

# The Newsletter



Tamil film culture and politics



The Focus

## Heritage expertise across Asia

Preservation through specific and diverse interventions



Chinese tea and Asian societies

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**In this edition of the Focus 29-40****Heritage expertise across Asia**

Trinidad Rico

This Focus section proposes to examine and study cultural heritage debates less on heritage objects and practices and more on the human agents that create, promote, and study cultural heritage and its preservation through specific and diverse interventions. These interventions do not occur in a void: they are often attached to distinct disciplinary approaches and informed by specific political contexts and historical circumstances. Therefore, the six contributors to this section, addressing challenging case studies of preservation of tangible and intangible heritage in six different regions of Asia, aim to highlight how the involvement of heritage experts affects the very nature of cultural heritage objects and practices, including the choice of approaches that are used for their study.

**The Newsletter is a free periodical published by the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS). As well as serving as a forum for scholars to share research, commentary and opinion with colleagues in academia and beyond, The Newsletter is also a window into the Institute.**

**T**he International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is a global Humanities and Social Sciences institute and a knowledge exchange platform, based in Leiden, the Netherlands, with programmes that engage Asian and other international partners. IIAS takes a thematic and multi-sectoral approach to the study of Asia and actively involves scholars and experts from different disciplines and regions in its activities. Our current thematic research clusters are 'Asian Heritages', 'Asian Cities' and 'Global Asia'.

Information about the programmes and activities of IIAS can be found in the Network pages of each issue of The Newsletter.

**In this issue**

In this issue, we take the opportunity to inform you about an exciting new chapter in the cooperation between IIAS and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (page 48). On page 51 we present again a report of an interesting activity within the framework of the Humanities across Borders programme, this time about a workshop on 'Feminist Methodologies' at Cotton University in India. We are particularly pleased that the ideas developed during the workshop for a real humanities approach to knowledge production and curricula development were received with much enthusiasm by Cotton University's Vice Chancellor and Registrar. On the preceding page, two international students of the Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies talk vividly about a working visit to Morocco, personally experiencing the importance of studying cultural heritage issues 'in situ', outside the walls of the academy and in conversation with local knowledge.

IIAS research programmes, networks and other initiatives are described in brief on pages 52-53. Information about the IIAS Fellowship programme can be found on pages 54-55. On pages 48-49 you will find our latest announcements, and on page 4 the Call for Proposals for ICAS 11, which will take place in July 2019, in Leiden, the Netherlands.



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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**I**  
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Asian Studies

## A benevolent crossroads

Philippe Peycam

We are currently entirely captivated by the preparations of two major events, both of which promise to stand as important new steps in the pursuit of IIAS's global engagement. The first is the upcoming Africa-Asia conference in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (20-22 September 2018). It will be the second edition of the Africa-based event after the success of Accra 2015, in Ghana. Following that historical event, IIAS, ICAS, the African Association for Asian Studies (A-ASIA) and their multiple partners were encouraged to think about turning the event into a regular one and with it, facilitating the development of a vibrant pan-African network of institutions and scholars wishing to build their capacity to respond to the everyday more conspicuous crossing of influences between political and economic actors of the two continents. Together with A-ASIA, we contacted the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM); an obvious choice given the central role the Tanzanian capital and its university once played in nurturing a spirit of African intellectual engagement in the post-independence period, and because of its geographically close connection to Asia through the Indian Ocean rim.

Already, the 2017 ICAS event in Chiang Mai saw three roundtables openly discussing the position of Asia and its interactions with other regions of the world including Africa, the Indian Ocean and Latin America. This interest in Asia's global connections is here to stay and to grow. Take for instance the interest in Asia's relations with Africa. Its range has expanded to embrace a multiplicity of spaces of inquiry as shown by the number of topics to be covered at the Dar es Salaam conference. An average of ten to twelve panels or roundtables will be organized under each of the following nine broad themes:

- Transcontinental Connections and Interactions
- Histories and Genealogies
- The Indian Ocean World
- Economy and Development
- Intellectual and Educational Encounters
- (Im-)Migrations, Diasporas, Refugees, and Identities
- Knowledge Production and Exchanges
- Cities, Urban Communities, Architectures
- Arts, Crafts and Cultural Interventions

The material is still 'raw', but with at least one hundred panels and roundtables expected on subjects as varied as 'Comparison of the Policies of the Two Koreas and Africa', 'Cuisines, Mobility and Criminality', 'African Communities in Guangzhou', 'Siddis in Karnataka, Gujarat, Hyderabad and Goa', 'Building a Francophone Centre d'Études Afrique-Asie', 'Writing Modern Architectural Histories of Africa, Asia and the Indian Ocean', the Dar es Salaam conference is set to continue what was pioneered at Accra, where aspects of connections and comparisons go hand in hand to weave a new trans-regional framework of intellectual inquiry.

For UDSM and IIAS, the principle organisers, new encouraging developments have occurred with a number of institutions willing to sponsor the event, by supporting a substantial number of participants or by contributing to a travel support fund for participants in need. I take this opportunity to thank our colleagues from Muziris Institute for the Indian Ocean Studies, University of Calicut (Kerala, India), Leiden University (the Netherlands), University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, U.S.), Observatoire des Sociétés de l'Océan Indien, Université de la Réunion (Réunion), National University of Singapore (Singapore), Social Sciences Research Council (New York, U.S.), Centre for Asian Studies, University of Ghana (Accra, Ghana), Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (China), the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (New York, U.S.), the Henry Luce Foundation (New York, U.S.), University Mohammed V (Rabat, Morocco). Behind these institutions are passionate people who believe in the importance of sharing and collaborating in an inclusive fashion.

The Dar event will be preceded by a two-day working meeting in Zanzibar, in collaboration with UDSM and local partners, on the subject of inclusive collaboration around the growing field of 'Indian Ocean Studies'. Here too, the institutions involved see the importance of pooling resources in view of developing an open Indian Ocean-focused consortium with at its heart, universities and communities from this vast maritime region.

The second forthcoming event is of course ICAS 11 in Leiden, in July 2019. With the general theme 'Asia and Europe, Asia in Europe', this ICAS event will be exceptional. Not only because it will be the first time in nearly two decades that such a mega conference takes place in Europe – in the city where it was born – but also because the terms of knowledge production and collaboration developed in, on and with Asia in Europe have dramatically

changed. The event of Dar es Salaam is a reminder that Asia in its definition or in its influence is increasingly pervasive. Europe for its part, as a world region in all its diversity, continues to be a major scholarly concentration of expertise on and with Asia. It also includes within its populations important segments of people with an Asian background whose voices and experiences are becoming more potent. Today, the mayor of one of Europe's most important cities, London, is of Asian background; so is the prime minister of Ireland. The modes of collaboration, even academic, are evolving, with more fluidity and balance in the exchanges, with more centres of excellence, and an ever-diversified range of connections, experiences and perspectives among scholars.

An illustration of this intensification and diversification in collaborations is the revamped European Alliance on Asian Studies. Originally a small 'club' of institutions, the Alliance has grown to represent almost all the regions of Europe where Asia is a focus of interest. This diversification is also true for the increasingly differentiated collection of institutions, from topically focused think tanks to generalist language-training based universities. The Alliance today represents 18 members or would-be members. It was never meant to be exhaustive. It works rather as a group of institutions who share a common interest in collaborating (not just in competing), in facilitating mobility across Europe and with Asia, and in working towards potentially meaningful shared initiatives, free from bureaucratic entrapments. On numerous occasions, the Alliance's members have expressed frustration over the lack of structural EU or national funding mechanisms that truly encourage collaboration and inter-European exchanges.

This is an issue the partners hope to discuss at ICAS 11. For the Alliance members as for many other participating institutions, Asian, European, and others, ICAS 11 in Leiden will be an opportunity to display their work and to contribute activities ('events within the event') in an open setting and a desire for cross-fertilization and a mutually beneficial partnership. In so doing, ICAS 11 should help to position Europe and European institutions in relation to Asia and Asian partners as an open space or meeting ground, less fixed in past certitudes, rich in multiple intellectual traditions and possibilities; a more benevolent crossroads between Asia and other regions of the world.

Philippe Peycam  
Director IIAS

### Africa-Asia, a New Axis of Knowledge – Second Edition

20 – 22 September 2018

Venue:  
University of Dar Es Salaam,  
Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania

Building on the multiple encounters, interactions and dialogues initiated at the 1st Africa-Asia Conference (Accra, Ghana, 2015), this second conference seeks to deepen the explorations of new realities, and long histories connecting Africa and Asia.

Information and registration:  
[www.icas.asia/africas](http://www.icas.asia/africas)



### International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS)

ICAS 11 – Call for Proposals  
16 – 19 July 2019  
Leiden, the Netherlands

ICAS 11 will be organized by Leiden University, the International Institute for Asian Studies and GIS Asie (French Academic Network on Asian Studies). 1500 Asia specialists and representatives of civil society are expected to attend.

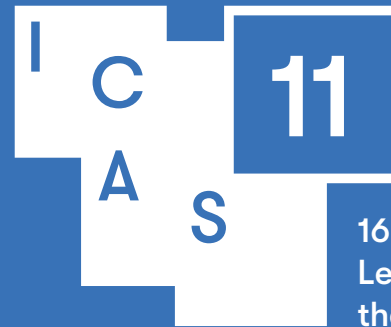
The submission deadline for proposals of Individual Abstracts, Panels, Roundtables, Book presentations and PhD Dissertation presentations is 10 October 2018.

For all information regarding submissions, grants, fees, etc.:  
<https://icas.asia/en/icas11-cfp>

For the ICAS Book and Dissertation Prize 2019:  
<https://icas.asia/en/icas-book-prize>



# The International Convention of Asia Scholars



16-19 July 2019  
Leiden  
the Netherlands

The International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) engages participants from all continents in dialogues on Asia that transcend boundaries between academic disciplines and geographic regions. ICAS is an active accelerator of research.

Since 1998, ICAS has brought more than 20,000 academics, civil society representatives, administrators and artists together at 10 conventions. Publishers, institutes and NGOs converge to display their products, services and research outcomes in the ICAS exhibition hall. The ICAS Book and Dissertations Carousel offers (future) authors a platform to launch their publications. With all these activities ICAS has contributed to the decentring of Asian studies by including more 'Asian voices', while successfully convening a global space in which Asia scholars from the whole world can directly interact.

## ICAS 11

Leiden University will be the local host of the eleventh meeting of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS).

ICAS 11 will be held in Leiden, the Netherlands, from 16-19 July 2019. The convention will draw on the historically rich Asian and global connections of the city, along with its renowned research institutes and museums.

**Call for papers: deadline 10 October 2018**

For further information visit: [icas.asia](http://icas.asia)

## The ICAS Book Prize (IBP) 2019

The biennial ICAS Book Prize (IBP) is a global competition that provides an international focus for publications on Asia in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The IBP received in excess of 500 entries in 2017 (300 books and 200 dissertations). In addition to the original English-language Prize, the IBP 2019 will include 5 other language editions: French, German, Chinese, Korean, and Spanish/Portuguese. The IBP awards will be presented during the ICAS 11 opening ceremony.

Eligible titles are Asia-related academic publications in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Books must have first been published after August 2016, and not have been submitted to a previous IBP.

**Submit your titles to the IBP 2019 on [icas.asia](http://icas.asia)**

**Deadline: 10 October 2018**

## Asian Studies Book Fair

Publishers and academic institutes are invited to exhibit at the Asian Studies Book Fair at ICAS 11, to present their publications, projects and programmes to the large number of attendees. The Book Fair will also host events such as manuscript pitches, author meetings and book launches.

Exhibitors or advertisers email [icas11.exhibition@iias.nl](mailto:icas11.exhibition@iias.nl)



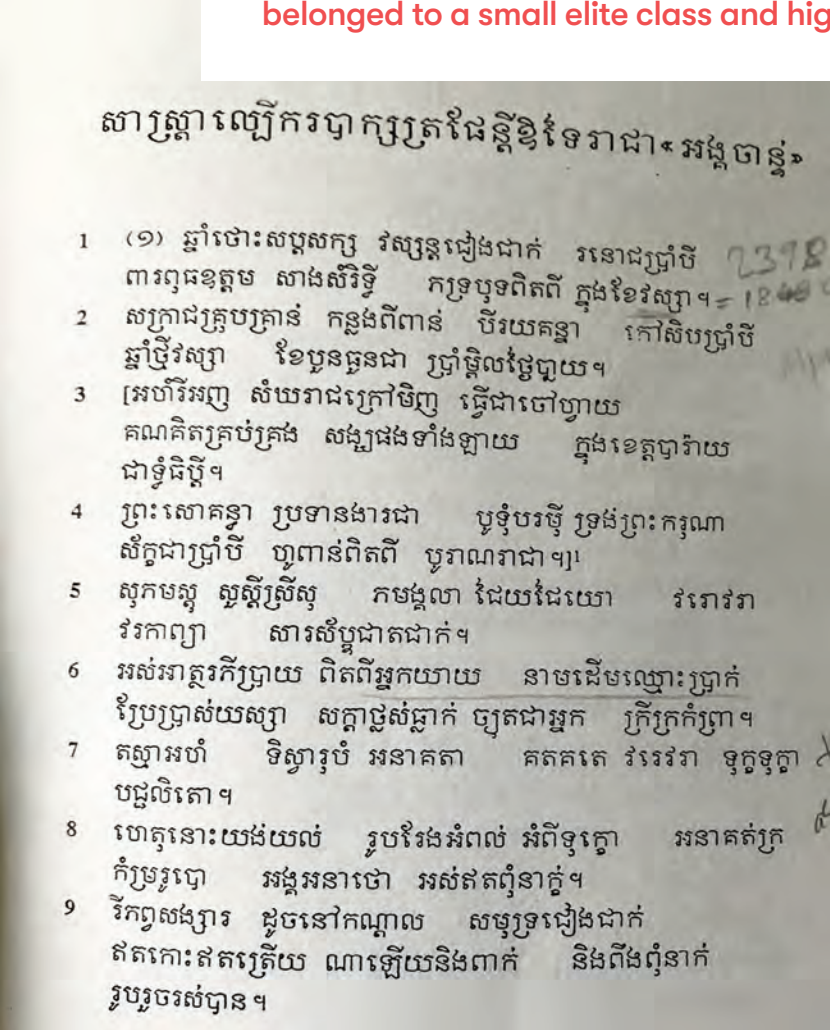
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# Representations of the past in a pre-colonial Khmer monastery manuscript

Theara Thun

Prior to the arrival of Western notions of history in Cambodia, *bangsāvatār* writing was the most popular genre used to record events and stories about the past.<sup>1</sup> Literally meaning ‘annals of a family or kingdom’ and commonly translated as ‘chronicle’, the *bangsāvatār* was a type of writing that belonged to a small elite class and highly respected religious leaders.



Cover page of the Pich 1855 (Courtesy of Khin Sok)

These texts were often associated with the royal palace and Buddhist monasteries. Those produced by the palace almost entirely focus on stories and events surrounding royal family members, especially the genealogy of rulers and their conflicts either among themselves or with the neighboring royal courts of Siam and Vietnam. Those produced by Buddhist monasteries, besides covering some major events about the royal court, mostly recount events at the local/provincial level. Composed in a poetic format, these particular texts were also known as the *rabā khsatr* writings, with their name referring to ‘line’ or ‘lineage’ of the kings.

There are two monastery texts that have been preserved until the present. They originated from the writings of a highly respected member of the *sangha* (the Buddhist monkhood) named Pich, an abbot in the province of Bārāy. The Venerable Pich’s earliest text dates back to the early 1840s, and another text composed by him is dated 1855. The two texts were later adapted by another highly respected monk, Chan, who composed a manuscript in 1876 by largely copying the two writings of the Venerable Pich. The manuscripts still in existence at present are the Venerable Chan’s 1876 edition and Venerable Pich’s work of 1855, which was preserved by the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh, where it was re-copied in 1951 and entitled it *Sāstrā Lbaeok Rabā Khsatr Pheanday Udai Rājā Eng Chant* [Palm-leaf Manuscript of the Poems of the Lineage of King Udai Rājā Eng Chant]. Khin Sok collected the two texts and published them in a book.<sup>2</sup> This paper discusses the contents and the representations of the past in the Venerable Pich’s text of 1855, referred to as *Pich 1855*.<sup>3</sup>

## Benefitting from three kinds of goodness

The main focus of *Pich 1855* is a noble family associated with the sponsorship of a religious building. The family is that of a lady named Prāk, whose husband, Narentrā, was governor of the province of Kampong Svāy. Narentrā was appointed as governor by the court of King Ang Chant (r. 1806-1834). After the king’s death and Siam’s withdrawal in 1834, he mobilized the people in his province and nearby provinces, including those in Bārāy, to rise up against Vietnamese rule. The revolt was defeated and Narentrā, together with his family, fled to Bangkok for safety. He fell sick and passed away in Siam leaving behind his wife Prāk and a young son named Moen Meas.

The text goes on to depict how, after the end of Vietnamese rule over Cambodia during the early 1840s, Prāk and Moen Meas returned to their country. Due to the works of his late father, Ang Duong’s court (r. 1848-1860) in Udong awarded Moen Meas an official title: Amrek Moen Meas. He married the daughter of another noble family, who gave birth to a son. Moen Meas passed away soon after due to sickness. *Pich 1855* describes the grief of his wife and of his mother Prāk. It also tells of Prāk’s decision to donate a large portion of her family’s wealth to the construction of a *vihāra* [Buddhist monastery building] in order to dedicate the *dāna* [merit generated by her donation] to her late husband and son. In the last few pages, the text elaborates in great detail on the activities of building the *vihāra*, including the amount of money

donated by Prāk. The text ends right in the middle of the description of a huge religious ceremony held for the new monastery building in 1855.

As the text is written by a Buddhist monk, Venerable Pich, it tends to give priority to the account of religious activities. More specifically, besides events related to wars and politics, the text appears to pay considerable attention to such events as funerals and wedding ceremonies, Ang Duong’s coronation ceremony and his restoration of Buddhism after the Vietnamese occupation, Prāk’s preparations for the Ancestors’ Day (*Pchum Ben*) festival, and the ceremony for the new *vihāra*. In addition, many events incorporated into the text are mentioned in an explicitly Buddhist framework. One finds ideas and philosophies of Buddhism inserted whenever significant events in the views of individuals and families are mentioned, most prominently those in Prāk’s family including the joyful moments, the marriage of Moen Meas, Moen Meas’s passing, and the sponsorship of the monastery building. These teachings help elaborate those events from a religious perspective. They are usually abstract and rationalize the events or activities by associating them with religious teachings. For example, the writer explained that the sponsorship that Prāk undertook for the new monastery building would allow her to benefit from three kinds of goodness, namely earthly goodness, celestial goodness, and nirvana, and thus to escape from all types of suffering and poverty.<sup>4</sup>

## Journeys, behavior and heartbreak

A close reading of the text shows that in its account of Prāk’s family, it also incorporates a mixture of elements from several pre-colonial literary genres such as the *nirās* and *chbāp*. The *nirās*, known in Thai literature as *nirat*,<sup>5</sup> which literally means memorable journey or departure, is a literary genre narrating someone’s journey to a particular place. Conveyed in poetic form, the *nirās* usually recount in detail each step of the journey from beginning to end. In the text, for example, a long *nirās* passage was inserted when describing the journey of Prāk’s family when they escaped from Kampong Svāy province to Bangkok. It describes different landmarks, including the names of the forests, rivers and localities through which they travelled, their difficulties and happy moments, people they met, and the natural beauty they encountered.<sup>6</sup> The *chbāp*,<sup>7</sup> which literally means the code of conduct, is another literary genre conveyed in poetic form that describes and analyzes people’s behavior and, at the same time, suggests norms and roles for people to follow. A *chbāp* passage was incorporated, for instance, when Moen Meas’s mother-in-law gives instructions to her daughter (Moen Meas’s wife) about how to serve and obey her husband by following five principles including honesty, patience, and politeness.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, some events in the text are heavily romanticized. When the writer covers dramatic moments, such as a death, he goes

into considerable detail so as to capture the grief of the relatives of the deceased person. The writer does so by highlighting how one or two family members express their sadness and mourning. Using the voices of the deceased person’s relatives, the writer poetically romanticizes the moment by interspersing personal expressions of love, loss and heartbreak. For example, at the passing of Prāk’s husband in Siam, the writer conveys Prāk’s feeling at that moment:

Remembering the sad moments we ran through the forests facing great difficulties and risking our lives. Thinking of those moments, it hurts my [Prāk’s] feeling very much. My darling, you have forever gone and left me alone without caring about me anymore. If it was me alone, it wouldn’t be a problem. But, we have our baby son. Why did you suddenly die and leave him behind without providing food? I’m deeply distressed for our baby who loses his father and lives with no one to take care of him.<sup>9</sup>

Based on what has been examined in the text so far, it is evident that, besides keeping a record of events about the past, this monastery text combines several forms of knowledge and literary genres. First of all, apart from recounting past events concerning wars and politics, it associates some of those events with the ideas and philosophies of Buddhism. This indicates that the teachings of Buddhism were a vital element of the perceptions of the past in this text. Secondly, the choice of several literary genres, including the romanticization of certain events, indicates the importance of foregrounding people’s feelings and behaviors. In this sense, the representations of the past in this pre-colonial text can be partly understood as recalling memorable moments and places, enforcing rules and regulations of how to behave, and romanticizing tragic moments such as the passing away of a loved one.

Theara Thun received his PhD in History from the National University of Singapore under a joint doctoral scholarship program between Harvard-Yenching Institute and National University of Singapore. [thearachula@gmail.com](mailto:thearachula@gmail.com)

### Notes

- 1 For further discussions on Khmer *bangsāvatār* texts, see Vickery, M. 1977. ‘Cambodia after Angkor: The Chronical Evidence for the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries’ (Vol. I and II) Doctoral Dissertation, Yale University; Chandler, D. 1973. ‘Cambodia before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794-1848.’ Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan; Mak Phoeun. 1981. *Chroniques Royales du Cambodge (De 1594 A 1677)*. Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient; Khin Sok. 1988. *Chroniques Royales du Cambodge: De Bañā Yat à la prise de Lanvaek, 1417-1595*. Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient.
- 2 Khin Sok. 2002. *L’Annexion du Cambodge par les Vietnamiens au XIX siècle: D’Après les Deux Poèmes du Vénérable Bâtum Baramey Pich*. Paris: You-Feng.
- 3 Even though the edition we have is not the original one, the contents of the text seem to be largely intact. This is mainly because it was originally composed in a poetic format that demanded that those who copied it paid great attention to the consistent lyrics, syntax, and rhyme in each verse. This does not necessarily mean that there are no errors in this copied edition. Thanks to Khin Sok’s intelligent and painstaking work, however, many errors could be identified, corrected, and the meanings of many terms clarified.
- 4 *ibid.*, Khin Sok 2002, pp.324-325.
- 5 For a good discussion on the *nirat* writing of the early Bangkok period (1767-1855), see Nadhi Eossewong. 2005. *Pen & Sail: Literature and History in Early Bangkok*. Chiang Mai: Silksworm Books, pp.126-143.
- 6 *ibid.*, Khin Sok 2002, pp.290-294.
- 7 For a good discussion on *chbāp* writing, see Chandler, D. 1984. ‘Normative Poems (*Chbap*) and Pre-colonial Cambodian Society’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15(2):271-279.
- 8 *ibid.*, Khin Sok 2002, p.310.
- 9 My own translation from the Khmer text in Khin Sok 2002, p.295.

# Empty Home. House ownership in rapidly urbanising China

Willy Sier and Sanderien Verstappen

Why do people buy houses in which they cannot live? How might we understand the fast expansion of China's urban peripheries, full of newly constructed flats but devoid of people, shops, and labour opportunities? In this article, we look through the windows of one such apartment in the outskirts of Wuhan, the provincial capital of China's Hubei province, based on insights acquired during the making and screening of our film *Empty Home* (2016).<sup>1</sup>



One of the bedrooms of Wendy's apartment (filmstill *Empty Home*).

In contemporary China, cities are growing fast and, as buying a house is becoming an important symbol of success, the real estate industry is flourishing. For rural-urban migrants, a group that contributes greatly to cities' growing populations, buying an urban house is seen as a great accomplishment that marks the completion of a transition from rural pasts to urban futures. Yet, the houses these migrants are able to afford are often located in city outskirts with few labour opportunities. Therefore, many are unable to stay long-term in their newly acquired houses, and instead furnish and store them for the future.

When Willy Sier conducted fieldwork in China's Hubei province (2015-2016) for her dissertation on rural-urban disparities in China, and the desires of university-educated youths from rural regions to overcome the rural-urban divide, she noticed that the topic of 'buying a house' came up frequently in conversation with rural families. Everybody seemed to be in dire need of a house, preferably a house in the city. It struck Willy that in many cases houses were purchased to subsequently remain uninhabited. These houses were located on the uttermost outskirts of the city, seemingly desolate places, with plentiful newly constructed flats but devoid of people. It is in these far-flung urban peripheries that house ownership is affordable. However, being so far removed from facilities, industry, and labour markets, owners are forced to reside elsewhere to make a living.

These field observations were turned into a short documentary film, *Empty Home*, in cooperation with visual anthropologist Sanderien Verstappen. *Empty Home* engages with the question of house ownership in China from the perspective of Wendy, a young rural-urban migrant in Wuhan. It is a film

about rapid urbanisation, the desire to buy a house in the city, and the inability to live there. The film has an open format that invites the viewer to think about the desire to purchase real estate in a context of continuous migration and mobility.

