Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge

The Focus
Reading space, society and history in Asia through its ruins

Living with and in the forest in northern Thailand

The Newsletter

Celebrating 25 years of the International Institute for Asian Studies
Ruins are everywhere. In Asia, aspirations for socio-economic development have led to the rapid transformation of the environmental, social and economic landscape. Led by a diverse range of local, national and international actors these transformations have informed the creation of new forms of ruins and ruinations, the disintegration of recognizable forms whether they be material, ideological or institutional. From ruined environmental landscapes, abandoned industrial estates, derelict housing estates, failed infrastructural projects to political disruptions, economic breakdowns and cultural disintegration, ruins are ubiquitous and varied in their manifestations. Ruins produce long-term effects and affect societies and individuals in expected and, often, unexpected ways. Therefore, these ruptures and their afterlife call for a wider conceptualisation of ruins that locates their materiality within wider social, political and economic contexts.

In this issue
The Humanities across Border programme presents three reports. Chaoyan Vaddanhagphutti and Malee Sitthikriengkrai write about alternative pedagogies to help Karen youth in Thailand research their own culture and history (pp.50-55). In ‘Languages on the edges: from private archive to shared library’, Mahomodou Houssouba talks in scents and colors about the need and art of accessing and preserving the invaluable knowledge hidden in local oral histories (pp.41–44). ‘Indigs as critical pedagogy’ (Min-Chin Chiang) is about a three-day curricula development workshop at Taiwan National University of the Arts (TNUA), which has developed BA and MA level syllabi as part of the Hall programme (pp.52–53). Four shorter reports are included on pages 46–47, namely: the UKNA symposium ‘Water heritage in Asian cities’, the first graduates of the Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe; the winner of the IIAS National Master’s Thesis Prize in Asian Studies; and the Spotlight Taiwan Programme ‘Making Place and Place Making’ (Leiden).

IIAS research programmes, networks and other initiatives are described in brief on pages 54–55. Information about the IIAS Fellowship programme can be found on page 53, and our latest announcements on pages 46–47.
am just back from a short trip to Taipei, Taiwan, after nearly 2 years since my previous visit. I can say that I returned from this trip truly refreshed, thanks to the sense of commitment that exists there among long-lasting friendships. This community is built on shared values and engagements, which, for example, I see reflected in the formation of the Double Degree (DD) programme on ‘Critical Heritage in Asia and Europe’, which IAS is facilitating together with National Taiwan University, Yonsei University (South Korea) and Leiden University (Netherlands).

I met with some of the first students who returned from their one year stay in Leiden, and with our Taiwanese colleagues who are working hard to make the DD programme a meaningful experiment. At NTU, the collaborative initiative involves the Faculty of Liberal Arts, especially its Department of Anthropology, and the Graduate Institute for Planning and Building (Faculty of Engineering). I noticed that our colleagues from Taipei, likewise those in Leiden, have come to appreciate this unique educational exchange initiative and the fact that our DD programme is the first of its kind involving European and Asian partners in the Humanities on Cultural Heritage Studies. At a time when the space for free intellectual inquiry on issues of knowledge and power is shrinking in many regions of the world, it is indeed refreshing to put into conversation, in a truly open and free (uncensored) fashion, experiences and ideas on the always contested question of cultural heritage and identity politics. On that matter, I want to pay personal tribute to Prof. Chia-Te Hu, a renowned Taiwanese anthropologist, who during the democratization process that took place in Taiwan in the 1990s and 2000s courageously engaged in the sensitive process of reviving and decolonizing the contested ethnological museum collections established by the Japanese colonial authorities on the societies and cultures of the Taiwanese Aboriginal communities at the University. Prof. Hu was instrumental as an enthusiastic supporter of the DD programme with NTU for what it could do to facilitate exchanges between Taiwanese and other scholars on the subject of ‘critical heritage’. She sadly passed away a few months ago.

I again recognised the same sense of solid friendship and continued commitment, when I visited the site of Báng-kah, in downtown Taipei, an area where IAS, together with NTU’s Graduate Institute of Building and Planning, Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, as well as local actors, organized a roundtable in 2012, under the coordination of Prof. Wang Liling. As its title indicates, this is in situ policy roundtable ‘Constructive Contestation around Urban Heritage in Taipei’ (7-10 October 2012), helped to devise a strategic blueprint to renovate and regenerate the area, through a collaborative process between the local inhabitants, the City Government and Heritage scholars. The recommendations made by this event sought to encourage processes of sustainable urban revitalization of the historical neighbourhood with its original inhabitants. More than six years have passed since that roundtable. But I have been informed by NTU colleagues and local individuals how the 2012 roundtable and the resulting recommendations for the area (to avoid a fatal decline and the prospect of being either erased to give way to new real estate developments, or of falling subject to a slow process of gentrification – both cases resulting in the marginalization or the outright eviction of its historical inhabitants) constituted a turning point, that energized the different stakeholders involved – from local groups, university faculty and students, to City Government officers – to re-invent a Báng-kah in which its inhabitants would take ownership. This weekend work was especially carried out by Dr Ch'en Te-Chun, a former NTU faculty member who actively participated in the roundtable and who ultimately moved to live and work permanently in the area. Dr Ch'en now runs an integrated NGO programme that works with local community members. The results are quite amazing. Local dwellers have organized themselves to invest in the revitalization of their neighborhood by developing a network of locally owned small shops, and by attracting initiatives aimed at homeless people. The Báng-kah local-global transactorial collaborative project is a good example of a sustainable participatory heritage-making process that gives concrete meaning to the study of critical heritage.

In these two small cases, to which I could add the multiple individual and institutional connections forged through other activities – such as our collaboration with the Taipei National University for the Arts (TNUA) and their involvement in the IAS-coordinated Humanities Across Borders programme’s pedagogical project developed by Prof. Chiang Min Chiu around Indigo craft making (see p.52 in this issue); or our collaboration with Academia Sinica and the series of international conferences on Asian Heritage making. There are also multiple other connections created through individual participation in IAS events, under for instance the Taiwan Ministry of Culture’s ‘Spotlight’ initiative (see p47 in this issue). There is a concrete case to be made of IAS’s long term collaborative commitment toward a nebula of Taiwanese academics, artists and other culturally active citizens, and the forging of a trans-border community of scholars and their institutions, all contributing to the shaping of a new range of activities and collaborations built around shared ‘universal’ questions. I could mention other places in Asia where IAS has played a significant role together with local partners, but this Taiwanese example of IAS’s longstanding involvement in Asian contexts is somehow a good fit as we celebrate the Institute’s 25 years of existence. The multiple connections forged in just one tiny part of Asia is a testimony to IAS’s continuing commitment toward academic collaboration and freedom in the service of innovative humanitarian scholar endeavours, and in a common effort to have a positive impact on society.

The upcoming ICAS 11 in Leiden, the Netherlands, will be an occasion for our Taiwanese colleagues, along with others from many other places where the Institute has also made its mark, to themselves contribute to the making of IAS in the very city where it was founded, a mutual dedication of knowledge-sharing that no amount of money, or big words, can replace.

Philippe Peycam
Director IAS

IIAS Photo Contest

IIAS is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, concluding with ICAS 11 in Leiden. In this context, we are organizing a photo contest in which everyone can participate in the following two categories:

1. Your most memorable picture taken during an IIAS event. Please send us your most memorable photo(s) taken during an event on other activity in which IIAS played a role, from our beginning in 1993 until now. Additionally, photos taken in the context of an IIAS research programme also qualify.
2. Asia and Europe. Asia in Europe. This is the general focus theme of ICAS 11 - Let your imagination roam free!

You may send in a maximum of three photos per category. It doesn’t matter when the photo was taken, but you must have taken the photo(s) yourself. Just keep in mind the above guidelines.

Besides rewarding the best three photos in both categories with a prize to the value of 500 euros (in gift cards), we also intend to include some of the entries in a retrospective exhibition of the various activities over the years. The winners will take place during ICAS 11. In addition, the winning images will be published in The Newsletter crediting you as the photographer. By submitting your photos, you grant IIAS the right to use your photo(s) in IIAS publications and for the photo exhibition during ICAS, mentioning your name as the photographer.

IIAS will judge the entries on the basis of relevance to the category as well as aesthetic and informative value.

The winners will be announced on ICAS 11, 16-19 July 2019. We hope that you will participate in this contest.

Upload photos to https://iasiawetransfer.com/ We will be accepting entries until 1 May 2019
The Eleventh International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 11)

16–19 July 2019
Leiden, the Netherlands
www.icas.asia/icas11
icas11@iias.nl

‘Leiden Asia Week’ and ICAS pre-events start on 13 July

The meeting place for the eleventh edition of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) will be Leiden, the Netherlands. The historic city of Leiden is home to the oldest university of The Netherlands and several of the most renowned Asia research centres. Leiden University will be the main host of ICAS 11, partnering with the city, research institutions and museums, who share equally rich Asian and global connections (www.visitleiden.nl/en).

On occasion of ICAS 11, the city of Leiden will be enveloped in an all-embracing ‘Leiden Asia Week’. The convention is more than an isolated academic programme – it will be enhanced by an assortment of pre/parallel scholarly proceedings, musical and gastronomic festivities, and an abundance of cultural events carried out in partnership with the city.

ICAS is the most inclusive international gathering in the field of Asian Studies. ICAS attracts participants from 75 countries to engage in global dialogues on Asia that transcend boundaries between academic disciplines and geographic areas. ICAS 11 will be held at the Law Faculty Building (KOG) and Lipsius Building of Leiden University from 16-19 July 2019. It will be organized by the International Institute for Asian Studies (www.iias.asia), Leiden University (www.universiteitleiden.nl/en) and GIS Asie (French Academic Network for Asian Studies; www.gis-reseau-asie.org), 2000-2500 Asia specialists and representatives of civil society are expected to attend.

Events will include panels and (keynote) roundtable discussions, the ICAS Book Prize, pre/parallel events, craft/cultural/art exhibitions, a film and documentary programme, various receptions and parties, and an Asian Studies Book Fair (exhibition area). With all these activities ICAS is contributing to the desanctifying of Asian Studies by convening a global space in which Asia scholars and social and cultural actors from the whole world can directly interact. Participate at ICAS 11 and enjoy the multitude of networking opportunities, possibilities to share your research (and more), and to meet with publishers and representatives of the best Asian Studies-related institutes in the world.

In partnership with GIS Asie
GIS Asie is a place of gathering, consultation and initiatives of the French community of Asian Studies. It aims to give structure to French Asian Studies, and promote and internationalise research on Asia.

Every two years it brings together its members from 30 research units at 22 institutions of higher education and research, at its ‘Congrès Asie’. In 2019 the congres will be co-organised with the International Institute for Asian Studies and Leiden University, and will run concurrently with ICAS 11.

ICAS Organisers
International Institute for Asian Studies (Iias)
French Academic Network for Asian Studies (www.gis-reseau-asie.org)

ICAS 11 Organisers

Pre-events

Asia Week at the Textile Research Centre (TRC)
The TRC special Asia programme from 13-19 July, will coincide with ICAS 11. This includes the exhibition ‘Out of Asia: 2000 years of fascination with Eastern textiles’, which tells the story of the age-long flow of ideas and techniques from Asia to the Middle East and Europe, with visual textiles and garments. During Leiden Asia Week at the TRC, workshops will be given, such as Indigo dyeing and printing techniques, Afghan embroidery, and Southeast Asian weaves identification. Lectures will cover the diverse field of Asian-European contacts, including Indian chintz and its impact on Dutch traditional costumes, and Indian influences on Persian Gulf textiles.

ICAS 11 participants have free access to the exhibition. Workshops and lectures are also free, but advance registration is required. Find out more at https://trc.uu.nl/TRCAsiaWeek

Reading Leiden: An Experiential School
Reading Leiden: An Experiential School (11-15 July 2019, Leiden) is being held as part of the Humanities across Borders (HaB) programme in coordination with IMA. This school is first among a series of experiential schools initiated to test socially embedded pedagogies being developed in the HaB programme’s project geographies in parts of Asia and West Africa. Exposure to Leiden’s history and development as a university town, its planned social housing, changing demographics and spoken languages, its textile past and hidden craft makers are some of the highlights of the school. In addition to Masters students and research scholars associated with HaB, ‘Reading Leiden’ is open to a few local volunteers who are fluent in Dutch and familiar with Leiden.

For more information please contact HaB Programme Manager Ms. Xiaolan Lin: x.lin@iias.nl

Asia and Europe: Histories of Entanglement
This ICAS Pre-Event Asia and Europe: Histories of Entanglement (15 July 2019), at Leiden University College in The Hague poses crucial questions about collective imaginings, in Asia and Europe, in regard to the historical conditions which shape today’s world at local and global levels. 2019 marks three decades since the end of the Cold War, its aftermath marked by the ‘end of history’ thesis. Political and ideological transformations converged around an elite consensus concerning liberal democracy and global capitalism. Yet talk of a peace dividend notwithstanding, optimism has given way to disillusionment and resentment, in many Western and non-Western countries.

For more information go to https://icas.asia/icas11/pre-event
Early bird ICAS 11 pre-registration

On Monday 15 July 2019 you will be able to pre-register and beat the rush of the next morning. Come to the registration desk on the Pieterskerkhofplein (Peter’s Church Square) and collect your badge, convention bag, and all other information you will need for your ICAS 11 participation. The Pieterskerkhofplein will serve as the centre point of the convention area, which will encompass a number of different venues in the city. Various activities will be organised here; for example, the Food Fair and Cultural Market that will take place on the square starting on Tuesday 16 July.

The ICAS 11 grand opening reception

Our grand opening will take place in the grandest of locations: the Hooglandsekerk (Highland Church) in Leiden. An imposing fifteenth century Gothic church, still functioning as a Protestant church, but which is also very much part of the Leiden (academic) community in its role as conference, concert and graduation venue. In addition to welcome words, we shall be awarding the ICAS Book Prizes during the opening ceremony, concluding with (musical) entertainment, food and drinks, inside and around the church.

Public food fair and cultural market

As part of Leiden Asia Week, ICAS 11 will be facilitating a public food fair and cultural market during the convention (16-19 July). Located at the heart of the convention area – the Pieterskerkhofplein – the food fair will host a variety of food trucks selling lunch options ranging from vegan to BBQ, juices to curries, salads to stir fries, and all sorts in between. There will be a strong representation of Asian cuisines, but also some indispensable Dutch favourites, such as ‘patat’ and ‘poffertjes’. After a long day of panels and papers you are welcome to return to the fair for a refreshing aperitif before you sample the food from another food truck, or head out to dinner elsewhere in the ‘gezellige’ city of Leiden. The market will entertain and enlighten you with a number of (interactive) artisan stalls, and provide you with an ample selection of local goodies to remind you of your visit to this beautiful European country. The full list of fair and market participants will be included in the ICAS programme book and on the convention website.

Engaging with Vietnam (EWV 11)

Engaging with Vietnam is delighted to announce its 11th Conference (EWV 11), to be held on 15-16 July 2019 in Leiden, alongside ICAS 11. Where its 10th conference sought to examine and move beyond dichotomies in knowledge production about and on Vietnam, EWV 11 will focus on one particular, and particularly complex, dichotomy/relational: Vietnam In Europe. Europe in Vietnam: Identity, Transnationality, and Mobility of People, Ideas and Practices Across Time and Space. The programme of EWV 11 interacts with ICAS 11’s theme ‘Asia and Europe. Asia in Europe’.

Querys and questions can be directed to: engagingwithvietnam@gmail.com

See p.3 in this issue for the call for papers.

CATS hands-on workshops for junior scholars

CATS Workshops: Engaging Translations and Circulations Across Asia and Europe will be held from 16-19 July 2019 in Leiden. How can we trace the circulation and translation of texts, images, sounds, and objects across national and regional boundaries, and how can we make sense of the involved agents’ actions and itineraries, without adhering to methodological nationalism or disciplinary reifications of essences? To advance these discussions, scholars working at or affiliated with Heidelberg’s Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) are convening a series of hands-on workshops on four consecutive days. The workshops are designed for junior scholars studying processes of circulation and translation within and between Asia and Europe.

Read more on pp.44-45 of this issue, or go to https://icas.asia/icas11/programme/ CATS.

Guided tours will be organised for convention participants who are interested in diverse aspects of Leiden. Please mind that for many of the ancillary activities around ICAS, those who are interested should register separately, and preferably well in advance. Please see the ICAS (online) programme for further details and registration (available as of mid-May).
In 2019, The Netherlands is commemorating 350 years since the death of Rembrandt van Rijn. As one of the world’s oldest universities, and the Rapenburg, and the digitalisation of the earliest issues of The Newsletter.

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is celebrating its 25 year anniversary this year we are also welcoming Spanish and Portuguese & Spanish Edition: Asia Center (SNUAC) \(\text{Korean Edition: Max Weber Stiftung – GIS Asie} \)

ICAS Book Prize (IBP) 2019

This will be the eighth instalment of the IBP-English Edition, which celebrates outstanding English-language works and dissertations on Asia. ICAS 11 (2017) saw the introduction of French, German, Chinese and Korean Editions – and this year we are also welcoming Spanish and Portuguese titles. The IBP aims to create an International focus for academic publications on Asia, thus increasing its worldwide visibility, and has always been organised around broad interdisciplinary axes (Social Sciences and Humanities) rather than traditional geographic or disciplinary compartmentalisations.

The winners of this year’s prizes will be announced during the ICAS opening ceremony on 16 July 2019.

Current IBP organisers and sponsors:


Korean Edition: Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC)

Portuguese & Spanish Edition: Sephis

The English edition has received a record-breaking number of more than 1000 submissions. The reading committees are working hard towards a shortlist, which will be made public in April 2019. The interest for the Book Prize continues to grow, and where the English version started with just a few dozen titles, we predict the other language versions will also catch up in a few years – they are already doing impressively well.

All submitted publications can be found here: https://icas.asia/en/submitted-ibp2019

The Colleagues’ Choice Awards

The Colleagues’ Choice Awards (for English-language publications) will be decided by an online public vote. See all options on https://icas.asia/icas11/book-fair/exhibit

Exhibit, advertise or become an ICAS 11 sponsor

Make sure to take advantage of the advertising opportunities at ICAS 11. Reach all participants directly through a printed advert in the programme book, a convention bag insert (flyer, booklet, poster, pen, etc) or with a targeted email sent out prior to the convention.

Or step it up and become one of our recognised sponsors! You could sponsor our opening reception or closing party, keep participants well fed and watered by sponsoring one or more coffee breaks, or you could contribute to keeping the convention eco-friendly and sponsor the water fountains and reusable ‘green’ bottles. See all options on https://icas.asia/icas11/book-fair/exhibit/sponsors

As ICAS 11 will be taking place in various Leiden University buildings, so too will the exhibition areas of the ICAS Book Fair.

We will be hosting a combination of (academic) publishers, book sellers, academic institutes, libraries, journals and digital services. The exhibition area at ICAS always serves as the best place to meet and share, to discover and purchase, and to establish future relations.

The exhibitors currently confirmed to attend ICAS 11 can be found on https://icas.asia/icas11/book-fair/exhibit

ICAS 11 Closing Party

After the final panels on Friday 19 July you are welcome to join us in celebrating all the hard work and multitude of fantastic new connections that will have taken place during ICAS 11. The venue of our closing party will be the Stadsgehoorzaal (Leiden City Auditorium). The stunning neo-renaissance architecture of the building, originally established in the early 19th century, can be admired in the columns of its façade and architectural details in its triple rooms, yet after a 1996 renovation the building now also boasts state of the art technology to guarantee the best ambience and acoustics. Due to the impressively large numbers of participants attending this edition of ICAS, we will be spreading out over the entire venue. Use music and DJs in the ‘Grote Zaal’, bar areas in the various foyers, and a lounge area in the ‘Bouwderzaal’. More information about the Auditorium’s rooms and foyers can be found on their website www.leidseschouwburg-stadsgehoorzaal.nl

The Night Watch, Rembrandt van Rijn. Image courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Anniversaries and celebrations

In 2019, The Netherlands is commemorating 350 years since the death of Rembrandt van Rijn. This will be evident in special events all over the country, including.

Leiden University is also celebrating an anniversary, 2019 marks its 444th birthday! As one of the world’s oldest universities, and alma mater/former employer of 16 Nobel Prize winners, the university without a doubt has much to celebrate.

The ICAS 2019 Film Programme

The film programme – scheduled and designed to complement ICAS 11 – will showcase documentary features from Asia. From human interest stories to narrative of caste, community and gender violence and exclusion, these films explore the histories, societies, politics and culture of various regions of Asia. The films attempt to move beyond academic enquiry and could be read as a visual document of these magnificently transforming societies, where the tradition and modernity are articulated not as binaries but located in an alternative conceptual universe. The films shortlisted for screening during ICAS 11 come from a diverse range of countries such as India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Hong Kong, China and Central Asia.

The programme provides a unique platform for ICAS participants to not only experience the films themselves, but also be part of a Q&A session with some of the filmmakers and experts immediately after the screenings. The films will be screened in the Uplus Building, and the programme of the screenings will be published in the ICAS programme book and on the convention website.

The ICAS 11 Opening Ceremony and Convention Dinner will take place on Saturday 13 July. The ICAS 11 Congress will be held at the Leiden City Auditorium on 16–19 July.

The exhibitors currently confirmed to attend ICAS 11 can be found on https://icas.asia/icas11/book-fair/exhibit

The ICAS 11 Programme

The ICAS 11 programme will be published in The Newsletter (see p.3), Alumni Club meetings, and on the convention website.
It was with great pleasure that the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) could once again serve as the principal facilitators of the Second Edition of the International Conference ‘Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge’ in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 20-22 September 2018. The honour of being associated with this major effort alongside the Association for Asian Studies in Africa (A-ASIA) and the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), stems from a continuing commitment to collaboration beyond boundaries of any kind, a collaboration that must include academic, cultural, public and social actors from the two most populated and dynamic ‘southern’ regions (or continents) of the world, Africa and Asia.

The conference was an extraordinary event, enjoyed by so many, both new and familiar participants, and supported by first-time and long-standing partners. The cooperation provided by our local hosts at UDSM was truly exceptional, and the conference would not have been quite so gratifying, let alone possible, without them. More information about the most recent and the first conference, including programmes, speakers, the platform, organisers, etc. can be found on the website https://africaasia.org. Below is just a small selection of commentaries sent to us by attendees, who like us agree that the meeting in Tanzania was a uniquely stimulating and thought-provoking collaborative event. More information about the third conference will be shared soon, but we hope to see you all there!

As a student of international relations, I am not sure if an Africa-Asia axis is necessarily innocent intellectually, politically or historically. However, one thing I am learning in my research and from having attended the second Africa-Asia Conference is that the connection one is that productive, in the sense that it creates anew. If not substantially then at least aesthetically, and the latter is not entirely nothing. I am happy I found co-journeymen at the conference that share the view that Africa-Asia provides a new axis for creativity that, while indeed never innocent, can be political without merely serving as a plot point in politics if the axis works through disrupting established habits, rituals, networks, modes, parameters of knowledge production and what knowing is and does in the world(s). For this disruption to be more than a rhetorical gesture, working to re-inhabit and redeploy the limits of conferencing, collaboration and knowledge production at a minimum is imperative.

I first learned about the conference through its first instalment in Ghana in 2015, when I was lost and was Googling for some grounding for an entry into Asia and Africa linkages for my research on North Korea and postcolonial theory. Following through the conclusions of my first book on re-imagining North Korea in international politics, I was working on North Korean art and aesthetic theory as a way to open up the predictably dictatorial and problematic way North Korean politics manifest that feed into the hierarchic international order. Art and taking North Korean sources on their own terms did not seem enough in my effort to reconfigure how ‘North Korea’ and ‘state politics’ converge, and in this context, North Korea’s Third World cultural activities in Asia and Africa seemed promising. ‘Trained’ in International Relations, Cultural Studies and Korean Studies, I had very little knowledge of anything African, and I had learned nothing about the Bandung Conference, the Non-aligned Movement, or inter-continental liberation linkages, as part of my training or in previous research. I was reading up on the topic on my own so when I stumbled upon the proceedings of the first Africa-Asia Conference online, this was exciting.

Besides curiosity about the research papers at the conference (because these papers were not published), I wanted to know about its politics. It was hard to tell what brought the organizing members together, what linked these people and their institutions to the project, what the political/ideological angle was in this inaugural meeting. Big western institution presence was noticeable, but did this mean they were the driving force? Did they pick their ‘African’ counterparts/local organisers? How do these inter-regional collaborations get off the ground? Is this a counter initiative to some other debates and network not reproduce existing models of the institution-in-the-making. For instance, the conference’s local convenor, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference’s local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the important...
An intellectual place of liberation and liberalization of intellectual discourses

Jimmy Harmon

I was made aware of the ‘Africa-Asia: a New Axis of Knowledge’ conference through Vijaya Teelock, Director of the Centre for Research on Slavery and Indenture (CRSI), based at the University of Mauritius. Due to my passion for history, memory and heritage, I am also an ‘engaged scholar’ in public advocacy for cultural empowerment and key player in the history of the Indian Ocean. It was, for my passion for history, memory and heritage, that I became fully engaged in the intellectual place of liberation and liberalization of intellectual discourses. The title ‘Africa-Asia’ was délicie, engaging, thought-provoking and giving new insights into Africa and Asia: a New Axis of Knowledge conference.

My conference presentation was titled ‘The Bandung Conference (1955) and the All African People Conference (1958): Understanding Asia Africa intercultural dialogue in the Republic of Mauritius’, and would examine the race relations between Chinese-Mauritians. My discussion was located in the legacy of the Africa-Asia intellectual and colonialization movement of the 1960s. The Bandung conference aimed to promote Afro-Asian economic and cultural co-operation and to resist the neo-colonialism. However, when I received the programme book for the 2nd edition of the ‘Africa-Asia: a New Axis of Knowledge’ conference, I found my presentation appearing in the panel: ‘Epistemological Questions in Africa-Asia context’. I had not realised that my work could be considered as an ‘epistemological question’! Coincidentally, after completing my PhD research and stage at the University of Mauritius in 2015, I was invited to participate in the Bandung Conference proceedings. This was interesting to me as it augurs new avenues for research and policies for sustainable development in Africa. It is like treading new paths. I consider this the most exciting take-away of the conference.

The format of the parallel sessions gave immense possibilities to discuss different issues of paramount importance. It was an intellectual délicie, engaging, thought-provoking and giving new insights into Africa and Asian and African standpoint. This is for me the originality of this conference. Engrossed in our disciplines, we academics, we lose sight at times of the multifocal perspectives of any topic being researched. We might be misled by our own research paradigms. The parallel sessions help to see how things must be looked at from different angles. They help us especially to stay grounded and come down from our academic towers. This conference fully responded to my responsibility of the role of the researcher on societal issues: I firmly believe that research can only be meaningful when it leads to social transformation. I can’t wait for the 3rd edition of the ‘Africa-Asia: a New Axis of Knowledge’ conference.
Does Area Studies require ‘fine-tuning’, or should we take a sledgehammer to it?

