Chinese authority in the region was obviouly to be welcomed.

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Tibetans ever experienced a civilizational hierarchy with China on top, depicting Qing rule as a "backward" and "semi-savage" form of governance. The very first paper presented to the Society set the tone on this matter. In "Journey into the Hoafan Valley," Canadian Methodist missionary T.E. Newman described his encounters with Tibetans and Qing as he traveled in northwest Sichuan. Although many of the Tibetans he encountered were, he admitted, quite friendly, he nonetheless believed that a significant number of them were "opium sots" and "bandits." Regarding those Tibetans who had thrown off Chinese overlordship, he wrote, "their independence had not brought them happiness," as lawlessness prevailed when Tibetans were left to govern themselves. In the end, he thought China can manage to re-conquer the region immediately, but in time, he says, it is the only possible good result.

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In another article, Edgar approaches the question of Tibet from a different perspective, arriving at much the same conclusion: China should open Tibet. Edgar notes the awkwardness of this point in light of his thesis that an "enlightened world conscience" now calls for weaker groups to "take the lead" in "civilizing" other peoples, what would independently actually mean for Tibet? Would Tibetans "drink, for instance, become an "interesting constituent in the world's greatest human amalgam" — that is, China. From this perspective, Edgar notes that "Lamasism" has always and will always staunchly resist Christianity, whereas Chinese authorities are relatively open-minded. As such, he concludes, missionaries should count themselves fortunate that "more than half of Tibetans are not directly under the Lhasa hierarchy.

Bringing it all back home

Although the WCMN and JWCRS surely reveal a host of studies and these missionaries in the region, perhaps of wider import, in the new of influence, were the books written by missionaries themselves. The missionaries came back home. Here we briefly survey four such volumes, showcasing their tendency to mix a Chinese culture and learning, Moslem kearness benefit of Chinese rule for missionaries. David (1711-1912) and Robert Ekvall (1899-1943), a father and son working as missionaries with the Chinese and Missionary Alliance, provide a good example of the thinking on the matter. A.B. Simpson, the founder of the Alliance, once famously declared that Tibet would be "the last land—before the Lord returns," thus putting a target on it for Alliance missionaries. Edgar evoked the "knight errant" imagery of a good squire who "nurtures the uncivilized Tibetans, who were a civilized people: he compared them favorably to the less civilized, in his estimation, Pacific Islanders and Australian Aborigines. Nevertheless, he also accepted the idea that Tibetans should be "enlightened and civilized, such as it was, was only barely to remain backward, and Tibet will not be neglected." After considering several candidates to do the job, he concluded that Tibet would be the most likely and the most preferable.

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It gives of its vast resources in a supreme effort to preserve the nation, to resist the enemy, and to build the great new China that is to be.” George Ritch (1883-1979), a YMCA Secretary with 30 years’ experience in Shanghai, compared China’s western frontier to the American one: “The Days of the ‘Golden West’ were the most romantic period in America’s history. Today much the same romance is being enacted in China,” suggesting a wide-open space, ready for Chinese settlers to exploit. Few of the contributors made much of the people already living in the area, but D.S. Dyne (1888-1977), echoing Edgar’s sentiment, closed out the essay by explaining to his Anglophone readership that not only was the integration of China’s West necessary for the war effort, but that the Christianization of Tibet would ultimately be wholly dependent on Chinese control of the region.

Thus, we can see that prior to 1949, among Anglophone Protestant missionaries active in China and eastern Tibet, there was little disagreement: Chinese rule of Tibet would benefit both the Tibetans and the missionary enterprise.

Conclusion

Outside the main line of this essay, but worthy of note, is that prior to 1949, among Anglophone Protestant missionaries active in China and intellectuals in China who admit to taking some amount of inspiration from foreign activity in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands.

Anthropologist Chen Zongxiang (b. 1919), for example, used Western missionary work in eastern Tibet as a model, urging Chinese educationalists and medical crews to move to the region in order to “transform the Tibetans into a modern society” by mimicking the educational crown of Xilam,” the missionary medical school in Ba’ol.” Another anthropologist, Xu Xiang (1896-1953), was struck by the power of Christianity for nationalism, and he urged China to unify all the people (especially those of the southwestern borderlands) by creating a new national religion that would use a blending of Confucianism and Christianity as its base.” The Chinese Christian church, during the war with Japan, also followed missionary educational models as they set up Border Service Stations. These were partly funded by the government in Chongqing to help bring the region into the national fold, much as the YMCA volume urged. It would be a great exaggeration (and Eurocentric and ahistorical) to say that Anglophone Protestant missionaries were somehow responsible for early 20th-century Chinese nationalist views of Tibet. Nonetheless, it is probably not too far off to see missionaries and Chinese officials and intellectuals as operating in a kind of mobius band of influence, where missionaries were inspired by features of the spread of Chinese civilization (be it Confucian or modern nationalist) vis-a-vis primitive Tibet, and they, in turn, inspired Chinese colleagues.

Anglophone discourse about Tibet significantly shifted after 1949. Quite suddenly, the “semi-savage” nature of Tibet seemed not nearly as threatening as did the specter of global communism. Missionaries, like so many other actors of Anglophone society (including business and political ones), abruptly took a decidedly pro-Tibet and anti-China turn. This obviously Cold War development should not, however, obscure the fact that, prior to 1949, decades of missionaries strongly supported the Chinese civilizing mission in Tibet. Most Protestant missionary writing on the matter was clear: Chinese rule was preferable, both in terms of assumed civilizational hierarchies and as an aid to the advancement of the missionary project in the region. One way of looking at it might be to admit that the “Pedagogy of Imperialism” was a very successful pedagogy, indeed, such that by the early 20th century, the line between teachers and students was becoming blurred, all accepting the naturalness of the emergence of modern, capitalist nation-states from the foundation provided by a traditional empire.

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Notes


2 Beam, W., “Taichiau Notes” WCMN (Nov. 1933).

3 Fergusson, W. “Anterior Tibet.” WCMN (Dec. 1911).

4 Cunningham, R. WCMN (Oct. 1912). In another article, Cunningham suggested that many of the Chinese troops were in fact “enquiries” from Changjiang’s churches. Cunningham, R. WCMN (Sept. 1917).


14 Xu, Y. Lai-Ma-Ping-ji ljak, Sichuansheng jaed wu jiating, 1944, pp. 2v-25.


I n May 2002 I returned to Afghanistan after an absence of almost twenty years. The first time I visited the country was in mid-1978, when I worked at an archaeological dig at Old Kandahar in the south of the country. Following the campaign, I had the chance to travel up north and see more of the land. Looking back, it was a weird time, and little did I – and, more importantly, the Afghans themselves – know what tragedies still lay in store for them. A coup in April 1978 had inaugurated a regime led by local communists, who quickly embarked upon wide-ranging modernist policies aimed at transforming the country: a redistribution of land, a cap to the bride price, a new national flag, subtle and not-so-subtle snubs towards the mullahs and Islam in general, and a realignment of foreign policy towards the Soviet Union.

The relative peace in Afghanistan following the Saur-Revolution, as the communists who came to power in 1978 called their bloody coup, soon came to an end. When in the spring of 1979, I wanted to return from Kabul to Europe, I was stopped halfway through Afghanistan at Kandahar when the first massive uprising erupted against the communist regime, in the western Afghan city of Herat. This revolt marked the start of a civil war that would continue for more than 40 years. At first a local conflict, it soon turned Afghanist, to quote one of my Afghan friends, into the cesspit of international relations and tensions – the land of dogs and stones, as the Persians used to call this unfortunate country along their eastern marches.

But when I finally left the country in early 1979, via a roundabout way across southern Pakistan and southern Iran, I had no idea what would happen. The Soviet invasion of Christmas 1979, in support of the communist regime in Kabul, changed it all, and Afghanistan became the hotbed of the Cold War. I returned in 1982 as a freelance journalist to report on the ongoing war between the Soviet-backed communist regime in Kabul and an ever-spreading uprising in the countryside by groups that called themselves the Mujahedin (“those fighting a jihād”). I spent some three months in their midst, my otherwise bland hair dyed black with Polycolor to distinguish me from a Russian, wandering from near Kabul some 500 km to the south, towards Kandahar, until I found myself back in Pakistan in the border town of Quetta. It was the first time I was in the middle of an actual, physical shooting war. I experienced the strong comradeship among the fighters. They took me with them in sometimes utterly amorous attacks on military outposts of the government and the Soviets. I also remember how easy it is to be sucked into the black-and-white thinking of “we are good, they are bad” – a feeling of absolute freedom, no nuances, but so dangerous. I also recall the villagers, some of whom were actively assisting the Mujahedin, others being forced to do so. And I sometimes vividly recall some of the horrors I came across. Many of my experiences from those days would colour my interpretation of recent Afghan history. I think I can understand a bit of the mentality of the Taliban fighters, of the local villagers caught between opposing forces, of the vicissitudes of war, and of the importance for any armed group to have a clearly defined enemy.

I returned to the Netherlands in the autumn of 1982. Many years followed: I got married and wrote a PhD. I had children, a mortgage, and partial end when a conservative Islamic anti-Taliban resistance was in serious doubt. The Taliban seemed fortified. Two years later, however, the al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington changed it all, and by the end of the year the Taliban were already back from Pakistan. By then I had become a kind of Westerner. I was no longer a nomad in Afghanistan, but a more or less regular visitor.

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But with the signing of the Bonn Agreement in 2001, I was optimistic that this was the end of the Afghan nightmare. One of the main strengths of the Afghan resistance against the Red Army had been, paradoxically, its fragmentation and division. The regime in Kabul and the Soviets could not talk with, or bribe, any organization that could speak on behalf of most of the resistance groups. The lamentable result was that by 1989, the country rapidly descended into chaos when the many Mujahedin organizations, by lack of a common enemy and following the destruction of anything resembling a central state, turned against each other and started to fight a bitter war with ever-changing alliances between warlords, ethnic groups, followers of particular Islamic movements, and proxies of neighbouring states. Some 200,000 people were killed in Kabul alone, as a result of endless mortar attacks. The carnage only came to a temporary and partial end when a conservative Islamic group from the south of the country, under the general heading of the Taliban (“religious students”) under Mullah Mohammad Omar, rose to power with the assistance of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence. Basically, the Taliban constituted the epitome of the anti-modernist movement that had turned against the communist-led government in Kabul. The country slid into war, as the Persians used to call this unfortunate country, into the cesspit of international relations and tensions – the land of dogs and stones, as the Persians used to call this unfortunate country along their eastern marches.

Some Personal Observations on the Western Echec in Afghanistan

“I have no idea what will happen. The end of the Afghan war, if it ever comes, will not be the end of the Afghan misery. Our country will continue to suffer, and our people will continue to be oppressed.”

Some personal observations on Afghanistan

Back to Afghanistan in the 21st century

In early 2002, having crossed the Khyber Pass, I spent some days in Jalalabad, an Afghan border town between the Khyber and Kabul. I walked around in the bazaar. At that time, the Taliban were in power, as they told me, for more than a decade. The country was in a state of shock after the Collapse and the disparity between the two countries was immense. The Taliban, who, as they told me, for most of this time had been living in Pakistan, were the ones who wanted to talk to me, and vice versa: when I was looking for a taxi, I was watched by a group of young men, and any other occupant of the car were wearing. Dress is everything, as the reader may know. But what impressed me that first afternoon in Jalalabad was the fact that these youngsters were openly expressing their animosity towards the Taliban, who, as they told me, for most of this years had stopped them from listening to
music, watching films, flying kites, or doing anything that would bring some fun into their lives. Their existence had been as bleak as the utterly boring Taliban dress.

In the weeks that followed, I went to Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif. Everywhere there was the same feeling of optimism and confidence in the future. So, what happened? Is the source of this defeat? How could a country, apparently full of hope and optimism, supported by some 130,000 foreign military personnel (2001-2011) and an endless shower of foreign aid, succumb to the same fate that the Taliban had the time. I am sure that all of the above observations make sense and that all of these facets, and there are many more, contributed to the defeat of the democratically elected government in Kabul. The effects of this defeat – first of all, the fall of Kabul on 15 August of this year – in my opinion, that led to the fall of Kabul on 15 August of this year.

But to return to my story. In those ten years (2001-2011), I witnessed enormous progress being made in Afghanistan – in health care, in education, and even in the now much-maligned state building initiatives and the introduction of democracy. At the same time, I noticed, as said before, a huge gap between, on the one hand, the Afghans – and please bear in mind that not every Afghan, man or woman, is the same – and, on the other hand, the amalgam of foreigners that descended upon the country, sometimes with the best of intentions, sometimes just doing their job. While for most Afghans any foreigner, especially when in military uniform, was the same, for many foreigners any man in a shalwar kameez was likewise identical. Stereotypes abound: the foreigners were rich, the Afghans were wild and badly in need of (Western) civilization. Against such a background, and in the context of a seemingly endless war, communication was extremely difficult. Yes, interpreters can translate words, but what do these words really mean? What is their connotation? I was often reminded of the famous, although rather slandered words of Rudyard Kipling: “East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” I know, times have changed, and after all, what is East, and what is West? But certainly in a world where almost everyone thinks they speak some sort of English, efficient and correct communication remains key, and miscommunication is rife. When my Dutch friends told their Afghan counterparts that they were in Afghanistan to help build up democracy, I could almost hear some of the elderly Afghans saying: “But is there another country in the 1980s fighting some People’s Democratic Republic from wherever. Are you Dutch trying to turn the tide back? And where is Holland anyhow? Do you mean Poland?” Communication is also more than trying to interpret the words of your partner. It is also about knowing your own background, preconceptions, and prejudices in the context of trying to understand the other. How do you, ghomi sazon, is, 1 think, a basic principle in any form of communication. You can only truly understand the other if you know yourself. And in Afghanistan, did we know ourselves? Did we know what we were doing? To be frank, I was never sure where we were in the first place. And were other (Western) foreigners equally confused? I am sure that they were. And if many of us did not know, how could we insist confidence in our Afghans? How could we defend policies that were of such importance for the future of their country? In Uruzgan we were frequently confronted with a dilemma: whether we should support the Afghan state and its institutions, or whether we should focus more on security and stability. Would we in all cases support the governor, appointed by the central government, or would we in some cases support local leaders, who were not elected but had a traditional, armed, and staunchly anti-Taliban following? Instructions from The Hague would emphasise the importance of state (and democracy) building, while our poor guys doing the actual work and trudging through the dust of Uruzgan were inclined to support an approach that would focus on good relations with local leaders. But how to frame this dilemma in any discussions with the Afghans? How could we have a meaningful discussion without being clean ourselves of what we wanted?

On the other hand, our Afghan partners had been around with very much the same problem. Did they always fully realize and comprehend what they wanted from the foreigners? How could they understand these foreigners from far-away countries? What were their own ideas, preconceptions, and prejudices? And how did many of us from the Netherlands, who had never known anything but war, and who had been made district chief after having fought for the People’s Democratic Republic by Australian forces, start to understand this blank blace from the small town of Medemblik in the north of the Netherlands, which does not even have a regular railway connection?

Communication is always a hazardous undertaking, and misunderstanding is always a risk lurking around the corner. But when a large number of foreigners from many different countries and backgrounds descend upon a country with a completely different set of norms and values, with an almost alien history, a different language and a deeply rooted religious foundation, and with so many people traumatized by years of war, then effective communication becomes extremely difficult. The outcome was not determined in the Presidential Palace in Kabul, in the White House in Washington, or the Binnenhof in The Hague, but in the plains and deserts of Afghanistan. Perhaps the Taliban won not because of their courage, determination, common objectives, or shared koffir (“nonbeliever”) enemy, but mainly because they could communicate more efficiently with many of the other Afghans. But however difficult, we have to keep trying to communicate, even with those we come to regard as our enemies. Perhaps the Afghan war has told us something about ourselves. At some point, we will have to sit together, drink tea, and try again.
Olympic Dreams and Trauma
Looking Back at Tokyo 2020

Torsstan Weber

On 8 August 2021 at 10.19 p.m. local time, the Olympic flame was extinguished in the new National Stadium in Tokyo. This marked the end of historic Games: the first time ever that they were postponed for a year, and the first time ever that they were held (almost) without live spectators. The fact that Tokyo is also the first city in Asia to host the Games twice was eclipsed by the pandemic, as were Tokyo’s and Japan’s original ambitions to repeat the success and emotions of Tokyo 1964. Back then, Japan had impressed the world with, among other things, the high-speed Shinkansen bullet train, live satellite broadcasting, and its unbeatable women’s volleyball team. Those Games had injected new self-confidence into its nation after the destruction, defeat, and isolation left in wake of World War II.

The Study

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The myth of zero risk games

“196 once again” was one of the mottos with which the organizers wanted to get the Japanese into the Olympic mood since the successful bid for Tokyo 2020 in September 2013 [Fig. 1]. In the midst of the pandemic, however, the references to the first Summer Olympics in Asia 57 years ago were of less interest than the daily updated infection figures in Tokyo and all of Japan: there were 1359 (Tokyo) and 3237 (rest of Japan) on the day of the opening ceremony, and this number more than tripled to 4066/14472 by the day of the closing ceremony. Before the start of the Games, Tokyo had extended its state of emergency. On the day of the closing ceremony, a state of emergency was in place in six prefectures, with a quasi-state of emergency in 13 others. The 7-day incidence per 100,000 inhabitants on the closing day was 196 in Tokyo. In Tokyo’s neighbouring Olympic prefectures, this number had risen to 126 in Kanagawa (sailing, baseball, softball, football), to 106 in Saitama (football, basketball, golf), and to 100 in Chiba (surfing, fencing, wrestling, taekwondo). On the opening day, the numbers had still been as low as 69 in Tokyo, 37 in Kanagawa, 31 in Saitama, and 30 in Chiba – making this a median increase of over 200 percent. Among the participants in the Olympics alone, the number of infected people had risen to 553 by the final day.

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide and Olympic Minister Marukawa Tamayo declared that “the increase has nothing to do with the Olympics.” They agreed with International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach, who had promised before the Games that there would be “zero risk for the Japanese people.” Bach was ridiculed for this, also because he initially spoke of “Chinese” instead of “Japanese people.” Was he already thinking about the next IOC playground, the 2022 Olympics in Beijing? Was Tokyo 2020 just a stopover on the seemingly endless journey of the IOC trop? led by Bach, that rakes in billions in profits at the expense of the local hosts and population?

Criticism of ‘Olympic aristocracy’

Bach had already come under heavy criticism in the weeks before the opening because his plan was to hold the Olympics at all costs, despite an increasing number of people in Japan being opposed to holding the Games amidst the pandemic. In May 2021, an Asahi opinion poll revealed that 83 percent were against holding the Games amidst the ongoing pandemic [Fig. 2]. Only 19 percent supported the decision by the government and IOC to hold the Games this summer. In due course, (now former) Prime Minister Suga’s popularity plummeted to a historic low of 33 percent shortly before the opening ceremony in July and fell to 29 percent after the Games in August. During the Paralympics in early September, Suga announced he would retire from his posts as leader of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and Prime Minister. This political damage occurred despite the success of the Japanese athletes and despite the fact that the local hosts had defied the IOC’s urging to allow spectators to the Games at all costs. After all, Bach had invoked a supposedly special Japanese culture of resilience and perseverance in an attempt to persuade the Japanese side to allow spectators into the stadiums and other sports venues.

Bach’s attitude earned him the nickname “Baron Von Ripper-off,” who, together with the IOC, “has a bad habit of ruining their hosts, like royals on tour who consume all the wheat sheaves in the province and leave stubble behind.” The Japanese translation of “Baron Von Ripper-off” as bottari danashiku (ぼったり男爵) went viral on social media.

When Bach arrived in Japan in early July, protesters outside his luxury hotel demanded that he go home. Instead, Bach went to Hiroshima to spread his message of the Olympics as a celebration of peace. Bach did not heed the government’s recommendation to refrain from non-essential travel, nor did he comply with the 14-day quarantine mandate for others entering the country. On top of that, the IOC refused to cover the costs for the security measures in Hiroshima of about 3.8 million Yen (30,000 Euro), leaving the city of Hiroshima to pick up the tab.

Nevertheless, the critique of “Olympic aristocracy” and Olympic “celebration capitalism” in Japan remained the weak movement it had been from the beginning. Already in 2013, an anti-Tokyo 2020 movement consisted of a handful of protesters. But against the background of the pandemic, opposition to the Games continued to rise and was joined by the national union of doctors, nurses, and newspapers, as well as celebrities such as Olympic swimmer Matsumoto Yuya and Rakan founder Mikitani Hiroshi, who called the plans to hold the Olympics amidst the pandemic a “suicide mission.” Within weeks, 352,000 people signed a petition to cancel the Olympics, organized by lawyer-activist Utsunomiya Kenji, who presented the petition to Tokyo’s governor Koike Yuriko in May.

Nevertheless, anti-Olympics demonstrations rarely drew more than several dozen people [Fig. 3 and 4]. In Greater Tokyo, even the largest demonstrations saw less than 0.001 percent of the area’s more than 30 million people participate. As Sonja Gansforth writes, the core of the demonstrators was primarily concerned with making a simple statement: showing “the difference between zero and one.” Public protest against social or political grievances remains the preserve of a tiny minority in Japan, even if the Games have ensured that media coverage has made demonstrations more visible than before.

A push for human rights?

Indeed, some of the strongest criticism of Tokyo 2020 and the IOC came from outside of Japan. A push for human rights – especially in comparison to South Korea and China – after the country’s economic bubble burst in 1999. Does Japanese society now also lack awareness of human rights, diversity, and inclusion? Former Japanese diplomat Tanaka Hitoshi wrote after one of the scandals: “Japan is only now learning how important human rights are.”

For decades, people have talked and written about Japan’s “lost decades,” referring to Japan’s weak economic development – especially in comparison to South Korea and China – after the country’s economic bubble burst in 1999. Does Japanese society now also have to admit that it has lost decades in terms of equality, diversity, internationalization, and human rights? Who within Japan is able to explain current international debates and standards to the Japanese society? When will international experience abroad and multilingualism – prerequisites for knowing and understanding the world outside of Japan – stopped being seen as a flaw and a career brake, rather than as a plus? Appreciating
international experience and intercultural competence should be a matter of course in a globalized world. The majority of courts were staffed by judges from abroad like hardly any other highly developed industrial country – be it through Nobel Prize laureates or branches of the Olympics or World Expositions (which is scheduled to be held in Osaka in 2025, a record third time after 1940 and 1972). The 1940 Winter Olympics, of course, did not take place because of World War II, just like the 1940 Summer Games. It was not until July 1938 that the IOC, the international Olympic Committee, had the confidence to formally return the right to host the Games to Tokyo. In the meantime, Japanese soldiers massacred tens of thousands of civilians in the Chinese city of Nanjing (“Nanking Massacre”). It was in this context that the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC), Tokyo, and the Japanese government agreed to offer the games to the world. A total of 20 new record holders set the record books at the IOC. “Tokyo 1940” never took place and, therefore, went down in history as the Phantom Olympic Games.