## Rural-urban migration and house ownership in China

The promotion of rural-urban migration is an important goal for the Chinese state. The 'National New-Type Urbanisation Plan (2014-2020)', released by the central committee of the China Communist Party (CCP) on 16 March 2014, stated that the percentage of the Chinese population living in cities should grow from 53.7 percent in 2014 to 60 percent in 2020. Indeed, many Chinese cities are rapidly expanding.

In Wuhan, the number of the city's inhabitants increased from 2 million in 1970 to more than 10 million in 2018.

China's *hukou* system is a family registration system that connects families to one certain location and assigns them either rural or urban status, which subsequently influences their access to social programs and state benefits (such as access to education and health care) in differential ways. The number of rural *hukou* holders living in Chinese cities is estimated at approximately 280 million. These citizens living outside their area of registration are often referred to as 'being afloat', for their lack of a stable home and local registration in the cities.

However, in an effort to put down new roots and affirm their urban identities, the rural-urban migrants Willy met in the field were often interested in investing in urban real estate. Their investments follow a national

upward trend in private homeownership. Since the beginning of the post-reform era, China has changed from a predominantly public housing regime to a country with one of the highest rates of private home ownership in the world. The number of square meters sold on the real estate market has increased from 27 million in 1991 to 157 million in 2016. Willy's research suggests that it is not only the wealthier urbanites who buy real estate, but that rural buyers also have a share in driving this real estate market.

## Explorations of an 'empty home'

Making the film *Empty Home* generated new insights into these issues of mobility and house ownership. Willy had conducted almost one year of ethnographic fieldwork in Wuhan before the film was made and had seen several empty houses during this period. While we therefore had initially not expected much difficulty in finding a house in which we could film, this turned out differently when Willy approached the owners of houses that she

had seen or heard about. The large distance between house and house owner created a problem: opening the house for the film crew required huge time and capital investments by the owner. Some owners offered to lend us the keys to their house, so we could enter their apartment by ourselves; however, to make the film we needed not only the images of the house, but also the interpretations and stories of its owners. This situation created a practical problem, yet it also highlighted the frequent occurrence of absentee house owners.

Then, there was Wendy. Wendy's parents own an apartment on the outskirts of Hankou district in Wuhan. The distance between Wendy and this apartment is 'only' a few hours by public transport, which enabled her to come to the house and show us around. Wendy is a recent graduate from a university in Wuhan. After graduation, she continued to live in the campus area near her college, where she opened a small fashion store together with her friend Lucky. When Wendy's parents decided to buy the apartment in 2012, investing their savings from several decades of factory and restaurant work, they were away in China's Southern megacity Guangzhou,



View from the window (filmstill *Empty Home*).



These shoes are handmade by my grandma, from the cotton we grow at home.

and so they let their two daughters, Wendy and her older sister, take care of most of the decorating. The girls furnished the apartment with love and attention for detail, putting Wendy's own drawings as well as a soft-coloured 'Love Home' IKEA painting on the wall. They now consider this apartment as their 'family home'.

Wendy took the presence of a camera as an opportunity to present herself and her family in ways that she herself chose. Her self-presentation took the form of a tour through the house, during which she opened cupboards, pointed at objects, and explained for each object how it had been brought to the house "by our own hands". Objects that stood out as important were the house slippers and blankets made from cotton produced in their village of origin.

Willy and Wendy discussed questions of residence. Sitting on the couch of the 'empty' apartment, Wendy explained how she lives in her shop and visits the family apartment only occasionally, whilst her sister married and moved in with her husband, and her parents live on the factory grounds in Guangzhou. Wendy hopes that her parents will live in the apartment in the future, maybe after retirement.

Wendy's family lives dispersed throughout the country—her parents and sister in Guangzhou, some family members in Wuhan, and one uncle remains in the old family house in rural Hubei province. Only once did they all gather in the new apartment for a New Year's celebration. In recent years, the family chose to return to the home village for this week of festivities, to be surrounded by old neighbours, friends and family members. Wendy herself does not have a strong connection to this village, having grown up mainly with her grandparents in another village—when her parents were away as labour migrants—and in the school system where she was a boarding student from age 10.

In the film, Wendy shows her current two 'homes', one being the new apartment, where she shows us around the living room and two bedrooms, the other her shop, where she sleeps every night on a fold-out couch, together with her friend Lucky. Wendy likes



They are handmade.

A video tour through the apartment (filmstills *Empty Home*).

to think that travel in between these two sites is easy, "very convenient", optimistically estimating the travel time at approximately 1 hour in the film, whereas in reality the journey requires 4 hours of travel on several buses and metro trains. In a city that now covers 8494 square kilometres—compared to, for example, the 790 square kilometres of New York City—it is no surprise that a daily commute from the apartment to the shop is simply not an option. With all other relatives residing even further away, the apartment remains unoccupied most of the year. Yet, Wendy tells us repeatedly in the film, this apartment is her 'home'.

### Settling in the city

The story of Wendy's family is the story of many rural families in Hubei province, and other parts of China. There has clearly been a shift in attitude towards housing and private property since the Mao-era, when most urban citizens lived in apartments provided by their work units and rural citizens were organised in collective farms. During that time, owning private property put citizens in the dangerous category of the landlord class, a classification that could lead to persecution under the political campaigns that called for the eradication of property-based class divisions. Nowadays, however, statistics show that house ownership is very popular in China.

The number of apartments bought has become an important marker of a person's

status; moreover, the purchase of real estate has become inescapable for bachelors looking to marry. It is true that with the country's history of patrilocal living, provision of a 'marriage house' by the husbands' family has long been part of Chinese wedding traditions. But, whereas previous generations could suffice with redecorating a room or building a structure on the family plot in the husband's village, rural families today are expected to provide the couple with a costly privately-owned apartment, preferably in an urban environment. This provision of a new house for the newlywed couple is partly driven by competition for a relatively small number of brides—due to China's current imbalanced gender ratio. The promotion of the city and urban living as the desired form of modernity is also reflected by government campaigns that call for speedy construction of the urban environment (see, for example, the billboard featured in the film that says "speed up the construction of our nation's cities").

How might we understand and further interrogate these profound shifts in attitudes towards house ownership in China, from collective to privately owned houses, and from rural to urban housing? From an economic perspective, the price of Chinese real estate has increased rapidly in past decades. Wendy believes that the price of houses in China "can only go up", and so, the purchase might be a smart investment. However, the way Wendy speaks about the

house, and the effort that has been put into its decoration, shows that its meaning goes beyond economic strategy. The symbolic value of purchasing a home in the city seems to be its power to solidify rural migrants' urban status and sense of belonging to the urban community, and its physical representation of the family unit.

For rural families with long and complex histories of mobility, the purchase of an urban apartment is often seen as the completion of a process of rural-urban transition. It seems that many of those families have practiced rural-urban migration since the 1980s, when fast economic development in cities and coastal areas created labour opportunities for rural workers and restrictions on mobility were lifted. They are now making their connection to the city more permanent by buying urban property, despite the continued restrictions of the Chinese *hukou* system.

Ever since Wendy has been born, she and her family members have been separated and on the move. For Wendy, the shoe cabinet in the new apartment (made especially for the storage of her sister's shoes) and the pictures on the wall (put there by her father) make her feel at home in Wuhan and closer to her absent family members. Within a context of intense mobility and fast societal transformation, might the meaning of this empty apartment then lie in its ability to provide physical evidence of the existence of this family, and its connection to the city?

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The film *Empty Home* had its premiere at the VU Ethnographic Film Festival in Amsterdam and has been screened as part of bachelor courses and events at the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, and the International Institute for Asian Studies. It was also published on the *Guardian* website on 24 March 2017 as part of their 'The Other China' series.



A billboard from a government campaign (filmstill *Empty Home*).

### Notes

1 <https://vimeo.com/209590747>



## Southeast Asia and Trump year one: a work in progress

Sally Tyler

In November of 2016, I published an essay in *New Mandala* comparing Donald Trump with former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra; drawing parallels between their status as billionaires who have avoided financial transparency, marketed false narratives of themselves as self-made men, and displayed formidable media savvy.<sup>1</sup> Like most political handicappers, I underestimated the Trump campaign's appeal, and predicted his defeat.

A few lines of that essay, however, stand in crystalline relief when trying to decipher the rise of outlier candidates:

“The U.S. and Thailand are separated by thousands of miles, but base voters for Thaksin and Trump share some notable characteristics. The Bangkok taxi driver transplanted from Isaan might seem to have little in common with the gun-toting, Christian fundamentalist in Oklahoma. Yet, both have felt overlooked by successive administrations, and have not identified with the campaign rhetoric spun by traditional candidates. Both groups have had their votes vilified as not merely helping a disfavored candidate, but as actually undermining democracy.

Pundits on either side of the Pacific have wondered how anyone could support a demagogue like Thaksin or Trump. “What is wrong with those people?” has been a familiar, shocked refrain. The more instructive question from a political viewpoint is, “What is wrong with democratic institutions for failing to craft policies and messages more inclusive of society’s marginalized factions to prevent them from becoming targets of megalomaniacal candidates?” A democratic nation which ignores large blocks of voters for long will be made to pay in one way or another.”

### Parallels in unexpected places

Like many others in the U.S. who found themselves stunned by the outcome of the 2016 presidential election, I experienced the desire to be far away from my home in Washington DC on the day of Donald Trump's inauguration in January of 2017. For me, there was little question of where to go: Southeast Asia. I first began traveling in the region more than two decades ago, and have developed enduring friendships there, which have led me to become a student of its culture and politics.

My work in the U.S. concerns both policy and politics, and I hoped that post-election travel in the region would bring me respite from it. It was impossible, however, to completely escape the political lens, and I saw parallels in unexpected places between events unfolding in the U.S. and in Southeast Asia. I explored these parallels in a series of articles published throughout 2017 in *New Mandala*, ANU's *Policy Forum* and the *Mekong Review*. I intentionally avoided the topics of trade and defense, because they are already extensively covered in the media; and instead focused on more subtle connections on a wide range of issues.

A visit to a ‘prison without walls’ on the Philippine island of Palawan allowed reflection on efforts to roll back Obama era criminal justice reforms in the U.S., and mass

incarceration trends in both nations. Changes to Internal Revenue Service (IRS) policy in the U.S. encouraged me to examine tax collection efforts in Cambodia, Indonesia, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia; and the necessity of a strong public sector workforce to create a value-based system of tax participation. Going to the theatre in Washington DC to see a new production of *The King and I* led to consideration of Thailand's *lèse-majesté* laws, and comparison with Trump's desire to tighten libel laws in the U.S., as well as the value of artistic free expression within a society. Other topics included labor rights, the environment, refugees, space exploration, the fashion industry, and more. What began as taking note of quirky associations while traveling morphed into a chronicle of the indirect ways that policy developments in the U.S. and Southeast Asia can affect each other; below are a few excerpts.

### On labor rights<sup>2</sup>

(Failed Secretary of Labor nominee) Puzder's c.v. is a familiar roadmap to Trumpland—a white male CEO with no experience in governance. His Senate confirmation hearing was delayed, at least in part because he failed to submit the required disclosure forms, apparently flummoxed by the level of transparency regarding possible conflicts of interest required of a Cabinet member. Or perhaps, it was indecision on how to spin his hiring of an undocumented

Above: U.S. President Donald Trump registers his surprise as he realises other leaders, including Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte and Australia's Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, are crossing their arms for the traditional 'ASEAN handshake' as he participates in the opening ceremony of the ASEAN Summit in Manila, Philippines, November 13, 2017. Copyright: REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst.



immigrant as a housekeeper, and the fact that he paid legally-required federal employment taxes for her only after he had been nominated.

The Secretary of Labor's impact on domestic policy is clear, but its linkage to foreign policy has received less public attention. From taking a stand on whether worker standards are included in trade agreements to weighing in on where nations land on the State Department's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, the Department of Labor contributes significantly to U.S. foreign policy, and decisions made by a new secretary will be felt by workers around the world.

Puzder's track record as CEO offers a dismal glimpse into his take on global corporate responsibility. A key example is palm oil, demand for which by the U.S. fast food industry has helped drive tropical deforestation in Indonesia and Malaysia, contributing to global warming and air pollution in Southeast Asia. As part of efforts to promote sustainable palm oil practices, the Union of Concerned Scientists released a score card indicating corporations' commitments to use deforestation-free palm oil. Puzder's Hardees and Carl's Jr. brands received a score of zero. Because of such disregard for sustainable food practices, as well as his company's sordid history of labor violations, the International Labour Rights Forum (ILRF) recently joined with more than 100 organizations to oppose Puzder's nomination.

Globally-minded consumers need to know that the world's largest economy is helping ensure labor standards around the world. Just as I want to be confident that a fashion bargain in Bangkok did not originate in an unregulated hellhole like Rana Plaza, other Americans should be able to eat a burger that does not contribute to the erosion of habitat for diverse species in Southeast Asia. But we can't do this without a firm and vigilant Department of Labor.

### On mass incarceration<sup>3</sup>

A prisoner named Ver gave me a tour of parts of the compound open to the public (the maximum security unit is off limits). He told me that he received a life sentence, of which he must serve 40 years, for selling marijuana at the age of 21. He has now served 32 years. Ver hails from Banaue, 330 kilometres north of Manila. At the time of his conviction, he had a wife and two babies, whom he has not seen since his imprisonment. He was imprisoned in Manila for a few years before being transferred to Iwahig, and says that the cost of travelling made family visits prohibitive. He says he does not think much about what he will do when he is released, as that is still eight years away and he will be an old man by then.

Historically, Iwahig has served as an overflow for Manila's notoriously overcrowded prisons, and those ranks are expanding precipitously. Though most international scrutiny of Duterte's so-called war on drugs has centered on extrajudicial killings, less emphasis has been given to the ever-widening swath of humanity he has had thrown into prison. Now, lawmakers happy to do his bidding are pushing legislation to lower the age of criminal liability to nine years old, where it had been until 2006, when the age limit was raised to 15.

Through concerted approaches, including new sentencing guidelines without mandatory minimums and clemency toward individuals sentenced under previous guidelines, the Obama Administration had successfully reduced the federal prison population from 220,000 inmates in 2013 to 195,000 inmates in 2016. Only days into a new Department of Justice, the dismantling of this progress began. US Attorney General Sessions announced the reversal of Obama's 2016 executive order aimed at reducing, and ultimately ending, federal use of private prisons.

And now, the Trump Administration has thrown the nation once again into the vicious cycle of the prison industrial complex. The cycle's effect is long-term; characterized by lack of economic and educational opportunity coupled with discriminatory sentencing guidelines, resulting in a veritable prison pipeline for many young people, particularly African Americans, leaving them just as hopeless as Ver in Iwahig.

### On the fashion industry<sup>4</sup>

This week<sup>5</sup> marks the launch of Asia Islamic Fashion Week, a first of its kind trade show in Kuala Lumpur to showcase fashion featuring "cutting-edge style that is in line with Islamic values". The women who wear such clothing have traditionally not identified it as 'Islamic', but simply as modest. The fact that the organizers of the Malaysian exposition chose to brand it as an Islamic fashion event reflects that they are aware that such clothing, and the women who wear it, has reached a new level of global visibility in non-Islamic eyes. Though the wholesale and retail buyers targeted by their trade show remain Muslim, their work, and any messages they wish to convey through it, now includes a potentially broader audience.

Asia Islamic Fashion Week comes on the heels of the spring shows in New York, where Indonesian designer Anniesa Hasibuan, who also made headlines by showcasing the first all-hijab collection at Fall New York Fashion Week, featured a cast of immigrant models, in response to the Trump Administration's highly-publicized travel ban targeting nine primarily-Muslim nations.

But beyond campaigns to confront implicit bias and incorporate inclusive messaging, can prominent Trump policies be challenged through fashion industry engagement? Lest the sartorially-dismissive scoff, consider that fashion is a more than \$1.75 trillion global industry, accounting for at least \$370 billion of spending in the U.S. The fashion industry could potentially provide a valid test case for engagement on Trump policies because it hits on so many key issues. The complex nature of the global supply chain involved in fashion touches on trade, labor rights, gender equity and the environment, among other issues.

**"A leadership void has been created; but nature abhors a vacuum."**

### On church-state relations<sup>6</sup>

The threat of taxation has been the primary regulatory mechanism that the U.S. has used to shore up what Thomas Jefferson called "the wall of separation between church and state", as articulated in the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The primacy of this concept within American society cannot be minimized. The country's founders, some who had fled religious persecution, understood religious freedom to incorporate both freedom to practice their religion of choice, as well as freedom from religion, a concept heartily articulated by Australia's most recent census.

But without the impending stick of taxation, would churches use their considerable resources to play politics? Other nations seem to agree that they might. In Singapore, churches are required to register as charities to receive a tax-exemption, with revenue from side business or investment taxed at a regular rate, tax-exempt income is required to be used for charitable purposes or the routine operation of their ministries, as in the U.S. Not surprisingly, the Singapore government is efficient about policing revenue owed to it, and leaders of the City Harvest Church (CHC) were criminally convicted in a high-profile case for misuse of S\$50 million of donations meant for charity, funneling the funds into the pastor's wife's pop singing career, as well as an opulent penthouse in Sentosa.

Christianity, however, does not have the lock on prosperity theology. Thailand's Wat Dhammakaya urges adherents around the world to give generous donations as a short-cut to merit making, and is conspicuous in its accumulation of wealth. Some have argued that the junta has been targeting the temple's assets to line its own coffers, summoning images of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries to pay for his military campaigns. The endless Ramayana ballet of Thaksin and Prayuth aside, the failed siege of Dhammakaya illustrates one peril involved in establishing a state religion: its institutions become impervious

to attack by the government, regardless of the transgressions of their leaders. Thailand's constitutional requirement that its monarch be Buddhist has created a *de facto* state religion. Despite its litany of legitimate or manufactured charges against (former abbot) Dhammachayo, the junta must tread carefully in attacking any wat, even one with deep connections to political forces which threaten its existence.

### On substance abuse<sup>7</sup>

Methamphetamine, whether called *shabu* in the Philippines or *yaba* in Thailand, has long eclipsed heroin as the most abused illicit drug in Southeast Asia, despite the region's proximity to the Golden Triangle. Ironically, though the U.S. is half a world away from opium's fertile crescent, Americans consume more drugs derived from opium than any other nation. Opioid overdoses are now the most common type of accidental death in the U.S., accounting for more fatalities than gun homicides and car crashes combined.

When the US launched its so-called war on drugs in the 1980s in response to the scourge of crack cocaine, criminal justice and sentencing policies were adjusted to incarcerate more people for longer times. Now, 16 per cent of all federal and state prisoners are locked up for drug use, possession or sale,

down from a high of 22 per cent in 2000.

More than half of all prisoners in Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand are jailed for drug related crimes, and many nations in the region require compulsory detention

for drug addicts. Such compulsory detention centers have come under scrutiny for human rights abuses, and for lacking scientifically-based rehabilitation therapies.

U.S. states have passed legislation attempting to halt the rapid transformation from patient to addict by creating prescription drug databases which can be monitored by law enforcement to scrutinise, and potentially stop, over-prescribers of opioids. The efforts are working, as prescriptions for Oxycontin (a brand name for oxycodone) have declined by 40 per cent since 2010. But even as reforms are taking hold in the U.S., Big Pharma is strategising ways to keep global sales strong. Following the 'playbook of big tobacco' manufacturers, the drug companies' solution to enhanced scrutiny back home involves global expansion, particularly in Asia's developing nations.

Mundipharma, a subsidiary of Purdue Pharmaceutical, the maker of Oxycontin, first began operations in Asia in 2011, as U.S. sales began to drop. With regional offices in Singapore, the firm's promotional materials downplay the risk of opioid addiction. Instead, flashy marketing campaigns have featured glamorous celebrities who tell viewers not to resign themselves to chronic pain.

### On the environment<sup>8</sup>

In late 2017, EPA director Scott Pruitt announced that the "war on coal is over", and that the agency will rescind the Obama Administration's Clean Power Plan, which required utilities to steeply reduce carbon emissions as part of the administration's overall goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, central to its commitments within the Paris accord on climate change, from which Trump has already signaled his intent to withdraw.

The Trump Administration's renewed endorsement of coal mirrors Vietnam's recent decision to mothball its long-standing plans to become Southeast Asia's first nuclear-powered nation, in favor of coal. Citing concern over both the level of public debt needed to complete construction and 'environmental risks' following the disastrous Formosa leak, the National Assembly announced a decision at the end of 2016 to halt development of the Ninh Thuan plant.

This sharp increase in the use of coal will carry dire health effects, according to researchers at Harvard and the University

of Colorado. Their report, *The burden of disease from rising coal-fired plant emissions in Southeast Asia*, concludes that Vietnam is the ASEAN country that will be most affected by coal pollution in the near future. They estimate that more than 188 excess deaths per million people will result there due to the burning of coal.

With the Asia-Pacific region representing four of the world's top five coal producers (China, India, Australia, and Indonesia), significant shifts toward coal could create economic benefits in the area – but these will be more than offset by the erosion of progress toward the Paris accord goals. If investment in renewable energy stalls, the global objective of decreasing greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 may prove unreachable. Thus, the 'Bridge Scenario' to increase Southeast Asia's reliance on renewable energy and decrease oil and coal consumption, envisioned by a 2015 report from the International Energy Agency, would be largely obliterated.

### The big picture

Obviously, the people of Southeast Asia want to understand where their interests may lie in the Trump Administration's new order, as do people around the globe. But connecting the dots between the president's words and actions to reveal what might be considered a consistent foreign policy is challenging, at best. It may be more instructive to examine understated themes to piece together the big picture.

Themes which emerged include the Trump Administration's troubling retreat from multi-lateralism, particularly on pressing issues requiring global solutions; and sheer inaction enabled by administrative chaos at the highest levels. A leadership void has been created; but nature abhors a vacuum, and it remains to be seen whether ASEAN nations will band together with more regional coherence to address problems, whether they will take more nuanced positions in bi-lateral dealings with the U.S., or will develop stronger alliances with nations ready to assume a greater leadership position.

The articles excerpted here are about neither U.S. nor Southeast Asian policy in isolation, but rather illustrate a juncture which may afford a synthesized exploration of both. As such, they may be difficult to characterize, particularly in a world prone to neat labels. Taken together, I hope they can help the reader recognize a greater connectivity between our two regions, in what has become an increasingly fractured world.

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#### Notes

- 1 Tyler, S. 'Second Acts for Thaksin and Trump?' *New Mandala*, 4 Nov. 2016
- 2 Tyler, S. 'A Good Day's Work', *New Mandala*, 16 Feb. 2017
- 3 Tyler, S. 'Lock Them All Up', *New Mandala*, 16 Mar. 2017
- 4 Tyler, S. 'A Fashionable Entry to Policy', *New Mandala*, 30 Mar. 2017
- 5 This excerpt originates from an article written on 30 March 2017.
- 6 Tyler, S. 'Blurring the Lines Between Church and State', *Policy Forum*, 7 July 2017
- 7 Tyler, S. 'Exporting Addiction', *Policy Forum*, 7 Sept. 2017
- 8 Tyler, S. 'Where There's Smoke, There's Coal', *Policy Forum*, 13 Oct. 2017

# Rodrigo Duterte and the Philippine presidency

Rupture or cyclicity?

Mesrob Vartavarian

Scholars have devoted much attention to the rise of Rodrigo Duterte and the impact his brand of populism has had on the quality of Philippine democracy. This piece focuses instead on the evolving nature of the Philippine presidency and gradual diversification of the national oligarchy. Rather than viewing Duterte as a break from the Philippine experiment with constitutional democracy or a reassertion of national boss rule, it would be more accurate to view his rise as a manifestation of oligarchic proliferation, in which actors and power groups previously excluded from the presidency manage to break into the national elite via political and electoral manipulation.



Rodrigo Duterte and children at inauguration ceremony. Presidential Communications Operation Office, Public Domain.

## Rejecting oligarchs: Duterte as demagogic populist

The most widely disseminated interpretation of the Duterte phenomenon contends that this local strongman from Davao City is a national manifestation of a troubling international phenomenon. Namely, the rise of right-wing populist figures who have issued crude, but at times unsettlingly effective challenges to liberal globalism. According to its detractors, the humanist inclusivity of liberal rhetoric that claims to champion the rights of all races, genders, and sexual orientations is but a mild palliative in the face of turbocharged neo-liberal economic policies that have left more and more wealth in fewer and fewer hands. Neoliberal globalization has been accused of creating deep fissures between classes and regions across what were once more cohesive nation-states. Cosmopolitan upper and middle

classes based in globally connected cities have neglected the socioeconomic concerns of peripheral regions left behind as a result of rapidly evolving economic structures. These globalist structures have placed more emphasis on highly mobile forms of capital and service sector jobs that require levels of education and training inaccessible to poorer segments of the population.

According to proponents of oligarchic rejection, the origins of this populist backlash in the Philippines can be dated to the People Power Revolution of 1986.<sup>1</sup> A combination of virulent plunder politics and increasing repression of traditional elites by the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand Marcos led to a groundswell of mass opposition, which the armed forces refused to suppress. Abandoned by their military and police, the Marcos family fled. The new democratic government of Corazon Aquino gave the Philippines a new

constitution that strictly curtailed possibilities for authoritarian backsliding and greatly empowered the national legislature.

