

Pull-out supplement

theFocus

The New Asia Scholar

There have been many developments in the field of Asian Studies and among its scholars during the last few decades, and we have been taking note. Our particular observatory has been the biennial meetings of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS), which had its first assembly in 1998, and its most recent earlier this year. After the first two meetings in Europe (Leiden and Berlin), ICAS was moved into Asia (with two diversions: Honolulu and Adelaide), not only to further increase participation of scholars from Asia, but also with the idea that the Asian case provides an ideal breeding ground to refine existing theories and to develop new ones.

Unlike other Asian Studies conferences, where the majority of participants come from the United States and Europe, ICAS boasts the greatest diversified cross-continental representation, and most of its participants come from Asian countries. One of our most obvious observations has been that Asian Studies is now more and more being produced in Asia. New ideas and research findings are discussed not only among researchers who study Asia, but also among scholars who live in Asia. This is important because so far the conceptual lexicons and theoretical tools used in social sciences and humanities have been derived almost exclusively from the West. Although these theories and methods have been applied throughout the world with considerable success, their limitations are increasingly apparent, especially in a place like Asia (or Africa for that matter) with its long indigenous traditions of organising social relations, its own norms concerning power and order, and its legacies of implementing rule.

Sonja Zweegers & Paul van der Velde



Adams Bodomo (University of Vienna), shortlisted for the Africa-Asia Book Prize 2015, and here seen speaking at the Africa-Asia conference.

The New Asia Scholar *continued*

Reverse and inclusive discourses

As Asian countries emerge to become prominent players in the world, here comes the point when we recognise that the region has something to offer for knowledge production. In his contribution to this Focus, in which various academics have joined our discussion of the current field of Asian Studies and the scholars involved, Tak-Wing Ngo (University of Macau and local host of ICAS 8), comments on this realisation. He signals that, recently, there has been an increasing demand for alternative scholarship within Asian Studies, for a move away from Western theory, and “for the development of ‘reverse discourses’ in order for non-Western scholarship to theorize back at the West”. But as local Asian centres and networks of knowledge emerge, seeking to interact with the rest of the academic world, they encounter the problem of language. And now the challenge has come to continue to judge scholarship according to quality not quantity, and to, in Tak-Wing’s words “encourage internationalization without compromising indigenous scholarship”.

Not only is Asia a breeding ground for new knowledge and theory, it is also a new home for the many foreign Asia Scholars who wish to ‘get up close’ to the discussion. Lena Scheen (New York University Shanghai), a sinologist from Leiden University, moved to Shanghai so that she could experience the benefits of being among her research subjects, but has now also been forced to learn how to deal with becoming part of her own research field. Essentially, she considers it to be a benefit: “to be required to consistently question your surroundings and yourself in it, creating never-ending opportunities to learn”.

Besides the refreshing reversal of roles and locations, we are also seeing a new inclusiveness in many areas of research. In her autobiographical introduction, Priya Maholay-Jaradi (National University of Singapore) presents herself and her professional career path, as exemplary of a new Asia scholar involved in the arts. She discusses how, as museums and university programmes draw closer together, their shared resources are resulting in new pedagogical tools and exhibition programmes; new media, such as video and digital archives, are gradually becoming part of a new arc of ‘scholarship-archives-museum-publications-teaching’; and the politics and poetics of culture are being implemented as tools for development and community activism. As museum theory is being linked with practice, academic research on museums becomes more socially relevant to local communities, “in an academic climate where researchers are increasingly encouraged to demonstrate the social impact of their research” (Yunci Cai quoted by Priya Jaradi).

Towards a multilingual level-playing field

A highlight of every ICAS is its Book Prize and accompanying award ceremony (see pages 4-5 in this issue). The ICAS Book Prize (IBP) has progressed from an experimental fledgling in 2005, with just 3 prizes awarded, to an established institution in 2015, with 5 main prizes and 20 accolades. The first IBP attracted 50 books, whilst this latest event (IBP 6) received 250 book and dissertations submissions, a clear testament to the growth of the study of Asia. IBP 6 (prizes awarded at ICAS 9 in Adelaide) presented us with wonderful opportunities for observation: the first unmistakable development has been a shift from humanities to social sciences; the second is the rise of Asian contributors from 20 to nearly 50 percent (compared to the first edition). This also mirrors the development outlined earlier: from western-based Asian Studies to studies coming from the region itself, enriched by indigenous research traditions.