Japan’s Olympic trauma

While not hosting the 1940 Games was due to actions of aggression by Japan, the postponement of Tokyo 2020 was hardly Japan’s fault. Consequently, the old guard of Japanese politicians, symbolically led by the longest serving Deputy Prime Minister in Japanese history, Aso Taro (in office 2009-2020), came into their own. The absence of the 1940 Games was hardly a missed opportunity for the IOC. “Tokyo 1940” never took place and, therefore, went down in history as the Phantom Olympic Games.1 Unlike the omnipresent references to 1940 in Japanese public life in the run-up to Tokyo 2020, the history and legacy of the Phantom Games of 1940 was largely ignored or downplayed.2

The pitfalls of Japan’s safe-and-secure
together

“Safe and secure” (anzen anshin) has probably been the most used expression in the Japanese public in connection with the Tokyo Olympics in recent weeks and months. It is not surprising that a study by the Mitsubishi Research Institute (MRI) found that most Japanese named as their desired Olympic legacy is “the safety and security of ordinary people in the world, where both the population and visitors feel secure.”3 However, respondents did not state this goal as clear-cut as the pandemic, as one may expect. Instead, this was the top response in all six surveys conducted by the MRI from 2019 to 2021 – that is, prior to the pandemic. Anzen anshin is part of the consciousness of many Japanese. The Japanese have a strong sense of urgency to control the pandemic, even far away from many crises frontlines, too bureaucratic, slow, and passive,” Okada says. “Another problem is that politicians and scientists are reluctant to communicate problems to ordinary people or to share important information with the public.”

At least regarding the ongoing pandemic, the reluctance of scientists to communicate the magnitude of the situation is probably linked to the Japanese public not perceiving the pandemic as a problem at all. This is why the willingness of the Japanese government and Olympic stakeholders to adapt and admit how dangerous the situation really is, in this case, is so important.

In the long run, comparisons with Japan’s handling of the triple disaster and the too-far-gotten, Japan’s pandemic-related death toll surpassed 15,000 shortly before the conclusion of the IOC Games in June 2021, reaching 16,373 on the day of the closing ceremony of the Paralympics. It looks set to overtake the official death toll of the triple disaster of 2011 (15,979) by the end of the current year. The number of COVID-19 related deaths in Japan is much lower than death rates per capita in countries like the United States, the UK, and Australia. 

Despite the magnitude of the pandemic, very few Japanese named it the most used expression or the main topic of the Games, mentioning it less than 10 times in the past year. Dallas Jenkins, a sociologist at the German Institute for Oriental Studies in Berlin, argues that the pandemic is a problem rather than the willingness of the Japanese government. But the reluctance of scientists to communicate the situation is also a problem, according to Dallas Jenkins. “I think the most important lesson is that scientists are reluctant to communicate problems to ordinary people or to share important information with the public.”

What will remain as the legacy of the Olympic Games is set to apply to host the 2030 Winter Olympics. As Japan is not the first to apply for the 2030 Winter Olympics, the next Japanese city is prophesied to be Tokyo.6 And despite Japan’s sour experience with the Olympic Games in 1964 and 1972, the Japanese government agreed to host the Games in 1993, a feat that the Olympic Games in 1964 and 1972, the Japanese government agreed to host the Games in 1993, a feat that the

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2 Data according to Ji Xuishan/Youzhao/Footbatsport - 2021.05.24.
3 Sally Jenkins, “Japan should cut its losses and sell the IOC to take its Olympic pilgrimage seriously,” Washington Post, 5 May 2021 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2021/05/05/japan-olympic-pilgrimage/).
9 See “Beyond 2020” reports by the Mitsubishi Research Institute (In Japanese), available online https://www.mri.co.jp/knowledge/wisdom/legacy/index.html
10 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games: how the world is reacting to the Games. Franz Waldenberger, “Number games: The 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games in a according to JX Tsushinsha/Fastalert
13 Ibid.
14 See “Beyond 2020” reports by the Mitsubishi Research Institute (In Japanese), available online https://www.mri.co.jp/knowledge/wisdom/legacy/index.html
15 Presentation by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the 159th Session of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Sep. 7, 2013), https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/igo/20130907_singi.html
16 日本のオリンピック史上最長経験の敗者。第40回オリンピックの日本敗者、2021年版。
Environmental Governance and Activism in a Democratic Regime: Discourses from India

India’s transition from a poor, drought- and famine-ridden country to one of the world’s booming economies has been a tough one. Many developing countries like India now face the challenge of making their cities both ecologically and economically sustainable. Such cities must continue to tackle and channelize the aspects responsible for poverty and growth offered by urbanization; at the same time, they need to mitigate the negative impacts of urbanization so that the cities can cope with the future scale of urbanization, considering their own limitations and capacities. There is a need to restructure and reexamine the existing institutional and policy structure in the multi-hierarchical environmental governance regime of India.

Environmental policies in India and their historical discourses

In Article 48 of the Directive Principles of State Policy, it is stated that every state shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife. Article 51A further emphasizes the duties of citizens of India to protect and improve the environment and forests. The popular discourse around environmental governance in India suggests that such governance has emerged as a response to global initiatives, and that external discourses have influenced the regime. However, this negates the long-term vision of Indian policymakers themselves. An alternate discourse has been that social movements in India have acted as a driving force behind demands for environmental reforms. Scholars like Kohli accede this opinion and state that societal forces have contributed prominently to the evolution of governance in India.1

The National Planning Commission of India was instituted in 1950 to develop a developmental agenda for the country. Its first task was to prepare “Five-Year Plans” (FYP) for development as its primary objective. Its first FYP was developed in the condition of poverty, the famished observed, “Environment cannot be more development.” In Environmental Policies in Asia (pp. 19-20), J. Migdal, 1997, Cambridge University Press.

In India, the FYPs were developed from 1951 to 2006.2 The NEPs are a direct instrument for environmental governance. The NEP in 1986, for instance, was a response to the disaster – and the inadequacy of legal and administrative procedures pertaining to the disaster. Nevertheless, India's transition to a market-oriented economy is yet to be properly evaluated, given that India faces challenges because of its political, economic, and social-cultural diversity. It is not easy to tackle the magnitude of challenges which India is currently facing. There have been various success stories, such as the Delhi government's initiative to replace petrol and diesel in public vehicles with Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). This was driven by public interest litigation and a public campaign for clean air and health, which gathered momentum in the later part of the 1990s. Following this, the Supreme Court issued several judicial mandates to ensure the implementation of the initiative in Delhi. Nevertheless, India’s transition to sustainability still has a long way to go as compared to Western counterparts. The country has elaborate regulations on environmental aspects but monitoring and enforcement capabilities remain weak. To ensure public participation in the policy process, civil society must be considered as a functional feature of a democracy, and its participatory role must be defined in the draft plans to institutionalize its activities. Civil society groups can play an important role in environmental education, thereby bridging the gap between the state and individuals.

Therefore, civil society in India has huge potential to mitigate the environmental issues due to increasing environmental problems.

Notes


Fig. 1: 32nd anniversary of the Bhopal Disaster. Rallies and parades, in commemoration of the dead and as a protest for justice. Image reproduced under a Creative Commons License courtesy of nhiluvale/Bhopal networks/1984-1985.

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Abhishek Koduvakun Venkitaraman
Rejuvenating Connections between Tibet and Indonesia through Artivism

For News from Australia and the Pacific, we ask contributors to reflect on their own research and the broader academic field in Australia and the Pacific of which it is a part. We focus on current, recent, or upcoming projects, books, articles, conferences, and courses, while identifying related interests and activities of fellow academics in the field. Our contributions aim to give a select overview of Asia-related studies in Australia and beyond, and to highlight exciting intellectual debates on and with Asia. The style of our essays is subjective and informal. Rather than offering fully-fledged research reports, our contributions give insight into the motivations behind and directions of various types of conversations between Asia and our region. In the current edition, we focus on the theme of “Rejuvenating Connections between Tibet and Indonesia through Artivism.”

Politics of the Unseen: Visual Practice, Spirituality, and Resistance in Contemporary Indonesia

Edwin Jurriëns

T he biennial Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) conference, the largest gathering of experts working on Asia in the southern hemisphere, was hosted by The University of Melbourne in 2020. Due to the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic, the event could not take place on campus on the planned dates in July 2020. Using a flexible approach in response, the organisers rescheduled the conference into a series of online panels and roundtable discussions throughout the remainder of the year. One of the events was the roundtable webinar “Politics of the Unseen: Visual Practice, Spirituality and Resistance in Contemporary Indonesia.”

The webinar was organised by Wulan Dirgantoro (School of Culture and Communication) and Edwin Jurriëns (Asia Institute) and sponsored by the Faculty of Arts’ Indonesia Strategy Engagement Group (ISEG) from The University of Melbourne. In the roundtable discussion, four leading Indonesian creative practitioners explored the intimate connections between art, spirituality, and social empowerment in contemporary Indonesia. The panellists explored the possibilities and challenges of personal and communal agency through the renewal of traditional knowledge in the present as well as in the context of “future Asias” (the key theme of the 2020 ASAA conference). Rather than making a priori distinctions between the modern and the non-modern, the speakers provided on-the-ground observations from various locations and multiple historical, social, political, and cultural perspectives.

Gustuff Hariman Iskandar from the Independent art collective Common Room Networks Foundation (est. 2006) in Bandung, the capital of West Java, discussed the ongoing creative collaborations between his urban collective and the indigenous Kayepuhane Cagpatngar community in the rural Mount Hallum Salak National Park area in West Java. Since 2013, their projects have focused on the participatory mapping of customary land and cultural space, indigenous land rights advocacy, forest and water management, food sovereignty, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and the utilisation of internet technology and digital media for rural development.

The presentation by literary author and Macquarie University lecturer Intan Paramaditha was about the Cipta Media Ekspresi (CME) arts and culture initiative (est. 2018). This initiative provides grants to women artists and researchers from various parts of Indonesia, particularly from relatively isolated or marginalised communities. Paramaditha asked, “What is gained and at risk when cosmopolitan feminist subjects interact and collaborate with women who articulate their agency through different means and paths detached from the global discourses of feminism?”

The third presenter was Naomi Srikandi, theatre director and co-founder of the women art worker organisation Peretas. The word peretas translates as “hacker,” but the name is also short for perempuan lintas batas (“women crossing boundaries”). Peretas seeks to facilitate creative opportunities for women by organising research projects, book publications, public discussions, and the annual event Peretas Berkumpul (“Peretas Get-Together”). Srikandi explained how one of Peretas’ collaboration partners, the women’s grassroots organisation Institut Mosintuwu, has been using culture, local knowledge, and spirituality as means to promote peace and justice in Poso, Central Sulawesi, an area hit by prolonged religious conflict after the collapse of the authoritarian New Order regime in 1998.

In this edition of News from Australia and the Pacific, we give space to the artistic statement by our fourth panellist, Arahmaiani. The statement has been translated from Indonesian into English by Wulan Dirgantoro. With her activism art projects, Arahmaiani attempts to promote a deeper historical understanding about Buddhist cultural heritage and living traditions in Indonesia that counters the narrow religious-nationalist causes and discourses of increasingly militant Islamic groups. This includes collaborations with monks from the Buddhist Lab monastery in the Kham region of the Tibetan Plateau. Arahmaiani’s “artivism” not only unearths the cultural connections between Tibet and Indonesia, but also the interrelations between art, religion, gender, and nature. We believe her ongoing visits to and collaborations with Australian universities confirm not only her self-proclaimed status of “nomadic artist” but also the highly productive and inspiring cross-fertilisations between art, academia, and activism.

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Notes
Introduction to Arahmaiani’s Second Life

Arahmaiani’s (b. 1960) art practice has represented Indonesian contemporary art on the global stage. Across nearly four decades of artmaking, Arahmaiani’s themes are consistent in her body of work. The artist’s works have evolved from her time as an art student pushing the boundaries of creative media in the 1980s to global recognition from the 1990s with a select group of other Indonesian contemporary artists including Novita Padi (b. 1960), Hari Dono (b. 1960), Mella Jaarsma (b. 1960), and Agung Kurniawan (b. 1968).

Arahmaiani’s works can be seen as a connecting point of gender activism in and beyond the Indonesian art world; however, her contribution through her art practice has impacted local and global communities through her work. Arahmaiani’s focus on participation and transversal dialogue attested to the potential of art and creativity to affect social and environmental change.

Arahmaiani’s engagement with various local communities speaks of connectivity within and beyond the boundaries of the nation. Her projects in Tibet deal with artistic and educational approaches and problem-solving strategies that would not add to the existing problems. This calling was also steered by another reason: the Tibetan Plateau’s importance for regional and global environmental sustainability. The Tibetan Plateau is known as the “Asian water tower.” This water source for more than 1.3 billion people who live on the Asian continent is threatened by droughts caused by global warming. This place is also known as “The Third Pole,” one of the most extensive ice surface areas on the planet, together with the North Pole and the South Pole. The ice and glaciers in this area are melting fast, causing regular floods and landslides that have claimed many victims in various Asian countries.

The environmental project began when I returned in the summer of 2011. For the first step, we implemented waste management because so much rubbish polluted the whole village. Even the rivers were full of waste, especially plastic! When I proposed managing the waste during my first visit in 2010, the suggestion was not taken up. Monks are at the top of the hierarchical system in the Tibetan community, so my suggestion was rejected.

Yet this partnership often just scratched the surface to enact change. Indeed, notable Indonesian activist artists such as the Taring Padi collective, the late Samsar Siahaan (1952-2005), Mohagyo (b. 1957), and Alit Amboro (b. 1971) have attempted to raise awareness of the importance of environmental issues, from replanting the earthquake-destructed land around the school to the benefits of organic farming. As a result, according to the artist, the school can now sustain their environmental curriculum by producing eco-friendly products that supplement the school’s income.

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The experiences and knowledge I gained while working with the Tibetan communities have given me insights into the connections between life and creativity. This connection is closely related to my learning about the culture and beliefs that developed in Indonesia a long time ago. While we can still see the biggest Buddhist temple in the world – namely the Borobudur temple in Central Java – as an example of the interrelation between Srivijaya and Medang (Mataram) Kingdoms (8th-11th century), and the remains of the Buddhist temple in Muara Jambi, Sumatra, the majority of Indonesians are not aware of their history. I also recently became aware of the history of the Eloprogo area, on an area of confluence between two rivers (Blio and Progo) near Borobudur, where Buddhist monks practiced their meditation. It is believed Atisha also spent some time at this site. However, the culture and teachings related to these temples have mostly been forgotten.

This knowledge pushed me to research and explore what is left from the past culture and what is still practised in Indonesia, especially in Java and Bali. Even though the monastery traditions that I witnessed and experienced in Tibet are no longer practised, I could still find related localised culture and philosophy in Indonesia.

The second important point is the teaching of the Bodhisattva that stated, “May all beings be free from suffering.” This teaching is based on compassion, the basic principle of Buddhism. Bodhisattva’s teaching uses reason and logic to formulate the specific link between good intention, wisdom, and action as a basis for humility and considerate actions. It is also strengthened by another important principle, namely, a tradition of non-violence. In Indonesia today, many people are no longer interested in pursuing the principles above; they prefer materialist and individualist lifestyles. They perceive violence as a normal part of everyday life. This problem can be traced to many issues throughout Indonesian political history, especially violent acts by those in power or those who want to control or gain profit from power. Violence and greed are rarely questioned, except by the people negatively affected, such as certain minority groups, women activists, or traditional communities.

Finally, another important historical reference relates to the position of women. A historical symbol of the highest knowledge and wisdom was prajnaparamita (“transcendental wisdom”), which was depicted through the figure of a meditating woman. It represents a balance between feminine and masculine energy or the interconnected balance of opposite fields in the universe. The principle of equality requires deep understanding, not a simplified black-and-white approach. Such understanding can become a positive force, urging people to understand the interconnections between nature, the elements, and the inhabitants. It can give people a greater understanding of the connections between the heart and the mind and about the principles of life.1

Notes
1 This essay was translated from Indonesian into English by Wulan Dirgantoro at The University of Melbourne.

Edwin Jurriëns
Regional Editor

not easy for them to accept. Of course, I could understand their perspective, but I also had a strong reason to ask the monks to help because there was no support from the government for solving environmental issues. After the arrival of a Tibetan Lama named Dagpo Rinpoche, who initiated Tibetan Buddhist teaching in Indonesia. In 2000, they opened a Gelugpa branch of Tibetan Buddhism in Batu, Malang (East Java). There are many interesting aspects of these past cultural practices, and they are connected to what is happening in Indonesia and the world today.

The first aspect is the snyenge principle, as, in the past, Buddhism was deeply connected with Hinduism and Animism. Pluralism was supported by shared values from different beliefs in different cultures. Furthermore, there was an awareness and ability to appreciate differences as positive and enriching, as reflected in Indonesia’s national motto Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (“Unity in Diversity”). Given the current global condition where various cultures and belief systems are often enmeshed, I believe that such pluralist values are still highly relevant to be learnt and practised.

Fig. 4 (above): Community member working in vegetable garden in Tibet.

Fig. 3 (above top): Solar panel project, Kham Tibet.

Fig. 2 (left): Monks collecting garbage in Tibet.

Fig. 1 (below): Community member working in vegetable garden in Tibet.

(All photos courtesy of Arahmaiani).

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News from Australia and the Pacific

Rejuvenating Connections between Tibet and Indonesia through Artivism

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Fig. 3 (above top): Solar panel project, Kham Tibet.

Fig. 2 (below): Community member working in vegetable garden in Tibet.

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They wanted to move to urban areas to get a “successful” life; the nomad lifestyle was considered out of date and non-viable. This project was not easy to conduct because it required much money to supply the expensive seeds. Therefore started with a loan of 37 yaks for one nomad family, so they could start reviving the nomadic tradition and reconnect with the land.

Our last project was the most critical, namely water management. The water was to be used for daily activities and as an alternative energy source in the village. The Kham area is crossed by three large rivers: the Yangze, the Mekong, and the Yellow River. With assistance from Chinese alternative energy and water management experts, this project is now running smoothly. As a result, villagers can consume healthy and clean local water for various needs. They also enjoy alternative energy that they produce independently, a method they were previously not aware of.

The focus points of this long-term project are education about nature, targeting the younger generation in the monastery and the outside villages, and women’s empowerment. In addition, an alternative communal market is planned as a place where organic products or crafts can be sold among community members. One of the most important educational premises is a collaboration between the monastic community and the common people for handling everyday problems. This used to be outside the monastic tradition, in which worldly life was to be avoided by the monks.

The experiences and knowledge I gained while working with the Tibetan communities have given me insights into the connections between life and creativity. This connection is closely related to my learning about the culture and beliefs that developed in Indonesia a long time ago. While we can still see the biggest Buddhist temple in the world – namely the Borobudur temple in Central Java – as an example of the interrelation between Srivijaya and Medang (Mataram) Kingdoms (8th-11th century), and the remains of the Buddhist temple in Muara Jambi, Sumatra, the majority of Indonesians are not aware of their history. I also recently became aware of the history of the Eloprogo area, on an area of confluence between two rivers (Blio and Progo) near Borobudur, where Buddhist monks practiced their meditation. It is believed Atisha also spent some time at this site. However, the culture and teachings related to these temples have mostly been forgotten.

This knowledge pushed me to research and explore what is left from the past culture and what is still practised in Indonesia, especially in Java and Bali. Even though the monastery traditions that I witnessed and experienced in Tibet are no longer practised, I could still find related localised culture and philosophy in Java and Bali. For example, I met with a small Tibetan Buddhism community, which started in Java about 30 years ago. It began with the arrival of a Tibetan Lama named Daggo Rinpoche, who initiated Tibetan Buddhist teaching in Indonesia. In 2000, they opened a Gelugpa branch of Tibetan Buddhism in Batu, Malang (East Java). There are many interesting aspects of these past cultural practices, and they are connected to what is happening in Indonesia and the world today.

The first aspect is the snyenge principle, as, in the past, Buddhism was deeply connected with Hinduism and Animism. Pluralism was supported by shared values from different beliefs in different cultures. Furthermore, there was an awareness and ability to appreciate differences as positive and enriching, as reflected in Indonesia’s national motto Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (“Unity in Diversity”). Given the current global condition where various cultures and belief systems are often enmeshed, I believe that such pluralist values are still highly relevant to be learnt and practised.

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(All photos courtesy of Arahmaiani).

Notices
1 This essay was translated from Indonesian into English by Wulan Dirgantoro at The University of Melbourne.
Solidarity with Myanmar in Northeast Asia

Ilhong Ko

The global community has stood witness to the Myanmar military’s coup d’état of February 2021, the subsequent resistance of the Myanmar people against the undemocratic actions of the junta, and the violence that has since been perpetuated by security forces towards demonstrating Myanmar citizens. International outrage and condemnation of the military junta has followed, and calls for solidarity with the Myanmar people have been heard throughout the world. However, amidst the continuing pandemic, global interest in the situation in Myanmar has waned over the past few months.

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

Social media has played a critical role in the formation of international solidarity with Myanmar citizens in protesting the Myanmar coup. Due to this, the military junta has prosecuted journalists, and assaults on non-governmental media in Myanmar continue to take place, with the Myanmar military government blocking Twitter, Instagram, etc. However, the citizens of Myanmar and journalists have been bravely standing up to anti-coup blockouts and crackdowns to make sure that the world stays focused on what is happening in the country. For example, on June 14, Cape Diamond, a journalist covering Myanmar for global media outlets, tweeted the link to a video showing anti-coup rallies near Singu on Myanmar border, covering violence by the country’s military. Within hours, more than 2,000 quoted tweets and retweets, mostly in the form of hashtags, were circulated throughout the world.

In South Korea, solidarity with Myanmar is in the form of hashtag activism. The spatial patterning of Google searches on Myanmar within South Korea reveals that, of all the provinces and major cities, the city of Gwangju witnessed the highest number of searches. This is significant because Gwangju was where a pro-democracy movement was suppressed by the military junta in 1980, during which hundreds of civilians were killed or went missing. It appears that the current demonstrations taking place in Myanmar, protesting the coup and the military’s violent crackdowns, are not something that the people of Gwangju can ignore. Noting the similarities between the May 18 Gwangju Democratic Uprising that arose 41 years ago and the ongoing Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar, Gwangju citizens have been voicing solidarity with Myanmar citizens and carrying out various activities to support the Southeast Asian country’s pro-democracy movement. In terms of social media, 877,068 data points were collected for the period spanning from January 1 to July 31, 2021. The data points include tweets, YouTube and Instagram uploads, and news articles, with tweets accounting for 98% of these data points. Interestingly enough, the pattern for peaks in social media interest in Myanmar was found to differ from the patterns for Google searches (Fig. 2). This may be because Google searches tend to represent the seeking of information by the public, whereas social media posts represent people’s reaction to events and opinion forming.

