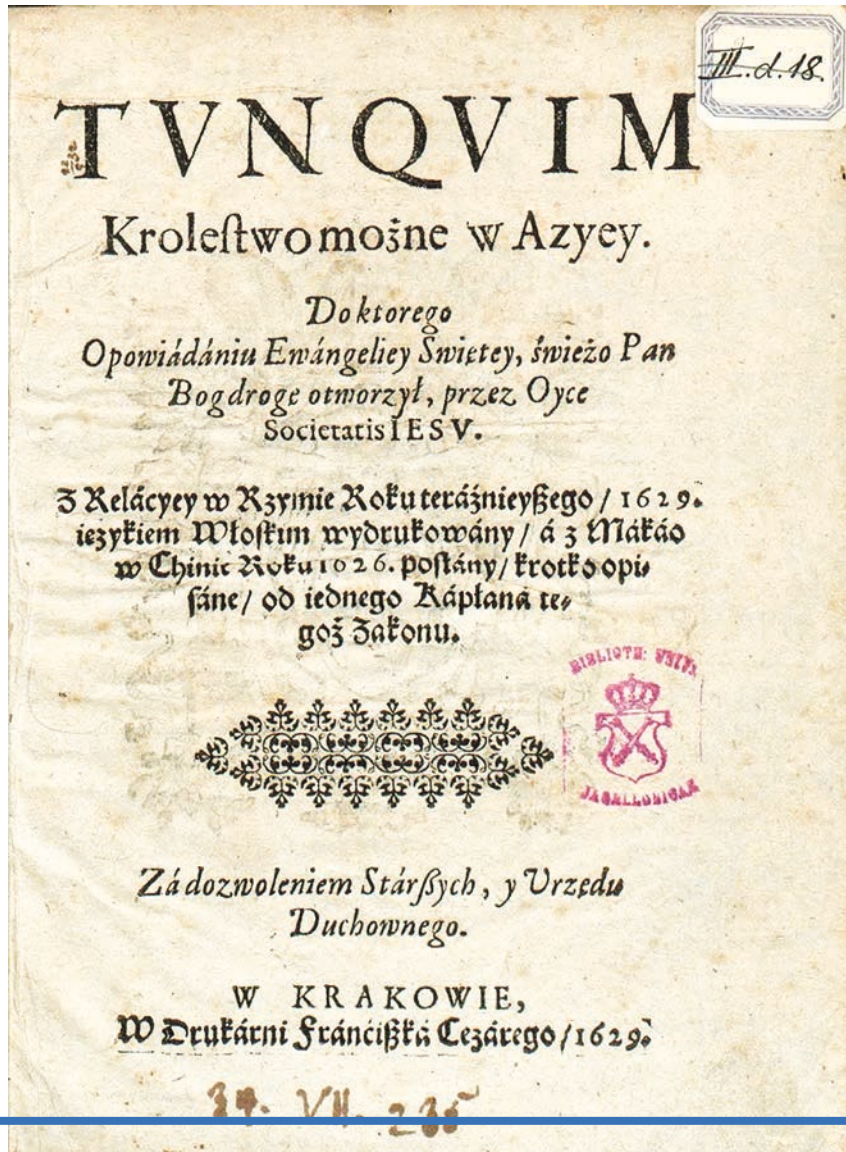


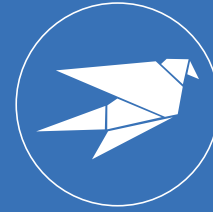
Below: First page from Fryderyk Szembek's treatise on Tonkin dated 1629, digitalised as a part of Orientalia Polonica project.



Understanding Asia: a view from the Polish perspective

Kamila Junik-Łuniewska

Asian Studies as a separate field of study was introduced at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków in 2013. Assuming five years as the necessary time span for a student to complete the BA and then Masters, 2019 saw the first generation of alumni specializing in various topics concerning Asia. Jagiellonian University's engagement with Asia and also the tradition of Asia-related (and Asia-centred) studies in Poland both go far beyond these mentioned years. However, the last years were crucial in developing a methodology of both teaching about and researching Asia in Poland, in which the Institute of the Middle and Far East, the youngest unit of the Faculty of International and Political Studies and a new member of the European Alliance for Asian Studies, has a leading role.



