

IIAS Report and Publications

IIAS seminar report International seminar: transnational religious and ideological influences in modern Central and Inner Asia

Regensburg, Germany
5-6 June 2015

IN THE CONTEXT of the three-year IIAS programme 'Rethinking Asian Studies in a Global Context', which is sponsored by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (New York), IIAS co-organised a seminar that discussed socio-political processes in Central and Inner Asia that are intersecting with global ideological trends. Particular emphasis was put on the question how the global processes influence current nation-building policies, social identities and people's loyalties. The seminar, supported by the International Unit for Central and Inner Asian Studies, followed up on a previous meeting, 'Knowledge production and knowledge transfer in and on Central and Inner Asia', which was held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on 5-6 August 2014.

In Regensburg, some twenty scholars from America, Central and Inner Asia, and Europe were welcomed by the co-organisers, namely the Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies and the Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, both of Regensburg University. During the two-day meeting, the participating researchers, invited by the convenors Dr Irina Morozova (Regensburg) and Dr Willem Vogelsang (Leiden), discussed their papers, which had been distributed in advance, thus providing ample time for thorough and sometimes very lively deliberations.

The intensive debates of the seminar highlighted some significant aspects of the transnational religious and ideological influences in modern Central and Inner Asia. One of these, not surprisingly, was the importance of the particular historical background of the pertinent country or region. The relationship for much of the twentieth century between Islam and the Soviet Union in Central Asia, whereby the Soviet leaders often tried to pacify the Muslim clergy, was very different from the generally very hostile attitude of the Mongolian communist government vis-à-vis Buddhism. Another aspect that was discussed at length was that of foreign influence, or at least international contacts. Mongolia was again taken as a very telling case study. After the fall of communism in the early 1990s, Buddhism, though regarded as part of Mongolian culture by many, was very dependent on foreign support. The Indian ambassador to Mongolia played an important role, and so did the Dalai Lama. There was, however, local opposition. Buddhism in Mongolia was and is closely linked to Tibetan Buddhism. On a governmental level, the close links with Tibetan Buddhism, and in particular the Dalai Lama, were regarded as perhaps hostile towards the Chinese government. But also ideologically, many Mongolian Buddhists preferred a more 'Mongolian' form



Dambadarjaa monastery, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Image courtesy of libreshot.com

of Buddhism. This wish for a more 'local' form of a global religion was also discussed in relation to Central Asia, where some governments try to regard and develop Islam as part of the, as it was called in one of the papers, 'genetic blueprint' of the state. Islam is being regarded as part of local 'folklore', and in some parts of Central Asia the government consequently supports traditional forms of Islam, rather than the fundamentalist forms so dominant in the world of Islam today. Whether or not these policies will prove successful remains unknown, but they conform to some of the issues also discussed at the 2014 seminar in Ulaanbaatar, namely the opposition in Central and Inner Asia between, on the one hand, a government-led push for nation-building and ethno-nationalistic symbolism, and on the other, the enormous expansion of globalisation.

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IIAS Book Series - Asian Heritages

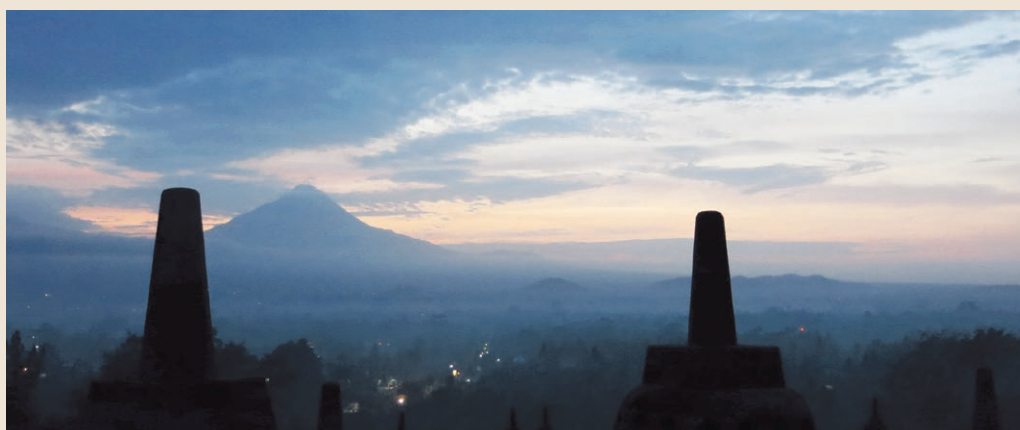
ASIAN HERITAGES SEEKS manuscripts of excellent quality and destined to become theoretically and descriptively significant contributions to the analysis of 'heritage' in the Asian context. All manuscripts are subject to a rigorous peer-review process, in which, in addition to the usual criteria of conceptual rigor and lucid, attractive writing, evaluators are asked to assess the work for its contribution to a critical rethinking of the key concept as it has been used in Asia.

Contributions should be both intellectually innovative and empirically grounded. They should engage with critical perspectives that shed light on how the concept of heritage and the practices associated with it are used in Asia today or have been employed there in the past. We especially seek new approaches to the origins and politics of heritage production, the relationship of heritage to colonialism in all its varieties and after-effects, and the translation of ideology into conservation and other relevant forms of heritage practice.

Among the many more specific topics that can be addressed by the series, we especially invite manuscripts on the following themes: processes of heritagization and gentrification in relation to ethnic and national dynamics, including those involving post-conflict reconstruction; reflections on the nature of materiality ('tangibility') and its relevance to the preservation of multiple pasts; development policies and the clash between heritage and economic security; heritage as neoliberal target and resource; heritage and rights; the social and cultural roles of museums; legal dimensions of collective cultural property; illegality as heritage; nationalism and its discontents; marginalized groups, self-determination, and heritage as ethnic resource; the impact of natural and human disasters on heritage and its evaluation; heritage and international conflict; inflections of heritage in contemporary art and media; language as and in heritage; local and national terminologies of heritage in comparative perspective; and the geo-politics of gastronomy and franchising. We also warmly encourage prospective authors to suggest additional themes that will enrich the critical perspective we intend as the hallmark of this series.

Interested authors should in the first place submit a short (two to five pages) summary of the book, indicating major content and themes and a chapter breakdown with a brief paragraph explaining the content and purpose of each chapter; intended audience; probable length; and expected date of submission. Proposals should also be accompanied by a brief bio-note if possible.

Please send your proposal to Adèle Esposito
(adelesposito@yahoo.fr).



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