Tweets about Myanmar increased by 1800%, compared to the same period of the previous year. Interestingly enough, the number of social media posts was higher on Myanmar on March 7, a day after the South Korean President Moon Jae-in talked about the Myanmar situation, compared to the number of posts from March 4, when the first massacre of Myanmar demonstrators took place. President Moon had written on social media that “The use of violence against the people of Myanmar must stop now. There should be no more loss of life.” The peak in social media interest in Myanmar remained strong for several days, possibly fueled by events such as the show of solidarity that took place in Gwangju every Saturday in March by more than 100 civic organizations. March 22 witnessed another peak of interest. Events that preceded this peak include the March 12 public demonstration by Buddhist monks and Myanmar activists, who marched from Myanmar’s embassy in Seoul to the office of the UN Human Rights Council, where they protested themselves. That same day, the Ministry of Justice announced that special stay permits would be given to Myanmar nationals on humanitarian grounds.

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Fig. 1: Graph showing the Google Search Trends for Myanmar from users based in South Korea (Jan 1 - July 31, 2021).

Fig. 2: Graph showing the Social Media Activity Trends for Myanmar from users based in South Korea (Jan 1 - July 31, 2021).

The patterns present in the Google search trends and social media trends indicate that South Koreans have consistently shown interest in the Myanmar fight for democracy, but there have been fluctuations in the degree of that interest. An interesting fact revealed through the analysis is that the degree of interest shown by Koreans has been heavily influenced by statements made by the Korean government, public figures, civil organization protests, as well as the tragic violence by the military junta.

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In this installment of News from Northeast Asia, we examine South Korean and Japanese responses towards recent events in Myanmar, with particular focus on efforts that have been made to encourage solidarity with the Myanmar demonstrators and how they have been received by the general public. In “Virtual Solidarity with Myanmar In South Korea through Hashtag Activism,” Jungwon Huh of Seoul National University Asia Center explores how social media has played a critical role in the formation of South Korean solidarity with Myanmar citizens. The fact that South Korean reactions to the events unfolding in Myanmar, rather than the events themselves, may have more heavily influenced online responses for solidarity with Myanmar citizens demonstrates the importance of active and vocal support for the pro-democracy movements in Myanmar. Youth Action for Myanmar (YAM) has played an essential role in organizing such needed support for Myanmar citizens. Mya Kay Khine of Seoul National University, who is a member of YAM, introduces the various efforts undertaken by this organization in “2021 Spring Revolution and Activities of Myanmar Youth in South Korea.” Of all countries of Northeast Asia, Japan has the longest history of engagement in Myanmar in the modern era. It is also the greatest contributor of Official Development Assistance to Myanmar. In “Japan-South Korea Solidarity: Past Engagement, Present Responses,” Inaba (Fujimura) Mai of Kwangwoon University, traces the deep relationship between the two countries, as well as the interactions that have been taking place between Japanese citizens and Myanmar residents in Japan as a result of the current events in Myanmar.
YOUTH ACTION FOR MYANMAR (YAM) is an organization formed by Myanmar youths residing in South Korea. Formed just after the military coup in Myanmar with the intention to support the pro-democracy movements of Myanmar citizens, YAM was founded by several Burmese international students studying in South Korea with help from the Korean Committee for Overseas Students (KOCO). YAM members have been participating in various activities and events supporting the pro-democracy movements in order to let the world hear the voices of Myanmar citizens.

YAM has organized a series of on-going protests since March. Silent protests have taken place every weekend in Insa-dong, Seoul, by a key tour site attracting tourists from passersby at these protests are, in turn, donated to the pro-democracy movements in Myanmar. Every week, protests also take place in front of embassies in South Korea. At protests in front of the Thai embassy, Indonesian embassy, Chinese embassy, and many more, it is possible to hear participants speaking out against the military junta. In addition to producing videos under a variety of other activities to support Myanmar’s pro-democracy movements and to garner interest from the Korean public. There have been interviews with various broadcasting stations. YAM has visited universities as well as elementary, middle, and high schools to talk about the situation in Myanmar. YAM has often been invited to events hosted by religious organizations to speak out for Myanmar. Members have met with political leaders online for discussions and have been involved in several campaigns in collaboration with other NGOs. It can therefore be said that YAM members have been almost everywhere in South Korea in order to deliver the voices of Myanmar citizens, who are suffering under the military junta. To keep delivering the news about Myanmar to the world so that its citizens will not be forgotten is one of the key missions of YAM.

The situation in Myanmar has recently changed as a result of the sudden surge of COVID-19. The situation has been worsening day by day. The third wave of COVID-19, which hit Myanmar in July, put the country into renewed turmoil. As the per capita death rate in Myanmar surpassed that of Indonesia and Malaysia, becoming the worst in Southeast Asia, medical supplies such as oxygen and essential drugs have been in short supply. The military junta has thus imposed a blockade of medical equipment, such as oxygen concentrators, to civilians in Myanmar. YAM members are thus calling on the international community to support the pro-democracy movements of Myanmar citizens.

YAM is a group that is formed by Myanmar students residing in South Korea. YAM was established with the intention to support the pro-democracy movements that support the Myanmar junta. To keep delivering the news about Myanmar to the world so that its citizens will not be forgotten is one of the key missions of YAM.

YAM’s existence is to ensure that these voices are heard, in pursuit of democracy.
The articles on the “News from the EAAS” pages in this edition represent the desire to study transregional entanglements across Asia and beyond. The first contribution is on the “Shaping Asia” network, coordinated by Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (Bielefeld) and Christiane Brosius (Heidelberg). The second introduces the newly funded research collaboration “Heritage as Placemaking,” headed by Sabin Ninglekhu (Kathmandu), Sasanka Perera (Delhi), Stefanie Lotter (London), and Heidelberg. The last section assembles recent research and teaching initiatives on and with Nepal at Heidelberg, including digital documentation and research-based teaching that bridges comparative work on urban transformation in Nepal, India, and Germany. The EAAS pages have been compiled by Christiane Brosius and Axel Michaels, who joined the European Alliance of Asia Scholars (EAAS) for the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) at Heidelberg University in 2015.

Shaping Asia: Connectivities, Comparisons, Collaborations

Christiane Brosius, Claudia Dericha, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, and Ursula Rao

Shaping Asia

Fig. 1: “Historical” photo studio specialised on 1920s and 1930s Shanghai, Sinan Mansions, French Concession, Shanghai (Photo by Christiane Brosius, 2017).

Set up in 2018, the network initiative ‘Shaping Asia: Connectivities, Comparisons, Collaborations’ seeks to push humanities and social science research on Asian societies and cultures more radically beyond a methodological nationalism and localism. The initiative takes on broad new themes, concepts, and methods in order to better understand interconnections within and beyond Asian societies and cultures, today and in the past. Asian Studies requires profound knowledge of languages, historical sources, and cultures, which, unfortunately, has often inhibited trans-regional scholarship. Through building new transnational collaborations and encouraging interdisciplinary relations, this network would like to radically broaden the scope of knowledge production. ‘Shaping Asia’ takes up the challenge of jointly grasping complex connectivities that shape (or have shaped) dynamics across Asia in diachronic and synchronic perspectives. This way, it aims at coming to terms with Asia’s positioning and circulations in a globalised world. The network encourages scholarship on various Asian historical trajectories, regions, and locales, based on the command of Asian languages and intimate ethnographic knowledge of cultural, political, and religious particularities. This rigorous research is additionally mostly obtained through prolonged field studies, which further sustains and deepens the field. This combination of approaches and aptitudes contributes to theorising ‘from the Global South’, in which connectivities and comparisons are taken seriously in scholarly cooperation.

Connectivities, comparisons, and collaborations

Scholars of critical area studies, transcultural studies, and postcolonial enquiries have helped overcome the confines of established academic cultures and colonial traditions of studying Asia within nation-states and along culturalist boundaries. We follow this path to study multiple entanglements and positionallities across larger spaces, and currently work on topics of urban transformation and placemaking, gender and religion, knowledge production and circulation, and the distribution of new infrastructures. Our projects trace continuities and connectivities between countries and traditions, as well as focus on ruptures and inequalities. They seek to better understand connections and power asymmetries between regions, intellectual trajectories, and political cultures. The term ‘connectivities’ – as opposed to ‘connections’ – draws attention not just to the connection between two entities, but also their potential entanglement and the transformation that
results from the contact. The concept of relationality increasingly impacts research in the humanities and social sciences. However, this must also include attention to disconnectivities or erasures.

The focus on interconnectness confronts us with important methodological challenges. Why, how, and what should we compare? The questions remain unsettled and are at the centre of methodological discussions of this network, which organises dialogues between scholars educated and working in different countries in Europe and Asia, as well as between people trained in different disciplines and familiar with different countries. Our collaborations force us to reflect on our assumptions and on the limits of particular theoretical or empirical claims. Building comparison into our research helps establish but also critically rethink what we consider as being different and similar, and helps conceptualise and demarcate specific or unique constellations.

We are committed to fostering more and broader collaborations. For this reason, the network ‘Shaping Asia’ includes collaborations as one of its three main methodological pillars. On the one hand, we acknowledge that researchers profit greatly from sharing and collaborating, also by using forums such as the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS, Heidelberg), the European Alliance of Asia Scholars (EAAS), the Global Asia Initiative (Duke University), and the Asia Research Institute (NUS, Singapore). On the other hand, we positle that the modalities of collaboration need to be an object of academic inquiry and scrutiny as well. After all, knowledge production and circulation has been shaped and is shaped by striking power differentials, by academic extractivism, and by blatant silencing. The modalities through which knowledge is and can be co-produced require self-reflexivity and different forms of dialogue. To elaborate, we will delineate a selection of topics of inquiry that our network partners attend to.

Knowledge production and circulation

Collaboration embedded in this comprehension of knowledge production has started in a number of projects currently funded in the ‘Shaping Asia’ network initiative. One thematic current that embraces a couple of projects is ‘knowledge production and circulation.’ In this current, scholars draw from large areas of research (e.g., postcolonial critique) while proposing novel analyses based on their strengths and addressing their shortcomings. Asia is conceived of as a region in which (post)colonial domination and the manifold ways in which it has been studied are linked to the very nature of knowledge production and circulation.

The quest for a fundamental reappraisal and reorganisation of knowledge production is a demand that the network strives to service. With a better understanding of the assumptions behind the (re-)production of knowledge about the world, and with the suggestion of alternative ways of producing and circulating it, chances to shape the world in more constructive and inclusive ways increase. Here, these alternative ways of shaping the world are taken to be relational, situational, and empowering. Collaboration evolves by way of different actors in Asia reflecting on how the views of the world are structured in the overall organization of knowledge generation, learning, and knowledge dissemination.

The ‘knowledge’ current aims to trace scholars’ attempts to uncover, support, and develop forms of knowledge considered to be relevant. Along this vein, it is imperative not to ignore the tacit ways of knowing and knowledge transmission that are carried out in everyday human actions. The projects in said current give primacy to conscious, reflexive dealings with knowledge in the quest to uncover how Asian actors seek to actively influence their sociability and culture. Following this principle, one of the projects addresses Muslim women in Asia who use their acquired religious knowledge in various professional activities – or for professionalization in a certain field, as it were. At the juncture of work and beliefs, businesses catering to the needs for halal products, for instance, are growing. One’s faith and religious knowledge informs one’s professional ethics. Muslim women often apply the principles of shared religious knowledge and societal norms in their practical professional life. The project aims at mapping the intersecting field of religious knowledge and Muslim women’s professionalism in Asia, providing, among other benefits, a platform to discuss how Muslim women express their connection with religion while engaging in various occupations. It maps the multiple creative fields in religious knowledge as it is the basis of Muslim women’s pathways to professional fields in the global economy, in the realm of social activism, education, welfare, and the like. It researches how faith, identity, piety, and notions of belonging are articulated by women in their professional lives.

Making of new infrastructures

Investment in new infrastructures contributes significantly to the current rapid transformation of Asia. The ‘Shaping Asia’ network also supports projects interested in the recursive processes by which new investments shape the social texture of Asian societies and vice versa. We propose comparison as an ideal tool to map contrasts and similarities across different countries and understand the role of inter-Asian relations. We study parallels and differences in local experiences of new technologies, and reorganisation of knowledge production and circulation. The three focus areas consider (1) the way new digital solutions as they occur on the ground and the role of political culture and power dynamics for framing their implementation. The three focus areas consider (1) the way new digital solutions as they occur on the ground and the role of political culture and power dynamics for framing their implementation. The three focus areas consider (1) the way new digital solutions as they occur on the ground and the role of political culture and power dynamics for framing their implementation. The three focus areas consider (1) the way new digital solutions as they occur on the ground and the role of political culture and power dynamics for framing their implementation. The three focus areas consider (1) the way new digital solutions as they occur on the ground and the role of political culture and power dynamics for framing their implementation. The three focus areas consider (1) the way new digital solutions as they occur on the ground and the role of political culture and power dynamics for framing their implementation. The three focus areas consider (1) the way new digital solutions as they occur on the ground and the role of political culture and power dynamics for framing their implementation.

Acknowledging the neglected character of building infrastructures, we focus on three types of adjustments that permit new developments to settle into a place and shape actors’ engagement with the evolving consequences. Situational adaptation helps universal forms to be fitted to local contexts; orchestration is an ongoing process of mainstreaming that tries to bring in line diversity with the needs of standard solutions; and cooperation helps to implement complex projects that require coordination between multiple stakeholders. Each project will lead to the theorising of one of these social dynamics. The first focus area considers local everyday negotiations of digital solutions. In an effort to improve the management of resources and populations, Asian countries are pioneering new digital solutions for streamlined delivery of services and stringent surveillance of behaviour. Their roll-outs in different social, physical, and cultural terrains leads to many logistical difficulties. These are solved through adaptations. Project studies the kind of adaptations adopted in India, Pakistan, and China that permit new technologies to become an integral part of everyday relations. The second focus area studies the variable implementation of standardised measures for coastal protection measures in South and Southeast Asia. In order to enhance climate resilience, many countries embark on international collaborations and build dams and sonar equipment to detect dangerous tsunamis in order to contain mobile substances, such as water. The group will consider the orchestration achieved by the deployment of valuable resources as a means to ensure inter-Asian connectivity. Other countries, like Korea and Japan follow suit. This project investigates co- and foreign-funded infrastructure projects in the border regions between South, East, and Southeast Asia. It considers the evolving compromises and frictions that accompany investments in energy or logistical systems that affect several states. As wide-ranging as our projects are, the initiative ‘Shaping Asia’ provides a methodological framework that is vital for understanding Asian transformations, ruptures, and similarities in transregional dynamics.

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8 Analysing Affective Societies (pp. 279–289). Knowledge.
10 Derici, ibid.
The project ‘Heritage as Placemaking’ investigates how places are made beyond their material construction through the formation of lasting bonds and shared care. We ask, what unites diverse, and at times ephemeral, communities in enabling or hindered the making of meaningful places with which future generations identify? The project focuses on large and medium-size cities as well as pilgrimage towns in North India and Nepal to capture how heritage placemaking constitutes an imagined, performative, physical, and geographical reorganization of space.

South Asia offers a politically and intellectually potent site for this study because of the ubiquitous interrelation of religious practices, socio-cultural hierarchies, ruptured notions of citizenship, and the accelerated forces of globalisation. Rather than understanding heritage placemaking solely as the conservative affirmation of a past status quo that preserves and restores original history, we see heritage placemaking as a constant process of formation and association that is deeply entangled in politics. The investment into collective futures is possible through forms of commencing and through evoking the commons to claim and manage shared forms of commoning and through evoking into collective futures is possible through deeply entangled in politics. The investment we see heritage placemaking as a constant that preserves and restores original history, conservative affirmation of a past status quo standing heritage-making solely as the notions of citizenship, and the accelerated practices, socio-cultural hierarchies, ruptured intellectually potent site for this study because of the contemporary decolonisation discourse. Lett’s work will contribute to this discourse the dimension of virtual placemaking, exploring the material and discursive creation of pilgrimage circuits and digital spaces beyond the state’s tourism efforts and local realities.

Heritage-making’s bureaucracies, lived gendered experience, activist formations, and selective historicity are investigated at the Social Science Baha in Kathmandu by Sabin Ninglekhu, Manalisa Maharjan, and Binita Magaiya. Ninglekhu will study heritage bureaucracy at work at the pilgrimage sites, counterbalancing Jayatilake’s work while also contributing insights into the bureaucracy at the project’s sites in the Kathmandu valley, highlighting heritage governance and governmentality. Complementing Brosius’ work on the public life and erasure of arcaded platforms, Maharjan studies communal water spouts (dhunga dhara/htl) as sites of heritage activism as well as of gendered spatialisation. Erasure and loss of heritage are at the heart of Magaiya’s study of rules and their communal interpretation. Finally, at SOAS, University of London, Stefanie Lotter and Emiline Smith will engage with the discourses of both development and replication, which reposition heritage in the contemporary decolonisation discourse. Lotter will work in collaboration with Magaiya on the conscious erasure of heritage through local and national agents. She will also work on the history of 50 years of international development collaboration in Bhaktapur, where heritage protection, destruction, reconstruction, and ownership have become increasingly contested. Emiline Smith will lead on questions of ownership of heritage by contributing a criminological perspective on heritage theft. With a collaborative study on movable objects and the repatriation discourse of stolen, lost, and rediscovered artefacts, her study adds insights into the entangled nature of placemaking.

Through the project ‘Heritage as Placemaking,’ we open the field of heritage studies in South Asia to enquiries that evolve around questions of whose heritage and whose rights. Together, the project team aims to create a better understanding of dynamic solidarities amongst different communities invested in making the, the upkeep, and the erasure of living and lived heritage. To this end, the project explores communal resourcefulness, political will, and bureaucratic attention critical to forming solidarities and making place for the future.

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everal initiatives at the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) — based at Heidelberg University and with the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences – bring together a particular research focus and expertise on Nepal from a transcultural, interdisciplinary, and internationally networked perspective. The projects mirror the breadth and get carefully entangled focus on digital humanities, on heritage documentation and critical heritage studies, as well as a particular focus on the Kathmandu Valley and West Nepal. In Germany, the NHDP is run collaboratively by the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS) and the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (HdA-W). Key partners and representatives in Nepal include the Saraf Foundation of Himalayan Traditions and Culture and the Department of Archaeology of the Government of Nepal. NHDP's first commitment is to historical monuments that are spread across the Kathmandu Valley. These monuments still play important roles in active social and religious habitats, be it in the old towns of Patan, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, or Bhaktapur, or in more remote places (beyond the Kathmandu Valley) like Nuwakot, Jumla, or Sokhumbhu. Most of the heritage sites documented are impacted by massive transformations in the city fabric, be this related to the aftermath of the 2015 earthquakes, to gentrification or informal densification, through encroachment or erasure. Others are affected by changing infrastructures (e.g., roads, airports) and changing trade patterns. Thus they reflect historical and urbanisation processes that can be witnessed across Asia and beyond. NHDP aims at documenting the historical and anthropological 'biographies' of such monuments as well as their current states and uses.

NHDP is even further enriched by the spirit with which many researchers and institutions have shared their (mostly unpublished) material related to tangible and intangible heritage. This includes close interaction with the impressive data collection of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) as well as ties with the digital and open access John C. and Susan L. Huntington Art Archive. Moreover, the legacies and support of architects, architectural historians, and researchers of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) have been instrumental in the formation of the NHDP team. The projects include the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) and the Digital Archive of Nepal (DANAM), which are supported by the Government of Nepal. NHDP's first commitment is to historical monuments that are spread across the Kathmandu Valley. These monuments still play important roles in active social and religious habitats, be it in the old towns of Patan, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, or Bhaktapur, or in more remote places (beyond the Kathmandu Valley) like Nuwakot, Jumla, or Sokhumbhu. Most of the heritage sites documented are impacted by massive transformations in the city fabric, be this related to the aftermath of the 2015 earthquakes, to gentrification or informal densification, through encroachment or erasure. Others are affected by changing infrastructures (e.g., roads, airports) and changing trade patterns. Thus they reflect historical and urbanisation processes that can be witnessed across Asia and beyond. NHDP aims at documenting the historical and anthropological 'biographies' of such monuments as well as their current states and uses.

NHDP’s team consists of architects trained in Nepal and with extensive experience in the country between the Indian and Tibetan/West Nepal. In Germany, the NHDP is run collaboratively by the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS) and the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (HdA-W). Key partners and representatives in Nepal include the Saraf Foundation of Himalayan Traditions and Culture and the Department of Archaeology of the Government of Nepal. NHDP's first commitment is to historical monuments that are spread across the Kathmandu Valley. These monuments still play important roles in active social and religious habitats, be it in the old towns of Patan, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, or Bhaktapur, or in more remote places (beyond the Kathmandu Valley) like Nuwakot, Jumla, or Sokhumbhu. Most of the heritage sites documented are impacted by massive transformations in the city fabric, be this related to the aftermath of the 2015 earthquakes, to gentrification or informal densification, through encroachment or erasure. Others are affected by changing infrastructures (e.g., roads, airports) and changing trade patterns. Thus they reflect historical and urbanisation processes that can be witnessed across Asia and beyond. NHDP aims at documenting the historical and anthropological 'biographies' of such monuments as well as their current states and uses.

The team is led by Christane Brosius, an anthropologist specialising in visual and media ethnology in urban India and Nepal, and Axel Michaels, an ethnologist and historian specialising in South Asian rituals and religions, as well as Rajan Khatiwada, an Indologist who coordinates the documentation work.

One example shall be sketched to highlight NHDP’s work: the Bhimsen Mandira, located at the northern end of Patan Durbar Square in Lalitpur’s historic city. It serves as an exemplary case because its documentation not only created awareness and meaningfulness and initiated the motivation to preserve the pre-earthquake monuments. By 2018, the project had gathered a large amount of data, and the documentation process had been completed. The temple, dedicated to the deity Bhimsen, was not destroyed in the 1934 earthquake but sustained heavy damage. Its carvings are remarkable, such as in the principal façade of the temple, which displays detailed images of different deities. Bhimsen is a mythological character of Hindu mythology, worshiped as the god of trade in Newar society. The temple is lively, frequently, and considered one of the ‘eight jewels’ on Patan Durbar Square. Constructed during the early Malla era (ca. 1200 CE), it was reconstructed in 1627 and 1681 CE by King Siddhinarasimha and King Sirinivasa Malla, respectively. Smaller and larger rituals were still taking place here, underlining the complementary relation of built and ephemeral heritage, its relevance for local residents rather than for tourists.