European Alliance for Asian Studies

The European Alliance for Asian Studies is a co-operative platform of European institutions specialising in the study of Asia. The aim of the Alliance, established in 1997, is to bring together the varied competences and expertise on Asia and Asian Studies found in Europe, strengthening this rich and unique tapestry of academic endeavour found in this region. The Alliance, moreover, facilitates a multi-level communication channel between its members, while it sets out to raise public awareness on the scholarly excellence they offer to the benefit of their constituencies and national and transnational environments.

The Alliance represents a community of institutions sharing a desire for transparency, collegiality and solidarity beyond national, institutional or disciplinary boundaries. It encourages collaborations, synergies and intellectual emulation among European academic institutions involved in Asian Studies and in collaboration with partners from Asia and the rest of the world.

The Alliance seeks to build high-quality border-transcending research, teaching and public services, including scholarly networks within Europe and beyond. It also encourages linkage between academic and non-academic actors, aiming to develop a model of how Asian studies in European academia could respond to political, economic and heuristic shifts and contexts.

The Alliance is not intended to merge the respective institutes, or blur their individual strengths, but rather to provide a framework for co-operation. Partners in the Alliance use the multiplicity of approaches, expertise and connectivities present in the network to strengthen research, teaching, collaboration and outreach.

Such a dynamic network works on various scales of expertise: (1) institutions based on policy-oriented research and competence; (2) institutions that seek to apply their Asia expertise beyond single locations and university frameworks, and (3) institutions combining research and teaching Asian Studies with an emphasis on humanistic and linguistic knowledge.

Members of the Alliance

As of 1 July 2019, the European Alliance for Asian Studies includes:

- the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS), Heidelberg;

- the Center for East Asian Studies at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (CEAO);
- the Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies (CESEAS), Lund University;
- the Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia (CRIA), Lisbon;
- the Department of Asian Studies, Palacky University, Olomouc;
- the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne;
- the Faculty of Economics, University of Coimbra;
- the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), Hamburg;
- the Groupement d'Intérêt Scientifique Études Asiatiques (GIS Réseau Asie), Paris;
- the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden;
- the Institut Roman de Studii Euro-Asiatice (IRSEA), Bucharest;
- the Institute of the Middle and Far East, Jagiellonian University, Krakow;
- the Institute of Studies on Asia, University of Torino;
- the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), Copenhagen;
- the School of Oriental and African Studies, London;
- the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale";
- the University of Vienna.

Website

The new Alliance website, www.asiascholars.eu intends to mirror the spirit of participation and sharing of its members, providing information on conferences and calls for proposals (grants, summer schools, fellowships, positions). The website disseminates information on open access, enabling members and the public at large to construct and share knowledge and data. It is a unique vehicle to learn from the partners' developments, their plans and their expertise.

Secretariat

The contact address for the Alliance is the International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden.

Please contact dr. Willem Vogelsang, w.j.vogelsang@iias.nl for further information.

The aim of this article is to introduce the main ways in which Asia has been approached in an innovative and interdisciplinary manner at the Institute of the Middle and Far East. How do we – its faculty – teach to understand the complexity of Asian contexts in order to equip the students with certain knowledge and skills, useful also in the rising business and economic environment in Poland and abroad. The emphasis will be put on the interdepartmental and international cooperation and projects both already conducted and planned for the nearest future.

'We teach how to comprehend the world': Asian Studies in Kraków

Although the Jagiellonian University (JU) has a long history of 656 years, the Faculty of International and Political Studies was brought to life in the year 2000. Its founding mission was to disseminate the achievements of the theoretical thought and research applied in the humanities and social sciences. The actions taken were aimed at ensuring the highest quality of scientific research (especially of interdisciplinary nature) and didactic effects – under the motto 'We teach how to comprehend

the world'. The studies developed in the fields of International Studies, Political Science as well as Area Studies focused on dynamically changing relations between cultural, political, economic, and social factors in the Western world, but also – what is most important here – in the Non-Western Civilisations (i.e., Asia, Africa, South America, and the post-Soviet region). During almost 20 years of its existence, it has grown into 16 separate fields of study, conducted both in Polish and English, and in cooperation with international institutions. Among the subjects offered, the most popular are: American Studies, Latin America Studies, International Migrations, Political Science, Russian Studies, European Studies, Cultural Studies, and Asian Studies.