The IBP organisers have recognised the growing ‘problem of language’ (discussed by numerous of our contributors to this Focus), and in response will be adding five eligible languages for the IBP’s seventh edition (prizes will be awarded during ICAS 10 in Chiang Mai, 20-23 July 2017): Chinese, Japanese, Korean, French and German. To celebrate this development we will be organizing the first Asian Studies Book Fair during ICAS 10, involving not just English language publications, but also those in the five languages listed above. This will hopefully make apparent that English language publications are but an iceberg slowly melting into an ocean of multilingual Asian Studies.

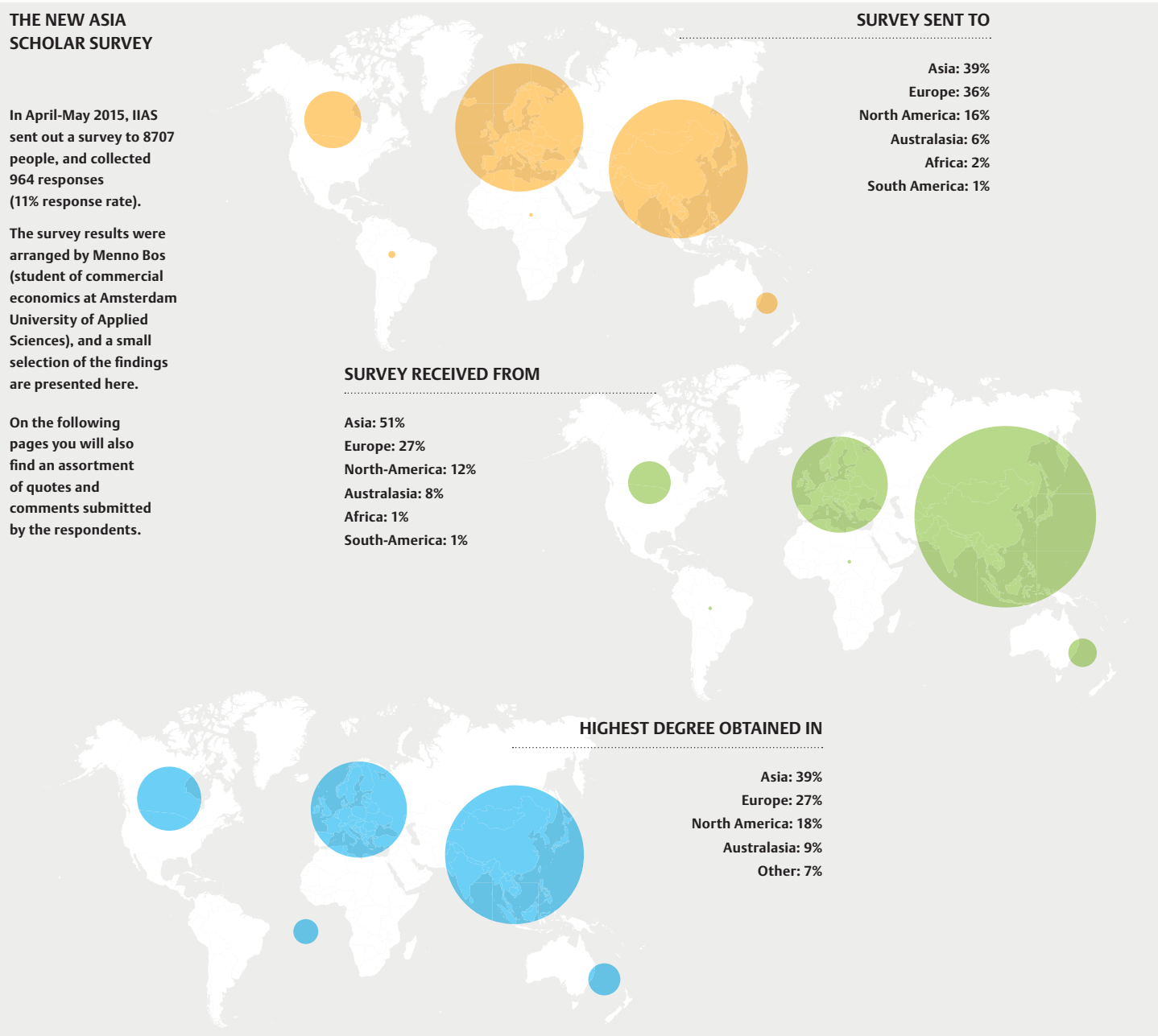
Language in fact plays an increasingly obvious role in Asian Studies; it is of importance for both collecting data and distributing it. Occasionally, language is the tool with which one will come to understand a culture, or a relationship between cultures. And knowledge of a particular language will often mean the difference between being able to publish for an international audience or not. The pressure to publish is a familiar sensation for most academics, but it weighs heavier on some than on others. John Bohannon has gone so far as to declare “an emerging Wild West in academic publishing”, and Ulrich Kozok (University of Hawai’i at Mānoa), in his Focus contribution, comments on this development at Indonesian universities, as an example of the pressure to publish so as to advance one’s career. In addition, Indonesian

