



My affinity with IIAS began in 2018, when I first met Philippe in New York. I was then completing my doctoral dissertation (finally!) and seeking postdoctoral opportunities outside the United States. Having spent several years in North America, I craved new experiences on another continent. Philippe's pleasant disposition attracted me to IIAS – if the Director were already so personable and visionary, what about his comrades-in-arms and the like-minded fellows whom the institute has hosted over the years? I was curious to find out more about whom I could meet and what I could achieve at IIAS, so without a second thought, I applied to become a research fellow the following year. I had never even been to the Netherlands, even though I was remotely fascinated with the country's history as the superpower of the seventeenth century (yes, I am the quintessential historian) and its economic achievements of recent times. Growing up in Singapore exposed to Dutch (or Dutch-related) brands such as Heineken, Shell, and Unilever, I wanted to know more about the Netherlands. Shortly after my arrival, I discovered another of the nation's great innovations: IIAS. Friends and collegial peers often asked what my deliverables were at IIAS, and my answer perplexed most when I said "nothing!"

I appreciate the beauty of what I would call the "IIAS mode" – providing its fellows with not only facilities but also, more importantly, the latitude in conducting their own research. Not having to teach, help out with administrative work, or even deliver a lecture for IIAS, I was able to churn out many journal articles and book chapters during my stint there. With IIAS's blessings, I was also able to complete visiting fellowships in Taiwan and Thailand. IIAS is truly "international" and "Asian." Through its programs, I made my maiden trip to Africa, attending the "Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge" conference in Tanzania (I am so looking forward to participating in the next one in Senegal). I also expanded my professional network beyond North America to Africa, Europe, and Asia, which allowed me to reciprocate the institute's support. I gathered a team of contributors for an edited volume in one of IIAS's book series (*Asian Cities*), which examines the politics of space in Cold War Asia. I also convened a selection committee for the ICAS Book Prize 2023 (Chinese Language Edition) when I was appointed as the secretary of this edition. I am honored to contribute to the IIAS cause of connecting knowledge and people for a more integrated understanding of Asia, and I am forever grateful to Philippe, my friends at IIAS, and colleagues from all over the world for enriching my life with their expertise and kindness.

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Photo from ICAS 11 at Leiden in 2019 with José Luís de Sales Marques and Sheyla Zandonai. (Photo courtesy of the author, 2019)



In 2016, I received an email from Philippe regarding an IIAS-co-organised conference I'd applied for. He asked for a revision of my abstract and, as I find out later, that he had pushed for my paper to be included in the programme. Philippe might have just been following a hunch, but the opportunity to participate in that conference in Leiden changed the trajectory of my academic life. There, I felt heard as a junior, affirming my drive to speak and write for a cause. I met 'partners-in-crime' who I still work with closely today. Subsequently, ICAS became a "good ol' stomping ground." From Chiang Mai to Leiden, every convention felt like a homecoming of sorts: the strong academic atmosphere was mentally refreshing while the familiar faces, laughs, and bear hugs were spiritually warming.

IIAS will always have a special place in my heart not only for its inclusivity, heart, and warmth, but also for its unwavering and staunch support towards facilitating progress and dialogue in all matters concerning Asia and its diverse cultures and inhabitants. The Institute's genuine devotion to championing intellectual freedom and opening new ways of understanding Asia's past, present, and future resiliency has inspired individuals like me to pluck up the courage to think, speak, and write about Asia – its cities, peoples, and creatures – through more critical lenses.

To Philippe and the entire IIAS team: congratulations on thirty years! I look forward to witnessing many more milestones. Mabuhay!

Catherine Chan, University of Macau

As a researcher on cultural heritage, I got to know IIAS during the first biennial conference of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies in Gothenburg (2012). However, I only officially started my experiences with IIAS in 2015, when I became an UKNA fellow at the institute. I am impressed by its multiple layers of networks and ambitious goal for civic emancipation.

Besides the fellowship, I have taken part in its various academic activities at different locations across Asia. From my observation, IIAS is an international knowledge hub deeply rooted in and widely engaged with local communities. From the perspective of heritage studies, it has established its unique approach for alternative use of culture as an emancipatory force through humanistic research, participatory learning, intellectual production, and empathetic communication.

IIAS has its own way of carrying out transdisciplinary discussions, even in difficult conditions. Heritage conservation is strongly bound to engineering disciplines in China, and the UKNA conference coordinated by Chinese partner institutes in 2015 was turning towards this trend at the beginning. Nevertheless, IIAS led the topic in a more humanistic direction, stressing the importance of humanities and social sciences in conservation planning and ecological development. It struck a balance between the fields [Fig. 1].

The seminar 'Revisiting Delhi' (2016), with which I was also involved, reflects IIAS's mission regarding teaching facilitation. Co-organised with local universities, the seminar focused on how to engage students with urban heritage [Fig. 2]. This resulted in a teaching collaboration between the Community Knowledge Center (CKC) at Ambedkar University Delhi and my faculty, the Department of Cultural Heritage and Museology at Fudan University, Shanghai. We have successfully "moved" the scenes of local life in old Delhi into the modern city of Shanghai: in 2018, a photo exhibition from CKC's collection was curated by Fudan students at the university museum.

The 2017 workshop in Surabaya was more neighborhood-based, and participants were all invited to a community meeting. The locals interpreted their own heritage to the scholars, instead of an authorised interpretation by the latter. It is a good start for further communication between academics and locals, as a scholarly way to promote the civic engagement.

From these experiences, I have found that IIAS links academic and non-academic communities at both local and international levels. Its core concern is the social responsibility for developing mutual understandings between people and achieving their spiritual liberty.

Xiaomei ZHAO, Fudan University, China

Fig. 1 (above): A site visit to an ancient Buddhist temple in Pingyao. (Photo courtesy of the author, 2015)

Fig. 2 (right): A visit to local community in Delhi. (Photo courtesy of the author, 2016)