Initially, Asian Studies were a specialty within the field of Cultural Studies, and concentrated mainly on the Middle and Far East. The two modules were organized at The Chair of the Middle and Far East – established around the same time as the Faculty. Its founder, the late Professor Andrzej Kapiszewski, himself a diplomat and an erudite, saw the urgent need and importance for Asia-centred research in the globalizing world – but not only in the shape of studies on the region, but also as an in-depth multidisciplinary research. His dream and vision have been expanded

by his successors: Professor Adam Jelonek, who managed to transform the Chair into the Institute, and Rev. Professor Krzysztof Kościelniak, who developed a separate Asian Studies programme taught since 2013.

The exceptionality of the idea behind our Asian Studies lies in the combination of methodologies applied. They grew out of experience of almost 12 years of teaching, comprehending, and rethinking Asia. What distinguishes Asian studies from Cultural Studies is primarily a strong connection with the new directions and studies on social, political and economic phenomena in a given region. The uniqueness of the direction is evidenced by its interdisciplinary approach, and justified, above all, by the reference of the studied issues to their historical, philosophical, cultural, and religious contexts. The distinctive feature of the studies is the possibility – or rather the necessity – of mastering the language, characteristic for the region or country concerned, at a practical level. Students who develop interest in language as such have the opportunity to participate in advanced courses in business language or translation.

The teaching program was prepared based on several innovative solutions, the most important being the departure from the Orientalist perception of Asia in exchange for focusing on regional studies. In a wide spectrum of modules of teaching not only Oriental language classes (Arabic, Hebrew, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Hindi, but also Bahasa Indonesia, Urdu, Turkish) can be found, but also classes related to the multifaceted specificity of the region, which can be grouped into the categories: culture, society, politics, security, and economy. For this – in a very short span of time – our Asian Studies have already been honoured (twice) with the prestigious Polish distinction 'Studies with a future'. The study programme also aims at linking academic education with practical knowledge, by developing specific skills and competences to analyse social, political and economic cultural phenomena of the given region/country. It enables meetings with diplomats, practitioners of special services of public administration and business, but also gives the opportunity to participate in workshops, conferences and Summer Schools, as well as apply for numerous scholarships to Western and Asian countries. In this way, Asian Studies have been strictly customized according to the needs of the labour market, the diagnosis of which remains the subject of our on-going analysis. The Institute is very sensitive to market trends, including the increase of socio-economic contact between Poland and Asian countries, but also the dynamically raising number of Polish business ventures implemented by taking into account the opportunities and growing needs of the Asian markets.

International cooperation: Europe and beyond

The Institute of the Middle and Far East actively cooperates with many institutions all over the world on the basis of international agreements signed at the faculty as well as the university level. Its students and employees take part in both Polish and foreign research projects. It also participates in the European Erasmus Programme, and maintains wide international contacts with universities in China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Israel, Syria, Algeria and Kuwait, successfully running a Visiting Professors' Programme for the last two years. In this context, I would like to mention two most advanced collaborations with Asian institutions, namely with Kobe University in Japan and with Beijing Foreign Studies University in China.

Since 2017 The Institute of the Middle and Far East has had an intensive cooperation with Kobe University, which is a top-rated institution of higher education in Japan. Both Kobe University (KU) and the Institute have also exchanged students. The cooperation has been ongoing at the level of teaching staff thanks to the Erasmus+ Program as well as on the basis on the mutual agreement signed in 2017 (which was extended in June 2019). During the 2018/2019 academic year KU

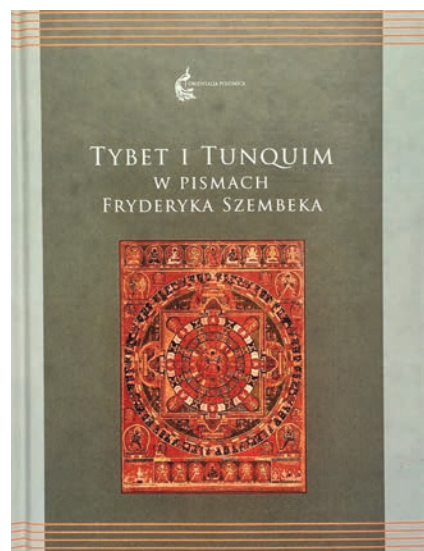
sent professors to give lectures on Japan and provide consultation time at the Institute within the framework of the 'Kobe Lectures Series2: Contemporary Japan in Global Perspective'. The lectures comprise topics such as 'Poland-Japan relations in high/pop and contemporary culture', 'Question of atomic energy in Japan: political and economic aspects' and 'Multiple modernities in comparison: focusing on the case of Japan and its meaning to the world modernization', to mention but a few.