Elizabeth Walker

The Routledge Area Studies team were delighted to host the second set of ‘New Directions in Area Studies’ roundtables during the international conference ‘Africa-Asia: a New Axis of Knowledge’, which took place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in September 2018. Partnering with the governments such as Tanzania’s by making ‘Area’ and enthusiastic chairing of both sessions; America, Oceania, South and East Asia, will serve a new generation of global scholars.

make a tangible contribution to developing with SOAS University of London in November 2017, has re-imagined Area Studies, and make a tangible contribution to developing more equitable Area Studies publishing that will serve a new generation of global scholars.

Nearly 30 scholars, from a diverse range of countries, participated in the two roundtable sessions; we welcomed participants from Latin America, North America, Oceania, South and East Asia, and from Western Europe. As we hoped and intended, the roundtable was a truly global event with participation from scholars from around the globe. We would like to express sincere thanks to Professor Diana Jester (University of London), Area Studies’ longitudinal and enthusiastic chairing of both sessions; with Professor Jester’s interest and commitment these sessions would not have taken place. Similarly, we thank colleagues at IAS, UDSM and SOAS University of London, Professor Rachel Harrison and the Philippe Peucq, who assisted with practicalities and logistics for the roundtable; they were passionate in their responses and debates that have surrounded Area Studies since its inception, and the material consumed during the sessions in ‘Area Studies’, the first of our two sessions focused on developments in the current SOAS Programme for Research on the History of Africa and Asia, which are resulting in the continued need to challenge the concept of Area Studies, to re-profile what we mean by ‘Area’ or ‘shared geography’, and to move beyond the institutional architecture, hierarchies and markets that are shaping knowledge production. Working on degrees of change were called for, from a lighter ‘fine-tuning’, to the need to ‘sledgehammer it’ (Area Studies), and real praxis was suggested during both roundtable sessions.

The group explored language as the means by which knowledge is packaged for consumption and shared initiatives that are disrupting the hegemonic dominance of English as the language of research, for example Kluswihl issues were completely resolved, the question remains, who is producing knowledge, and whose questions are being adopted?

It was frequently argued that, in fact, scholars in the north simply do not know what’s really going on in the south, and that south–north cooperation is flourishing, language rearing its head, once again, as a possible barrier for those in the north. A case in point being Afro-Asiatic studies, the first Latin American journal on Africa, and indeed the work of SEPHIS (the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development), which has been running for over twenty-five years. As one participant noted “knowledge are out there, they become legible to academics when they become disciplined by universities who want to categorise that knowledge”. Add to this the need to be alert to multiple, intersecting forms of privilege, since problems between the Global North and Global South do not mean there are no problems or inequalities within the Global South. There was a clear and consistent call to expand our ‘circuits’ or clusters of knowledge production (including knowledge transfer) and a need to conceptualise our connections in different ways, which more closely match the experiences of young scholars today. We heard tangible examples of how we can begin to do just that, for instance using real-time archival collaboration, a new methodological approach to archival work that favours the distinct area and linguistic knowledge of the collective involved (see their manifestos), as well as the linguistic effort described above. How much of this analysis and responsibility and the need to recognise linguistic and fieldwork limitations were raised several times. The Routledge Area Studies team would like to work with the participants further on enabling expanded circuits; indeed, we see these roundtables as a starting point in that endeavour.

We must also pay special thanks to our colleagues Choc Macanine, based in Johannesburg, who attended the conference on behalf of the wider Area Studies team, and provided us with wonderful follow-up notes, photos and ‘reportage’ that have enabled us to gain a real sense of the nature of the discussions in that endeavour.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who participated for your support, energy and enthusiasm; we look forward to continuing both the conversation and the practical work involved in shaping our discipline, pushing at the boundaries of what ‘Area Studies’ means, while maintaining its usability.

Elizabeth Walker, Publisher, Area Studies, Routledge, Taylor & Francis

Unusual connections

Tharaphi Than

O n the last day of the conference ‘Africa-Asia: a New Axis of Knowledge’, Dr Kojo Aido (Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana) and I left our hotel early to explore a Hindu neighbourhood in Dar es Salaam. Eventually, we became unable to navigate the neighbourhood because of road constructions. Disappointed, we proceeded to the conference venue during the drive Kojo decided to cheer me up with his lecture on Pan Africanism and recent political developments in Ghana. On his way home, Kojo’s questions to him was why we Asians do not have as strong a unifying version such as Pan Africanism, which to me is more than an ideology. It is a very practical way of finding solutions for historical and current problems of the continent, a concept that deeply resonated with me.

During the conference, I had many conversations like the one with Kojo. In one of these conversations, Dr Malamiwo (Hanoi University of Foreign Studies, South Korea/ Sokoto State University, Nigeria) enlightened us as to why the process was the site of epistemic violence committed by colonialisits irrigating many communities to express their ideas, thou not to pass down and pass on. In fact, Kojo’s questions to him was why we Asians do not have as strong a unifying version such as Pan Africanism, which to me is more than an ideology. It is a very practical way of finding solutions for historical and current problems of the continent, a concept that deeply resonated with me.

During the session, Kojo and I met with Dr Abdouralaminej (University of Kingston, Senegal) and I surprised each other with the many parallels between his ‘street food project’ in Senegal and mine on ‘history through food teaching methods’ at Yangon University. Our research questions, methodologies and approaches, particularly the triangulation of interests among communities, students and universities in our projects, share many similarities.

Through our choice of intervention, i.e., ‘food’, we want to investigate broader histories, anthropological and historical landscapes of Myanmar and Senegalese communities. Realizing these parallels became important in the process of understanding our thought-of-collaborations possible. A joint book project on Myanmar and Senegalese food (studies) was hatched promptly. Cross connections between Asia and Africa, and between Asian and African scholars, are valuable because they help us learn new things, and learn new ways of knowing the old things. What binds us is our collective desire to challenge, de-colonise and de-imposed undertaking to transcend through coloniality of knowledge. How do we reclaim and break relevant our indigenous traditions in knowing things and producing knowledge? Asia and Africa, particularly the latter because of an even longer burden and deeper scars of imperialism, can empower each other through co-conceptualizing ways to see ourselves and each other without Orientalism or hegemonic (Western)

constructions of ‘Asia’ and ‘Africa’. The journey ahead is long and, as we discussed during the conference, there exist many barriers – such as established and accepted ways of teaching, researching, publishing, and even organizing conferences in particular locations. But a new axis of knowledge is possible, and the conference in Dar showed us how.

Tharaphi Than, Associate Professor in World Languages and Cultures at Northern Illinois University

Photos taken during panel sessions.

Photo taken during panel sessions.
Hong Kong Studies is emerging as an area studies field in its own right, edging out from the shadows of China Studies after the months-long street-occupation protests in 2014 and violent Mong Kok incident in 2016, and amid a rise in scholarly interest in the territory from outside the confines of the Social Science departments of Hong Kong’s establishment universities.

Go global
The Education University of Hong Kong’s Academy of Hong Kong Studies (AHKS), inaugurated in July 2015, claims the position of first Hong Kong Studies centre in a Hong Kong university. The academy sees its mission as driving “interdisciplinary knowledge creation and transfer initiatives on Hong Kong-centric subjects within the context of global-city studies”; its motto is “Hong Kong in the World.” The academy is headed by Professor Lui Tsz-lok, who joined the Education University in 2014, when it was still known as the Hong Kong Institute of Education (Hong Kong’s legislature granted the institute university status only in 2018.1) Ironically, the establishment of AHKS came as academics in Hong Kong have been under pressure to “go global,” amid government-funding and “assessment systems that valorise frequency of publication in international journals.”2 The “go global” mantra could be seen as an oblique injunction to avoid paying much scholarly attention to social and political developments in Hong Kong itself, even in this time of rapid transformation. That would echo the sentiment of a Hong Kong scholar in 2017, who told me that Social Science research at Hong Kong universities was “Singaporeising” (not “mainlandising”); researchers were being dissuaded from doing research and publishing on Hong Kong subjects “for the sake of angling to some extent for a little observed in semi-authoritarian Singapore.”3 Before there was someone hired to work on local issues. That’s not the case anymore because the incentives, including during the hiring process, are geared towards publishing in international journals.

In an attempt to make comparisons across departments and universities, scholarly research in Hong Kong is “considered valuable only if it is published in internationally-refereed journals, which, despite claims that this does not exclude Chinese and other local journals, has created a strong bias against journals published in Asia”, according to adjunct associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Joseph Bosco, who describes such a dichotomous method as an “audit culture”.4 Audit culture uses “business metaphors” that stifle “academic creativity by focusing only on process”, he writes, adding that one of its side effects, “probably not entirely unintended”, is that “more power shifts to the funding agencies” and “researchers are incentivised to publish as many papers as possible, even if they are merely transcribing what has already been said”.5

Beyond departments and borders
On the issue of Chinese state control over Hong Kong universities, Bosco says there is no direct interference in teaching or research, but that there is control over funding: “Since over 95 percent of funding for universities comes from the government, universities, governments and the Chinese are very dependent on government policies.” He notes the speculation that Hong Kong “elses” (little hyphens used to separate words) were being involved in [pro-democracy] protests against ‘National Education’ [in 2012] and in favour of ‘Universal Suffrage’ [in 2014]6 are seeking “to reduce the number of students majoring in fundamental social sciences and humanities. If departments are having limits placed on their student intake, limiting their allocated financial resources, or, for example, are not having their offices and facilities refurbished, leaving them decrepid and decayed, it would not be surprising if their research agendas turn cautious and complacent and they reject scholarly proposals that touch on sensitive Hong Kong political issues, as many more students and faculty are from the mainland and the political struggle in Hong Kong has intensified in recent years.

When it comes to Hong Kong Studies, it appears that departments and scholars’ pursuits, or mere periphery, of their economic and careerist interests could be conflicting with their scholarly urges or even conscience. And, if that were indeed the case, it would not be surprising if we were to observe a flourishing of Hong Kong Studies outside the Social Science department of Hong Kong’s establishment universities, including overseas. In fact, that is what we are now seeing. The inaugural issue of a new academic journal, Hong Kong Studies, was published last year by Chinese University of Hong Kong’s Department of English. The semi-annual publication says it is “devoted to original, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research on Hong Kong affairs from multiple fields in the humanities and the social sciences” and is “not at all bilingual”, with “special focus on Hong Kong as a site of debate.” In other words, although based in a humanities department, it will publish Hong Kong-focused social-science research. The journal’s editors believe that the “temply expansion of the field of Hong Kong Studies warrants a journal of its own, in order to provide a focused platform for discussion of Hong Kong between different disciplines and viewpoints in relation to Hong Kong.” One of those editors, Tammy Ho Lai-Ming, is Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Hong Kong Baptist University.

Separately, Bristol University launched The Hong Kong History Project under the leadership of Professor of History Robert Bickers in January 2015, with funding from the Hotton Trust. The initiative “aims to encourage and facilitate the study of the history of Hong Kong in the UK.” The initiative “will support cutting edge research into the history of Hong Kong by funding research studentships, visiting fellowships, conferences and workshops, exploring new and under-researched areas in Hong Kong history”. It “aims to serve as a focal point of study in itself, with a comparative and regional perspective”. The project’s website notes that there is a “growing critical mass of scholars and writers turning their attention to post-Occupy Hong Kong.”

Meanwhile, the University of British Columbia in Canada launched its Hong Kong Studies Initiative within its Asian Studies department in April 2017. The initiative, led by Leo K. Shin, Associate Professor of Chinese History in the Department of History, considers the territory “as both an extraordinary Chinese city and as a spectacular international and transnational hub.” In a YouTube video, Shin notes the initiative was “founded on the firm belief that there is a genuine need for passion and also well-informed and fair-minded discussions about the past, present and future of this most-improbable metropolis, both as a spectacular city in its own right and also as an important gateway”. In a newspaper report, Shin was quoted as saying that the centre was designed to create space outside China for Hong Kong to discuss the history and culture as, in Hong Kong itself, academia was “being squeezed”.7 “Incidentally, in 2015, UBC became the only university in Canada to teach Cantonese.”8 Also, the Society of Hong Kong Studies (SHS) formed in 2010 and affiliated with the Association of Asian Studies, held its inaugural forum at City University of Hong Kong in January 2018. Two months later, it sponsored two panel sessions at the AAS annual conference in Washington, D.C. Chaired by UCLA sociology professor Ching Kwan Lee, the society held another meeting in Hong Kong later this year. Similarly, the newly-established United Kingdom-based Hong Kong Studies Association launched its own network in “European institutions”, will launch its “Hong Kong Insights” blog this year, according to Hong Kong Weekly.9

New generation of activists
Since it arose during World War Two, the term ‘area studies’ has been criticised as “colourless” and “ambiguous”, but also lauded for its “modesty.” It came about to describe the American effort to “achieve an en Encyclopedia of political science unknown areas of the world” that the United States found itself involved in during the war, and, understandingly, the discipline is “extremely vulnerable to the charge of serving ‘non-scholarly’ political or military interests”.10 Approximately thirty years after the 1997 handover and thirty years until the expiry of “One Country, Two Systems”, a turning point around the 2017 University of Hong Kong’s struggle to maintain its political autonomy under Chinese sovereignty. For the original generation of Hong Kong intellectuals, Chinese identity issues were crumbling amid social, economic and technological change and the simple passage of time. Others say the ‘decade of dichotomy’ in the 1980s and 1990s was a period of liberation from China, and others a referendum to determine post-1997 sovereignty. Some argue that the territory is caught between a desire for autonomy and independence from China, and others a desire for permanent political union with China.

These historic developments, representing fundamental shifts in the tenets of the territory’s democracy movement, contextualise the clear rise in scholarly interest in Hong Kong as an object of study, and students and scholars outside the audit culture that social scientists in establishment Hong Kong universities face, in addition to understanding with aspirations to go global.

Notes
1. The incident is also known as the “Fishball Revolution”, “Hong Kong riot” and “a clash between civilians and police”.

Above: Hong Kong skyline. Image reproduced under a Creative Commons license courtesy of Banana on Flickr. Original Image: https://www.flickr.com/photos/75987888@N00/32692519723. License: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Benjamin Garvey

1. The incident is also known as the “Fishball Revolution”, “Hong Kong riot” and “a clash between civilians and police”.

Kyoto’s urban development has generally been characterised by an innovative use and management of the city’s material heritage; the urban historian Nishikawa Kijji was among the first to recognise this fact. During the ‘Symposium for the Preservation of Traditional Culture in Kyoto and Nara’ organised by UNESCO and the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs, in September 1970, Nishikawa commented on how much the citizens of Kyoto disliked the word koto (ancient city and former capital), because municipal officers and citizens of Kyoto made their best efforts to develop the city with a progressive view towards the incorporation of new technologies and new concepts of urban living. Nishikawa explained how this enterprising spirit was fundamental for allowing the city to adapt to the social and economic changes that emerged after the function of ‘capital city’ was transferred to Tokyo during the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact, the preservation and revival of the material heritage of the city was based on the active and permanent invention of the city’s new functions over time.

Innovative city making

During the entire modern period, and particularly after the transfer of the Emperor to Tokyo in 1868, the most influential residents of Kyoto started to press local officers towards the improvement of the city. Just before the Meiji restoration (1868), the population of Japan had reached about 3.6 million, with approximately 3 million inhabiting cities, and more than 90 percent of the population living in ordinary farmhouses. Although Kyoto has an urban history of more than 1200 years old, during the mid-19th century the general image of the city was marked by rurality: from the wooden built typology of constructions to the size of urban parcels and districts, and the overall landscape still dominated by agricultural fields and forested mountains. However, during the transformation from a former imperial capital into one more local city competing for national resources, instead of reinforcing the agricultural basis of the economy, the local elites chose to orient city improvements towards innovation. It is worth remembering that the national government only issued the first official city planning regulation as late as 1919. This left a regulatory gap that allowed local officers, local merchants and other influential residents of existing cities to autonomously decide and implement city improvements. This autonomy was added to the fact that Kyoto reached the modern period with an accumulated experience in urban making from its long history as an imperial capital. In 1994 the League of Historical Cities was established in Kyoto as an inter-municipal entity of international character that differed from other state-based organisations. This international organisation relied on the accumulated experiences of cities (cities as political entities with much longer histories than national states). This internationalisation illustrates the entrepreneur spirit that has historically and consistently supported urban development in Kyoto, a notion greatly contrasting the well-spread impression of Kyoto as a city of traditional heritage repository.

...an interest for the material culture of everyday life came to the fore.

As one of the largest cities of the period – after Tokyo and Osaka – Kyoto competed in attracting rich merchants to revive the local economy. This was achieved through city improvements related to hygiene and prevention of epidemics, as well as the improvement to urban services such as electricity and transportation. After the completion of the large-scale ‘Lake Biwa Canal’ infrastructural project (1885-1890), Kyoto built the first hydroelectric power generation plant in Japan – the ‘Keage Power Station’ – followed by the city’s pioneering project of an electric streetcar railroad, whose operation began in 1895.6 In addition to infrastructural improvements, significantly sized cities in Japan have a history of competing in the attraction of large scale events, such as industrial exhibitions. This competitiveness continued to be evident during the postwar period, for example, during the process of selecting the host city for the Expo 1970 (eventually going to Osaka), when local governments in the Kansai Region struggled against the powerful local governments of the Kanto Region (where Tokyo is located).7 Early records boast the occasion when Kyoto hosted the ‘Fourth National Industrial Exhibition’ in celebration of the 500 year anniversary of the city’s foundation. This exhibition was held to the south of the actual site of Heian Shrine, with a total venue area of 178,000 m² and a total site area of 7,000 m². The event served to showcase the first electric streetcar ever installed in Japan, and the innovative features of a city supplied by electricity. It also presented the occasion to enlarge streets and improve the supply of accommodation in the city. These urban improvements supported the long-term process of transforming Kyoto into an important sightseeing destination. Upon the establishment of Kyōto municipality, in 1889, the city counted around 279 thousand inhabitants. In 1918, the city of Kyoto incorporated 16 towns and villages that resulted in a suburban expansion in which the municipal land area doubled. The development of roads and the electric street car, and the creation of new housing sites accomplished this expansion. The most important variations in population growth occurred during the modern period until 1939 and after the war until 1970. The population increased to about 521 thousand in 1920, reaching over 1 million in 1935, and about 1.5 million in 1970, after which numbers stabilized.8 The modern period population growth was mainly related to the variations in city limits involving the successive incorporation of surrounding towns and villages. In contrast, the postwar population growth was generally the result of internal migrations from rural areas. Although the population grew vastly until 1970, during the postwar period the rate of growth in Kyoto was modest when compared to other cities, such as Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya or Yokohama.

Redefining postwar urban development

Kyoto city witnessed the challenge of redefining new objectives for urban development during the postwar period, similar to other local cities involved in dynamic processes of population movement towards metropolitan regions.9 As described in the Kinki Area Development Law (1963), the municipal government enthusiastically embraced the project of transforming Kyoto into a cultural
The long history of the traditional wooden buildings in central areas has unfortunately often been overlooked since the end of the war. The large-scale destruction of cities during the war (fast spreading fires during bombing raids) is the number of locally based national professionals who were aware of the specific needs and characteristics of everyday life in Japan. As early as 1960, Nishiyama strongly advised the Kyoto University professor, Nishiyama Uzo. The preservation of the city after the 1945. At the local level, in Kyoto, a ‘Scenic Landscape District’ of 340ha was established in 1972 in order to protect certain areas, including the areas of the Kamo River, and the Higashiyama and Kitayama mountains. Since 1957, the municipality classified neighbourhoods – including ancient features and modern structures – as areas of historical importance. In 1972, the structures built in the Nishijin textile neighbourhood on the western side of Kyoto, a neighbourhood slowly shaped over a long period of time, consisting of family-based small-scale industrial installations, in which the workplace was integrated in the everyday life of the community.

Urban change and the improvement of everyday life

The large urban changes that took place in the 1950s generated a demand for specialists on urban and regional planning, and led to an increasing number of local and national professionals who were aware of the specific needs and characteristics of everyday life in urban areas.

As a matter of fact, the postwar urban expansion advanced out of a rigid control oriented towards preservation. For the local communities that started to become influential in barring undesired projects, among them, the interdiction of a theme park construction on Mount Hiei in 1950, and the construction in 1949 of a 133m high hotel in front of Kyoto station and a hotel on Nanabashi Rose Hill. The ‘Protect Nanabashi Rose Hill’ civil society movement echoed movements taking place in other cities; for example, the Tsujigakko Hill in Kamakura. These civil society movements triggered the enactment of the Ancient Capitals Preservation Law (1956) at a national level, and raised concern for preservation. An awareness emerged of the long-term interactions existing between everyday human activities and natural settings, in processes of physical shaping. In the case of Kyoto, located in a river basin surrounded by mountains, the technical possibilities of different periods, heavily based on wooden building techniques, greatly shaped the physical features of the city. Until the mid-1960s, most of the housing in central areas was composed of two-storied wooden structures, some roofed with thatch that together form a specific townscapes called machihara [the ‘lined’ town]. Also known as kyo-machiya, this urban type of house was nonetheless raised concern for preservation. An awareness emerged of the long-term interactions existing between everyday human activities and natural settings, in processes of physical shaping.

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Revisiting the First and Second Sexism in Japan

Deborah Giustini and Peter Matanle

2018 has been a pivotal year for women worldwide. Revelations of harassment, assault and rape by powerful men indicate that everyday sexism is being taken seriously. Yet there is still so much to do. In Japan too, 2018 saw women’s lives changing, revealing both the light and shadow of normative assumptions about men’s and women’s attributes, capabilities, and roles.

No (work)place for gender equality

Despite more than thirty years of legislative progress, beginning with the 1985 Equal Employment Opportunities Law – and 1997/2000 revisions – as well as recent initiatives such as the government’s Gender Equality Bureau,3 gender equality in the Japanese workplace remains at best an aspiration. It’s not hard for women to get jobs in Japan; however, access to core and senior roles is heavily restricted – just one third are in regular employment, compared to two thirds of men – and progress comes at a slower pace than international competitors.4 While women have achieved considerable gains in health and education,5 gender segregation at work remains entrenched and discriminatory barriers to advancement persist.

Numerous indicators point to women’s subordinate status at work. Rankin: Japan 110th among 146 countries for gender equality – below Guinea and above Ethiopia – the World Economic Forum emphasizes Japan’s limited achievements thus far: an urgent problem acknowledged by the government, which rather ambitiously aims to increase the proportion of female decision-makers to 30% by 2020. Currently just 13% of managers are women,6 and women’s salaries are still 25.7% lower than men’s for equivalent work.7 The third widest gender pay gap in the OECD. What’s going wrong?

Although overt workplace discrimination is illegal, what stands out is the progressive decline in the quality of women’s employment as they pass through adulthood, while male employment quality improves. In essence, the everyday practice of men’s and women’s work in organisations and society is gendered – formally and informally – hence disparities widen with age, even as women gain the experience, knowledge and skills that employers value. Why? Inequality is structured from the beginning of people’s working lives. It is already known that women are assigned by mutual consent to managerial or clerical career tracks, and this decision is based on gendered normative assumptions about personal attributes, capabilities, and expectations. Crucially, the managerial track requires a strong commitment to organisational working practices and cultures as a requirement for progression. This includes location transfers, very long working hours, sudden overtime demands, routine evening meetings for core team members, and late night team building and client entertainment, often featuring smoking and heavy drinking. These workplace activities, and the (self-)selection of those who perform them, are as much based on assumptions about women’s capabilities and needs as they are about men’s. The outcome is a progressively gendered organisational hierarchy, where many women opt for clerical track and part-time roles in anticipation of childbirth and rearing, or later withdraw altogether.

And if a woman does seek re-entry into the labor force she will often feel ‘punished’ by having access only to lower paid and lower quality employment than if she had remained childless in her original organisation. Hence, women’s employment outcomes in Japan are on most conventional measures inferior. Women have less access to long-term career formation, occupational specialisation, and progression opportunities, and consequently they earn less. Just as women are assumed not to be able to transfer suddenly, or participate in late night client entertainment, so organisations expect that men can and should perform – or withstand – those duties and pressures by dint of their gender, if they are to succeed and earn more.

Do men really want to work extremely long hours separated from their loved ones for long periods, damage their health by drinking excessively in smoke-filled environments, and suffer physical and mental stress from lack of sleep, just because they happen to be men? Why do organisations assume that it is okay to drive their male employees routinely to forswear full participation in the opportunities and duties involved in household formation? Are not these assumptions, and the work-place and societal outcomes they produce, also sexist?

The first and second sexism in the Japanese workplace

Alongside what he calls the ‘First Sexism’ – the most egregious and widespread sexism worldwide and perpetrated against women – philosopher David Benatar argues that there is a hidden ‘Second Sexism’, against men, which contributes to persistent structured gender inequality.8 Hence, Benatar argues, sexism against men should also be acknowledged and dealt with; that the principle of universal justice requires that equality for women can only be brought into existence within the context of equality for everyone.

The Japanese workplace has long produced sexist outcomes against women, and efforts have correctly focused on establishing equal opportunity for women. But let’s start to unpack what equal opportunities constitute. Doing so will provide the groundwork for establishing of equal pay and access to core and senior roles, women will gain the opportunity to work unreasonably long hours, or be posted for years to a distant location? Is this a form of equality that women want, or is it something that neither women nor men would wish for?

When asked why they ‘choose’ part-time employment, Japanese women – particularly mothers and middle-aged women – commonly cite that it gives them control and flexibility over their working hours, a strong indication that they prefer work structural conditions that the majority of working men endure. This is a ‘Hobson’s choice’. Many women would prefer the challenges and self-development that comes with full-time long-term regular employment – and the accompanying salary – but feel those roles are inaccessible because they are unable to commit to the employer’s demands. Similarly, many men would participate more in family formation, but feel unable because of workplace demands and the responsibilities of being principal earner.

Equality for women and men

The government is pushing on a piece of string. Its policies don’t achieve what policy-makers ostensibly intend, and likely never will. Technically and legally core and senior roles are open to female employment. But the majority of women won’t or can’t occupy those roles because of the customary obligations they entail. Indeed, since most men don’t want to work like Japanese men, why would women want to?

What is needed for genuine workplace equality to be achieved, therefore, is a set of career pathways for people to realise their own visions for themselves regardless of gendered assumptions about the ‘nature’ of women and men. In addition to trying to establish equality for gender, one would also look to the direction from the work of trying to establish equality for men, with the intention that the workplace becomes more attractive to both genders.

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Notes

1 https://tinyurl.com/jpgender

2 https://tinyurl.com/jpgender2

3 https://tinyurl.com/jpgender3

4 https://tinyurl.com/jpgender4

5 https://tinyurl.com/jpgender5


Above: Tokyo Metro. Image reproduced under a Creative Commons license courtesy of Tokyo Form on Flickr.
The Newsletter – is the focus of a brief review below.

Madura, Flores, Sumbawa and Singkawang artists from four outer island locations – involving connections with local actors and Mime Theatre, have been involved in activities evoking everyday experience and engaging in Javanese language aiming to train young people; modern theatre groups both a continuation of the focus on the local tradition in engaging with contemporary Indonesia.

In the late 1970s, ketoprak’s performances of historical and legendary stories celebrated the Javanese cultural heritage, while its improvised dialogue resonated with daily life experiences. The leftist, populist political connection of much ketoprak in the 1950s and 1960s had ceased with the takeover of the New Order government, turning to modern Indonesian language theatre that problematized Javanese cultural tradition, depicting past kingdoms ruled by corrupt power holders to comment critically on the state of the contemporary Indonesian nation.

