

The Newsletter is a free periodical published by IIAS. As well as being a window into the Institute, The Newsletter also links IIAS with the community of Asia scholars and the worldwide public interested in Asia and Asian studies. The Newsletter bridges the gap between specialist knowledge and public discourse, and continues to serve as a forum for scholars to share research, commentary and opinion with colleagues in academia and beyond.

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Fig.1:
The Lighthouse.
(Illustration by Narutai
Riangkruar, 2024)

Facilitating Knowledge Exchange

A Special Issue Dedicated to ICAS 13

Paramita Paul

Welcome to ICAS! The 13th International Convention of Asia scholars will be held in Surabaya, Indonesia, between 28 July – 1 August 2024. We are expecting almost 1500 participants from all over the world for our first conference-festival (ConFest), a newly re-imagined form of the academic conference that engages both academia and society in knowledge exchange. This unique and locally-embedded experiential event comprises panels, roundtables, workshops, and fairs, as well as participatory activities in and around our ConFest venues. We look forward to an exciting week of connections, re-connections, and exchanges!

To complement our ConFest, we designed a special issue of *The Newsletter*. This is the last in our special series of three issues – #96, #97, and #98, published respectively in Fall 2023, Spring 2024, and Summer 2024 – commemorating 30 years of the International Institute for Asian Studies. The contributions in this issue all align with the concept of “Crossways of Knowledge,” the title of ICAS 13. They probe what happens at intersections, when we engage across divides and transcend the boundaries between academic disciplines, knowledge sectors, and geographic regions.

Last year, as we were preparing for our special series, I sat down with Narutai Riangkruar, Assistant Coordinator ICAS and Conferences and a dedicated illustrator, to discuss an image that could suit the atmosphere and tone of this issue. We thought of our institute and its diverse activities as a lighthouse, a physical structure designed to emit light, to connect, and to contrast. The lighthouse is meant to provide navigational aid, as it improves visibility and marks ports of entry. It orients ships, but also collaborates with other lighthouses to facilitate understandings of space and place. Inside a lighthouse, systems of lamps and lenses come together to enable these processes, and to ensure

and inspire movement and change. Fig. 1 is our lighthouse, fueled inside by our various programs dedicated to research, pedagogy, dissemination, capacity-building, and civic engagement. The IIAS lighthouse illuminates the world around us, reaching out to and collaborating with innovative, critical voices. It is at the intersection of these connections and collaborations that our institute, the ConFest, and *The Newsletter* exist and thrive.

Issue #98 opens with a welcoming note from our director, Philippe Peycam. This is followed by an introduction to the Airlangga Institute for Indian Ocean Crossroads (AIIOC) at Airlangga University, the host and co-organizer of ICAS 13, written by Irfan Wahyudi, Lina Puryanti, and Alexei Wahyudiputra (pp. 6–7). Their piece is complemented by an article by Adrian Perkasa, Project Manager ICAS 13 at IIAS, in which he charts the history of IIAS’ engagement with Surabaya. Another partner, and the host of our upcoming Asia-Africa ConFest in Senegal in 2025, is Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar. Ibrahima Niang introduces this university, discussing relations between Senegal and different countries in Asia and anticipating what promises to be an equally diverse, exciting, and inspiring gathering (p.8).

This summer, we are delighted to present a truly unique edition of “The Focus” section (pp. 9–21). In a series of articles collected under the overarching theme of “The Ta-u and Their Island Home,” our guest editors Annika Pissin, Huei-Min Tsai, and Eric Clark have brought together personal stories by authors from the Ta-u Indigenous community of Pongso no Ta-u (Lanyu, Orchid Island), a small volcanic island to the southeast of Taiwan and north of the Batanes Islands of the Philippines. The Ta-u authors elaborate on the multiple dimensions to Ta-u life, reflecting on traditional practices and knowledge as well the challenges to Ta-u culture today. As such, *The Focus* epitomizes the concept of “Crossways of Knowledge,” inviting us to consider fundamental differences between capitalist and Indigenous cultures, and

to engage across knowledge divides. To complement the written collection, we have recorded a brief teaser episode on *The Channel*, our flagship podcast (<https://www.iias.asia/the-channel>). In the teaser, Syaman Rapongan, an elder of the community and a contributing author to *The Focus*, offers a recitation in Ta-u of ceremonial words and a poem. After that, Syaman Lamuran, another author, introduces the recitations and translates them for us. We strongly encourage our readers to listen to the episode for a deeper, aural experience of the world and the people central to this special collection of texts and images.

Connections across divides feature centrally at ICAS 13, and in this issue. Our articles in “The Study” cover topics ranging from Indian indentured laborers in the Caribbean and their representation in literature (pp. 40–41) to the handmade postcard as interactive object in early modern China and Native America (pp. 34–35), from portrayals of the “River gypsies of Bengal” (pp. 36–37) to the Vietnamese experience at the Paris Colonial Exposition in 1931 (pp. 38–39), and from conservatism and modernization in New Order Indonesia (pp. 42–43) to activists’ struggles in Myanmar (pp. 44–45). Our guest editors for “The Region,” too, have compiled articles around the themes of cross-border flows and mobilities, and about the shifting dynamics between the personal and the political, the private and the public, and the local, national, and global. Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC) offers up a series of articles on the diverse experience of refugee groups in Northeast Asia (pp. 27–29), while articles from The Asia Institute of the University of Melbourne consider female agency and activism in Japan (pp. 30–33).

This issue’s “The Tone” contemplates the framing of an exhibition of the work of the renowned Turkish-Armenian photographer Ara Güler (1928–2018) (pp. 54–55). Meanwhile, in “The Slate,” scholars from the Humanities Across Borders (HAB) network at IIAS and their colleagues report on a community storytelling workshop in Chiang Mai, involving participants who experienced trauma and displacement from Thailand and Myanmar (pp. 24–25). “The Imprint,” our new page dedicated to highlighting the critical work of small publishers around the world, this time features a selection of recent titles from Zubaan Publishers, a feminist publishing house based in India.

We are excited about ICAS, but we want to use this occasion to also look forward to two upcoming conferences next year. First is the aforementioned Africa-Asia ConFest in Dakar in June 2025. In addition, our next conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN) will be held in Irbid, Jordan, in September 2025. You will find calls for proposals for these conferences on p. 5 (Africa-Asia) and p. 46 (ABRN). For now, we wish everyone a fruitful, stimulating time in Surabaya, and we look forward to connecting with you at our ConFest!

Paramita Paul,
Chief Editor of *The Newsletter*