Continued overhead

Fig. 1 (above): Bhimsen Mandira, temple front, view, scaffolded for renovation (Photo by Yogesh Budholz, 2019).

Fig. 2 (right): Historic photograph of Bhimsen Mandira temple front and Shepherd, ca. 1975.

Fig. 3 (above-right): Strut inscription on 1682 CE (NE 802) (Photo by Yogesh Budholz, 2019).

Fig. 4 (far right): Section drawing of Bhimsen Mandira temple by Anil Basukula (September 2020).
The aim is to make the information retrieved from persons and places tagged in the digital data formats and is programmed by Oliver Hellwig, features further components, providing tools for textual processing and analysis. The project aims to be an integral part of a collaborative database and a glossary of technical terms, both of which are collaboratively edited by experts. Names of persons and places tagged in the digital editions feed into the ontological database with the aim to make the information retrieved from the documents reusable in broader ontologies, controlled vocabularies, and the semantic web.

The latest addition to the digital architecture is the development of a lemmatizer that is trained to analyse the texts morpho-syntactically and thus contributes to the study of the lexicography and grammar of the still-under-researched Nepal language. In a substantial number of cases, the data of Documenta Nepalica and NHDP are cross-referenced. The project started under the lead of Axel Michaels in 2019, as a research unit of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. With teams in Heidelberg and Patan, it consists of the researchers Bajracharya, Simon Cubelic, and Ramhari Timalsina; the deputy project leader Astrid Zottet; the head of the editorial program Christof Zotter; and the cataloguers and editors Rabi Acharya, Pabitra Bajracharya, and Yogesh Budhathoki.

The Research Unit publishes the print-on-demand series “Documenta Nepalica: Book Series” by Heidelberg University Publishing. The first volume – Studies in Historical Documents from Nepal and India – is edited by Simon Cubelic, Axel Michaels, and Astrid Zottet (2018) and contains contributions by Diwaker Acharya, Manik Bajracharya, Rajan Khatiwoda, Glauke Krauskeopf, Timothy Lubin, Charles Ramble, Alexander von Puspat, and others. It aims at exploring and rethinking issues of diplomatics and typology of documents in relation to other texts and literary genres, methods of archiving and editing, geo-references, and published by play in social, religious, and political constellations. The second volume – The Muluki Ain of 1854: Nepal’s first codified law – is the first comprehensive translation of a foundational legal text for modern Nepal. It covers almost every aspect of public, criminal, private, and religious law, ranging from the organisation of the state and courts to murder and other delicts, the workings of the caste system and the joint family, matters of purgry and penance, customary law, widow burning, and witchcraft. As such, the Muluki Ain is a unique source for the place of traditional Hindu jurisprudence in South Asian legal cultures.

Connecting written artefacts to social practices: the anthropology of inscriptions

This project aims at investigating the crucial role that inscriptions – mobile and place-bound, graffiti or other publically displayed media of written communication – have played (and still play) for the construction of spaces, belonging, collective memory, and varieties of value in the Kathmandu Valley. A selected corpus of inscriptions has been documented, catalogued, edited, geo-references, and published by play in the digital platforms of the NHDP and the Research Unit “Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Premodern Nepal.” Besides a description of the inscriptions as text- and image-bearing objects, socio-religious practices connected to the inscriptions are also documented. A special focus is on inscriptions related to religious sites and the processional chariot of the Newari deity Bu Nagdai, also referred to as Karunmaya or, for Hindus, the Râta (Red) Matyanandarâ. By drawing on methods from visual anthropology and philology, the inscriptions are studied from an interdisciplinary and transtemporal perspective: as images and texts, as sediments of past meaning and sites of contemporary struggles, as historical objects embedded in monument sites, but also as literate practices through which ritual and festive activities are connected to heritage scopes. Thereby, the project wants not only to contribute to a better understanding of the linkage between tangible and intangible heritage, but also to intergrogate the concept of cultural heritage by opening it up for local notions from the past and present. The project team, headed by Christiane Brosius and Astrid Zottet, includes Simon Cubelic, Rajan Khatiwoda, Monalisa Maharjan, and Nutanbhad Sharma.

Studying the city: entangling cities across South Asia and Germany

How can knowledge about urban transformation in globalizing cities be shared and used in both local and self-sufficient ways? This question is investigated by tools across disciplines and institutions of higher education in the so-called Global South and Global North. The interdisciplinary and cross-cultural project, ‘Urban Transformation Urban Placemaking: Learning from South Asia and Germany,’ funded by the German Academic Exchange service (DAAD), explores the ways in which cities reflect and stimulate cultural, social, economic, and political lifeworlds across time and space. It also aims to develop curricula about these dynamics. The research considers the transforming nature of public urban spaces and practices related to cultural heritage, neighbourhoods, and everyday life as a resource of knowledge co-production and collaborative socio-cultural practices. The project members pay attention to this demographic condition, but go deeper and beyond quantitative dimensions to jointly investigate and develop research- based teaching toolkits. The aim is to enable institutions of higher education to respond to the ways in which cities in South Asia and Germany transform and what can be learnt from their often substantial changes. With this, young generations of students will be trained in the humanities and social sciences as well as art and design, to shape sociably responsible and sustainable career paths by means of handling future-oriented questions and methodological challenges related to the ‘Urban Age.’

The network pays particular attention to the study of urban responses to the ‘Urban Age’.
The history of foreign exchange involving the Chinese and other people in Asia and Europe is the subject of a relatively new researched theme in the existing scholarship. Sino-European relations, in particular, have become the subject of a number of renowned scholars, such as Kenneth Pomeron, Bin Wong, Jonathan Spence, and Leonard Blussé, among others, largely from the perspective of politics, trade, and religion.

Cultural aspects, on the other hand, constitute an emerging, and hitherto less studied area in the relevant existing literature. Some exceptions include Vermeer’s Hat, which uses specific artifacts as starting points for broader discussions on transnational exchange. This edited volume aims to refine received assumptions about the mechanisms of Sino-European encounters through the lens of cultural history. To a certain extent, the collaborative and highly diverse characters of the book resemble the three-volume Asia Inside Out series (edited by Eric Tagliacozzo, Helen Siu, and Peter Perdue), which also takes a somewhat unusual approach by zooming in to the significance of specific concepts, moments, and even years in history to shed light on their role in the shaping of Asia – although the latter focuses predominantly on Asian (and not Asian-European) circumstances.

In general, Sino-European relations in the early modern period are often studied through the operations of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and its British version, as well as through the missions of the Jesuits. These appear in the present volume as well, but less as protagonists and rather as platforms, for the most part providing a sort of ‘stage set’ for more specific and narrowly defined analyses to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the nature of Sino-European (particularly Dutch) encounters. The book clearly avoids the over-simplification of the dynamics of Sino-European encounters and provides plenty of information with regard to the key actors of these processes. It thus offers a great inventory of knowledge about the concrete individuals and the characteristics and content of available primary sources. However, the length of this volume is also its most challenging segment: it is an illuminatingly informative book, particularly for specialists of the field, but in certain essays, the amount of detail provided by the authors may make it difficult for readers who are less knowledgeable about the topic and the time period to follow the flow of the pieces. This issue becomes particularly apparent in the case of specific actors who are not always introduced sufficiently in the essays, implicitly expecting a fairly profound familiarity with their significance.

The book is complemented by an abundant appendix with the translation and transcription of the key primary sources used in the chapters for reference, although some authors ambivalently fully translated texts into their own essays, which somewhat disrupts the otherwise consistent structure of the book. That said, the volume constitutes a rich contribution to the field and, using cultural products and ideas as instruments and platforms, it sheds new light on various (hitherto rarely examined) aspects of early modern foreign encounters. Due to the fairly large time frame covered by the volume, as well as the clear emphasis on chronology in the organization of the book, perhaps adding some explicit concluding remarks to reflect on the overarching changes over time would have helped connect the otherwise highly revealing and fascinating dots discussed throughout the book.

This review has been abridged for the print issue. To read the full version, visit https://ias.asia/the-review/foreign-devils-philosophers.
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In this Focus section, we and our SEANNET partners reflect on the first five years of SEANNET, but we also look forward to the next phase, for we are very happy to announce that the Henry Luce Foundation has confirmed funding for a second and larger phase, entitled the Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network 2.0: Communities of Learning, Research and Teaching Collaborative, or “SEANNET Collective” for short. Whereas SEANNET 1.0 was led from IIAS, SEANNET Collective will be led from the Singapore University of Social Sciences, with Rita Padawangi as the overall coordinator.

The expansion of the network comes at a critical time for cities in Southeast Asia, as is explained in more detail in the “Significance of SEANNET” section below. Not only is the coronavirus pandemic altering the life of millions (as in the rest of the world), but political turmoil and insecurity reigns in many countries of the region, which tends to affect poor urban dwellers the hardest.

In what follows, the co-coordinators of SEANNET 1.0 introduce the objectives and approach of the network, expand on the larger expansion mentioned above, and invite the principal investigators of the six SEANNET 1.0 study sites to reflect on a central question: “What have you learned about cities in general, and your city in particular, through the neighborhoods you have been studying in the past five years?” Each team has approached this question differently, and this Focus section brings their voices together in the form of seven essays and accompanying images that appear after this introduction.

About SEANNET

SEANNET supports the development of contextualized knowledge about urban life in Southeast Asia. The program aims to provide an epistemology of the city that is different from conventional top-down (“expert-subject” oriented) studies. It does so by unearthing new, multi-disciplinary knowledge about cities in Southeast Asia and re-assessing them through the methodological lens of what happens at the micro-urban, neighborhood
The Focus

SEANNET The first five years

Categorizing institutions of higher learning

If redevelopment pressure is a direct threat to neighborhoods in Southeast Asian cities, then the effects of the growing corporatization and commodification of higher learning in the region represent a more indirect but perhaps equally existential threat. The growing commercial direction of many universities brings with it several linked developments, such as the hollowing out of public universities (and classical education programs aimed at “student citizens”) in favor of privately-run corporate universities (catering to “student consumers”), as well as the growing importance of university rankings and an Intense competition to publish.1 Universities worldwide are cutting or scraping their humanities and social science programs as students become increasingly skills-oriented, and this is certainly the case in Southeast Asia. The result is that the main entry points for studying everyday lived realities in the region’s cities—through ethnographic methods in anthropology and sociology, for example—are rapidly dwindling. Cuts to history departments, cultural studies, and the arts further reduce entry points for better understanding and valuing community life. Such cuts in the arts, humanities and social sciences perpetuate technocratic perspectives of managing cities, as students are directed to become a labor force in profit-driven industries that shape cities as collections of entrepreneurial projects to accumulate profit. This direction contradicts the need to cultivate students with empathetic understanding of the social and cultural lives of cities. With decreased knowledge about urban community life will come a longer-term lack of appreciation for this vital part of the city, leading to further invisibility and political neglect, or worse.

In the essay of the Surabaya team, Adrian Perkasa (local principal investigator for the Kampung Peneluh neighborhood), makes a strong case for an ethnographic approach to research when he writes that “careful study and engagement with local residents, based on “sincerity and compassion,” are necessary to “better understand the current urbanization processes at work and the ways in which local populations are resisting urban “superising” when these effectively lead to the destruction of the local social fabric.” The Chiang Mai team shares a similar sentiment, as Komson Teeraparbwong writes in his essay about the Chiang Mai, “We need to have a keen eye on the world of the neighborhood, to be attentive to the small scale in order to learn about the whole. These principles and values are under threat in the model of the corporative university, which is very likely to promote the kind of technocratic, top-down “social expertise” that Perkasa objects to in his essay because it is presumed to be more time-efficient.

The impact of COVID-19

The advent of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 presented a shock to SEANNET neighborhoods as much as it did to the SEANNET teams themselves. Pandemic-related social restrictions meant that SEANNET 1.0 could not complete its scheduled in-person workshops in 2020 as previously planned. SEANNET 1.0 eventually obtained a no-cost extension from the Henry Luce Foundation to continue until December 2021, though even in 2021, SEANNET has had to continue with online-only meetings and local initiatives in the neighborhoods.

For our neighborhoods, the pandemic has proven to be a double-edged sword. The sudden collapse of the tourism economy, disruptions to the schooling of children, and the curtailing of many livelihoods and businesses have produced unemployment and misery for many households. On the other hand, the pandemic has provided evidence of community self-help and solidarity in many of the SEANNET neighborhoods. As the essay by Jagde Roberts, International principal investigator for the Thingazza Chaug neighborhood in Mandalay illustrates, in the face of Myanmar’s military junta banning unofficial distributions of oxygen tanks, residents placed boxes of disposable masks and even oxygen tanks in front of their homes, accompanied by signs that invited passers-by to “donate if you have extra, take if you need.”

In Bangkok, the pandemic opened up space for local initiatives, as community leaders, with the help of external community architects, organized small initiatives to “help vulnerable individuals (particularly poor groups) to cope with the impact of the pandemic,” including community kitchens and food and medicine to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

In their own words: “what have we learned about the city through the neighborhood?”

The seven essays in this Focus section reflect seven very different perspectives on a central question: how has COVID-19 affected experiences of the neighborhood in the first phase: “What have we learned about cities in general, and our cities in particular, through the neighborhood?”

Given the decentralized nature of SEANNET, reflective thinking and trable freedom to determine its approach to its study sites. In SEANNET 1.0 these approaches reflected the backgrounds of the principal investigators, the composition of each team, and the reality on the ground. This diversity is captured in the present set of essays.

In the first essay on Kampung Peneluh in Surabaya, Adrian Perkasa discovers, by training, observes that the traditional methods used by historians to gather information about their subjects (including the use of archives) were largely ineffective in Peneluh due to the limited availability of written records. Instead, the SEANNET team resorted to experiential, dialogical, and ethnographic methods to unearth new knowledge about Peneluh directly from residents. These methods included organizing old photo competitions, public mapping, sketching activities (together with a local group of sketchers), and community-engaged research. To build the trust of residents and make contacts, the SEANNET group invited local student team members to live in the neighborhood for extended periods of time. Perkasa’s essay ends with a call for urban studies scholars to learn from spontaneous settlements in cities and to be open to rethinking the “non-linear narratives” of cities.

The significance of SEANNET

SEANNET responds to several important underlying trends in Southeast Asia, which have huge implications for the lives and livelihoods of ordinary residents in urban neighborhoods in the region. The first trend is a new “developmentalism” that threatens

level. The local research and findings will help to frame the development of a new urban pedagogy, in the form of Southeast Asian neighborhood theories and methodologies that can be applied both inside and outside the classroom.

In studies of Southeast Asia, the region is often eclipsed by its larger neighbors (i.e., China, Japan, and India), which have traditionally commanded more attention from scholars. Moreover, many of the urban theories in Southeast Asian research and university curricula are still based on classical Western theories of the city, which do not capture the distinctiveness of urbanization and social life in the region. SEANNET was established to address these gaps and more. In the process of uncovering this “new knowledge” about cities in the region, SEANNET seeks to bridge theory (institutional knowledge) and practice (sites of knowledge) to bring about transformation on the ground in both institutions and communities.

IASS’ regional partner in SEANNET (and lead partner in the second phase under SEANNET Collective), Singapore University of Social Sciences represents an example in bridging theory and practice: as the newest autonomous university in Singapore, SUSS distinguishes itself from other traditional research-driven universities by adapting an applied educational approach in its curriculum design and teaching, with special attention to community-based learning.

In seeking to institutionalize this field-based knowledge, SEANNET formed partnerships with multiple research centers and universities in Southeast Asia, Europe, and beyond. In 2019, 22 teams were already in place before 2019, they each had considerable freedom to refer to a tendency of city and national planning theories of the city, which do not capture the underlying trends in Southeast Asia, which cover all countries in Southeast Asia.

A new urban developmentalism

We use the term “developmentalism” to refer to a tendency of city and national governments to disproportionately invest in economic development and prestige projects at the cost of other priorities, particularly public goods with social and environmental objectives. Cities, and especially national capitals, are often the canvases for large-scale infrastructural and real estate projects, with inadequate provisions for social or environmental amenities. In the search for maximum profits or city beautification (which aids in city marketing for future investors), older and/or poorer neighborhoods in Southeast Asian cities are increasingly making way for new development, whether abruptly or in the medium term through gentrification. As these neighborhoods face market pressure, their homes, lives and identities are put under severe strain.2

This is the fate befalling several of the SEANNET neighborhoods in the region. In Phnom Penh’s Kala neighborhood in the city of Phnom Penh, which is a vibrant community.

In their own words: “what have we learned about the city through the neighborhood?”

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The second essay, by Tessa Maria Guazzan, Alma Quinto, and Nathalie Dagmang on the Escolta Santa Cruz neighborhod in Manila, is a similar heartfelt call to look at a city differently, through the daily lives and struggles of its residents, and to deploy tools of community engagement to build trust and get closer to the target group. In the Escolta case, these residents are a community of homeless women who try to keep their “spots” on the streets by maintaining good relations with fellow street dwellers and vendors, building owners, and local customers.

At the same time, they have more tenuous relations with the authorities, in the form of local politicians, the police, the clearing operation squad of the city government and the welfare department. “The city” for the Escolta study team is a place shaped by continuous tactics and negotiations. It is a place without permanence or property. In their efforts to unearth these daily struggles for a “right to the city,” the Escolta SEANNET team emphasizes listening and reciprocity, building relations of trust, recording narratives and life stories, and organizing collaborative workshops with the homeless women.

Another site where a SEANNET team has studied the competition and constant negotiation for space is in Ward 14 of Phú Nhuận district in Hồ Chí Minh City. The essay, “Clubbing to investigate various uses of local space in the neighborhood and in sidewalk and street food hawkers (and the homeless) and renegotiated by users. Nothing is impossible to see it… In order to more properly understand the neighborhood… (we need to) place people and their relationships at the center of a project to develop a “neighborhood” that is a neighborhood without its people and impossible to see it… In order to more properly understand the neighborhood… (we need to) place people and their relationships at the center of a project to develop a “neighborhood” that is a neighborhood without its people and impossible to see it…”

Echoing this sentiment, the Manila SEANNET team speaks for the other neighborhood teams when it concludes that “Our research allowed us to shift our focus from neighborhoods as geographically bound units towards an understanding of ‘neighborhoodness,’ on what we analogously in our women partners call ‘attitudes of being neighborly.’” It is this contribution that SEANNET—in its initial phase and its continuation as SEANNET 1.0. What they have in common is that “Our research allowed us to shift our focus from neighborhoods as geographically bound units towards an understanding of ‘neighborhoodness,’ on what we analogously in our women partners call ‘attitudes of being neighborly.’” It is this contribution that SEANNET—in its initial phase and its continuation as SEANNET 1.0. What they have in common is that “Our research allowed us to shift our focus from neighborhoods as geographically bound units towards an understanding of “neighborhoodness,” on what we analogously in our women partners call “attitudes of being neighborly.” It is this contribution that SEANNET—in its initial phase and its continuation as SEANNET 1.0. What they have in common is that “Our research allowed us to shift our focus from neighborhoods as geographically bound units towards an understanding of ‘neighborhoodness,’ on what we analogously in our women partners call ‘attitudes of being neighborly.’” It is this contribution that SEANNET—in its initial phase and its continuation as SEANNET 1.0. What they have in common is that “Our research allowed us to shift our focus from neighborhoods as geographically bound units towards an understanding of “neighborhoodness,” on what we analogously in our women partners call “attitudes of being neighborly.” It is this contribution that SEANNET—in its initial phase and its continuation as SEANNET 1.0. What they have in common is that “Our research allowed us to shift our focus from neighborhoods as geographically bound units towards an understanding of “neighborhoodness,” on what we analogously in our women partners call “attitudes of being neighborly.” It is this contribution that SEANNET—in its initial phase and its continuation as SEANNET 1.0. What they have in common is that “Our research allowed us to shift our focus from neighborhoods as geographically bound units towards an understanding of “neighborhoodness,” on what we analogously in our women partners call “attitudes of being neighborly.”

Conclusion: “Who is a neighborhood?”

One of the fundamental questions SEANNET partners have grappled with since the start of the network is “What is a neighborhood anyway?” After years of discussion within the SEANNET teams and among the SEANNET 1.0 partners, this inclusive answer is still elusive. In part, this is because there are many terms to describe a neighborhood, from most Southeast Asian languages—both informal and formal—and none of them feels complete. Moreover, what formalizes a neighborhood varies from place to place: it may be different across countries, and even within countries. Each country has an official differentiation of neighborhood that is the state’s categorization of a “neighborhood” rather than what people and what narratives perceive to be characteristics of their own neighborhoods.

The Focus section illuminate many different aspects of the neighborhoods that were the study sites in SEANNET 1.0. What they have in common is that they all point to what is perhaps the missing piece of the puzzle: their people and the ties they have to one another. None of the six neighborhoods could be imaginable as entities without the people in their midst. Several of them are facing an existential crisis precisely because external pressures are threatening these social bonds. In an article for a special issue of SEANNET and Asia Research Institute papers to appear next year, Erik Harms (principal investigator of the Ho Chi Minh City team) concludes that:

There is no such thing as a neighborhood. But neighborhoods! Neighborhoods are regularly described as places, but we cannot touch them. We can walk through the streets of these places as places, but we cannot see them nor find their edges. The more you stare at a neighborhood, the more it seems impossible to see it… In order to more properly understand the neighborhood… (we need to) place people and their relationships at the center of a project to develop a “neighborhood” that is a neighborhood without its people and impossible to see it… In order to more properly understand the neighborhood… (we need to) place people and their relationships at the center of a project to develop a “neighborhood” that is a neighborhood without its people and impossible to see it…”

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Notes
Understanding the City from Below

Kampung Peneleh, Surabaya

Adrian Perkasa

Being involved in the SEANNET program brings many privileges for the present writer. Trained as an historian in the undergraduate level, I have an opportunity to leave the parochialism of this discipline. When enrolled in a course called Indonesian Urban History, I was only reading the perspective usually taken by urban planners, governments, or the authorities on the city. In general, they tend to view the urban, especially its settlement, as in need of development, improvement, and even demolition to give new space for more modern forms. On the other hand, having lived in several cities in Indonesia, I hold an understanding that there is something beyond that perspective.