The ending of the Suharto era in 1998, with a new freedom of cultural expression, was reflected in Yogyakarta by vibrant performances dramatizing real-life occurrences staged in neighbourhood locations and connecting with communities. One group, Teater Garasi, staged a series of productions reflecting on the state of contemporary Indonesia as a whole – problematizing the haunting stain of Java’s past (Waktu Batu), depicting people rushing headlong into the future (Tubuh Ketiga), and exposing intolerance (Yong Fana Iku Waktu, Kita Abadi).

Recent visits to Yogya have evidenced both a continuation of the focus on the local and a ‘new’ reaching out beyond Java to the wider nation. Veteran ketoprak figures stage performances, organise festivals, train young people; modern theatre groups perform in Javanese language aiming to evoke everyday experience and engage identification among audience members. At the same time three groups, Teater Garasi, Kalambari The Movement and Bengalab Mime Theatre, have been involved in activities outside Java. Garasi’s Pementasan Antar Ragam ‘Performing Difference’ project, involving connections with local actors and artists from four outer island locations – Madura, Flores, Sumbawa and Singkawang – is the focus of a brief review below.

On Garasi’s website the ‘Antar Ragam’ project is described as ‘a new initiative that aims to build contacts and new meetings with different traditions and cultures as well as with emerging artists and young people in cities outside Java, as an unlearning and relearning process on being Indonesian Asian’. In conversation, Garasi members explained that they were seeing radicalism and intolerance rising everywhere. They decided to go outside Java as the centre of Indonesia, to see how things looked from elsewhere.

Madura and Flores were their first destinations. Garasi’s major aim was to encourage young people to look around them, to identify important social issues and engage with these issues in performance. In strongly Islamic Madura they encountered relatively large numbers of theatre groups, encouraged by an emphasis on literature by the peak Islamic school system. In Flores theatre is generally less developed, although in Maumere there is an active group of writers and artists, mostly students and former students of the local Ledalero Catholic theological college. Garasi teams were asked by local artists to share their own theatre process, so they visited again some months later, holding workshops about researching social issues, then exploring them through improvisation to develop a full performance. Used to presenting conventional written scripts, local performers found Garasi’s method new and stimulating, and wanted to emulate it in their own work.

Local representatives undertook residencies at Garasi’s studio in Yogyakarta, discussing and developing their planned projects with Garasi members, observing studio activities and attending arts events in the city. At the Garasi studio in July 2017 I met the two Flores representatives, Ibu Veronika, from Adonara Island, whose women’s theatre group stages plays about women’s experiences, and Eka Putra Ngalu, a theatre writer and other artists. Given the history of Yogya with these issues among local theatre groups and government officials impressed by a theatrical work and providing funding for its further staging. The Madura event focused on land, viewed traditionally as a sacred family heritage, and now, after construction of the bridge linking Java and Madura, a contested economic resource. One festival in Flores focused on the theme of tsunami, both the literal tsunami which struck the region in 1992 and the current metaphorical flooding in of global capitalism and mass media. The Singkawang festival, with its theme of tolerance, featured a performance depicting transformation of the city’s famous market Pasar Hongkong from a wholly Chinese site to today’s centre of vibrant multi-ethnic activity.

Such activities provide insight into the diverse, complex social conditions characterising the different regions of Indonesia, and a seemingly growing commitment to engaging with these issues among local theatre groups and other artists. Given the history of Yogyakarta performance in connecting with its social context, might there be suggestion here of a more general shift in social attitudes to and understandings of ‘the nation’? Do Garasi members envisage the current project feeding into their own creative work, inspiring future productions? “Certainly”, they say, because every new experience enriches artists’ ideas; however, they don’t yet know what form this work might take. Watch this space!

For News from Australia and the Pacific, we ask contributors to reflect on their own research interests and the broader academic field in Australia and the Pacific of which it is a part. We focus on current, recent or upcoming projects, books, articles, conferences and teaching, while identifying related interests and activities of fellow academics in the field. Our contributions aim to give a broad overview of Asia-related studies in Australia and beyond, and to highlight exciting intellectual debates on and with Asia in the region.

Our preferred style is subjective and conversational. Rather than offering fully-fledged research reports, our contributions give insight into the motivations behind and directions of various types of conversations between Asia and the region. In the current edition, we explore varieties and practices of translation and collaboration between writers, artists, and translators in Indonesia and Australia.

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### Yogyakarta theatre reaches out

**Barbara Hatley**

*For many years I’ve been observing and writing about theatre in Yogyakarta, Central Java. Focusing first on the Javanese popular melodrama ketoprak, then also modern Indonesian language theatre, I’ve explored the ways in which these forms draw on Javanese theatrical and cultural tradition in engaging with contemporary Indonesia.*

On Garasi’s website the ‘Antar Ragam’ project is described as ‘a new initiative that aims to build contacts and new meetings with different traditions and cultures as well as with emerging artists and young people in cities outside Java, as an unlearning and relearning process on being Indonesian Asian’. In conversation, Garasi members explained that they were seeing radicalism and intolerance rising everywhere. They decided to go outside Java as the centre of Indonesia, to see how things looked from elsewhere.

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Makassan and Northern Australia. An artistic perspective of the shared history

Lily Yulianti Farid

In December 2018, three Yirrkala artists from Yirrkala, Northern Australia and three artists from Makassar, Indonesia participated in an artist exchange program organised by the Wilin Centre, Victorian College of the Arts, The University of Melbourne. The centre worked together with Rumita’s Art Space in Makassar and Buku-Larrŋgay Art Centre in Yirrkala to invite Adi Gunawan (visual artist), Nurabdiansyah Ramli (visual designer and researcher) and Muhammad Rais (filmmaker) from Makassar, and Arian Pearson (musician and sound producer), Barayuwa Mununggun and Dion Matimunik Gunueuwel (radio DJ) from Yirrkala. The creative practice research project funded by the Australia-Indonesia Centre aims to facilitate cultural exchange between the young artists, based on the historical relationship between Makassan seafarers and the First Nations peoples of the north coast of the Australian continent between the mid-18th century and early 20th century.

After the artists spent time in both Makassar and East Arnhem Land, they returned to their respective countries where they were given time to reflect on their experience through the creation of artworks. This essay follows the creative process and personal experiences of the three Makassan artists who joined the historical research-based art project. It demonstrates how the art project functions as an effective medium to spread knowledge on the richness of both Indigenous and East Arnhem Land cultures and on the rich history of the Malaakse people. Yirrkala’s Arts Centre, the Wilin Centre, and Rumata’ Artspace invite the audience to engage with the works of the artists and learn something new about their cultures and histories.

New learning, old history
Mural artist Adi Gunawan, one of the three young Makassan artists selected for the program, commented: “I have learned about the street art in Australian cities and that was the only reason for me and my wife who is also an artist to plan a visit to Australia. I never thought that it was the historical relationship between Makassan and Northern Australia that would bring me to Australia and then to create an artwork after the visit.”

Nurabdiansyah Ramli, one of the other Makassan artists, learned about his family members who had sailed to Australia to fish the waters off the coast. “I feel the connection, however, I have never had opportunities to further explore the history as the information I have received from Australia is mainly about higher education and contemporary arts.”

The three artists from Yirrkala had previously learned about the presence and influence of Makassan seafarers through paintings, drawings, objects and Yolŋu traditions and oral stories, and so their visit to Makassar (2-5 December 2018) was an opportunity “to confirm” the cultural knowledge they had about Makassar. As one of the artists, Arifan Pearson, described: “Our parents, grandparents and great grandparents shared the stories, including those about the marriages between our people and the Makassans. They often reminded us that we have cousins and relatives in Makassar. This is my first time visiting Makassar and seeing the trepangs [sea cucumber] in a village outside Makassar; then I learned about the traditional boats and listened to the locals speak in the Makassan language. For the first time, the history felt so real.”

In a focus group discussion after the visit, questions about who Australians are (are they white, Indigenous, migrants?) and about the history of Aboriginal people and Indigenous arts dominated our discussion as the visiting artists were overwhelmed with the rich tradition, art and history of Yolŋu, its connection with Makassan trepangers and Chinese traders, as well as issues and challenges faced by Indigenous people in Australia today.

“Our understanding of Australia before the visit was focused on Australia as a white country as well as a land of hope for migrants; a country with world class education – because many of our friends have studied, are studying or are planning to study in Australia. However, through this research-based art project, we have entered the pre-European period, and our ancestors played a very significant role during this period. We did not learn this at school. Our Yolŋu friends in Yirrkala and Bawaka were enthusiastic to share their stories about Makassan influences in their ceremonies, songs, dances and art works. Meanwhile, as Makassans, we came to Northern Australia with almost zero knowledge about the relationship,” commented Muhammad Rais.

Creation of artworks
The three artists worked on a collaborative art project exploring key elements they learned during the visit: trepangs, boats and ships, friendships between Makassan seafarers and Yolŋu people, traditional ceremonies, and the sea that connects the two cultures. Adi Gunawan decided to produce a relief about the Yolŋu tradition to bid the Makassan seafarers farewell, with both groups sitting on the beach watching the sunset together. Normally, Makassans would stay in Arnhem Land for six months, to catch and process the trepangs until ready to be sold to Chinese traders. Each time the season ended, they would bid a farewell and attend the sunset ceremony. Muhammad Rais also explored the traditional ceremony in his video mapping project, working with smoke, lights and colours. Nurabdiansyah created a replica of a Makassan traditional boat [Paddawakang] for his artwork. “My visit to Arnhem Land was a mind-blowing one. It was the first time I traced down my ancestors’ footprints, seeing the tamarind trees that they planted hundreds of years ago, listening to oral histories and tales told by our Yolŋu brothers and sisters, finding the remnants of clay pots brought by Makassans to Australia. The history is very old, however, through this project, we are learning new things about knowledge and technology transfers between Makassans and Yolŋu people. I am lost in my own history.”

In an international symposium to open the artist exchange in Makassar, the initiator of this program, Prof. Richard Frankland from the Wilin Centre, explained that the project mainly focuses on how young generations in Makassar and Arnhem Land respond to the shared history through the arts, since in both countries, many students and people in general are not aware about our shared history.

The three artists list “contact and friendship with Australian Indigenous peoples” as the most valuable thing gained from the program. “Australia is the top destination for education. Many young Indonesians study in major Australian cities, but this project has led us in a very different direction because our first encounter with Australians was with the Yolŋu people, the owners of this part of the continent, and not Australians that we have seen at popular tourist destinations in Bali or on the popular media. That is the beauty of this project. The arts serve as an effective way to learn about our shared history.”

The translation of Indonesian literature into English is a complex and multifaceted process. According to Edwin Jurriëns, a Senior Lecturer at the Asia Institute, Faculty of Arts, The University of Melbourne, and a PhD candidate at Leiden University, the practice of translation involves a number of considerations. One of the main factors influencing the translation of Indonesian literature is the historical and cultural context in which these texts were written. The translation process is not merely about transferring words from one language to another, but rather involves a deeper understanding and appreciation of the cultural and historical context in which the original text was created.

Edwin Jurriëns notes that the translation of Indonesian literature into English is not a straightforward process. It requires a deep understanding of the cultural and historical context in which the original text was created. Moreover, the translation process involves not only the transfer of words but also the preservation of cultural nuances and values.

Another important consideration is the audience for whom the translated text is intended. The translator must be mindful of the cultural and linguistic differences between the source and target cultures, and adapt the text accordingly.

In conclusion, the translation of Indonesian literature into English is a complex and challenging process that requires a deep understanding of the cultural and historical context in which the original text was created. The translator must be mindful of the cultural and linguistic differences between the source and target cultures, and adapt the text accordingly to ensure that the translated text is accessible and meaningful to the audience.

Edwin Jurriëns is a Senior Lecturer at the Asia Institute, Faculty of Arts, The University of Melbourne, and a PhD candidate at Leiden University.
The presence of strong centralized states in Northeast Asia from ancient times, as well as the geographical and political conditions of the present-day, has meant that the movement of people across boundaries in the region has been less marked, compared to other places in the world. Nevertheless, there are countless accounts documenting how individuals or groups came to find themselves across boundaries in unfamiliar environments, be it through their own agency or as a result of coercion. These experiences of the ‘Other’ in Northeast Asia can provide important insights into the issues that the region faced in the past and continues to face in the present.

In this issue of News from Northeast Asia, we examine four different groups of people and their unique experiences as ‘the Other’ in Northeast Asia.

In “Tan Jie-sheng: a success story of one transnational Cantonese merchant in Korea” by Jin-A Kang of Hanyang University, the Tongshuntai Firm (同順泰號) of Seoul National University Libraries preserves a vast amount of the古文献資料室 of Seoul National University, one of the representative Chinese companies in modern Korea. The Kujunggak (庫章閣) Archives and the Rara Books & Archives Collections of Seoul National University Library, which compose a large amount of the Tongshuntai Firm’s invoices, receipts for transactions and business correspondences. Containing over six thousand volumes in total, these Tongshuntai documents are nearly ready to be published by Guangdong People Publishing House of China.

Although overseas Chinese merchants have always been a crucial agency in Asian trade prior to the 19th century, Joseon Korea was exceptionally isolated from this network unlike Japan and South East Asia. Along with the opening of the treaty ports, Joseon became incorporated into the regional trade system of East Asia. Subsequently, Chinese merchants began to settle down around these ports on a large scale following the establishment of Regulations for Maritime and Overland Trade Between Chinese and Korean Subjects (otherwise known as the China-Korea Treaty of 1882). While the predominant ratio of the Chinese population in modern Korea was represented by the natives of Shandong Province, the treaty ports at the very first stage of their opening, as well as Seoul at the time, witnessed a diverse composition of Chinese merchants. These merchants came to Korea encouraged by the possibility of the Korean market and the apparent official supports of the Qing government in Korea. Tan Jie-sheng was Cantonese—a typical case of a Southern arriving Korea in this period—and became the richest Chinese merchant up until the 1930s.

The Tongshuntai Firm was founded first in Incheon around 1818 by the Tongtai Firm (同泰號), a Cantonese firm in Shanghai. The owner of Tongtai Firm was Liang Lunqing (梁錦卿), a native of Xiangshan County, Guangdong, who left the management of the new business and eventually became the firm’s actual owner. Liang Lunqing maintained close relations with the comprador-officers group from Xiangshan County, Guangdong, who had helped Li Hongzhang establish businesses as part of the Self-Strengthening Movement. In addition, there were quite a number of Cantonese returnees from the Chinese Educational Mission (留美幼童) program working as Chinese staff of the newly opened Korean Maritime Customs Service or working for Yuan Shikai (袁世凱) as diplomatic officers. The native-place bondage of the Cantonese community both in Shanghai and Korea was an important resource for the Tongshuntai Firm and other Chinese merchants, which enabled them to secure their initial success in Korea.

At first, Tongshuntai Firm’s growth was based on trade, selling imported British cotton, Chinese silk, and other general merchandise in Joseon and exporting Joseon goods, such as Red Ginseng, gold, and cow hides. Trade mainly took place between Incheon and Shanghai, but expanded to Japan and Hong Kong as well, through Shanghai. Additionally, the Chinese were in close contact with the official group of the Self-Strengthening Movement and their status as the largest Chinese company let the Tongshuntai Firm play a considerable political role in Korea. For example, under the circumstances in which a banking system was developed in Qing China and Joseon was lacking, Tongshuntai was not only responsible for the transfer of government funds between Shanghai and Seoul, but also assumed the role of an official treasury on behalf of the Chinese legation in Korea. Exploiting this special status, the Tongshuntai Firm could utilize official funds for their cash flow. The money-lending business to Chinese officials and upper class Koreans, including merchants, officials and the royal family, was highly lucrative. One of its debtors was Heungseeda Daewongun, father of King Gojong. When the Qing government provided the Joseon government with a loan of 200 thousand liang in 1892, Tongshuntai was written down as the lender, due to the anti-Qing sentiment prevalent in Joseon at the time. In return for lending its name, Tongshuntai was granted monopoly of navigation rights along the Han River and the operation of a regular route between Incheon and Mapo. Tongshuntai also issued a note, known as “Tongshuntai-piao” (同順泰票), which was widely circulated in the treaty ports and Seoul as currencies until 1904. During the First Sino-Japanese War, and particularly after the battlefield was shifted into Chinese territory, Tan Jie-sheng monopolized the profit of the wartime boom in Korea and built a big fortune, taking advantage of the temporary setback of the Shandong merchants.

It is worthy to note that Chinese merchants continued to grow in Korea, both in number and in economic power, without the political support of Qing government after the defeat of the First Sino-Japanese War. The trade value with China increased tenfold from 1893 up to 1910 (when the forced Korea-Japan Annexation took place) and grew sevenfold again until 1927. However, the direct route between Shanghai and Incheon was shut down following the political withdrawal of Qing, the advantage of the Cantonese merchants, whose strong international trade networks had been based in Shanghai. Disappeared conditions became more favorable for traders from Shandong Province, which was geographically closer. Many Cantonese merchants withdrew as Joseon lost its charm but Tan Jie-sheng chose another path, reducing its dependence on Shanghai by cutting back its trade operations and adopting a localization strategy, which involved branching out into various businesses, such as the soles of Chinese lottery, real-estate development, and managing a taxi service. During this process, the capital of the Shanghai merchants was withdrawn and Tan Jie-sheng became the de facto owner of Tongshuntai. Real-estate and house leasing business became Tongshuntai’s main means of increasing its wealth during the colonial period. Real-estate investment by Chinese merchants began during the real-estate crush caused by the Imo mutiny of 1882 and the Gapsin
Japanese Wives in North Korea

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apanese women who migrated to North Korea (DPR Korea) with their Korean husbands during the era of Zainichi Koreans from Japan are known as Japanese wives. They are now quite aged, around seventy to eighty years old, and wish to travel to their motherland, Japan, in order to meet brothers, sisters and other relatives, or to visit the graves of their ancestors before they die themselves. The existence of these Japanese wives in North Korea is not well known, but their experiences as ‘the Other’ in North Korea is a greatly interesting topic.

Zainichi Koreans are those who came to Japan during a period of Japanese occupation as a result of forced labor, or relocated during the post-war period. Also included in the category of Zainichi Koreans are their descendants. The majority of Zainichi Koreans suffered discrimination by the Japanese people and faced hardships due to unemployment and poverty. The exodus of Zainichi Koreans from Japan to North Korea began in 1959; by 1984, about 93,339 people had moved to North Korea. Included in this number are at least 6,479 Japanese nationals, some of whom were women, who had Zainichi Korean spouses. The number of women – the so-called Japanese wives – was 1871. Such a large-scale movement of people from a capitalist country (Japan) to a socialist country (Korea) during the Cold War Period was a very rare case indeed.

The exodus of the Zainichi Koreans began when the North Korean leader Kim Il-sung declared that North Korea would welcome the Zainichi Koreans in North Korea. The North Korean government may have intended to improve the country’s image within international society by accepting the Zainichi Koreans. However, the Japanese government and the Red Cross Society of Japan had their own reasons for wanting this group of people to move. Japanese society at the time was going through a period of post-war restoration; the policy towards the Zainichi Koreans was a great worry, liability, and burden to the Japanese government. One solution for this ‘problem’ was to make Zainichi Koreans move to North Korea. Korea was very poor, but not all, of the Zainichi Koreans were actually from the southern regions of the Japanese Peninsula, but the decision to immigrate to North Korea was based on political grounds or in the hope of a better future; they were determined to ‘return’ to a country that they had never been to before. For these Zainichi Koreans, North Korea was their motherland and South Korea merely their hometown. Of the Zainichi Koreans who moved to North Korea, some were accompanied by their Japanese spouses, and the majority of these cases consisted of a Korean husband and a Japanese wife. These Japanese wives saw North Korea for the first time when their ship, which had departed from Niigata port in Japan, arrived at Chongjin port in North Korea; most were shocked to see the North Korean people who had come to the port to welcome them because they looked poor.

The Japanese wives and their families settled down in the areas designated by the North Korean government and living standards differed from person to person. Some lived in urban environments while others found themselves in rural areas. The conditions found in the countryside faced significant hardships. Some of the Japanese wives passed away early on as they could not adapt to the food scarcity and the social environment of North Korea. Of course, there were also those who enjoyed a happy life, to some extent, with their families. Although the situations of the Japanese wives may have differed among people, they shared a common desire – to visit their hometowns in Japan.

The hometown visits of these Japanese wives were carried out on three occasions – November 1997, January 1998, September 2000 – but they have not taken place since then, due to political problems between Japan and North Korea. In May 2012, Kyodo News (a Japanese wire service) reported on Ms. Mitsuaki Minagawa in Pyongyang, a Japanese wife. The reporter asked Ms. Minagawa, “Do you hope to go to Japan?” and her answer was “Of course I hope, because my hometown is there. I hope I can travel back and forth between North Korea and Japan. For that I hope both countries will realize diplomatic relations as soon as possible.”

In recent years, there have been some Japanese journalists who have energetically reported on the issue of these Japanese wives, for example Takashi Itô and Noriko Hayashi. Takashi Itô has reported on the existence of a ‘circle’ of Japanese wives – the ‘Hamhung Rainbow Association’ – based in Hamhung, the largest city on the east coast of North Korea. The circle provides a mutual exchange and fellowship between Japanese wives. In the absence of diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea, it is difficult to travel freely between Japan and North Korea. The short trip made by Japanese wives in September 2000 was the last to take place. In order for such trips to take place, special humanitarian measures must be taken through the Red Cross Society of Japan and North Korea. However, such procedures are heavily influenced by international relations between Japan and North Korea and so the possibility of such measures being realized are, at present, uncertain.

The Japanese wives issue was dealt with in Japan-North Korea diplomatic negotiations. On 17 September 2002, the ‘Japan-North Korea Stockholm Agreement’ marked a turning point in relations between Japan and North Korea. The Japanese wives issue was also addressed in the ‘Japan-North Korea Stockholm Agreement’ of May 2000. The subsequent deterioration of Japan-North Korea relations, however, has meant that additional trips by Japanese wives have yet to take place. Then a Cold War government has set the resolution of the ‘North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens’ as a top priority in negotiations with North Korea, and comparatively the issue of the Japanese wives is of a lower priority. However, the Japanese wives are already quite old and time is running out. For them, this is an issue that must be dealt with as soon as possible.


Notes
1 These ‘Japanese wives’ should be distinguished from other female Japanese residents of the Korean Peninsula’s who continued to live in North Korea even after the defeat of Japan in 1945 as they were not able to return to Japan due to certain circumstances. The concept of ‘Japanese residents of the Korean Peninsula’ first appeared on 7 April 2018, on TV Asahi’s 2018 TV documentary ‘Family ties connecting Japan and North Korea’.
The first reliable mention of contact between Russian and Korean people dates back to as early as the 17th century. However, these contacts were episodic until the emergence of a land border between the Russian Empire and the Joseon Kingdom in the second half of the 19th century, following the accession of the Ussuri krai region to the Russian Empire under the Treaty of Aigun in 1858 and the Treaty of Peking in 1860. Soon after, Korean peasants began to move on a massive scale into Russian ‘Primorye’. It is with these peasants that the formation of a large Korean diaspora in Russia began.

The beginning of this migration is considered to have started in the 1860s. Researchers have not arrived at a consensus regarding the specific date but according to the officially held point of view shared by many Koreanists both in Russia and abroad, the first Korean families appeared in the territory of the Russian Far East in 1863. As many as 13 families secretly escaped from Korea and settled in the basin of the river Tishinka. Lack of land and natural disasters forced Korean peasants to move to Russia in several waves from the very moment that a common border with Russia was set up, and up until official diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1860. Vladivostok, which was founded in 1860 almost simultaneously with the beginning of the events described above, became one of the destinations of these migrations. According to V.Y. Grove (a Russian foreign affairs official), Korean people had begun to appear in small numbers in Vladivostok and Ussuri krai even before 1863. During the mass migration of Korean peasants in 1869-1870, Rear Admiral U.V. Fursulin (Governor-General of the Primorsky Krai Oblast) gave the order that permitted Korean people to work as laborers in the building of a dock in Vladivostok, and for the Treasury to pay all of their transportation costs and other necessary expenses. By 1876, a significant number of Korean people had settled down in Vladivostok and local authorities decided to resettle them from the center of the growing city to its suburbs. The Koreans chose the marshy area of Semyonovsky pokos as the site of their compact residence, which was called ‘Koreyskaja slobodnik’ (Korean settlement) near the Kuperovskaya pad (valley). The plan for the creation of ‘Ktayskoye-Koreyskoye slobodnik’ (Chinese Korean settlement) near the Kuporovskaya pad (where Khabarovskiy and Amurskaya streets are presently located) was approved in 1892 by the Governor-General of the Primorsky Krai Oblast P.F. Unterberger. Koreans followed the authorities’ orders, while the Chinese did not. Soon afterwards, Korean-style houses appeared in the place known as ‘Novaya Koreyskaya slobodnik’ (New Korean settlement or Shirkhanovsky).

In terms of the number of Korean people officially residing in Vladivostok, we know that the Korean population of Vladivostok totaled 420 in 1886 but increased to 457 by 1892. During the First General Population Census of the Russian Empire in 1897 there were already 1,361 (1,032 men and 329 women) Korean residents in Vladivostok (the total population of which was 28,890), and this number increased significantly following the annexation of Korea by Japan; in 1910. The number of Koreans increased significantly following the annexation of Korea by Japan; in 1910; it reached approximately 10,000 in Vladivostok alone. We can assume that this number remained more or less stable until the deportation of the Korean people to Central Asia, since the Korean population in Vladivostok was 799 people (423 men and 375 women) according to the 1929 Population Census; among those Koreans, only 3,088 individuals were still living in Novaya Koreyskaya slobodnik. The Koreans of the time tried not to mingle with other ethnic groups. Unlike the Chinese, Koreans preferred to marry within their own ethnic group, thereby preserving the purity of their race. And unlike the Chinese, Koreans were often accompanied by their families when moving to Vladivostok, even for temporary earnings. Therefore, as mentioned by F. F. Busse, it was impossible to expect the assimilation of Koreans by the Russian majority or even their partial ‘russification’. In his letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs on 8 March 1908, Governor-General of Primorsky Oblast P.F. Unterberger remarked that the Koreans, who had lived in the Ussuri krai for more than 40 years, with few exceptions, retained their ethnicity to the fullest extent and remained ‘alien people’ within the boundaries of Russia. Unfortunately, the sad events of 1937 – the deportation of Korean people to Central Asia – interrupted the further development of the Korean community in Vladivostok. However, even after the deportation of almost every Korean from Vladivostok, the historical memories of their presence continue to exist amongst the indigenous inhabitants of Vladivostok, even to this day. Parts of Khabarovskiy Street and Amurskaya Street are still called ‘Koreyka’ and even ‘Varnaya Koreyska’ and ‘Novaya Koreyska’ are still distinguished.