Almost immediately, however, it became apparent that the Philippines had overthrown a national cacique only to see the return of traditional political dynasties committed to a severely truncated form of democracy.<sup>2</sup> 1986 was more of a restoration than a revolution. Proponents of major social reform were either met with congressional obstruction or military repression. No meaningful land reform took place, particularly on those estates owned by well-connected oligarchs. Counterinsurgency operations against agrarian leftist organizations launched during the Marcos years continued under the new democratic dispensation. Beset by a wide array of economic woes and attempted coups by disgruntled elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), President Aquino could

not afford to alienate a military that used the protracted campaigns against communist guerillas to justify its continued preeminence.<sup>3</sup> Manifestations of the Philippines' continuing dependence on its former colonial master also persisted in aggravating nationalist sentiments. Eager to retain the favor of the United States, Aquino allowed Washington to hold on to its military bases at Clark Field and Subic Bay until these agreements came up for formal renewal. Disgusted by America's support for the Marcos regime, enough pressure was maintained inside and outside the political establishment to close these bases down in 1992. Yet, this only occurred after the Cold War had ended, thus creating the impression that the Americans had not been thrown out so much as abandoned an overt military presence in the Philippines once it was no longer necessary.

National leadership left much to be desired. Presidents, weak and strong, rewarded cronies and kinsmen with lucrative contracts and sinecures while leaving pressing problems unresolved. Politics seemed to be the exclusive preserve of a charmed circle of elite families who rotated high office amongst themselves. The dynastic nature of the Philippine presidency reached its apogee at the turn of the twenty-first century: two successive presidents, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Benigno Aquino III, were the children of former presidents. Impressive economic growth has occurred since the early 2000s but little of this wealth has trickled down and the Philippines remains far behind most of its neighbors in lowering the percentage of people living in poverty.

Structures of illicit political bargaining that typified the pre-Marcos era emerged seemingly unscathed after 1986. National politicians aligned with provincial warlords and local strongmen who delivered guaranteed vote-banks during election campaigns in exchange for patronage and pork barrel projects. Most resource disbursements from the center to the periphery disappeared into the pockets of local political clans, empowering a few elite families at the expense of an effective civil infrastructure and the satisfactory delivery of services.

All these sociopolitical ills are magnified manifold on the island of Mindanao, particularly in the autonomous Muslim areas. Neglect, mismanagement, clan feuds, and corruption have left large parts of the island mired in poverty and disappointment. National politics are remote and seemingly uninterested in southern provincial problems. It was widely felt that only a presidential candidate from Mindanao could understand and resolve the island's inequities. Duterte presented himself as a familiar strongman who could get the job done. He gave frequent speeches and interviews in Visayan, the *lingua franca* of the central Philippines as well as northern and eastern Mindanao. This was a welcome relief from the Taglish-speaking elites of imperial Manila. His profanity-laced tirades and locker room banter made him come across as an avuncular figure not averse to using physical violence to keep unruly behavior in check. Mindanao's electoral mobilization on behalf of one of its own was a major factor in Duterte's victory, but it is unlikely he would have won the election without a similar sense of disillusionment with elite politics throughout the archipelago. In areas like Central Luzon and the National Capital Region, voters turned to Duterte because he was an outsider. A new generation of young voters who had no memory of Ferdinand Marcos, martial law or the People Power Revolution backed an unknown quantity for the sake of shaking up a stagnant status quo.

Duterte's ostensibly simple solutions to complex problems have brought disruption rather than resolution. The scourge of criminality and illegal drugs, which Duterte vowed to eradicate in a matter of months, has resulted in an interminable war on the poor. Drug users and small time pushers are targeted for extrajudicial execution while major kingpins have been largely unaffected. Duterte's true intentions appear to be a nationwide social cleansing of indigents and undesirables. The poor are a convenient scapegoat for the social ills that plague the body politic, but killing them does not reform the structural inequalities that produce those ills.

The near obsession with eradicating illegal drugs in slum areas further delayed the enactment of the Bangasamor Basic Law (BBL) of 2014, which would give territorial autonomy to the Muslim south. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front's inability to pass the BBL in partnership with Duterte expeditiously weakened the organization's credibility among its members and precipitated the breakaway of disaffected family clans who joined or founded more extremist Islamic groups. The Maute group's rise was a result of these frustrations. Their seizure of Marawi City in conjunction with other extremist gangs blindsided Manila. The AFP missed numerous self-declared deadlines for Marawi's complete liberation. More damaging has been Duterte's imposition of martial law on the entire island of Mindanao. Although not as all-encompassing a political crackdown as the variant imposed by Marcos over forty years ago, it brought back bitter memories of an era thought to be long gone. The fighting in Marawi also offset Duterte's attempted tilt away from the United States, with the military seeking the technical assistance of American special operations forces without initially informing Duterte of their intention to do so.

Oligarchic rejection thus led to a rash decision on the part of voters to back a local warlord for the nation's highest office. Although he ran Davao City relatively effectively, the use of local methods to solve national problems has had very mixed results. While Duterte has thus far been able to reward his supporters and coopt most of the national legislature through the disbursement of presidential patronage, he has not dismantled vested interests committed to the socioeconomic status quo. While Duterte's violence at home and grandstanding abroad have been cathartic for many, the Philippines remains as oligarchic a state as ever.

### Philippine oligarchic cycles: wild and reformist fluctuations

Theories of oligarchic rotation have viewed Philippine national politics as a cyclical phenomenon that operates according to the disposition of the national executive. Corazon Aquino's presidency from 1986 to 1992 saw the reestablishment of elite families who were denied the spoils of office under the Marcos dictatorship. Although President Aquino herself rarely engaged in pathological excesses, a number of her close family and key associates ruthlessly reasserted their dominance over local bailiwicks and lucrative assets. Fierce competition between provincial clans for legislative seats and mayoralties resulted in extensive electoral violence. The AFP and police remained on hand to suppress those voices and non-governmental organizations calling for genuine social reform. The administration of Fidel Ramos, 1992-1998, significantly tamped down on egregious political violence. Although a former Marcos crony and kinsman, Ramos went some way toward portraying the Philippines as a business friendly country eager for foreign investment. Attempted coups became a thing of the past and economic deregulation was the order of the day.

These reforms were far from complete by the time Ramos left office. Partial stabilization was followed by an extended period of wild oligarchic accumulation during the presidencies of Joseph Estrada, 1998-2001, and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, 2001-2010. The Arroyo years saw the very worst of what presidential predation had to offer. Provincial warlords such as 'Chavit' Singson in Ilocos Sur and the Ampatuan clan in the autonomous Muslim areas were given free reign so long as they delivered the votes Arroyo's clique needed to prolong its rule and amass further plunder. The damage inflicted under Arroyo was so extensive that significant reforms were required to salvage the Philippines' international image and economic prospects. Benigno Aquino III's presidential term from 2010 to 2016 saw a sustained drive against corruption and attempts to prosecute provincial clans involved in politically motivated massacres. While political killings as a whole were never completely eliminated, they ceased to manifest themselves in the brazen and bloody manner that typified the Arroyo era. However, Aquino III's administration did not last long enough

or try hard enough to lessen the staggering disparities between rich and poor. Access to socioeconomic resources were still heavily dependent on the favor and patronage of elite families. The Philippine presidency was still exposed to capture by a wild oligarch.<sup>4</sup> Oligarchic power was temporarily tamed through a plethora of civic reform programs and presidential initiatives, but its deep structures endured, making it possible for Duterte's predatory populism to take hold.

### Oligarchic proliferation: an expanding national elite

The abovementioned theories focus more on contemporary practices and beliefs than on long-term historical trajectories. Once established, the traditional families appear unshakable and near hegemonic in their control of national political office. Some oligarchs are more civil and reform-minded than others, but they are basically cut from the same cloth and in being so their reformism can only go so far. While it is true that national elites have rarely been eliminated, they have had to share the trough of state with an increasing variety of voracious mouths.

An examination of Philippine political development since the American colonial advent demonstrates that Duterte is as much a manifestation of oligarchic proliferation as a rupture or cyclical phase. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the Philippine national elite has become progressively diverse. Various oligarchs of different origins have had to share an increasingly crowded national political arena. The initial channeling of local and regional elites into Manila politics by American colonial officials led to a homogenization of the national political class. This homogenization began to break down during the Second World War. Marginal and more militarized elements of this elite began to penetrate national office in ways previously thought impossible. These aggressive up-and-comers assembled client networks that allowed them to distance themselves from established political families. Marcos's consolidation of power and declaration of martial law then saw the politicization of a heretofore apolitical military. Finally, since the year 2000, local warlords from fringe areas have been gaining in power and influence, a trend which culminated in one local warlord seizing control of the national state.

Political horizons began to expand for the indigenous elite during the archipelago's transition from Spanish to American rule. Philippine elites were no strangers to fierce electoral contests that determined the distribution and denial of resources. However, under Spanish rule elections were limited to the local level. As an increasingly valuable possession of Spain's dwindling empire, provincial and capital administrative positions were reserved for Spaniards alone. The lockout of indigenous elites from lucrative government posts was a major factor precipitating the Philippine struggle for independence.

Faced with a formidable insurrection of their own, American policymakers cast about for ways to dissipate mass resistance. Initially, they opted to govern the archipelago through highly educated Manila-based elites. Very soon, however, American administrators found these capital-elites ill-suited to govern a highly localized and deeply fragmented polity. The colonial state thus began to cultivate local and provincial elites who were then cast upwards into national politics.<sup>5</sup> Weaving local indigenous elites into central administrative and political networks substantially weakened the insurgency. Popular and millenarian movements would continue to erupt in rural and urban areas but were not enough to halt the coalescence of a self-replicating national oligarchy. This stage of Philippine political development reached a high point under the authoritarian presidency of Manuel Quezon.<sup>6</sup> He carefully cultivated alliance networks stretching from rural localities to Washington, DC. Soon, almost all state patronage flowed from his hands.

This period of centralized executive power was brought to an end by the Japanese invasion. The violence and dislocation that came with Japanese occupation created spaces for new power networks. Followings cohered around local strongmen who could obtain weapons and plunder. Rivals were eliminated under vague accusations of 'collaboration' as armed bands competed for smuggling routes and high-value contraband. The political future belonged to these local toughs. With independence in 1946, they quickly entered the national legislature, using their war records and armed followings to obtain electoral support. Ferdinand Marcos was only the most successful example of guerilla commanders who had gone to Manila. Once in the national political arena, he furnished his kin, armed followers, and former fraternity brothers with further rewards. Marcos also made extensive use of the rapidly modernizing news media to construct an image of heroic military service that went well beyond the factual record. In addition, he managed to market himself as a firm believer in top-down technocratic modernity, which would catapult the Philippines into the foremost ranks of developing nations.

All this was enough to win him the presidency in 1965, but if he wanted to hold onto it indefinitely he would need the military. The politicization of a heretofore professional officer corps began almost immediately. Budget increases, infrastructure projects, and slush funds gave military and police commanders a taste for power. When Marcos declared martial law in 1972 their status and opportunities for illicit enrichment increased exponentially. Marcos continuously allowed them to accrue wealth and in exchange they continued to support his dictatorship. Yet, the dictator had made a mistake. His military and police cronies soon became autonomous oligarchs in their own right. The profits they accumulated from payoffs, black market ventures, and smuggling routes were plowed back into constructing client networks of their own. When the regime's prospects became untenable they readily turned against it to preserve their privileges. Abandoned by his security forces during the People Power Revolution, Marcos had no option but to pack up and fly away.

Having enabled the fall of Marcos, the security forces felt entitled to a preeminent political role in the new era. A series of coups were launched against a tottering Aquino administration, several of which came dangerously close to succeeding. Consequently, Aquino agreed to maintain Marcos-era security structures and make Fidel Ramos her foremost advisor on military matters. Coup threats were thus contained, but at the price of sustaining institutions and personnel from an authoritarian past. The subsequent Ramos presidency saw former military and police commanders reach the commanding heights of political power. Ramos filled his administration with over a hundred retired officers.<sup>7</sup> Although the

armed forces were retrenched and modernized to a significant extent, Ramos maintained its privileged position and rewarded his former military associates with the plums of office.

The Estrada and Arroyo years witnessed the elevation of local warlords to heretofore unknown levels of prominence. Marcos had used warlords to drum up support and marshal votes in the past, but they were never a major component of his inner circle. Arroyo's reliance on the vote-banks of the Ampatuan clan by contrast meant sustained levels of presidential patronage and support for provincial predation. Full presidential backing created a sense of complete impunity that eventually went too far. Had the Ampatuans not committed the Maguindanao massacre in 2009, they might have used their near total control of the autonomous Muslim region to act as kingmakers in future presidential elections.

Rodrigo Duterte's urban warlordism proved far more successful.<sup>8</sup> He launched his career from a narrower base, Davao City, where he had to contend with fewer jostling interests.

His law-and-order platform, undergirded by a steady hum of extrajudicial executions, made him popular with local business interests and Chinese investors seeking to expand their horizons into the island of Mindanao. Duterte allowed the business sector to accumulate profits without being too avaricious or involved in their activities. This set the precedent and tone for his economic policy at the national level. Although his associations with the leftist movement and hostility to the United States make him something of an atypical president, he is quite the typical warlord. Duterte built alliances with and accepted resources from any quarter that would increase his personal power.

Upon his election to the presidency, Duterte brought a bevy of advisors and acolytes with him to Manila. Team Duterte quickly replicated local methods of social control on a national scale, with the killings of social marginals across the archipelago becoming a top priority. The rhetorical flourish utilized by traditional elites to mask the brutalities of a profoundly unequal society was quickly dropped in favor of a far cruder demonization of the superfluous poor. Oligarchs who had been under a cloud during Aquino III's administration were quickly rehabilitated and Duterte was frequently seen hobnobbing with the likes of Gloria Arroyo, Estrada, and the Marcos family. The Marcoses delivered him the votes of Ilocos Norte, their provincial bailiwick, in exchange for expediting their political rehabilitation, symbolized by Ferdinand's reburial in Heroes' Cemetery.

Duterte has also experienced substantial pushback from other established oligarchic interests. Fidel Ramos chided Duterte for his tilt away from the United States and other senior officers grumbled at his patronage of the police at the expense of the AFP. Such opposition has compelled Duterte to backtrack on his anti-American rhetoric and the protracted conflict in Marawi City made for quite amicable exchanges between Duterte, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and President Trump during ASEAN's 2017 summits. Certain senators have also expressed growing unease at the negative international imagery generated by the drug war, a downward slide that could result in divestment and credit rating downgrades. Duterte has responded to elite criticism with a combination of threats and half-hearted investigations of police excesses.

It remains to be seen if the various oligarchs in Manila will fully accept Duterte as one of their own. Established families and interests can be cajoled and occasionally bullied, but never fully eradicated. Most of them must eventually be accommodated, or else a hostile oligarchic coalition might coalesce, as it did in 1986, and place Duterte in an untenable position. Populist pronouncements aside, Duterte's principle intention appears to be the consolidation of his position as a new type of national oligarch; whether or not he succeeds, other local warlords will invariably follow suit. Duterte's rise to power represents a further widening of the Philippine oligarchic gyre.

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#### Notes

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“...national elites [...] have had to share the trough of state with an increasing variety of voracious mouths.”

# Experiences with censorship in research and publication on Singapore's multiculturalism

Lai Ah Eng



Leaders of the main faiths in Singapore.  
Photo © www.mfa.gov.sg.

This short essay is based on my own work experiences. I write about censorship by the state, vested interest groups or individuals, and even oneself, in the context of research and publication of findings on the topic of multiculturalism in Singapore. By censorship, I mean broadly the curtailment of freedom to research and present certain information and interpretations in public through publication, either through formal means or through practice and judgement in professional conduct.

## Multiculturalism in Singapore

I have had a mixed career in social research (1982 to date) in various government and academic and policy research organisations, working primarily on Singapore's multiculturalism (with its overlapping ethnic, cultural and religious dimensions). Multiculturalism is highly complex and open to uncertainty, contestation and tension, and thus research and publication on it is open to critical and censoring comments and responses, be this by the state, various vested interest groups/individuals and/or myself.

The Singapore state has historically set the institutional framework for social-cultural policies. Multiculturalism is an explicitly declared founding principle in its nation-building project, but 'race' and 'religion' are treated as sensitive subjects requiring careful management through a plethora of legislative measures and institutional arrangements. State rhetoric on multiculturalism is focused around celebration of its diversity and fear of its conflict-proneness. Any direct state censorship and legal action is justified on grounds of the potential dangers of ethnic and religious extremism to public order and social stability. Although such action has been taken mainly against those in mainstream media and political and religious individuals and not against academics, the academic atmosphere has been affected and discourse on race and religion is generally one of extreme caution and preferably evaded. Some of my experiences point to caution and censorship not directly by the state, but by gatekeepers in academic and research organisations.

## Experiencing caution and censorship

My attempt to publish my doctoral thesis "Meanings of Multiethnicity" with a local publisher, with the aim to promote local publishing, was met with silence from a commercial house, and a verbal response from a local research institute: "the director said not ready to publish such a book". The final recourse was to publish it with Oxford University Press (1995).

My application for a job in a policy research institute, based on a research proposal on multiracialism in Singapore,

was successful only in a subsequent assessment. Yet when the completed project, with the proposed title "Beyond Rituals and Riots" (2004), was ready for publication, I was advised by my directors to replace 'Riots' with 'Rhetoric'. However, I insisted that the most important word in the title was 'Beyond', and that 'Riot' was both a state-referenced and academic/research concept.

The next publication "Facing Faiths, Crossing Cultures" (2005) was a compilation of an intercultural and interfaith dialogue series of public lectures, seminars and discussions. In order to facilitate open and frank exchange, some discussions were conducted as closed-door sessions. Nothing happened censorship-wise in this unprecedented dialogue series, although I was taken to task for inviting an outspoken intellectual, who was critical of American foreign policies, as a speaker. My justification: he had credentials and expertise in interfaith issues, foreign policy views aside.

I approached a following research project, on religious diversity, with the understanding that there were huge gaps of knowledge to be urgently filled and issues to be better understood and managed for the larger social good. I worried about finding enough participants with sufficient local knowledge and experience for the project, but the end result was a bumper crop of 28 contributions. In the context of rising religious disrespect, extremism, aggressive proselytisation, provocative behaviour and other inter-religious tensions in Singapore and elsewhere, each invitation to contribute was undertaken with earnestness, concern and commitment to the larger social good of interfaith understanding. My editorial approach to the rare chance of publishing the project's "Religious Diversity in Singapore" (2008) was one of including as much as possible within the scope of religious diversity, with the exception of one detail on religious proselytisation in one chapter: I removed, to the dismay of the author, an example of overzealous religionists posing as tourists visiting some named religious sites (in Singapore and Malaysia), but who were actually engaging in spiritual warfare and praying for their collapse. I feared that the example might trigger more inter-religious anxiety, mistrust and even provide fuel for fire.

My primer on "Religion in Singapore" (2017) received two major reviewer's comments that posed potential censoring edits: that I misrepresented one of the religions discussed

as full of 'superstition' to account for massive conversions out of it; and that I was giving unwarranted attention to the secular state's management of multi-religious Singapore. I responded that I was simply reporting converts' given reason for leaving the religion, and that not to discuss the dominant state's role in the Singapore case would be negligent and careless scholarship. Thus far, nothing has happened censorship-wise since the book's publication, even though it covered several highly contested issues such as religious proselytisation, absolutism and extremism in some interpretations, gay rights and homosexuality and the secular-religious divide.

## Self-censorship

There are at least two reasons behind possible self-censorship. The first is the fear of authority, be this the state or powerful gatekeepers such as work superiors or even publishers, and the consequences for self-interests. The fear of state limits on academic freedom in Singapore has its roots in early post-colonial nation-building history in which there were varied views on the autonomous role of universities. This was made worse by the state's authoritarian and interventionist tendencies in political and social life, particularly through punitive action against mostly political individuals whose public views and actions were seen as disruptive to public order or threatening to social stability. At the same time, its pragmatic priority over economic survival and economic goals rendered the social sciences and independent critical thinking on social issues unappreciated, even sometimes distrusted. The culture of caution and fear of writing and speaking on the 'sensitive' topics of race and religion is also a consequence of the larger ethnic politics of the 1960s and 1970s in Malaysia and Singapore, and later of religious politics.

However, it would be mistaken to think that this culture of caution and fear is rigid and unchanging. Since the 1990s, there has been a gradual opening up of research and scholarship to address pertinent and pressing social issues, including race and religion, as younger generations of both locally- and foreign-educated scholars and researchers entered the field. There was a strongly felt urgency to fill huge gaps in and catch up with information and higher level knowledge, and a hunger for discussion and varied views on complex and difficult topics, amidst rapid changes and developments. The advent of the internet and social media further drastically changed views and expectations about social research and its public implications. Thus, even as I worried about finding enough participants from the local pool for my research projects, those I found showed sincere interest and earnest desire to take up the challenge of researching difficult

issues, and to write and speak with a sense of concern and commitment – this not only with regard to professional scholarship per se, but equally to larger social ideals of intercultural understanding and social cohesion. This maximised the desire for freedom to research, write and publish – and minimised any tendency to practise self-censorship. At the same time, in the context of volatile religious politics, the closed-door discussions which were part of our research methodologies were not seen as reflecting or perpetuating the lack of freedom to speak openly, but as safe spaces where participants felt free to speak frankly. Nor was censorship by gatekeepers a rigid practice to be unquestioningly accepted, but to be negotiated based on facts and reasoning. The books still got published. And as for self-interests, I did not lose my job nor did I switch to safer topics. Indeed, my idealistic motivations, nerve and competency to research multiculturalism, with all its 'minefields', were gradually recognised.

## Academic responsibility in the real world

The second reason behind self-censorship in publication is the fear of causing offence to others and of the social consequences, particularly contributing to intercultural tensions. Whether to publish in the interests of knowledge or to omit a piece of evidence, fact or opinion to avert offence and its consequences – requires discerning judgement based on skills, experience and grounded awareness. Having directly experienced an ethnic riot (Kuala Lumpur, 13 May 1969), and having witnessed or researched ethnic tensions over the years, has shaped my views towards a broader sense of responsibility in research and scholarship on multiculturalism. Rigorous gathering, analysing and interpreting of evidence remain the main requirements of responsible research. But responsibility is also about consciously considering the social impact and consequences, whether on policy and practice implications or the behaviour of vested interest groups or individuals. Responsibility's underpinning ideal of contributing towards better understanding and management for the common good and a cohesive multiculturalism is all the more central in importance in our time. As such, rather than focus on censorship versus freedom in a narrow sense, I consider social responsibility in scholarship and publication to be a parallel challenge. Working under the often complex, uncertain and volatile conditions that multiculturalism presents, the responsibility of taking extra care, caution and consideration of the consequences of publication is not so much an act of self-censorship that goes against academic freedom, but an expression of the responsibility that must accompany it. This larger sense of responsibility also helps us make clearer and better judgements in our decisions on what to publish for the real world.

Other issues, such as access to information held by the state and the culture of civil debate, discussion and dialogue, affect freedom and censorship. But there is now definitely more freedom to research and publish on issues of race and religion than before, and one must continue to expand this freedom. It also remains forever true to write and publish honestly and responsibly, without fear or favour.

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## Note

The ongoing incident (since March 2018), in which the Law Minister intensively questioned historian P.J. Thum on his 'fake news' interpretation of the state's rationale for the arrest of political opponents (Operation Coldstore, 1963) on grounds of public security, is a case of old versus new political styles of managing information, publication and interpretation. I view the Minister's style as akin to that of some old ruling party first-generation political leaders', and Thum's as that of an idealistic and young historian's.

# Chinese tea and Asian societies

Kunbing Xiao

Tea originated in China and has spread worldwide over the past two centuries. Tea plants are highly sensitive to their natural environment and, even today, are mainly cultivated in subtropical Asian countries. The cultivation, processing and consumption of tea has influenced Asian societies for centuries, in various ways. In this edition of 'China Connections', inspired by Appadurai's 'Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy', we explore how tea, as a commodity critically involved in modern world history, affected ancient China's regional politics, and how it still permeates ordinary people's lives in Asia.

We encourage our readers to consider tea in both its macroscale and microscale contexts. On the one hand, tea is associated with regime change, long-distance transportation, the organization of production, and global capitalism, and so has propelled the emergence of the world trade system. On the other hand, tea is closely related to our consumption habits, our social organization and life-styles, and to some extent reflects our bodily perception of the environment.

Following the 'the flow of tea', five articles outline the transmission of tea and the interplay of tea-tasting arts in Asian societies, including China, British India and Taiwan. Researchers working from the diverse backgrounds of history, art history, anthropology and substance abuse, reveal in their studies the hidden nature of tea's

impact on economics, politics and people's daily lives throughout Asia. These fascinating research findings also remind us of Okakura Kakuzō's claim made approximately 200 years ago, when he asserted that "Asia is one", a possible contemplation on his latter even more renowned work, 'The Book of Tea'.

However, a discussion about tea in Asian societies should never ignore western influences. We cannot imagine those tea plantations in Darjeeling and Assam without the enthusiastic British search for the taste of tea. The circulation of Chinese tea around the world occurred at the same time as westerners invaded the old empire. Thus, global capitalism has been a critical factor, infiltrating and becoming rooted in Asian societies. In the modern era, tea's globalisation is significantly accelerating and becoming more widely appreciated than ever before.

The extensive influence of tea has also challenged researchers' assumptions and knowledge, making an interdisciplinary approach and methodology essential for the study of tea. From China of the Tang Dynasty to California in America, from British Indian tea plantations to tea houses in Chaozhou, tea has influenced our societies dynamically and is still shaping our modern world. We hope that the following articles will unveil some of tea's mysteries and enable you to enjoy more than just a cup of the beverage.

