

# Afro-Ásia

A Biannual Journal of the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil

*Afro-Ásia* is a full open access, biannual publication of the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil, which publishes peer-reviewed scholarly articles, book reviews, and, in some cases, exceptionally singular primary sources. While the language of the journal is Portuguese, manuscripts may also be submitted in English, French, or Spanish. Articles will normally be reviewed in their original language, and upon acceptance will be translated into Portuguese. The journal welcomes a broad range of academic disciplines on topics related to the African Diaspora, Africa, and Asia – especially history, anthropology, sociology, literature, and cultural studies.

The journal was founded in 1965, as the scientific divulgation vehicle of the Center for Afro-Oriental Studies (CEAO), established in 1959 in the wake of the Bandung Conference and at the onset of African decolonization. CEAO was the first Brazilian academic institution of its genre, and it was made possible by the convergence of multiple interests, from state agencies to social collective actors. In fact, the state of Bahia, with its roughly 80 percent African-descent population, had since the beginning of the 20th century been a hotspot for the making of a transnational research field on race relations and Afro-American culture. From the 1930s and well into the 1960s, a host of foreign scholars, especially American and French, came to Bahia to study Black neighborhood and religious communities, looking for 'African survivals' and profoundly intrigued by the local racial convivial mores that presented such a stark contrast to US segregation. Bahian scholars, some of them Black or mixed-race, had entered the field since its inception and tried to carve out spaces for the organic intellectuals of the Black community – namely, female religious leaders of *Candomblé* – to be properly heard and considered in academic venues such as the Second Afro-Brazilian Congress, held in Salvador in 1937. Boosted by the post-war economic boom, which in Brazil was paired with a democratic interstice, Bahian scholars with links to leftist parties or *Candomblé* houses came together with Portuguese humanist and political exile Agostinho da Silva, who was in touch with anticolonial activists from Portuguese-speaking African

countries. Together, they established CEAO as a specialized agency within the state public university.

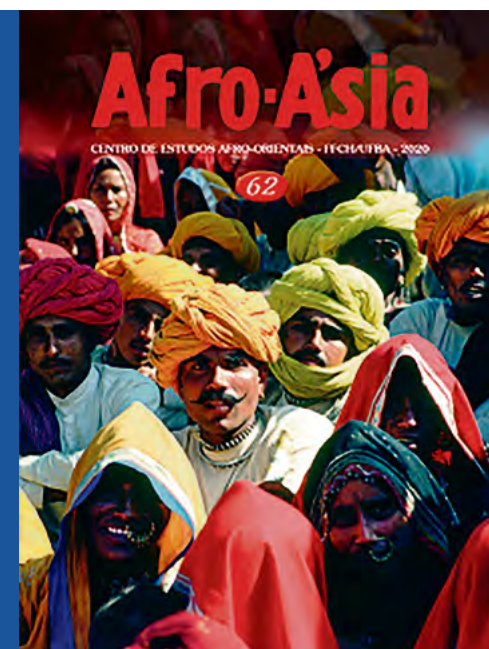
The Brazilian government was then trying a more independent foreign-relations policy, abandoning its traditional automatic alignment with the United States and reaching out to key actors in the emerging Third World, such as Cuba, China, India, or Indonesia. Thus, funding for an academic center that could help government officials to better understand the frenzy developments in Asia and Africa became available, and that small group of intellectuals in Bahia took their opportunity to design the first university mobility programs with the African continent. Early researchers affiliated with CEAO spent long research stays in different African countries, some of them even pursuing masters and doctorates, which were still rare in Brazil at the time. CEAO also hosted the first African university students in Brazil, by means of a pioneering initiative that would later serve as a model for the main Brazilian official scholarship program for foreign undergraduate and graduate students, directed at candidates from what we today call the 'Global South.' Moreover, Yoruba and Japanese language classes, open to the general public, were regularly offered from the 1970s and 1980s. Soon, the center was also recognized as a focal point of articulation for anti-racist struggles in Brazil, especially due to its always intense dialogue with *Candomblé* communities, the Black movement, and its organic intellectuals. *Afro-Ásia* was regularly published until 1970, facing thereafter an extended period of

## Call for Papers *Afro-Ásia*

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In a bid to expand the Brazilian conversation in the field of Asian Studies, and to better engage with a more international research agenda, *Afro-Ásia* invites scholars at any level of their career development, from any part of the world, to submit original, full-breadth research articles, theoretical and methodological essays, or historiographical balances from any area of the social sciences and humanities that represent a significant contribution to the scholarly debate.