Notes

1 This article is based on work that was supported by the Core University Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2015-OUL-2250003).
3 Унтербергер П. Ф. Приморская область 1856–1898 гг. (Unterberger P.F. Primorsky Krai Oblast 1856–1898) СПб, 2011. С. 1 (табл);
4 Граве В. В. Корейцы, японцы и иностранные в Приморье (Граве В. В. Koreans, Chinese and Japanese in Primorsky Oblast) // Труды комиссионной по Высшему пожарному обучению Английской экспедиции. Вып. XI. СПб, 1912. С. 147.
6 Итоги переписи корейского населения Восточно-Сибирского края в 1929 году. Корейская поголовная перепись, проведенная в Южном Приморье. Владивосток, 1932. С. 78.
After the Asian Pacific War, 600 thousand soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army in Manchuria were demilitarized by the USSR Red Army and moved to Siberia, where they were subjected to forced labor for several years. It is said that 60 thousand of these soldiers died between 1945 and 1946. The Japanese government insisted that this incident should be treated as a case of ‘internment’ since many of the soldiers had been interned illegally after the war. Meanwhile, the USSR government insisted that they were prisoners of war (POWs), arrested legally, and therefore not internees.

The repatriation of these soldiers took place over a span of around 10 years, at 18 repatriation harbors spread out over Japan, the Korean peninsula, Manchuria, mainland China, Siberia, and Taiwan. The most famous of these repatriation harbors is Maizuru Harbor, in Kyoto prefecture, where the Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum is located. Interestingly enough, almost all of the museum’s exhibitions are about the repatriates from Siberia and not those from China or Korea. This may be because Maizuru Harbor was the last of the repatriation harbors to remain open, where people waited for the repatriates from Siberia. The last repatriation ship from Nakodka entered into Maizuru Harbor in December 1956.

In addition to the Maizuru Museum exhibitions, the collective memory of internment in Siberia is also presented in hundreds of Japanese books that describe disastrous memories of forced labor, starvation, and death, or address the problem of unpaid wage and other reparations. After 1945, the Japanese government paid full wages to ex-soldiers who had been subjected to forced labor in Australia, New Zealand, and the South-East Asian countries on the grounds of the Forth Geneva Convention (1949) and the labor certificates that had been issued in the US, UK, Netherlands, and Australia. However, the ex-soldiers who had been interned in Siberia were not paid any wages due to the fact that the USSR government, for a long time, had not issued labor certificates to Japanese ex-soldiers. This unfair treatment acted to augment their terrible memories of internment in Siberia.

Of the Japanese Imperial Army soldiers interned in Siberia, some were from Korea and Taiwan. For a long time after 1945, it was known about the fates of these imperial soldiers from Japan’s colonies upon their return to their home land. This changed, however, with the showing of Siberia in the Memory: My Grandpa’s Memory and a Letter by Naoki Watanabe. The protagonist, Park Dohun, was born in a poor rural village in northern Korea. In the early 1940s, he joined the Japanese imperial army in order to help his poor family although he had not adopted a Japanese style name. He first went to Yokchi, Hokkaido, to participate in military training and then was sent to Shikotan Island. The war came to an end whilst he was stationed on this island and there he waited for a ship to take him back home. The ship that eventually arrived, however, was a USSR ship that took him, not to Hokkaido, but to the Soviet Union, where soldiers from Korea and Japan were interned in separate camps (according to his recollection). In 1949, he boarded a ship at Nakodka and landed in Heungnam, located in the territory of North Korea (the border marked by the 38th parallel had almost been fixed by that time). Upon his arrival at Heungnam Harbor, some members of North Korean Labor Party met him with the greeting “Welcome from Socialism Motherland”.

As Park Dohun’s hometown had been located in North Korea, he had indeed returned home. Soon afterwards, he joined the North Korean Peoples’ Army and, when the Korean War broke out in 1950, crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea as a soldier of the Peoples’ Army. In South Korea, he was subsequently arrested by the South Korean Army, spent time in a prison camp at Ojijado Island, and was involved in the South Korean Army for 2 years. Upon discharge from the army, he worked as a piano engineer. In this way, Park Dohun was an ex-soldier of the Japanese Imperial Army, the North Korean Peoples’ Army, and the South Korean Army. Park Dohun’s fascinating journey, however, is not an isolated one. There were a great many individuals who were ex-soldiers of all three armies. The ‘Shiberia Sakpunghwe’ (Siberia North Wind Association) was established in order to address the issue of these ex-soldiers in 1990, just after the summit meeting between Roh Tae-woo and M. S. Gorbachev took place and in the year that South Korea and USSR accomplished diplomatic normalization. Investigations into the experiences of these ex-soldiers were also carried out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the Roh Mu-hyun administration of South Korea. This was followed by the publication of the book I was a soldier of the Japanese Imperial Army, North Korean People’s Army, and South Korean UN Army by Kim Hyosun, a prominent journalist of the newspaper Hankyoreh, which addressed the issue of Korean internees in Siberia. Around the same time, a program on Korean internees in Siberia – Another Internment to Siberia: Korean POWs’ 60 years – was featured on NHK TV of Japan. The Korean ex-internees appearing in this program had been sent to Hallar, in Manchuria, as soldiers of the Kwantung Army around the time that the northern part of Manchuria (Including Hallar) was being abandoned by the Kwantung Army. After the end of the war, they were interned to Krasnoyarsk, in the western area of Lake Baikal, by the Soviet Red Army. Afterwards, they departed from Nakodka and arrived in Heungnam Harbor, and later crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea at the time of Korean War. It is said that the USSR government at the time had been aware of the existence of some Korean soldiers amongst the Japanese internees in Siberia. However, it had taken a long time to confirm their identity since many of the Korean soldiers had adopted Japanese style names.

Almost all of the Korean internees in Siberia have now passed away and so although some information can still be gained of their histories and experiences, the picture is fragmented and incomplete. About 23000 Korean internees in Siberia made the journey to Heungnam Harbor but only a few of them crossed the 38th parallel and went back home; it is said that almost all of the repatriates remained in North Korea or went to Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in China.

It is open to debate whether, and to what extent, the Korean internees in Siberia were victims or victimizers, given that they had been involved in warfare as soldiers. However, the fact remains that they did not receive any reparations as soldiers from the Japanese government after the war. In addition, some of them became soldiers once again in both North Korea and South Korea. As such, the question of how, and to whom, they are to appeal for redress and reparation still remains.
The campaign for Indonesia’s April 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections officially kicked off on 23 September 2018. However, a more interesting process preceded the official campaign. It was the process to determine which parties fulfilled the requirements to stand candidates in the elections and which parties would enter into coalitions in support of the respective presidential candidates.

Such a pre-campaign process reflects two features of contemporary politics in Indonesia. First, Indonesian politics is still characterised by what can be called ‘transactionalism’ (politik transaksi), namely, a process of negotiations among a plethora of factions within the Indonesian elite driven by concerns about ekstabilitas (popularity among the voting public).

The second feature is an extreme shallowness of contestation in the sense that all of the political and economic elite agree on most, if not all, aspects of cultural, social, political and economic strategies. This shallowness of contestation means that the elections will resemble a superficial image war with little, if any, policy content.

**Political transactionalism**

During the 2014 elections, a crucial part of Joko Widodo’s image was that of a politician who would reject politik transaksi – the politics of deal-making with political players and parties that would be given government positions such as those in Ministries. In reality, however, the idea that President Widodo could be a non-transactional president was always untenable. This is because, since 2009, the national budget and other policies requiring legislation required parliamentary approval and Widodo’s 2014 coalition of parties initially did not have a majority in the parliament, thus making transactions necessary. To run a stable government, Widodo needed to both satisfy all the parties supporting him as well as win over parties that had not supported him. He was able to do this by bringing over the National Mandate Party (PAN), the United Development Party, and Golkar, all of which had supported Widodo’s opponent, Prabowo Subianto, in 2014. All these parties were given Ministries to run. Transactional politics certainly featured prominently in Prabowo’s 2018 selection of vice-presidential candidate. There was the initial question of whether Susila Bambang Yudhoyono’s party, the Democratic Party (PD), would join the coalition with Gerindra, Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), and PAN. Yudhoyono and the PD were caught in a bind. It was clear that there were ambitions for Yudhoyono’s son, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (known as AHY), to be a presidential candidate in 2024. However, under existing law, a party that does not nominate a presidential candidate in 2019, would not be allowed to do so in 2024. PD had to join either Prabowo or Widodo. Most of the discussions carried out between Yudhoyono and Prabowo took place behind closed doors, so we cannot be sure if a deal was eventually transacted. Finally, Yudhoyono as Chairperson of PD announced, standing alongside Prabowo, that PD would support Prabowo for President and join that coalition. There was no explicit commitment by Prabowo to choose AHY. Indeed, the public position was that PD would support whichever Prabowo selected.

Nevertheless, Yudhoyono outlined a series of policy points that he shared with Prabowo. These were, however, all formulated in very general terms, and could have also been supported by Widodo. There were no real ideological or policy differences of sufficient importance to be a hindrance to Yudhoyono joining either Widodo or Prabowo’s coalition. Yudhoyono’s elektabilitas in the coming April presidential elections simultaneously in April 2019. Since the 2014 presidential elections, the age of ideological and political positions has been quietly forgotten.

**Transactionality and shallowness in Indonesia’s election campaign**

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The Indonesian Studies Program

This issue offers three articles from the Indonesia Studies Programme (ISP) at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS). ISP promotes in-depth understanding of Indonesia through conferences, workshops, seminars, publications and timely commentary in regional and international media. ISP seeks to understand the effects of political and economic reform in Indonesia following the end of the New Order era, especially with respect to the implementation of decentralisation policies throughout the archipelagic nation.

Indonesia will be holding its legislative and presidential elections simultaneously in April 2019. Since the 2014 presidential elections, Indonesia’s electoral landscape has been marked by an unusual level of ideological division, and an upswing in popular politics and Islamist activism. Why have such divisions emerged, and will they affect the upcoming presidential and legislative elections? And what impact will the simultaneous implementation of these two different elections have upon campaign strategies and voter preferences? ISP has a team of researchers monitoring these developments, and providing timely analysis on campaign dynamics, patterns of coalition-building, and the broader consequences of these elections for the health and stability of Indonesia’s democracy.

The Co-coordinators of ISP are Dr Siwage Mauad and Dr Norshahril Saat. For more information please visit: https://www.iseas.edu.sg/programmes/country-studies/indonesia-studies.

None of these two election processes has been formulated in very general terms, and could have also been supported by Widodo. There were no real ideological or policy differences of sufficient importance to be a hindrance to Yudhoyono joining either Widodo or Prabowo’s coalition.

**Conclusion**

Nevertheless, there are early developments that may hint at some change in democratic practices. First it should be noted that Prabowo’s treatment of his coalition partners exhibits a disdain for transactionalism itself. Currently, any semblance of democracy mainly relates to the openness of negotiations between the myriad segments of the broad elite, including the middle class. As much, with the exception of West Papua, there are no serious political threats to the status quo from outside of the elite. Gerindra’s 2014 call for indirect elections rather than direct elections was based on the desire to limit negotiations to the electing of executives by parliament, in contrast to the current long-drawn negotiations that continue up to and throughout the campaign. Gerindra’s call was desirous of more centralist ‘leadership’ over the elite. One factor that may disrupt such transactionalism is the current campaign is the presence of two parties directly linked to Suharto, through family ties, in Prabowo’s coalition. These are Party Garuda and Partai Karya, linked to Tommy Suharto and Titiek Suharto respectively, which may call for a return to Suharto-style policies. This, however, is not clear yet. It also appears that the Prabowo campaign may wish to focus on economic policy questions rather than issues of either political culture or religion. The campaign orientation of the two Presidential candidates should become clearer as the election date draws near.
### Economic challenges

Indonesia's economic challenges

*Swiaga Dharma Negara*

President Joko ‘Jokowi’ Widodo's chances of re-election on 14 April 2019 will very much depend on how he handles the national economy. External factors, such as China’s economic slowdown and the trend of trade protectionism have put pressure on Indonesia's trade balance. The tightening of monetary policy in the US and other advanced economies has triggered capital outflows from emerging markets, including Indonesia. These developments have strained Indonesia's current account deficit and weakened its currency.

Moreover, the rise in world oil prices and the weakening rupiah have impacted the economy, putting pressure on the state budget and on domestic prices. Internally, the government has to tackle issues like the widening fiscal deficit, slow investment, and on domestic prices. Internally, the government has to tackle issues like the widening fiscal deficit, slow investment, sluggish manufacturing sector, and the increase in the borrowing cost for businesses.

In line with rising public pessimism about the economic situation, Jokowi’s political opponents have criticized him for mismanaging the economy. They have argued that he is responsible for the country’s stagnating growth and for the rising external debt that has increased the country’s financial vulnerability. They also claim that the government has failed in maintaining the value of the national currency. The rupiah (Rp) depreciated beyond the so-called psychological barrier of Rp 15,000 per US dollar in October 2018, and this was despite Bank Indonesia having raised its benchmark interest rate five times since May, to 5.75%. The question is, how strong is Indonesia’s economic fundamentals actually are.

Relatively strong fundamentals

If one were to look at key macroeconomic indicators such as growth, inflation and foreign reserves, the Indonesian economy offers no real reason for concern. Compared to the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the 2013 Taper Tantrum, and the recent emerging market crisis, the Indonesian economy exhibits relatively stable growth, coupled with low inflation rate and higher foreign exchange reserve. Moreover, Indonesia’s external debt level is also relatively low, at 34% per cent of GDP, compared with 116 per cent during the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis.

Meanwhile, there is one potential source of vulnerability in the economy, and that is its expanding current-account deficit. The tightening of monetary policy in the US and Euro region, together with general tightening of financial conditions have exerted considerable pressure on the financial stability of emerging market economies, including Indonesia. Portfolio investors have been withdrawing their investments from these markets, particularly those with a large current account deficit, such as Argentina and Turkey. Both have seen their currencies plummet since the beginning of this year. To a lesser extent, Indonesia’s vulnerability is in this type of capital outflow since a large proportion of its current-account deficit is financed by portfolio investment. Failure to manage its current-account deficit will certainly put Indonesia under increased risk of financial instability.

### Economic challenges

While the key indicators are strong and the country’s economic fundamentals remain resilient, there are challenges that loom ahead for the administration.

First, it must find ways to deal with the country’s current-account deficit. A large current-account deficit dominated by portfolio investments makes for economic vulnerability. The government’s efforts to attract FDI need to be complemented with reforming regulations that constrain the expansion of its manufacturing sector and export performance, including revision of the 2003 law to boost the growth of labour-intensive exports. Moreover, the expected fiscal space, the government should re-evaluate all projects listed as national strategic projects and begin to be more selective in prioritizing them, and be more selective in prioritizing them, and be more selective in prioritizing them, and be more selective in prioritizing them, and be more selective in prioritizing them.

Second, the government must carefully implement and monitor its import restriction policy, including the local content requirement (TKDN) policy and the mandatory use of a 20 per cent blended biodiesel (B20) mix. Local content requirement, if too restrictive, may adversely affect industrial performance and its competitiveness. A more buoyant environment for export should be prioritised. The B20 policy also needs to be supported by a clear implementation strategy for fear of it failing, as in the past.

*Swiaga Dharma Negara is Senior Fellow and Coordinator of the Indonesia Studies Programme at the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute. This article is condensed from his Perspective piece which can be found here: https://tinyurl.com/iseasmedialist2018*
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Until recently, Hmong studies has overwhelmingly focused on the more accessible Hmong populations in Thailand, Laos, and Western diasporas, despite the fact that three quarters of Hmong live in Thailand, Laos, and Western diasporas, despite the fact that three quarters of Hmong live in Thailand, Laos, and Western diasporas, despite the fact that three quarters of Hmong live in Thailand, Laos, and Western diasporas, despite the fact that three quarters of Hmong live in Thailand, Laos, and Western diasporas, despite the fact that three quarters of Hmong live in Thailand, Laos, and Western diasporas, despite the fact that three quarters of Hmong live in Thailand, Laos, and Western diasporas.

Religion and Charity: The Social Life of Goodness in Chinese Societies


Abuses China Langda - Min Laoshu Engai.png
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Religion and Charity: The Social Life of Goodness in Chinese Societies

n Religion and Charity: The Social Life of Goodness in Chinese Societies, Robert Weller, Julia Huang, Keping Wu, and Lizhu Fan provide a comparative study of what the authors respectively call “industrialized philanthropy” and “the unlimited good” – they have also been shaped and reconfigured by the local historical and political situations in each of these locations.

Weller et al. propose the concept of industrialized philanthropy to describe three interrelated phenomena at the core of religious philanthropic practices in China, Taiwan, and Malaysia. Industrialized philanthropy entails large-scale philanthropic practices that are “increasingly rationalizing and bureaucratizing”, with institutions employing accounting methods, forming boards of directors, recruiting members, using new media, and developing relations with governments (p.2). It engenders and relies on a new vision of the self that makes autonomous decisions, embodies a vision of universal goodness, and voluntarily dedicates time and resources to the causes of doing good. Weller et al. term this new sense of goodness the unlimited good; it is a form of goodness that espouses great love and unlimited good’ – they have also been shaped and reconfigured by the local historical and political situations in each of these locations.

Musical minorities

Musical Minorities: The Hmong Ethnoscapes in Northern Vietnam


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Musical Minorities: The Hmong Ethnoscapes in Northern Vietnam

The book’s main argument is that “attempts to categorize Hmong music by using cultural traits such as music are fullfilled unless one cuts out the inconsistencies, the participatory discourses, and local community memories of practice and reclassify what was previously the so-called ‘Hmong flute’ (the milo), the iconic sound of Hmong ethnicity in Vietnam, which is in fact not a native Hmong instrument but created by an ethnic Kinh (Vietnamese majority) in the 1970s. While O’Brien acknowledges the creative possibilities of such hybridised, unequal majority-minority power relations are never far away as Kinh representations of Hmong culture tend to dismiss minority voices. One strange feature of the book is the order of chapters. O’Brien starts with two chapters on the importance of Hmong state and media influence as a form of cultural imperialism, arbitrarily categorising and assimilating minority cultural practices, before focusing on Hmong traditional music and folklore in Chapter 3. The book’s core argument may have been delivered more powerfully if the reader were to first appreciate the plurality and depth of Hmong musical cultures, and then move on to observe the destructive effects of such cultural imperialism. Of course, this is only one side of the story and in later chapters O’Brien highlights the agency of Hmong music on accommodating the shifting, adapting to shifting external pressures and opportunities such as tourism, Christianity, and Hmong transnationalism. Nevertheless, the book ends with a warning that “although the multiplicity of styles enhances the resilience of their cultural practices, certain
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Chandini Singh

Remittance Income and Social Resilience among Migrant Households in Rural Bangladesh

New York: Palgrave Macmillan
ISBN 9781137577517

The case for studying migration and its outcomes

The issue of human migration has never been more prominent. The World Bank's latest Groundswell Report (Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration, The World Bank, 19 March 2018) predicts that Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America could see more than 140 million people move within their countries' borders by 2050. Simultaneously, the International Migration Report 2017 (Highlights), United Nations, 18 December 2017) found that 3.2 per cent of the world's population, or international migrants, were 49 per cent since 2000. But what do these numbers mean for the experience of migration? How does the ever-increasing flow of migrants shape lives of those who move and those who are left behind? And do remittances really help improve quality of life? Remittance Income and Social Resilience among Migrant Households in Rural Bangladesh answers these questions by drawing on rich empirical evidence from Bangladesh, a country at the interface of poverty, rapid development, and a large, increasingly mobile population. The book focuses on the impacts of remittances on migrant households, especially on those who are left behind, to draw conclusions about how households use remittances to change their life circumstances, adapt to crises, and plan for the future. To study the impacts of remittances, Mohammad Jalal Uddin Sikder, Peter Harry Ballis, and Vaughn Higgins use the lens of social resilience, commonly understood as the ability to bounce back or cope in the face of substantial adversity. Early in the book, the authors question the idea of remittances only being 'inflows of money from migrants to their families' saying they go beyond monetary flows to encompass technological transfers and social remittances such as skills, practices, and identities. The book draws on in-depth interviews with 35 migrant households – a small number that compensates in depth what it lacks in breadth. Chapters 1 and 2 set the context through a review of the extensive literature on the role of remittances in household income and consumption. Importantly, rather than exploring this seemingly binary relationship of remittances and household spending, the authors expand the 'uses' of remittances by assessing their impacts on social resilience.

Religion–state relations

Weller et al. challenge two dominant hypotheses in the study of engaged religion: the interfacing and the state factor hypotheses. While the former assumes that state interference with grass-roots philanthropies leads to the deterioration of the non-state domains, the latter attributes the contemporary proliferation of grassroots charities to state's failure to provide social assistance. Both of these hypotheses, the authors insist, do not hold up well in the contexts of China, Taiwan, and Malaysia. On the one hand, the state in these three societies are neither failed nor weak states. All three states are powerful enough to regulate and interfere with philanthropic causes, and neither Taiwan nor Malaysia ever tried to control religious activities in the way that the state controls religious activities in China. This stands in stark contrast with previous forms of charitable activities by local Chinese temples and lineage associations whose leaders are ‘relatively wealthy, middle-aged or older, and always in power’ (p.105). Weller et al. observe that despite certain shared characteristics, civic mixing does vary depending on social structures. While civil mixing in China and Taiwan harkens back to socialist morality and the Kuomintang's civilizing campaign respectively, civic mixing in Malaysia attempts to go beyond the Chinese ethnic enclave and ‘thus breaking away from the ghettization of purely Chinese associational life’ (pp.125–6). It is also important to note that the Chinese understanding of goodness has a long heritage in Chinese notions of benevolence (Li) and imperial love (義, the Daoist vision of cosmic impartiality, the Daoist vision of cosmic impartiality, and the Buddhist field of merits and bodhissattva ideals (pp.90–100). In tracing these linkages to Chinese traditions and the varieties of civic mixing, Weller et al. refrain from calling these new volunteers ‘neo-liberal’ and thus destabilize the usage of neo-liberalism as a sweeping analytical lens to examine new forms of religious voluntarism and philanthropy. As such, Weller et al. join other scholars of East Asia (e.g., Donald M. Norrie, Is China becoming neoliberal?, Critique of Anthropology 28(2), 2008: 95–106; Christina Schwenkel and Ann Marie Leahokshen, How is neoliberalism good to think Vietnam? How is Vietnam good to think neoliberalism?, Positions 20(2), 2012: 376–90) in registering their concern for the complex and multidimensional nature of the book. It will provide the roadmap for innovative anthropological theory on the subject of China, Taiwan, and Malaysia and their relationships to East Asian societies and encourage further research into religious voluntarism and what Joel Robbins calls ‘the anthropology of the good’ (Joel Robbins, Beyond the suffering subject: Remittance Income and Social Resilience among Migrant Households in Rural Bangladesh is a useful read for migration researchers, development practitioners, and students interested in the complex and multidimensional nature of the research. Overall, an engaging read, what adds depth to the analysis is the use of extensive quotes from migrants and family members left behind and the rich empirical evidence even in contexts that are unfamiliar with the Bangladesh or South Asian context, an opportunity to understand local conditions with respect to global trends. While I would have enjoyed a deeper conceptual engagement with social resilience, the book definitely adds to the current migration and livelihoods literature.
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Ruins are everywhere. In Asia, aspirations for socio-economic development have led to the rapid transformation of the environmental, social and economic landscape. Led by a diverse range of local, national and international actors these transformations have informed the creation of new forms of ruins and ruinations, the disintegration of recognizable forms whether they be material, ideational or institutional. From ruined environmental landscapes, abandoned industrial estates, derelict housing estates, failed infrastructural projects to political disruptions, economic breakdowns and cultural disintegration, ruins are ubiquitous and varied in their manifestations. Ruins produce long-term effects and affect societies and individuals in expected and, often, unexpected ways. Therefore, these ruptures and their afterlife call for a wider conceptualisation of ruins that locates their materiality within wider social, political and economic contexts.

Objects and institutions generate social effect in their preservation as well as in their destruction and disposal. Thus, what we allow to disintegrate, to fall into ruin, is as powerful an assessment of our collective lives and histories as those objects and institutions we preserve and allow to flourish. Although sites of ruin and ruination can be ambiguous, unmoored from their present surrounding, they seldom remain dormant, often giving rise to new spatial and social conglomerations, new networks and infrastructures, or creating yet another ruin. Despite the apparent inertia around ruins, they are dynamic and act as metaphors for the ruptures and transitions at different stages of the socio-political history of a place or a people. Relegating ruins and historical processes of ruination to the past, therefore limits ways of engaging with and understanding the world.

Ruins can tell us much about the present, as they can of the past. In the Focus of this issue of the Newsletter we concentrate on the social, political and economic “afterlife of ruins” that have emerged from the structural fallout of rapid cycles of industrialisation and abandonment, urban growth, infrastructural development, modern state building and conflict in Asia where the “present has not moved too far from the past and the future is at best uncertain.” Through an engagement with ruins of the past as well as the present, the processes of ruination and their impacts on people living amidst these ruins, we aim to contribute to a nuanced understanding of development and change underway in Asia.

Agency of ruins
Ruins can be both objects and/or processes and a deeper understanding of the afterlife of ruins necessitates an interrogation of the wider entanglements and the actors that produce them. This in turn makes ruins and ruinations an important, albeit often neglected, vantage point through which to explore the various temporal and spatial interconnections between political/economic institutions, the cultural/historical structures that enable its proliferation and the people living and sometimes, creating these ruins. In ruins, the processes of decay and the obscure agencies of intrusive humans and non-humans transform the familiar material order disturbing the orderly, “purification of space”.

Blurring boundaries, both spatially as crumbling structures colonise their immediate surroundings and temporally as they articulate the overlaying of temporalities. While it is important to consider the function of these ruins prior to the decay and eventual disintegration, the impact of ruins goes beyond the “mulch of matter which profanes the order of things and their separate individuality,” to affect people, their lives and their interactions in the world. The afterlife of ruins draws our attention towards the changed socio-economic realities that groups and individuals are suddenly faced with, the different contestations that emerge as a result of scarcity of resources, the new aspirations for the future that sometimes fuel ruinations (see Woodworth in this issue) and the aftermath of abandoned futures. In understanding ruins, the linearity of the past or events is upstaged by a host of intersecting temporalities that collide and merge, enabling the emergence of different or conflictual narratives. Thus, while ruins may be a way of reflecting on the past, the failure of political institutions or the breakdown of economic systems, they can also be used to challenge and/or re-consider the ways of engaging with the dominant narrative. Focussing on the afterlife of ruins and ruinations, therefore offers different perspectives into the conditions, negotiations, challenges and vulnerabilities that have emerged as a result of accelerated development in Asia. Furthermore, these introspections can offer insights and can act as either critical counterpoints to complicate and critique received historical narratives or as a platform for alternative, marginalised histories.