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## Tea and everyday life: observations from Chaoshan, Guangdong

Peter d'Abbs

What place do the rich traditions of Chinese tea culture hold in the everyday lives of people in a fast-changing, increasingly consumerist society? To explore this question, I travelled to a region renowned for its traditional tea culture: the Chaoshan (潮汕) region in eastern Guangdong province, home of *gongfu* tea – one of the most elegant and refined of China's diverse tea-drinking traditions. Through in-depth, informal interviews, and observations over several trips to Chaozhou and other centres in Chaoshan, I tried to understand what *gongfu* tea meant for people in Chaoshan.<sup>1</sup>

The first finding that became apparent to me was how deeply *gongfu* tea was integrated into the everyday lives of people of all kinds of social background. As one of my interviewees explained, it has 'seeped into our bones'. People who were born and raised in Chaoshan did not consciously learn about *gongfu* tea, they simply came to know about it as they grew up. The integral place of *gongfu* tea had three dimensions: spatial, temporal and social. Spatially, *gongfu* tea was everywhere. In the workplaces, shops or homes that I observed, a *gongfu* tea set was always found in regular use. Temporally, *gongfu* tea is woven into the rhythms of everyday life: at home, after dinner; and in shops, whenever trading is slow, out comes the *gongfu* tea set. Above all, drinking *gongfu* tea can be considered to be a social activity, nurturing relationships with family, friends and associates, and in doing so, affirming the drinkers' identity in a network of

social relationships through which a distinctive and valued regional culture is transmitted.

As literary descriptions tell us, *gongfu* tea is a highly refined way of preparing and drinking tea, using small teapots, preferably of Yixing or Chaozhou clay, or porcelain *gaiwan*, in which to prepare a very strong brew, most frequently of the locally grown, semi-fermented *Fenghuang Dancong* (鳳凰單叢) tea. This is poured into small cups of around 30 ml capacity for drinking repeated infusions from the same tealeaves. From my observations, preparing and drinking *gongfu* tea requires attentiveness to procedural details – to being *jiangjiu* (講究) – but this was achieved, not by slavishly following a rigid sequence of steps as some literary accounts suggest, but by showing skill and dexterity. A *gongfu* tea-drinking occasion creates its own tempo. Regardless of whether the occasion lasts ten minutes or two hours, during this time participants put aside the incessant demands for haste that punctuate the world around and appreciate the tea slowly.

For most of my research participants, drinking *gongfu* tea was seen as "part of our lives". Some participants, however, had chosen to elevate their tea-drinking to a kind of art.

Again, this was accomplished by cultivating expertise and discernment in one or more of several domains, for example, creating a special space for drinking tea; seeking out high quality tea utensils; exploring philosophical and spiritual aspects of tea-drinking; developing a capacity to understand and appreciate the qualities and properties of any given tealeaves, and knowing where and how to purchase teas of the finest quality.

Today's globalised world is characterised by what some sociologists have described as transnational streams of 'cultural capital', in which cultural objects from one place are appropriated, redefined and repackaged for deployment as commodities elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Chaoshan *gongfu* tea, it is possible to detect at least three such 'streams'. Firstly, within China, *gongfu* tea modelled on Chaoshan practices has been taken up by many non-Chaoshan people, particularly in business settings, as a vehicle for interacting and negotiating with associates. Secondly, in the emergence of contemporary tea art in Taiwan that began in the 1970s, a style of drinking adapted from Chaoshan

*gongfu* tea came to be regarded not as one among many regional styles in China, but as Chinese tea art per se.<sup>3</sup> Thirdly, outside China *gongfu* tea is being promoted as an authentic, national Chinese 'tea ceremony', by implication analogous to the well-known Japanese tea ceremony, with cultural roots that go back to ancient times. This last claim is bolstered by historically dubious suggestions that Chaoshan *gongfu* tea is a modern manifestation of Tang dynasty tea-drinking practices as described by Lu Yu in the oldest extant treatise on tea, the *Cha Jing* or Classic of Tea. (In fact, *gongfu* tea almost certainly originated in the 18th century in the Wuyi mountain area of Fujian province.)

Where these cultural streams will flow in future is a question for another day. In the meantime, in at least one region of China, traditional tea culture continues to enrich the lives, not just of a privileged cultural elite, but of people everywhere.

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Gongfu tea. Creative Commons. Courtesy Cosmin Dordea on Flickr.

### Notes

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## Center for Global Asia at NYU Shanghai

The Center for Global Asia at NYU Shanghai serves as the hub within the NYU Global Network University system to promote the study of Asian interactions and comparisons, both historical and contemporary. The overall objective of the Center is to provide global societies with information on the contexts for the reemerging connections between the various parts of Asia through research and teaching. Collaborating with institutions across the world, the Center seeks to play a bridging role between existing Asian studies knowledge silos. It will take the lead in drawing connections and comparisons between the existing fields of Asian studies, and stimulating new ways of understanding Asia in a globalized world.

## Asia Research Center at Fudan University

Founded in March 2002, the Asia Research Center at Fudan University (ARC-FDU) is one of the achievements of the cooperation of Fudan and the Korean Foundation for Advanced Studies (KFAS). Through the years, the center is making all the efforts to promote Asian Studies, including hosting conferences and supporting research projects. ARC-FDU keeps close connections with the ARCs in mainland China and many institutes abroad.



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## The Global Tea Initiative at UC Davis

Katharine P. Burnett

In 2015, the University of California, Davis launched the Global Tea Initiative for the Study of Tea Culture and Science (GTI). GTI is now transitioning to become the Global Tea Institute for the Study of Tea Culture and Science. GTI is committed to producing tea research with a global perspective and supporting research on tea from anywhere in the world, in any discipline, and with any methodology.

GTI's mission is to promote the understanding of *Camelia sinensis* through evidence-based research. Its goals are many. They include fostering knowledge about tea through colloquia and symposia, lecture series and workshops, and through the extended



Global Tea Initiative with photograph of Tea Garden Village, Qinghai. Photograph courtesy of Zhong Zhao, Green Camel Bell NGO, China.

efforts of research and teaching on campus and through national and international partnerships and exchange; developing a curriculum for undergrads and grads, as well as extramural courses for industry specialists and the general public. When GTI becomes an institute, we envision a dedicated building with tearooms and gardens, exhibition space for narrating the stories of tea culture and science around the world, meeting and teaching space, a sensory theater, and more. Although *Camelia sinensis* is the primary focus, GTI scholars acknowledge not only that many things are consumed as tea, but also many diverse tea cultures exist around the world. All merit study.

Students are eager for formal classes and research opportunities. Some of us are already making this possible in our home departments. This year, seven GTI members team-taught a trans-disciplinary First Year Seminar on *Global Tea Culture and Science*, a course aimed at new students on campus. This course is providing the basis from which to build a permanent course on *Global Tea*

*Culture and Science*, and then the curricula on *Global Tea Culture and Science*. GTI aims to collaborate and partner with scholars, research institutes, and the tea industry nationally and internationally. With its broad mandate for research and teaching across the disciplines and from a global perspective, GTI aims to work collegially and flexibly with others, with an inclusionary attitude.

**Katharine P. Burnett** Associate Professor of Art History at UC Davis, is Founding Director of UC Davis's Global Tea Initiative for the Study of Tea Culture and Science at the University of California, Davis. Her interdisciplinary research explores how cultural values are manifested in art, what it means to collect art, and now also, what we can learn about cultures and societies through studying individual and diverse tea cultures. For more information about GTI, please contact Katharine Burnett, [kpburnett@ucdavis.edu](mailto:kpburnett@ucdavis.edu). To inquire about supporting the program, please contact Assistant Dean Charlene A. Mattison, [cmattison@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cmattison@ucdavis.edu)

## The globalization of Chennian and Qingxiang

Shuenn-Der Yu

Studying the globalization of 'aging' (*chennian* 陳年) and 'fresh fragrance' (*qingxiang* 清香) allows us to understand how Taiwan has influenced the development or resurgence of Chinese tea art and culture in recent years. How the flavors known as *chennian* and *qingxiang* were discovered or created, recognized, and evaluated across Asian markets has been the focus of my research for the past fifteen years. Few Taiwanese knew of Pu'er tea before the 1990s; nonetheless, the fervor for Pu'er emerged in Taiwan, rather than in Hong Kong where this aged tea had been stockpiled for decades. The craze then spread back to Hong Kong, and soon to Guangdong, Yunnan and Northeast Asia.

While Pu'er tea was gaining significance in trade, the high-mountain tea (*gaoshancha* 高山茶) from the tea plantations in the high mountains of Taiwan (established in the late 1970s), quickly became Taiwan's most popular tea. Remarkably, the flavor preference and appreciation rituals in Taiwan had a profound influence on other kinds of partially fermented teas. The popularity of Pu'er and high-mountain tea led to the emphasis of two new flavor categories—*chennian* for the former and *qingxiang* for the latter.

In fact, *chennian* was a newly defined taste for Pu'er by Taiwanese tea merchants and experts in the late 20th century. The development of *chennian* revealed the socio-cultural and historical processes wherein value was allocated and meaning was constructed by the tea merchants, collectors, consumers and the government. Pu'er tea from Yunnan was first introduced to Taiwan in the 1970s through Hong Kong, but this 'stinky' tea was not well accepted by Taiwan's popular tea culture that highly appreciated fragrance. Nonetheless, the sophisticated tea art in contemporary Taiwan, which was advanced by the government to increase domestic tea consumption, facilitated the invention of appreciation rituals and evaluation standards for Pu'er tea. After years of exploratory research in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Taiwan tea merchants and experts established an evaluation scale for Pu'er tea according to the degree of aging; the longer preserved Pu'er tea has better taste and thus has higher value.

In the late 1980s, as the tension between mainland China and Taiwan started to relax, Pu'er tea became better recognized and accepted by the Taiwanese under the 'China Fever' (*zhongguo re* 中國熱). The return of Hong Kong to China in 1997 also accelerated the growth of the Pu'er tea market in Taiwan;

the Hong Kong tea traders sold off their aged Pu'er tea to Taiwanese merchants because of the uncertain future of Hong Kong's economy. The Pu'er tea fad was developed in the mid-1990s in Taiwan, and soon spread to the rest of Asia and the world. Today, one aged tea cake can be sold for as high as 100,000 USD. Along the globalization of the Pu'er tea products was the legitimization of *chennian* as the criterion to evaluate Pu'er and other aged teas. This criterion also had an influence on the fresh teas; for example, big-tree tea (*dashu cha* 大樹茶) of better leaf quality for potential aging is preferred in the market.

*Qingxiang* (fresh fragrance) has a different story. It has been widely used to describe the fresh aroma of tea in Taiwan both in history and in modern times. However, in the mid-1990s, *qingxiang* was adopted to describe the unique flavor of high-mountain tea to distinguish this newly invented tea from Oolong tea. This *qingxiang* flavor partially depends on the special materiality of tea leaves from high altitudes, but mainly is the result of a deliberate manipulation of the manufacture process to create a new tea.

Thus, the life history of *qingxiang* reveals the co-evolution of technology to ensure



Tea tasting with double cups (*shuangbei pinming* 雙杯品茗) were invented when high-mountain tea became popular in 1980s. Photograph courtesy of Shuenn-Der Yu.

this flavor is consistently produced and well appreciated. For example, a hot-air withering machine was used to counteract the fickle weather in mountain areas and to stabilize the chemical reactions; a new utensil (the sniffing cup) and a new style of tea tasting with double cups (*shuangbei pinming* 雙杯品茗) were invented to promote this *qingxiang* flavor. As *qingxiang* has become a preferred taste in Taiwan, it gradually transformed the flavor, aroma and values of other teas in Taiwan, as well as in Fujian, Yunnan and North Vietnam. Teas now tend to go through reduced fermentation and baking to produce a similar *qingxiang* flavor. For instance, Anxi County

in Fujian started to produce the *qingxiang*-style variation of *Tieguanyin* (鐵觀音) called 'green *Tieguanyin*'. On the other hand, since high-elevation cultivation is considered the key to achieve the *qingxiang* flavor, a concept called 'mountain-top aroma', similar to the idea of French terroir, which emphasizes the micro-environmental ecology and local flavor of teas, has become the predominant factor in determining the qualities and thus values of high-mountain tea.

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Puer tea cakes are being sun dried in Yiwu, the famous Puer tea production/distribution center since the Qing times. Photograph courtesy of Shuenn-Der Yu.

## Chinese and Indian teas and the history of global capitalism

Andrew B. Liu

Tea, originating in China and later widely cultivated in colonial India and other Asian societies, was one of the key factors in the creation of a global market. Tea sales from China spiked after the 1842 Nanjing Treaty and the attendant creation of the treaty port system. At the same time, British colonialists established their own tea industry in the northeast Indian territory of Assam. Over the second half of the century, the Chinese and Indian industries engaged in a back-and-forth competition for consumers in Europe and the U.S. In both regions, the first systematic calculations of labor (conducted in the twentieth century) revealed that each of the tea industries employed more workers than any comparable urban sector in each country. In short, tea was central to the creation of modern capitalism in both regional societies.

Past scholarship has acknowledged the massive expansion of tea cultivation and production in Asia during this period, but it has been skeptical whether market competition actually transformed the economic conditions in those regions.



Tea cellar in Ruiquan (瑞泉) Wuyi Rock Tea Factory. This tea cellar was inspired by wine cellars from western wine culture. Courtesy: Ruiquan Wuyi Rock Tea Museum.

For instance, the China trade relied upon smallholder peasant households, and the Indian industry was powered by an indentured workforce. Historians have labeled both types of production as 'precapitalist' in nature.

In fact, tea production in Asia was constantly evolving and dynamic. Chinese merchants and British planters introduced techniques that were recognizably industrial and modern. For instance, much like the classic English factories of the industrial revolution, they increased the scale of operations in response to greater demand,

and relied upon a strategy of hiring primarily low-wage workers—women and children—in an attempt to save expenses.

But perhaps the most notable instance of the subtle 'industrial' character of rural tea production in Asia was the way in which tea plant managers developed systems for rationalizing production through the careful calculation, measurement, and disciplining of their employees' working time. This was true for tea production in both China and India. For instance, in the Chinese tea districts of southern Anhui (Huizhou), we have manuals written by merchant and workshop owners

that use precise calculations to designate how quickly one should roll and roast tea. Huizhou factory managers would monitor working time by lighting incense sticks that burned at a constant rate. With the sticks as a baseline, the managers rewarded workers based upon how many pounds of tea they could process in a given time. Similarly, in the plantations of Assam, we have recorded observations that the 'tea gardens' in the remote valleys of the Brahmaputra River set their clocks differently from the rest of the surrounding Indian society, a system they called 'Garden Time'. British planters sought to maximize the amount of daytime spent working, so they set their clocks backwards an extra hour such that, in the words of one account in Bengali: "when the gong strikes six o'clock, it is not quite (*thik na*) six o'clock". Planters then divided up the day into twelve equal units of sunlight, in which work was carefully regulated by the ringing of gongs and the constant weighing of leaves plucked.

Such examples suggest that instead of thinking of Chinese and Indian tea as the apex of the traditional, pre-industrial economies of Asia, we should view the history of tea as a pivotal moment in the history of capitalism, both within China and India as well as in their connection to the rest of the world.

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## Tea production in southern China and its political implications during the Tang and Song Dynasties

Yi Zou

Throughout the Tang and Song dynasties (618-1279), the center of China's economy gradually shifted southwards into the valleys of the Yangtze and Huai Rivers—a region that is now known as 'southern China'. Moreover, a significant fiscal reform on taxation took place during the mid-Tang era; the government started to collect a tea tax, which gradually became an important source of

government revenue. This practice was legitimized in 793 AD through a law imposing a 10 percent tax on tea. Before that, the government only collected land taxes and commodity taxes on textiles. This tax reform was closely related to the expansion of tea plantations, as well as changes in the broader context of economy and politics during the Tang and Song dynasties.

Tea production in China was originally concentrated in Sichuan and Yunnan, and expanded east- and southward to the Yangtze River during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Up to the Tang, tea plantations had prospered in southern China. Parts of southern China, like the hilly areas in southern Anhui, had already been known for tea production during the Tang dynasty. Historical records show that around 862 AD, 70-80% of the residents in Qimen (祁門) County, Anhui depended on tea cultivation. During the spring harvest season, merchants would flock in to purchase tea with silver or silks, and then sell the tea in other parts of China or abroad. During this time, the once backward hilly areas developed into affluent counties that contributed abundant taxes. Local elites, such as the Zheng Chuan (鄭傳) family, who accumulated enormous wealth from tea trading, founded a militia for self-defense during the turmoil in late Tang.

Later, the Northern Song dynasty re-unified the Central Plains, but was confronted with chronic threats from nomadic regimes in the north. Tea, as a profitable business and means to cover the military expenditure necessary for protection from nomadic groups, became a strategic commodity for the Song government. Thus, the government continued to adjust the tea acts (*chafa* 茶法). It also promoted a government monopoly on tea to maximize fiscal revenue and to control the outbound flow of tea products. As a result, the merchants, who paid a high price for their official tea licenses (*yin* 引), armed their caravans to protect their tea products. At the same time, the highly lucrative tea business attracted increasing numbers of armed smugglers seeking to counter the government monopoly. Consequently, local militias organized by the tea giants appeared in provinces such as Hubei, Jiangxi, and Anhui. Later, during the north-and-south military confrontation between the Great Jin and the Southern Song dynasty, these local militias played active roles to guard their own properties. When the Yuan dynasty replaced the Song, the government appointed the surrendering militia leaders to rule their own regions. For example, Wang Yunlong (汪雲龍) from Wuyuan (婺源) County, Anhui, was appointed as a local administrator, and his offspring inherited his authority to manage tea taxes in Anhui and Jiangxi.

This historical vignette indicates that tea production and trade advanced the development of the hilly areas in southern China during the Tang and Song dynasties, turning infertile counties into prominent tax contributors. The loose control of the government over these originally barren and backward areas facilitated the growth of local forces in the new prosperous era of tea. However, as the government quickly became aware of the financial and strategic significance of tea, it extended central administration into these areas. Despite the initial interdependence between the central and the local forces, the government eventually absorbed the local forces and gained control over lucrative and strategic tea resources.



Tang Dynasty. Anonymous: A Palace Concert (*Gongyuetu* 宮樂圖) Ten court ladies in late Tang Dynasty were sitting around a table and drinking tea. Courtesy: National Palace Museum (Taiwan).

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**ISEAS** YUSOF ISHAK  
INSTITUTE



2018 marks the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute's 50th anniversary. Initiated in 1968 by then Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee, ISEAS has since been dedicated to research and scholarship on Southeast Asia.

# Excavating Singapore

Terence Chong

Singapore is a densely packed urban city not immediately associated with archaeology. However, there has been a surge in archaeological activities on the island in recent years, especially around the historical downtown Civic District. This flood of activities has been the result of growing public interest in the country's heritage and history. Globalisation and immigration have raised public priority over local and national identities, leading to greater attention to stories, artefacts and research that help Singaporeans understand who they are and where they come from.

ISEAS-Yusof Ishak's Archaeology Unit (AU) was formed in 2010. It is the only dedicated archaeology centre in Singapore committed to the promotion of archaeology in the country and Southeast Asia. AU not only conducts annual archaeological Field Schools in the Southeast Asian region for students but also collaborates closely with local agencies on excavations, archaeological surveys and post-excavation work. Local archaeologists have been excavating in post-independent Singapore since 1984. Approximately 30 sites have been examined since. Archaeology in Singapore can be chronologically organised into several periods.

Firstly the Neolithic Period (New Stone Age) (from approx. 10,200BC). In the 1930s, British archaeologists based at Singapore's Raffles Museum reported the existence of Neolithic stone tools and implements at Tanjong Karang (near Tuas) and on Pulau Ubin. No excavations were conducted in Singapore, but a brief excavation at Tanjong Bungah on the Johor side of the Tebrau Straits (known as the Johor Straits from the 1890s) revealed a well-preserved site with stone tools related to those found in Sumatra, but different from those found in the Malay Peninsula.

Secondly, the Temasek / Singapura Period (1300-1700 CE). Excavations since 1984 have revealed large amounts of artefacts dating from the Temasek period. The archaeological

evidence challenged past perceptions that the island's historical narrative only began with the British establishment of a trading station in 1819, and pushed back the historical timeline to approximately 1300CE.

Thirdly, the Colonial Period (1819 -1959). Some 11 sites specific to the colonial period have been excavated. The artefacts uncovered have provided insights into hitherto unknown social practices and cultural behaviour of everyday people. These practices and behaviour were simply not documented in official historical records. We also know little about the lives of the local population during Singapore's early years as an East India Company settlement or the daily routine of soldiers during the Battle for Singapore in 1942.

Finally, the Contemporary Period (1959-present). Singapore's frantic pace of industrialisation and urbanisation has resulted in only a few pristine sites left for archaeological study. These remaining sites feature the vestiges from a rural agricultural community. They also showcase the industrialisation period through brickworks and early post-war housing settlements. All of these sites present potential for archaeological research into the lifeworlds of our forebearers from the not too distant past.

The following articles are a sample of the research AU is conducting.

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## Archiving archaeological materials: whose responsibility is it?

Lim Chen Sian

Archaeologists are portrayed in popular imagination as individuals with dirt-caked brows, hunched over in a trench, patiently digging away the sediments, revealing marvels from the past. While true to an extent, excavation is nonetheless only one characteristic of the discipline. Beyond the excavation is a long-drawn sequence of processes that archaeologists grapple with behind-the-scenes: cleaning, sorting, conserving, illustrating, photographing, cataloguing and studying the finds. As a custodian of the past, the archaeologist bears a heavy responsibility in caring for and maintaining archaeological collections. However, the archiving and curatorship of archaeological artefacts is a frequently overlooked aspect of the archaeological progress.

In the UK, archaeologists have the ethical and professional duty to ensure that the archaeological collection is looked after for posterity. In Singapore, the ownership of archaeological finds is unclear. There is no law addressing any antiquities recovered from either archaeological excavations or by chance. As such, there is no agency or institution in Singapore that serves as a central depository for archaeological materials. While select museums under the National Heritage Board (NHB) may occasionally accept a few items for exhibition purposes, these institutions hesitate over receiving the complete archaeological

assemblage from an excavation project. Understandably, these institutions also do not have the necessary archaeological staff to handle and curate the collection. All this presents a conundrum for archaeologists in the country, as for the last three decades archaeologists have taken it upon themselves to look after the excavated materials, and this archive has grown over the years. Presently, the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS) has in its custody approximately 6 tons of artefacts from excavations dating back to 2004. Separately, another principal collection is held at the National University of Singapore.

In an attempt to answer the query of 'whose responsibility is it?' a dialogue on the future of the archaeological collection commenced with an ISEAS-NHB workshop on Archiving Archaeological Materials in late 2014, where heritage practitioners and archaeology specialists from the UK and Singapore debated and discussed the need for an archaeological archive. The workshop surmised that archaeologists and heritage institutions in Singapore all have a role to play in determining the fate of the archaeological collection or archive. In the immediate future, archaeologists as domain specialists will need to lead the way to develop the archiving protocols for Singapore. In the longer term, legislation addressing the ownership of antiquities, and the delegation of responsibility for their upkeep and care will need to be determined.

Meanwhile, at the NSC Archaeology Unit, the future is in the making. Since 2014, there have been post-excavation and collection management initiatives to demonstrate that archaeological archives are vital for both academic research and to safeguard a national collection for future researchers. With the provision of adequate resources and funding, the Archaeology Unit has plans to catalogue and care for the materials from excavations at the National Gallery Singapore, Victoria Concert Hall, Empress Place and other sites by 2024. This ambition is coupled with the production of useful research from the collection, including rolling out the publication of site reports as part of the documentary archive.

All this is contingent on the availability of adequate resources and funding. ISEAS looks forward to working closely with heritage agencies to collectively preserve the country's archaeological collection.

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Papers from the 2014 ISEAS-NHB workshop Archiving Archaeological Materials are now published and available for download on <https://tinyurl.com/auseries> as NSC Archaeology Unit 'Archaeology Report Series No. 7'.

