

Editorial

For a few years now, the illusory safe haven for humanities and social sciences in general and of Asian Studies in particular appears severely challenged by substantial budget cuts in many countries across the globe. How could this happen? As Asia's prominence and international role is increasing, wouldn't it make more sense that Asian Studies achieves a higher profile? In the previous issue, I voiced some personal concern that the scientific community has created a separate niche for itself and neglects one of its core responsibilities towards society at large, namely critically examining politics and power. One could imagine that if Asian Studies takes up this responsibility of informing the public and involves itself more in broader political, economic, and cultural public debates and events, policy makers will be more likely to appreciate its intrinsic value. These brief thoughts fit well with Jan Annerstedt's article on this page, which emphasizes the relevance of academic involvement in the Asia-Europe Meetings and Business Forums. It also links to the front-page article, in which Mongolian parliamentarian Sanjaasuren Oyun addresses the dark side of globalization and expounds the ways in which Mongolia's post-communist economic development has been going awry.

Economic globalization has an equally marked (but surely not necessarily negative) impact on Asian cities and ranks high among the causes for their lasting attraction to the rural poor, to (foreign) investors, and to various layers of government. The current and expanding global and regional importance of Asian cities warrants an extensive (11-page) theme section on 'Mega-Urbanization in Asia'. Theme editor, Dr Peter Nas, has edited a wonderful collection of articles on a number of urban areas, in which both universal and city-specific aspects of mega-urbanization are addressed. Due to the sheer size and rapid expansion of these cities, the Asian landscape steadily becomes more urban. In due course this changed geographical reality will no doubt prompt research fields such as anthropology, sociology, urban planning, socio-economy, cultural studies, but also history, to adjust their approach. Whether this rapid urbanization is lamentable or not, Asian cities bear witness of a waning importance of rural in favour of urban areas and deliver another blow to Orientalist images of an unchanging rural Asia. At the same time, by conveying some specific forms of urbanization in the non-Western context, the universal concept of urbanization is being redressed. We hope that you agree that this issue's theme proves a promising step in the above direction.

To conclude, Yasser Tabbaa's article 'Lessons from Looting' deserves a short remark. The much-debated unreliability of the figures on looted material that the Iraqi National Museum's director presented some two months ago, no doubt add to the controversial nature of this topic, for which reason we open the floor for your reactions to this article in particular. As always we also warmly welcome your comments and suggestions to other parts of the newsletter. Enjoy reading. < Maurice Sistermans

# Growing Together

## The Academic Invigoration of the Asia Europe Business Forum

Whereas political and business circles recognize the importance of the biannual Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM), the significance of these deliberations and the possibility to influence them seems to escape many in academia. Alongside the ASEM political summits in the media spotlight, the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) gatherings provide researchers the opportunity to constructively influence the process of business cooperation, facilitating and invigorating the AEBF deliberations and ultimately the ASEM agenda as such.

Areas for improvement were also identified. The lack of a permanent ASEM secretariat and the annual shifting of AEBF conference responsibilities render continuity in deliberations and the implementation of follow-up recommendations more difficult. As a result of the transfer of responsibilities between Europe and Asia, specialized knowledge is unfortunately lost. Therefore, the installation of a 'lean, yet effective' ASEM secretariat was recommended on behalf of ASEM leaders. With the expansion of the European Union, these proposals are more urgent. They also fit well with Wim Stokhof's emphasis in his 'Director's Note on ASEM' (IIASN 30, p.2): The ASEM process, of which AEBF remains an important part, is in need of a 'long-term internally driven strategic vision, which can be translated into clear and concrete objectives'.

Deliberations among business representatives, academics, and other specialists need to continue to invigorate the next AEBF planned in Seoul for October 2003. <

Forum >  
General

By Jan Annerstedt

Coinciding with the September 2002 ASEM Economic Ministers' Meeting in Copenhagen, the seventh annual Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF 7) conference was held just ahead of the ASEM IV summit. Well in advance, academic researchers and other specialists from East Asia and Western Europe met to discuss strategic issues identified at the previous meeting in Singapore.

