

The 100th Issue

Paramita Paul

Figure 1 is a pen drawing of a breadfruit by illustrator Wanmin Huang. It is a detail of a branch with lush, gorgeous leaves, carrying large fruits of a tree that is well known across tropical areas from the South Pacific to the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. The 100th issue of *The Newsletter* opens with a piece on two leaves of the breadfruit tree that were purported to have been brought to Scotland from Tahiti via Mauritius. Sarah Easterby-Smith's emphasis on the *journey* of these leaves, and, particularly, on the *multiple narratives* in which the breadfruit tree is embedded, functions as a key element that connects all articles in this special, festive issue of our journal. The 100th issue brings together research on people, objects, and images, from Tanzania to Japan, Cambodia to Ghana, the United States to La Réunion, and many other places. In each case study, the focus is on movement, layers of histories, and perspective.

The Study

In Oceania, the breadfruit has been associated with spiritual forces for thousands of years. In her article for our section "The Study", Easterby-Smith shows that in 18th-century England, it inspires new narratives that speak about the significance of the figure of Captain William Bligh (1754-1817) in British naval and cultural history, overlooking the plant's connection with colonization and slavery, as well as its place in Oceanic and Caribbean cultures (pp. 6-7). Importantly, she notes how the leaves' placement in the herbarium of the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh is against a blank white background, accompanied by specimen sheets with handwritten and stamped connotations. This presentation invites viewers to accept the information as "fact," downplaying other understandings of breadfruit as "traditional knowledge." "Wherever we find breadfruit, we find human connections," Easterby-Smith concludes, and these connections are manifested as much in the existence of the plants as they are in the narratives told about them.

Competing narratives also characterize the lives of Kenyan runners in Japan (pp. 8-9). Michael Kentaro Peters probes the nuances of how these athletes understand their purpose in Japan, and describes how this differs from the expectations of their agents, coaches, employers, and the general public following them on various media. In Tanzania, John P. Cooper and Elgidius B. Ichumbaki investigate alternative forms of maritime heritage-making (pp. 12-13). Is there a way to resist official heritage narrations of the sea, and instead follow approaches that serve the needs of local communities? The remaining two articles in "The Study" take us from specific locales to the wider world of books (pp. 14-15) and the nebulous environment of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) (pp. 10-11). Introducing "The Antilibrarian Project", Sourav Chatterjee's personal essay reflects on his ever-growing collection of unread books and the manifold significances of a "microcosm that embodies a little bit of everything we ever want to know but will never come to know." Subsequently, Gabriella Angellini reports on her fascinating travels in the worlds of GenAI, in search of a visual depiction of "a romantic couple with a Chinese man and a white woman." This proves to be a near-impossible task, and she calls for more accurate and equitable representations.

Fig. 1: Breadfruit tree, pen drawing by Wanmin Huang [wmh_888], 2025.



The Slate, The Tone, and The Region

In our section "The Slate", dedicated to the debates, practices, challenges, and opportunities of 21st-century education, Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier and the students of the workshop "Repurposing Phnom Penh" introduce us to the activities they undertook in September 2024 (pp. 18-20). The workshop helped the students to familiarize themselves with archive institutions in Phnom Penh, and to critically appropriate materials. Joanna Masangkay then spotlights the establishment of the Gold City Football Club in Ghana (pp. 16-17), through the case study of her mentee, whose master's thesis laid the foundations of the club. Her article shows how academic projects can transcend scholarly boundaries and make a difference in society.

"The Tone" highlights art and creativity in the broadest sense of the term, and in this special issue includes Rosa Beunel-Fogarty's analysis of the Creole musical innovations in the work of Reunionese singer Maya Kamaty (pp. 30-31). In our era of globalization, artists such as Kamaty preserve Creole heritage through reinvention. Also, fifty years since April 17, 1975, the beginning of a genocidal regime led by the Khmer Rouge, Darozyl Touch writes about her multimedia storytelling project *Hau Proleung: Calling the Soul*, designed to symbolize the Khmer diasporic experience (pp. 32-33). Finally, Talisha Schilder and Nadja Ritter showcase a selection of eight conversations with and portraits of female traditional tattooists (pp. 34-35). In today's male-dominated world of traditional tattooing, they invite readers to connect to the stories of these women, who navigate and challenge complex power structures.

Our colleagues from the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies at Vilnius University are new to our section "The Region," and in this edition they introduce us to the history of Asian Studies in Lithuania (pp. 36-37). Also in "The Region," our regular guest editors from Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC) and the Center for Global Asia at NYU Shanghai have collected research on "Observing the Challenges of Regionalism in Northeast Asia from Comparative Perspectives" (pp. 38-41) and "Doing History of Childhood in China" (pp. 42-46), respectively.

A festive issue in challenging times

At 100 issues, *The Newsletter* remains the most widely read publication of its kind in Asian Studies. An exceptional phenomenon in the world of academic publishing, our journal and its satellite platforms of *The Channel* and *The Blog* make knowledge freely accessible to all, catering to and collaborating with a global community of partners, authors, and readers within and beyond academia. "The Focus" section of this special issue celebrates this by highlighting six core values and priorities held by our publication and its editorial team (pp. 21-27): (1) Diverse Voices and Multiple Languages, (2) Mappings and Re-mappings, (3) Accessibility and New Formats, (4) Creative Expression and Artistic Collaboration, (5) Critical Insights and Timely Interventions, and (6) Readers around the World. To complement our celebratory milestone, our subscribers' copies of issue #100 include a sticker specially designed by our graphic designer Paul Oram.

The 100th issue of *The Newsletter* is a festive issue, but it appears at an exceptionally challenging moment for IIAS and the values it represents. In The Netherlands and worldwide, right-wing governments are implementing budget cuts in higher education and cultural programs. At Leiden University, these cuts will especially affect the Humanities and the Social Sciences. The consequences comprise not just the loss of fields of study, worldwide networks and collaborations, archives, collections, data, and individuals, but also the loss of nuanced, careful, and clear thinking itself. To draw attention to this critical moment, and for the first time in the history of 100 issues of *The Newsletter*, we are printing a blank spread in the center of our journal (pp. 28-29).

Despite the impact of such budget cuts at IIAS, both the institute and *The Newsletter* will persist in our efforts to facilitate critical, humanistic, and collaborative work. We are grateful to our engaged community, and have been encouraged by the letters of support that we have received from all over the world.

Returning to the pen drawing of a breadfruit introduced at the beginning of this editorial, at 100 issues, *The Newsletter*, too, has travelled long distances. It has found itself to be part of multiple histories and narratives, just as it has become a central platform for the critical exploration and understanding of those histories and narratives. And just like the pen drawing of breadfruit – a representation of the plant that differs from its display in the herbarium or its Wikimedia photo – adds another layer and perspective to the story of this tree, we will embark on a new journey, and add yet another layer and perspective to our history.

Paramita Paul
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