THE NEW ASIA SCHOLAR SURVEY

In April-May 2015, IIAS sent out a survey to 8707 people, and collected 964 responses (11% response rate).

The survey results were arranged by Menno Bos (student of commercial economics at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences), and a small selection of the findings are presented here.

On the following pages you will also find an assortment of quotes and comments submitted by the respondents.



academics find themselves in that disadvantaged situation of having to publish in a foreign language. With the pressure high and predatory publishers on the lure, their choices are perhaps understandable. But standards of quality control must be improved if the reputations of academics, and the scientific world of research, are to be protected.

Duncan McDuie-Ra (University of New South Wales) was a member of the IBP 6 Reading Committee and is a former accolade winner. In his article Duncan comments on the benefits those roles have presented him. Although an immense task, judging the IBP gave him the opportunity to act as a clearinghouse, advise anyone he could on which books to read next, and to accumulate new names for peer-reviews. Significantly, he was able to observe the extremely broad field of Asian Studies, and the current state of its publishing. Duncan comments on the ongoing value of books (monographs in particular), produced despite the pressures of academic life, and notwithstanding the ‘phantom crisis’ in the humanities and social sciences. As a judge, wading through the 200 plus submitted books, he found that the field of Asian Studies is very much alive.

In their co-written article, Paul Kratoska and Peter Schoppert present a shift in Asian Studies publications they have recently been witnessing in their role as publishers located in Southeast Asia (NUS Press, Singapore). Western authors have in the past mainly written to explain Asia to audiences in their own part of the world, but Asian publishers have tended to find the appeal of that scholarship limited. However, distribution of research published by Asian scholars in local Asian languages has in its own way also been restricted, that is, until the recent developments encouraging Asian scholars to publish in other languages (mainly English). Their audience is evolving and is starting to include scholars in the West, but also scholars based in other Asian countries. The shift: authors from all over the world are embedding themselves in local discourse, publishers are going straight to the source, and innovative technologies are helping regional knowledge to reach new global audiences.

As a publisher and owner of Silkworm Books in Chiang Mai (Thailand), Trasvin Jittidecharak is in a suitable position to comment on the ‘problems of language’. In her article, she raises concerns acknowledged by many in the field: lacking funds for academic publishing and the pressures of writing in English for non-native speakers. But she also importantly mentions the problem of censorship in many Asian countries. Political systems are perhaps developing towards more liberal forms in many areas of ‘new’ Asia, but freedom of speech is still far from being a reality.

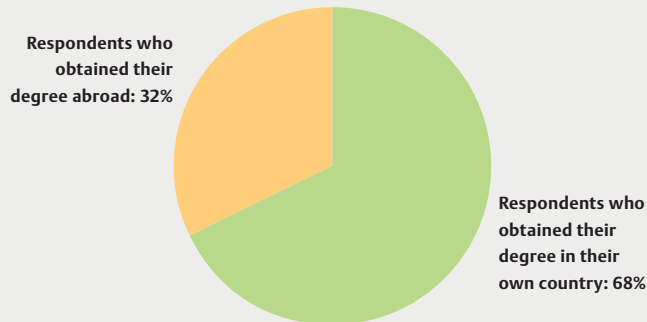
Also contributing to this discussion of language concerns is Tom Hoogervorst (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies), who asks if the ‘New Asia Scholar’ is perhaps motivated by, or even swept up in, ‘the crisis of area studies’, be it real or just an apparition. Has the scholar gone into survival mode, demanding innovation and adaptation? As a researcher of interethnic contact through language, Tom wonders what role language will play in the scurry to reconfigure the field. He follows the path that language-learning in area studies has taken in the recent past; from western researchers learning local languages in their attempts to become ‘regional experts’, to the centrality of English for academic theorisation, to the engagement of native speakers as fieldwork assistants, concluding with the undeniable importance of the study of language to help understand the rapidly homogenising world.

