

Evolution of The Newsletter



The IIAS Newsletter, later simply re-named The Newsletter, was created along with the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in 1993 and is an embodiment of the institute's ideals. This is clear from the inaugural issue of The Newsletter, in which its first managing editor, Paul van der Velde, explained how IIAS “was expected to play a stimulating and integrating role in the field of Asian studies in Europe through organizing international workshops, conferences, a database and by publishing a newsletter.” IIAS was founded to give coherence to a fragmented Asian Studies world and The Newsletter was to be a partner in that endeavour. It took on that role from its very inception by assimilating the already existing *South Asia Newsletter*, which was in itself a collaborative effort by CASA (Amsterdam) and the Kern Institute (Leiden). The Newsletter was thus from its very initial conception meant to be much more than the dictionary definition of a periodical bulletin of institutional news and events.

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Promoting and connecting others

In earlier issues of the IIAS Newsletter, contributions were sorted into three main sections – South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia – each with news about institutes, conference reports, calls for papers, lectures, awards and events. The issues also included a general section on Asian Studies. But in everything it reported on, it was unique. It provided exhaustive information about other institutions rather than exclusively listing its own institutional news. There was a conscious effort to build networks and to sketch the larger picture. Hence, it would frequently profile new, as well as established, institutions devoted to Asian Studies – both nationally and internationally.

While heavy on news, The Newsletter never forgot people. Right from the beginning, along with the reports and agendas, readers were given interviews and profiles of people who contributed to Asian Studies in varying capacities. They included not only scholarly stalwarts, such as Peter J.M. Nas, the Leiden ‘godfather’ of Urban Studies (issue #7), but also others contributing to research, such as librarian Roger Tol, who established the Malaysian Resource Centre at the KITLV (issue #8).

Supplements

Another interesting feature of The Newsletter are its occasional special supplements – which make the already hefty Newsletter even heftier! An early example is issue #6, which in addition to its 76 pages, had a 16-page Special Supplement on ‘Dutch Museums with Asian Collections’. But perhaps the most significant of the early supplements was the one in #11, on ‘Newsletters on Asia in Europe’, containing the lectures delivered by several editors of comparable newsletters during a conference at IIAS in 1996. It is notable that while some of the newsletters listed in the supplement have regrettably become defunct, The Newsletter has continued – getting bigger and better and more innovative each year.

Redesigns – going full colour!

Issue #6 witnessed the first introduction of colour into the publication, but this concerned only the front and back pages. There were two major redesigns over the course of the next 14 years. In issue #27 (2002), The Newsletter was given a face-lift, and the layout was changed “by dropping the regional designations and categorizing articles according to type”. It was also the point at which The Newsletter became fully available online. Prior to that, only the bare text of selected essays were published online. Issue #50 was a big milestone: the publication went from being the ‘IIAS Newsletter’ to ‘The Newsletter’. It also went full colour; and building on the layout changes of the previous years, it was given five distinct sections: ‘The Study’, ‘The Review’, ‘The Focus’, ‘The Network’ and ‘The Portrait’.

‘The Study’ includes research articles by both IIAS Fellows as well as other Asian scholars. Reviews are an important vehicle for the dissemination of new research, and ‘The Review’ section covers this aspect in an innovative way. It works in sync with ‘New Asia Books’, an initiative of IIAS that aims for the greater visibility of new books on Asia worldwide (see page 36 of this issue). ‘The Focus’ is compiled by a Guest Editor, and consists

of various coordinated articles on one theme. ‘The Network’ includes the pages on all things institutional: fellows and fellowships, alumni, events, reports, grants, call for papers, etc. ‘The Portrait’ can be found on the back cover of each issue; it is devoted to some aspect of visual culture in/on Asia. This is in addition to the bounty of images found in each issue of The Newsletter; a reflection of a world-wide trend of the increasing importance of the image in publishing. Keeping this reality in mind, and in celebration of its 20 year anniversary, IIAS and The Newsletter will be launching a Photo Contest in January 2014. You are all invited to join in! (see opposite page)

The Internet & The Newsletter

The Internet profoundly affected publishing the world over, and The Newsletter was no exception. IIAS established its website in 1996, which was proudly announced in issue #10. Prior to that, The Newsletter had taken it upon itself to educate its as yet uninitiated audience. In a series of articles in issues #4 to #9, a special correspondent (Annelies de Deugd) gave detailed information and instruction about how to use the internet. Once the internet became more generally accessible The Newsletter confidently reached out to its new online audience. Thanks to the internet, it has a much wider readership than would otherwise have been the case. Its present readership has reached 17,000, of which only 8000 are in hardcopy, as a growing number of readers are digital subscribers. The issues are also always available to everyone on our website.

The future

The Newsletter is exploring the possibility of putting together an International Council (similar to ICAS, see p21). This Council would not be an editorial board, but rather function as an advisory council of global members – giving global input in the ever expanding field of Asian Studies. It would reflect the global institutionalisation of IIAS, and reinforce our global networks.

The future looks promising for The Newsletter, but what will be crucial to its ongoing success is the maintenance of the basic principles that it has always worked according to – that of being broad, free and accessible (in the widest sense of the term). Because IIAS is broad (it embraces the study of the whole of Asia and is committed to building networks), The Newsletter also reaches wide in its scope. Its readers come from all over the world, and thus it is important that The Newsletter be accessible, which is only to be achieved with a style of writing that is light on terminology and not research-field specific. It is also accessible to its contributors, and is an encouraging platform for young researchers and established scholars alike. Importantly, The Newsletter has always been available at no cost to its readers – it has remained free for 20 years, even at a time when academic publishing, in general, has become more and more expensive. It will continue to be available to all, and maintain its consummate role of ‘encouraging knowledge and enhancing the study of Asia’.

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