With the community-engaged research model in SEANNET, our group explores different approaches to study urbanism, especially in the neighborhood context. Work with the urban sketchers to draw meaningful spaces and activities in local residents’ everyday lives is one example. This activity actually ignited from the idea of the youth who got involved with our research team. However, the sketch drawing program was not only conveying the image of the neighborhood as an important part of the city and inviting more residents to participate; methodologically, drawing itself has potential to be a way of describing the lives we observe and with which we remember a critical truth that underpins all the activities: the importance of the liberating power of reason and science. Wirth believed that the neighborhood as a traditional type of social organization would go away as society became increasingly secular, impersonal, and metropolitan. The narrative of Surabaya history provided by Dick is similarly written in a linear way and gives no place for the role of

There are abundant historical sources to write urban history. And these will be upsurging as the cities develop. He also pointed out that the historian could capture the process of urbanism to differentiate his or her works with other scholars studying the city. There are at least five major topics in urban history to study: the city’s ecology, socio-economic transformation, social system, social issues, and social mobility. The most important reading for the course was Surabaya, City of Work: A Socioeconomic History, 1900-2000 by Howard Dick. Naturally, it is essential because our university is located in that city. Compared to other works on the history of Surabaya, this book enjoyed popularity not only in urban history courses, but also among students in sociology and urban planning departments. For a historian or someone who loves history, Dick recounts the ups and downs of Surabaya’s 20th-century destiny in a series of lengthy, comprehensive, analytic chapters on government, industry, land usage, and commerce.

He characterizes Surabaya’s birth and expansion against the background of its hinterland, giving particular attention to the physical and historical conditions that favored the city over other metropolitan centers on Java. He contends that by the end of the 19th century, Surabaya had emerged as the leading port and most populous city of Java, owing to its privileged access to the interior via the Brantas and Bengawan Solo rivers, as well as to its uniquely sheltered harbor, which made Surabaya far more appealing a port than either Batavia or Semarang. Surabaya evolved into Indonesia’s leading commercial center and one of Asia’s most vibrant and cosmopolitan ports. This was the result of Dutch Colonial policies, particularly the Cultivation System, the Agrarian Law, and the railways built in the second half of the 19th century, which tightened links between the city and its hinterland.

Surabaya was the biggest city in Indonesia at the beginning of the 20th century. With a population of about 150,000 people, it was even bigger than Jakarta. Surabaya rose to prominence in the early 20th century as a result of the processing and transportation of sugar and other agricultural commodities from East Java. The worldwide market was undercut by the 1930s crisis, sending the city into an economic and demographic depression. The city’s economic slump was exacerbated by Japanese occupation, followed by a revolutionary struggle for freedom during the 1940s. In the decolonization period (1945-1975), the people in several Surabaya kampungs felt the improvement projects in the colonial period were better and more beneficial. Many such projects are still in use today. For example, many kampung people still use public bathrooms that were constructed during the colonial period. The closed gutters or sewage systems built on each side of kampung roads were considered another positive outcome. The residents believe that the system could prevent their kampungs from flooding. In addition to that, they saw that the colonial intervention paid more respect to the several sacred sites in the kampungs, while the post-independence projects tended to neglect their existence.

Collecting historical sources related to kampung improvement programs was the first and most crucial step. We relied on oral history of the kampung residents. Oral history, the interviewing of five people about events they witnessed, are one of the most important tools in the historian’s toolbox for researching the very recent past. In principle, there is no better way to acquire an understanding of events in living memory than to speak with those who saw or participated in them. People interviewed, unlike written sources, may be asked precise follow-up questions about their experiences and opinions, depending on what the historian wants to investigate or uncover. Interviewing five historical participants allowed us to remember a critical truth that underpins all excellent works of history: history is a narrative about real people, with all the depth and nuance that human reality implies.

Nevertheless, many urban planners found Dick’s Surabaya more useful for them perhaps because it is in line with Louis Wirth’s idea on the history of the city. Wirth believed that history is a linear and progressive unfolding of the liberating power of reason and science. According to Wirth, at the beginning, there was a neighborhood or a community before the emergence of a society. Moreover, the neighborhood as a traditional type of social organization would go away as society became increasingly secular, impersonal, and metropolitan. The narrative of Surabaya history provided by Dick is similarly written in a linear way and gives no place for the role of
men nor women in it. The urban planners of Surabaya treated historical facts in this book somewhat like a recipe, using medical records to cure their patients. Indeed, Wirth’s ideas on urban planning remain influential in urban studies research. According to Wirth, the urban mosaic (e.g., personal and social disorganization, role conflict, and the like) is an analytical tool that the values in the city) can be cured by rational planning. Thus, Wirth argued that planners are the best analysts of urban reality and logical consistency. Wirth is also well-known for his advice on planning at the regional, metropolitan scale rather than the small-scale, neighborhood level. He advised planners to investigate the area over which such urban institutions as hospitals, schools, churches, theaters, and clubs are patronized to see where the people spend their time.

According to Wirth, “Some believe that the hope of our social order lies in the return to the local centers of neighborhood. The trend of our civilization, however, has generally been sensed to lead in the opposite direction. There can be no return to the local self-contained neighborhood community except by giving up the technological and cultural advantages of this shifting, insecure, and interdependent, though intensely interesting and far-flung, community life, which few would be willing to do.”

What we are doing in SEANNET (2017-Present)

Almost all of the SEANNET project objectives are related directly to Wirth’s ideas. In their proposed methodology, the program sets out to question the everyday nature of urbanization processes and explore the specific perspective of its cities’ neighborhoods. The notion of neighborhood refers to both built and social environments. If the city at its smallest, most local level disappears, this will have profound consequences for Southeast Asian societies as a whole, not just for their densification and social fabric. In addition to that, the story of neighborhoods in several cities in Southeast Asia (including Surabaya) can be understood by using signs and symbols, mapping and labeling out experience (Fig. 2 & 3).

A what long-term strategy is critical in obtaining information from local people. The presence of the research team in the field on a regular basis, as well as their access to community events, is critical as a sign of sincerity in gaining a better knowledge of the kampung. As time passed, the team studied the importance of the neighborhood residents’ needs and aspirations. The first moment when we could assess the people during their daily life was during the celebration of Indonesian Independence Day. Independence Day is celebrated in Surabaya's neighborhoods by the residents of each RW (a region with similar characteristics) and of each RT (a region grouping). The first moment when we could assess the community residents’ needs and aspirations was during their daily life.

In this methodology, we followed the new urban pedagogy for South-East Asia, which is mentioned in the SEANNET proposal. This is a methodology that is experimental, dialogical, and ethnographic. At the experimental level, we tried to dig up any historical sources in KAMPUNG Peneleng by responding to the residents’ needs and aspirations. The first moment when we could assess the community residents’ needs and aspirations was during their daily life.

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What we (tentatively) conclude

At this point, we are inclined to repeat the historian Theodore Roszak’s ideas on the failure of technocracy or top-down approaches in studying urbanism. Roszak coined a term that he called “citadel of expertise.”10 In their view, the urban technocracy just replaces the urban community from myth, religion, and problems of existence. In the guise of liberating urban community from myth, religion, and problems of existence. In the guise of liberating urban community from myth, religion, and problems of existence, the urban technocracy just replaces the urban community from myth, religion, and problems of existence.

In the perspective of urban history, we are in line with Richard Sennet’s idea on the non-linear narrative of cities. According to Sennet, cities do not build linearly or in a straight manner; Instead, they shape and twist and turn as historical events alter the ways people live in them. Urban studies scholars can learn from numerous spontaneous growths in small-scale urban units. In small projects, the researchers can work reflexively. We, as a group of researchers at SEANNET in Kampung Peneleng, always try to explore the unforeseen. We engage with local residents about what to be done in the near future. We carefully evaluate our steps to prevent the dangers of research blueprints that serve only our side rather than serving the local interests.

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Notes
8. For more critical review of this work see John Sidell, Reviewed Work in Indonesia, 76 (Oct, 2003), pp. 205-209.
Wbodegas Escolta housed warehouses and between 1565 and 1815 [Fig. 1]. Even then, flourished as a port city from the galleon trade and to busy Chinatown, Binondo.2 Manila the Pasig River to the walled city Intramuros, It used to be a thriving commercial strip linking a neighbourhood beyond property. theirs is a neighbourhood beyond ownership, neighbourly. We eventually surmised that of neighbourliness and attitudes of being one formed around strategies and tactics shaped this neighbourhood of women, We were interested in how these negotiations staff of the social welfare department. squad of the local city government, or politicians, police, the clearing operation tenuous ones with authorities, whether local customers”). These relationships also included suki building owners, and their (“loyal with fellow street dwellers and vendors, Escolta by maintaining informal concessions These women managed to keep their ‘spots’ in Sta. Cruz, the district where Escolta is located. These women are ‘neighbours’ in Escolta who occupy various spots on the sidewalk beside an estuary. This corner of Plaza Sta. Cruz was a busy thoroughfare, situated at the intersection of a church, a commercial bank, fast food restaurants, and jeepney transport points. While we became acquainted with a number of women from our early site visits, our main collaborators were seven women who were third- and fourth-generation residents of Sta. Cruz, the district where Escolta is located. These women managed to keep their ‘spots’ in Escolta by maintaining informal concessions with fellow street dwellers and vendors, building owners, and their suki (“loyal customers”). These relationships also included tenuous ones with authorities, whether local politicians, police, the clearing operation squad of the local city government, or staff of the social welfare department.

We were interested in how these negotiations shaped this neighbourhood of women, one formed around strategies and tactics of neighbourliness and attitudes of being neighbourly. We eventually surmised that theirs is a neighbourhood beyond ownership, a neighbourhood beyond property.

Escolta is a street corridor connecting the districts of Quiapo and Santa Cruz in Manila. It used to be a thriving commercial strip linking the Pasig River to the walled city Intramuros, and to busy Chinatown, Binondo.3 Manila flourished as a port city from the galleon trade between 1565 and 1815 [Fig. 1]. Even then, Escolta housed warehouses and bodegas for commercial goods.4 The city was heavily bombed during the Japanese occupation, and Escolta fell into ruins. It had a brief revival in the 1950s and 1960s but fall into dereliction in the 1970s, when Manila was overshadowed by rising commercial districts, primarily those in Makati City and Quezon City. The late 1990s saw efforts in reviving and revitalising Escolta, with the local city government eyeing it as a crucial commercial development corridor. This occurred alongside campaigns to conserve and reuse historic buildings in the area. There were also plans in the early 2000s for Escolta to adopt a mixed-use development plan, which did not materialise. One of the more well-known urban redevelopment projects of this period was Revive Manila, conceived by Manila mayor Lito Atienza from the early 2000s to 2007.5 Escolta had long been the focus of an architectural conservation campaign by heritage advocates, as several of its postwar structures were either being demolished or had become derelict.6 Around 2013 onward, Escolta and other areas in Metro Manila saw a revival through art and cultural events, trendy shops, hip coffee bars and restaurants, bazaars, and street parties. These drew crowds interested in ‘happenings,’ exhibition openings, architecture photography, and art-related events. In Escolta, these centred around the First United Building, which houses a small historical museum, several offices for design start-ups, a space for the art laboratory PBB, a ground floor with bootles selling artisanal and vintage products, a coffee shop, a bar, and even a barber shop.7 At present, Escolta remains a commercial area, albeit less busy compared to other commercial zones in Metro Manila. Most of its buildings remain offices and there is little business. Structures on the fringes of Plaza Sta. Cruz, however, continue to fall into disrepair.

The Manila research team for the Southeast Asia Neighbourhoods Network (SEANNET) considered how urban redevelopment and gentrification alter the configuration of neighbourhoods. Our essay title suggests the complex relationships between formal and informal systems and structures in the city and how they frame and mediate exchanges between social groups.8 These groups include ourselves as researchers, who were initially outsiders to this specific neighbourhood context. The focus of our research was the women we worked with our women partners in late 2016 and proceeded to did our first site visits to Escolta in early 2017 through the middle of 2020. Our team included seven women from our early site visits, where our women partners previously lived and worked, April 2018. The focus of our research was the women we worked with our women partners from early 2017 through the middle of 2020. Our team included seven women from our early site visits, where our women partners previously lived and worked, April 2018.
Neighbourliness amidst uncertainty

Our cooperation with our women partners yielded new ways of understanding life on the streets of Manila. Our research allowed us to shift our focus from neighbourhoods as geographically bound units towards an understanding of ‘neighbourliness,’ or what we and our women partners call ‘attitudes of being neighbourly.’ Early studies of Philippine culture identified kinship structure as the primary unit of socialisation in Philippine society. Jocano situated the importance of the family and kinship structure in an agricultural society. Jocano situated the importance of the family and kinship structure in an agricultural society. Jocano situated the importance of the family and kinship structure in an agricultural society.

We also hosted a cookout, mapping workshop at the local YMCA led through. In 2018, we had a walking tour of artists collectives, the state, private agencies, our earliest planning workshop as a research group in 2017 to the more recent nutrition and health workshops we designed and facilitated: from mostly conveyed through narratives and stories. how are neighbourhoods formed through which collective patterns of dissent and new forms of collective life emerge. We aim to situate our research in these imaginations of collective life. We want the narratives of our women partners to ‘let the heart of our [research] field’ and not merely be regarded as ‘voices from the margin.’ Hence, the emphasis how they understood their lives on the streets: they used the word mamamanggala (“living on the street”) to describe their way of life. This “world of disjunctive flows,” as described by Appadurai, is the quality and intensity of social relationships that define a segment of the rural society where collective engagements with urban communities.

During our visits to Escolta, we conversed with, listened to, recorded, and reflected on the lives of our women partners, which mostly conveyed through narratives and life stories. Our research is grounded in six workshops which included our first planning workshop in 2013, followed by a history workshop at a cafeteria in Escolta led by Nathalia Dagmang. We had preparatory sessions for the local action workshop at the local YMCA in 2019, followed by the country action workshop with members of the different SEANNET research teams in the same year. In March 2020, we worked with children on a workshop about nutrition and hygiene at the Museo Pambata (Children’s Museum). We consistently began our workshops with a review of SEANNET’s research goals, previous activities and interactions, and the levelling of expectations. The workshop method allowed us to work at a scale that was small and flexible, open to greater interaction and intimacy that would have otherwise been difficult on a larger scale. We knew we wanted to move away from the ‘city as laboratory’ approach and explore how a grassroots approach can lead to deeper engagements with urban communities.

We asked what it meant to be neighbourly under precarious and uncertain living conditions. How are neighbourly forms in the absence of property? In one of our workshops, a partner named Susan insightfully claimed that they know that changes in the city are inevitable, but that all they want is for their voices to be heard. She hoped “to be part of whatever change will happen in Escolta” (Sana ay kasali kami sa anumang pagbabago pagmamga sa Escolta). The workshops themselves become significant platforms for these women’s narratives, and for our part, a crucial methodology of learning about the life ways of marginalised communities in cities.

Harnessing the imagination: narrative, immersion, and participation

Our women partners shared their life stories in the family tree workshop by narrating family histories, describing their daily routines, and reflecting on how their changing fortunes led to their lives on Escolta Street. Similar to this was the timeline workshop from the cookout, where discussions of changes in the city seemed to echo the upheaval in their lives: uncertain livelihood, illnesses, and the theft of their belongings, among other dire events. In one of our conversations, we asked whether they felt they belonged more to the city during the streets: they used the word "kapitbahay" to their formally organised counterparts; or to gated communities. The government for military and employees in active service are often configured around blocks. Rather, “it is the quality and intensity of social relationships” that define the residents of adjacent dwellings. There were no fixed physical boundaries in the households, however. Rather, “It is the quality and intensity of social relationships that define a household, in what we might call ‘neighbourliness,’ or what we and our women partners call ‘attitudes of being neighbourly.’”

The Malay word kapitbahay means a house linked to another house or houses near each other. The proximity of housing units or residences is dictated by social class, hence the variation in neighbourhood clusters or configurations: a tahan is a term often associated with inner city slums; a “compound” is a plot of land with houses for relatives or extended family members; a “village” or a “subdivision” can refer to suburban housing developments, to middle-class housing outside the metropolitan core, or to gated communities in the cities.

Neighbourliness is reconfigured in these imaginations of collective life. We want the narratives of our women partners to ‘let the heart of our [research] field’ and not merely be regarded as ‘voices from the margin.’ Hence, the emphasis how they understood their lives on the streets: they used the word mamamanggala (“living on the street”) to describe their way of life. This “world of disjunctive flows,” as described by Appadurai, is the quality and intensity of social relationships that define a segment of the rural society where collective engagements with urban communities.

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Performing and ‘Rhythm’ the Neighbourhood 24/7
Methodological Learnings from Ward 14, Phú Nhuận, Hồ Chí Minh City

Marie Gilbert-Flutre

I t’s 11 AM in Ward 14 of Phú Nhuận district. The local market is in full swing [Fig. 1]. The local traders lure passers-by, and the waste collectors struggle to make their way through the goods-laden alleys. The customers are regular: residents of the neighbourhood who come on foot, but also from neighbouring districts who come by motorcycle to do their food shopping. Street vendors put away their goods while others set up temporary shops. They stay on the doorstep for a few hours, sometimes less, in an incessant ballet. District officials and local police watch from a distance and sometimes participate in spontaneous discussions. They don’t seem to care too much about the presence of street vendors, despite discussions. They don’t seem to care too much about the presence of street vendors, despite discussions.

The local market is in full swing [Fig. 1]. The atmosphere is very lively, and the presence of street vendors, despite discussions. They don’t seem to care too much about the presence of street vendors, despite discussions.

Between acquaintance and the city at Large: the neighbourhood as a field of forces

The popular Vietnamese saying “selling siblings who live far away to buy neighbours who live next door” (Bán anh em xa, mua láng gîng gần) illustrates the social significance of the neighbourhood in local city life. A neighbourhood is indeed a key place of social encounters that help one to find one’s own place in the metropolis. As such, the neighbourhood plays the strategic role of a launch pad at the interface of the domestic life unit (as a place of acquaintance) and social belonging) and the city at large. It can be seen both as an intimate place of social encounters and a field of expression of social forces, which is practiced – and thus performed – on a daily basis. As such, neighbourhoods generate many local centralities in their city. They invite to produce a place-based geography of the city that has long provided for cosmopolitan diversity and in which populations in their diversity are able to assert their agency in city-making. Acknowledging “the drama of co-presence and co-existence” unfolds in the everyday;” our study was mindful of avoiding a totalitarian theory of the everyday: “everyday people are not always a unified, organized group but in urban settings involve a variety of people with different tactics and understandings.” Thus, our Phú Nhuận neighbourhood analysis centres on dwellers, sellers, and anonymous passersby in all their diversity, providing a grounded and ethnographic perspective on local power relationships in the metropolis. Our attention to daily rhythms challenges representations of the local neighbourhood as simply a “place of belonging.” It suggests that this belonging is not guaranteed to all city dwellers on a 24/7 basis, but constantly has to be negotiated and renegotiated, even for access over short periods.

With a plethora of competing urban uses, neighbourhoods are also places of daily frictions and confrontations. Multiple claims to limited space ensure that tensions run high, especially in urban contexts where public spaces sustain the livelihood of a large part of the population, as in Vietnam. In this competitive context, constant spatiotemporal negotiations are needed to gain access to space in which to perform the activities required to secure one’s livelihood. At the same time, most metropolitan areas of the Global South engage in an active rewriting of the rules of public space by arbitrating on which spatial practices can be considered legitimate. In this context, informal street vendors are among the most precarious urban actors. The literature on the competition for public space primarily focuses on the strategies of various stakeholders to gain access to urban amenities.” Our research aims to add a temporal approach to the study of the power relations that constantly shape and reshape everyday usages in neighbourhoods.

Rhythm(an)alyses as a critical method

In his writings generally, and in his Essai de rythmanalyse (1992) in particular, Henri Lefebvre describes the study of daily rhythms as the gateway to a political reading of the city. In recent years a great deal of empirical research has taken up Lefebvre’s conception of rhythms. Within the SEANNET program, I mobilized rhythm-analyses as an analytic lens for investigating the political dimensions of how patterns of small, local, often overlooked behaviours are structured in metropolitan neighbourhoods. Envisioned as a praxis, it invites the researcher to consider the concrete conditions of social life that emerge from the ways in which different categories of city dwellers interact in the neighbourhood.

This approach highlights the value of ephemeral uses of local space. Like space, time is anything but a neutral container for social life: “time-sharing” is the product – in Lefebvre’s sense of the term – of unequal everyday negotiations, intertwined with the more commonly studied negotiations pertaining to spatial access. Thus, understanding the politics of the everyday and the unequal capacity of various urban actors to access valuable timeslots in public spaces requires us to scrutinize the temporal organization of a place throughout the day, every day, and to delve into the local sociopolitical meanings of time-based transactions.
Evidences from Phú Nhuận

With its 10 million inhabitants, HCMC is an emerging and rapidly changing metropolis of Southeast Asia. In this context, local land conflicts – from obstacles in major projects to daily frictions in the use of public space – are multiplying and have become central to the recalculation of power, requiring constant arbitration. The first major source of land conflict in the historically unplanned and informal urbanization process of HCMC: unclear tenancy status and dwellers with mixed interests.

This methodological exercise visualizes the presence there for longer or shorter and during more or less valuable periods of time.

A Rhythm of the Kiến Thít local market: time tradeoffs and unequal capacities of negotiation

Our rhythm analysis reveals that the temporal succession of activities throughout the day results from constantly renegotiated and reiterated local agreements, in which each urban actor has a different degree of negotiating power. On the basis of our 30 interviews, we were indeed able to distinguish four types of actors, classified in terms of their capacity to negotiate and assert their position, from the local authorities and local landlords – who appear to be the real “masters of time” in the neighbourhood – to the temporary vendors and the most precarious ambulant traders who are unable to settle in locally during the valued hours of the day.

The first actors in the Phú Nhuận ballet are the local representatives of the Vietnamese state, who are responsible for enforcing the law locally. Visual propaganda is a classic way for the state to assert its local authority in organizing time and space: displays about rules are ubiquitous. Despite these local infrastructures of power, however, our study of local rhythms also reveals a certain floating of the state: many local rules are openly violated, and the more trust they gain. In return, the more of their ephemeral access to the plaza. Time tradeoffs and unequal capacities of negotiation identify several patterns of unregulated access and unequal capacities of negotiation.

Implications: addressing the politics of the everyday in the neighbourhood

Our operationalization of rhythm analysis offers several insights into the daily life of a Vietnamese urban neighbourhood. It highlights the social complexity of the neighbourhood, beyond the simplistic idea of a harmonious community. If the most precarious ambulant traders who are unable to settle in locally during the valued hours of the day. The first actors in the Phú Nhuận ballet are the local representatives of the Vietnamese state, who are responsible for enforcing the law locally. Visual propaganda is a classic way for the state to assert its local authority in organizing time and space: displays about rules are ubiquitous. Despite these local infrastructures of power, however, our study of local rhythms also reveals a certain floating of the state: many local rules are openly violated, and the more trust they gain. In return, the more of their ephemeral access to the plaza. Time tradeoffs and unequal capacities of negotiation identify several patterns of unregulated access and unequal capacities of negotiation.