The New Asia Scholar

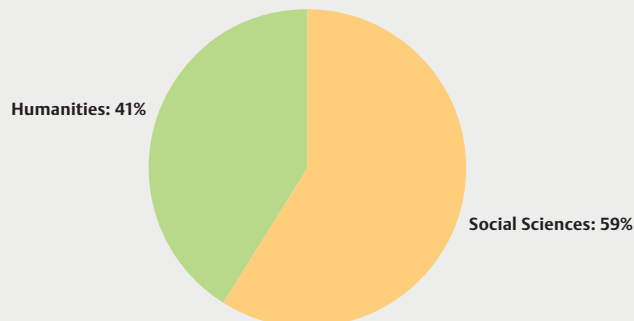
This changing field of Asian Studies brings with it a new academic, one we have termed the ‘New Asia Scholar’. Although, Marlon James Sales (Monash University) astutely remarks, in his opening words, that the term can both refer to a scholar who is attuned to the newness of Asia as a field of inquiry, and also be interpreted as a reconfiguration of ‘who’ studies Asia. Marlon is the ‘incidental’ Asianist’, one of a variety of scholars whose specific fields of study (in Marlon’s case, linguistics/translating) draws them nearer to Asia by looking at the continent through a ‘new’ set of lenses. He puts forth that both the area of the world and the scholars who study it are ‘new’. But more than that, Marlon discusses the limitations of interculturality in Asia (the acknowledgement of different cultures in Asia), and calls rather for transculturality, which alongside the differences also acknowledges the permeable borders of languages and cultures.

One of the platforms at ICAS this year was ‘Intercultur-Adelaide’, which aimed to bring together scholars, policymakers and other stakeholders to consider the idea of ‘interculturality’ – broadly defined as a set of cultural skills supporting openness and adaptivity. Cathy Monro (University of Sydney) calls attention to the oft-failing collaboration between the academic and legislative worlds, particularly in the context of interculturality. Anyone in the field of Asian Studies knows how diverse and vast topics of academic research can be. We’ve all seen those monographs come by with exotic titles such as ‘yak milk preservation on the Mongolian steppe’, ‘embroidery from the Sumatran forests’, or ‘coconut collection from the beaches of some tropical island’. And as you pick up the book to delve into bizarre new worlds, a little voice in the back of your

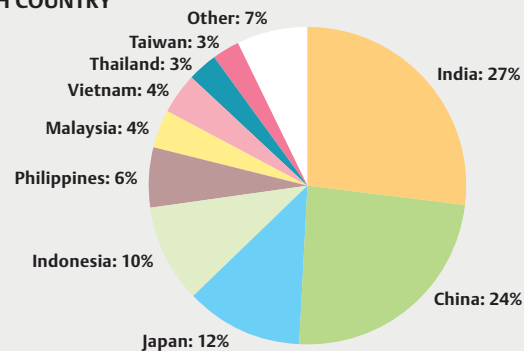
SOURCE OF DEGREE



RESEARCH CATEGORY



RESEARCH COUNTRY



mind might be asking “why?”. Why indeed. It is not always immediately clear why a particular research has been undertaken, or what its significance for society could be (assuming that one would want to have at least a slight impact on society beyond the academic bleachers). Too often, research findings fail to find their way into the realm of practical applicability. Researchers are not always concerned with this aspect, and policymakers habitually bypass academic research findings in their decision-making.

Jinghong Zhang (Australian National University), winner of the ICAS Book Prize 2015 Social Sciences, comments on the dilemmas encountered when attempting social scientific research in the globalising and commercial world (the ‘new’ Asia). Where the new world wants fast and clear answers, the new social scientist must learn how to adapt. Forfeiting their desire to understand the ‘why’ and the ‘how’, they must learn to answer the ‘what’, in the process possibly losing their academic soul. However, learning to adapt to the changing environment, Jinghong explains, will also conceivably give them something new and valuable in return.

Imran bin Tajudeen (National University of Singapore) also comments on the links between knowledge production and usefulness for the ‘new’ commercialised world. He approaches the New Asia Scholar as both an emerging scholar who is changing the conditions for knowledge production, and also one who is challenging the existing forms of knowledge produced about (Southeast) Asia. Imran observes how the old regime of scholarship was motivated by the need to serve various colonial territories, with its legacy still being felt not just in the West, but in Asia too. The post-colonial era continued to see scholarship regimes produce research with utility for Western knowledge consumers. These Anglo-American academic traditions subsequently went on to form the framework of research for most Asian institutions and scholars; alternative discursive domains and traditions of scholarship remain very limited even today.