Continued overleaf on page 30
Ruins are ruins precisely because they are considered without meaning, value or importance in the present. They become relevant only when their disintegration affects some aspect of our lives. While some ruins are preserved and refilled for their spatial form and/or history of suffering and resistance, others are abandoned, allowed to decay as simultaneously a reminder of the past and of the impossible future (see Venhovens in this issue). However, the ruination of landscapes, culture, livelihoods or identity usually revives in different, sometimes unexpected ways, to affect nations of belonging, history and identity. Ruins can therefore be sites of different scales and temporalities. Thus, sites of ruin and processes of ruination can often become objects or experiences in which ruins continue to produce affect over different periods of history. Ruins are always ruins of something and thus, the sites of modern ruins and ruination discussed here are imbued with histories of former ruination through the assemblage of colonisation, frontier making, capitalistic resource extraction and exploitation, war and state-building. As the papers highlight, modern ruins in Asia are often built upon the structural and political reconfiguration of pre-existing cultural, political and economic dynamics under conditions of globalisation and state-led neo-liberalisation policies. Ruins can be both ‘fast’ (created through abrupt transitions like war, natural disaster or economic crisis) or ‘slow’ (slipping into ruination more gradually, side-lined by socio-economic transitions or incrementally abandoned). In Asia, ruins and ruination exemplify how both these conditions can often co-produce the identity of these groups and Meena traces the latter of the ruins of violent conflict. These new ruins are a by-product of colonial and state-led neo-liberalisation policies. For example, ruination through ruins that serve as reminders of their violent past and impossible futures. The papers illustrate different ways of understanding the relationship between the border and the everyday negotiations of the bordering neighbour, has led to the proliferation of infrastructural ruins. Nonetheless, these ruins have also contributed to new understandings of development and the relationship between state and society. Like the case of energy boom-towns in Ordos, these ruins have been built on hope and aspirations for a better future that have led to the creation of new ruins.

Notes
5 ibid. Edensor, p.318

Above: Dirt road running through palms of plantation in West Kalimantan along the Indonesia-Malaysia border. Photo by Michael Elferink.

Below: Rusting pump plumb in the middle of a border boom-town in Sikkin, India (Photo by Mona Chettri, 2016).

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When infrastructural ruins inspire political reorganization

Sindhumata Hargyono

The Indonesian border became central to the national political discourse in 2014. The newly elected president, Joko Widodo, identified the border as one of the central issues of his administration. Widodo argued that the state had been absent for people on the territorial margins, and that citizens on the border had less access to welfare than those located closer to urban centers. In a bid to change the fate of the marginalized citizens on the border, Widodo campaigned for “developing Indonesia from the margins.” In so doing, Widodo utilized a developmentalist paradigm that predated his regime. The paradigm is an invitation to alter the gaze toward the border, from seeing it as the backyard to seeing it as the front yard of the nation.

The generative effect of failure

The construction of infrastructure always carries political significance. In the context of border governance, it carries the imposition of the state’s territoriality—as both the marker of sovereign space and as a political intervention. But what happens when such a political campaign encounters the memory of failure? In this section, I will look at the way that failure becomes politically generative for the villagers amid the production of the front yard border.

As I have indicated, the on-going infrastructural development in Long Nawang village is just another layer on the pallimpsest of infrastructural development. The landscape of the village has already been decorated with infrastructural ruins. These infrastructural ruins are ruinous because, despite their completion, they have never fully and felicitously performed their function. In other words, these material structures are ruinous because they fail to comply with their objectification.1 Infrastructural ruins, however, are everything but material superfluous. Here, I look at infrastructure as having a dialectical relationship with politics.2 Consequently, infrastructure, in any of its material-temporal forms, simultaneously embodies political power of the state and the possibility of political practice. The temporality of ruin, that can be judged only through its (in)felicitous material remains, plays a central role in inaugaturing spaces for political action. Such an understanding is possible only when we realize that infrastructure is never built for eternity, and each time an infrastructural project is carried out, the materiality of infrastructure oscillates between the time-space of ruination and that of renewal.3 Thus, ruin is not merely an autonomous temporal feature in some teleological timeline. Rather, ruin should be imagined within a non-teleological temporality of infrastructure, where ruin is always standing on its horizon. Imagining ruin in this way enables us to go beyond the narrative of infrastructural violence—that is, the absence of public service as a form of violence—and instead look at the moment of infrastructural failure as generative to political action.4 That is, when ruins inaugurate a space for political actions.

The materiality of infrastructural ruins in Long Nawang village preserves the memory of the state’s incapacity in fulfilling its promises. Villagers experience this failure on a daily basis. For instance, despite a tall base transceiver tower having been erected in 2013, four years later a mobile signal still appears only sporadically in the village due to the dearth of gas supply. In spite of having solar power plants, villagers are forced to power the village office’s diesel machine to access up to twelve hours of electricity per day. The sporadicity of public service in juxtaposition with the visibility of infrastructural materiality reminds the villagers on a daily basis that the imagination of a new frontier of infrastructure and the availability of basic public services is not necessarily parallel. Each time the village’s electricity is turned off at 6 AM, the villagers receive a reminder about the state of ruination that is eating away at infrastructures in their village. It is within the time-space of ruin that the experiencing of failed objectification of infrastructural promises becomes politically generative for the villagers amid the reinstatement of infrastructural development on the border. Caught between the memory of failure and the desire to take part in the front yard future, the village office has decided to introduce a new political organization: a development watch committee. This village apparatus was created by a newly elected village head in 2017. At the time, the Widodo administration had built a diesel power plant in the village. Nevertheless, a familiar story unfolded: as the electrical poles to distribute electric power failed to materialize, the new diesel power plant quickly became an infrastructural ruin. As the village cannot bear any more non-functional infrastructures, the village governance has given the development watch apparatus three tasks: (1) to stop any on-going development project and (2) to solve the problem of infrastructural ruins through meetings with relevant state institutions. When I visited the village in 2018, I witnessed the fruit of the development watch committee. Nowadays, the village has a functional telecommunication tower and solar power plant, the village governance had sent development planning to the district-level and province-level state officials. The village officials proposed to power the solar panel. As the solar power plant could not function because no official handover had taken place after the completion of its construction. The proposal was approved, and just before I left the village, a state technician and some villagers were working collectively to connect cables from the power plant to the telecommunications tower. Today, as both the telecommunication tower and the solar power plant have been moved to the time-space of renewal, villagers can finally have a fully working mobile signal.

Notes

Altering the gaze toward the border: producing the state’s front yard

This development paradigm, originally conceived by the Indonesian National Planning Agency of the previous regime, imagines the state space as a house, where the border functions as the front yard or the front porch. In a culturally-specific logic, this paradigm carries the idea that an ideal house should prioritize spending resources and time to assure the propriety of the appearance of the front yard rather than dealing with the backyard, as the latter is invisible to the eyes of outsiders. Here, the front yard is understood to be representative of the quality of the people who inhabit the house. Just like this ideal house, Widodo sees the border as representing the quality of Indonesia as a nation. The current condition of the Indonesian border area is problematic for the regime, however, because despite ideally serving as the front yard, it looks more like a backyard in that, in the regime’s judgment, it is characterized by impoverishment, rurality, isolation from the domestic space, and illicit cross-border dependency.

In a bid to materialize the front yard border, Widodo’s administration designed development planning that centers on the idea of designating new growth poles on the border. Border villages are handpicked by state officials to be these future growth centers. State officials expect these rural growth centers, through territorial infrastructural development projects, to flourish as prosperous border cities in the future. This article focuses on the experience of one such border village: Long Nawang village. The village is undergoing a district-splitting process and is projected to become the capital of a new border district called

Ruined pondscapes in North Kalimantan, Indonesia

Thomas Mikkelsen

The frontier of large-scale shrimp aquaculture arrived in North Kalimantan in the early 1990s, boomed during the Asian Financial crisis of 1998-1999 when the ruipiah was weak, and expanded in the years afterwards. Since then things have changed, as ponds have started dying off. Today, as especially downriver ponds are abandoned, caretakers and businessmen find new ways to extract resources in the ruins, maintaining debt-based patronage relationships that often stretch back generations and span several waves of different resource frontiers and territorializations. Resource frontiers created tension and conflict over land, but so did the following ruination, and struggle for control over new resources.

Shrimp aquaculture is not the first resource frontier to wax and wane on the northeast coast of Borneo, what is now the Indonesian province of North Kalimantan, and it is not the first one to produce ruined, altered landscapes either. For hundreds if not thousands of years, commodities have been extracted, traded and shipped off from forests and coastal reefs, reaching distant destinations. Slaves, rattans, eaglewood and gold dust from land; holothurians and prized shells from the bottom of the sea. Each manual work. They are employed by thousands of owners, most of whom live in the city. The owners are indebted to a class of buyers, often called brokers, who finance their ponds, the machinery needed, the shrimp fry, their nets, the ice, the gasoline. In turn, the brokers will have exclusive rights to the catch – part of which he will take as repayment of the loans. The ponds will produce the fish, which will be sold at a discounted rate. The fish himself is often indebted too, to richer men known as bos besar, who manage a portfolio of minor pond owners, and the master storages, factories owned by Chinese or Japanese conglomerates, who ultimately buy, process, freeze and export all quality shrimp farmed in the area.

The infrastructure and ruins of today’s resource frontier, extensive shrimp aquaculture, is impossible to miss when arriving by plane. From the air, these pondscapes, mosaics of greens, browns and blues, have an eerie likeness to those cross sections of cells found in biology textbooks. In order to maximize the productive surface, ponds are shaped to fit each other, while following the twisting and curling streams they depend on for fresh water and for disposal of wastes. Streams that run into rivulets, that run into rivers, that run into the sea during low tide, and reverse during high tide, create long stretches of labyrinthe brackish waterways. Once meandering freely through mangrove forests, the streams are now held in place by the floodgates, the dikes and the embankments characteristic of shrimp aquaculture; some abandoned ruins, others still producing.

On debt-based patronage

The political economies of the pondscapes follow a similar logic as the ever-branching rivulets. Many thousand men are hired as caretakers, responsible for doing all the manual work. They are employed by thousands of owners, most of whom live in the city. The owners are indebted to a class of buyers, often called brokers, who finance their ponds, the machinery needed, the shrimp fry, their nets, the ice, the gasoline. In turn, the brokers will have exclusive rights to the catch – part of which he will take as repayment of the loans. The owners are dependent on inputs from the factory, where riverbanks are washed away with upstream. Their herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers foul the water, and the clearing of forests changes drainage dynamics, leading to surges of fresh water through the otherwise forested river systems during heavy rainfall, which are deadly to the farmed shrimp.

Others blame the upstream hydraulic mining, where riverbanks are washed away with high-pressure hoses, and mercury is used in the process of extracting the precious flakes of gold. But take a look at the shelves of any well-stocked pond owner and you will find a collection of products to match the chemical shelf of any plantation: pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics and an assortment of unhealthy relationships (in some cases, even prior to shrimp aquaculture), thereby enforcing the predatory box dynamics so visible in city geography.

Ruined pondscapes

In recent times, older ponds have started to fall into disuse, and are quickly deteriorating. The mud embankments that encircle them, once laboriously maintained by hard-working men, crumble and leak while the abandoned sheds that once held families are scavenged for building materials. The ponds themselves chafe with fast-growing palms and the brightly-leaved saplings of mango trees sprout around the stumps of trees cut down years ago. Around these ruins are clusters of ponds that are still maintained, restocked and harvested in the old days, but production is erratic and harvests frequently fail. Sometimes failure can be predicted with the help of subtle signs, such as an overrepresentation of a certain kind of freshwater snail, too much or too little of a certain kind of algae; other times the signs are obvious even to the untrained eye: the water smells rotten, has an unusual color or might be covered by an oily film. But mostly, failure is not evident before the pond is emptied through a huge net into the river at low tide. Anticipation turns into disappointment in a matter of hours. These ponds are in a process of continual ruination that ties the choices of the past together with the possibilities of tomorrow.

Explanations for these failures vary. Most of the owners and caretakers I spoke with blame the expanding palm-oil plantations upstream. Their herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers foul the water, and the clearing of forests changes drainage dynamics, leading to surges of fresh water through the otherwise brackish river systems during heavy rainfall, which are deadly to the farmed shrimp. Others blame the upstream hydraulic mining, where riverbanks are washed away with high-pressure hoses, and mercury is used in the process of extracting the precious flakes of gold. But take a look at the shelves of any well-stocked pond owner and you will find a collection of products to match the chemical shelf of any plantation: pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics and an assortment of unhealthy relationships (in some cases, even prior to shrimp aquaculture), thereby enforcing the predatory box dynamics so visible in city geography.

... crabs are also active co-creators of ruin, presenting opportunity in the ruins [...] for the people working at the bottom of the supply chain.
powders and mixtures, all extensively used. Others again point to bacterial or viral epidemics that spread through the monocrop shrimp ponds, where the accumulated buildup of waste from billions of shrimp form a hotbed of infection, which easily spreads from pond to pond through the waterways connecting them all. Ruination is an active process co-created by many actors, human and non-human alike. It is not something than is solely thrust upon affected pond-owners from the outside, although that is what pond owners and workers will tell you.

Ruination leads to downriver ponds being abandoned every season. In the remaining ones, owners maintain production. Some because of sheer stubbornness, others because of mounting debts that desperately need repaying (by that windfall harvest that grows ever more unlikely as the ponds further deteriorate). For the owners of the ponds this is critical, as they repay their loans with the value of the catch. Caretakers, many of whom are landless immigrants from neighboring Sulawesi, are paid in percentages, and so failed harvests equal punishment.

### Productive ruins

In the downriver patchwork of ruins and struggling ponds, all caretakers I met supplemented their income by collecting and selling mango crab, the common name for what is actually at least four different species (Scylla spp.) A prized delicacy, sold alive in the metropolises of Asia. Naturally occurring in the brackish waters of estuaries and mangroves in the Indo-Pacific, the crabs have adapted and proliferated in the pondscape. The sheltered ponds, stocked with feed and free of some of their natural predators, are near perfect environments for the crabs, who can better tolerate variations in salinity, and levels of ammonia and oxygen than farmed shrimp can. They even thrive in some of the ruined ponds where the shrimp have died off from pollution. Productive ruins in ruins.

Mangrove crabs hide during the day in tunnels dug in the intertidal zone, and forage during night. In the wild, this helps soil aeration and increases soil turnover rate in the mangrove to the extent that biologists have labelled them ecosystem engineers. However, in the ponds the burrowing crabs undermine the embankments, leading to leaks and accelerating the ruination. Sometimes a serious leak caused by burrowing crabs will be the final straw if reconstruction of the embankment is unfeasible, and thus they are considered pests by pond owners. Maintaining embankments is backbreaking work, done with hoe and shovel; but repairing a collapsed embankment is expensive and requires heavy machinery, something the owner would consider twice in an already degraded pond. For the caretakers, however, the mangrove crabs constitute an opportunity for a relatively stable income; in struggling ponds the sale of crabs often exceeds the salaries they are paid by the owners, and in failed ponds crabs are their only source of revenue. At night when the crabs are active, caretakers don headlights and rubber boots, and stalk the pond embankments with large nets. The presence of ruined and abandoned ponds increases the area the caretaker can cover at night and the number of crabs he can catch. Among the overgrown ruins, however, one has to be careful. Not only crabs but saltwater crocodiles too are attracted by the abandoned ponds, only visited occasionally by a caretaker on the hunt for crab. Downstream the large majority of them are juveniles, but occasionally a caretaker goes missing, save for a foot or disgorged sandal. I am told, as long as you don’t swear or throw things at them, the ibu ibu [grandmothers], as they are called, will not attack you, but in the ruined landscapes you never know.

Several times a week, a speedboat with a collector of crabs will visit the caretaker’s shack, buying any live crabs he might have to offer. Collectors also peddle in everyday items such as cigarettes and instant noodles, and some in more clandestine wares such as methamphetamine, a relatively common drug in the Indo-Pacific. So the crabs are not only a benefit to the collector and caretaker, but also to the drug trade. This is not without any risk though, as the crabs feed on the valuable shrimp larvae and thus the collectors can end up with a 50-50 split. If the owner learns of this practice, the caretaker in question will surely be fired. Thus, the crabs thrive in the pondscape, even in those that are ruined and abandoned. But the crabs are also active co-creators of ruin, presenting opportunity in the ruins of monocrop pond aquaculture for the people working at the bottom of the supply chain. When the crab ends up on the plate in a Singaporean restaurant, it has become an object of luxury, of desire. Its past as a pest in the ruins of old extractions, retaining and solidifying systems of immense inequality that sometimes span centuries, but also presenting possibilities for the astute worker, and thus the cycle begins anew.
The Thar Desert has a rich history of the circulation of people, commodities, cattle, ideas, and services. The mobile communities of the desert had close connections and associations across the regions of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Sind, and even Afghanistan, prior to Partition. However, in 1971 the India-Pakistan border was demarcated and it passed right through the Thar Desert, separating these well-connected areas (in terms of trade and socio-economic exchange) of present-day Rajasthan, Kutch, Sind, and Bahawalpur. The Thar frontier, a crossroads of geographical, environmental, social, cultural and economic relations, was thus suddenly split between two nation-states: India and Pakistan. The demarcation of the border, along with the associated security practices, heavy militarisation, and checkpoints, has severely impacted the traditional lifestyles of the inhabitants in these areas. The ensuing regulations on varied forms of previously unregulated mobilities, and irrigation-based developmental initiatives through canal extension, aimed to encourage a settled lifestyle and agrarian expansion. Consequently, many semi-nomadic pastoral communities like the Raikas established themselves in arid areas near the western border areas of Bikaner with agriculture as their prime source of income. The modern Indian state’s encouragement of a sedentary lifestyle, and the enhancement of agricultural practices through the development of the Indira Gandhi Canal, transformed western Rajasthan and the lives of people who live there. The ruination of pastoralism, and the extension of the Indira Gandhi Canal in the 1980s), and the complete sealing of the India-Pakistan border in the 1990s. Against this background, this article explores the social, political, and environmental entanglements that have led to the (social) ruination of pastoralism, and focuses on the implications those ruins have had on the pastoral way of life and the pastoralists’ notions of belonging, history, and identity.

On the western border of Rajasthan (India), adjacent to Pakistan, pastoralist communities like the Raikas sustain themselves these days primarily with canal-based agriculture. Prior to Indian independence in 1947 their way of life was generally characterised by livestock (mainly camels and sheep), and movements associated with animals in search of grazing and water. The changes in the traditional lives of the inhabitants are a result of significant political events, such as the Partition of India (1947), the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971, irrigation-based development (such as the land settlement schemes of the 1950s-1980s and the extension of the Indira Gandhi Canal in the 1980s), and the complete sealing of the India-Pakistan border in the 1990s. Against this background, this article explores the social, political, and environmental entanglements that have led to the (social) ruination of pastoralism, and focuses on the implications those ruins have had on the pastoral way of life and the pastoralists’ notions of belonging, history, and identity.

Ruins of the pastoral lifestyle are observable in the memories and experiences of the pastoralists, and in the decline of pastoral practices, such as the traditional branding of the community’s livestock (daag) and the underground rainwater storage tanks littered throughout the desert (tanka). The Thar Desert comprises mainly vast barren lands, but for the occasional variation of grasses, and in some parts continuously moving sand dunes. Villages of western Bikaner live in extreme arid conditions with frequent food shortages. However, for many generations, the mobile communities adapted to the desert environment, reflected in their way of life (such as their special relationship with animals). For semi-nomadic pastoralists and tribes of the Thar, mobility was not only an important means of survival, but also their socio-cultural identity. Tradition, custom, livelihood, religion, and socio-political position in society may differ between the various groups, but the idea of ‘mobility’ was central to their ways of life and still remains ingrained.1 According to the popular narrative of groups within the region, pastoralists followed the semi-nomadic lifestyle of moving livestock during the dry season and a settled life of cultivating crops in the rainy season. Irrigation was only possible during the rainy season (termed as berani-khet) by the villagers), and so subsistence relied on livestock products for the rest of the year. Villagers learned to depend less on water and more on buttermilk (Choach) and milk (i.e., camel milk). The natural vegetation of the region such as sewan grass, phog, khejri, tree, and wild grasses, sustained the animals. During the drought and dry season, people survived on animal products, such as wool, meat, milk, and dung; either for self-consumption, sales, or exchange for other household goods.2 Depending on the environmental conditions, many communities even adopted a combination of occupations for livelihood and survival. For instance, the Maghwalis, Nalas, and Kumbhars were involved in agricultural labour, along with the rearing of livestock. The western Thar region contained mainly brackish-water wells that were used primarily for watering livestock or consumed by villagers during the dry season and in times of drought, after mixing it with buttermilk and pear millet flour/bajra.3 Given the scarcity of water and arid conditions, rainwater was stored in the underground water-tanks (locally termed as tankas/kund) for drinking and other household purposes. The villagers built these tankas by digging a hole of up to 300 feet deep, then plastering the opening with a layer of gypsum and ash (nakha) and covering with a wooden lid; water was stored for at least seven months in these tankas. During periods of water shortage, women and men would collect water from the tankas; and this was mixed with brackish well water for the animals. Throughout pre-independence, even crops (like bajra, guar) were cultivated on the sandy tracts of the desert with the usage of camels for tilling and sowing seeds. In addition, camels were essential for migration and transportation to distant locations of the desert. With the system of rainwater tanks the people were able to meet their drinking water needs to some extent, but for the requirements of their large herds of livestock they would seasonally migrate to other, more humid, areas. Depending on the intensity of the dry conditions, the movements ranged from days to months, to even a year. For these migrations, most of the communities maintained cordial socio-economic relations.

Ruins of social, cultural and economic pastoral life

Villagers learned to depend less on water and more on buttermilk (Choach) and milk (i.e., camel milk). The natural vegetation of the region such as sewan grass, phog, khejri, tree, and wild grasses, sustained the animals. During the drought and dry season, people survived on animal products, such as wool, meat, milk, and dung; either for self-consumption, sales, or exchange for other household goods. Depending on the environmental conditions, many communities even adopted a combination of occupations for livelihood and survival. For instance, the Maghwalis, Nalas, and Kumbhars were involved in agricultural labour, along with the rearing of livestock. The western Thar region contained mainly brackish-water wells that were used primarily for watering livestock or consumed by villagers during the dry season and in times of drought, after mixing it with buttermilk and pear millet flour/bajra. Given the scarcity of water and arid conditions, rainwater was stored in the underground water-tanks (locally termed as tankas/kund) for drinking and other household purposes. The villagers built these tankas by digging a hole of up to 300 feet deep, then plastering the opening with a layer of gypsum and ash (nakha) and covering with a wooden lid; water was stored for at least seven months in these tankas. During periods of water shortage, women and men would collect water from the tankas; and this was mixed with brackish well water for the animals. Throughout pre-independence, even crops (like bajra, guar) were cultivated on the sandy tracts of the desert with the usage of camels for tilling and sowing seeds. In addition, camels were essential for migration and transportation to distant locations of the desert. With the system of rainwater tanks the people were able to meet their drinking water needs to some extent, but for the requirements of their large herds of livestock they would seasonally migrate to other, more humid, areas. Depending on the intensity of the dry conditions, the movements ranged from days to months, to even a year. For these migrations, most of the communities maintained cordial socio-economic relations.

Remembering a migratory experience, an elderly Bishnoi man from Mankasar narrated that during one of the periods of drought (drought), they migrated to the village Gogda (presently named Rod BD after the canal distribution began passing through it), a small village near the main canal and lived there for a year with their entire family and livestock. Anyone in Mankasar with livestock would migrate, and only a few elderly people were left to look after the stock. These migrations could be up to 70-80 km towards the western and north-western Bikaner as water was favourable for drinking. Also, based on the good socio-economic relations between the Bishnois and the inhabitants of Poogal village, they were provided with land for temporary settlement, and were allowed to graze their livestock on the village pastures. Such associations maintained by communities during their migrations and exchanges across the desert have been completely destroyed in the past few decades.

Before the Partition, the entire border region was open. There was a continuous flow of people crossing border areas. It included the states of Sindh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Punjab. These movements in the desert periods were mainly towards humid and rain-fed areas with an aim to access the markets as well as grazing areas for livestock. The social, economic, and cultural life of the inhabitants was dependent on animals—cows for milk, goats for meat and milk, sheep for wool, and camels for transportation and milk. The elderly generations of Raika, Bishnoi, Meghwal, Kaniar, and Raigar communities, residing in the desert for decades, narrated their subsistence on seasonal agriculture with predominant dependence on livestock products, such as milk, wool, and dung. For instance, during the seven year long Satkali famine sheep wool was sold to the banjias (merchants) who would sell it further in the nearby markets. In return, villagers received money which sustained them for at least 4-6 months. This pastoral relationship between animals and human beings in the desert areas of Thar is still remembered in the folkloric traditions, myths and memories of the communities.

The caste-based distinctions between communities are an essential part of the pastoral lifestyle in these rural areas, visible in the daily lives of the communities as well as their narratives of the past. The camel, an essential part of their lifestyle, has also been a unique cultural symbol to maintain caste-based distinctions and social boundaries between communities. Since many of the communities, including the Raikas, Bishnois, and also the Meghwal, bred camels and moved during the dry season, daag (branding) was used on the body of the camel to represent ownership. As narrated by Raika pastoralists, the unique mark on the body of a camel could be used to identify the community and village to which camel belonged. This mark even helped people in tracing misplaced camels to their owners.

Rainwater tanks (tankas) and the symbolic marks on a camel body (daag) were the material representations of the pastoral culture/lifestyle of the Thar region. However, political, social, economic and environmental changes have led to the decline of dependency on these practices, leading to the transformation of pastoral communities. The crucial event which decimated the pastoral culture of the Thar desert was the legal declaration of the area as Pakistan in 1947 and the subsequent wire-fencing and militarisation of the border. This transitory caste into the geo-politically sensitive border in western India. Such practices to maintain territorial security were accompanied by the developmental policies, like the extension of irrigation canals in the region. With the construction of canal lines through the barren desert of Bikaner in the late 1980s, the Rajasthan state government aimed to encourage settled agriculture on the lands distributed to the people. However, with the restrictions on free movement of people and decline of pasture lands, settled agriculture emerged as the only source of livelihood for the pastoral communities. To encourage canal-based agriculture, the government allotted land to lower caste groups, provided agriculture-related monetary subsidies for the construction of water tanks in the fields and establishment of new markets for the sale of farm produce. Therefore, the restrictions on pastoral movements in search of pastures to nearby areas, militarisation of the region, and development of canals collectively led to the ruination of pastoralism, visible in the unused rainwater tanks in the fields and decline in the usage of caste-based symbols on the bodies of camels.

Ruins of pastoralism: loss of culture and traditional livelihood

Conversations with elderly Raika pastoralists living near the India-Pakistan border, revealed that even after the Partition pastoralists attempted and struggled to maintain their traditional pastoral routes across the region. For instance, villagers who were unaware of the new cross-border legacies after Partition tried to move across the newly formed border to graze their animals and search for water resources. Some pastoralists were even able to develop close associations with the Indian Army on the border check-posts and were able to move across the border with their animals through permits issued by the Army. However, as told by elderly Raikas, this soon came to an end with the arrest of pastoralists by the Pakistani Army and eventually, the wars between India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971 led to the complete fencing of the western border in the late 1990s, thereby restricting all cross-border movements. The pastoralists responded to these restrictions by altering their migratory routes to fertile areas within India. However, even these movements declined with the decrease in pasture areas as a result of land settlement policies of the Rajasthani government, extension of the Indira Gandhi Canal, and a prolonged series of droughts and famines within the region. Also, since the 1980s, the grazers (now confined to a few pastoral groups) were required to obtain permits from the panchayat (local civil administration) and police to cross the state borders with their animals. Gradually, all kinds of mobilities and cross-border interactions of the people across the border came to an end. Meanwhile, between 1960 and 1980, there occurred a series of droughts and famines in western Rajasthan. During this period, the government provided necessities like food, water and medicines, however, no such measures were taken for animals which decimated the livestock population of the pastoralists and the villagers alike (as narrated by pastoralists residing in western Bikaner). In addition, road construction and the canal development project was initiated by the government with an objective to provide employment and means of livelihood to the inhabitants through settled agriculture. Indira Gandhi Canal, one of the most significant development projects, was extended from Ganganagar district in the north-west to three western border districts of Rajasthan, i.e., Bikaner, Jaisalmer, and Jodhpur. The efforts in the 1980s canal water was supplied to the villages of western Bikaner. With such initiatives, villages with a pastoral lifestyle were encouraged towards canal-based agriculture and a sedentary way of life. They were encouraged to work either as labourers or producers of vegetables, fruits and cash crops, and the construction of the canal and people’s dependence on it has transformed the traditional pastoral culture into some form of settled agriculture—keeping in the region.