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Over the past decades, due to its charms as a bastion of quickly disappearing Thai cultures, Nang Loeng has been subject to multiple technocratic interventions by various actors (e.g., universities, government agencies, and advocacy groups), all under the same benevolent banner of heritage preservation. In parallel, as Bangkok expands its underground railway into the inner city, Nang Loeng is designated as one of the new stations. The construction project raises the alarm among the current tenants who, having learned of eviction cases elsewhere, fear for their own future. To this end, they turn to their cultural assets and experiences gained from their interactions with technical experts, weaponizing heritage as a claim towards housing security.

This essay explores the complex relationship between heritage and housing precarity in Nang Loeng. First, we review the unintended impact of underground construction. While the official goal was to alleviate automobile traffic and promote densification through transit-oriented development (TOD), landlords seized the opportunity to evict tenants and redevelop their properties. Bangkok's Chinatown is a case in point. Perceiving the looming threat, the residents of Nang Loeng came together to make their voices heard. To do so, they have relied on art activism as a tactic to bring attention to their cause. Equipped with knowledge from the experts, the residents mobilize their cultural heritage as resources to negotiate within the climate of precarity. The seemingly harmless appearance of art allows the tenants to communicate their plight. While the tenants argue that their cultural heritage is being endangered by redevelopment pressures, it is their housing tenure that is, in fact, equally under threat.

The changing face of historic Bangkok

Like most major cities in Southeast Asia, Bangkok is notorious for its traffic congestion. Decades of ineffective land control have produced a sprawling metropolis of over ten million residents without proper mass transit systems. To address the issue, the Thai Government dusted off their transport masterplan, revisisting the possibility of turning Bangkok into a rail-oriented city. Beginning in the early 2000s, downtown Bangkok has welcomed a few lines of urban rail, the Green, Blue, and Purple lines, with a few more to come. Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), the city government, has responded enthusiastically to the vision of a denser Bangkok, stipulating – perhaps prematurely – upzoning around all transit stations, in the hope of growing a larger residential population in the city and therefore reducing automobile trips. The language of TOD has entered Thai planners' discourse as a cure for the city's infamous traffic.

In addition to the downtown core, three stations were constructed in Bangkok's historic district and its adjacent areas in 2017-2018, with a few more underway. While the general public celebrates their newfound mobility, the megaproject has spawned unintended consequences, particularly in the abrupt transformation of the old town's fabric. Much of the historic district is owned by the government and a handful of landed elites. As Bangkok began to urbanize, the landlords constructed shophouses upon their land, later renting them to Chinese merchants. As such, today's Nang Loeng is known for its rich cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, from food to artisan crafts, from traditional dance to vernacular shophouse architecture.
BANGKOK’S THREE historic moats was long known for its toy markets. Over the decades, merchants encroached the canal, setting up their semi-permanent stalls. However, in 2016, with too short a notice, the occupiers were forcibly removed, literally overnight, to pave way for the Ong Ang Canal Revitalization Scheme, a recreational waterfront project inspired by Cheonggyecheon in Seoul. A short distance from Ong Ang was Prom Mahakan, a low-income community that inhabited forts. After decades of bitter battles with the city government, the residents were finally removed, again quite forcibly, under BMA’s pretext of constructing a public park. For years, the displaced residents have felt the impact. The most obvious is that of the tenants have been forced to relocate, their landlord, the CPB, a major landowner of the neighborhood where they were born, as local weapons. The residents are able to continue to maintain its cultural activities, the CPB, a major landowner of the neighborhood where they were born, as local weapons. The residents are able to continue to maintain its cultural activities.

As a neighborhood in the larger transit masterplan, Nang Loeng will be home to a new transit station, and is thus seen as a possible medium-sized TOD. While the construction project has yet to start, many residents have begun to feel the impact. The most obvious is that the most unprivileged residents staying near the Buddhist temple, Wat Soonthorn Dhammathan. A considerable number of small timber shops located in the areas around the temple have squatted in the land of the CPB, the neighborhood’s major landowner. Many of the tenants have been forced to relocate, thus offering new development opportunities. Another case was the renovation project of Sala Chalerm, the Nang Loeng Artist House, a historic timber cinema, erected in 1918 (Fig. 1). When the lease contract of the cinema was terminated, the landlord came to renovate the theater. The renovation is now completed, waiting for a new investor and a new lease of life. Before the renovation, the front court of the theater was used as a venue for local cultural activities.

Today, the locals have to move their events to either the market or the temple. As mentioned above, various actors have been involved in organizing cultural events and activities in Nang Loeng, including state officials, local authorities, local educational institutions, and the residents themselves. All aim to promote local tourism and to conserve local culture. Civic Society Tourism Network (CSTN), a non-profit, local tourism alliance, is a good example. CSTN has helped the residents organize tourist activities, such as walking tours and bike tours. These are to generate incomes directly for the locals. As an entertainment district in the 1960s, Nang Loeng’s historical heritage has also attracted local and international artists. Such artists come to organize a variety of artistic events. These events recognize both the tangible and intangible assets of Nang Loeng, including architectural heritage, local authentic cuisine, traditional dance performance (Chatreeplug), and cultural spots such as the Dance House, the Nang Loeng Artist House, and the Naraaslip House (a 70-year-old local workshop making Khon costumes). A series of local cultural events are driven by both the locals themselves and also by the other key outside actors (Fig. 2). Some are genuinely collaborative and some are claimed to be participatory. Apart from the self-organized cultural events, a group of community architects and their networks have come to engage the local cultural practices in Nang Loeng with their professional creativity, knowledge, and expertise. The ad hoc collaboration uses different tactics and resources to convey local concerns, anxieties, and struggles through various kinds of artistic performances. At this point, social, cultural, and human capital stand at the forefront to encourage community activism. The Buffalo Field Dance Festival (BFDF) was a good example, demonstrating how local tactics were carried out to express local appetites, hopes, and concerns towards their livelihood through creative cultural events. From 2017-2019, the BFDF was organized at the end of each year, inviting both Thai and international artists to stay at the neighborhood for a week and prepare their dance performance at various important spots around Nang Loeng. From time to time, the BFDF became more complicated and organized with wider networks of artists, academics, and residents, both within and outside Nang Loeng. The latest BFDF was in December 2019, where local workshops were organized during the daytime to engage ordinary residents (Fig. 3). These workshops investigated local assets and emotions of the locals towards their livelihoods. Dance performances by Thai and international artists, along with some interventions co-created between invited artists and local people, were shown at night as a highlight of the festival (Fig. 4).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also opened up new spaces for local initiatives. The community leaders and the community architects have organized small initiatives to help vulnerable residents cope with the impact of the pandemic. For example, community kitchens were founded to feed the unemployed and patients (Fig. 5). Moreover, a testing station was set up to help all Nang Loeng residents who have received minimal support from the government. Networking to obtain immediate help and support are crucial in the present critical moment. A couple of outside organizations including NGOs, civil society groups, and educational institutions have given assistance to Nang Loeng. A Facebook page, Community x Covid-19, has additionally been set up by community leaders to reach out and communicate with their wider networks. Practices have evolved from being passive recipients to becoming active doers, organizing local COVID-19 patients’ information and managing foods and medicine to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic.

Situated in the old Bangkok areas where economic activities, living environments, and public infrastructure and services are inadequate, Nang Loeng has limited financial and environmental resources. However, it still has plenty of local resources, including architectural heritage as well as social, cultural, and human capital. These community capitals are collective assets that can attract the public’s attention. Most cultural events funded by the local authority and state officials are always full of participants from both local and outside areas. In this sense, the local residents, now savvier, seem to know exactly how to keep their neighborhood lives in the spotlight by participating in the state’s promotion of old Bangkok tourism. On the other hand, local-initiated cultural events are not always full of participants. This may be due to the specific purposes of such events, which are likely to be activism. The BFDF is a clear example in which the community architect group with active Nang Loeng residents works collaboratively towards the presentation of the local pressures and the voices of the residents. Urban precariousness will continue to put Nang Loeng residents to the test, as they have to face various kinds of urban intervention and redevelopment plans and projects. However, with local resources, which the locals know best from learnt tactics and input from their network, Nang Loeng can continue to maintain its cultural activities as local weapons. The residents are able to fight for their right to the city in Nang Loeng, the neighborhood where they were born, live, and struggle to endure.

Notes
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The accelerated growth since the 1990s of Chiang Mai, the economic capital and tourist center of the northern region of Thailand, has erased many urban legacies. The development of mass tourism and speculative construction have contributed to a profound transformation of the spatial and social landscapes of the old urban neighborhoods. Fearing a loss of local identity due to urban and social changes, local people have initiated a number of collective actions to promote their local heritage as a resource for surviving in an era of globalization.

Sacred place and craft: resources for collective action

Buddhist temples (wat) are central to the social and spiritual life of villages and urban neighborhoods in Thailand. Many residents in the vicinity of Wat Muen-Sarn regard themselves as sathat wat Muen-Sarn, a group or collective of the people owning a common allegiance to Muen-Sarn temple. They also call themselves chabaob wat Muen-Sarn (‘villagers of Muen-Sarn temple’). The wat is, therefore, closely linked to social identity and to the sense of belonging to a neighborhood. It asserts the existence of a group of households as a social unit. Furthermore, beyond the religious sphere, the temple plays a key role in community life. It is a meeting place for worship and For decades, Wua-Lai, a low relief mural representing 12 sacred stupas was launched in 2002. The neighborhood committee mobilized donated funds for the construction. They stimulated the sense of cooperation and willingness to contribute to this project through the Theravada Buddhist concept of merit (bun) and the long-standing presence of Theravada Buddhism in Chiang Mai. Wua-Lai temple was the first community to collaboratively constructing sacred structures for their neighborhoods. Based on the concept of merit, the residents donated the temple saw the donations as acts of “merit-making” (tarn bun). They donated money and material goods and worked together to build the art gallery. About 14 silversmiths and monks of Wua-Lai contributed their skills to the construction. They also created wall decorations in low relief, depicting the history of Wua-Lai villagers’ immigration from Salween river valley, scenes of daily life in the past, silver craft production, and ritual ceremonies of the villagers. In this way, the traditional narrative productions of the community museum was illustrated in image. Furthermore, this art space was made sacred, allowing the temple to be a shrine, each depicting a venerated monk (iruva) of Chiang Mai and Wat Muen-Sarn, as well as by a local resident, the late monk who graduated in Buddhist Studies for Community Development from the Mahamukt Buddhist University. Second, the neighborhood committee widened the partnership to include other civil society organizations in the city. They developed the Wua-Lai neighborhood tourism project with two other craft neighborhoods in Chiang Mai, proposing a visit to the community museum, the artisans’ workshops, and local craft shops of the community enterprises. Their aim was to create a supplementary income for the residents and artisans, to raise the visibility of the neighborhood’s craft products, and to promote the neighborhood’s traditional heritage of their neighborhood. However, this project is now present disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The collective actions of Wat Muen-Sarn, Wua-Lai and other neighborhoods allow us to learn about the autonomy of citizens in conducting neighborhood-based projects, as well as their ability to use and adapt urban resources and deep-rooted cultural practices for contemporary projects. This study also provides insight into citizen movements in the urban heritage field from the neighborhood level. It will be interesting to continue observing the network of neighborhoods and civil society organizations, the way in which the Wat Muen-Sarn neighborhood connects local heritage issues with broader ideologies, and movements that circulate in the city. This is especially so in the context of Chiang Mai’s increasing momentum as a heritage city, from the “Chiang Mai City of Crafts and Folk Art” project to the “Creative Cities Network” of UNESCO. This could allow us to learn more about the circulation of ideas, knowledge, ideologies, and urban issues in the city and beyond.

Notes

Fig. 1 (above): The Silver Art Gallery Silthohta at Wat Muen-Sarn Temple (Photo by the author, 2018).

Collective Actions and Heritage of the Neighborhood

Wua-Lai, Chiang Mai

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he city of Chiang Mai has recently adopted a conservation approach that is in line with the international sustainability agenda promoted by UNESCO. In 2015, Chiang Mai University, in collaboration with the municipality, created a tentative list: an inventory of monuments, sites, and cultural landscapes for inclusion on the World Heritage List. In 2017, the city was registered in the Creative Cities Network in order to highlight the local know-how and traditional craftsmanship of local communities. These efforts contribute to the sustainable urban development. This trend in heritage conservation has been driven by citizens and local experts, who take into account the diversity of urban heritage on its two sides, tangible and intangible. Moreover, this heritage approach reflects the local people’s recognition of ordinary urban heritage, which has historically been excluded from official heritage definitions preffered by the national authorities. It also shows the increasing power of citizen movements to defend the “heritage of community” (moradok chumchon) that has developed in Thailand since the 1990s.

The residents of Wua-Lai, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Chiang Mai, have participated in such citizen movements to protect their local cultural and urban heritage. This neighborhood is well known for its ancient skills, inherited from the silversmiths who immigrated from the Salween river valley in Shan State to Chiang Mai, the former capital of the Lan Na Kingdom in the 19th century and settled outside the ramps to the south of the royal city. In the first half of the 20th century, Wua-Lai was also a neighborhood with indigenous skills and Wua-Lai, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Chiang Mai, have their own workshop for producing silverware. The common products were mainly sacred objects and reliquaries, good gifts for ritual and ceremonial occasions, including silver bowls (sathat) and elaborated silver plates and trays. Since the 1960s, Chiang Mai City Municipality has been promoted as a center of domestic and international tourism of the Northern region. Wua-Lai was branded as the “Silver Village,” where customers can come into direct contact with producers. By the mid-1990s, following the government’s economic policy, a center for export-oriented craft production was created at San-Kamphaeng village, situated 13 kilometres east of the city. The development of the new artisan center caused the decline of Wua-Lai’s craft production. In the 1990s, Wua-Lai’s craft market became more competitive; many marketplaces were developed in the city center, such as Night Bazaar and Tapae Walking Street. Another major threat was the displacement of people and craftspeople from the city and beyond.

In response to these problems, the residents of Wua-Lai have initiated a number of collective actions and projects for reviving their livelihoods but also for collecting and transmitting their unique craft skills. We found that they often developed economic regeneration projects (e.g., weekend craft markets, community enterprises, etc.) in relation to heritage projects and the construction of neighborhood identity. Based on the recent research conducted within the framework of SEANNET, this essay focuses on the collective projects run by the residents of Wat Muen-Sarn, one of the oldest neighborhoods in the neighborhood of Wua-Lai. Through the analysis of heritage practices and discourses, I scrutinize how the residents use local cultural and urban assets in contemporary projects.

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An Architectural Approach to Studying the Neighborhood

Wua-Lai, Chiang Mai

Komsom Teerapanrung

In an architectural approach, we “read” and “learn” about the neighborhood by mapping, by visiting for sketch observations, and by conducting measurements and interviews. Through SEANNET's pedagogy with students covering roundtable sessions and many workshops as in-situ investigations, it has been an interesting process over the four years of the program.

We adopted an interdisciplinary analysis based on the architectural, urban, and socio-archaeological approaches that have been developed from the French-Thai Student Workshop, thereby suggesting new methodological approaches to neighborhood and urban studies. The lessons learned from the neighborhood became the basis for our pedagogical approach in response to the series of workshops. This led to the new idea of “a forum within a forum” where the students organized workshops within the neighborhood forum. Thus, the integrated approach between the residents and students, enables vocal voices as well as the voices of students involved in the work of measuring local heritage houses, to be heard. It also reflects the need of the silver village to sustain its craft-heritage status and to respond wisely to future economic challenges and the changing urban condition.

At the heart of the intensive workshop in Chiang Mai, the students were assigned to conduct a survey of inhabited space. Each group comprised between five and eight students. The students explored a neighborhood and made sketches of the timber houses that were selected by the teachers, who had received the homeowners’ permission in advance to access these houses. Then, there was a transitional stage that brought the students from the urban to the domestic scale, measuring the wooden houses (of silversmith masters) around the neighborhood. Its realization allowed the students a new way of reflecting upon and imagining their study project.

The survey becomes "a tool of understanding" the neighborhoods’ essence. It is our intention to get the students into the reality of a residential area, allowing them to understand the complexity of the building’s structures, their specific materiality (in particular wood), the uses, and the context to which it responds and maintains with the outside, the garden, the street, and the neighborhood.

Moreover, the exercise allows the students to observe, to look at the world of the neighborhood. Drawing by observation is, then,

a way of connecting students with the owners of a property in pursuit of understanding it. Observation leads to identifying the "details of architecture," naming and comparing them little by little. It enables students to discover the logic of forms and the meaningful character of architecture. Guided by the eye, manual drawing and sketching help the students to develop a specific spatial intelligence, which fully functions as part of the training for architectural practice. Unlike photography, the intelligence of the eye as an extension of the brain makes it possible to select and present the data to be represented and illustrated.

In order to allow the establishment of a community of researchers, we undertook the survey, which began with the “temple-oriented neighborhood” – i.e., the former as a center-oriented and the latter as a network. As an exercise, students need to understand these human relationships on the scale of the habitation, the plot, the street. This gives them essential information to develop the architectural project to come. The recording of these data is a precious tool for understanding spatial organization, the succession of thresholds and limits (corresponding to the plot, an open space) considerably enriches the transition from public space to private space. The cross-sectional drawing of this type of internal space of plants, architecture, and furniture is a valuable source for understanding these domestic transitions in relation to spatial proportion, the scale of everyday living, and the human dimension. During this SEANNET project, these types of drawings have formed the basis of an inventory of socio-spatial situations, which today tend to disappear rapidly.

The present exercise is to try to realize and become aware of the neighborhood’s quality, which has evolved through architectural relationships of people themselves. Also, it informs the students within the workshop, to rethink how we might keep these living quarters alive through various possibilities. The project has uncovered architectural information within the neighborhood and local people representing their reality of the neighborhood (i.e., residents, artisans, and monks). Many drawings and documents about tangible and intangible aspects of the Wua-Lai neighborhood are reviewed and re-interpreted to illustrate how we learn from this neighborhood, and how we will continue to do so in the next phase of SEANNET.

Notes

2. An ongoing workshop every December of each year (before COVID-19).

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Notes

2. An ongoing workshop every December of each year (before COVID-19).
In March 2021, two months into the most recent and increasingly violent coup d’état, local residents across Myanmar set up small roadside tables with basic foodstuffs under signs marked “po yin hlu, loh yin yu” (“Donate if you have extra, take if you have need”). As COVID-19 spread and the State Administration Council (SAC), the post-coup military government, dismissed public cries for medical assistance and even banned non-SAC distributions of oxygen tanks, residents placed boxes of disposable masks and even oxygen tanks in front of their homes, again with signs that invite passers-by to donate if they have extra and take if they have the need. These locally initiated direct actions are part and parcel of everyday life in Myanmar. They have constituted ayut (places) that cohere into socio-spatial units which could be labelled as neighborhoods.

Building social infrastructure through Sabbath day practices

This essay focuses on the collaboration for Upoutai (Sabbath Days) in Thingaza Chaung, the study area for the SEANNET Mandalay team. It reveals how local residents build and maintain a social infrastructure that is informal but systematic and helps to create place and a sense of belonging.

Every year before Vassa, the annual rainy season retreat observed by Theravadin Buddhist monks, community and religious leaders in Thingaza Chaung hold meetings to discuss how they will host senior monks from the 26 monasteries within the Chanthagyi Monastic Complex during the 13 days of Sabbath from Waso to Thadingyut (approximately July to October).1 The Chanthagyi Monastic Complex grew around the Chanthagyi Stupa (Fig. 2), which was built long before the founding of Mandalay in 1857 by King Mindon, the penultimate ruler of the last Burmese dynasty. The residents who live in the six wards that surround the Chanthagyi Stupa, like other Burmese Buddhists, also maintain a symbiotic socio-spiritual relationship with monks, who are seen as “fields of merit.” The laity provide daily alms as well as other necessities for the monks (hpangyi, literally “man of great merit”). Through this support, the lay person can accumulate the good merit (hpah-kan) that is required for a better rebirth. In Myanmar culture, the rainy season is seen as a special period for cultivating merit, and the residents of Thingaza Chaung organize special community-based alms giving during these three months.

In the planning meetings, community and religious leaders negotiate the number of senior monks to be invited for each Sabbath Day in each ward. These leaders are not ward level officials but respected members of the community. Once the decision has been made collectively, no ward can alter the number of monks to be invited, and the leader of each ward announces the decision in their respective Dhamma Halls, a community space for religious and social gatherings. In 2018, for example, Aleybaung North Ward was allowed to invite four monks for the first Sabbath Day and then three monks for the remaining 12 Sabbath Days. Shwelaungnyi Ward was allowed to invite two monks per Sabbath Day. After the number of monks per ward is announced, residents negotiate who will serve as the lead donor for each of the 13 Sabbath Days. They then publicize the list to the entire ward.

The different wards in Thingaza Chaung organize their Sabbath Day donations differently. In Shwelaungnyi Ward, local monks start at their Dhamma Hall and march around their area while ringing a gong to collect donations of uncooked rice. This occurs the day before Sabbath in order to donate (hpah) the rice on Sabbath Day. In Aleybaung South, Shwelaungnyunt, and Hledan Wards, residents work with each other across different socio-spatial units which could be labelled as neighborhoods.

Fig. 1: Volunteers from Aleybaung South Ward collecting donated dishes with custom-made carrier (Photo by May Thu Naing, 2018).

In all wards, the procession ends at their respective Dhamma Halls. Here, as the dishes are processed, the leaders and volunteers categorize the different dishes according to type and portion them equally for the invited monks. The senior monks are then served some special dishes such as mahinga (Burmese rice noodle and fish soup) and later escorted back to their monasteries with a large selection of food for other monks in their monasteries. In addition, the lead donor of each Sabbath must prepare food for the volunteers and community members who practice the Eight Precepts for Sabbath. Community members are served after the senior monks have taken their meals. Sometimes, lead donors also offer soap, cold drinks, and snacks to the volunteers and participants. Anyone who passes by and expresses interest in the event is welcomed into the Dhamma Hall to partake in the ceremonies and share the food as well as the gifts of alms and other items. With all of the food has been served, the organizers and volunteers wash all of the dishes and clean the Dhamma Hall, which concludes around 10:30 in the morning.

These annual holy days, which take place for 13 consecutive weeks and are organized by six adjacent wards to honor senior monks from 26 different monasteries, require systematic coordination. Buddhism is a hegemonic force in Myanmar that has both united and divided...
local, regional, and national populations. At the scale of townships, the administrative level above wards, the desire to appear more accountable has led to ward-level competitions expressed through the number of senior monks hosted, the types of dishes served, and the general liveliness of Sabbath Day events. The women in Aleybaung North proudly described how their shwegyiawminawin (Burmese semolina cakes) are known as the most delicious in the area and how residents in neighboring wards come over to their Dhamma Hall to “eat for free.” This effort to outperform each other is largely friendly and jocular but requires regular management to keep peace within the township. This is done every year through the pre-Vassa meetings, where community and religious leaders can reach a mutually acceptable agreement that is then honored in practice.