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Artefact storage at the NSC Archaeology Unit, ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute. (Credit: Aaron Kao)



# Pulau Ubin Anti-Motor Torpedo Boat Battery: the gun that never was

Aaron Kao

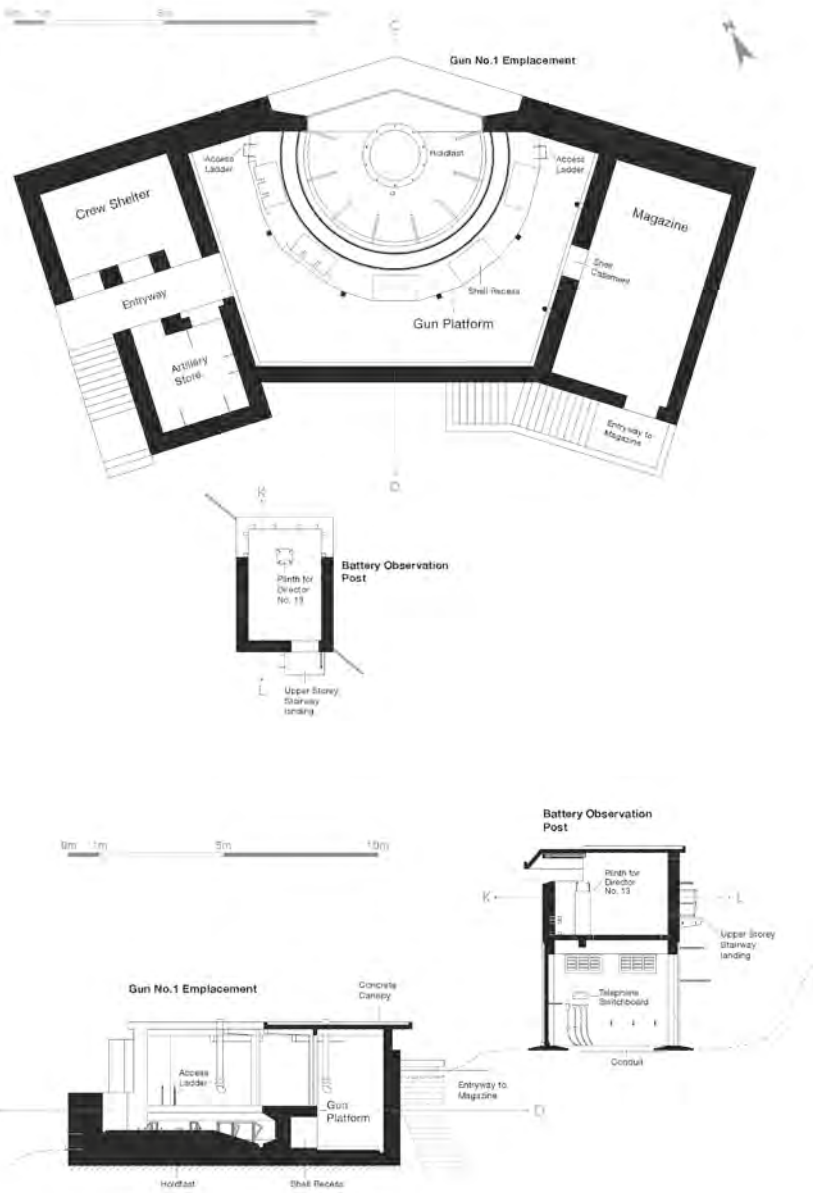


Fig. 1: Pulau Ubin AMTB battery gun no. 1. Above: Plan view cross section. Below: West elevation cross section. (Credit: Aaron Kao)



Fig. 2: Gun floor consisting of overhead concrete canopy, gunner's platform, and holdfast bolts for a twin 6-pounder gun. (Credit: Young Wei Ping)



Fig. 3: One of the DEL emplacements featuring steel reinforced shuttered concrete construction to protect the searchlight equipment and crew. (Credit: Aaron Kao)

The National Parks Board and the NSC Archaeology Unit recently launched a research collaboration to investigate the archaeological significance of Pulau Ubin island, located northeast of the main Singapore island. The archaeology team would conduct surveys and excavations on the island over a span of 18 months. In December 2017, the team completed its first field season by evaluating and recording the remains of the Anti-Motor Torpedo Boat (AMTB) military structures. While the documentation has been completed, archival research and analysis are still ongoing to interpret the past use of the site.

Kampong Bahru is a 21m knoll situated immediately west of Sungei Mamam creek along the central northern shoreline of Pulau Ubin. During the Second World War, it was the site of a coastal artillery emplacement designed for two twin 6-pounder guns. These guns were termed AMTB equipment, and typically emplaced near the entrance of harbours in two or one gun configuration. The Pulau Ubin AMTB battery formed part of the Changi Fire Command – a network of coast artillery batteries placed to protect the eastern part of Singapore; specifically, the waterway leading into the Royal Navy base at Sembawang.

The first production batch of twin 6-pounders at the Woolwich Ordnance Factory, UK, were sent to Singapore in 1937. They armed several emplacements in Changi, Pulau Tekong, and Keppel Harbour. However, it is unclear whether the guns for Pulau Ubin arrived in time to see any action. As a result,

the emplacements remain in relatively good condition as it did not suffer from direct enemy fire, and demolition by the retreating British Army. Part of the research at the Ubin AMTB was to examine whether any guns were ever emplaced at the battery.

The two gun emplacements of the AMTB were similar in layout (see fig. 1). The central gun floor area was flanked on the east side by the magazine, and on the west side by a crew shelter and artillery store. Both emplacements were built eight meters apart in a staggered formation on a terraced slope approximately mid-way on the knoll, and facing northeast. Gun no. 1 (see fig. 2) was the first emplacement from the east. Entry into the emplacement was on the west via a corridor situated between the crew shelter and artillery store. Behind each emplacement, stood a two storey (gun no.1) and three storey (gun no.2) battery observation post (BOP) tower. This structure housed equipment and men to command the guns, engines, and searchlights.

In addition to the gun emplacements, the battery also consisted of ancillary buildings such as barracks, toilets, cookhouse, engine room, oil store, storerooms, water pumping station, and searchlight emplacements. They were all built in a compact location on the knoll. A jetty located west of the gun emplacements also served the establishment. The barracks, toilets, and cookhouse have since been demolished. The engine room and oil store were located together on the south-eastern foot of the knoll, out of view from an attacking enemy ship. Both were simple rectangle concrete structures with flat roofs. Approximately 300m downhill

from the northeast corner of gun no.1, and at the water's edge, were three DEL (defence electric light) emplacements (see fig. 3). These concrete structures house fixed beam electric searchlights powerful enough to light up a section of the waterway. These would have allowed the guns to engage intruders at night or in low light conditions.

Although it is unclear if the guns were installed in time for the Japanese invasion, it is evident that the battery was used to some extent. Electrical fittings and other debris observed in one DEL emplacement seem to suggest the occupation of equipment. A telephone communication switchboard was probably installed in gun no.1's BOP as marks and fittings on the wall indicated so. An engine was in use for a period of time as the ceilings of the engine room were heavily covered in soot. It may be possible that a temporary arrangement was placed pending the arrival of the guns. More research is now being conducted to establish the activities of the site.

This AMTB battery was significant within both local and national context. It marked the technological evolution of coastal artillery in the British Army that started in the 16th century in Britain, and early 19th century in Singapore. If we were to discount British association, the nearby 17th century Johor Lama kingdom located along Sungei Johore just across the straits had fought coastal battles with the Portuguese and Acehnese by employing a wide array of coastal artillery as a part of its defences. The Ubin battery serves as an interesting evolutionary study in this related field of warfare and coastal defences in Southeast Asia.

The substantial remains of the Ubin battery make the site rare as many other coastal artillery gun batteries were destroyed during the war or demolished to make way for development. This surviving specimen remains relatively intact and legible. The battery also formed the larger military landscape of fixed defences that was unique to Southeast Asia. Singapore was after all the most heavily armed colony within the British Empire in terms of coastal artillery. At a local level, the Pulau Ubin documentation project would complement available information regarding the subsistence and lifeways at Kampong Bahru. It would help to answer questions such as whether the militarisation of Kampong Bahru affected or benefited the local community. Despite the shortcomings of the British Army in 1942, the coastal batteries did deter a Japanese seaborne assault, and fulfilled the role it was designed to do.

This article can be found in NSC Highlights Issue #8 (March–May 2018).

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## The decorated earthenware from the National Gallery Singapore site

Aaron Kao

Earthenware decorations are underexplored in Southeast Asia. This makes the earthenware discovered at the site of the National Gallery Singapore (NGS) in 2009 all the more exciting. These artefacts, weighing about 32 kilograms, were one of the largest haul of ceramic from the site. By identifying the different types of decoration, production techniques, and socio-cultural representations, these artefacts allow archaeologists to make inferences into the lifeways of these inhabitants of 14th century Singapore.

Most of the earthenware found in NGS were low-fired (400 to 900 degrees Celsius) clay vessels and likely served as utilitarian receptacles for cooking and storage purposes, and possibly as religious paraphernalia. Found mainly in the 14th century Temasek context, their widespread distribution at nine other nearby sites around NGS in the downtown Civil District of Singapore suggests that they played an important role in day-to-day activities.

One primary goal of my research is to form a classification typology. This is useful as a data set for inter-site comparisons which enable archaeologists to examine the evolution of pottery making cultures, and how it relates to socio-cultural interactions. Four attributes were used to form this classification typology.

The first – ‘Surface treatment’ – describes the physical qualities of the ornamentation and the type of intervention carried out by the potter on the surface of the clay. Within the archaeological context, decorations on earthenware are forms of ‘surface enhancements’ applied to the surface of the pottery during various stages of its production. This is done to amplify the appearance or functionality of the pot. To archaeologists, these can be important indicators of individual or group behavioural patterns such as artistic expression, cultural identity and beliefs, or simply as a form of maker’s mark or ergonomic feature.

A sample set of 585 pieces weighing 2,564 grams was analysed. The sample size mass is approximately 8% of the total earthenware assemblage. At NGS, an overwhelming 88% of the earthenware decorations were physically recessed. In other words, the majority of techniques used involved a degree of penetration and displacement of the moist clay (fig. 1). The remainder portion consisted of relief features created by adding (appliqué) and shaping the clay by hand. These are considered rare.

‘Operational action’, the second attribute, investigates the random tool or finger marks left behind by the potter(s). These physical gestures indicate the type of motor performance associated with production techniques (fig. 2). At NGS, impressing and incising were the most common action at 52% and 38% respectively. They were also responsible for all recessed decorations. The third attribute, ‘decoration’, is a description of the tool used and its related ‘operational action’. For example, out of a total of 23 types of decorations identified, carved-paddle-impressing (fig. 4) accounted for 46%. This particular tool is a hand held wooden paddle with a carved design on its working surface(s). It is struck repetitively around the surface of the pot, in unison with a supporting anvil held within the vessel. A textured imprint is normally produced (fig. 1). The second most numerous type of decoration is broadly incised concentric grooves found on the rims of the vessels. These range from one to five groove configurations. The remaining decorations are varied and uncommon. These included different forms of impressing, such as paddles that were bound with a variety of textured organic materials, stamping with an intricately carved tool (fig. 3), and puncture marks created with

a single-point or dentate-tipped implement. These tools resembling a comb were also used to incise parallel lines (fig. 2).

The fourth attribute, ‘motif’, describes the primary visual elements of a decoration. A diverse assemblage of 75 motifs was identified at NGS, with most of these occurring as complex or simple geometric designs within the carved-paddle-impressed category. Common visual elements used consist of triangles, squares, zigzag and curvilinear lines, circles, and parallel dashes (fig. 4). Complex geometric designs are composed of hachured triangles laid in an alternating or linear configuration, herringbone pattern, and repetitive rectilinear spirals. Variations within these motifs are evident, which indicate that some potters might have shared a non-rigid expression of similar beliefs. Incised decorations are less elaborate, featuring borderlines, or unidentifiable curvilinear patterns. Appliqué designs are mostly plain bands going around the vessel but rare organic forms were also encountered.

The distribution of archaeological materials at NGS suggested that small households probably occupied the site. This would indicate the type of domestic environment in which this heterogeneous assemblage of decorations would have high visibility. The high frequency of geometric motifs produced by carve-paddle-impressing appears to place the pottery tradition found at NGS in context with the Bau-Malay pottery tradition hypothesised by Wilhelm G Solheim II. Solheim believed that this tradition could have formed as early as 1000 BCE, with strong similarities with the geometric pottery found in Southeastern China. It is believed that this particular pottery tradition occurred as early as 3,000 to 2,500 BCE. Although it is not clear if these decorations share the same meanings as those found at NGS, the antiquity of this form of aesthetic expression is apparent.

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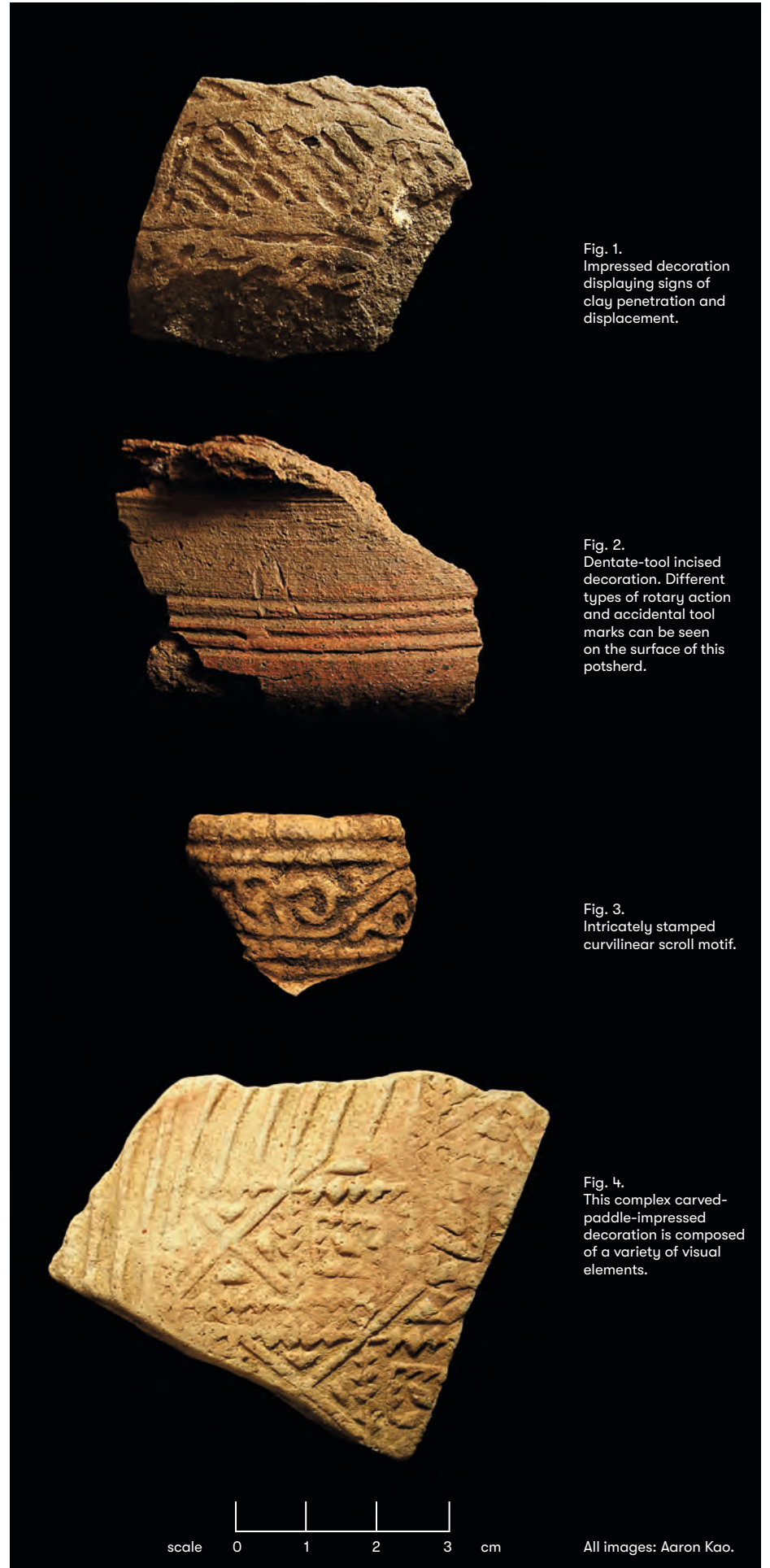


Fig. 1. Impressed decoration displaying signs of clay penetration and displacement.

Fig. 2. Dentate-tool incised decoration. Different types of rotary action and accidental tool marks can be seen on the surface of this potsherd.

Fig. 3. Intricately stamped curvilinear scroll motif.

Fig. 4. This complex carved-paddle-impressed decoration is composed of a variety of visual elements.

All images: Aaron Kao.

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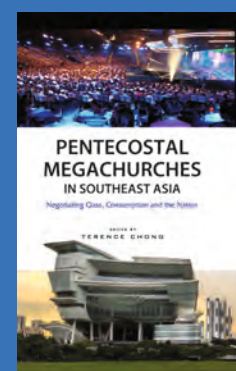
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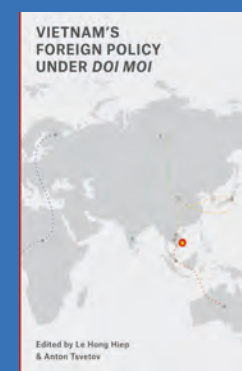
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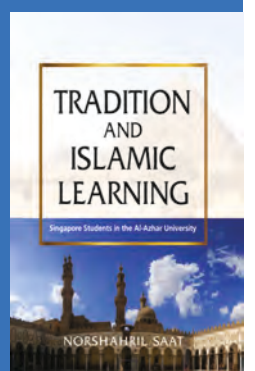
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# Human rights practices in Southeast Asia

For *News from Australia and the Pacific*, we ask contributors to reflect on their own research interests and the broader academic field in Australia and the Pacific of which it is a part. We focus on current, recent or upcoming projects, books, articles, conferences and teaching, while identifying related interests and activities of fellow academics in the field. Our contributions aim to give a broad overview of Asia-related studies in Australia and beyond, and to highlight exciting intellectual debates on and with Asia in the region. Our preferred style is subjective and conversational. Rather than offering fully-fledged research reports, our contributions give insight into the motivations behind and directions of various types of conversations between Asia and the region. In the current issue, we highlight the topic of *Human Rights Practices in Southeast Asia*. We would like to acknowledge Ken Setiawan's invaluable support for this collection of essays.

Articles are edited by Ana Dragojlovic [ana.dragojlovic@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:ana.dragojlovic@unimelb.edu.au) and Edwin Jurriëns [edwin.jurriens@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:edwin.jurriens@unimelb.edu.au), with assistance from Andy Fuller [fuller.a@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:fuller.a@unimelb.edu.au), from the Asia Institute in Melbourne [arts.unimelb.edu.au/asiainstitute](http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/asiainstitute)

## Writing against impunity and state violence in Thailand

Tyrell Haberkorn

“What does it mean to protest suffering, as distinct from acknowledging it?”

Susan Sontag<sup>1</sup>

Since completing my PhD in 2007, Sontag's question has frequently recurred as I have worked to become a scholar-activist who divides her time between the present and the recent past, and among reading in archives and libraries, observing human rights court cases, and translating accounts of state violence. The inspiration for my work primarily comes from outside the academy: writers like Sontag who make human rights violations accessible to a broad public, human rights workers creating knowledge that challenges the silences and elisions present in dominant state narratives, and survivors of rights violations who dare to speak out despite the risks they face. My work as a scholar grounds my activism in rigour and activism in turn reminds me of the urgency of putting knowledge to work in the service of justice.

Since 1997, my work has been based in Thailand. Since the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, through twelve 'successful' (meaning that power was seized) coups and seven failed coups, democracy and justice have remained largely elusive. My latest project, a book and a series of articles on impunity in Thailand grew out of academic-activist crossings.<sup>2</sup> In 2011, I observed an Appeal Court ruling in Bangkok in which Suderueman Maleh, who had submitted a complaint of being tortured by a police officer while in custody, was sentenced to two years in prison for doing so.<sup>3</sup> Suderueman's conviction, for the alleged crime of providing false testimony as a state official, laid bare the many layers of protection for perpetrators of state violence. It was not enough that he was tortured and his torturer was exonerated: Suderueman was further persecuted for daring to speak out. To understand how

and why, I decided to trace the history of impunity in Thailand.

While doing so, I was based in the Department of Political and Social Change (PSC) at the Australian National University (ANU), which I joined in 2009. PSC is a collection of political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians working on questions of political transformation across East, South, and Southeast Asia. The interdisciplinary and comparative breadth present inspired me to approach impunity from the perspectives of law – namely how law facilitates rather than prevents impunity – and politics, specifically how impunity contributes to state-building, as well as across time. My work greatly benefitted from conversations with colleagues working on the rule of law, and its opposites, and the challenges of ending authoritarianism.<sup>4</sup>

### Witnessing impunity

Beginning with the end of the absolute monarchy on 24 June 1932 and ending with the coup by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) on 22 May 2014, I asked, what does the history of a nation look like when told from the perspective of citizens whose rights are violated, rather than that of the victorious and powerful leaders? My research found that Thai citizens have experienced a range of forms of extrajudicial violence at the hands of state officials, including torture, disappearance, assassination, and massacre, across regimes both dictatorial and democratic. In nearly all cases, state officials have escaped sanction and accountability. This impunity has been produced and sustained through the unwillingness of state officials to find their colleagues responsible, the intimidation of victims of violence and other citizens, and weak legal and other institutional structures. Impunity takes place in public and is pedagogical and meant to be witnessed, from the instance of state violence to the evasion of accountability and finally to the creation of evidence about it.

The most surprising lesson I learned while researching impunity led to the title of my latest book: state violence and impunity take place in full public view. My expectation was that finding

evidence would be difficult. Instead, I mined archival and other publicly-available state documents, newspaper articles, memoirs of civil servants and victims of state violence, and court observation to reveal a history of impunity. Many of the violent events I write about have been previously unexamined or overlooked, but the primary reason is not a sheer lack of information. The events, as well as the evidence of violence, are in plain sight.

22 May 2018 marked the fourth anniversary of the NCPO being in power. Like the previous eleven 'successful' coups, the leaders of the NCPO are bold in their violation of the peoples' rights because they do not fear being held to account.

### Fighting for justice

But the history of impunity in Thailand also contains fragments of justice. In 2015, the Supreme Court exonerated Suderueman for exercising his right to call for accountability as a survivor of torture.<sup>5</sup> Citizens continue to protest the NCPO, even though they risk prison terms for doing so as the regime has outlawed public assembly and casts all criticism as sedition. After writing about impunity for the last seven years, I am now turning to what may be its opposite. I ask how, why, and with what possible effect does opposition to dictatorship emerge? To understand how to remake society anew after dictatorship is an urgent corollary to understanding how dictatorships come to power again and again, for us as humans as well as scholars.



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### The Asia Institute

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Supreme court of Thailand, Bangkok. Photo Wikimedia.

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### Notes

- 1 Sontag, S. 2003. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p.40.
- 2 Haberkorn, T. 2018. *In Plain Sight: Impunity and Human Rights in Thailand*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- 3 Asian Human Rights Commission, 11 August 2011, 'Thailand: Court demonstrates contempt for human rights by jailing torture victim on say-so of alleged perpetrator'; <https://tinyurl.com/ahrc100811>
- 4 See, for example, Cheesman, N. 2015. *Opposing the Rule of Law: How Myanmar's courts make law and order*. Cambridge University Press; and Aspinall, E. 2005. *Opposing Suharto: Compromise, Resistance, and Regime Change in Indonesia*. Stanford University Press.
- 5 Prachatai, 13 October 2015, 'Supreme Court rejects charges related to Deep South torture allegations'; <https://prachatai.com/english/node/5538>

## Reparations of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia: a brief update

Rachel Hughes

Some refer to a ‘cultural renaissance’ as being underway in Cambodia, even as recent events in the political sphere have troubled many. The arts—film, dance, music, theatre, drawing, sculpture and literature—are increasingly prominent mediums for education and intergenerational dialogue in the country, as well as, for finding some satisfaction and peace for victim-survivors.

The morning sky is clear and the pale grey cattle pass by the classroom building. Some eighty senior students of Kampong Chhnang High School wait inside for a show to begin. An actor suddenly appears at the door. She is dressed in a school uniform like theirs but carries a drawing in one hand and what appears to be a turtle in another—its head firmly tucked inside its shell. This is a performance of ‘Courageous Turtle’, a two-actor play written by Sokyou Chea and directed by Soung Sopheak that is currently touring Cambodia. One of the suggestions of the play is that we can learn from turtles: “only if you stick your neck out [do] you make progress!”. It uses humour, pathos and audience participation to play out situations of control and resistance, and stories of suffering, care, worry, longing and loss. Relationships from the past and present—between students, family members and cadre—provoke attention to the nature of action, repercussion and courage. The official aim of the play is to promote historical awareness and civil courage in Cambodia by reference to the Khmer Rouge regime.<sup>1</sup>

After watching the play, students listen to one or more victim-survivors from their local area speak about living under Khmer Rouge rule. In Kampong Chhnang, many had questions for their elder after she spoke about her experiences. It is estimated that, by the end of 2017, 150 civil parties and over 10,000 students had seen the play and engaged in intergenerational dialogue following the performance.<sup>2</sup>

### Reparation projects

The Courageous Turtle is one of nearly thirty reparation projects either recognised or currently awaiting recognition by Cambodia’s internationalised Khmer Rouge tribunal. The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) is a hybrid international criminal tribunal currently underway in Cambodia. It aims to bring those most responsible for crimes committed in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979 to justice. One important development of the Cambodian tribunal is to allow some victim-survivors to directly participate as parties in the cases against former Khmer Rouge. These participating victims are known as *civil parties* and they assist the Prosecution and may claim for reparations.

ECCC Case 002/01 was completed in 2016, resulting in the conviction of two former senior Khmer Rouge, Khieu Samphan and Noun Chea. As part of this case, some eleven reparations have been implemented, including permanent and mobile exhibitions, the publication and distribution of the case judgement, a memorial, published testimonies and testimonial therapy and curriculum resources.

For Case 002/02, whose closing statements I observed in June 2017, fourteen funded projects are currently being considered by the three Cambodian and two international Trial Chamber judges. Recognition of these projects is expected (as part of the larger judgement) in the third quarter of 2018. These additional fourteen reparations include the play discussed above, as well as a legal archive, dance performance, storybook, graphic novel, song-writing competition, and an internet-enabled app for learning Khmer Rouge history. Most of the reparations are either already completed or well underway; their recognition by the tribunal will be largely retrospective.

All these reparation projects—in their development, resolution and implementation—have involved donors, partner organisations and victims themselves. Many long-standing Cambodian NGOs have helped to develop and implement these projects as partner organisations. As well as involving civil

society, two initiatives have been made possible by the Cambodian government, while other government Ministries—especially the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport—have lent their support to the work of partner organisations on other reparations.

### The politics of reparation

In my research, I am interested in how these reparations have come about. Existing relationships and complex negotiations mean that these initiatives are all in some way political. I am also asking: when, where and for whom is this redress? What is the nature of these reparations, what is their spatial and temporal extent? And what is the relationship between these reparations and other past and present-day memory work in Cambodia? How do the current activities and events arise out of, or directly contest, these other ways of working with the past?

Many of the ECCC reparations have been funded by the German state, while three projects share a large pool of European Union funding. This is not a politically neutral arena; rather, memory work is seen as a means to access a new funding stream by both existing and new organisations. As many of these organisations are headed by overseas-born or educated Cambodians who have returned home from the diaspora, the ‘geography of justice’ of the ECCC extends not only inside but beyond Cambodia’s national borders.

