Frank Dikötter explains how the Western prison became

Who hears the voice of North Korea? Koen De Ceuster explains the role of Western media and US politics in the North Korea crisis.

The interview with the Malaysian poet Muhammad Haji Salleh by Professor Md. Salleh Yaapar including two of his poems, is a real treat for poetry lovers.

A Tibetan mystery: Wickham-Smith tells the story of the Sixth Dalai Lama who died in 1706 and miraculously reappeared in 1716.

An answer to modernizing Qing China, offering the opportunity to modernize while at the same time keeping with Confucian values.


A different approach to political campaigning is offered in Paul Brass’ latest book on Muslim-Hindu violence. Thomas Blom Hansen wrote a review.

How obedient were Qing Dynasty officials? Kenneth Hammond reviews a publication on the matter describing them as either dogs, tigers or dragons.

This autumn the House of World Cultures in Berlin was stage to modern culture from India. Peter Nagy describes the different paths the curators of the spectacular exhibit took.

Who pays the piper calls the tune? Not quite at the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation. Hans Blom gives an insight in the dilemmas faced by institutes doing commissioned research.

The past several decades have witnessed a growing communications gap on the nature of nationalism between Western scholars and those in the new nation-states in Asia. Within academic circles in the West, the critique of nationalism is well established. Among scholars from the more recently independent states of Asia, one finds greater identification with the nation. I will try to explain this gap by exploring the changing relationship between nationalism and globalization in different parts of the world, before outlining an approach that aims to bridge this gap.

In this view, nations are not ancient continuities. While the shaping influence of historical factors is undeniable, the positive evaluation of globalization, although that may be contrast, Western critique of the nation has a long history. Contemporary criticism, again mainly from the West, draws attention to the nation’s many failures: state socialism has led to inefficiency and coercion; national development to ecological imbalance and disaster; national culture to chauvinism and exclusion of outsiders and minorities; secularism has become the lightning rod for the discontent of resurgent religious groups. Far from the solution, nationalism is now seen as part of the problem. Can the nation still be the goal of our endeavours? Is it still fruitful to see the amelioration of the conditions of the poorest through national lenses?

In the new nation-states, the attitude of intellectuals towards nationalism and the nation-state is more complex than in the West. Foreign criticism of the national project is often perceived as grossly one-sided and irresponsible, ignoring both the nation’s intractable problems and its genuine achievements. As both insider and outsider, I have levelled the critique and experienced the pain of not having the problems and achievements of the new nations recognized.

Inhabiting both sides of this border has not brought me special insights and may have compounded my dilemmas. But my position has spurred me to probe these dilemmas further.

Globalization and the accompanying shift towards the globalization paradigm have tended to undercut the moral weight of nationalism and national models. The shift to the globalization paradigm does not mean, in my view, a shift towards the positive evaluation of globalization, although that may be the dominant tendency. I understand it to mean that the societies of the world have been globalizing for quite some time and that nations and localities have been just as significantly shaped by global developments in society, economics, culture, and ideology as by their individual histories.

Nations and global competitiveness

Debate now rages on when globalization began. My own view on this question is that it depends upon which indices are considered. In my recent writings I argue that the early twentieth century represented an important stage of ‘cognitive globalization’ when societies the world over re-fashioned themselves as nation-states.

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This study treats some of the basic themes in connection to the social and cultural history of modern China, which feature among Duara's evolving interests since the 1980s. He deals with the changing relationship between the state, elites, and popular culture from the late imperial period until the present and, in recent years, scrutinized many of the problems regarding these issues through the lens of gender and sexuality.

A second area of Duara's interest deals with nationalism, imperialism, and transnationalism. He has written two books with a comparative understanding of nationalism: Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (University of Chicago Press, 1995, 1996) and Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern (Bowman and Littlefield, 2005).