Contemporary scholarship in the US mould is concerned with what Benedict Anderson has cynically called the ‘theory market in the academic marketplace’, resulting in the dilemma that scholarship with a concern for social engagement must operate beyond and in spite of the adopted US model. To generate critical and socially-engaged scholarship, new avenues must be paved so that research may reflect locally-embodied knowledge and understandings. These ideas resonate with Dell Upton’s advocacy for a cultural landscape approach to architecture and urban history, and with an emerging notion of the ‘flipped academic’, where publication is delayed in favour of community engagement.

New approaches and players in Asian Studies

Asian Studies as a field of research is constantly developing, but at times a more concerted effort must be made to identify, define and design new approaches. IIAS (The International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden; publisher of The Newsletter, and home of the ICAS secretariat) is responding to the organic developments outlined above – new knowledge, new scholars, in a new Asia – as have numerous other knowledge institutions in the field. In 2014, IIAS initiated a programme, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation: ‘Rethinking Asian Studies in a Global Context’ (www.rethinking.asia). With the objective of reshaping the field of Asian Studies the programme seeks to foster new humanities-focused research. In practice, this means adapting Asian Studies to an interconnected global environment built on a network of academics and practitioners from Asia, the Americas, Europe and Africa. Educational opportunities are created by selecting cross-disciplinary methodological questions likely to shift scholarly paradigms as they pertain to Asia.

Titia van der Maas (IIAS) is the project coordinator of the ‘Rethinking Asian Studies’ programme. In her contribution to this Focus she points out how recent technology has improved communications and the sharing of knowledge, and how uniformity in this and in research methodology has facilitated the running of research (projects) across the globe. However, it is nevertheless important to not forget the pursuit of alternative interpretations; to question and challenge the establishment. Although a field of studies will evolve organically in some ways, there are always good reasons to promote more deliberate developments.

In a similar vein of highlighting new players in the field, David Camroux (Sciences Po) delivers a wealth of bibliographic references in his demonstration of the changes occurring in the field of political science research in Southeast Asia. An emergence of new scholarship is introducing comparative dimensions, crossing disciplinary boundaries, and juxtaposing theoretical arguments and observations drawn from various regions of the world, requiring us to rethink a number of assumptions and interpretations.

New approaches and players are also emerging in ‘new’ regions of the world. Cláudio Pinheiro (Rio de Janeiro Federal University) provides a historical overview of Latin America’s curiosity about Asia, which challenges the hegemony of the Northern framework, helping to de-provincialize Asian Studies. This curiosity has passed through various phases; at first defined by Orientalist approaches emulating colonialist views, later by the theories of Development and Modernity; from a diffuse 19th century aristocratic inquisitiveness to the professional academic interest of post-WWII; from disperse connections between peripheral parts of the world to alternative models of modernization. Area Studies, in general, can both develop capacities of intellectuals dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of specific spaces, whilst simultaneously isolate academics in self-contained realities. It has also validated the prevalence of a North Atlantic expertise, which has hindered the postcolonial peripheries from observing one another intellectually. Pinheiro therefore advocates the institutionalization of Asian Studies in the Global South (particularly Latin America and Africa), which will help to improve the progress of the field, to de-centralize Asian Studies, and to encourage debates that cross disciplinary boundaries.

The institutionalization of Asian Studies in the Global South has recently seen fruition in Africa, where the African Association for Asian Studies (A-Asia) was founded in 2013. Lloyd Amoah (Ashesi University College) is Secretary of A-Asia and was also one of the convenors of the recently held conference, ‘Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge’ (see page 6 in this issue). In his contribution, Lloyd notes that, despite the Asia-Africa relations that can be traced back into antiquity, there has always been a notable lack of an institutional pursuit of knowledge about Asia in Africa. He references Kierkegaard’s ‘midnight hour’ and declares that the hour of ‘unmasking’ has finally struck. Burdened by a past of imperialist subjugation, both continents of Asia and Africa are perhaps finally ready to see each other without the blurring mask of colonialism, struggles of independence, and the Cold War. New relations are being forged; ones that take their source from ancient connections, but which also attempt to craft fresh engagements befitting a rapidly changing world. At the conference in Accra, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana was alerted to this development and understanding its significance announced that the institution planned to open an Asian Studies Centre at the beginning of 2016.