Most of the reparations are creative arts-based projects, adding to an increased role of art and art practice in public dialogue about the past in Cambodia. One of the expected effects of the ECCC reparations is greater cross-cultural and intergenerational dialogue at an interpersonal level. New forms of scholarly or larger-scale historical dialogue, and renovation or contestation of prior political cultures of memory, is also observable.

Many reparations are based in, or travelling into, provincial areas, to places otherwise distanced by rural-urban inequality. In many ways, and perhaps not surprisingly, these ‘projects’ are a continuation of memory work, or historical dialogue, that has been ongoing for decades. This memory work was central to building political legitimacy throughout the country in the post-Khmer Rouge period.

### Change

Between my visits to Cambodia in June 2017 for the final hearings of Case 002/02 and January 2018, there were a few important changes. One change was increased uncertainty and cynicism amongst Cambodians and civil society actors. Researchers and NGO staff were worried about the viability of their ongoing work, many quietly despairing of political debate. With the arrest and detention of the politician Kem Sokha, and the forced closure of the well-known independent newspaper *The Cambodia Daily*, many in Cambodia are concerned about the future.

Another change was the relative quiet at the ECCC, with no more Trial Chamber hearings for now. As the judges deliberate Case 002/02, reparation activities continue elsewhere. On tour with the Courageous Turtle, at a new memorial installation site, and in the rooms of the new Legal Documentation Centre, the legacies of the ECCC are only just emerging. In the words of Prim Phloeu, Executive Director of Cambodia Living Arts:

[the process of] finding justice has used the arts [because] you have to recreate and reimagine what was the past and how can we also tell those stories, but in a way that [...] is about creating dreams, creating a future, creating something that people can relate to.

Rachel Hughes is a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Geography at the University of Melbourne. Her interests include the politics and geopolitics of the memorialisation of the Khmer Rouge regime, and the social and political legacies of the current Khmer Rouge Tribunal (the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia).  
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### Notes

- 1 ECCC Civil Party Lead Co Lawyers’ final claim for reparation in Case 002/02 (Doc. No. E457 6 2 1) p. 12.
- 2 *Ibid.*



Ven Keana (left) and Sum Momykeo (right) perform the play ‘The Courageous Turtle’. photo: Rachel Hughes



Photo: Rachel Hughes



## Fighting impunity through family stories: photography and Indonesia's 1965 killings

Ken Setiawan

*Titik Awal (Starting Point)* depicts Luweng Grubug, a vertical cave in Wonosari, central Java. Between November 1965 and January 1966, 1500 members of the Indonesian Communist Party and its affiliate organisations were killed here. Image reproduced courtesy of the artist, Rangga Purbaya.

Twenty years since the end of authoritarianism in Indonesia, justice for the crimes committed during the regime of President Suharto (1966-1998) remains elusive. One example is that of the 1965-1966 mass violence, during which approximately 500,000 Indonesian communists and members of affiliated organisations were killed. Another million were arrested and detained for lengthy periods of time, mostly without trial. These events were at the basis of the rise of the authoritarian regime; as such addressing this particular case is important to clearly break with the past.

While in the early years of democratisation Indonesia embarked on a process of significant legal and political reforms, including in the area of human rights and justice for past crimes, those responsible for past crimes have in general not been held to account. Therefore, the country has not been able to break with the culture of impunity instilled during the authoritarian regime. My doctoral research on the Indonesian Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) revealed a number of reasons that explain the organisation's limited effectiveness, which are also relevant to the broader challenges of human rights reform in the country. These include shortcomings in legal drafting, a lack of political will and the ongoing influence of powerful elites opposed to the pursuit of justice.<sup>1</sup>

### The role of photography

As a postdoctoral fellow at The University of Melbourne, I have continued my research on the dynamics of human rights in contemporary Indonesia. One of the most worrying trends of recent years is the rising intolerance against minority groups. A particularly striking example of such increased pressures is that in September 2018, the police – giving into demands of Islamist groups – broke up an event at one of the country's most renowned human rights organisations, the Legal Aid Foundation (LBH) in Jakarta.

The attack on the LBH illustrates both the Indonesian government's failure to resolve past human rights abuses and the limited

social support for justice endeavours. In the specific context of the 1965-1966 violence this is, amongst others, caused by the fear of communism that was instilled into Indonesian society by the Suharto regime. Twenty years on, these "ghosts of 1965"<sup>2</sup> remain a powerful tool to counter progressive groups. In this situation of increased illiberalism, there is an important role to play by civil society actors in raising awareness on human rights issues. At the same time, this task is also fraught with difficulties, including how to prevent their work from being censored.<sup>3</sup>

A few years ago, I became acquainted with Yogyakarta-based photographer Rangga Purbaya (1976) whose work is focused on opening a dialogue on the 1965-66 killings. At first sight, there is little that refers to the violence in his work: Rangga's photographs depict places, people and everyday objects such as notebooks, razors and wooden boxes. Upon closer investigation, however, the images allude to a broader narrative. The objects are old and worn, but because they have been kept with great care, it is evident that they are treasured. The places in the photographs are haunting: an empty street and a vertical cave surrounded by mist. The portraits, mainly of young persons, suggest various messages: some look directly into the camera, others avoid the lens. One young woman is pictured looking at old photographs.

The viewer again has to move closer, with titles and descriptions giving more clues. The image of the vertical cave is titled 'Starting Point' and adds that between 1965 and 1966 the place was a site of mass killing of alleged communists. The photo of the empty street is accompanied by a short story of a daughter looking for her father. We discover that the notebooks and razor belonged to someone called Boentardjo, who – as one can gather from statements accompanying the portraits – is a largely unknown figure, but also a source of pride and respected.

### Family stories

Boentardjo Amaroen was Rangga Purbaya's paternal grandfather. Boentardjo was one of many who was disappeared in 1965 and presumably killed in circumstances that have never been uncovered. As so many

Indonesians of his generation, Rangga grew up unaware of his family's past.<sup>4</sup> But in 1998, a few months after the fall of the Suharto regime, Rangga's parents told him about his grandfather. At the time, he was not sure what to do with the information ("to me, it was just a fact") and continued to focus on his studies and work. While his parents became active in victims' rights organisations, Rangga kept his family history at a distance. Ten years later, however, this changed when Rangga had to pick up his mother when a meeting she attended was threatened by a vigilante group known as the Indonesian Anti Communist Front (FAKI), not dissimilar from the attack on LBH Jakarta mentioned above.

Rangga explained his frustration: "I felt that what they did wasn't tactical, it wasn't strategic. Their events always had a high risk of intimidation. There was no back up plan when things went wrong. My mother was panicking, she was scared". And so, Rangga decided to make the story of his family – and the bigger story of the 1965 killings – central to his work for the first time. He researched his grandfather's documents, which had been kept by an aunt, and he spoke to family members, but many were reluctant to open old wounds. In general, Rangga found the younger generation more receptive and decided to tell the story of his grandfather primarily through them.

There are two main distinguishing characteristics of Rangga Purbaya's work. The first is that direct references to violence are absent. As Rangga explained, this was a deliberate choice he made as an artist, wanting to present something new. This aspect differentiates his work from other visual artists, who have portrayed the 1965 violence explicitly. At the same time, I see the absence of direct references to violence in his work also as a reflection of his position as someone born long after the events took place. The absence of violence almost automatically triggers a conversation between the viewer and the artist about the places, objects and people portrayed, eventually bringing us to Boentardjo and his fate, and the broader context of the 1965 killings.

A second characteristic of Rangga's work is the central place of the family. Family is, so he has found, a relatively easy way to talk about the 1965 killings. "I've decided to

address 1965 from a perspective that I know best: my family. It's easier than talking about people you don't know. Also, when I talk about my personal history, that of my family, people often become more open. Often, they start talking about their families, too".

Together, these two elements allow for a dialogue on family, collective history and loss, as well as hopes for the future. The creation of a conversation is one of Rangga's main objectives, who argues that interpersonal dialogue is crucial for reconciliation: "before we can reconcile, people need to be aware of what has happened, so they can see the event from various perspectives". His work also underlines that in a context of rising illiberalism, personal stories are both a powerful and gentle tool to continue discussions on past wrongs and directions towards a more just future.

Ken Setiawan is a McKenzie Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne's Asia Institute. She has a PhD in Law from Leiden University, the Netherlands. Her research interests include globalisation and human rights, the sociology of law, transitional and historical justice, as well as reconciliation and reparation. She is the author of *Promoting Human Rights: National Human Rights Commissions in Indonesia and Malaysia* (Leiden University Press, 2013). [setiawan.k@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:setiawan.k@unimelb.edu.au)

### Notes

- 1 See, for instance, Setiawan, K. 2016. 'From Hope to Disillusion: the Paradox of Komnas HAM, the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 172 (1):1-32.
- 2 Kuddus, R. 2017. 'The Ghosts of 1965. Politics and Memory in Indonesia', *New Left Review* 104:45-92.
- 3 Indonesia has a vocal human rights movement. For a recent discussion of Indonesian civil society and the 1965-1966 violence see Kuddus, 2017.
- 4 All quotes of Rangga Purbaya in this piece are from my interview with him on 10 January 2018.

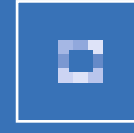
# Northeast Asia's engagements with the Middle East

Ilhong Ko

Northeast Asia's links with the Middle East can be traced back to ancient times, when the two regions were connected via trade routes. The material remains of these trade relations, housed in the museums of Japan, South Korea, and China, are a vivid reminder of the active movement of Arab merchants and goods. In the modern period, engagements between the two regions have extended to the political, as well as economic realms. In this issue of *News from Northeast Asia*, we examine the reality of modern interactions between the Middle Eastern region and the countries of Northeast Asia, focusing on issues such as energy, diplomacy, investment, and military relations.

## SNUAC

Seoul National University Asia Center



The Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC) is a research and international exchange institute based in Seoul, South Korea. The SNUAC's most distinctive feature is its cooperative approach in fostering research projects and international exchange program through close interactions between regional and thematic research programs about Asia and the world. To pursue its mission to become a hub of Asian Studies, SNUAC research teams are divided by different regions and themes. Research centers and programs are closely integrated, providing a solid foundation for deeper analysis of Asian society.

Of the Northeast Asian countries, Japan was the first to establish formal economic relations with the Middle East in the modern period. The way in which these economic, and later political, relations developed throughout the 20th century to the present day is addressed by Akiko Yoshioka, Senior Analyst at the JIME Center-IEEJ, in 'Relations between Japan and the Middle East'. For South Korea, the Gulf region has been a 'land of opportunities' since the 1970s. In 'Reinventing the Middle East? South Korea's Engagements with the Gulf amid Geopolitical Conflicts', June Park of Seoul National University discusses the potentials and risks facing South Korea's maneuvers in the Middle East. China's presence in the Middle East is considerable indeed, and its influence in the

region is expected to increase even further. In an attempt to present a multi-faceted view of China-Middle East relations, two perspectives are presented. The way in which China envisages its role in, and relationship with, the region is first illustrated by Tsinghua University's Tingyi Wang in 'China and the Middle East: Old Friends in a New Era'. The reality of China's engagements in the Middle East is then examined by Ceren Ergenç of Middle East Technical University in 'China's Relations with the Middle East: A Perspective from the Region'.

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## Relations between Japan and the Middle East

Akiko Yoshioka

The beginning of the 20th century saw a rapid increase in Japan's demand for oil, along with the introduction of motor vehicles and warfare, while domestic oil production had already peaked at the time. Safeguarding a stable supply of oil became a keystone of Japan's energy security, which led Japan to the Middle East, as well as Asia and Russia.

Japan's first import of Middle Eastern oil took place in 1921 from Iran.<sup>1</sup> After World War II, Japanese demand for oil continued to increase, for postwar reconstruction and economic growth. Despite failing in Saudi Arabia and Iraq in the 1930s due to insufficient development funds and technical capacities,<sup>2</sup> Japan's endeavor to secure crude oil by developing oil wells eventually succeeded in 1957, when the Arabian Oil Company gained concession of the Khafji field at the neutral zone between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. However, since most of Japan's oil was imported through major Western oil companies that controlled vast resources

by concession agreements, Japan's relations with Middle Eastern countries, albeit important, were not considered vital.

A paradigm shift occurred in 1973 when the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) implemented an oil embargo after the fourth Arab-Israeli war. Japan had failed to be categorized as an Arab-friendly nation and was informed of an export reduction. The news caused a so-called 'toilet-paper panic' among the Japanese who believed paper production would soon stop, leading to massive purchases. The oil crisis accelerated inflation, which led the government to introduce a legal framework to prevent the hoarding of goods and the arbitrary hiking of prices. This event inspired some serious rethinking with regard to Japan's energy security and its relations with the Middle East. As a new initiative to understand Middle East geopolitics and to strengthen ties, the Japanese Institute of Middle Eastern Economies (JIME), the predecessor of JIME Center-IEEJ, was established in 1974.

On the energy security front, the national oil stockpile, which did not exist in 1973, is now secured for more than 100 days, and energy-saving measures have become prevalent in Japanese society. The Japanese government also increased the use of nuclear energy and natural gas in an attempt to diversify its primary energy supply. Therefore, the share of oil among primary energy sources decreased significantly from 75.5% in 1973 to 41.1% in 2015.<sup>3</sup> However, in terms of dependence on Middle Eastern oil, not much has changed; the current share of the oil supply coming from the Middle East is more than 80%, higher than the 77.5% in 1973—although it did temporarily decrease in 1987 to 69.7%. In 2015, four Middle Eastern nations—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar—provided as much as 75.4% of Japan's oil. Since 1975, either Saudi Arabia or the UAE have been top oil exporters to Japan; meanwhile, UAE, Qatar, and Oman provide a quarter share of Japan's natural gas supply. In 2011 Qatar doubled its gas export to Japan following the suspension of nuclear power operations caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake, and became Japan's third gas provider besides Australia and Malaysia.<sup>4</sup> Since the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) has predicted that oil and natural gas will continue to make up about half of Japan's primary energy in 2030, relations with the Middle East shall remain the most important for Japan's energy security.

Relations between Japan and the Middle East have grown outside the realm of energy in past decades. The Middle East is an important market for the automobiles and machinery export, as well as for infrastructure development for Japanese companies, who have also worked on enhancing human resources and technical cooperation in various fields through government support. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been engaged in several reconstruction projects after the Iraq War in 2003, such as power plants, water-supply systems, communication networks, oil refineries, and fertilizer factories. At the beginning of the 21st century, some gulf airlines introduced direct flights to Japan and contributed to raising the profile of Arab Gulf countries among the Japanese. Dubai has now become a well-known tourist destination among the Japanese, in addition to the historic cities of Istanbul and Cairo.

Beyond these economic aspects, the Middle East has also been the center stage of national security discussions, especially since the end

of the Cold War. During the Gulf Crisis and the Gulf War in 1990–1991, the Japanese government maintained a rather tentative approach to the hostage situation in Iraq, where hundreds of Japanese were used as human shields; at the same time they were asked by the United States to contribute militarily in the war as an ally. It was the first time post-World War II that Japan had to deal with an international conflict. Even though Japan ended up spending as much as \$13 billion, the *ad hoc* policy was not appreciated in the international community, and the Gulf War is now remembered as a diplomatic defeat. Since then, Japan has pursued a 'Proactive Contribution to Peace' policy, sending the Self-Defense Force (SDF) overseas mainly through peace-keeping operations with the UN. A new law in 2007 upgraded international operations as the primary mission of the SDF. So far, the SDF has been deployed to the Persian Gulf (1991), the Golan Heights (1996–2013), Iraq (2004–2008), Sudan (2008–2011), and South Sudan (2011–2017), as well as other Asian and African countries.

Japan's active political and economic engagement with the Middle East, at both government and private levels, aims to achieve peace and stability in these countries. For this purpose, Japan has been deeply involved in the Middle East peace process since the 1990s. However, Japan lacks the political leverage to be an influential mediator between parties in conflict because of stringent constitutional limitations on the military sphere, despite the historical advantage of neutrality it has enjoyed in the Middle East compared to European countries. Therefore, Japan's approach to energy security and strengthening relations with the Middle East has been and will be mainly to focus on the economic field, including a steady and long-term commitment to human and social development.

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## Reinventing the Middle East? South Korea's engagements with the Gulf amid geopolitical conflicts

June Park

South Korean industries take great pride in having constructed some of the most monumental infrastructures in the Gulf since the 1970s. The oil shock of 1973 prompted a spike in oil prices and allowed for petrostates in the Gulf to initiate an economic development agenda focusing on infrastructure, across Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran and Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Following the Asian Financial Crisis of the 1990s, South Korean construction companies—notably Samsung C&T, Hyundai Engineering & Construction, GS Engineering & Construction—have constantly looked into opportunities in the region.<sup>2</sup> The expansion of South Korea's economic engagements with Gulf States is coupled with its cultural charm offensive of the Korean Wave (*hallyu*), and exports of 'Made in Korea' products ranging from halal-certified foods to electronics and autos.<sup>3</sup>

South Korea stands at a pivotal turning point for diversification of trading partners, as it continues to rely on an economic model heavily dependent on exports—with a huge concentration on China and the United States as export destinations. Along with Southeast Asia, the Middle East region is all the more important for the South Korean economy as an alternative export destination. But as the relationships between South Korea and the Gulf states deepen, despite the positive effects of increased level of engagements, South Korea's engagements in the region are not without potential risks as the Middle East is by far one of the world's most geopolitically complex regions.

Energy is the most crucial component in South Korea-Middle East transactions, and the main drive for South Korean outward investments in the region. As Asian demand for Middle Eastern energy continues to grow, South Korea is one of the biggest consumers of Gulf oil and natural gas.<sup>4</sup> South Korea's first overseas nuclear power plant building project in the UAE and installation of a nuclear reactor for a joint research project in Jordan brought about subsequent interests from Saudi Arabia. As the Gulf states look toward diversifying their energy sources, they look to Northeast Asia—China, Japan, and South Korea—for provision of nuclear and renewable energy sources.

Yet, South Korea manifested patterns of disorganization and corruption in its investments for energy resources in Iraq during the Lee Myung-bak presidency (2008 to 2013). As one of the major buyers of Iraqi oil, South Korea has made deliberate miscalculations in its investments in oil drilling and liquefaction projects in pre-ISIS Iraq. Its public investments in Akkas, Mansuria, Badra and Zubayr under the Lee Myung-bak presidency were considered catastrophic failures, incurring huge losses of the South Korean taxpayers' money, and investigations into the investments under the Moon administration have culminated in Lee's arrest in March 2018.

In the pre-ISIS era, South Korea also suffered from misreading local politics, as the Korea National Oil Corporation and SK Energy were excluded by the Iraqi Central Government in Baghdad in the 2008 bidding process for oil fields development, due to their previous involvement in oil liquefaction projects with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq. When the Iraq War ended in 2011, South Korean industries sought for a revival of economic engagements with the region, but the interwar period did not last long and investment projects would soon be stalled due to the Syrian war that broke out in 2011, and the subsequent rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014.



President Moon Jae-in and Suhail bin Mohammed Faraj Faris Al Mazrouei, UAE Minister of Energy and Industry, during the South Korean president's state visit to the UAE in March 2018. Image courtesy of The Republic of Korea Cheong Wa Dae (Blue House).

With the effects of the KRG referendum of 2017 becoming obsolete, South Korean firms are now vying for new opportunities in Iraq, notably in infrastructure and technology for democratic growth. South Korean conglomerate Hanhwa's construction of residential apartments in Bismiyah New City of the Baghdad Governorate<sup>5</sup> and South Korean IT firm Miru Systems' successful bid for sale of electronic voting machines for Iraqi local and parliamentary elections to the Baghdad Government signaled the beginning of South Korea-Iraq partnerships toward reconstruction in post-ISIS Iraq.<sup>6</sup>

While South Korea could indeed play the role of a facilitator in Iraqi democracy and governance through such partnerships—resembling Iraq as a former war-stricken country that went through democratic transitions and breakthroughs in the 1980s—South Korea's own controversies in the 2012 presidential elections, entailing manipulation of vote count methods via automated voting machines, let alone its previous experiences of vote count controversies in the presidential elections of Sungman Rhee, the first Korean president, and authoritarian leaders Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-whan, attest to certain limits of the South Korean model of democracy and South Korean transfer of democratic governance toolkit to post-ISIS Iraq.<sup>7</sup> Whether South Korea as a US ally would be able to proactively engage with Iraq on projects other than oil, and whether its assistance could help shape Iraq's governance structure towards democracy, remains to be seen.

While it is widely understood that South Korea's main security concern is North Korea, South Korea has been involved in a series of broader security roles in the Middle East from the 2000s. Into the new millennium, South Korea's pursuits in the Middle East were centered around achieving economic interests, but with combined military engagements.

Post-9/11, with the U.S. declaration of war on Iraq in 2003, South Korea was obligated as a U.S. ally to deploy troops to Erbil of the Kurdistan autonomous region of Northern Iraq (now Kurdistan Regional Government: KRG) upon the U.S. request to send additional forces on 4 September 2003. The Zaitun Division, composed of 600 military medics and engineers, operated in Iraq as contingent of the Republic of Korea from 2004 to 2008. In 2018, nine years after its signing, a secret military pact between the Republic of Korea and the United Arab Emirates obligating South Korean deployment of special forces to the UAE on a regular basis, without South Korean national assembly approval, came to light.<sup>8</sup> The pact proved to be instrumental in finalizing the South Korean bid for the Barakah nuclear power plant in the UAE under Lee Myungbak. Nonetheless, the Moon administration's decision to embark on a more strategic partnership with the UAE reveals South Korea's vested economic interests on outward investments in the renewable and nuclear energy sectors in the coming years, despite its internal reluctance to delve into the region with military pursuits.<sup>9</sup>

The Middle East is a complicated region in many aspects, and a power vacuum gradually develops in uncertainty. Russia under Putin remains engaged in Syria, but the U.S. under Trump sways between engagement and withdrawal, while China seeks more active involvement economically and politically in the region. The Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry is intensifying via proxy wars in Yemen and Syria. South Korea's engagements could thus be a double-edged sword due to the geopolitical complexities in the region, particularly owing to South Korea's own military engagements with the U.S. that have been deemed a priority for South Korea in the postwar period. Participation of a middle power such as South Korea in the management and reconstruction

of a post-conflict state of Iraq and strategic partnership with a Sunni state would entail certain levels of risks for South Korea going forward. Such risks may be compounded as decision making processes are convened by omnipotent presidencies in the South Korean political system. South Korea's maneuvers in the Middle East will require careful treading, as North Korea's ties with other Middle Eastern countries could also potentially jeopardize South Korea's position in the region.

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## China's relations with the Middle East: a perspective from the region

Ceren Ergenc



President Xi Jinping. © Creative Commons. Courtesy UN on flickr.

After thirty years of domestic development and consolidation, China has entered a new phase in which its international aspirations are clearly pronounced; it is redefining its role in the international system. The Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) in particular signals a new type of regionalization in the making, with its bilateral projects with countries and regions beyond China's immediate borders. One of these regions is the Middle East, where this realignment is intertwined with political and economic concerns.

China's relations with the Middle East were initially shaped by Cold War dynamics. While China did not intend to be actively involved in the region's affairs, it took a stance within the framework of the 'Third Worldism' of the Mao-era. China's relations with the Middle East were predominantly political during the Cold War period. Given China's pro-Palestinian attitude, Egypt, a leading member of the Arab (Socialist) League, became the first Arab country to recognize the People's Republic of China in 1956, while the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in the West Camp refused to recognize it until Sino-US normalization in 1972. In return, China did not establish diplomatic relations with Israel until 1992. China recognized Palestine in 1988 with which it had maintained political, cultural and economic relations since the early 1960s.

Turkey also did not establish diplomatic relations with China until 1971. Turkey had received a high number of Uyghur refugees throughout the 1950s, following the consolidation of China's borders. Consequently, Turkey served as one of the major hubs of the Uyghur diaspora in the following decades. The activities of the Uyghur diaspora leaders in Istanbul remained a source of discordance between the Turkish and Chinese governments even after the establishment of diplomatic relations.<sup>1</sup>

In short, China's relations with the Middle East until the 1980s were shaped by two factors: Cold War-era political rivalries and China's own domestic security concerns. The post-Mao years would witness the centrality of economic motivations.

Currently, China's relationship with the Middle East has three dimensions: Economic, international political, and domestic/regional security concerns. In assessing each of these dimensions, China's uneasy relationship with the Middle East due to clashes of economic, diplomatic and security interests in the region can be highlighted. Japan and South Korea were the primary East Asian economic partners of the Middle East during the 1970s and 1980s. China slowly became an economic partner as its dependency on the region's energy resources grew from the 1980s. China's economic interests in the Middle East focus on four aspects: energy, trade, service labor, and the construction industry/investment. China has become an energy importer following the exponential growth of its industries. The Middle East supplies more than half of China's oil needs and in return, China is the largest buyer of MENA oil.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the Middle East is one of the central zones of the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) of China launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013. BRI is the proactive foreign policy of China that aims at channeling out excessive domestic capital, creating employment for China's skilled and unskilled workforce, and fostering bilateral interdependencies in Asia, Europe and Africa. The BRI includes the Middle East through major infrastructure investment policies, such as the Suez Canal, which is central to the 'maritime Road' part of the BRI. Israel and Iran are also included in the BRI: Iran through the Tehran railway that connects to the China-Pakistan route, and Israel through the Red-Med project that aims at connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. Both railway projects are central to the 'land-bound Belt' part of the BRI.