This level of accountability is uncommon in Myanmar’s state-society relations. Governance reform between 2011 and 2021 struggled to increase trust in the municipal and national governments. Most people approached laws and policies with scepticism, often only complying with regulations if compelled by force. In contrast, the rules established through the pre-Vassa meetings, wherein community and religious leaders can reach a mutually acceptable agreement that is then honored in practice.

The first five years

Fig. 4: Temporary position set up for Kohlein (Photo by author, 2008).

Collect donations from Aleybaung South and Shwevyiawminawin Wards. Some of this transgression is unsurprising, as neighbors who face each other along a single street often associate with each other even if their homes fall in separate administrative zones. The red houses along Shwevyiawminawin Street belong to two different wards but work together for collecting special dishes for the monks.

Other lapses, however, reveal relationships that would be subtle – if not hidden – without ethnographic attention to fleeting practices such as Sabbath Day processions. The women of Aleybaung North visited all of the houses in purple even though some of these families technically belong to the Shwevyiawminawin and Aleybaung South Wards and should be more loyal to their own Dhamma Halls. This collaboration across ward and Dhamma Hall boundaries is significant because religious practice is a central determinant of social belonging in Myanmar, subject to both praise and censure. As giving food to senior monks is held in the highest esteem, the purple households in Shwevyiawminawin Ward likely enjoy communal recognition for their good deeds and would suffer negative consequences if they donated twice, to the collection efforts of both Shwevyiawminawin and Aleybaung North Wards. Adherence to traditional Buddhist social norms is still very strong in contemporary Myanmar. These boundary-crossing networks show how people-to-people relationships can transcend more constrained administrative definitions of belonging and encourage accountability through collaboration.

Note

1 Jayde Roberts and Elizabeth Rhoads, “Myanmar’s Hidden-in-plain-sight Social Infrastructure: Neibouhu through mutual同样的, capacities such as social cohesion and cultural identity, are often celebrated in ways that emphasize the collective over the individual. In the context of Myanmar’s current political landscape, these social infrastructures can serve as a form of resistance against state control and as a means for people to maintain a sense of community and identity.


3 Jayde Roberts, People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg (Public Culture 15, no. 4 [Fall 2004]: 409-432).

4 The research team consists of May Thu Naing, Kathy Khine, Myat Soe Phyu, Hsu Lai Yee, and Zwe Pyae.

5 Most of this ethnographic fieldwork was undertaken by May Thu Naing with assistance by Kathy Khine, Hsu Lai Yee, and Zwe Pyae between April 2018 and February 2019. This essay is based on May Thu’s fieldnotes and discussions with team members.

6 The site for the founding of the original Chanthagyiu Stupa has yet to be verified but Myat Soe Pyu, a Mandalay team member, found a source written by Achi Teseia, a venerable monk, that the stupa has been in Thingaza Chaung since 833 C.E.

7 We were not able to ascertain this detail during fieldwork in 2018.

8 Dhamma Halls are complex and sometimes contested spaces. Further analysis is presented in “The Secular/Religious Construction of Neighboring in Mandalay, Myanmar: Dhamma-youns as Infrastructure” in an upcoming special issue of The Asia/Pacific Viewpoint presented by SEANNET. In Yangon, dhamma-youns have been vulnerable to governmentality, and research to date suggests that the military junta has used these spaces to force compliance with their vision of a Burman Buddhist nation-state.

Fig. 3: Houses visited during Sabbath Day. (Map created by May Thu Naing and Kathy Khine.)

Fig. 2: Ward boundaries as described by local residents. Current maps at the municipal level do not match maps at ward levels (Map created by May Thu Naing and Kathy Khine.)

Meaning collective social meals for monks or ensuring neighbors have enough to eat under a coup-induced state of emergency. The above analysis is not a naive celebration of local initiative as resilience or a dismissal of state failures. Rather, it seeks to highlight the systematic quality of collaboration that not only produces successful Sabbath Day celebrations but maintains community relationships over time. This systematic, locally organized, and long-term collaboration could be conceived of as a basis for a form of local governance, one that might engender a participatory democracy which has eluded Myanmar despite the promotion of free and fair elections.

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The Focus

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SEANNET

The first five years

Streets and Dhamma halls as social infrastructure

The 13 Sabbath Days of Vassa are not celebrated in every ward or township in Myanmar. In Yangon, the country’s largest city, none of the SEANNET researchers have seen donation processions during the rainy season but we have seen similar collaborative efforts for other holidays. In all cities, neighbors come together to celebrate Kohtein, the festival at the end of Vassa when the laity donate the Eight Requisites to Buddhist monks, and Thadingnyu, the festival when residents line their streets with colorful lights and candles to welcome the Buddha and his disciples. For these and other Buddhist holidays, self-organized street and ward committees plan the celebrations by setting up temporary pavilions on their streets (Fig. 3). They solicit donations by broadcasting Buddhist chants and shaking aluminum donation bowls that clang with the sound of coins. They also invite venerable monks to give Dhamma talks and hold out mohinga and other free food to residents in the neighborhood and anyone who happens to walk by. These activities transform the street into a shared living room of sorts, where neighbors sit and chat in the pavilions where volunteers cook and distribute the mohinga, and where children run around enjoying the festivities.

Similarly, residents who live near Dhamma Halls use these spaces to celebrate different holidays and hold community events. As the halls are generally small, academic buildings are rented onto the street, once again creating an open, shared space where local residents and visitors are welcome. As permanent structures, however, Dhamma Halls are generally more regulated, and non-Burmese Buddhist populations such as long-resident Muslims have felt excluded.8

In Yangon, the country’s largest city, streets are blocked to facilitate large-scale processions during Kohtein and Thadingnyu, and sometimes even by Dhamma Hall processions. This “people as infrastructure” is not just a form of social organization that facilitates large-scale processions and processions but to fend for themselves, whether that

mean collecting special meals for monks or ensuring neighbors have enough to eat under a coup-induced state of emergency.
Once the decision was made in April to organize ICAS 12 fully online – the ongoing pandemic made it impossible to organize ICAS 12 live in Kyoto as originally planned, and even a hybrid conference proved to be too optimistic – the ICAS Secretariat in Leiden worked together intensively with Kyoto Seika University, our local partner in Japan, to present an immersive online ICAS 12 experience.

Beyond presentations: the ICAS 12 Cultural Platform

After the launch of the Academic Platform on 10 August, we were proud to present the Cultural Platform on 20 August, which was meant to evoke the city of Kyoto itself. Participants would enter a beautifully designed Kyoto-style floorplan with different buildings to explore [Fig. 1]. Although we could not wander around Kyoto and the conference venue itself, the multiple 3D art galleries on the platform effectively approximated the experience of being at an exhibition. Entering the first exhibition space (Visual Arts Meets Research), participants could walk around and explore two projects lead by faculty members of Kyoto Seika University – namely, WADAKO: Stories of Japanese Kites and Washi: From Mulberry to Manga, the Art of Paper in Japan. The second exhibition space featured graduation works by students of Kyoto Seika University, which were produced in the faculties of Japanese Painting, Sculpture, Ceramics, Textile, Printmaking, Video & Media Arts, Illustration, Graphic Design, Digital Creation, Product Communication, Interior Goods and Design, Fashion, Architecture, Cartoon Art, Comic Art, and Character Design. Beyond these virtual exhibitions, the platform also included the ICAS 12 Hidden Talent Gallery, a special space in which colleagues could showcase other talents beyond their academic field. The result was a rich variety of music, dance, fashion, poetry, manga, food, arts and crafts, and other performances.

There was so much going on in the Cultural Platform that it was difficult to discover all of it. Think, for example, about the vast selection of 32 documentaries included in the ICAS 12 Film Festival, which was curated by Dr. Maria Lopez of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. Titles ranged from Ambon: A Return to Peace to Golek Garwo, from Miobii in the Woods to The Father I Knew 2020. This film festival edition also showcased a selection of short animated films bringing out issues of social relevance, which were created by students of the Graduate School of Film and New Media, Department of Animation, Tokyo University of Arts.

The publishers and institutes of our Asian Studies Exhibitor Gallery also found a place in our Cultural Platform. Several booths could be visited to learn about the latest books, products, and activities in Asian Studies. Participants could also gain more insight about publishing during two How to Get Published sessions, which were led by editors from Brill. Other features of the Cultural Platform included the Poster Gallery, where participants presented their latest research as a poster of which some were also accompanied by a short explanatory video; the Networking space, where participants could virtually gather with the Kamo river in the background; the Photo Booth, where participants could take a selfie to add to the Crafting a Global Picture mosaic; and the Explore Kyoto! Bus, where participants could explore and learn more about Kyoto. Not to be missed was also the Catch-Up Cinema, where one could view recordings of the live events that one had missed earlier in the conference, and which also presented a rich collection of short video clips of (Japanese) cultural performances and activities. The selection ranged from noh play (Japanese original dance with drama) to sado (tea ceremonies), from zazen (meditation with temple chief priests) to kamishibai (“paper play” stories) specially created for ICAS 12.

The Live Events Stage featured a range of events and performances during the breaks. It started with the official opening speeches. Following this, a keynote symposium occurred, in which Prof. Dassouyou Sacke (President of Kyoto Seika University), Prof. Juichi Yamagawa, and Prof. Shlochii Inoue discussed the importance of locality and crafting a global future based on the diversity of nature and culture. Besides live performances, the Live Events Stage was also a space where experience was shared. There were several interviews: the rapper Moment Joon shared his experience as a Korean immigrant in Japan on Tuesday, 10 August 2021, we are sitting in the IIAS office in Leiden, the Netherlands, looking at each other and wondering whether everything is ready before sending the access codes for the ICAS 12 Academic Platform to the participants. In the past couple of weeks, the ICAS 12 panel participants have carefully prepared their presentations and have either uploaded it or recorded it within the platform. Now the time has come to make it available to their ICAS 12 colleagues. A rich database of more than 1000 presentations was available to be explored in the two weeks before ICAS 12 officially opened on 24 August.

On Tuesday, 10 August 2021, we are sitting in the IIAS office in Leiden, the Netherlands, looking at each other and wondering whether everything is ready before sending the access codes for the ICAS 12 Academic Platform to the participants. In the past couple of weeks, the ICAS 12 panel participants have carefully prepared their presentations and have either uploaded it or recorded it within the platform. Now the time has come to make it available to their ICAS 12 colleagues. A rich database of more than 1000 presentations was available to be explored in the two weeks before ICAS 12 officially opened on 24 August.
ICAS 12 participants are even more important in an online ICAS, the firsthand experiences of our participants to provide us with their feedback. We greatly appreciated the rich, varied programmes they created, thanks in particular to Prof. Oussouby Sacko, Dr. Shuzo Ueda, Dr. Manabu Kitawaki, Ms. Hiroko Iuchi, the Academic and Cultural Committees, and all supporting staff for their hard work in bringing Kyotan to the ICAS 12 participants. During our weekly online meetings, we together crafted the ICAS 12 experience, and we appreciate the opportunity to participate, even though the experience was virtual, we hope that the participants got a touch of the Kyoto vibe by navigating the Academic and Cultural Platforms. We do hope that, someday soon, there will be an opportunity for all to visit this wonderful city in person.

### Feedback and the future

The richness and diversity of the different researches presented at ICAS 12 was truly benefitted with ICAS 12. The future will show us how, where, and when ICAS 13 will take place.

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**Notes**

1. Aga Chan, the young Burmese filmmaker behind ‘The Father I Knew’ 2020, passed away in an accident after granting us permission to screen her work. The ICAS 12 Film Festival was thus dedicated to her.
3. The English edition also included a dissertation prize.
4. In 2019, Engaging With Vietnam organized their EWV 15 conference in conjunction with ICAS 11.
5. The ICAS Book Prize Series – Asian Cities, Global Asian, and Asian Heritage – are also published by Amsterdam University Press, as is the forthcoming methodologies series from Humanities Across Borders (HAB).
“Humanities Across Borders” (HAB) is an educational cooperation programme, co-funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in New York, which aims to create shared, humanities-grounded, inter-disciplinary curricula and context-sensitive learning methodologies at the graduate and postgraduate levels. Twenty universities in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas contribute time and resources to this unique and innovative venture. The HAB partners are now in the process of signing a joint agreement that will bring them together in a vibrant international consortium, committed to building new humanist capacities at the inter-institutional level, including thematic projects, syllabi, and joint classrooms with other continents. This new phase (2021-2026) builds on the groundwork laid during the first phase of the programme, under the title “Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World” (2016-2021). As HAB enters into this exciting next chapter, we present a series of photographs from the first five years alongside a brief reflection on what was accomplished, where we are now, and what the future has in store.

Humanities Across Borders curriculum development
HAB’s work of building and sustaining a collegiate spirit among globally dispersed partners has not been without its challenges. A major setback has been the tightening grip of authoritarian regimes over freedom of expression in university campuses, classrooms, and syllabi in many countries. Among the systemic challenges we have faced is the relative conservatism of many academic institutions and the perpetuation of a singular, dominant model of the “modern university.” At the end of HAB’s first phase, however, we can say that we now rely on a solid network of dedicated individuals, educators, and administrators keen to implement the pedagogical and institutional objectives of HAB.

Given the new circumstances of work and life under the Covid-19 pandemic, we have now set in place a new strategy toward institutionalizing its curriculum model. We aim to accomplish this through internal evaluation procedures and the creation of defined HAB standards. We anticipate that the HAB Accreditation Committee (AC), to be set up, will be responsible for developing criteria for membership at the individual, departmental, and institutional levels. It will help define and refine operational criteria for the alternative humanist model of education articulated in the HAB Manifesto.

Working with institutions along the South-South-North axis has proven to be an extremely powerful way to collaborate. One reason is that universities from the South find themselves generally more exposed to societal boundaries and resource uncertainties. Another reason is that the level of global entanglement existing in higher education – in terms of students and faculty populations, and also in terms of the subjects covered – makes it necessary for institutions from the North to show the same level of knowledge and awareness of what is happening in the South as it is for the South towards the North.

The trans-regional discussions along the four HAB themes have yielded interesting comparisons, connections, and collaborations across the network. At the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 12, August 2021), organized and hosted jointly by IAS and Kyoto Seika University (Japan), HAB scholars shared field experiences to co-create didactic tools, syllabi, and teaching resources. The HAB roundtables on food, Indigo, rice, intersectional pedagogies, and place-making are examples of the creative interactions and sustained relationships that have been forged with partners since 2016. It is these very collaborations that will sustain and bolster our shared vision of education as we move forward into the second phase of Humanities Across Borders.

Notes
1 The program draws upon, but is not limited to, Lawe and Wenger’s ideas of learning as a social process within a community of practice. Lawe, J., and Wenger, E. (1999). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
2 This model has “laid claim to universality through the regular, carefully orchestrated opening and closing of doors.” Reinhold Martin, Knowledge Worlds, Media, Materiality, and the Making of the Modern University, Columbia University Press, NY, 2021.
We envision a university that reclaims its rightful civic role and responsibility at the confluence of multiple nodes of knowledge exchange. 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.

“Preamble,” HAB Manifesto
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 cosmopolitanism and connectivity at their core, framing the existence of vibrant ‘social networks’ 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 cultural 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-regional 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).

Call for Papers


Deadline: 17 Dec 2021 (see page 50).

www.iias.asia/events/crie-self-iii

www.ukna.asia

Coordinator: Paul Rabé

p.raber@iias.nl

Clusters: Asian Cities; Asian Heritages

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 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.

www.ukna.asia/seannet

Coordinators: Paul Rabé p.raber@iias.nl and Rita Padawangi Singapore University of Social Sciences rita.padawangi@sus.edu.sg

Cluster: Asian Cities

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.

www.iias.asia/programmes/forhead

Coordinator: Jennifer Holdaway Leiden University

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.paskaleva@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Cluster: Asian Heritages
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 repository, 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 96-97 for a photo essay on the Humanities Across Borders programme.

Follow the stories on the Humanities Across Borders Blog
humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog
www.iias.asia/hab
Clusters: Global Asia; Asian Heritages

Africa, 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

Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN)

This network focusses particularly on the border regions between South Asia, Central/East and Southeast Asia. The concerns are varied, ranging from migratory movements, transformations in cultural, linguistic and religious practices, to ethnic mobilisation and conflict, marginalisation, and environmental concerns. ABRN organises a conference in one of those border regions every two years in co-operation with a local partner.


www.asianborderlands.net
Coordinator: Erik de Maaker
moeder@few.leidenuniv.nl
Cluster: Global Asia

Energy Programme Asia (EPA)

The current joint research programme between IIAES 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 Balkans, and Russia.

www.iias.asia/programmes/energy-programme-asia
Coordinator: M. Aminah
m.p.aminah@uva.nl, m.p.aminah@iias.nl
Cluster: Global Asia

Global Silk Road

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

The current joint research programme between IIAES 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 Balkans, and Russia.

www.iias.asia/programmes/energy-programme-asia
Coordinator: M. Aminah
m.p.aminah@uva.nl, m.p.aminah@iias.nl
Cluster: Global Asia

International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS)

With 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 IIAES, 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 the biennial ‘ICAS Book Prize’ (IBP), which awards the most prestigious prizes in the field of Asian Studies for books in Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish; and for PhD Theses in English. Twelve conventions have been held since 1997 (Leiden, Berlin, Singapore, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Daejon, Honolulu, Macao, Adelaide, Chiang Mai and Leiden. ICAS 12 was organised together with Kyoto Bunko University, Japan, and took place entirely online).

www.icas.org

International Convention of Asia Scholars
The Network

Announcements

Lecture Series: Itinerant Heritage

Interdisciplinary lectures on objects from the colonial age, looted art and the illegal trade of cultural goods
Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS) at Heidelberg University, Winter Semester 2021/2022

The curtain-raiser for the lecture series on 26 October will be given by anthropologist Prof. Dr Haidy Geismar from University College London (UK) with a lecture on digital cultural heritage. Eight more lectures follow, from November to January 2022, exploring further forms of itinerant cultural heritage with respect to theoretical, methodological and empirical challenges. Besides lectures on handling plundered art from Africa or museum objects acquired during colonization, the programme also includes sessions on the illegal worldwide trade with cultural goods and the ecological and political-nationalist dimensions of cultural heritage. The final lecture on 1 February 2022 will be given by Prof. Dr Wayne Modest, Director of Content at the Museum of World Cultures (Wereldmuseum Rotterdam) and director of the Research Center for Material Culture in Heidelberg University.

For the livestream link email: clare.harris@hcts.uni-heidelberg.de

For the lecture series ‘Itinerant Heritage’ go to: www.uni-heidelberg.de/itinerant-heritage

Above: Murat, Bajitshah (Photograph by Christiane Brosius, 2010).

50

Borderland Futures: Technologies, Zones, Co-existences

7th Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network
Reconciliation & Co-existences in Contact Zones (RCCZ) Research Center, Chung-An University, Seoul, South Korea, 23-25 June 2022

The 7th Asian Borderland Research Network (ABRN) conference focuses on three key themes – technologies, zones, co-existences – that aim to generate broader debates and intellectual engagement with borderland futures. Panels and papers will offer critical reflections on these key themes both theoretically and empirically. The conference is organised by the Reconciliation & Co-existences in Contact Zones (RCCZ) Research Center; International Institute for Asian Studies; and the Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN).

Registration will open in January 2022. Fees are as follows, with special rates for (PhD) students:

- Early bird (before 1 March): € 110 / (PhD) students € 70
- Regular (before 15 May): € 150 / (PhD) students € 90
- On-site: € 170 / (PhD) students € 110

Information and registration www.iias.asia/events/borderland-futures-technologies-zones-co-existences

The Humanities Across Borders (HAB) book series aims to trigger discussions on the relevance of normative, top down, and institutionalised standards of knowledge production and transmission in the academy. As conventional models and modes of understanding lose their capacity to explain the human condition in the new global era, the multitude of voices, lives, locales, and journeys emerge as windows into the past and present to give a fresh, more expanded meaning to the Humanities.

Comprising monographs as well as edited volumes, the HAB book series focuses on methodological experiments and reflections across disciplinary, institutional, ideological, national, and sectorial borders. The series will:

- Interrogate prevailing, often dominant, conceptual frames and categories.
- Post-uncommon entry points to inquiry that bear meaning in the everyday lives of people and are relevant for interrogating wider global issues.
- View quotidian knowledge-practices as valuable sources of experiential knowledge (and pedagogies) unframing over time and space.

The call for papers is now open until 17 December 2021. Selected papers will be presented as work in progress and should consist of previously unpublished material. At the event you will receive feedback from carewors, fellow participants, and audience members. A selection of papers will then be made into a book.

This conference forms part of the Care of the Self project which has been investigating human agency in society, taking Michel Foucault’s concept of the care of the self as its point of departure. The project’s focus on citizenship and human rights in Asia and the West (and comparisons between them) is one of its unique selling points.

This event is intended to be multi-disciplinary, with contributions from (but not limited to) anthropology, architecture, geography, history, philosophy, political science, religious studies, social science, urbanism, etc. The point of departure is citizenship in Asia and/or the West. Papers should deal with current or emergent challenges to citizenship with regard to (among other things) the built environment, climate change, increasing inequality, the rise of Big Data, Covid-19, and its responses, etc. Papers are free to propose their own definition of citizenship, and those that make comparative analyses between, within, or across the themes listed below will be particularly welcome.

Finally, this conference will be a hybrid event, meaning that while we strongly encourage participants to join in person in Leiden, should this not be possible then arrangements will be made to accommodate online participation by successful applicants. We would prefer, however, for people to attend in person, as this makes the initial peer-review process so much stronger.

This conference is organised by Delft University of Technology (Netherlands), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA), and the International Institute for Asian Studies (Netherlands).

Deadline for submissions: 17 December 2021

For questions, please contact Mik Xianlon Lim of the UKNA Secretariat at iias: Email: x.jin@iias.nl

Humanities Across Borders: A Methodologies Book Series

T

n the 2021/2022 winter semester, the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS) at Heidelberg University is hosting a lecture series on the topic of ‘itinerant cultural heritage’. The focus of the interdisciplinary lectures is tangible and intangible cultural goods of different kinds that move dynamically between different cultures and forms of intercourse. For example, it deals with stolen art, or illegally traded collectables. The lectures – in English – will reflect approaches from anthropology and archaeology, art history, criminology, museum and area studies. Starting on 26 October 2021, they will be livestreamed Tuesdays from 14:00 to 16:00.