Today, the majority of the population is nomadic in the Thar region. They are allotted through summary settlement by the Pakistan government. Movements with animals are restricted to some pastoralist families, and only for shorter distances. With social, political and economic changes, pastoralists are forced to keep very small groups of animals only within the range of their village area. Instead, all villages are occupied irrespective of their socio-cultural identity as pastoral groups are engaged in agriculture. While nomadic pastoralists across the desert with large flocks of animals and livestock production, many of the elderly Raika pastoralists narrated that due to the shortage of canal water and rainfall, agriculture in the desert was not as successful compared to their former practices of migratory livestock rearing. However, with no other livelihood alternative, they can only remember those times and their relationship to the ruins of pastoralism. The old empty rainwater tanks in their fields continuously remind them of their lost traditions and cultural identity. The representations of the pastoral culture and traditional pastoral life illustrate the emotional and psychological forms and role of the pastoral, as well as the cultural life, which will have a long-lasting impact even on their future generations.

Daag on a camel’s body (Photo credits: Neha Meena, 2017).

Notes
1. Dependency on camels and sheap has been associated with their socio-cultural identity. The claims on traditional identity are often observed in the oral narratives, folkloric histories of the region, and the Rajasthani state. For instance, in the folktales of Panjir, Gogda, Tejaji and Pabuji of Bikaner, the saviours who are also worshipped as local deities have been presented as the protectors of cattle. The cow in the case of Gogda and camels by Pabuji, a saviour of mankind and pastoral work. The cow has also been presented as the protectress of livestock; see Kumar, M. 2003. “The Vedic and Hindu views on cow protection: an ethnic comparison,” in Irrigation and Settlement Patterns in Early Medieval Rajasthan,” The Medieval History Journal 5, pp. 57-84.
2. For instance, villagers would exchange water for wool, ghee (butter), and milk. According to shop owners, to meet their needs of alternative goods such as clothes, paper, sugar, oil, and other household items. The shop owners would then sell their exchanged goods in the market for money.
3. In Baramura village, there were two saltwater wells, the water of which was used for livestock on a rotational basis. The village elders along with Baramura Dev (Thakuri) would organise a meeting in which women who own animals were assigned a day for using the well water per their total number of animals. According to them, those who lived close to the main road for protection of livestock; see Kumar, M. 2012. “Village irrigation,” in Irrigation and Settlement Patterns in Early Medieval Rajasthan,” The Medieval History Journal 5, pp. 57-84.
4. Men would carry water in huge bags known as karembas, and a cloth bag or cloak of gauze. In the coming of the wooden cart in the 1950s, water was transported in big plastic water tanks. Thosar and later replaced with iron water tanks.
5. The dusty animals were transported in a cart with bellows. Saltwater wells, the water of which was used for livestock on a rotational basis. The village elders along with Baramura Dev (Thakuri) would organise a meeting in which women who own animals were assigned a day for using the well water per their total number of animals. According to them, those who lived close to the main road for protection of livestock; see Kumar, M. 2012. “Village irrigation,” in Irrigation and Settlement Patterns in Early Medieval Rajasthan,” The Medieval History Journal 5, pp. 57-84.
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8. Some members of Meghwal community continued to rotate the usage of water from the main water tanks. Those plastic tanks were later replaced with iron water tanks.
9. The dusty animals were transported in a cart with bellows. Saltwater wells, the water of which was used for livestock on a rotational basis. The village elders along with Baramura Dev (Thakuri) would organise a meeting in which women who own animals were assigned a day for using the well water per their total number of animals. According to them, those who lived close to the main road for protection of livestock; see Kumar, M. 2012. “Village irrigation,” in Irrigation and Settlement Patterns in Early Medieval Rajasthan,” The Medieval History Journal 5, pp. 57-84.
Ruins are not mere residuals of man-made structures; they also include narratives and histories ...

Ruins of living and dead in the Himalayan borderlands

While ruins might appear to be mere physical sights of decay and disintegration, they are much more than that. Every ruin is a witness to its own cycle of life and death and the entire gamut of processes which encompass socio-political and economic events in an area. Ruins can be unique yet interconnected and share commonalities; tangible as well as intangible through the passage of time. As humans are in a continuous state of movement, societies have been in a contiguous pursuit of constructing and deserting the signs of their cultural traits. Thus, the formation of ruins is unceasing and revealing of the past. This essay looks at the tangible and intangible ruins of the Western and Eastern Himalayas.

MEMORIAL CAIRNS ABOVE ROGHI VILLAGE IN KINNAUR (PHOTO BY UTTAM LAL, 2019).
Corridor of death
Rohit-Kanda and Runag-Kanda are contiguous alpine grasslands overlooking the majestic Kinnaur-Kailash range across the Sutlej valley in Himachal Pradesh, India. These pastures are located along the mountain ridge that formed a part of the old Hindustan-Tibet road, a pony trail suturing numerous high-altitude villages and pasturelands, which used to enjoy bustling seasonal foot-fall of shepherds, pilgrims, traders, etc. However, with the coming of roads the cross-border high-altitude villages and pasturelands, which included these pastures, have been forced to come to terms with the reality of a border and a border economy. As these animals are too young to learn the trail patterns and movements, and became become more sedentary and changed in how they move and interact, such landscapes often present a confusing picture of a valley of ruins and death and are often not well understood. Although these ruins are often not well preserved, they nonetheless offer significant insights into how people lived, consumed and interacted centuries ago. For instance, a common practice among highlander families was to accord clan/group identities based on place of origin and clan/group identity on both sides of the India-China border. They live in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Yunnan province of China. In comparison to most other trans-border communities of the Himalayas, the Mishmis are unique as they are not connected through trade and pilgrimage but rather through death. Majorly, the Mishmis still follow their own indigenous religion and, as per their belief system, a Mishmi soul travels back to their original home which is their place of origin. Incidentally, the place of origin is believed to be across the border in TAR and Yunnan province. Their religious priest (lgu) still facilitates in this death ritual, in which the journey of the departed soul is sent back to the place of origin, treading the same trails their ancestors took to reach the homes of the living. However, cross-border government policies have brought about changes that have led to the disruption of socio-religious institutions like the lgu. Nonetheless, despite the tremendous social economic transformations on either side of the border, priests on the Indian side still perform lgu rituals and services for Chinese Mishmis. Chinese Mishmis find ingenious ways to send money and the names of their dead relatives, mostly through locals who go hunting in areas where borders are undefined and who occasionally jump into Indian Mishmis. Owing to the contemporary border realities of India and China, villages and ridge of the Mishmis have been fragmented, constituting an intangible ruin of Mishmi cultural landscape.

Not just what we are left with
The geo-politics between India and China have obviously taken their toll on cross-border cultural linkages of the Mishmis. However, a prominent face from the community, Jibi Phulu, summed up the situation of his community as follows: “I am a proud Indian but I am a Chinese”. Mr. Phulu is well aware of the dangers of being misunderstood by some Indians, but the trans-border ruined sites have been forced to come to terms with the contemporary political realities. Like many other highlanders, they negotiate this uncertain geo-political terrain with their social mental maps of cultural similarities on both sides of the border. These mental maps are nothing but intangible ruins of a community. In the Western Himalayas, excavation during road-broadening works unearthed many sites of cist-burials. Locally they were believed to be Muslim graves or graves of Kashmis. However, scientific studies revealed that some of these graves predates Islam, and the buried bodies shared morphological and genetic proximities with Central-Asian people. This shed light on the ancient space-relation and cultural linkages of the Western Himalayas with Central-Asia. Additionally, Kinnaurus referred to these ruins “epicentres of renewed claims”. Similarly, another ruin of a prominent Lepcha fort in Sikkim, near the contemporary border realities of India and China, valleys and ridge of the Mishmis to the contemporary border realities of India and China, valleys and ridge of the Mishmis have been fragmented, constituting an intangible ruin of Mishmi cultural landscape.


Notes
7. For example, in 1987, Lepcha, My Vanishing Tribe, New Delhi: Sterling Publications

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When driving through the Abkhazian borderland region of Gal(i), one cannot help but notice the numerous ruined buildings that lay scattered throughout the green hilly landscape. Few people live in this stretch of land, as many of the former residents – ethnic Mingrelians, an ethnic Georgian subgroup – fled during the last part of the war due to the fear of repercussions by Abkhazians and fighters from the Northern Caucasus. These buildings serve as tangible reminders of the violent episodes that occurred during the 1990’s, starting with the Abkhazian-Georgian war of 1992-1993, after which Abkhazia declared its independence from Georgia, which was then left in a state of limbo and isolation as no other member of the international community recognized Abkhazia as a sovereign state. It was not until August 2008, just after the Russian-Georgian war, that the Russian Federation, together with Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru and since 2018 Syria, recognized the Republic of Abkhazia, while the rest of the world still sees Abkhazia as an integral part of the Republic of Georgia.

S
ince then, the contrast between the Gal(i) landscape and the surrounding borderlands has been increasingly noticeable. It seems as if time stood still in the Gal(i) district, while the Western part of Abkhazia has seen considerable improvements in regard to infrastructure and renovation of buildings, mainly thanks to the financial aid provided by the Russian Federation after 2006. However, the most eastern part of the Gal(i) district, namely the stretch of land bordering the Inguri river, which acts like the natural division between Georgia proper and Abkhazia, has seen significant changes over the last ten years. Since then, a borderization process has been underway, which has upped the border in both bureaucratic and material ways. Before 2008, the border regime was notably more fluid, as cross border movement of persons and goods was made possible through several formal and more informal procedures. Today the installation of barbed wire, guard posts, and the Russian Federation taking control of the borderlines, have hardened the border substantially.

The contrast between the ruined hinterlands and the ‘upgraded’ borderline is striking. It illustrates the nation-state building efforts of the Abkhazian Republic, now strengthened by the Georgian minority living in the borderlands that were installed after the war between the two groups continue to live on both in a social and spatial way.

Reading conflict through space: the politics of materiality and mobility

The people in the Gal(i) region live their everyday life among ruins. The burned-out buildings that scatter the landscape, the roads that have not been maintained since 1991 and other neglected infrastructures are the physical reminders of the war, but maybe even more, of the current situation in which they find themselves. When moving 10 kilometers to the east, the infrastructure changes. The road that starts at the Abkhazian-Russian border and ultimately leads all the way to the Inguri river border crossing, was renovated in 2016 and could now be considered to be one of the best roads in the region (speeding on this renovated road is considered one of the main reasons for the significant increase in traffic accidents in Abkhazia, as drivers do not have to watch out for potholes anymore). Alongside this road, which was paid for by financial aid provided by the Russian Federation, the only well-maintained building that can be seen when driving towards the Inguri river is the newly built Russian military base. The road abruptly ends at the Abkhaz checkpoint, where numerous tanks and buses stand waiting for people coming from the other side.

The Abkhaz checkpoint/border has seen a tremendous change over the last 10 years. From being a heavy militarized checkpoint and frontline, including gun emplacements and concrete barricades, it has now been transformed into a ‘proper’ border. Pillboxes and turrets have been replaced by sterile metal containers from which passport control is carried out by the Russian Federation. Waiting lines have been installed and the overall feeling at the checkpoint is more ‘clean’ and ‘official’ than before 2008.

Changes can also very much be observed along the Inguri river as the material demarcation of the Abkhazian state border has increasingly changed the landscape. The riverbanks have been populated by various forms of state materiality, such as barbed wire, guard posts and radio towers that are installed with cameras in order to keep an eye on the borderlands. Furthermore, Russian military patrols along the Inguri River are frequent in order to stop people from crossing the river, which is considered illegal by the Abkhazian government. An interesting paradox is the fact that it is the Russian Federation and not the Abkhazian government itself that has taken the responsibility for the border control; they are providing the manpower, bureaucracy, technology and materials. The function of this ‘hardening’ of the border, first of all, is practical, as it gives control to the joint Abkhazian-Russian authorities over the border. The movement of persons and goods is regulated by funneling them through the main crossing point at the Inguri bridge crossing. The main aim, besides preventing smuggling, has been the regulation of the movement of persons. The return of Georgians, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to Abkhazia has been a pressing issue since the end of the war. While the actual numbers of returning IDPs have been quite limited, the issue has been used very frequently in political discourse. Many Abkhazian politicians have warned against the ‘Georgianization’ of Abkhazia, as this might result in ‘losing sovereignty and territorial integrity’ that eventually would result in Abkhazia ‘exploding’ from within. This stance and rhetoric have also been a significant focus of the current President of Abkhazia, Raul Khadjimba, during whose term the Abkhazian passports of most ethnic Georgians of the Gal(i) region were revoked as they were deemed to have illegally been handed out.

In addition to the IDPs, the enhanced borderization process also structurally limits the mobility of the current Gal(i) residents who still have very strong social/communal links with the Eastern regions of Abkhazia. These links result in “losing sovereignty and territorial integrity” that eventually would result in Abkhazia ‘exploding’ from within. This stance and rhetoric have also been a significant focus of the current President of Abkhazia, Raul Khadjimba, during whose term the Abkhazian passports of most ethnic Georgians of the Gal(i) region were revoked as they were deemed to have illegally been handed out. In addition to the IDPs, the enhanced borderization process also structurally limits the mobility of the current Gal(i) residents who still have very strong social/communal links with the Eastern regions of Abkhazia. These links result in “losing sovereignty and territorial integrity” that eventually would result in Abkhazia ‘exploding’ from within. This stance and rhetoric have also been a significant focus of the current President of Abkhazia, Raul Khadjimba, during whose term the Abkhazian passports of most ethnic Georgians of the Gal(i) region were revoked as they were deemed to have illegally been handed out.
through the officialization and normalization of the Inguri River checkpoint by referring to it as the ‘State border’. This is in sheer contrast to the discourse of the Georgian authorities in Tbilisi. They refer to the border as the Administrative Border Line (ABL), as they still see Abkhazia as part of Georgia. They still refer to the conflict as a ‘frozen conflict’, indicating that conflict and war is ongoing. This is why the Georgian side of the border is heavily militarized with pillboxes, a checkpoint and a small military outpost manned by forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. This sidetrack of the river is kept as informal as possible. At the police checkpoint, there is only a passport check for foreigners while Georgian citizens can freely pass through to the Abkhazian side of the river. This is due to the fact that for the Georgian authorities, when crossing the Inguri River you are not leaving Georgian territory. Issues arise when people enter or leave Abkhazia to/from the Russian Federation, as you will have then entered/left Georgia illegally. This manifestation of discursive and spatial discourses is not only performed at the borders but also on road signs throughout Georgia. When travelling towards the west of Georgia, Sukhumi (the capital of Abkhazia) shows up on highway signs as if it is simply a city further down the road. A city that is easily accessible. This while most Georgians will never be allowed to actually travel there. What becomes evident here is how a variety of spatialities is co-implicated in complex ways. The example of the Inguri crossing point and the road signs illustrate these complexities, as authorities deploy imaginaries and practices that, while centered on place-making (‘Sukhumi is home’), at the same time (re)work mobility (‘Sukhumi is accessible’) and scale (‘Sukhumi is part of the state of Georgia’). By creating an atmosphere in which nothing has changed and by deploying a spatial politics of ‘wholeness’ and ‘accessibility’, these road signs reinforce the discourse of an Abkhazia that is still under Georgian authority. ‘Materialities, such as road signs, walls, barbed wire and check-points are the physical facts created on the ground that convey either the narrative of partition or the wholeness of a territory. In reality, the Georgian authorities have no formal control over Abkhazia at all, and the ethnic Georgians left in the Gali region are caught between a rock and a hard place.

Abandonment among ruins

The sheer scale of human displacement and dispossession during and after the war of 1991-92 radically transformed the landscape of Abkhazia. In the western regions, the Georgian population fled during an immense ethnic cleansing campaign, during which an estimated 20,000-30,000 civilians were killed and between 200,000 and 232,000 fled across either the Caucasus mountains or the Inguri River to uncontested Georgian territory. Of these, only roughly 40,000 ethnic Georgians have found their way back to their homes in Abkhazia, primarily in the Gali region.

The physical neglect of the Gali() district illustrates the post-conflict power relations amidst a ‘victor’ and a ‘losing’ party. Especially with the backing of the Russian Federation, which ensures the safety and sovereignty of the semi-recognized Abkhazian state, the Abkhazian authorities have been increasingly more confident in imposing limitations on the political rights and movement of the Gali() population. Before 2008, the Abkhazian authorities lacked a firm control over the Gali() district, due to lack of knowhow and manpower, but also due to the presence of several paramilitary guerrilla troops that contested the Abkhazian authorities. These often-criminal groups controlled the district firmly through violence and intimidation of not only Abkhaz residents, but also the Georgian population. Killings and kidnappings were frequent occurrences during the 1990s and early 2000s. This unstable situation came to an end after 2008, when Georgian troops left the Kodori Gorge, north of the Gali() district, and the Russian Federation took full control over the Inguri border. Since then the Abkhazian government has tightened control over the Gali() district, without necessarily improving the living conditions of the local population. The ethnic Georgian population is not allowed to possess an Abkhazian passport. Since 2018, a process has started in which foreign nationals who reside in Abkhazia for more than one year can apply for a residence permit. This permit gives them the right to reside in Abkhazia and to move in and out of the country freely, but does not allow them to vote, buy or sell property or participate in elections on any level, including local elections.

From a material perspective, there are ruins scattered across the district, left behind by ethnic Georgians who fled the numerous violent episodes during the 1990s and 2000s. The ruins that can be found both in the urban and rural areas of Gali are striking to foreign visitors, as they have heard and/or read about the war and the violent events that occurred. The 20-year-old war becomes tangible as the aftermath can be clearly seen through the ruins and abandoned buildings.

The normalization of the situation and material state of the district has had 20 years to settle in, so now most of the locals merely shrug when asked about the state in which many buildings appear. They refer to the people who used to live in the once typical Georgian two-story buildings. Their friendly neighbors, the tomatoes and cucumbers that they used to grow in the back garden, or the kids who used to play on the street. After the joyful memories comes a heavy sigh, which is almost always followed by a sentence along the lines of: “But the war made them go. They had to leave it behind. Now they live in Tbilisi/ Zugdidi and we are still here.” Some people who fled the Gali() district have been able to temporarily return to visit their former homes, but now that the ruins have been cleared through the landscape act both as scars, reminders of past events and the establishment of a new status quo. Yet, underneath these stories of lost friends and families of whom they are reminded every time they leave their house and walk among those ruins.

The physical neglect of the Gali() district illustrates the post-conflict power relations amidst a ‘victor’ and a ‘losing’ party.
In the 2000s, China’s economy grew at an average annual rate of nearly 7 percent. Recent talk of a ‘new normal’ foresees slightly slower growth rates closer to 6 percent extending into the medium-term future – a rapid pace when compared with other large industrial economies historically. Within this broad growth picture, cities and their metropolitan regions have grown even faster, as the engines of the national economy. Central to all this metropolitan growth was a frenzy of urban construction of all types: private housing, office spaces, retail centers, roads, subways, parks and so on. As any casual observer of Chinese cities can readily note, urban construction has been the order of the day for quite some time, and it drives local economies.

Energy boomtowns

While the growth of mega-cities on the eastern seaboard has been ostensible, a number of less-known cities of the central and western regions grew even faster than their eastern peers. Foremost among this subset of cities are energy resource boomtowns. Economic expansion in the city surged on the basis of rising energy demand and national energy policy favoring expanded production in a small number of locales concentrated in Western China. The urban component of boomtowns derives from three interrelated processes. First, it established the order-of-magnitude increases in energy demand for both electric power generation and economic activity. Second, 15 years of rapid economic growth and rising energy demand provided the impetus for dramatic declines in coal prices. Third, the ramifications of this growth in demand, initially, in the high density, low efficiency urban clusters of the Northeast, were felt across the country. By the time the price bubble burst in 2011, Ordos, built-up urban area had ballooned more than tenfold from roughly 25 square kilometers to 270 square kilometers. Among the registered urban population, surveys found the average household held ten properties.

Modern ruins

The uninhabited luxury villa compounds and vacant construction sites that still litter the landscapes of Ordos nearly ten years later reverberate recent debates about modern ruins and ruination.6 The ‘modern ruins’ of capitalist development arise, Edensor notes, as waves of investment wash over places and then recede, leaving behind the detritus of industrial progress.7 Thus, the creative destruction of capitalism produces ruins in formerly bustling sites like Detroit or Manchester or Fordlandia, and does so on a continual basis in new places. As such, various types of ‘new ruins’ provide material reminders of the parapital reproduction of destruction that is at the center of capital accumulation. Yet unlike erstwhile thriving spaces that have fallen to ruin, the ruins of Ordos were never fully populated; a great number of newly built homes, storefronts, and offices were never used. Yet nearly all units in completed projects had, in fact, been purchased on a speculative basis. The ruins of urban projects in Ordos thus speak to industrial capitalism and its precarious territorialization than to essential processes of place and time and value in the production of built environments through financial speculation. The city’s ruins might be regarded as exhalations of what Stoler refers to as the ‘temporal and material process of “ruination”’.2 In a variety of settings, the central role of finance has been noted in driving the speculative property bubbles of the twenty-first century. Ordos was no exception. However, the particular modes of finance that arose in the city were crucial to the specificity of its urban growth patterns — and to an understanding of how urban growth followed a decidedly ruinous course. Of special importance here were the tangled networks of informal finance that fed off rising incomes in the city and promised to mobilize savings toward high-profit sectors. As elsewhere in China, the property sector in Ordos offered abundant opportunities to see rapid returns. Moreover, with the finance sector effectively cut off from all but the largest institutional investors giving the scale of necessary investments and with local and commercial economies constrained by small population and geographical isolation, local residents sought outlets for savings other than bank accounts where officially set interest rates were lower than local inflation. Numerous forms of non-bank lending evolved in response, including micro-lending cooperatives, pawn shops, underground banks, rotating savings and credit associations, and outright pyramid schemes. While each such mode of financing offered different terms, all featured high interest rates and short repayment schedules. As such schemes involved Madagascar private savings toward land and property development, the pace of growth in Ordos’ property sector was fueled by the supply of high-interest fast capital financial and not by demand for the ever-greater stock of new properties. It also clear that collusion and incompetence were salient elements of the bubble, as local officials joined the fray, leaning on loan officers in formal banks to extend credit to property developers, approving projects after project, and engaging in risky borrowing and lending. By the time the bubble had burst in 2011, Ordos’ built-up urban area had ballooned more than tenfold from roughly 25 square kilometers to 270 square kilometers. Among the registered urban population, surveys found the average household held ten properties. The municipal government responded to the twin crises in the local property market and inform finance in three main ways. First, it established an ad hoc office in 2012 to sort through claims by bilked lenders in informal lending networks. This entailed identifying borrowers and seizing their assets to compensate claimants. Second, municipal leaders applied pressure to local branches of state-run and commercial banks to extend loans to developers to keep the property market afloat. Neither approach restored Ordos' economic growth, which had been inflated by the property bubbles. Between 2012 and 2017, Ordos was the slowest-growing municipality in Inner Mongolia. Third, municipal authorities opted to wait out the downturn. As one local official explained in an interview in 2019, "there is nothing to do with all of these houses but wait until more people arrive, or see if another bubble will overturn this sentiment. This sentiment is widely shared in the city, as owners of multiple homes rehouse their future children and migrants would eventually fill the thousands of unused properties. Everyone jokes about Ordos being a ‘ghost city’. But it’s only just recently built. It’s natural that it takes time for the people to arrive."

Imagined futures

Such anticipations of deflational optimism collected during fieldwork in the post-bubble years in Ordos contained a palpable resistance to the ‘ghost city’ narratives that the media used to characterize the city’s development. That narrative has hinged on diagnosing Ordos’ urban development project as a bubble that has reduced to ruins. Fault for Ordos ‘failures’, according to much reporting on ‘ghost cities’, is laid on the feet of greedy, naive investors and venal provincial officials who unwisely allowed supply and demand to become decoupled. Yet, as local residents rejection of such judgments suggests, the ruins that persist in the post-bubble moment index a more complicated set of realities. The absence of evident uses in the uninhabited built environments underlines the commonplace negative dream of ‘ghost cities’ and ruination. Moreover, it ignores how the financialization of the urbanization process brings forward in time the accumulation of surplus and is sustained by adumbrations of hope and delusion, the essentially liquified ‘holographic’ capital of development. One need look no further than Wall Street to find a contemporary example in the so-called ‘advanced industrialized’ countries. Viewed outside the frame of failure that shadows the ghost city tropa, Ordos’ abandonment is thus presented as a failure to thus present object lessons in ruination or accumulation. The ruins of Ordos’ property development projects do not so much narrate a linear history of ascendance and decline as posit a reordering of time enabled by the essential and time-honored lubricants of capitalist growth such that, as Smithson posits a reordering of time enabled by the absence of linear history of ascendance and decline as posit a reordering of time enabled by capitalism. One need look no further than Wall Street to find a contemporary example in the so-called ‘advanced industrialized’ countries. Viewed outside the frame of failure that shadows the ghost city tropa, Ordos’ abandonment is thus presented as a failure to thus present object lessons in ruination or accumulation. The ruins of Ordos’ property development projects do not so much narrate a linear history of ascendance and decline as posit a reordering of time enabled by the essential and time-honored lubricants of capitalist growth such that, as Smithson

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The 11th ‘Engaging With Vietnam’ Conference

Engaging With Vietnam is delighted to announce its 11th ‘Engaging With Vietnam Conference’ (EWV 11), to be held on 15-16 July 2019 in Leiden, the Netherlands, alongside the 11th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 11) on 16-19 July 2019. ICAS 11 is organized by the International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden University and GIS Asia (French Academic Network for Asian Studies; www.gis-reseauasia.org).

The collaboration between ICAS 11 and EWV 11 offers a special way to mark a new decade of Engaging With Vietnam, whereby EWV will embark on new initiatives to deepen and enrich dialogue on knowledge production between EWV participants and varied communities of scholars and participants that are often outside the usual Vietnam-focused forums. By taking place alongside ICAS 11, this EWV conference promises to be an exciting experience for participants of both events, in which all can engage in a diverse range of scholarly and professional activities that ICAS and EWV have built up over the years and take pride in.

Having just celebrated its 10th Conference, which sought to examine and move beyond dichotomies in knowledge production about and on Vietnam, Engaging With Vietnam is pleased to announce that its 11th Conference will focus on one particular, and particularly complex, dichotomy relating to Vietnam and Europe. This particular focus of EWV 11 intersects with ICAS 11’s theme of ‘Vietnam and Europe’.