The BRI is primarily based on the construction industry, as exemplified in Kuwait's Silk City.<sup>3</sup> China's infrastructure investment in the construction industry is a welcomed development against the economic slowdown Arab countries have been facing following the political instability in the aftermath of the Arab Spring or dropping oil prices.<sup>4</sup>

Besides these economic motivations, China appears willing to be involved in regional political affairs as a tool to consolidate its image as a responsible world power. China's traditional foreign policy doctrine, Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, formulated in 1953, upholds non-intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign states. Such an approach prevented China from getting involved in regional conflicts as a moderator or an external actor that could change the balance of power. However, China has recently made moves signaling a more proactive foreign policy. In the Arab-Israeli conflict, China maintains its position of advocating a two-state solution as manifested in the 2016 Arab Policy paper.<sup>5</sup> However, Chinese academic and cultural institutions also do not participate in the boycott against Israel, which makes China a welcome candidate for mediation between the two parties.

As for the Syrian civil war, China has been following international institutional channels such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the International Syria Support Group, and has acted as Special Envoy in the Syrian Peace Talks following Russia's proposals. Therefore, China is perceived as a part of a coalition with Russia and partly with Iran on the Syrian peace process.<sup>6</sup> The reason that China does not act more forthcoming regarding the Syrian crisis is due to the outcome of the Libyan civil war during the Arab Spring period. China did not object to the UNSC resolution to intervene in the Libyan civil war but when the intervention caused the overthrowing of the Qaddafi regime,

China felt its main foreign policy principle, non-violation of state sovereignty, had been compromised.<sup>7</sup>

Turkey is currently ambivalent about China's position in the Syrian crisis, although it previously collaborated in a military drill with China in 2010 on the condition that Israel be excluded. The military drill was followed by a missiles deal with China which was abruptly and unilaterally canceled by Turkey in 2014 in response to NATO's protests.<sup>8</sup> Prospects for a closer alliance with China and membership to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are often pronounced by the current Turkish government as a sign of its new multifaceted, less Western-oriented, foreign policy orientation.<sup>9</sup> In short, China is gradually emerging as a global power involved in regional affairs.

While China appears willing to act as a responsible global power, its own domestic security concerns prove its involvement in the Middle East region to be less than smooth. There are two main domestic concerns that shape China's involvement in the Middle East: Middle Eastern relations with the Uyghur minority in China, and the impact of the Arab Spring on China's public opinion. China's relations with Turkey have followed a tumultuous path given the former's soft attitude towards the Uyghur separatist movement. While the movement's headquarters were removed from Istanbul following the Turkish government's 'China pivot' in the early 2000s,<sup>10</sup> China is concerned that there is an increasing number of Chinese nationals of Uyghur background joining ISIS in Syria with the intention to go back to China via Turkey.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, China imposes visa restrictions on Turkish nationals even though China and Turkey enjoy warm relations at the presidential level, as demonstrated in the 2014 G-20 Summit in Hangzhou where Turkish president Erdogan was a keynote speaker along with Russian president Putin.

China's approach towards the popular protests in Iran and the Arab Spring has been cautious, as it perceives these popular protests against governments to be detrimental towards China's domestic stability concerns. However, China's reluctance to take a stance against the Arab regimes during the Arab Springs led to a loss of credibility for the country in Arab public opinion.<sup>12</sup>

To conclude, China has been heavily involved in Middle Eastern affairs in recent years. While its economic involvement is welcomed by the regional actors, political and security concerns create obstacles for China to be perceived as a global power central to regional affairs in the Middle East.

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## China and the Middle East: old friends in a new era

Tingyi Wang

It is quite unusual to see a state keeping good relationships with all the Middle East countries. In January 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping made his first state-visit to the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran. This symbolic visit marked the rapidly developing relationships between China and the Middle East. The ambitious initiatives of Xi's presidency, such as 'One Belt One Road', Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the Silk Road Fund, all have linkages with the Middle East. Connections between China and the Middle East date back to around 2000 years ago to China's Han dynasty. Now both sides are entering a new era as old friends.

China is a strategic partner of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, and it also maintains frequent high-level contacts with Israel, Turkey, and other states. Very few state leaders could pay state visits to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran at the same time and receive warm welcomes, as President Xi did in 2015. Just before Xi's departure, China issued its first 'Arab Policy Paper' since 1949, which is a milestone of Sino-Arab relations. China was also determined to play an active role in the Palestine-Israel Peace Process, and held the Palestinian-Israeli Peace Symposium in Beijing in 2017.

Besides warming up diplomatic and political interactions, China has already become the largest trade partner of many Middle East countries. 'Make Trade, Not War' – trade and peace are China's two main objectives in this region. So far, around 300,000 Chinese nationals live and work in the United Arab Emirates. They mainly stay at the 'Dragon City', a well-known bazaar city crowded with Chinese businessmen, located next to Dubai. It is estimated that at least a million Chinese now live in the Middle East.

One Belt One Road, or the so called 'New Silk Road' is a worthy attempt, although some may argue that it will be too costly and profits not as good as projected. Despite these arguments, China's trade with the

Middle East is maintained at high levels. To take Sino-Arab trade as an example, China's trade with Arab countries has grown from 36.7 billion USD to 251.2 billion USD between 2004 and 2014. In 2016 the bilateral trade volume reached 231.9 billion USD, with more than half of China's crude oil coming from Arab countries (190.6 million tons, 50.15% of the total amount of 381 million tons).<sup>1</sup> This figure does not include Iran, the fifth largest oil importer to China. As Professor Tim Niblock has noted on China's relations with GCC countries, "For the two centuries preceding 2013, the bulk of Gulf trade was with Western countries ... In 2013, for the first time, China became the largest partner of the Gulf region (taking all eight Gulf countries together)."<sup>2</sup>

Military cooperation between both sides has steadily moved forward. Despite the frequent high level visits and purchases of equipment and weapons, China's military existence in the Middle East is generally 'soft', taking the form of peacekeeping missions in Sudan and Lebanon. China's naval escort fleet also made a number of stops at the ports of Middle Eastern countries and played an important role in evacuations in Yemen in 2015 when civil war broke out. Compared to China's various commercial interests and presence of more than a million Chinese nationals in the Middle East, its military power is relatively weak and so far it only has a limited existence in this region to protect its people and commercial interests. But China may have two ports surrounding the Middle East in the near future: one is Gwadar port in Pakistan and the other is Djibouti port in East Africa.

As for how the Chinese view the Middle East region, there are very different opinions. Some believe that the Middle East is a strategic area for China and will be useful to China's One Belt One Road initiative; others think the area is

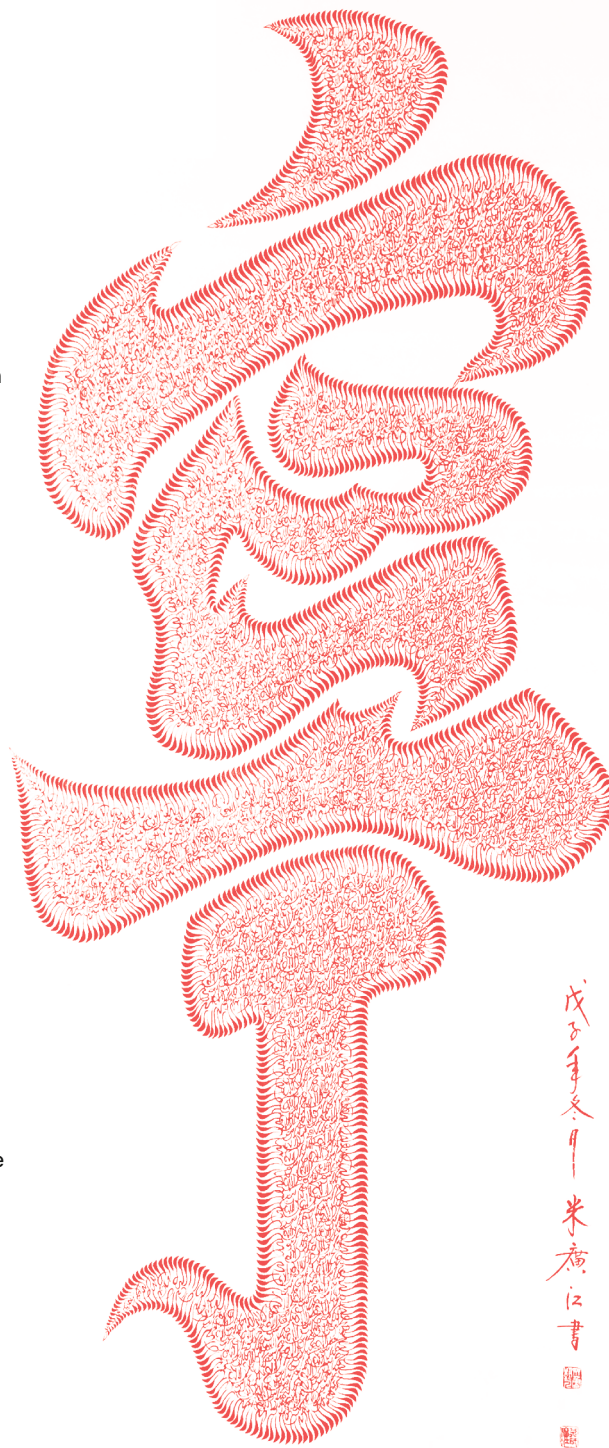
harmful to China's development and just to want keep away from this 'Graveyard of Empires'. But basically, most Chinese people know very little about the Middle East. As for the view from the Middle East, some may appreciate China's non-involvement attitude towards local issues and its maintenance of long-term friendly relations, whilst others may suspect China's intentions in the region and fear that China may become another dominating power as its influence grows.

The challenges to Sino-Middle East relations are obvious, and may cause some problems or even risks in the near future. Firstly, each side has only a limited knowledge or understanding of the other. Although historical connections existed in the past, China's relationship with the Middle East was halted for quite a long time and even after World War II, the Cold War and ideological divisions still played a very negative role in bilateral relations. Until 1992, Israel as the last Middle Eastern country finally established its diplomatic relations with China. Secondly, the turbulence, conflicts, and civil wars taking place in the Middle East have already caused some worries within Chinese society, following the kidnapping and murder of Chinese nationals in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the past few years. Thirdly, China is a newcomer with growing interests in the region but at the same time faces pressures in East and South Asia. Whether China has enough resources and the determination to continue developing its long-term strategic relations with the Middle East countries is still a question with no answer in sight.

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Calligraphy combining the Arabic word 'Salam' and the Chinese character '宁', which both mean 'peace'. Adapted from a photo taken in Riyadh.

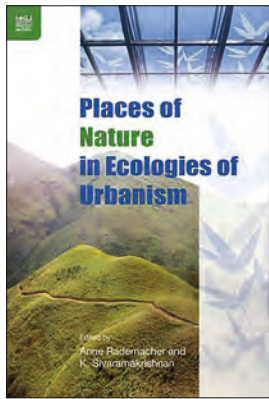


Participants of the 'China-Arab Academic Dialogue', which took place in Beijing in September 2014.

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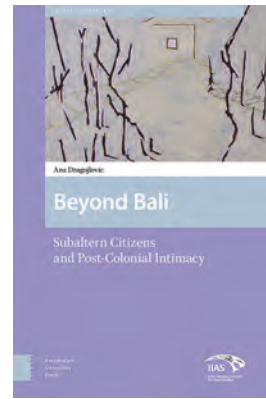
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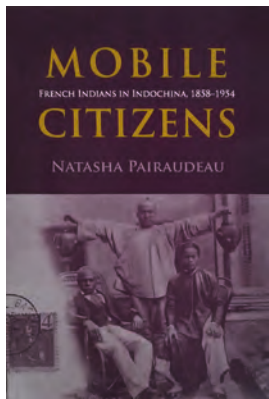
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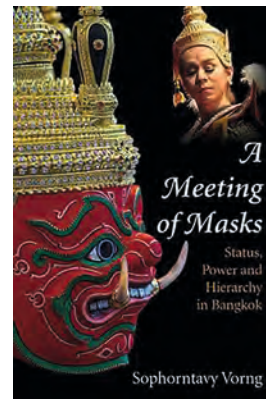
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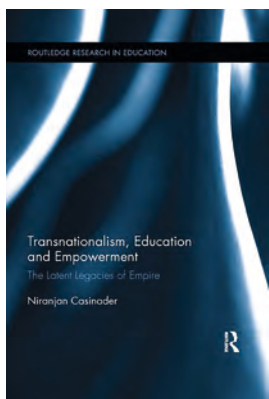
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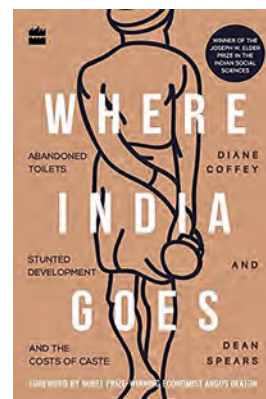
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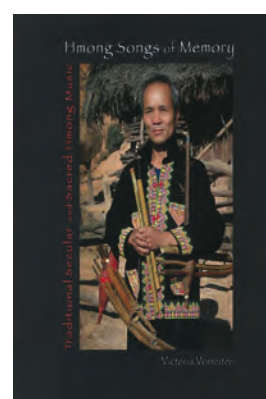
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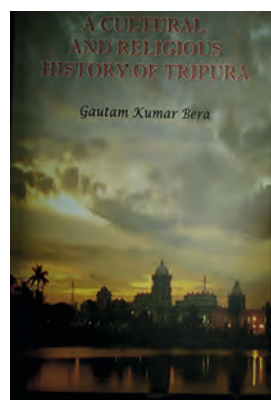
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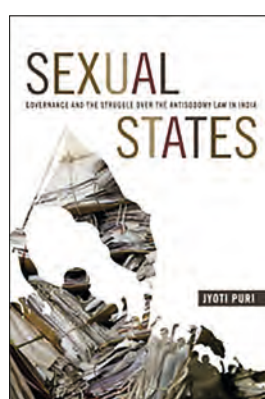
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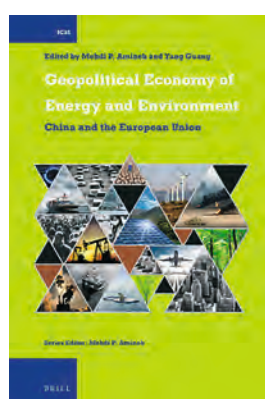
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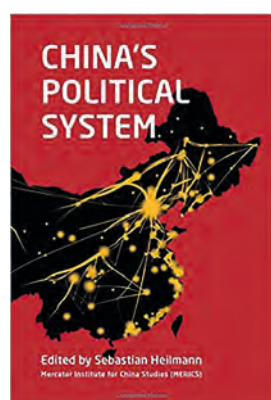
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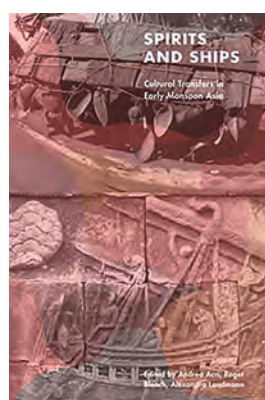


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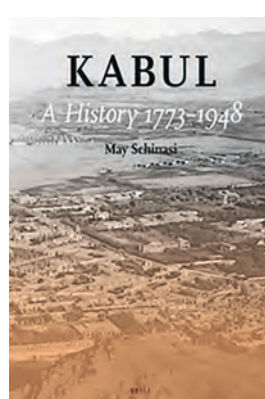
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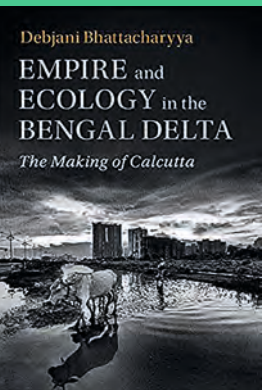
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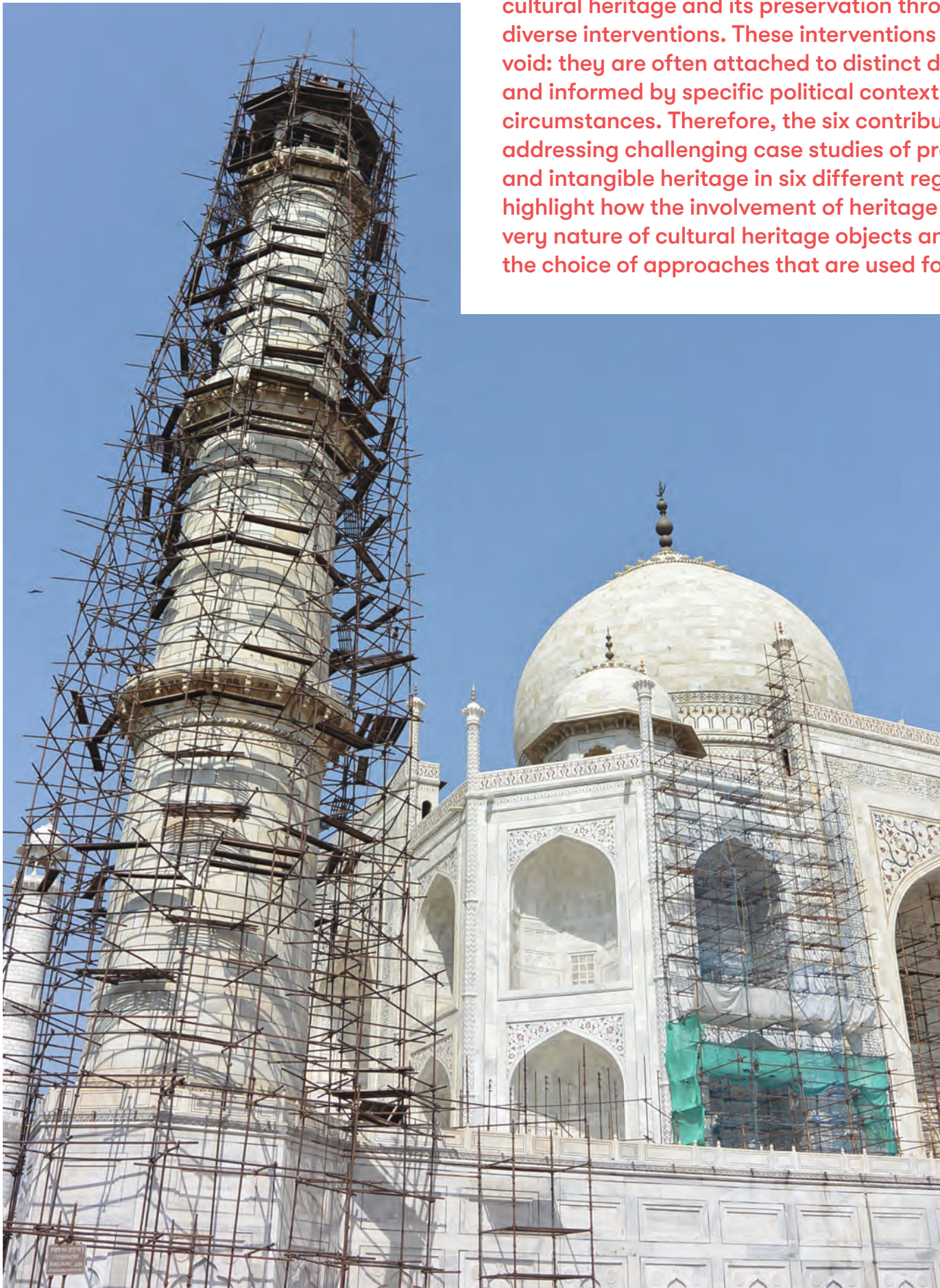
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# Heritage expertise across Asia

Trinidad Rico

This Focus section proposes to examine and study cultural heritage debates less on heritage objects and practices and more on the human agents that create, promote, and study cultural heritage and its preservation through specific and diverse interventions. These interventions do not occur in a void: they are often attached to distinct disciplinary approaches and informed by specific political contexts and historical circumstances. Therefore, the six contributors to this section, addressing challenging case studies of preservation of tangible and intangible heritage in six different regions of Asia, aim to highlight how the involvement of heritage experts affects the very nature of cultural heritage objects and practices, including the choice of approaches that are used for their study.



were applied in the restoration of Buddhist Stupas irreversibly damaged the authentic value of these objects across Thailand as objects of living religious practice.<sup>1</sup> This type of argument propelled both a distinct academic debate on 'alternative' modes of heritage preservation, and also an articulation of a support for alternative approaches to preservation through the formalization of suitable principles and standards for 'non-Western' heritage in policy documents by international heritage safeguarding organizations.

On the other hand, and intimately connected to these developments, a disciplinary interest in 'non-Western' heritage debates and practices called for a better understanding of precisely what a 'non-Western' approach should be, and equally important, who should be authorized to articulate it. The study of heritage in Asia as a territory for heritage studies that has been used to define 'non-Western' heritage approaches has since grown in the direction of a heritage preservation field that frames its study and management within suitable social, historical, political, and especially religious contexts—an effort that aims to bring complexity to a homogeneous idea of 'non-Western'—or 'Eastern'—heritage.

As researchers working on Asian cultural heritage sites, the contributors to this section align with this aim but are also concerned with the way in which we are deeply implicated in the expert roles and voices that are part of the examination of 'Asian' heritage preservation in various ways. For example, we may manage and deploy specific disciplinary forms of expertise in our studies, which originate elsewhere and are brought in to become vernacularized in local contexts. We also examine and engage critically with the work of other experts and their forms of knowledge from our particular disciplinary vantage points, and finally, we construct and perform our own disciplinary expertise through the production of academic debates across different sites as well as globally. Our work connects the specificity of heritage preservation practices in the context of Asia with broader debates in regional and international scales, examining the channels of expertise, their points of origin, destinations, as well as conversations and their adaptations into local contexts and needs. Because of this, a concern with expertise, and the complicated dynamics that are involved, has become germane to a critical heritage turn and the ethical study of heritage preservation and management in contemporary Asia.

It is a very exciting time to be interrogating the value and scope of different forms of cultural heritage expertise that are deployed across Asia for two main reasons. On the one hand, since the late 1980s, global histories of the development of heritage discourses and methods have predominantly highlighted the significance of recognizing a set of opposing territories, practices and experiences, articulated as 'Western' and 'non-Western' heritage approaches. Although this distinction is problematic in itself, what is significant about this turn for the purposes

of the present collection of debates is that the idea that there may be a 'non-Western' approach was built significantly on evidence collected from different sites across Asia. These studies suggested convincingly that a 'Western' model for heritage preservation was incompatible with—often described as destructive—local material and immaterial values and practices surrounding a heritage, and therefore contrary to the aims of cultural heritage preservation. For example, in his early work, Denis Byrne argued that the way in which standards of authenticity

Restoration work at Taj Mahal, 2016.  
Photo by author.

Continued on next page >



Excavation and restoration work of a historic building in Doha, Qatar. Photo by author.

### The contributors

The contributors to this Focus section address the role of experts, expert knowledge, and expert networks in the mediation of cultural heritage value, its management, and its dissemination across various professional and academic platforms. In particular, contributors were asked to consider the intimate relationship between heritage value, its preservation, and the disciplines that approach them, as well as their own roles as disciplinary agents and knowledge-brokers in the transmission of specific forms of expertise—carrying forms of knowledge and methodologies that construct knowledge about, and together with, the field and its interlocutors. This ongoing debate unfolds through different active or completed research projects across field sites in various countries of Asia: Syria, Afghanistan, (Western) Indonesia, (Eastern) Indonesia, China, and Japan. While there are many scholars involved in this type of work across regions of Asia and the world, this section curates a few archetypal voices from different disciplinary angles, including views from Anthropology, Archaeology, Art History, Heritage Studies and Sociology. This overview, therefore, aims to give a sense of the mosaic of issues that are encountered in the field when heritage preservation is put to work by the hands of experts in different contexts, while also hoping to draw out common challenges and concerns that may inspire us to think of new ways to support and/or challenge different forms of expertise in accordance with concerns articulated collectively as ‘heritage ethics’.

In the opening article in this section, Salam Al Quntar offers a discussion on the way in which different forms of expertise address the challenges of preserving heritage resources in war-torn Syria. Considering the immense level of interest that the ongoing conflict has brought to the fate of heritage resources, Al Quntar identifies an issue that underscores disciplinary and institutional approaches alike: the absence of Syrian-centered approaches to the safeguarding of heritage value and heritage resources. Instead, she points out, efforts have been often directed towards hyper-visible initiatives for Western audiences and the mobilization of heritage concerns in diplomatic transactions—which Al Quntar likens to the use of heritage for propaganda by the perpetrators of destructive practices.

Constance Wyndham brings a second challenging case study in the examination of heritage expertise, focusing on her research in Bamyan, Afghanistan. In this piece, she lays out a complicated landscape of experts and local stakeholders that unfolds throughout the reconstruction efforts and debates surrounding the destroyed Bamyan Buddhas. Her work narrates the interplay

between different forms of disciplinary expertise, that is, different conservation and heritage management agencies, which territorialize through their work the ruins of the famous Buddhas. This piece captures in particular the way in which local groups are not only excluded but also unable to perceive the differences between the various international bodies of foreign experts working on this heritage site. The outcome of these negotiations, which mobilize concepts of authenticity in accordance with different regional and institutional interpretations, causes confusion among local stakeholders and experts.

Cut Dewi follows this collection of debates with a commentary from Western Indonesia through her study of post-disaster Banda Aceh, on the island of Sumatra. In this piece, she highlights a dynamic that is often observed in ‘non-Western’ heritage territories, where heritage experts foreign and local alike deploy standards of expertise that are damaging to the preservation of local heritage value. Considering expert assessments and processes of selection that actively exclude the restoration of active ‘living’ mosques, Dewi critiques a dominant heritage practice that fails to acknowledge its Western colonial legacy, advocating instead for forms of expertise that devise ways to embrace Indonesia as a stand-alone territory.