The Institute of the Middle and Far East includes in its structure the first and the largest Model Confucius Institute in Poland. It was co-established by the Beijing Foreign Studies University and the Jagiellonian University in Krakow in 2006 as the first Confucius Institute in Poland. From its inception it has been very active in teaching about China and promoting Chinese culture in various ways. It conducts Chinese language courses at different levels for students and the general public of every age, including business Chinese and Chinese for children. In fact, the Confucius Institute has developed an impressive cooperation with a few local schools, not only providing them with Chinese classes, but also facilitating the possibility to make Chinese compulsory in one of them. Several books, including the first all-level Chinese language textbooks in Polish, have been published under the Confucius Institute's auspices.

Besides the Jagiellonian University, the Institute also collaborates with other universities in Krakow, and holds lectures and courses for the elderly. It also supports young scholars of contemporary China in conducting research in various fields, recommends students to study in China on scholarships provided by the Institute and promotes the exchange of students and scholars between the Beijing Foreign Studies University and the Jagiellonian University, playing a crucial role in enhancing bilateral relations between China and Poland.

Orientalia Polonica: preserving Polish heritage of Asia

Implemented under the auspices of the Jagiellonian Library and in cooperation with the Faculty of Philology (i.e., the Institute of Oriental Studies) and the Faculty of International and Political Studies (i.e., the Institute of the Middle and Far East) of the Jagiellonian University, the project *Orientalia Polonica. Polish traditions of research on the Orient* aimed to initiate and conduct a long-term research and editorial works on publications by Polish researchers and authors (for the period of 17th until the end of the 19th century), dedicated to four cultural traditions of the Orient: Arabic, Turkish, Iranian, and Indian. This joint project was developed between 2013 and 2018 in order to prepare for print and to publish the selected material in the form of research books (historical, literary, linguistic, biographical, etc.) and literary resources (such as translations, adaptations and outlines) related to the culture and tradition of the Orient. The concept grew from the notion that a rich scientific heritage of significant importance for culture-forming processes occurring in Poland is now almost completely forgotten and often poorly known (or quite unknown) even among specialists. Historical and



Reprint of two Fryderyk Szembek's works (on Tibet and Tonkin), published in 2015 - one of 12 volumes published within the *Orientalia Polonica* project.

political circumstances have often resulted in an interruption of research continuity in Polish humanities (including the tradition of Polish research on the Orient). The aim of this project was therefore also to restore the little-known or forgotten scientific heritage remaining within the thematic scope of the project to the Polish academic community – a heritage that is an integral and constitutive part of Polish identity in its cultural and national dimension.

Paraphrasing the quote by the famous Polish poet, C. K. Norwid, that a nation without memory is a nation without identity, the authors of the project emphasized that the processes of defining one's identity may occur in confrontation – also through research – with the 'other', the 'unknown'. In this context, works thematically related to the Orient belong directly or indirectly to the Polish cultural canon, at least through their authors (Mikołaj Rej, Ignacy Krasicki, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Joachim Lelewel, and others).

Polish culture, like any open culture, in its history has assimilated many diverse elements, both eastern and western. The evidence of diffusion and osmotic absorption of the components of the Eastern culture (even by xenophobic denial of this culture), although clearly present in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, has so far remained a little neglected. National or cultural identity is neither endogenous, nor permanently defined, and shaping the national identity is an unending historical process. The intention of the authors of the project was to address that part of the process which was associated with learning about and assimilating the broadly understood East in Polish literature. There are a great many examples of this type of textual evidence, which so far were little studied or even unknown. Besides, as compared to the awareness of the culture-forming role of the Western heritage in shaping the Polish national identity, the influence of the widely understood East, especially in the period mentioned, remains rather little studied.

