

Contents #35

- 1&4 What is the use of area studies? / C.J-H Macdonald
3 Letters to the editor

Theme - Indigenous peoples' movements

- 6 Theme introduction / Gerard A. Persoon
7 Indigenous peoples at the global level / Barbara Slee
8 Beyond Integration: indigenous assertion in India / Bengt G. Karlsson
9 Indigenous rights and resource management in Philippine protected areas / Padmapani Perez and Tessa Minter
10 The Orang Asli of Malaysia / Alberto G. Gomes
11 Indonesia: reformulating indigenous identity / Gerard A. Persoon
12 Minority rights and national development in the People's Republic of China / Xu Yuan

Research & Reports

- 13 Male Homosexuality in the Philippines: a short history / J. Neil C. Garcia
14 Dravidian Studies in the Netherlands: Part 1 – Pioneers of Orientalism at the VOC (1605-1690s) / Luba Zubkova
15 Digital and other divides in a developing country / Edilberto C. de Jesus
16 Local Pilgrimage in Java and Madura: why is it booming? / George Quinn
17 From Zábaj to Jáwa / Michael Laffan
18 Tsedenbal's Mongolia and Communist Aid Donors: a reappraisal / Balázs Szalontai
19 The Translation of Russian Literature in Republican China / Mark Gamsa
20 Chinese Overseas studies coming of age / Mette Thunø
20 Theory and method in Indian intellectual history / Saraju Rath
21 India-China Comparisons: state and society / Peter van der Veer
21 Avoiding Harm: medical decision making and East Asian values / Margaret Sleeboom

Arts

- 22 Cartographies of Fragmentation / Duncan Campbell
23 Perform : State : Interrogate / Matthew Isaac Cohen
24 The Fight Against Illicit Traffic in Cultural Property: the importance of case studies / Lyndel V. Prott
25 35th Poetry International Festival
26-27 Arts Agenda / Carol Brash
28 On the manifest and latent functions of the mistress / Yue Tao

Publications

- 29 Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident: reflections on twenty years of comparative scholarship / Lisa Raphals
30 Androgyny in late Ming and early Qing literature / Roland Altenburger
31 Earlier Origins, Protracted Journey: local, regional and global pathways to independence / Vincent K. Pollard
32 Circumambulations in South Asian history / Nile Green
32-33 Traditional Malay literature / Dick van der Meij
33 Agency denied / Irfan Ahmad
34 Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade / Hasan Karrar
34-35 Encyclopedia of Modern Asia / Hendrik E. Niemeijer
35 The melodrama of South Korean modernity / Suzana Dudic
36 Social movements in India / Manish K. Thakur
37 Books Received

IIAS / ASEF / ALLIANCE

- 38 The Swedish School of Advanced Asia-Pacific Studies / Thommy Svensson
39 The Public Sector in Urban Housing and Regeneration: converging and diverging experiences in Asia and Europe / Anne Power, Bingqin Li and Hyun-bang Shin
40 IIAS Fellows
41 IIAS Research Programmes

Announcements

- 42-43 Projects & events
44-45 Call for Papers
46-47 International Conference Agenda

Front page photo

General map extending from India and Ceylon to northwestern Australia by way of southern Japan, the Philippines, the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago (coloured engraving), by Nicholas (Claes) Jansz Visscher (1586-1652)

Eurasian research and education: a two-way flow

Director's note

The twenty-first century is often proclaimed as the century of Asia. Indeed, there are good reasons to presume that China, India and Japan will play determining roles in the economic, political and scientific developments of the future. For Asian Studies, we are convinced that the future also lies in Asia. This, however, should not deter non-Asians from studying the continent in all its facets and forms.

Future research should address Asia as part of our global community – historically as well as comparatively – from a perspective beyond that of traditional area studies, which in the past has fragmented disciplinary coherence and limited the scope and quality of research.

The most pressing reason for us to pursue Asian Studies, however, is that Europe can sustain its scientific position only through co-operation with Asian partners in multidisciplinary research and education. Disincentives for studying in Europe notwithstanding – e.g. the shortage of courses taught in English, uncertainty in the degree structure and equivalence of qualifications and the absence of a clearly defined credit-transfer system – the majority of graduate students in Europe in the exact sciences are already from Asia.

With the Bologna process, which aims to tackle the above drawbacks well underway, preconditions for the inflow of Asian students and researchers seem to have been met. But is this really so? Or is it a bureaucratic dream which is turning out to be a well-oiled machine, the main output of which is reduplicative mediocrity? The weaknesses of the European science and education systems (there are of course exceptions) are not addressed by the Bologna process.

Pan-European research and education will become feasible only when member countries of the European Union are prepared to put in perspective their chauvinistic and romantic notions of education and research as identifying features of the nation-state. Needless to say, this remains a real barrier to organizing a truly European scientific education and research culture. In a period of declining resources, a division of labour on the basis of proven excellence seems to be, for Europe, the only remedy against a decline in its research and education.

Only under these conditions can a European research and education culture flourish and link up with rapidly emerging Asian research and education infrastructures. Many Asian countries, among them China, Japan, India and South-Korea, already have many institutions offering high-quality education in the professional disciplines, which have brought to Europe's shores large pools of Asian scientists. The time that the 'trade' in education and research was a one-way flow from Europe (and America) to Asia is long past. The future lies in inter-regional research and educational linkages based on a mutual appreciation of each other's strengths and weaknesses. <

Wim Stokhof
Director, IIAS



The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is a post-doctoral research centre based in Leiden and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Our main objective is to encourage the interdisciplinary and comparative study of Asia and to promote national and international cooperation in the field. The institute focuses on the humanities and social sciences and, where relevant, on their interaction with other sciences.

IIAS values dynamism and versatility in its research programmes. Post-doctoral research fellows are temporarily employed by or affiliated to IIAS, either within the framework of a collaborative research programme or on an individual basis. In its aim to disseminate broad, in-depth knowledge of Asia, the institute organizes seminars, workshops and conferences, and publishes the *IIAS Newsletter* with a circulation of 24,000.

IIAS runs a database for Asian Studies with information on researchers and research-related institutes worldwide. As an international mediator and a clearing-house for knowledge and information, IIAS is active in creating international networks and launching international cooperative projects and research programmes. In this way, the institute functions as a window on Europe for non-European scholars and contributes to the cultural rapprochement between Asia and Europe.

IIAS also administers the secretariat of the European Alliance for Asian Studies (Asia Alliance: www.asia-alliance.org) and the Secretariat General of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS: www.icassecretariat.org). Updates on the activities of the Asia Alliance and ICAS are published in the *IIAS Newsletter*. <

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