

Leiden, the Netherlands, 27-30 June 2006

19th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies

ECMSAS is held every two years and is one of the largest gatherings of South Asian researchers in Europe, covering all fields from the humanities and social sciences to technology, the natural sciences and medicine.

ECMSAS 2006 is organized by the International Institute for Asian Studies and the European Association of South Asian Studies (EASAS)

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The future of Asian archaeology

The future of Asian archaeology at Leiden University was debated at the workshop 'Current issues in the archaeology of Asia' following the first IIAS masterclass on this topic. I would like to re-emphasize some of my own observations from this meeting.

In my opinion, there are four main requirements for effective research on archaeology in Asia, in particular in my own area of Southeast Asia. The first is an archaeology department able to provide the training and practical methodology necessary for field research. The second is access to modern facilities and specialist knowledge required to analyze archaeological material. The third is broad expertise in the history and material cultures of Asia as a whole. As early as 1937, J.C. van Leur argued that Indonesian history could only be understood within a wider Asian context and this is also true for Indonesian archaeology, even for the earliest periods of prehistory. The last and rarest resource is a centre of learning for area languages and cultures. The decline Southeast Asian Studies was noted at an earlier seminar in Amsterdam. Terry King, summarising the present situation in the UK, noted that the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies in Kent was closed in 1991 and the Department in Hull in 2002, leaving only London as a collective centre of learning in this area.

Despite the problems faced by university departments across Europe, it is notable that all four areas of expertise are present at Leiden University. With the gradual centralization of both Asian studies and non-western archaeology, it is now the only institution in the Netherlands where in-depth research is possible. For the study of Indonesian archaeology, the situation is even more serious, as much of the essential literature remains in Dutch and archival resources (such as the photographic archive of the Oudheidkundige Dienst) are available only in Leiden. The university is a centre of European importance for Southeast Asian archaeology, and a unique centre of learning on Indonesia. Moreover, the strength of both the Sinological and Indological departments makes the future potential for Asian archaeology even greater.

Teaching remains integral to long-term research strategy. The four key speakers at the meeting – John Miksic, Pierre-Yves Manguin, Bion Griffin and Ian Glover – all supported PhD students as part of their archaeological programmes. This teaching and supervision is vital, and I do not believe long-term archaeological programmes can be maintained in Leiden without the continuity of teaching staff and faculty. Finally, I have constantly been impressed by the high quality of research in Asian archaeology currently being undertaken by graduate and doctoral students in Leiden, and the long academic tradition established here. To allow this tradition to be broken, notwithstanding the financial pressures now involved, would be, in my opinion, not only a loss, but a tragedy. ◀

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Unrepresentative, pusillanimous & politically correct

Dear Editors,

Your recent special issue on 'the Asia-Pacific War 60 years on' was seriously unrepresentative and defective in its neglect of both Burma and Thailand. Of course, even these days, different though they are, both are still treated all too often as non-countries. But Thailand (formerly mis-represented as 'Siam') has a good claim to be considered the *real* Southeast Asia, as the one historic local polity never colonized, and therefore best able to develop according to its own needs. And Burma, no 'imperial construct' like many others in Asia, was perhaps the land least happy to be subordinated to western rule, as indicated by its unique refusal on regaining its independence in 1948, to join the British Commonwealth.

As I pointed out in a review article in the *Cambridge Historical Journal* as long ago as 1987, Thailand unfortunately but understandably indulged from 1944 in a 'fudge' of its earlier policies in order to limit the postwar punitive Allied reaction to a minimum. And Burma can be considered to have done much the same in order to gain its independence. One thinks of General Slim's comment to Aung San when at last, in May 1945, he marched his troops through the Japanese lines to join the British forces: 'You only come to us because you see we are winning'.

For that matter, there is extensive evidence from right across Southeast and South Asia – Chandra Bose for instance – of local support for the Japanese war against western colonial hegemony, up at least to the point when the return of the western powers began to seem likely, and the locals could recognize the need to make their peace with them. By the same token, as defeat began increasingly to stare them in the face, some Japanese began to treat local Southeast Asians in a much more repressive manner. This is something particularly well illustrated by Dr Ba Maw's Breakthrough in Burma, written though it was, years later, primarily as a vindication of the Japanese, something still quite misrepresented by such as John Dower.

Fundamentally however, the native (as opposed to Overseas Chinese) view of the Far Eastern War differed markedly from the Sino-Korean, and should have been given at least equal recognition in your essentially very 'politically correct' not to say pusillanimous coverage. Events at the time of the late Showa tenno's funeral would seem to indicate that pathological Japan-bashing still reigns particularly widely in the Netherlands. ◀

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