When choosing the materials for reediting and reprinting, the authors of the project considered their originality and uniqueness, date of writing (it had to be before 1900), cognitive and culture-forming significance, lack of re-editions or studies, and their thematic scope (association with any of the five cultures: Arabic, Turkish, Iranian, Indian, and Chinese/Far Eastern). The work of the members of the research team included in particular: querying the source texts of the selected authors and conducting research on their work and biography; writing introductions, afterwards and/or comments, which have then been published in the critical editions of individual works, as well as the editorial elaboration of individual volumes.

The re-edited material comprises 2 volumes, which were published between 2014–2018. All the selected source texts have also been digitalized and can be accessed through the platform of the Jagiellonian Digital Library available under a separate tab: Projects - *Orientalia Polonica* at: jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra. As a result, the forgotten intellectual achievement of Polish researchers and orientalists has been restored and included in the contemporary discussion, not only in Poland, but also abroad, on the occasion of various international conferences, etc. The project – planned for continuation in the coming years – also enabled the integration of the representatives of the Jagiellonian Asia-oriented research units. It has also strengthened awareness of the need to continue the tradition developed by earlier generations of researchers, especially those who were associated with Krakow.

Current project: focus on Bangladesh

In January 2019, the Jagiellonian University and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish the Bangabandhu Centre for the Studies on Bangladesh. The Centre starts operating from 1 October 2019 within the structure of the Institute of the Middle and Far East.

Named after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first President of Bangladesh, it is the first such centre in Europe. It is intended to encourage,



Bangabandhu Centre.

support and develop knowledge and understanding of Bangladesh, Bangladeshi history, society, languages, and culture, in Poland and in Europe. In the context of growing importance of Bangladesh in (South) Asia's socio-economic sphere, and its place in the so-called 'Asian Century', it also seems important to grow academic ties with the best universities in Bangladesh, as well as with Western educational institutions, conducting with them joint research on Bangladesh.

The Centre's scheduled activities may be grouped into a few sections. Firstly, Bangabandhu will enhance the quality and number of academic courses offered by the Institute by organizing courses on Bangladesh related topics (including a Bengali language course). The courses shall be taught by academics based at the Institute and by visiting scholars from Bangladesh and other countries. Secondly, visiting scholars will also be expected to take an active part in intensive workshops (on Bangladesh and South Asia related topics). In case of such workshops, the credits earned will be transferrable between universities within the EU. Another important task will be building up the Institute's Bangladesh Studies teaching resources and enhance the Bangladesh related resources of its library.

Apart from its educational purposes, the Centre is expected to serve as a platform to facilitate research on Bangladesh in every aspect. This includes research fellowships for the staff of the Institute, but also joint initiatives such as organizing Bangladeshi Studies conferences and Bangladeshi Studies academic seminar for scholars from Poland and Europe. To make the knowledge and understanding of Bangladesh and South Asia more broadly available to students, to the wider academic community, and to the general public, a Bangladesh Lecture Series will be organized. Within the Series, scholars and experts from the field of Bangladeshi Studies – from Bangladesh and other countries – will present their lectures on Bangladeshi issues.

Future prospects

The change of approach in Asia-oriented research, which was the foundation stone of the Institute of the Middle and Far East almost 20 years ago, happened in a response to changing realities of the world, growing importance of Asian countries, and the need of skilled professionals in various sectors of administration and economy. To borrow from the motto of the Faculty of the International and Political Studies, 'We teach how to comprehend the world', the main focus here is to 'Teach how to comprehend Asia' in its complexity, and also be able to deliver an in-depth research and study programme on Asia, maintaining the political, social, cultural, and economic contexts, as well as the historical and traditional background. In this light, the *Orientalia Polonica* project provides a significant link between present-day research and the Polish academic achievements of the past. It also indicated possibilities of cooperation between institutions, be it on the faculty level, or – what is more essential – on international level. This is, among others, important because of the shrinking space for humanities in academia and the somehow alarming rush towards automation all over the world. As a relatively new member of the EAAS, a platform consisting of European Institutions dealing with Asia, we are open to all kinds of collaboration, seeing it as an opportunity not only to share our expertise and experience, but also to learn from our partners and, together with them, make our joint voice stronger in the contemporary world.

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