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authors in finding a suitable, affordable translator. Also, in the frame of our new IIAS-CEAO partnership, current and former IIAS Research Fellows may apply for support in the translation process.

To submit an article, please visit our submission page: <https://periodicos.ufba.br/index.php/afroasia/about/submissions>. Be welcome to join and help strengthen the Brazilian conversation on Asian Studies!

institutional fragility with only a few editions spaced along the years. From 1995 on, the journal managed to retake its regular publication frequency and established itself as one of the most important venues for Brazilian academic conversations on the African Diaspora, Africa, and Asia, reaching out to Spanish-speaking Latin America, where it also has a significant reader base.

Needless to say, the interest in Asia has always been a secondary concern for both CEAO and the Brazilian research community at large, in part because of the prohibitive costs involved in doing research in Asian countries and a faltering funding strategy by the Brazilian government through subsequent regime changes. Of course, *Afro-Ásia* vied to bring discussions about Asia to its readers in Brazil, translating a number of research articles by established foreign researchers, most of them Westerners. Published pieces ranged from more exoticizing, Orientalist perspectives on themes such as literature in Sanskrit or the Noh theater, to reflections on pressing contemporary issues such as the Afro-Asian solidarity movement, Gandhi's political philosophy, Nehru's ideals for a new international order, and Sino-Indian frontier disputes. However, a recognizable, institutionalized academic field of Asian Studies has yet to emerge in Brazil. Certainly, beyond the initial interest in Asian decolonization and political affirmation in the world arena, a growing number of research themes has been developing along the last decades, sometimes stemming from emigrated Asian-descent communities present in major Brazilian cities, particularly

the national economic metropolis, São Paulo, where university courses on particular Asian matters are offered more regularly. A certain number of scholars in literary studies, history, geography, sociology, and anthropology have consistently built their careers as specialists in Asian Studies, and many are now actively involved in teaching and supervising a potential new generation of researchers throughout the country. The general interest in Asia is on the rise, pushed by China's and India's economic puissance, their ever-expanding global reach, as well as considerations about the role of Brazil in affirming the agency of the Global South and forging South-South cooperation initiatives and strategic partnerships.

In recent years, this growing Brazilian interest in Asia has been reflected in the issues of *Afro-Ásia*, which has assumed the mission of supporting and helping to consolidate Asian Studies made in Brazil. Understandably, contemporary China and India, Brazilian partners in the BRICS coalition, concentrate much of the scholarly gaze, but other spaces are also starting to attract the focus of Brazilian researchers. In this special section of The Region, we feature some examples of the varied interests – in terms of methodological, empirical, and geographical framing – that have recently appeared in our pages.

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## How Many Hands Does It Take to Write History of Literature? The Politics of Theoretical Divergences in Indonesia

Felipe Vale da Silva

While searching for the origins of modern Indonesian literature, we come across a recurrent formulation: "modern Indonesian literature was born around 1920." Such an assumption leads back to Dutch colonial scholar Andries Teeuw's book *Pokok dan Tokoh* (1952), and it is fair to say that it has been accepted as a historical fact ever since.

Accordingly, natives of what was then called the Dutch East Indies developed their literary expression due to the exertion of the educational policies of the Dutch crown, especially after the 1901 reform package known as *Ethische politiek*. The new colonial code not only aimed at spreading knowledge amongst natives, but also created an official publishing house called Balai Pustaka,

whose goal was to monitor the 'proper' literary material made available for local populations.

For this article, we analyzed newly-found documents that reveal the imperial goals and institutional structure of the Balai Pustaka: being directly connected to the colonial agency *Kantoor voor de*

*Volkslectuur*, it performed the dual role of a Ministry of Education and Ministry of Propaganda in the Indies. The main goal was to convey Western concepts of cognition to indigenous populations, thereby outlining and establishing values, behavioral models, and new ranges of social functions. Thusly, a significant part of Balai Pustaka's activities consisted in translating classics of Western literature into local languages. In the 1920s, it provided institutional support to native writers based in Sumatra, the same who wrote the classics of modern Indonesian expression, who were later named the Balai Pustaka literary school.