Habibul Khondker (Zayed University in Abu Dhabi) focuses on the challenges and potential of Asian Studies in the Arab states of the Gulf. He shares with us his take on the current state of Asian Studies in his region of the world. He concentrates mainly on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and paints a picture of hopeful future growth. Although initially established to cater to the human resource needs of a modernising world, the universities in the Gulf region are starting to ‘Look East’ and to recognise the importance of global relations and developments,

possibly encouraged by the infatuating influences of Asia’s pop culture, which are emblematic of the ‘new’ Asia and can be gleaned from the literary contributions to the latest issue of the *Griffith Review*.

One hears the expression ‘the Asian Century’ all the time, but what really does it mean? Are we just talking about growing economies and evolving political systems? Or is the ‘new’ Asia more than that? Julianne Schultz and Jane Camens (respectively, *Griffith Review*, and Asia Pacific Writers & Translators), the co-editors of the latest issue of the *Griffith Review*, titled *New Asia Now*, put this question to 49 literary authors in Asia. All born after 1970, all grown up during a period of extraordinary change. This in all respects ‘ground-breaking’ publication was reviewed by Richard Newman (The University of Queensland). He points out that the publication both reacts to and emerges from the pluralism and ambition of ‘the Asian Century’ and that the contributions consist of realistic and sceptical observations on political dogma, Asian orthodoxy and imported liberalism alike.

Looking ahead

In his key-note address, ‘Looking Back, Looking Ahead: Asia in the 21st Century’, at the ICAS 9 opening ceremony in Adelaide, Takashi Shiraishi (National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, Tokyo) started with an overview of the economic, political and social developments in Asia, among Asian areas and countries, and in relation to the rest of the world. He continued by targeting Area Studies specifically. The quote reproduced below were Shiraishi’s concluding words to his speech, which we encourage you to read in its entirety (www.icas.asia/ICAS9-keynote). His address, and especially his observations made in the section below, sum up our discussion of a ‘New Asia Scholar’ and the field of Asian Studies better than we could ourselves, so we leave it to Professor Shiraishi to conclude this introduction:

“I have worked as a historian, an international relations specialist, a political economist, and a foreign policy expert over the last 40 years, but have always studied Asia, Southeast Asia initially and Asia more generally in recent years. It is my conviction that Area Studies have a lot to contribute to our understanding of the very complex global, regional, national, and local processes at work, precisely because our perspective is anchored in historical and comparative approaches to and across areas rather than in any disciplinary box. The ‘crisis’ of area studies has been talked about since the end of the Cold War era, with budget cuts, disciplinary compartmentalization and the imposition of quantitative, technical assessment standards borrowed from some of the natural sciences and now applied uncritically to the social sciences and the humanities. At the same time, we are very much aware that no discipline can account for the complexity of the lived experience and processes currently unfolding across different scales. Our understanding of the region these days is most often based on a certain discipline, and disciplines are useful because they pose questions from which we can undertake our study of and engagement with the world. But I believe that area studies provide an arena in which we can talk across disciplines and learn from each other. At a time when we have all the more reason and need to learn about ourselves and our neighbors, this crisis of area studies may in fact be a crisis of knowledge and authority, or rather the way in which we go about producing, authorizing or validating, and sharing knowledge. We need to ask the question of whose crisis this is, and whether we are not ourselves guilty of thinking within a box, or even in a box within a box, and complicit in reproducing the inequalities that structure knowledge production. What is clear is that we can no longer go about doing area studies the way we have been used to: which is to say, we go to a ‘field’ somewhere, do research and write about ‘other’ people not our own, publish in our own national language as well as in English but not the languages of the people we are talking about, talk to our fellow academics in America or Europe or Asia while feeling ourselves above the debates happening within communities in the region and in the different countries, not talking to nor citing the scholarship produced by our colleagues in this region, and then insisting that everyone should publish in English language journals with high impact factor. The point is that people in the region and the world move on and things are unfolding right in front of us, and for many of the people who find themselves in an ‘area’ – in the many senses and contexts in which it is understood as such – that area is not something removed or out there, but the ground on which they, and we all live, work, love, hate, have children, move about, grow old, and die. Let us be open-minded and stop thinking about Asian studies as something out there, but something we do together with our friends and colleagues here.”

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