The convenors of the lecture series are Prof. Dr Christiana Brosius, professor for visual and media anthropology at the HCTS, and Dr Carsten Wergin, anthropologist and associate professor at the HCTS. “With the series we have foregrounded the mobility and fragility of cultural goods that move in the field of tension between different socio-cultural, political, economic and ecological forces. The focus is, inter alia, on how people engage with their cultural heritage in view of climate change, migration, urbanization, nationalism or colonialism,” Christiana Brosius explains. Carsten Wergin adds: “With the concept of ‘itinerant heritage’ we highlight the dynamics and mobility of cultural goods – in time and also in space. We are interested in how, and with what consequences, social actors claim cultural heritage for themselves, imagine, transform or critique it.”

For the livestream link email: clare.harris@hcts.uni-heidelberg.de

For the lecture series ‘Itinerant Heritage’ go to: www.uni-heidelberg.de/itinerant-heritage

Above: Murat, Bajitshah (Photograph by Christiane Brosius, 2010).

Future Practices of Citizenship in Asia and the West: The Care of the Self

A two-day hybrid conference, Leiden, the Netherlands online, 25-26 April 2022

We are deeply concerned that the closure of borders has led to the rise of Big Data, Covid-19 and its responses, etc. Papers are free to propose their own definition of citizenship, and those that make comparative analyses between, within, or across the themes listed below will be particularly welcome.

Finally, this conference will be a hybrid event, meaning that while we strongly encourage participants to join in person in Leiden, should this not be possible then arrangements will be made to accommodate online participation by successful applicants. We would prefer, however, for people to attend in person, as this makes the initial peer-review process so much stronger.

This conference is organised by Delft University of Technology (Netherlands), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA), and the International Institute for Asian Studies (Netherlands).

Deadline for submissions: 17 December 2021

Detailed information about the programme and submission guidelines can be found on our website: www.iias.asia/events/care-self-iii

For questions, please contact Mik Xianlon Lim of the UKNA Secretariat at iias: Email: x.jin@iias.nl

Climate Strike on Dataran Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. (Photograph by Nurul Ezlin, 2019).

Call for Papers

The Humanities Across Borders (HAB) book series aims to trigger discussions on the relevance of normative, top down, and institutionalised standards of knowledge production and transmission in the academy. As conventional models and modes of understanding lose their capacity to explain the human condition in the new global era, the multitude of voices, lives, locales, and journeys emerge as windows into the past and present to give a fresh, more expanded meaning to the Humanities.

Comprising monographs as well as edited volumes, the HAB book series focuses on methodological experiments and reflections across disciplinary, institutional, ideological, national, and sectorial borders. The series will:

- Interrogate prevailing, often dominant, conceptual frames and categories.
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Would you like to reach 50,000 readers worldwide?

Call for Submissions to The Newsletter

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is a Humanities and Social Sciences research institute and knowledge exchange platform based in Leiden, the Netherlands. It takes a thematic and multisectoral approach to the study of Asia and initiates programmes that engage Asian and other international partners. The Newsletter is a free periodical published by IIAS, and the premier Asian Studies forum for scholars and experts alike to publish research essays and reviews. The Newsletter bridges the gap between specialist knowledge and public discourse and provides an exceptional opportunity to share work with our 50,000 readers worldwide. Pertinent and provoking, The Newsletter encourages discussion and interaction.

New section - The Tone

Be the first! The Tone will feature works of creativity and curation. While this includes traditional museums and exhibitions, we increasingly encourage contributors to think in broader terms about artistic output: film and literary festivals, street art, digital media, musical recordings, crafts, and more. Articles in this section can be written by the curators/artists themselves or by a third party. To pitch an article for The Tone, please reach out to the editorial team.

Find more information about submission procedures and style guidelines here: https://www.iias.asia/contribute. For examples of previously published issues, please use the link below: https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter.

Research essays for The Study in issue #92 should be submitted by 1 March 2022. All article submissions, Focus and Tone proposals, and any other enquiries can be sent directly to the editorial team at thenewsletter@iias.nl.

Paramita Paul, Chief Editor of The Newsletter, IIAS

To contribute to our blog email us at: thenewsletter@iias.nl

To submit an article visit us at: www.iias.asia/contribute
The Story of IIAS as a Publisher
A Conversation with Paul van der Velde

From its inception in 1993, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) has been active in publishing a wide variety of academic book series, promotional material of all kinds, and its flagship Newsletter that reports on what is happening in the field of Asian studies worldwide. IIAS Publications Officer Mary Lynn van Dijk talks to Paul van der Velde, who has been involved in publications at IIAS from the very beginning.

What was your position at IIAS when you started in the 1990s?

As Head of Communications, I was responsible for IIAS’ academic publications, but also for ancillary publications such as guides, reports, yearbooks, lecture series, and public relations in general. The founding director of IIAS (Wim Stokhof) and I teamed up and brainstormed a lot on how we could stand out in the totally fragmented field of Asian Studies. We agreed that we should have an attractive quarterly publication in newspaper format, which should be distributed for free to all interested parties worldwide. I became the editor of the periodical you are presently reading and was responsible for the first 17 editions and a variety of supplements. Three years after its first issue, the newsletter had reached a worldwide circulation of 25,000 hard copies, and it was also available online from its inception.

How did you set up the Publications program?

Setting up The Newsletter and its international editorial board took up a lot of my time. Needless to say, an academic institute should also be active in publishing its and others’ academic output. First, we concentrated on what our fellows were working on, which resulted in ‘Yearbooks containing fellows’ articles and also a Working Papers Series. Furthermore, we mounted an IAS Lecture Series, which contained the speeches of politicians and Asia scholars held at the IIAS. Their printed versions were handed out to the participants at the end of the meetings. Furthermore, as a facilitating institute, we wanted to give an idea of who was doing what in the field of Asian Studies. This led us to publish the Guide to Asian Studies in the Netherlands, the IIAS Guide to Asian Collections in the Netherlands, and also the IIAS Internet Guide to Asian Studies.

After years of working with a number of different publishers (e.g., Curzon, Brill, Kegan Paul International, etc.), we eventually thought the time was ripe to concentrate our publications into a single dedicated programme. Our proposal to start two series primarily on contemporary Asia was embraced by Amsterdam University Press. That AUP’s books were distributed in the United States by University of Chicago Press and across Asia itself was an important factor that led to our decision.

When were the IIAS Publications (Monographs and Edited Volumes) and the ICAS Publications (Monographs and Edited Volumes) started?

After we were convinced that Asian Studies would be one of the spear points in AUP’s publication policy, we signed the contract. Whereas all previous IIAS books had been hardcovers, we shifted to much cheaper paperbacks in order to increase the accessibility of our academic output. This was the beginning of the IIAS Publications Series (2007-2013) and the ICAS Publications Series (2006-2012), both of which consisted of monographs and edited volumes. To test the ground, Jasine Stremmelnaar, at that time Executive Manager of IIAS and ICAS, and I co-edited What About Asia? Revisiting Asian Studies (2006) on the occasion of the retirement of Wim Stokhof as IIAS director. I was appointed General Editor of both series. Much more important were the Editorial Boards of these series which consisted of Asian Studies scholars such as Carol Gluck, Prasenjit Duara, A.B. Shamsul, and Wim Boot. With them and their contacts, I was able to set up both series in a reasonably short time span. The IIAS Publications Series served as a channel of publication for the many fellows visiting IIAS. The topics of the books reflected the kind of research being supported by IIAS during those years.

When were the current four series – Asian Cities, Asian Heritages, Global Asia, and Humanities Across Borders Methodologies – started?

Every now and then institutes such as ours change directions. Under the present-day director, Philippe Peycaum, IIAS streamlined its research-led activities around three broad themes: Asian Cities, Asian Heritages, and Global Asia. Each of these “clusters” became the basis of a book series at AUP. Humanities Across Borders is a recent addition, and the first volume in its series is expected in 2022. So far, 32 volumes (on average five per year) have been published with titles ranging from Shadow Shadows in Eastern Asia: The New Silk Roads and African-Asian Encounters: New Cooperation and New Dependencies to Beyond Dalai: Subaltern Citizens and Post-Colonial Intimacy and Ideas of the City in Asian Settings. The series editors of each of the series (Global Asia: Tol-Wing Ngo; Asian Cities: Paul Rabé; Asian Heritages: Adèle Esposito and Michael Herzfeld) play an important role, both in encouraging new submissions and in deciding whether submitted manuscripts fit in the series.

They have been very successful, judging from the number of books which have been published and the 17 books which now are in various stages of production. Also not unimportant, these books have been widely reviewed in major Asian studies journals worldwide. Book series are the global currency of our academic economy. Our new series from Humanities Across Borders, with appealing working titles as Rice and Indigo, will add a long overdue pedagogical and methodological dimension to our IIAS publications.

What would you consider your legacy at IIAS in terms of publications?

This is the most complicated question you can ask me because I cannot separate my work as editor from the many projects I have been involved with at IIAS over the past 30 years. They are all intertwined. I hope to have contributed to establish IIAS as one of the drivers of Asian Studies publishing, from books to The Newsletter. I derive most pride from having been co-instrumental in the creation of the conditions under which what I labeled the New Asia Scholars can thrive. They all have a transregional, multidisciplinary, and multilingual approach to Asian Studies, an approach with concomitant academic attitude which lies at the heart of IIAS and ICAS.

Paul, many thanks for giving this insightful overview of the publications activities of IIAS from its foundation to the present day and beyond.

Mary Lynn van Dijk, IIAS Publications Officer.
Email: m.l.van.dijk@ias.nl
IIAS Fellowship Programme

In the Spotlight

The International Institute for Asian Studies annually hosts a large number of visiting researchers (fellowships) 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

Rafael Abrão
IIAS Research Cluster: Global Asia
1 Sept 2020 – 30 Aug 2022
Home Institute: Federal University of ABC (UFABC), São Paulo, Brazil

The Belt and Road Initiative: challenges and opportunities to Latin America

It was a perfect moment to arrive in the Netherlands in September 2021. Considering that almost all Covid restrictions were gone, I was able to enjoy the end of the summer. I was born and raised in Brazil, and this is my first time working abroad and experiencing a new culture. Leiden is a lovely place, and I quickly fell in love with the city’s historic centre and lifestyle. I have also explored local culture, visiting other cities such as Utrecht, Nieuwegein, Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam. It feels like I’m taking a big step in my career. Having the opportunity to conduct my research in a diverse work environment such as IIAS is, of course, the most valuable point in this first international experience that I am having. If you wonder what brought an Afro-Latin American researcher to Asian Studies, it is pretty straightforward. The geopolitical interactions between Asia and Latin America are usually underestimated, which caught my attention in the first place. Most Asian researchers tend to look to other regions, thereby neglecting the relevance of China to Latin America and Latin America to China. My research at IIAS aims to partially cover this gap, at least where it concerns China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is an effort to consolidate China’s influence in Asia, Africa, Europe, and, more recently, also Latin America. China has advanced its presence in the region through investments, financing, and expanding its companies’ activities. Since 2018, Latin American countries have been officially invited to join the initiative, and the Belt and Road Initiative is an area of my expertise where I have been publishing for some years. The geopolitical interactions between Asia and Latin America are not only from Asian Studies but also from Latin American Studies. The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands, is an ideal institution to combine your IIAS fellowship with two extra months of research in Paris

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 d’études mondiales de la Fondation Maison des sciences de l’homme (CEM-FMSH), in Paris, France, immediately after your stay in Leiden.

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.

Apply for a Gonda fellowship

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

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

Mohammad Tareq Hasan
IIAS Research Cluster: Global Asia
1 April 2021 – 31 Jan 2022
Home Institute: Department of Anthropology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

An open time at IIAS

My fellowship at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) started amid the COVID-19 pandemic. But fortunately, many preventive measures have been gradually lifted since I arrived in Leiden. In a way, this allowed me to settle into the new rhythm, and my life in Leiden started at a comfortable pace. At IIAS, I am primarily writing a monograph that ethnographically explores an expanding garment sector and an expansion of industrial work opportunities combined to produce a shift in the labour regime from subsistence to wages. The monograph that I am preparing presents a situation where corporate international trade agreements, a new neoliberal state regime, and a growing textile market have enabled establishing a new class of Muslim female workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Based on over 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork in a garment factory and among the garment workers of Dhaka, this monograph sets out to represent why people in this system do the things they do, imagining the industrial scene in Dhaka as a total system and analysing how this was historically constituted, transformed, maintained, and reproduced over time. Leiden University’s incredibly vast library resources are a treasure in this writing process. I have found a few ethnographies on pre- and post-independence Bangladesh that I did not find in original prints in Dhaka. In addition, the Fellowship allows me to interact with people from diverse academic backgrounds through seminars, presentations/discussions, and writing groups. Contacts with other current and ex-fellows of IIAS have enriched my social and intellectual experience in the Netherlands. Adding to this further, the most welcoming IIAS staff have made my stay in Leiden a bit easier in every possible way.

In addition to the academic opportunities, experiencing Dutch culture and nature is a value in itself. On the weekends, weather permitting, I travel to other cities, which is a rewarding cultural experience. While the pandemic restricted movement across Europe to some extent in 2021, such restrictions left me with an opportunity to explore the Netherlands a bit more. Nonetheless, I plan to visit some other European cities and take advantage of the Schengen Area in the coming months. Like the other Dutch cities, Leiden is great to walk through or to explore by bike. Walking through the parks and by the canal every day refreshes my tired mind. A walk through Haarlemmerstraat, bookstores in Breestraat, and the many stalls at Leiden’s Street Market along the canal have been incredibly. A stroopwafel (Dutch syrup waffle) from the stalls is a treat and gives a little more energy to walk a bit longer. In the evenings, Plantsoen, a city park along the canal, is the place where I can get some quiet time.

It has been a unique opportunity for me to be here at IIAS. I can term this Fellowship period as ‘an open time’ – nothing is expected of me other than doing what pleases me academically. IIAS is an ideal institution to host post-PhD scholars as it provides time and resources for publishing and building a career in academia. Having all the support, but nothing that can distract me from writing, has made my stay at IIAS an incredible experience.

Overall, the IIAS Fellowship has offered a quiet time and stimulating intellectual environment to explore new ideas that will guide my entire academic journey in the future.

Chinese officials have labelled the region as a natural extension of the BRI. My project looks at the challenges and opportunities of the BRI to Latin America under the guidance of Prof. Mehdi Parvizi Aminsh, who is the coordinator of one of the BRI projects at IIAS. Here, in Leiden, I have the chance to discuss and widen my perspectives by interacting with other researchers and discovering a wide range of new sources. I plan to visit the IIAS and Leiden University facilities, including the Asian Studies collection at the library, to expand my knowledge of China. Getting in touch with other investigators based in the Netherlands is also part of the plan – not only from Asian Studies but also from the Department of Latin American Studies at Leiden University and other institutions. During my stay, I hope to contribute to the academic and cultural environment of IIAS by adding a Latin American flavour.
The Museum of Material Memory is a crowdsourced digital repository of material culture from the Indian subcontinent, tracing family history and social ethnography through heirlooms, collectibles, and objects of antiquity. Through the intimate act of storytelling, each essay reveals not just a personal history of the object and its owner, but leads to the unfolding of a generational narrative spanning the traditions, cultures, customs, conventions, habits, languages, geographies, and history of the vast and diverse subcontinent.

It was during my masters’ thesis at Concordia University (Montréal) that I would come to understand the intimate relationships that humans share with objects, particularly heirlooms whose origin may lie in geographies that are inaccessible, both physically and temporally. In the year 2013, I embarked on a cross-border research project, trying to archive the objects that had migrated with refugees during the 1947 Partition of India. The intention was to understand whether the notion of belonging to a particular land can be imbued within an object carried from that land, even though the land itself now remained on the other side of a border. Over time, this research coalesced into a book published in South Asia as Remnants of Partition and internationally as Remnants of Partition. This method of excavating personal history through material culture found resonance even with many who had no history of Partition. Gauging this interest, I co-founded the Museum of Material Memory with a friend, Navdha Malhotra, who works in the social impact space, in September 2017.

With the exception of physical museums, there are few places where the life and materiality of an object of age is celebrated. The inherent misfortune of mundane objects, unlike those which may be either monetarily valuable or visibly precious, is that they are often underappreciated. Too often, the stories connected to them are forgotten to time. These are the objects that find their way into the virtual shelves of our Museum – an ordinary patina-lined utensil in a grandparents’ kitchen, a framed photograph of a distant ancestor, perhaps a notebook, or even a box that holds trinkets. The Museum of Material Memory, thus, invites South Asians from around the world to submit short essays and photographs – either through our submission page or via email – on aged objects they may find in their possession. The Museum now welcomes objects predating the 1970s and originating anywhere in the subcontinent or its diaspora.

In the folds, crevasses, edges, and lingering smells of old objects lie the tangible links to a past that the writer may never have known of, or to family members they may never have met. The process of oral history and familial interviewing embodied in each essay also ensures that the objects can act as multi-generational emblems, encouraging active conversations, and the writing often becomes a deeply emotional exercise. After receiving a submission, we work closely with the writer to develop the narrative further. The final piece, therefore, is a result of extensive collaboration, detailing not only the physical and tactile nature of the object, but also highlighting generational memory and collective history.

For the subcontinental region, where borders are still fraught with contention, resulting in a history that often remains unreconciled, this humble archive aims to be a borderless platform for conversations extending beyond nationality, citizenship, religion, ethnicity, and caste. To that end, the Museum is both digital and crowdsourced to retain accessibility. But most importantly, it is a space where material culture acts as a democratic medium to tell the stories of a shared history.
An ideal example of this is a piece titled "The Bengali Bonti," where Asasnaal-bosed Kasturi Mukherjee writes about "a kitchen instrument that is used in Indian households to peel, chop, shred, slice and dice items, especially in the states of Bengal, Assam, Orissa." The piece narrates how a woman at the bonti is "bonti" including what the it was published, highly nuanced memories the overwhelming response to this story. Once own [Fig. 1]. No one could have anticipated from her great grandmother’s kitchen to her own [Fig. 1]. No one could have anticipated the overwhelming response to this story. Once it was published, highly nuanced memories began to pour in from across the subcontinent, including what the bonti was called in different regions: paniki or panik in Odisha, danti or danto data in Punjab, chule in Nepal, aruvamanai in Tamil Nadu, nesak in Assam, dha in Sylhet, chirava in Kerala. We also learnt how particular ones were used for particular things like fish, meat, only a certain kind of vegetable or fruit and even coconuts, and never interchangeably. The object appeared emblematic to so many people’s lives in different parts of the region, and the collective tapestry of their responses affirmed the purpose with which we had begun the project. The submissions to the Museum are divided into various categories, including Household Items, Textiles, Photographs, Jewellery, Documents & Maps, Heirlooms & Collectibles, and Art & Books. However, the stories of widely different objects can live together within a single category. For instance, Documents & Maps includes the story My Great-Grandfather: A British Subject by Birth by Kolkata-based Rajita Banerjee. By way of a British Indian passport, Banerjee writes about how travel documents and modes of identification were issued in the 1930’s to those under colonial rule in India [Fig. 2]. Also included is Lahore-born, Dubai-based Sabar Giltzbash’s Aghajani’s Cheque Book, which discusses the treasured document from the Imperial Bank of India, carried by her grandfather from Srinagar, India to Lahore, Pakistan after a ten-month imprisonment in New Delhi, following the 1947 Partition [Fig. 3]. The chequebook was bequeathed to Saba at her wedding day. In a third story, Kerala-based Amit Pallath’s News from Ceylon: 1942 describes a letter addressed from his grandfather to the family in Thrissur, Kerala from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), where he stayed and worked for almost eight years sending money back home [Fig. 4]. The letter highlights the hardships felt by migrant workers during the British rule: “Food is rationed and I receive 3 naazhi a week.” One naazhi was approximately 200 grams.

At times, what is considered a mundane object by a family can reveal itself to be a rare and important artefact from history, as in the case of Indore-based Saba Bhata. In Souvenir from the Trenches of World War One, she discovers her grandmother’s brass jewellery box to be Princess Mary’s Christmas Gift Box given to “every sailor afloat and every soldier at the front” in 1914, including the nearly 1.5 million soldiers from undivided India sent on behalf of the British Empire [Fig. 5]. Bhata found out that her grandmother had inherited this box from her mother, whose adoptive father was a buyer and seller of military equipment for the British. He had procured this Christmas Box as a valued artefact of the time. Around the same time that this submission was made to the Museum, I was working on a book partly set in World War I and had done significant research on the Princess Mary Christmas Box. Thus, the final published piece is a collaborative text between Bhata and myself, where she offered a personal perspective on the artefact, and I, a historical one.

In the Jewellery category, which remains our most popular, we often receive submissions for objects that look near identical but unravel deeply different histories. On first glance, the substantial pair of silver anklets in Delhi-based Prabhdeep Singh Mathur’s A Spared Pair of Pagal and Sri Muktsar Sahib-based Khushveen Brar’s Heirlooms from Faridkot look as though they could have been fashioned by the same jeweler [Fig. 6 and Fig. 7]. However, Mathur’s story begins in 1949 in Kapurthala district, with the anklets traveling to Delhi with her grandparents. Upon their death decades later, amidst a division of family wealth, Mathur’s mother is moved to pay more than the last traces of her mother-in-law. Meanwhile, Brar’s maternal story extends to the 1920s in Faridkot, where her great-grandmother inherited the anklets as a part of her trousseau, subsequently passing them down the generations. In both cases, the jewellry bears an identical interlinked design, oxidizing with the passage of time, and is similar in weight and length. Despite the unique contexts, both families consider the weight of the past to have settled into these anklets.

While the virtual world may seem impersonal to some, we believe that our efforts at the museum not only offer a personal corridor into the past, but also inculcate within our readers and writers a deep sense of nostalgia and pride for their personal histories and memories, which can, when threaded together, represent collective histories and memories.

**Hello@museumofmaterialmemory.com**

Endnote:

Special issue on COVID-19 (vol. 35, no. 3)
Guest edited by Jeroen de Kloet

The politics of care during COVID-19: The visibility of anti-virus measures in Wuhan Willy Sier
COVID-19 nationalism and the visual construction of sovereignty during China’s coronavirus crisis Florian Schneider
COVID-19 and sonic governmentality: Can we hear the virus speak? Qian Zhang and Yu Fai Chew
Inside the Wuhan cabin hospital: Contending narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic Ralph Litzinger and Yuning Ni
The politics of emotion during COVID-19: Turning fear into pride in China’s media discourse Jeroen de Kloet, Jian Lin, and Jueling Hu
Humour and TikTok memes during the 2020 pandemic lockdown: Tensions of gender and care faced by Chinese mothers working from home Xiao Han and Giselinde Kuipers
Services and surveillance during the pandemic lockdown: Residents’ committees in Wuhan and Beijing Zhenjie Yang et al.