While the equation of ‘Europe’ with ‘France’ is a phenomenon that was prominent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, over the past 70 years there have been numerous different ‘Vietnams’ that have engaged with numerous different ‘Europees’, and vice versa. From students, immigrants and refugees from the Republic of Vietnam, to students, workers, immigrants and migrants from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, to the wide population of Vietnamese who travel by different means and routes to work, tour, build, invest, live and study in Europe today, there has been a constant flow of different Vietnamese to different Europees for decades now. Moving in the other direction has been a flow of people, ideas, technologies that have likewise brought different Europees to different ‘Vietnams’. The 11th Engaging With Vietnam conference will examine these issues under the theme of Vietnam in Europe, Europe in Vietnam: Identity, Transnationality, and Mobility of People, Ideas and Practices Across Time and Space.

Types of Proposals

The focus of EWV 11 is Vietnam in Europe. Europe in Vietnam: Identity, Transnationality, and Mobility of People, Ideas and Practices Across Time and Space, but proposals for EWV 11 may involve topics from all disciplines in the broadest possible sense. We welcome various types of proposals: individual presentations; panels/symposia/colloquia; in-depth roundtable discussion sessions; art exhibitions/performances; and movie/documentary screenings. For more information on the different proposal formats (including the submission requirements), please see www.engagingwithvietnamconference.org/call-for-proposals.

Registration

EWV 11 participants will pay the same registration rates as ICAS 11 participants. Registered EWV 11 participants can attend both EWV 11 and ICAS 11. In addition to the EWV programme on 15 and 16 July, and lunch on 15 July, EWV 11 participants can enjoy all what ICAS 11 registration covers for the period of 16-19 July 2019.

For more information on registration and fees, please see https://icas.asia/icas11. Please note the registration rates remain the same for those participants who only participate in EWV 11.

The Early Bird rate for EWV 11 accepted authors will be available until 1 May 2019. The registration link will be included in your acceptance letter.

Call for Proposals


Deadline proposal submissions: 5 April 2019

Notification of Acceptance: On-going until 10 April 2019

Conference dates: 15-16 July 2019

Venue: Leiden, the Netherlands

http://spreadingknowledge/vietnamconference.org

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Spreading knowledge easily - Open access publishing in Asian Studies

For more than three years CrossAsia-epublishing has supported unlimited and free access to scientific information on the Internet. CrossAsia-epublishing provides a platform for publishing in open access. The range of services varies from the hosting of e-journals to the publication of books of different types and formats, i.e., digital and print-on-demand editions. The current focus is to enhance the traditional publishing format by bringing them up to the standards of the ‘digital age’. Annotations, links to external resources and the incorporation of multimedia content, as well as related research data in CrossAsia-epublishing, are crucial to providing scholars today with a publication service that meets their needs.

What are the publishing options for scholars?

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Dynamic and collaborative

At the present time Heidelberg University Library focuses its current activities in the area of electronic publishing on the full development of dynamic and collaborative publication possibilities. This includes so-called ‘enhanced publications’, i.e., linking scholarly texts to images, maps or 3D visualization. Moreover, through ontology-based data storage in a triple store, research data can be linked to related data repositories worldwide by using linked data.

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Notes

1. CrossAsia-epublishing is part of the project ‘Forschungsergebnisdaten Asien’ (FD Asien), funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

The FID Asien is cooperatively carried out by the State Library in Berlin, Heidelberg University Library and the South Asia Institute (SAI) in Heidelberg.

The web portal CrossAsia is used as the central access point to the project results and for scientific information in Asian studies (https://crossasia.org). The area of ‘electronic publishing’ in the FID Asien is the central field of action of the project team of the Heidelberg University Library and SAI, where all publication platforms are developed, hosted and operated.
Early 2019 sees the opening of the new Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) at Heidelberg University. CATS brings together the South Asia Institute, the Centre for East Asian Studies, the Institute of Anthropology and the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS). These institutions are situated in four buildings surrounding a square with a newly-built underground library, which will provide central access to four departmental libraries and which will house a Digital & Computational Humanities Unit, the Heidelberg Research Architecture (HRA). The official opening will take place on 25 June 2019 and visitors are very welcome!

CATS can build on a dozen years of research and teaching in the Excellence Cluster ‘Asia and Europe in a Global Context’, which has manifested in the foundation of an online journal, two (open access) publication series, and a Master and Graduate Program in Transcultural Studies—with the largest number of (international) students in the Humanities and Social Sciences in Heidelberg.

Bringing together four independent institutions, CATS forms a research collaboratorium enabling critical dialogues between Asia and Europe. CATS houses some twenty-five full professorships in Asian Studies, provides access to a unique and hybrid Asia library, one of the largest in continental Europe. It also offers more than twenty Asian languages to its approximately 3500 students. It also provides access to a unique and hybrid Asia library, one of the largest in continental Europe. Most importantly, CATS is not just another Asia Centre. Its uniqueness comes from being structurally linked and strongly committed to thinking beyond Asia in order to engage in an extended conversation with specialists whose regional expertise lies elsewhere.

CATS as collaboratorium: dialogic perspectives on Asia and Europe

Research on Asia in Europe has developed rapidly in recent decades; but how Asia can in fact be adequately studied is a question much discussed, especially in view of Asia’s substantial transcultural entanglements. The significant differences in disciplinary cultures between Europe and Asia as well as the predominance of models and discourses developed in Europe, which have long been accepted as blueprints in Asia, make it necessary to break new grounds. CATS as a collaboratorium suggests an innovative approach by intensifying a dialogue between what is sometimes divided along the lines of ‘area studies’ and ‘systematic disciplines’, between scholars working on antiquity, modernity and pre-history and between scholars working on what has superficially been divided along the lines of nature and culture.

Cultures are not contained within ethnically closed, linguistically homogenous and territorially bounded spheres, yet today they are framed by specific, often region-bound disciplines. Instead, cultures are constituted through transformations and entanglements that follow from contacts and relationships between various agents, concepts and institutions, between human and non-human factors. This intrinsic transculturality must be seen as the norm, the default mode rather than the exception in human history and experience. Indeed, processes of transculturation (e.g., assimilation, acculturation, hybridity, etc.) are ubiquitous, even if they are often resisted and denied. CATS has thus been conceived as a collaboratorium that transgresses disciplinary and regional limitations and gathers specialists of Asia and beyond in many different disciplines, ranging from archeology to geography, from the philologies to religious studies and pairing them up with scholars in the Humanities and the Social Sciences focusing on other regions of the world. CATS assembles Heidelberg faculty and international fellows or activists, artists and professionals committed to transdisciplinary work that cuts across different regions and temporalities ranging in time from pre-history to the present and in space from Honolulu to Rome to Chennai.

Researchers in CATS will attempt to overcome prevalent value dualisms that treat Asia and Europe as distinct epistemic domains characterized by an inherent conceptual and methodological incommensurability. They will develop methods to overcome this barrier and to come to a historically more plausible, non-orientalist approach that helps uncover a dynamic and connected relationship between Asia and Europe. Such an approach would be both self-reflexive and an essential step towards the development of new epistemologies adequate to the task we have chalked out.

CATS thus stands for a critical engagement with some of the epistemic foundations specific to the disciplines while at the same time maintaining their strengths. There is a striking tension between the stabilizing functions built into disciplinary practices on the one hand and the flux and fragility of the objects they study on the other. To question the values academic disciplines transport—such as authenticity, cultural purity, a deference to origins, notions of skill, perfection, beauty, or the valorizing of single events over long-term processes, is the aim of research in CATS. This kind of disciplinary critique, however, does not imply wholesale rejection of proven disciplinary methods. To the contrary, CATS is committed to disciplinary expertise in fields that are the backbone of the Humanities such as sound philological, historical, archaeological, iconological or narratological methods.
CATS research: theorizing from Asia and Europe

The transcultural and multidisciplinary approach practiced in CATS is an answer to the widespread feeling of crisis and threat pervading academic life today. Political and religious fundamentalisms, new forms of nationalism, populism and protectionism, and persistent mass migration have intensified conflicts and heightened the awareness of the fragility of our world. A transcultural perspective can be read as contestations of perspectives and transformative forces by cultural resistance. Interaction to such pluralizing developments often aims to restore what is felt to be a “suffering unity” that is considered to have been lost. It is this that creates a more stable and predictable future by helping us read the signs and signals in a more or less distant past. This points to a paradox: for some, instability is produced by cultural flows and exchanges for others, it is generated precisely by opposition to these very forces. The tensions between the cultural flows and exchanges on the one hand, or less pronounced at certain times and in certain places, and the frictions they generate are integrated and sedated by interactions at every scale. They are inscribed in the remains of the earliest human settlements, scriptures and stone inscriptions, cast in bronze or carved in stone, they have left a wealth of material and written traces through which the history of the world can be told and they are the most contested issues of our present day. This raises the questions which practices of resistance to whom, which cultural readings in-conjunction, developing innovative methods and paradigms in use today were linked to Europe. Exchanges have taken place like that of Japan a few decades earlier, has increasingly in Southeast Asia, have undergone an economic development that, like that of Japan a few decades earlier, has made them leading powers internationally. Once emerging countries, they have become economic competitors, partners, and allies. At the same time, this development has led to social and political tensions and upheavals within and outside Asia. As a result, this region has become a complex object of research not only in Asian Studies, but also in those disciplines that developed discipline-specific study methods based on data from the “Global North”, simplifying them to Asia. This is where the traditional Chinese, Japanese Studies departments (the teaching of Asian languages and knowledge of Asian cultures and intellectual history), the societal and the Natural Sciences, thus opening up new modes of conducting research in the humanities and forming public debates on questions of learning, in and for an increasingly international world.

CATS will enable the transdisciplinary development of new research methodologies. The intensive dialogue between disciplines specializing in Asia and Europe, will allow researchers in CATS to address transnational research challenges to be read-in-conjunction, developing innovative analytical tools and vocabularies constantly sharpening them in different historical and regional contexts. CATS will further the integration of hybrid research materials. Through CATS, making the field in the digital and computational humanities and materialities research, CATS will also use and rapidly generate digital image and textual data in Asian and European studies will enable research analogous to the development of “data driven science” in the natural sciences and serve as a basis for research-based teaching in CATS. The Heidelberg Research Architecture of Digital and Computational Humanities Unit based at the HCTS, will be developed into an important facility for the University. It has developed a collection management system designed for collaborative research and VR standards for high descriptive standardized metadata.

CATS: the future

For many years, it has been closed linked to Europe. Exchanges have taken place in the fields of religion, art, literature and music as well as in business and politics, but also in terms of geology, health, climate and environmental sustainability. Recently, states in these regions, especially in China and India, but increasingly also in Southeast Asia, have undertaken an economic development that, like that of Japan a few decades earlier, has made them leading powers internationally. Once emerging countries, they have become economic competitors, partners, and allies. At the same time, this development has led to social and political tensions and upheavals within and outside Asia. As a result, this region has become a complex object of research not only in Asian Studies, but also in those disciplines that developed discipline-specific study methods based on data from the “Global North”, simplifying them to Asia. This is where the traditional Chinese, Japanese Studies departments (the teaching of Asian languages and knowledge of Asian cultures and intellectual history), the societal and the Natural Sciences, thus opening up new modes of conducting research in the humanities and forming public debates on questions of learning, in and for an increasingly international world.

CATS will enable the transdisciplinary development of new research methodologies. The intensive dialogue between disciplines specializing in Asia and Europe, will allow researchers in CATS to address transnational research challenges to be read-in-conjunction, developing innovative analytical tools and vocabularies constantly sharpening them in different historical and regional contexts. CATS will further the integration of hybrid research materials. Through CATS, making the field in the digital and computational humanities and materialities research, CATS will also use and rapidly generate digital image and textual data in Asian and European studies will enable research analogous to the development of “data driven science” in the natural sciences and serve as a basis for research-based teaching in CATS. The Heidelberg Research Architecture of Digital and Computational Humanities Unit based at the HCTS, will be developed into an important facility for the University. It has developed a collection management system designed for collaborative research and VR standards for high descriptive standardized metadata.

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Notes

1. https://www.cats.uni-heidelberg.de
2. https://tinyurl.com/heidelEAS
3. https://tinyurl.com/heidelpub
4. https://tinyurl.com/heidelSAI
5. https://tinyurl.com/heidelHCTS
6. https://tinyurl.com/heidelSAI
7. https://tinyurl.com/heidelHCTS
8. https://tinyurl.com/heidelEAS
10. https://tinyurl.com/heidelSAI
11. https://tinyurl.com/heidelHCTS
12. https://tinyurl.com/heidelpub
IIAS National Master’s Thesis Prize in Asian Studies 2018

This year’s Master’s Thesis Prize went to Yannick Lengkeek for his thesis on fascism in late colonial Indonesia. Yannick completed his thesis, entitled, “Neither Show nor Showdown: The “Fascist Effect” and Cooperative Nationalism in Late Colonial Indonesia, 1935-1942”, at the Institute for History of Leiden University in November 2017. It was supervised by Dr Bart Luttikhuis (Institute for History and the Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, Leiden).

With this yearly prize, IIAS not only honours talent but also aims to stimulate and facilitate a further career in research; the prize consists of a three-month full fellowship with IIAS, either to be used to write a PhD project proposal or a research article.

The prize was presented by Dr Nira Wickramasinghe, Chair of the IIAS Board and Professor of Modern South Asian Studies at Leiden University: "In this thesis, Yannick Lengkeek argues that fascism was seriously under-explored and under-theorised field of the 1930s, Parindra, the Great Indonesia Party. This thesis inserts Indonesia within the field of Fascist studies, a notoriously eurocentrist field. A path breaking venture in an under-explored and under-theorised field based on extensive archival work in Indonesia and the Netherlands.”

During the award ceremony, held at Leiden University’s Faculty Club on 24 January 2019, praise was also given to the three other shortlisted nominees:

Selima Abraham (Delft University of Technology), ‘Beyond Urban: Mitigating Urban Biases in Planning Processes in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region through Agro-Urbanism’.

Joel Eduard (Leiden Institute for History), ‘Slavery, Resistance, and Colonial Power in Dutch Mauritius (1664-1710)’.

Levi Voorsmit (Leiden Institute for Area Studies), ‘Friendship and Place in Fourteenth Century China: Gao Qi, Wang Xing, Xu Ben and Zhang Yu’.

Submissions to the IIAS National Master’s Thesis Prize in Asian Studies can be made each year before 1 November. Eligible MA theses are those in the broad field of Asian Studies in the Humanities or Social Sciences (or related fields), completed during the previous 12 months (1 Nov-31 Oct) at a Dutch university, and marked with an 8 or higher.

For further information go to: https://iias.asia/masters-thesis-prize
Critical Heritage Studies: the first graduates of a unique international postgraduate Double Degree programme

On 30 October of last year, a small ceremony was organised at IIAS to mark an important milestone in the development of one of IIAS’ major programmes in recent years: the Double Degree Programme in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe. The ceremony included the presentation of certificates to the first graduates of the programme.

This unique international Double Degree Programme was started in the academic year 2017-2018, and is a collaborative effort, initiated and sponsored by IIAS and run by the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS) of the Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University (Netherlands), the Graduate School of International Studies at Yonsei University (South Korea), and the Graduate Institute of Building and Planning and the Department of Anthropology, both at National Taiwan University (NTU, Taiwan). Students in this Programme can use the Leiden-based one-year MA programme (Asian Studies) to cover part of the two-year MA programmes in Korea and Taiwan, and vice versa. If successful, students will obtain two MA diplomas, and a certificate issued by IIAS that declares that the student obtained both MA diplomas with a focus on Critical Heritage Studies as offered by the Double Degree programme.

The programme focused on the question ‘Making Place and Place Making’. It included a series of lectures and a workshop at IAS as well as a series of practical workshops on rush weaving and an exhibition at the Textile Research Centre (TRC), Leiden. The rush weaving was of particular interest, not only as an old craft that is being revived in Taipei, but also because it is being used to help different communities in this city to regain their strength and cohesion.

All parts of the programme were well attended, especially with students of the Leiden MA programme on Critical Heritage Studies (including Taiwanese students), which forms part of the Double Degree Programme in Critical Heritage Studies of Leiden University, IAS, National Taiwan University and Yonsei University in South Korea. Other participants included students and scholars connected with other IIAS programmes on Urban Studies. The final reception, at the end of the highly satisfactory programme, was held on Friday 2 November and was attended by some thirty participants and other guests who took an interest in the discussions.

The ceremony included the presentation of certificates to the first graduates of the programme (on 30 October 2018) were Hyunmi Kim from Korea, and Anna Tonk and Koert Stijne, both from the Netherlands. A fourth student, Mingyuan Cheng from Taiwan, could not be present, but will also receive her certificate.

For the academic year 2018-2019, Shuya Kang from Taiwan and Hue Ji Jang from Korea have enrolled at Leiden University and hope to obtain their Leiden MA diploma this summer. Marijke Schmidt passed her Leiden MA examinations in 2017 and has enrolled at Yonsei, while Edwin Pietersma, a Leiden MA student from the 2016-2017 class, has enrolled in the Heritage Programme at the Department of Anthropology at NTU in Taipei, Taiwan.

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Announcements/Reports

UKNA symposium ‘Water heritage in Asian cities’ Shanghai, 29 November – 1 December 2018

From 29 November to 1 December 2018, the IIAS coordinated Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA) held its annual event in Shanghai, where UKNA-partner the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) hosted the symposium ‘Water heritage in Asian cities’. It was jointly organised by SASS, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), New York University-Shanghai (Center for Global Asia) and Fudan University (Department of Cultural Heritage and Museology).

This symposium sought to contribute to the building of a broader multi-disciplinary understanding of the role and functions of water in cities in Asia throughout history. To this effect, it brought together a range of experts and scholars from the humanities, natural sciences and social sciences, including the urban planners who are working or have worked on the current Shanghai master plan (2017-2035) for the Shanghai waterfront. The symposium featured four panels on the following topics: (1) urban water infrastructure; (2) diversities of water-based cultural heritage; (3) linked histories of landscapes and waterscapes; and (4) waterfront redevelopment and urban transformation in Shanghai. The keynote speakers were Prof. Maria Montoya, Dean of New York University Shanghai and Prof. Han Meyer, Professor of Urban Design at Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands. UKNA’s previous annual meeting (in 2017) was also in the form of a symposium on the theme of water, that time hosted by Airlangga University in Surabaya, Indonesia on 11 and 12 December, titled, ‘River cities. Water Space in Urban Development and History’.

Interested in UKNA’s activities on water and cities? Please contact Paul Rabé, UKNA Coordinator based at IIAS or paul.rabe@iias.nl
Visit the websites: www.iias.asia/event/water-heritage-asian-cities and https://www.ukna.asia

Above: Symposium participants admire the skyline of Shanghai from on board the Pudong River cruise.
Languages on the edge: from private archive to shared library

Within the framework of the IIAS programme Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World (HaB), Mali is the site of investigation for language and translation practices with a special focus on opening and connecting ‘marginal libraries,’ that is: the often modest collections of print, sound and film records that any individual or institution might possess. In this regard, both the archives of the host institution, Mali’s Institute of Humanities (ISH), and personal files come into play.

A need of narrative structure
My own fascination for the art and technique of such storytelling came later. Indeed, it took me years of living away from my home region and my family to gain a genuine interest in the stories with which I grew up. The first moment came in my third year at the teachers college in Bamako, I grew up. The first moment came in my third year at the teachers college in Bamako, 1200 km southwest of Gao. After coming across Charles Bird’s research on the hunters’ musical and narrative traditions in southern Mali, I decided to write my undergraduate thesis on traditional storytelling techniques, focusing on the prosody of Songhay, genealogical and historical accounts.

Floating family trees
Growing up in a farming village, I first experienced the seasons as alternating cycles of seemingly endless activity with short moments of rest. Of the latter, the end of the rice harvest season remains the most memorable, when, at the peak of the flood season, people traveled by pirogue to visit their relatives along the river. During this period, our house would fill up with visitors, who sometimes arrived from far away. I used to listen to my father reciting names after names, sometimes being interrupted with questions about a person or prompted for details about how this one was related to that one. My father’s objections to some detail or other had a lot to do with how he identified with a given character in the story. The other’s account, at times, either displaced the centrality of our own lineage in the context of local history, or produced portraits that did not correspond to the image my father had of these ancestors. I came to the conclusion that there was no single story to be told and that an important task in my project could be to tease out the elements of empathy and self-identification, and, conversely, aversion and rejection that might drive the storytelling and shape the relationship between the narrator and the topic, object or figure of narration.

Rethinking the library
The ISH, a descendant of the Institut Français d’Afrique Noire (IFAN), founded in 1936, holds a rich repository of written documents, but also voice and sound recordings from the colonial era onwards. The material is strong in history and social anthropology as well as in oral tradition recorded in different linguistic and cultural regions. Of the three research departments at ISH, the Department of Linguistics and Oral Literature was established with the mission to coordinate and harmonize research on local knowledge and the medium in which it is transmitted, preserved, and transformed. Still, the process has been neither systematic nor sustained. Moreover, frequent moves have forced the ISH Direction to store away a significant part of its documents. The ISH relocated to a permanent site in 2017, and the three departments are only now recovering their archives. With regard to the language archives, though the inventory of the scattered documents started before HaB, its completion and integration into a larger curriculum of training, knowledge production and dissemination has been accelerated through our exchanges around the activities to be undertaken for the language and translation theme of the HaB program.

The next phase in the program is the training of students to digitize priority content and make it accessible to the research community. Part of the planning was done during my visit to the ISH in September 2017. I had brought along samples of personal archives, some thirty years old, others quite recent, that I had been sorting out for digitization, transcription and translation. As it turned out, the physical presence of both the material and the portable equipment I had brought stimulated a productive discussion on the best way to move ahead, even if step by step and with limited resources. For that matter, the ISH and similar institutions have recently seen their research budgets drastically reduced or cancelled altogether. The dying-up of research funding is officially blamed on increased spending on military and security efforts, but the humanities have in fact always been making do with scarce resources. For the ISH department in charge of revitalizing language research, these sudden cuts have made planning even more difficult, at a crucial juncture. Therefore,
Poetics of everyday life

Having transcribed and partially translated the recordings, I am now focusing on the intertexts of different narratives, recorded about familial and regional histories over the last three decades. The centrality of the Songhay empire in West African history and its global relevance are well known, thanks to the chronicles and testimonials written by traveling scholars of the Arab-Islamic world and the European explorers of Timbuktu, Gao and Essouk, from the late Middle Ages to the colonial era and throughout the 20th century.

More recent narratives help us supplement fragmentary and obfuscating documentation, especially by shedding light on the practice of everyday life, giving insights into material culture and consumption, and providing new moral standards, prejudices and biases, affect or interpersonal proximity and distance. Thus, at the same time, I focus on how the internal dynamics of my father’s family and its relation to the larger community; the social in another; how traditional chieftaincy emerged, the early death of my father’s parents and the adoption of my father and his siblings by a childless, no-husband family, and the last major regional state, which marked the irreversible shift of power from the Saharan desert routes to the Atlantic ocean.

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Renewed sense of urgency

When I rediscovered them again in full, ten years later, the recording of the oral historian was intact. It struck me then as the performance of a well-trained, routine performer. The speaker came across as a warm conversation partner, who, at times, provoked the listener into asking the right questions, and at times, to a wrong answer to one of his rhetorical questions. In all, he was an agile performer who enjoyed sharing his knowledge and establishing his authority as the master of the word.

On the other hand, my father spoke in a neutral, metallic voice with hardly any interruptions, until the tape started to waver and disintegrate after thirty-two minutes. The rest of the tape was hardly audible. It came to an abrupt end, just when he was telling me about the situation in our village near Gao at the onset of the French colonial era. I seemed to have never truly grasped the content of the story, as before I had only focused on the form and style (prosody) of the story. I had been interested in the strategies used to memorise such complex details, to keep a narrative going with hundreds of names, events and places, spanning different centuries and regions. The brutal interruption in the story, when my father reflected on the fundamental shift that had occurred in local genealogical and the nature of social bonds, motivated me to make up for the lost recordings. There were other points I had hardly noticed, and one unfulfilled promise still lingered with me. He had asked me to go see an aging, elderly woman in our extended family in the old city of Gao, and ask her for more precise details about my mother’s side of the family, considered to be more deeply rooted in the area and related to key figures of the past.

To be sure, as I started my seventh year in the Midwest, listening to the distant voices of my father and his contemporary prompted me in a sense of urgency that I had never felt before in relation to the long, fragmented and variegated story of the Songhay-speaking people and their heartland between Djenné and Niamey; the cycles of a being dominating African continent has yet to exit.

In 1979, as I delved into slave narratives for my dissertation on the discourse on the African diaspora, it became clear to me that one day, the oral fragments I had recorded could help substantiate part of a narrative that could neither be linear nor complete. Like American slave narratives, the stories of the West African past are permeated by traces of displacement, bondage, slavery, freedom for, and the destruction and reconstruction of, the homeland. Nevertheless, they also convey a sense of wholeness and rootedness that is hard to associate with the hesitantly, experience of radical disruption, I decided to have my younger brother do a follow-up recording with our father. The 1997 recordings would last 320 minutes. I was not present at these sessions, but this made me all the more the narrate. Distance pulled me into the center of the story as my name was uttered every time my father decided to tell the genealogy from my generation to the most distant ancestor recorded in our lineages on his side and my mother’s.

Transcription: listening (more) closely to silence

More recently, transcribing the 1987 and 1997 recordings has enabled me to listen more closely to my childhood, and people occasionally referred to us as Fulani, because ‘technically’, our paternal side can be traced back to a faraway Fulani heartland, although my mother’s family is considered to be part of the indigenous Songhay stock of Gao. In fact, for a long time, my own representation of the recordings revolved around the genealogical part that connected me to my parents and made me part of a web of kinship, and especially my relation to people who today identify with a specific ethnic group, with its associated language, social culture, and world view.

However, as I resume working with the recordings, I realize that in my representation of the material, the share of the genealogical part is in fact exaggerated. While it makes up about half of the audible part of the 1987 recording (16 out of 30 minutes), it ends after 25 minutes of the 320 minutes recorded in 1997. Given the overlaps in the rendering of family trees, the genealogical viewpoint is just about 30 minutes. The remaining 320 minutes cover other topics; recently, these have become more relevant, motivating my effort to transcribe and translate the material in full.

From genealogy to general history

The genealogist is the guardian of collective memories. Stories, from the family unit, he or she weaves together the complex fabric of kinship, made up of unions and separations, harmony and discord, old and new identities. In this regard, beyond reciting a lineage, genealogists link persons through time and space. Genealogical knowledge used to be considered an important strategic knowledge base; this is why people travelled from far away to consult the expert, able to disentangle the intricacies of a particular ancestry. This is what brought people to my father. From his parents, he had learned the lesser known history of the Fulani migration from central to northern Mali, which would have a sequel at the end of the 19th century with the last waves leaving Gao for the Sudan between 1918 and World War I, prompted by drought, famine and the bloody suppression of revolts by the French colonial administration. The resulting colonies still populate at least six villages in today’s Sudan and largely speak Songhay. However, recent emigrations to the Gulf States are once again shifting the cultural and linguistic identity of these ‘enclaves’. By all indications, the youngest generation tends to be more fluent in Arabic and English and again identify as Fulani as there is a more continuous presence of this ethnic group across the Sahel, from Senegal to Cameroon.
Learning with and in the forest in northern Thailand

Engaging Karen youth in participatory community research

Chayovan Vaddhanaputhi & Malee Sitthikriengkrai

With a population of 438,450 the Karen form the largest ethnic minority group in Thailand.¹ They can be divided into two major sub-groups, Karen Pwo and Karen Sawg, or P'gaw K’nyjau [human being]. The Karen’s cultural life and production activities are deeply embedded in a spiritual and holistic worldview. The forest is not only perceived as the source of all life, but also a dwelling place for different spirits, and thus treated with great care and respect.