While the former work deals with nationalism and the emergence of modern historical consciousness in China, the latter is about the changing relationship between imperialism and nationalism in twentieth-century East Asia through the study of Manchukuo, the Japanese puppet state in the Chinese northeast (1931-1945).

Professor Prasenjit Duara obtained a Ph.D at Harvard University in 1983 and won the American Historical Association's Farbahn prize and Association for Asian Studies' Levenson prize with his first book, Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942 (Stanford 1988, 1991). This study treats some of the basic themes in connection to the social and cultural history of modern China, which feature among Duara's evolving interests since the 1980s. He deals with the changing relationship between the state, elites, and popular culture from the late imperial period until the present and, in recent years, scrutinized many of the problems regarding these issues through the lens of gender and sexuality.

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Regional interdependence

While the existing relationship between globalization and nationalism seems incapable of generating new visions, emerging transnational linkages present new opportunities to think about development in spaces where nation-states have had little interest or access. They enable scholars and intellectuals to direct their attention to those who have been left behind or peripheralized by national societies.

While transnational linkages are global, many of the dense points of interaction and interdependence are regional, pointing to new ways to think about development. To be sure, the one experience with regionalism we have had in Japan has been Japan’s prosp-erity Sphere – or can serve as a negative model, a model where regionalism in the form of the ban for nationalism. We have also seen how competing interests and visions make Asian regionalism a project for the long-term future. While an Asian regionalism is unlikely to look like the Euro-pean Union, Asian scholars will look at Europe anew – without post-colonial anxiety – to learn from the EU and avoid its mistakes.

To allow me to indulge in my fantasy for Asia’s future. Nations, of course, are unlikely to disappear any time soon. Central to the formation of a region, however, is interde-pendence, an interdependence likely to be expressed in com-mon policies in such areas as the environment, cooperation, coordination, control, and autonomy. Interests are, and will remain, too varied to make the region anything like a nation, while the distribution of power is, and ought to be, unfavourable to the hegemony of any single country. At any rate, it should be an inclusive, functional formation rather than an exclusive power bloc. But perhaps it ought to have just enough power to deter the US, the hegemon that now dominates the world.

Despite some brave efforts, we scholars have been laggard. The forces of globalization have generated trans- and sub-national relationships that have sped ahead of the initiatives of nationally organized academic establishments. Business networks and states have sponsored organizations such as APEC, the East Asian Economic Council, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), each with its own vision for Asia. What are the ways scholars can play their constructive role in the cooperation, coordination, control, and autonomy? What lies beyond national competitive-ness and scholarly carcerism? Let me suggest one example from the region where I was born and spent my early childhood: Assam.

Assam is part of the frontier zone between Southeast Asia, China and India, and used to be, a very long time ago, a vibrant region of flourishing commerce and Buddhism. It is now a disaster-stricken, exploited periphery, where a war of all against all amidst the futile project of sorting out who’s who. Assam is of course important to me, but I raise it because it is the kind of place that Asians ought to explore. Its incorporation as a periphery in the Indian nation-state has de-linked it from its historical connections, while its backward and troubled status ensures that celebratory notions of Asia will pass it by.

Yet there are people in places like Yunnan and Assam, in institutes such as the ADB and the Ford Foundation, and elsewhere who have begun re-thinking the region with an eye towards its revitalization, well beyond its present nation-al confines. Today the old Stilwell Road is again in use, trans-Himalayan trade has re-opened, and there is talk of an Asian highway. As scholars of Asia, we can deploy our knowledge of the changing contours of regions and affiliations, of mul-tiple links between centres and peripheries, of complex rela-tions between culture and political economy; so that when the political formations are born, we too can shape them in new and meaningful ways, to restore the spirit of the anti-colonial movement that once brought Asians and others together.

Reference


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Additional bibliography


This article is a shortened and revised version of the keynote speech, which the author delivered at the International Convention of Asian Scholar Societies. Reactions for the author can be sent to the editors at IAS. The full text of this speech can be read at: www.iias.org.