

'Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge'

The Second Edition

It was with great pleasure that the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) could once again serve as the principal facilitators of the Second Edition of the International Conference 'Asia-Africa: A New Axis of Knowledge' in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 20-22 September 2018. The honour of being associated with this major effort alongside the Association for Asian Studies in Africa (A-ASIA) and the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), stems from a continuing commitment to collaboration beyond boundaries of any kind, a collaboration that must include academic, cultural, public and social actors from the two most populated and dynamic 'southern' regions (or continents) of the world, Africa and Asia.



Above: A few of the student volunteers helping at registration

The conference was an extraordinary event, enjoyed by so many, both new and familiar participants, and supported by first-time and long-standing partners. The cooperation provided by our local hosts at UDSM was truly exceptional, and the conference would not have been quite so gratifying, let alone possible, without them. More information about the most recent and the first conference,

including programmes, speakers, the platform, organisers, etc. can be found on the website <https://africasia.org>.

Below is just a small selection of commentaries sent to us by attendees, who like us agree that the meeting in Tanzania was a uniquely stimulating and thought-provoking collaborative event. More information about the third conference will be shared soon, but we hope to see you all there!



Below: Dr Mathew Senga - Local convener UDSM



Africa-Asia: a 'New Axis of Knowledge', to what effect?

Shine Choi

As a student of international relations, I am not sure if an Africa-Asia axis is necessarily innocent intellectually, politically or historically. However, one thing I am learning in my research and from having attended the second Africa-Asia Conference is that the connection is one that is productive, in the sense that it creates anew, if not substantially then at least aesthetically, and the latter is not entirely nothing. I am happy I found co-journeymers at the conference that share the view that Africa-Asia provides a new axis for creativity that, while indeed never innocent, can be political without merely serving as a plot point in politics if the axis works through disrupting established habits, rituals, networks, modes, parameters of knowledge production and what knowing is and does in the world(s). For this disruption to be more than a rhetorical gesture, working to re-inhabit and redeploy the limits of conferencing, collaboration and knowledge production at a minimum is imperative.

I first learned about the conference though its first instalment in Ghana in 2015, when I was lost and was Googling for some grounding for an entry into Asia and Africa linkages for my research on North Korea and postcolonial theory. Following through the conclusions of my first book on re-imagining North Korea in international politics, I was working on North Korean art and aesthetic theory as a way to open up the predictably dictatorial and problematic way North Korean politics manifest that feed into the hierarchic international order. Art and taking North Korean sources on their own terms did not seem enough in my effort to reconfigure how 'North Korea' and 'state politics' converge, and in this context, North Korea's Third World cultural activities in Asia and Africa seemed promising. 'Trained' in International Relations, Cultural Studies and Korean Studies, I had very little knowledge of anything African, and I had learned nothing about the Bandung

Conference, the Non-aligned Movement, or inter-continental liberation linkages, as part of my training or in previous research. I was reading up on the topic on my own so when I stumbled upon the proceedings of the first Africa-Asia Conference online, this was exciting.

Besides curiosity about the research papers at the conference (because these papers were not published), I wanted to know about its politics. It was hard to tell what brought the organizing members together, what linked these people and their institutions to the project, what the political/ideological angle was in this inaugural meeting. Big western institution presence was noticeable, but did this mean they were the driving force? Did they pick their 'African' counterparts/local organisers? How do these inter-regional collaborations get off the ground? Is this a counter initiative to some other debates or developments I am not able to read in the public-facing self-presentation?

When the announcement for the second Africa-Asia Conference was made, I felt that I had to go see for myself (by then, I had secured a research fellowship with travel funds from also a Western/American source). Some of my structural questions were answered – it helped that there were many

panel sessions to discuss the procedural, strategic and pragmatic aspects of how to nurture the axis, more so than one would expect from a medium sized conference. I am sure these discussions also happened behind closed doors, over dinner and drinks with key actors and stakeholders, but the discussions and reflections were also abundant within the conference proceedings. I found this inclusivity and transparency refreshing; it brought to the fore how research findings do not spring from a vacuum, that it is important to bring into research spaces the machineries of what sustains the gathering, but also the aspirations, what is at stake and concerns of the institution-in-the-making. For instance, the conference's local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference and network not reproduce existing models of Asian Studies centres elsewhere, but claimed that they (we?) were about creating Africa-Asia centres. This hyphen is a significant difference from the European models that make its location invisible while all the while resting on the currency of Europe/West to make their work and reach possible. Others recounted the discords at the Ghana conference and the unresolved financial aspects of this ambitious enterprise, which