Huang Hin Lad Nai is a Karen Sawg community located in a National Forest Reservation in Chiang Rai Province, Northern Thailand. With a population of 108 people or 21 households, this small community represents an extreme case for a sustainable and self-determined development approach. The villagers continue to practice traditional shifting cultivation [Rai Mun Vien], while government policies aimed at eradicating this form of agriculture have already forced other ethnic highland communities in Northern Thailand to replace hill rice farming with permanent cash crop cultivation.

The project ‘Living with and in the Forest in Northern Thailand’ of the Center for Ethnic Studies and Development (CESD), Chiang Mai University, Thailand, aims to enable the Karen youth of Huay Hin Lad Nai to study their own community history, their everyday knowledge and practices related to their life in the forest and to their traditional shifting cultivation practices, as well as the past struggles of the villagers for their right to live in the forest.

The CESD’s project is part of the Humanities across Borders programme (HaB), which looks to develop alternative pedagogies across disciplinary, institutional and national borders, with a focus on production sites of humanistic knowledge practices. It is one of four regions of the world, Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia, and West Africa. As HaB’s local project partner in Southeast Asia, the CESD focuses on knowledge production in the Huay Hin Lad Nai community in Thailand in order to contribute to HaB’s larger vision of creating expanded humanities along the Asia-Africa axis of knowledge.

Empowering the ethnic youth

In order to understand the CESD’s approach of enabling learning processes among the youth as well as of strengthening the existing transgenerational transmission of knowledge in the community, it is crucial to look at Huay Hin Lad Nai as a community composed of three main generations, each with different experiences with the Karen way of life and with the outside world.

The first group, i.e., the generation from the age of 55 onwards, did not study in the formal education system. This generation has in-depth knowledge and holistic worldview. The forest is not only perceived as the source of all life, but also a dwelling place for different spirits, and thus treated with great care and respect.

Pedagogy beyond classroom in key community domains

It is noteworthy that learning processes in the Huay Hin Lad Nai community take place in different social contexts, i.e., within the community, in the form of a transgenerational knowledge transfer between elders and the youth, as well as in the interactions and exchanges between community members and outsiders, such as other ethnic groups, NGOs and academics. In line with this, the CESD’s project is analyzing knowledge-practices related to a life in the forest and forest resource management that involve ‘beyond classroom’ learning of different generations, particularly in two major domains of the community: 1) learning through the everyday life practice of upland rice cultivation, and 2) learning to negotiate state policies through interactions with community outsiders.

Learning through interactions with community outsiders

A second focus has been placed on the villagers’ learning to negotiate state policies through different measures, e.g., through joining movements and networks, and through engaging in research and community mapping. The traditional lifestyle of the Huay Hin Lad Nai villagers has been greatly threatened by development projects and state policies aimed at replacing their traditional shifting cultivation system with permanent crop cultivation. Moreover, the community faced a policy intent on wicing forest communities between 1993 and 1997, in line with the dominant conservation paradigm, which based on ‘Western’ ideas and concepts, emphasized the establishment of protected areas without human interference. Through this policy, the state sought to expand reservation forests in the country and to prohibit communities from living in those areas. Highlanders were labelled as non-Thai ‘hill-tribes’ who practice environmentally destructive slash-and-burn practices.

Even though the Huay Hin Lad Nai villagers have faced state power in various forms since 1983, they have been able to maintain their traditional rice production system until today, through a number of different actions and strategies. For example, the community has set-up networks with different forces in society to enhance bargaining power towards the state for the recognition of their community rights. In 1999, ethnic groups, academics and NGOs jointly drafted a Community Forestry Bill that differed from the Community Forest Act proposed by the Forest Department in 1989. Even though this Bill has not been passed, the movement created greater understanding among the youth back then (today’s 2nd generation) of their community rights and the need for action. NGOs and academics also began to support ethnic groups in conducting research and in producing proof that their community was living in the area prior to the announcement of protected areas. The...
villagers collaborated with NGOs and forest officials to produce maps depicting the land use of the community in order to demonstrate to the public that Rai Mun Vien is a form of local knowledge, different from slash and burn agriculture, as well as to show that their own communities are taking serious efforts to conserve their natural resources.

Through processes of interaction with outsiders and by joining protest movements, community members, particularly the 2nd generation, have thus acquired knowledge how to deal with threats to the Karen way of life, how to negotiate with government agencies, and how to maintain and defend their age-old shifting cultivation practices in the face of state repression, changing socio-economic landscapes and development pressure.

Since the youngest generation has no direct experiences with the movement, the CESD's project encourages them to learn from the older generations, and thus enables them to deal with development and state policies based on evidence-based research.

An unconventional approach to the co-production of knowledge

Accordingly, the CESD makes use of an adaptive pedagogical approach that allows the ethnic youth not only to gain deeper insights in and learn about their own culture, ecology, and history, but also to question mainstream development policies and programs. At the same time, it seeks to create a better understanding of how the youth comprehend their own learning from their parents and relatives. Rather than providing lecture- and text-based training in a conventional education setting, this project provides lecture- and text-based training in youth comprehend their own learning from their grandparents and colleagues and collected them in a booklet. First analyses of the collected data centered around community transformations and mobility patterns over the last one hundred years. Based on this information, a detailed kinship map and digitalized timeline of the community were produced. The latter highlights the close intertwining between community internal events and the broader socio-political context.

Film Making. The young Karen were invited to produce a visual documentation of the Karen traditional forest life and resource management practices. In line with this, they have started co-producing a short documentary with international students in order to present their own narrative about Huay Hin Lad to community outsiders. Documenting Learning through Practice. Traditionally, the Huay Hin Lad youth gain knowledge on community life in the forests and Rai Mun Vien through practice, learning by doing and on-site action engagement. For example, children learn about the rotational farming system and respect for nature through observation and engagement in parent-related activities. The shifting cultivation form thus represents a socio-cultural sphere to transfer knowledge and cultural traditions and to foster transgenerational relationships. Also other sites of intersection serve as ground of learning in which young people acquire knowledge from community elders, e.g., ritual performances, such as funerals or the New Year ceremony. Thus, the CESD project teaches and encourages the Karen youth to observe, systematically document and reflect upon these practices.

Learning through Traditional Hta Verses. The Karen traditionally use oral and visual channels rather than written materials to transmit their knowledge. Besides their own experienced knowledge, the youth also learn from sung or spoken traditional Hta verses, or quasi-sacred ‘word of the ancestors’. Handed down through generations, Hta center around Karen values, norms, religion, nature and society. They serve as culturally appropriate means of aspiration when a question of basic social importance or considered controversial. Accordingly, the CESD project also studies and records the use of traditional Hta verses in the community.

Exchanges with Other Communities. CESD is further facilitating exchanges with other ethnic communities in order to create greater understanding and cultural awareness among youth about the meaning and threats of mainstream development. For example, the young Karen from Huay Hin Lad visited the Karen community Nong Tao in Northern Thailand, which has replaced shifting cultivation by cash crop production. Other than in Huay Hin Lad, a large part of the youth is working outside of the village, faces problems with drug abuse and have little pride in their ethnic group. Some time, the problems of Ban Nong Tao have expressed the wish to revitalize traditional Karen culture in their community. Since the Huay Hin Lad youth had already been thoroughly trained to live and work with their parents in the community, they shared their experiences with the Nong Tao community members and described their daily learning experiences in the forest and shifting cultivation forms: “Why should we be shy or not proud of our culture? When we stay at home, raise pigs and chicken and practice Rai Mun Vien, we are happy that we can go to school, our overlords will be the same. We wake up early, have breakfast, clean the classroom and then go to bed. This will be the same pattern from elementary to secondary school, and even beyond. But we stay at home, however, we learn a lot in different ways, and we are able to do many things”. The youth of Huay Hin Lad highlighted, in that the visit in Nong Tao was of great importance for them to see and understand the rapid and profound socio-economic changes occurring in some ethnic communities, but also to reflect upon their own community situation and on ways how to strengthen their local initiatives and deal with such transformation processes.

Socially engaged research on rice cultivation in Asia and beyond

The CESD's project makes use of a pedagogical approach that helps the youth researchers learn about their local culture, knowledge, and their own way of learning. They are encouraged to reflect upon all day life community practices in a systematic way in order to become aware of, reflect upon and strengthen existing knowledge-practices and their transmission processes. From the elders and their experiences, they are able to gain new understanding about their own community context and of dealing with state policies. This can help them to defend their traditional lifestyle and knowledge against prevailing prejudices and misconceptions shared by government authorities and the wider public who continue to perceive hill rice cultivation as a backward agricultural practice and as a major cause for deforestation and environmental destruction.

In line with the HAB’s overall objectives to develop new pedagogical frameworks at both local and national levels, the CESD project not only opens insights into context-specific learning related to rice cultivation as both knowledge-practice, but also contributes to critical reflections on rice, its meaning and related practices, that transcend national, regional and global borders, e.g., in other Asian or African contexts.

Accordingly, at the 6th Conference of the Asian Borders Network, held in Bishkek from 13-15 August 2018, CESD researchers and other HAB members from South and Southeast Asia and West Africa presented their research concerning the notion of ‘rice-scapes’ through different modalities of rice cultivation in a double panel titled ‘Alienation or Recognition? Pedagogical Approaches and Technologies’. The different papers analyzed interconnections and divisions between hill cultivation and rice cultivation and explored rice as knowledge-practice based on three different ecological systems – water-based, lowland rice – with different rice cultivation techniques, such as irrigated or flooded, settled cultivation as well as shifting cultivation, or the rotational use of land plots. Participants had the chance to jointly reflect upon the development of a rice syllabus based on these ecological systems, by drawing on the presented local examples from different parts of the world. Comparisons across borders revealed the importance of the research process as a crucial element for the development of alternative and more locally relevant rice that allows unconventional approaches and perspectives and that can be reproduced in different geographical contexts.

Accordingly, the CESD’s project proposes a syllabus for an ethnic youth training on pedestrian rice cultivation in Northern Thailand that is highly relevant to create an in-depth understanding of local knowledge and learning processes, and how to preserve rice cultivation practices against challenges related to urbanization, socio-economic development and agricultural modernization. This can be beneficial for other countries and regions, since local and traditional rice cultivation practices are facing growing pressure worldwide due to the impacts of climate change, the large scale expansion of urbanization, as well as the use of new agricultural cultures as well as the shrinking of arable land.

Future transnational and regional collaboration of the rice project may center around further compromising process and content of different ecological and regional approaches to rice cultivation and rice pedagogy that ultimately feeds into the different parts of the world. Comparisons across borders’ curriculum as an overall outcome of the HAB program.

References

Notes


In October 2018, a curricula development workshop was conducted at the Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA), Taiwan, as part of the IIAS’ Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World (HaB) programme. The workshop focused on the practice of indigo dye production and its use as critical pedagogy in higher education. Our aim was to view indigo as both knowledge and practice, epistemology and pedagogy, whilst interrogating the many discourses in which indigo is embedded in popular and disciplinary imagination. Methodologically, the workshop sought to explore lateral engagement on global issues and, at the same time, encourage context-specific, in-situ teaching and learning practices that can be reproduced anytime, anywhere.

Indigo as critical pedagogy

Min-Chin Chiang

The workshop was an occasion for us to share and further refine the bachelor’s and master’s syllabus being developed as part of the HaB project ‘Indigo: Developing a Curriculum across Borders’ with the student community and other members of the faculty of the Graduate Institute of Architecture and Cultural Heritage at TNUA. The HaB programme was represented by HaB advisor François Vogelenzang, academic director Aarón Kowela; Yoko Inoue, a multi-disciplinary artist-educator at the Bennington College, Vermont, USA; and Jocelyne Vaissière of the Institut des Sciences des Socétés, Centre national de recherche scientifique et technologique (INSS-CNRS), Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Signalling a new relationship between HaB and Kyoto Seika University, the workshop also welcomed Yip Honkaho of the Centre for Innovation in Traditional Industry, Isanori Oha from the Office of International Education, as well as Kyoto-based indigo artist and guest faculty at the university, Mitsusau Tania.

Day 1: Field visits

On the first day we visited Zhuo Ye Cottage, a family-run homestay and indigo production and dyeing studio in Sanji, in Miaoli county, a three-hour drive from Taipei. We were guided by Mr Tzu-Lo Cho, the second-generation owner of Zhuo Ye Cottage and an artist who works with indigo and batik techniques. He led us through his farm where he grows various plants for their natural dyes, including indigo varieties such as Strobilanthes Cuapio (Assam Indigo), Indigofila tinctoria, Polysgynum tinctorium (Japanese indigo) and Isatis tinctoria (woad). We were invited to observe the indigo-making process using sedimentation technology, which is the most commonly applied method in Taiwan. In the indigo-making area there were different basins for soaking the leaves and threads, and for mixing the dye liquors for oxidation. At the studio, we could follow the progress of indigo dyeing techniques from handmade pieces to the semi-automated production of broadcloths. The Zhuo Ye Cottage also applies natural colours in their culinary services, which were sampled by us at the sumptuous vegetarian lunch that delighted our international guests.

In October 2018, a curricula development workshop was conducted at the Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA), Taiwan, as part of the IIAS’ Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World (HaB) programme. The workshop focused on the practice of indigo dye production and its use as critical pedagogy in higher education. Our aim was to view indigo as both knowledge and practice, epistemology and pedagogy, whilst interrogating the many discourses in which indigo is embedded in popular and disciplinary imagination. Methodologically, the workshop sought to explore lateral engagement on global issues and, at the same time, encourage context-specific, in-situ teaching and learning practices that can be reproduced anytime, anywhere.

Day 2: Sharing, discussions and plant pigment extraction workshop

Day 2 began at the FuturePost Lab at TNUA, with a welcome address by TNUA president Kai-Huang Chien and introductions by the participants. This was also an occasion for self-introductions and a presentation of the HaB vision and the ‘Indigo across Borders’ project. After lunch, it was time for the natural pigment extraction workshop. The participants, guided by Hua-Chen Huang, lecturer at the Department of Fine Arts, explored the campus collecting plants from which we later learned to extract colours and produce pigment.

From a humanities across borders perspective, the extraction of colours and pigments from plants is a method of knowing, of engaging with a place and its lived history and of making transversal connections. The process of pigment extraction was not only an occasion for ‘doing’ but also coming closer to the immediate environment, constructing a colour map of the university campus walking about collecting plants, and recognising and archiving them for their pigments in a kitchen-like studio/lab setting. The plant pigment extraction workshop brought different people together, including indigo artists, researchers, PhD students, fine arts students and cultural heritage students, to produce alternative ways of seeing and knowing a place. The workshop was followed by a discussion on how colour extraction can be used as educational material and method for a variety of experiential pedagogies in different contexts. In particular, our conversations revolved around the knowledge practice of indigo in Taiwan to trigger critical reflections on its meaning and practice in other Asian and African contexts. We also discussed the parameters for building a syllabus (including a shared vocabulary and learning modules) that would eventually contribute towards a ‘Humanities across Borders’ curriculum.

Day 3: Roundtable on Indigo as critical pedagogy

The third day began with a discussion of the syllabus for the BA and MA courses ‘Indigo across Borders’ and ‘Indigo Liquid Museum’, introduced by me under the HaB programme at TNUA. As part of their final project, MA students of the ‘Indigo Liquid Museum’ course presented their curatorial project proposal for a global indigo liquid museum. The group with the best proposal was invited to present at the HaB roundtable. This group of four young ladies made a proposal for ‘Global Indigo Studies’ by reviewing the development of the indigo dye and exploring the relations between the indigo dye and the different stakeholders involved. The other BA level ‘Indigo across Borders’ course exposed students to harvesting the indigo plant on a local farm, to indigo arts and cultural forms around the world as well as the critical issues pertaining to indigo in contemporary society. A key aspect of this course was to encourage students—the young generation—with indigo practitioners and to learn from this mutually sympathetic connection, which becomes quite profound after the harvesting and indigo extraction experience. We all sensed this very clearly from the students’ final proposals on Indigo and the thoughts they presented from their notes after each class. The indigo artists, researchers and community members working together in the two courses, and over the last seven years, were all more than willing to join the methodologies workshop, share their ideas on how to develop an indigo syllabus, and learn together! Given the vibrant discussions during the three-day long HaB workshop, the two courses will be presented during the 11th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) 11 in Leiden, the Netherlands, in July 2019. Moreover, the courses will be revised and implemented in Semester 108-1 at TNUA (from September 2019).

The HaB workshop moved to a roundtable format presenting short provocations that explored the reasons for creating an indigo syllabus—what, why, how, and for whom. This was followed by the participants splitting up into four breakout groups, each of which discussed indigo across the following four themes: (1) Place, Belonging and Nature; (2) Word, Memory and Meaning; (3) Practice, Knowledge Production and Reproduction; (4) Market, Aesthetics and Ethics. Following guidelines provided by the workshop conveners, each group discussed the assigned theme from their own specific context. What emerged was the possibility of using indigo as critical pedagogy to interrogate prevailing discourses and disciplinary knowledge such as development; heritage; urban ecology; design and fashion; material culture; history of colonialism; agricultural and development economics; dye chemistry; linguistics; geography, and so on. By making indigo and its practice familiar and bringing it into classroom discussions, each group was able to see ‘indigo’ as a tool for self-reflection and critical pedagogy beyond the classroom.
study of Kochi, the South-western port city
space that is enlivened by the various ways
account of the vitality of space – the life of city
marginalisation as negotiated, lived and
account of development, displacement and
status and so on. How can one provide an
cultural lives in terms of religion, social
but also transform and reimagine their
shaped cities such as Lahore, Kolkata, Mumbai,
also historical accounts of how colonisation
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of cities in the developing world, including
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fastest growing cities and a popular tourism
destination in South India. Like any other city
in the developing world, Kochi has its own
stories of displacement, marginalisation and
economic progress. The spatial arrangement
and reorganisation of the city holds within
itself people’s memories and lived experiences
of material and cultural development. My
project takes off from this point to capture
the affective memories and lived experience
of the displaced communities in the ever-
expanding city of Kochi.

This is a major project that I am taking up
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IIAS Research, Networks, and Initiatives

IIAS research and other initiatives are carried out within a number of thematic, partially overlapping research clusters in phase with contemporary Asian currents and built around the notion of social agency. In addition, IIAS remains open to other potentially significant topics. More information: www.iias.asia

IIAS research clusters

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

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

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

Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network (SEANNET)
SEANNET is a four-year project (2017-2020), supported by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation (New York, USA) that seeks to develop a multi-disciplinary body of knowledge on cities in Southeast Asia through the prism of the neighbourhood. Through case study sites in six cities (Mandalay, Myanmar; Chiang Mai and Bangkok, Thailand; Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Manila, Philippines; Surabaya, Indonesia), SEANNET seeks to engage the humanistic social sciences in a dialogue with urban stakeholders as co-contributors of an alternative knowledge on cities. It seeks to achieve this through a combination of participatory field-research, in-situ roundtables and workshops, academic conferences, publications, and new forms of pedagogy developed in collaboration with local institutions of learning. The second ambition of SEANNET is to help shape and empower a community of early career scholars and practitioners working on and from Southeast Asia. To that effect, SEANNET research teams in the six neighbourhoods comprise international and local scholars, students from local universities, and civil society representatives, working together with neighbourhood residents.

Indian Medical Research Network
IIAS supports the work of the Indian Medical Research Network, which aims to stimulate social-cultural and social-historical research on Indian medical traditions such as Ayurveda, UnaniTibb, Siddha, Yoga and Sowa Rigpa. Of special interest is the integration of Indian medicine in Indian public health and its role as second resort for middleclass Indians and Europeans.

Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe
Initiated by IAS, 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 Herfel (Harvard) as a guest teacher and the Senior Advisor to the Critical Heritage Studies Initiative of IAS.

Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA)
The Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA) is an inclusive network that brings together 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 emphasis is on immediate problem solving as well as on the identification of long-term, transformative processes that increase the scope for the active engagement of people in the creative production and shaping of the city in Asia. 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).

The IIAS Research Network

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Cluster: Asian Heritages
**African area studies—something that would benefit the two continents. It is also an opportunity to move for a sustainable and balanced socio-economic progress and societies. This exchange, we believe, is a prerequisite knowledge in the two regions about one another’s cultures.**

**Asian universities, capable of delivering foundational continents. We aspire to facilitate the development of an intellectual and academic community of individuals African and Asian world regions. Our aim is to contribute and beyond to study, discuss, and share knowledge on education across borders.**

Follow the stories on the Humanities across Borders Blog [https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog](https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog)

**Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge**

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

[www.africaasia.org](http://www.africaasia.org)

Cluster: Global Asia

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**Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN)**

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

[www.asianborderlands.org](http://www.asianborderlands.org)

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Cluster: Global Asia

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**Energy Programme Asia (EPA)**

The new joint research programme between IIAS-EPA and the Institute of World Politics and Economics 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.

The first research-oriented meeting with fourteen scholars from China and the Netherlands will take place during ICAS 11 (16-19 July 2019, Leiden, the Netherlands).

[www.iias.nl/research/energy-programme-asia-epa](http://www.iias.nl/research/energy-programme-asia-epa)

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Cluster: Global Asia

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**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 IIAS, ICAS serves as a platform for scholars, social and cultural leaders, and institutions focusing on issues critical to Asia, and, by implication, the rest of the world. The ICAS biennial conferences are organised in cooperation with local universities, cities and institutions and attended by scholars and other experts, institutions and publishers from 60 countries. ICAS also organises the biennial ‘ICAS Book Prize’ (IBP), which awards the most prestigious prizes in the field of Asian Studies for books and PhD theses in English, Korean, Chinese, French and German (more language editions are planned for the future).

Ten conventions have been held since 1997 (Leiden, Berlin, Singapore, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Daejon, Honolulu, Macao, Adelaide, and Chiang Mai).

ICAS 11 will be held in Leiden, the Netherlands, 16-19 July 2019.

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

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Instruments and playing them, along with the performances, the techniques of producing tchudu but also the dadou are very popular in Laos, it is the traditional to a region or a few communities only. Instruments are an important part of the musical landscape of Laos, with their variety of roles, techniques, and timbres. Some are shared (often in different forms) by several ethnic groups, and others are more specific to a region or a few communities only.

While the guitar and the electric keyboard are very popular in Laos, it is the traditional aerophones that are celebrated in TAEC’s newest exhibition: ‘Voices of the Wind: Traditional Instruments in Laos’. The aerophones (commonly called ‘wind instruments’) form the most varied instrument family in Laos. They include the emblematic mouth organ khaen, but also the abduola (a flute), the tchudu (a trumpet), and even simple leaves. They are used in festive, ritual and court contexts, or simply to break loneliness. TAEC’s exhibition explores different contexts of the music performances, the techniques of producing instruments along with the different materials – modern and traditional – used to create sound. These different themes show the deep connection of nature, and everyday life, and the complexity and variety of voices of the wind in Laos.

Speaking about music is speaking about life in Laos, its changes and challenges. More than singing, musical instruments are directly influenced by the changes in local traditions and the musical practices related to them. While some instruments disappear, others are re-fashioned and adapted to the availability of new materials. It is not unusual to find an empty paint can transformed into the resonant chamber of a lute, or a plastic bottle used as an amplifier. TAEC’s exhibition celebrates these changes as well as the voices of traditions.

Left Notice the amplifier of the free reed Hmông pipe or rōt opāmi (pronounced pō plō). Traditionally the amplifier would be made of bamboo, but it can also be modified with a plastic bottle. Top right: Mr. Hôu Lua, an Akha musician, playing a buffalo horn called tchichla. The instrument is traditionally played to communicate messages, but some can also be used in healing ceremonies, Hom sai village, Luang Namtha Province, 2007. Above: The music dissemination project in Ban Ngàng Tol, January 2019. All photos VTAC.

**Voices of the Wind**

**Voices of the Wind: Traditional Instruments in Laos**

Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre (TAEC), Luang Prabang, Laos

September 2018 – September 2020

www.taecaos.org

**Promoting and celebrating musical cultures in Laos**

The deceptively simple-looking wind instruments have generally been overlooked as an important part of Laos’ cultural heritage, until now. The rapid economic and social changes taking place in the country have drastically changed the mechanisms of transmission of oral cultural practices, such as music. Young people have better access to education (a positive development) or leave the village for work, spending less time with elders performing traditional music. Further, instrument-makers are often old and no longer have apprentices. Once an instrument breaks, it is difficult to find someone able to repair it. Finally, changes in social mores also deeply influence the use of traditional instruments, as most young people regard the use of music for counting as old-fashioned. TAEC’s music project aims to promote these instruments and their musicians, and support the safeguarding of their knowledge so they will remain accessible to future generations. The project is divided into three phases: 1. the documentation of traditional wind instruments; 2. the creation of an exhibition at TAEC; 3. The dissemination of the collected data to the research communities.

The ‘Voices of the Wind’ exhibition was designed to highlight the variety and complexity of traditional wind instruments of Laos. It is accessible to a large audience, from the visitor eager to learn more about local culture, to the musician researching specific musical techniques. For example, many instruments of the region are used to communicate, either symbolically or directly, by mimicking tones of the spoken language. This exhibition uses audio-visual examples to make this complex phenomenon more accessible.

Through recreations of a Hmông instrument-maker’s workshop and the staging of a Tai Dam healing ceremony, as well as interactive video kiosks with over a hundred pictures and video recorded by the TAEC team, the visitor is invited to experience music in its traditional and daily context; to witness festivals, ceremonies, and everyday life rarely seen by the general public.

**Passing and giving back musical knowledge**

This music project goes beyond the exhibition, as the TAEC team wishes to share with the community that participated in the project. Therefore, after the opening of the ‘Voices of the Wind’ exhibition in September 2018, the TAEC team started a dissemination project, to compile and bring the documentation material and recorded music back to the communities from which they were collected. At the time of writing, the team is visiting the main villages in which fieldtrips took place; setting up pop-up exhibitions of traditional music in Laos, screening videos recorded during the research trips, and organizing small performances of local musicians. DVDs and mini SD cards with audio and video recordings will be given to key members of the villages (head of the villages, teachers, etc.), as well as a booklet in the Lao language, with 70 pages of text and photos collected in 15 villages. An archive of traditional music, all the interviews and recordings collected during the research, is accessible to local and foreign visitors in the TAEC library in Luang Prabang. The videos and pictures in the exhibition are accessible online on the TAEC website.

The main goal of this dissemination phase is not so much to teach people about local music, but to promote and celebrate this music and its actors. Organising the exhibitions in the villages, with panels, videos, instruments from different ethnic groups to try, and performances of local musicians, invites villagers to share about music, to exchange experiences, stories, and knowledge.

**Notes**

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