

## Textiles on the Move: An online meeting



Above: Final discussion – 7 October. Top f.l.t.r.: Christopher Buckley (convenor and roundtable moderator), Lee Talbot (presenter), Barbara Köstner (roundtable participant). Bottom f.l.t.r.: roundtable participants Zvezdana Dode, Zhao Feng and Eric Boudot. Left: Moroccan/Japanese women's kaftan; collection Textile Research Centre Leiden.

From 6–9 October, IAS organised an online conference entitled 'Textiles on the Move'. Not only could the conference be attended by people from all over the world, but we are now also able to share the digital recordings with you on our website. These will be publically available until 15 November 2020.

A (minor) victim of the COVID-19 pandemic was the IAS conference 'Textiles in Motion & Transit', which had been planned to take place in Leiden in October 2020 and was organised together with the Tracing Patterns Foundation in Berkeley, California, and the Textile Research Centre (TRC) in Leiden. A Call for Papers had been circulated, some 80 lecturers from all over the world (from a total of more than 200) had been selected and invited, and a fringe programme of workshops, displays and demonstrations had been set up. Unfortunately, it all had to be postponed, probably until the middle of next year.

We subsequently decided to organise an online conference, on the same theme and around the same time, with some of the confirmed speakers. We did so in close collaboration with the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C., and using the advantage of an online event, we opened participation to anyone interested, worldwide. To share even more broadly, we also decided to make the recorded online sessions available via our website as soon as possible after the conference.

The theme and title of the virtual conference was 'Textiles on the Move'. The programme focused on the role of textiles beyond their primary function, namely to provide warmth and protection. Textiles and clothing also speak volumes about the hierarchy of power relations among their users, and they may act as repositories of spiritual power that can be tapped into by following the correct rituals and prescriptions. These meanings and values of textiles are culture-specific, often unspoken, but fully understood within a given tradition. Due to their portability, however, textiles regularly move to and pass through foreign places. On these journeys and in their new environments, they often lose their original values, acquire new significance, and/or communicate altered messages.

The 'textiles on the move' concept was used to explore the lives of textiles—their displacements and transformations—within the Asia-Pacific region as well as between this region and the rest of the world. During the conference, scholars investigated the materiality, the making, and the use and reuse of textiles outside the context of their original cultures. In broad terms, they looked into the agents that facilitate textile movements, the forces that contribute to accumulating new meanings, and the circumstances that allow these transformations to take place. One entry point of discussion was the global trade network that resulted in so many

cultural exchanges, as in the case of the trade between South Asia and Europe from the sixteenth century onwards, but also in Asia itself, between Indonesia and India. Fascinating in this respect is the spread of the (in)famous *buteh* motif from Iran and India, which in the West became known as the Paisley motif, named after the Scottish town with the same name. The same motif can now be found in Indonesia, but also on men's underwear from America and women's wrap-arounds from Zanzibar.

The programme of the virtual conference included a series of different contributions, including a roundtable discussion, two video recordings, various brief presentations on a plethora of subjects, and even a recorded guided tour of a museum exhibition on the *kimono*, in London's Victoria & Albert Museum. In almost all cases, people could join in and discuss the subject of the talk with the speaker(s). The conference also included two key-note speakers, namely Sumru Belger Krodoy of the George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum (Washington, D.C.) and Dale Carolyn Gluckman, former Head of Costumes and Textiles of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and former senior consultant to the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles in Bangkok.

Please feel welcome to switch on the recorded sessions of the four-day online event, and enjoy listening to a roundtable

discussion on new directions in Silk Road studies (with Zhao Feng, Director of the China National Silk Museum, Hangzhou), or a lecture on Javanese textiles in the Thailand court, or a talk on prayer rugs and their changing meanings. Another subject that was covered is the production of a seventeenth-century nightgown produced in India and its context within the broad global trade network between East and South Asia, and Europe. Or, you may be interested in the development of specific textiles in the French Provence that are based on seventeenth and eighteenth-century Indian chintzes. And what about a video of the production of *kantha* covers in northeastern India, or a talk with the title 'Textiles with two parents', about cloths that combine two completely different traditions, such as a Moroccan wedding curtain embroidered in *chikan* work from Indian Lucknow? These are just a few examples. The world of textiles is indeed highly fascinating and reflects many aspects of human life and the worldwide interaction between users and producers.