In Singapore in 2001, it was decided that three strategic issues cutting across the AEBF working groups would be brought to the fore to bring momentum to the deliberations: (1) dynamic regions, metropolitan hubs, and modern governance in the globalizing economy; (2) strengthening the economic fabric through the growth of small and medium-sized business enterprises; and (3) the global challenge to corporate governance and business participation in socio-economic development.

These themes were discussed in meetings among Asian and European specialists, and evaluated in a workshop that brought together academics and other specialists from Asia, Europe, and North America three months ahead of the Copenhagen AEBF. The resulting 30-page Briefing Paper presented a comprehensive set of suggestions for the eight working groups and for deliberations in the plenary sessions. The working groups then used this content to develop their platforms for advice to

the ministers and other top policy-makers involved in the ASEM process.

To deliver tangibles, much of the work in the AEBF conferences is conducted in the aforementioned working groups, each co-chaired by an Asian and a European business representative. The two chairs prepare the deliberations and help in the follow-up to the conference. Over the past years, the 'Trade' and 'Investment' working groups have been instrumental in identifying obstacles to trade and investment and in proposing specific actions by governments, the WTO, and similar international and regional organizations. Last year, with the Doha development agenda at the centre of discussions, business representatives urged governments to liberalize intercontinental trade and to simplify and make more transparent rules for foreign direct investment.\*

As in Singapore, the conference in Copenhagen hosted working groups for Financial Services, Information and Communications Technology, Infrastructure, and Life Sciences and Health Care. Two new working groups, 'Environment' and 'Food', discussed the food processing, biotechnology, and environmental technology industries and implementation strategies for sustainable economic growth that allows for social as well as environmental improvement. While the private role in initiating and facilitating trade and cross-continental investment was emphasized, so were the issues of corporate citizenship and social responsibility.

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Research and urgent policy issues

For many AEBF 7 participants, the discussions in Copenhagen were useful and intellectually inspiring. For the 30-odd researchers involved in preparing the AEBF Briefing Paper, AEBF 7 was a challenging set of encounters, where research results were confronted with urgent policy issues as expressed by top business representatives and public officials.

Note >

\* The November 2001 declaration of the Fourth Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar, provides the mandate for negotiations and other work including issues concerning the implementation of current WTO Agreements, i.e. the agreements arising from the Uruguay Round negotiations. In Doha, ministers agreed to adopt around 50 decisions clarifying the obligations of developing country member governments with respect to issues including agriculture, subsidies, textiles and clothing, technical barriers to trade, trade-related investment measures and rules of origin.

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**IIAS**  
International Institute for Asian Studies

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is a post-doctoral research centre based in Leiden and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Its main objective is to encourage the study of Asia and to promote national and international cooperation in this field. The institute focuses on the humanities and social sciences and, where relevant, at the interface between these disciplines and sciences like medicine, economy, politics, technology, law, and environmental studies.

The IIAS endeavours to adopt a dynamic and versatile approach in its research programmes. Research fellows at post-PhD level are temporarily employed by or affiliated to the institute, either within the framework of a collaborative research programme, or on an individual basis. Always ready to anticipate new developments, the IIAS aims to achieve and continue to build on a broad, high-quality level of knowledge of Asia. The institute organizes seminars, workshops, and conferences, and publishes a newsletter with a circulation of approximately 21,500 copies. Moreover, the IIAS has established a database for Asian Studies, which contains information on researchers and research-related institutes worldwide.

The IIAS acts as an international mediator, bringing various parties together. In keeping with the Dutch tradition of transferring goods and ideas, the institute works as a clearing-house

for knowledge and information. This entails activities such as providing information services, constructing international networks, and setting up international cooperative projects and research programmes. In this way, the IIAS functions as a window on Europe for non-European scholars and contributes to the cultural rapprochement between Asia and Europe.

The IIAS administers the daily secretariat of the European Alliance for Asian Studies (Asia-Alliance: [www.asia-alliance.org](http://www.asia-alliance.org)) as well as the Secretariat General of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS: [www.icassecretariat.org](http://www.icassecretariat.org)). Regular updates on the Asia-Alliance and ICAS activities can be found in the *IIAS Newsletter*. <

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