



Left: Inside rubber plantations with cattle, Bukulumba, South Sulawesi (Photograph courtesy of Iqra Anugrah, 2016)

A Journey to IIAS

Iqra Anugrah

My first encounter with the IIAS was through *The Newsletter*. I remembered back when I was in college, I read several research and fieldwork articles by Southeast Asianists published in it. I still remember reading two articles on Islam and politics in Indonesia by Okamoto Masaaki and Ken Miichi, two Japanese scholars of Southeast Asia. Since then, I have followed IIAS's activity and its many initiatives.

Fast forward to my time as a scholar in training during my PhD program at Northern Illinois University (NIU). My experience at NIU was kind of unique, since the push to prove myself as a "real" political scientist was there, but my colleagues and mentors also appreciated and encouraged those who still wanted to do the classic area studies research – deep fieldwork and archival

works, interdisciplinary thinking, theorizing in and through Asia, that sort of thing. Once again, IIAS made an appearance in my trajectory. I became aware of IIAS's book review series (then called as *New Asia Books*), the ICAS Conference, and the IIAS itself, including its fellowship program. I also contributed a book review for *New Books Asia* around that time.

Up until this point, my engagement with IIAS was still primarily dominated by technical concerns.

After I embarked on a career as an itinerant (non-tenure) scholar with ties to the Indonesian activist scene, I naturally searched for options, for jobs that would allow me to keep myself financially afloat while doing my research. Then IIAS appeared as a natural option. I applied for a 10-month IIAS fellowship in 2022 and was notified in December of the same year that I was selected as one of the fellows. I was elated!

I have come a long way in my career since my starting point as a clueless

yet curious undergraduate student. The intellectual and social milieus of Asian Studies community, in which IIAS plays a significant part, have facilitated my growth, both personally and professionally. Okamoto Masaaki and Ken Miichi, scholars whose writings in *The Newsletter* I read as an undergrad, have both become my colleagues and mentors. My stay at IIAS so far has proved my impression of IIAS as a place to do social science and humanities research beyond the sometimes-suffocating pressure of professionalization in our respective disciplines (winking curiously at my political science colleagues). This is something that I never imagined possible to experience as a political nerd from Indonesia for whom English is a third language.

I am happy that my experimental project as a recovering political scientist-turned-theorist found a place at IIAS. Finding a group of colleagues who are interested in my weird project – a political

theory of competing visions and forces of conservatisms in Indonesia (anti-communist intellectuals, neoliberal economists, and Islamist activists and celebrities) – is indeed encouraging. The eclectic formats for scholarship outputs and deliveries that IIAS expects from its fellows make my intersection with the institute fruitful. My IIAS affiliation had allowed me to give a talk on the specter of Edmund Burke in Indonesian conservative statecraft vision and discuss Trump's right-wing populism with colleagues. The abundance of sandwiches, cakes, and snacks at the institute's events and kitchen helps a lot too.

I hope that my remaining stay at IIAS will be productive (which will give me longer time to enjoy Dutch *kaas* and *brood*) and the Institute remains committed to the promotion of interdisciplinary, innovative, and rigorous Asian Studies amidst the pressure of neoliberalism and parochial professionalization on today's academia. Three cheers for IIAS!

Fostering New Communities and Perspectives

Jean-Thomas Martelli

IIAS is an institution instrumental in bringing together scholars from different horizons. Usually, what 'binds' a group intellectually is either a common disciplinary focus or a similar geographical interest. The IIAS is neither of those: its originality is to connect researchers on the basis of different specializations tied together by a larger areal cohesiveness that goes far beyond traditional decoupages of Asia: China, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia ...

As a result, I learned about parallel and divergent political processes beyond the traditional 'referent' of the West. Although I sometimes disagreed with my colleagues on what the substantive nature of a de-colonial practice was, I thought that intra-Asia comparisons carried the potential of such *de*. By toning down

compulsory references to socio-political processes in Europe and North America, our discussions asserted the standing of our Global South-centered fieldworks and artistic practices. Notwithstanding that some 'Asian' realities are in part derivatives of what happens elsewhere, our scholarly engagements converged and humbly contributed to establishing the primacy of a de-Western perspective.

I thank the IIAS for providing researchers with the resources they need to transition into more stable academic jobs. The IIAS is a beacon of hope for a more sensible approach to trans-disciplinary studies grounded in Asian spaces, and I am confident that through the diverse and impactful publications of your fellows you will continue to make significant contributions in that direction. Thank you for your hard work and dedication.



Above: Fellows enjoying a winter market. (Photo courtesy of Aditya Kiran Kakati)