The online conference was attended each day by some 150 participants, and the general appreciation of the varied and lively presentations augur well for future online conferences. IAS and its partners, in the face of future travel restrictions, were fortunate of having the opportunity to learn enormously from this conference. Its formula of an interactive programme with relatively brief items, a moderator for the day, and the possibility for participants to ask questions, offers hope and inspiration for future events.

### Information

The recorded sessions will be available to watch until 15 November. [www.ias.asia/events/textiles-move](http://www.ias.asia/events/textiles-move)

#### The convenors

**Sandra Sardjono**, Director Tracing Patterns Foundation, Berkeley

**Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood**, Director Textile Research Centre, Leiden

**Christopher Buckley**, Wolfson College, Oxford

**Willem Vogelsang**, Deputy Director at the International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden

## Webinar 14 May 2020 Princely Airs: Aerial navigation and the question of sovereignty in colonial India

Joppan George

As the world began to be gripped by the pandemic, arresting everyday life to the confines of home, this webinar hosted by IAS offered a measure of relief in reaching out to the world outside my window, thereby bringing together, albeit remotely, scholars and avid enthusiasts of the history of aviation and the princely states. Participants logged in from locations as far and apart as Kansas and Kochi, offering a rich variety of questions and comments, encouraging me to look into scarcely accessible work and prompting me to make connections with books in the making. This was the first in a series of webinars that helped rekindle our scholarly fellowship and expand the dialog more democratically under lockdown. While this thoughtful and timely initiative to maintaining a scholarly community under the duress of the global pandemic continues to keep alive the foundational directive of open exchange of ideas at IAS, it also attests to the undiminished spirit of camaraderie around the world.

### The webinar

In the long march of the history of India in the 20th century, from under the constraints of the colonial yoke to the postcolonial pastures it promised itself, the princely states managed a vanishing act. Various called the Native States, Indian India, and the Indian States, the princely states formed about two-fifths of the area of the subcontinent and one-fifth of its population. Colored yellow in the colonial maps, in stark contrast to the pale pink of British India, the princely states under the personal rule of the princes were also under the suzerainty of the Crown. In the webinar *Princely Airs: Aerial navigation and the question of sovereignty in colonial India*, I traced the interest that the princes had in aviation since the start of its career in India circa 1910, their oft-forgotten initiative of the gift of airplanes for imperial defence during World War I, and their continued involvement in interwar aerial navigation in the British empire.

If the presentation of airplanes as machines of war served to highlight the fealty of the princes to the imperial cause, they did not shy away from exploiting the potential that aviation held in store. In representing India in international fora such as the Imperial War Conference and the Paris Peace Conference, the princes had found themselves adding luster to their prestige. The Government of India, tasked to forge aerial regulations in keeping with the provisions of the international aerial convention under the remit of the Paris Conference in 1919 and with an eye on the imperial commercial gains, found that the exercise of policy-making often exceeded the legal ambit of aviation. The government's administrative and legislative vexations were not limited to drawing up the aerial routes but extended to the constitution of airspace, the law of the air, and the question of aerial rights. In the interwar years, as Britain began to develop its imperial skyways from London, via Cairo to Karachi, Bombay and Calcutta all the way to Darwin, the princes galvanized under the aegis of the Chamber of Princes to demand that their concerns be addressed or the government risk upstaging the imperial aviatric plans.

Most urgently, aerial navigation complicated the extant understandings of imperial sovereignty in the mosaic of colonial geography, where the territories of the princely states were often contiguous with those of British India. Aviation unsettled the traditional dimensionality of the concept

of territorial sovereignty, which began to assume the characteristics of volumetric space extending into the air. For an airplane leaving England to arrive at its destination in Australia, the Government of India had to maintain both its expansive aerial routes as well as their relations with the princes. The need to accommodate the imperial arrangements of aerial navigation within the structure of the governmental provisions in British India without upsetting the princely order remained a contentious issue in the political deliberations. The question of empire-wide aerial mobility offered the princes a template to articulate their discontent of the treaties and engagements that bound them to anachronism and irrelevance. In the opinion of the architects of the resurgent princely order, the colonial Indian treaty map was in dire need of revision. The quest for this revision inflected the law of the air in India as the princes staked a claim to their aerial sovereignty. The webinar explored how the compromise between the Government of India and the princely states tilted the scale and scope of aerial navigation in the interwar years.

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