In contrast, Joella van Donkersgoed observes a different embrace of colonial legacies for the preservation of heritage resources in Eastern Indonesia. In the Banda Islands, she documents the development of a heritage industry that openly welcomes Western experts to highlight and protect Dutch heritage resources on the island as part of a broader legacy of economic wellbeing and

resource exploitation that has characterized the island through the Spice trade. This, however, does not happen without conflict between local and foreign ideas of restoration. Aesthetically, she documents the restoration of Nassau Fort as a process that causes tension between disciplinary standards of restoration and local perceptions of authenticity that go against modern approaches to the conservation and management of heritage resources. Logistically, local stakeholders resent the type of workforce that is used to carry out restoration work as something that somewhat affects the authenticity of the restoration work itself.

Moving eastward, to China, Qioayun Zhang discusses heritage preservation debates and policies that surround the preservation of intangible cultural heritage for the ethnic Qiang people in the aftermath of the Wenchuan earthquake of 2008. Considering governmental efforts to preserve this previously unsupported heritage resource, she examines the way in which the local Qiang have reacted to expert assessment and subsequent monetization of their skills as their newly-heritagized cultural resource was drawn into the post-disaster limelight, and the challenges involved in maintaining authenticity in these practices. This case study cautions against the use of intangible heritage practices in nationalist agendas at the expense of alienating practices from their rightful practitioners. Zhang also highlights the uneasy relationship between heritage preservation and the religious practices that rely on entirely different forms of authority and expertise in order to assess authenticity and value.

A final contribution from Tomoe Otsuki describes a challenging expert involvement in the identification and protection at a global

level of Christian sites in Nagasaki, Japan, as a process that has compromised the authenticity of an important narrative that has the opportunity to be revealed and communicated through heritage constructs. Through a process that involved grassroots, governmental, and international experts at different stages, this piece brings forth the complicated relationship between foreign experts and local forms of knowledge production that are able to reveal unknown, concealed, and extremely sensitive ‘hidden’ historical and social facts in Japan. In addition, Otsuki challenges the selective use of different historical and ethnographic sources that are used by foreign experts to support the work of heritage preservation, suggesting instead a better incorporation of local archives of knowledge in order to construct heritage resources more ethically.

### Charting expertise

Although the six case studies featured in this issue are diverse, they do problematize coherently some of the key concerns for critical heritage studies in this region. A theme that weaves these case studies together is a concern with heritage ethics, that is, a concern with not just the type of expertise that is deployed to resolve specific heritage preservation challenges, but also with the forms of self-assessment that may (or may not) be used alongside standards, methodologies, and the authority of disciplinary archives and knowledges. Experts, however critically trained, are not immune to perpetuating dominant frameworks through the work of heritage identification and management, and Eurocentrism in cultural heritage preservation approaches is not simply resolved through interventions applauded in critical heritage studies. Despite a growing concern with marginalized voices and agendas that have propelled the critical heritage turn, an under-development of new and alternative methodological discussions that accompany this turn in heritage studies means that interventions often normalize foreign ontologies. The interplay of international, regional, and local expertise today makes the work of heritage preservation a true cosmopolitan venture. This is not simply due to the networked nature of heritage preservation organizations, but also the hybrid identity of approaches that make the identification of ‘the local’ increasingly challenging: local expert authorities may partake in self-colonization through the systematic use of foreign tools, and local stakeholder groups may exercise their agency through the willing assimilation of foreign principles in order to gain authentic control of a heritage resource and its future. In this sense, expert networks become increasingly reticent to being identified as ‘local’ or ‘foreign’.

Therefore, moving forward, a concern within the growth of a critical heritage methodology is not simply to challenge forms of expertise but to confront the disciplinary baggage of Heritage Studies in order to challenge categorical distinctions between different levels of locality that are used to inform research questions and methodologies. Looking beyond nationalities, languages, and institutional arrangements, there is a construction of knowledge that travels very effectively ‘under the radar’ in the form of best practices, standards, and disciplinary languages that originate in the same colonial centers and are deployed by ‘foreign’, ‘local’, and ‘hybrid’ experts alike. The challenge is, therefore, to assess how this hybridity affects the work of characterizing the relative value of highly politicized types of expert knowledge, and to examine the effects of how and when these categorical boundaries are erected or erased.

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### Notes

- 1 Byrne, D. 1995. ‘Buddhist Stupa and Thai Social Practice’, *World Archaeology* 27(2):266-281.



Heritage construction at work in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Photo by author.

# Palmyra and expert failure

Salam Al Quntar

Since the outbreak of Syria's civil war in 2011, Syrian cultural heritage has suffered extensive destruction resulting from collateral bombing damage, military use, intentional destruction, and looting. As discussed in relation to the international failure to respond to the tragic humanitarian crisis that ensued, the destruction of heritage has created great frustration for the international community of heritage experts, who have focused primarily on obtaining and distributing information about the extent of damage to cultural resources, rather than on the conditions created by the crisis.<sup>1</sup>

In this sense, the Syrian heritage crisis represents what Lynn Meskell has called an "expert failure" to describe the ineffectiveness of professional archaeologists and preservationists to save heritage in a time of conflict.<sup>2</sup> I would argue that traditional expert responses to the crisis by international organizations, spearheaded by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), have shown little tangible benefit to Syrians, to Syrian heritage professionals, and to Syrian cultural heritage.

The majority of appeals made in support of the protection of Syrian heritage have endorsed a notion of universality and neutrality to justify the need to protect this cultural heritage. However, the emphasis by UNESCO on coordinating its efforts through governmental communication channels has resulted in an inability to take effective protective actions and puts to question its commitment to neutrality. The ongoing concerns with the fate of Palmyra, as I discuss in this piece and through my research, demonstrates the failure of UNESCO's commitment to building peace in the minds of women and men. It also attests to the failure of international experts to preserve the heritage of Palmyra in any meaningful and sustainable way. I argue that, in these failed attempts, little consideration has been given to local communities and to Syrian experts as main stakeholders in the preservation of this cultural heritage resource.

## Palmyra

Built around an oasis in the Syrian desert, Tadmur—or Palmyra [city of palms]—was one of the most important trade and cultural centers of the ancient world, with a distinctive local culture that was incorporated into the Roman Empire in the first century CE. More than two centuries later, the city gained independence from Rome, and under its famous Queen Zenobia, established the

Palmyrene empire which annexed much of the Roman east. Palmyra's architecture is notorious for its grand colonnade, a 1100 meter-long Roman street that connects a temple to the god Bel with the area known as the Camp of Diocletian. Other archaeological remains in the ancient city of Palmyra today include an agora, a theatre, urban quarters, and other temples that comprise what is generally considered by scholars to be the finest example of surviving Roman architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean. Also, within the archaeological zone of Palmyra stands the Fakhr-al-Din al-Ma'ani Castle. This heavy fortification dates to the 13th century and offers a spectacular view of the site. The site of Palmyra, inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980, has a defined place in Syrian historical consciousness. Syrians feel a particular connection to the site and take much pride of the once great merchant city that influenced and ultimately defied the power of Rome. Palmyra stands at the literal crossroads of civilizations as the art and architecture of the city is also a perfect portrait of the Fertile Crescent, which features an incredible blend of cultures and traditions: a dynamic culture and a land of inherent pluralism and *mélange* owing to its Mesopotamian, Levantine, Semitic, Greco-Roman, Persian, and Islamic heritage.

Both the modern town and ancient city of Palmyra were caught in the crossfire that marked the Syrian civil war, first starting during early 2013. In 2014, military forces from the Assad regime fortified themselves within the site, further damaging the ruins. In 2015, ISIS forces overran Palmyra, and committed barbaric and monstrous assaults on the people and cultural monuments and artifacts of the city. Throughout these events, the destruction of Palmyra's magnificent monuments provoked an international outcry and prompted significant media attention. At the center of these events, ISIS executed Khaled Al-Ass'ad, the former director of Antiquities at Palmyra and a devoted outstanding archeologist whose work had

been dedicated to this site. Following this shocking execution, ISIS proceeded to destroy many of the most famous ruins in situ—the Bel and Baalshamin temples, the tower tombs, the monumental arch and standing columns—in addition to plundering the Palmyra Museum and destroying a large number of sculptures and artifacts still inside. In March 2016, the Assad forces backed by Russian military support, recaptured Palmyra and immediately started building a Russian military base within the site. Nine months later, in December 2016, ISIS recaptured Palmyra and this time destroyed the tetrapylon and damaged the theater. The Assad regime forces managed to take it back in March 2017.

During this time, the ancient site also witnessed extensive looting operations, which resulted in many Palmyrene artifacts appearing on the antiquity market or being captured by Lebanese and Turkish customs officers. Looting started in the fall of 2011, closely following the uprising in Syria, and as ISIS took occupation of the site, they established the so-called *Diwan al Rikaz* office, giving digging permits in exchange for a tax, applied only for non-figurative objects. However, it is believed that the looters were handing over only unsellable figurative objects to the *Diwan al Rikaz* (presumably to be destroyed by ISIS fighters), while keeping from ISIS those artifacts in good condition that are to be sold to dealers of antiquities on the black market.

## Heritage and preservation as propaganda

Throughout the different shifts in the control of Palmyra, its monuments and artefacts have been used in appalling political propaganda.<sup>3</sup> While ISIS used the ancient theater to stage dramatic executions for circulation on social media, Russian military forces later staged a music concert at the theater to promote an image of a civilized

Russian savior before losing the site to ISIS forces again. As ISIS was driven out of Palmyra in March 2016, and despite the fragile security conditions, UNESCO released a statement on its future plans for Palmyra on 27 March 2016. In this, the organization announced a telephone conversation between the Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, and President Vladimir Putin of Russia during which they discussed the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of Palmyra. Offering "full support for the restoration of Palmyra", this diplomatic display was underscored by the fact that UNESCO openly collaborated with a foreign actor in an issue contextualized by an ongoing civil war, making claims on behalf of a devastated nation. UNESCO's statement came at a time when millions of Syrians were, and still are, displaced as a consequence of the bloody conflict and the people of Palmyra continue to experience

active risk to their lives, including possible detention by the Assad government and the destruction of their homes and heritage. This tone-deaf engagement with heritage preservation in the context of active conflict suggests an absence of ethical concerns.

There are, in addition, equally problematic claims surrounding the preservation of Palmyra from other organizations. During the destruction documented at the site, a number of international research efforts were launched to record the extent of damage to cultural heritage resources in various ways. While analysis of high-resolution satellite imagery has typically been used to record the destruction of monuments by the hands of ISIS,<sup>4</sup> technological advancements in 3-dimensional documentation (3D) are used popularly to produce archival information and promote dissemination of information about cultural heritage sites. For example, the Institute for Digital Archaeology at the University of Oxford has created a 3D model of the destroyed Arch of Triumph in Palmyra using structure-from-motion photogrammetry data,<sup>5</sup> which was then printed as a 3D arch and put on display in London and New York. This initiative prompted a heated debate about the purpose of such an endeavor, both its creation and display, especially considering that the reproduced model not only failed to capture the authenticity of the original structure, but moreover showed a lack of relatedness between this initiative and heritage stakeholders in Syria. In this sense, the display was a 'technological hit' that claimed Western custodianship over an endangered heritage and not much else.

## Reconstruction of Palmyra

Throughout my work as an archaeologist concerned with the ongoing developments in Syria I note that, at various levels of authority, groups of international experts engage with problematic uses of heritage preservation claims without a clear concern for the ethics associated with the work of heritage preservation and management. Instead of promoting a better understanding of the way in which Syrian cultural heritage resources and their fate are mobilized for political or sectarian gains, a concern with an idealistic reconstruction of Palmyra de-sensitizes audiences and other experts alike to the context that gives Palmyra its significance: heritage reconstruction as a reconciling and unifying role in post-conflict Syria, with the Syrian people (not monuments) at the core of the reconstruction process. The day for discussions about the reconstruction of Palmyra will come and it will require a period of reflection about what should be rebuilt, how it should be done, and how recent events of the war and occupation by ISIS should be memorialized, if at all. This is a discussion that will invite voices from institutional and disciplinary heritage expertise. I argue, therefore, that this discussion must be undertaken by Syrians on all sides of the conflict and not decided for Syria by international experts and diplomatic organizations.

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The Arch of Triumph, Palmyra, Syria. Photo by author.

# Bordering on the criminal

## A clash of expertise in Bamyan, Afghanistan

Constance Wyndham

The idea that cultural heritage is increasingly under threat has ushered in a new era for heritage expertise. One example where various regimes of heritage expertise converge is at the site of the destroyed Bamyan Buddhas in Afghanistan. Clashes between these conflicting realms of expertise have resulted in a 'stalemate' over the future of preservation work at the eastern Buddha and affected how local groups understand and relate to the site. As the preservation of damaged heritage is increasingly mobilised as a feature of international post conflict reconstruction programmes, this scenario asks questions about the role of experts and expert knowledge in such heritage interventions.

### Heritage 'at risk' and expertise

While the destruction of the Bamyan Buddhas by the Taliban in 2001 was treated as a new phenomenon, cultural property has often been subject to intentional acts of destruction and iconoclasm. Indeed, 'heritage' and destruction are deeply intertwined because damage to the material and immaterial past often inspires heritage designation.<sup>1</sup> A common response from heritage agencies and professionals to the destruction of the Buddhas was to organise awareness raising initiatives and academic conferences aimed at mitigating threat to heritage. However, asserting such conventions and mechanisms for protecting heritage, which are common in the aftermath of such spectacular attacks, empower the idea that heritage is increasingly endangered which, in turn, provides legitimacy to the construction of specific forms of preservation knowledge, agendas, and policies.<sup>2</sup>

The notion that heritage is under threat gives power to a dominant global approach to heritage preservation that results from an 'Authorised Heritage Discourse' (AHD),<sup>3</sup> a hegemonic discourse that promotes an idea of heritage as monumental, material and permanent, and something to be cared for by trained 'experts'.<sup>4</sup> Here, I will outline how the significant amount of international heritage expertise attracted to the preservation challenges of the Buddha niches – a high profile site that is still perceived to be at risk – affects how local groups understand and relate to this heritage site.

### The authority of experts

The Buddha niches are part of the designated 'Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamyan Valley' inscribed on the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List and World Heritage in Danger List in 2003, two years after their destruction by the Taliban. Due to this designation, any conservation work on the niches must comply with the Operational Guidelines of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972 (also known as the World Heritage Convention) and preserve the Outstanding Universal Value of the site. From the beginning, the conservation efforts at this site have been concerned with the management of international expertise. In Munich in November 2002 the 'Bamyan Expert Work Group' (BEWG) was formed by UNESCO and the National Committee of Germany of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS Germany). Since 2002, this group has met approximately every 18 months in a different city around the world (although only once in Afghanistan in 2005), to debate and discuss plans for the future of the Bamyan valleys' heritage. A small number of Afghans are included at each meeting while the majority of the group consists of international experts from UNESCO, the Japanese National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, the Italian Institute for Protection and Environmental

Research, Italian firm RODIO, Aachen University, Munich Technical University and ICOMOS Germany.

Since 2002, under the umbrella of UNESCO, experts from these heritage agencies and organisations have implemented a highly technical programme of conservation, largely funded by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The focus has been on surveying, measuring and logging of data relating to the niches and the surviving fragments from the blasts, and stabilising the niches of both the eastern and western Buddha. Hundreds of fragments with a recognisable sculpted surface have been recovered, numbered and documented, and are currently housed in temporary buildings constructed at the foot of each niche. Japanese conservators and archaeologists have undertaken an adjunct programme of laser scanning the extensive network of caves and conservation of the remains of the mural paintings. The 'safeguarding' project has so far received US \$6,345,807 of funding.<sup>5</sup> To date, these interventions at the niches have been technical with an emphasis on the role of the international expert or consultant who visits Bamyan for short periods, rather than longer-term investments focused on either understanding local regimes of heritage value, or on training for Afghan conservators or engineers.

### A conflict of expertise

In July 2002, upon the arrival of the first ICOMOS Germany mission to the valley, the governor of Bamyan province expressed his urgent wish to 'reconstruct' the Buddhas.<sup>6</sup> While reconstruction, without the correct documenting evidence, is not permissible under paragraph 86 of the World Heritage guidelines and its principle of authenticity,

during my field research in the valley Afghans continually expressed a desire to reconstruct at least one of the Buddhas in some shape or form. However, the international 'experts' seem split between two camps over the future of the niches: the group of experts from ICOMOS Germany based at the Munich Technical University, led by ex ICOMOS President Michael Petzet, recommend anastylosis, a method of reconstruction that involves reassembling and restoring the many boulders and fragments to their original positions on the monument, possibly with the use of a foundational structure as support, while Japanese donors and consultants and UNESCO largely advocate for the niches to be stabilised but remain empty. One supporting argument here is that the niches were inscribed on the World Heritage List after the destruction of the Buddhas, therefore any change to the integrity of the site as it has been inscribed would be considered to detract from its authenticity.

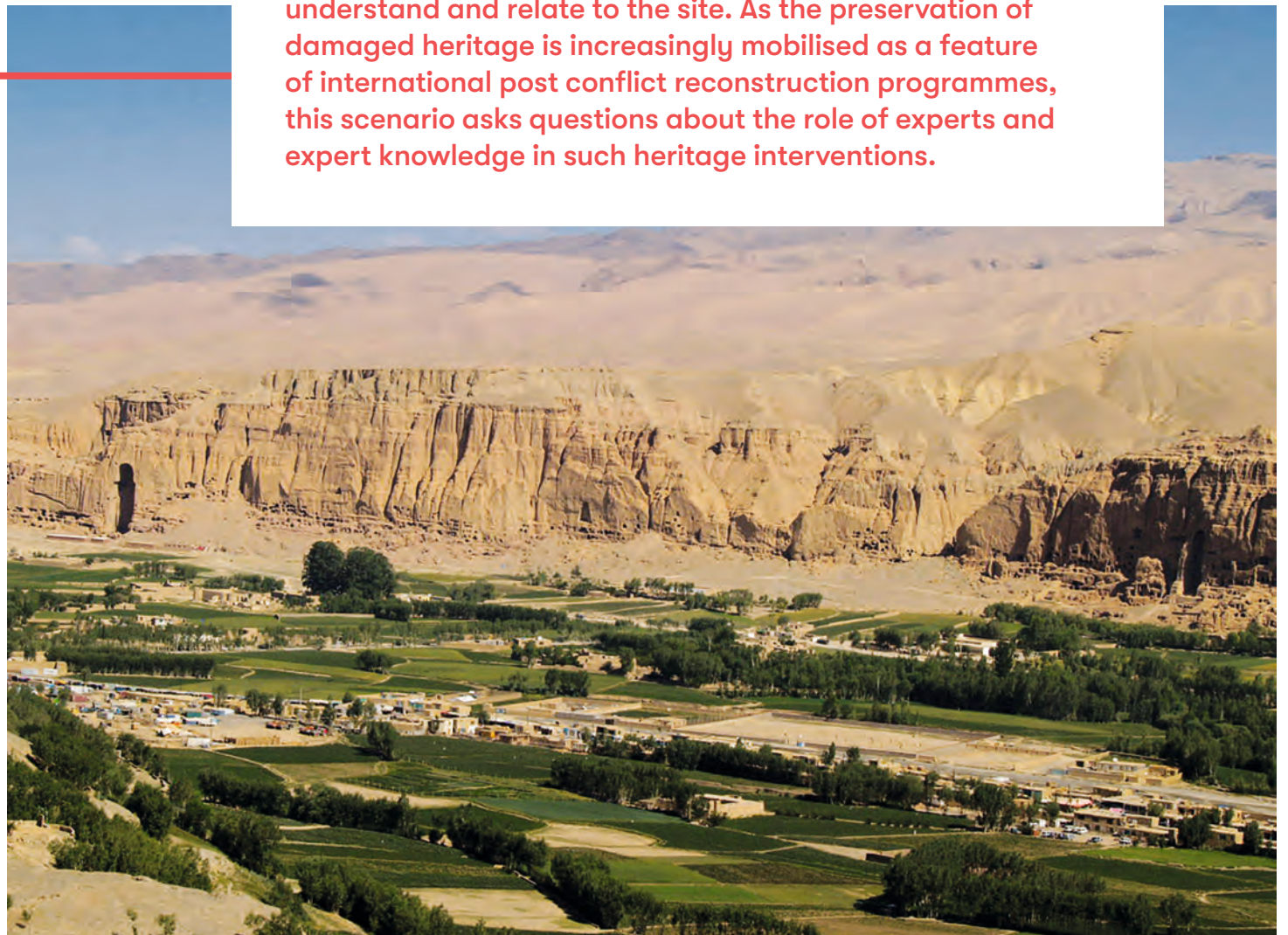
At the 10th BEWG meeting, which took place in Tokyo in 2011, it was announced that neither Buddha statue was to be totally reconstructed. This determination was followed by a recommendation from the Expert Working Group that the large western niche be left empty "as a testimony to the tragic act of destruction" while a study is undertaken to see if a "partial reassembling of fragments of the eastern Buddha could be an option". Afghan local, national government and Bamyan residents were disappointed.

What followed reveals a difference in agenda and a lack of communication between the two giants of international heritage policy and practice. In 2013, experts from ICOMOS Germany were contracted by UNESCO to build a platform to structurally consolidate the rear face of the Eastern Buddha and protect the public from falling rocks. During their work at the site to build this platform, ICOMOS consultants fashioned two structural supports to the eastern Buddha niche that were constructed with iron rods, reinforced concrete and bricks. As the work progressed, these half-built

**"[...] carrying out work that was "bordering on the criminal", "wrong on every level" and taking place without their knowledge or permission."**

pillars, which stuck out at the bottom of the niche began to resemble the Buddhas destroyed feet. ICOMOS consultants maintain they were merely following UNESCO's instructions and constructing a protective platform to improve access to the site. However,

UNESCO understood the appendages as an opportunistic attempt by ICOMOS to reconstruct the eastern Buddha's feet as a means of instigating its preferred conservation strategy of anastylosis, and was outraged at this apparent deliberate flouting of World Heritage conservation doctrine. In an article by *The Art Newspaper* from February 2014, a consultant architect for UNESCO accused ICOMOS Germany of carrying out work that was "bordering on the criminal", "wrong on every level" and taking place without their knowledge or permission. As a response, in July 2014, UNESCO terminated ICOMOS Germany's



The Bamyan Valley showing the two Buddha niches. Photo by Bert Praxenthaler.





The eastern Buddha with the 'feet' concealed behind plastic sheeting in 2015. Author's photograph.

contract to work in Bamyan, accusing the organisation of making new constructions that threatened the Outstanding Universal Value of the site.

Since the debacle, the Japanese government has withdrawn funding support and two independent international heritage consultants were sent to Bamyan to assess the situation at the eastern Buddha. These experts subsequently sent a report recommending that the 'feet' be carefully removed, a solution that is not possible due to local sensitivities around any further destruction at the site. Currently, the unfinished appendages stick out at the bottom of the Buddha, partially covered by a brown plastic sheet that flaps in the wind around the ungainly ankle-like structures. This controversy, which was played out in the international media, in which photographs of the supposed, and unfinished, 'feet' were included for everyone to make their own judgment, demonstrates the power of the monument for international heritage organisations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS Germany to attract publicity, leverage themselves and undermine each other's work. Since this wrangle in 2013 between the two international organisations there has been no further conservation work at the eastern Buddha.

However, this deadlock had an interesting effect locally. Interviews that I conducted as part of my field research with members of the local community in the valley during 2015 suggested that ICOMOS's construction of the 'feet' or structural platform was exactly what the majority of local residents expected, and that this incident was widely interpreted locally as the start of the much-anticipated rebuilding of the Buddhas. Interestingly, local groups do not seem to perceive the differences between the various international bodies who are seen instead as interchangeable foreign experts. Several residents expressed disappointment that the 'foreigners' had started to rebuild the Buddhas and then stopped without undertaking any more activity at the site.

So far, the processes of preservation and clashes between conflicting realms of international expertise at the Buddha niches have worked to largely sideline local systems of heritage value and ideas of ownership at the site. This scenario illustrates the territorial manner in which international bodies persist in dealing with the Buddha niches while paying lip service to Afghan ownership and participation. One result is that local groups and individuals relinquish responsibility

of the valley's heritage as they understand international agencies and experts as having control: "it is a World Heritage site – we don't have a role" explained one informant.

However, several recent local initiatives reveal interesting counterpoints to UNESCO's expert led interventions at the Buddha niches and their attached notions of authenticity. One such happening is 'One Night with Buddha', an annual event organised by The Bamyan Tourism Association to commemorate the destruction of the Buddhas. This ceremony takes place on 2nd of March, the date of the beginning of the statues' destruction. Students and younger residents of Bamyan attend the event, during which participants walk with candles around the site and read poetry. While the Bamyan Expert Working Group recommended that the niche of the western Buddha remain empty in order to bear witness to the Taliban's act of destruction, 'One Night with Buddha' is a way for local groups to momentarily reclaim the site from international heritage agencies and undertake acts of memorialisation and commemoration of their own.

Another such event happened in 2015 when Bamyan was declared the first cultural capital of the South Asian Association for Regional

Cooperation (SAARC), an initiative aimed at promoting trade and regional economic development. Visiting filmmakers from China sponsored a 3D laser projection of images of a life sized Buddha into the niche of the western Buddha at night as part of the festivities, using a huge projector transported from Kabul. The principal Buddha hologram projected into the niche was one of a totally different Buddha, which has no direct relationship to Bamyan but rather resembles a statue of a generic Gandharan Buddha from southern Afghanistan or Pakistan, enlarged to fill the niche. The niche of the western Buddha, which had been occupied by a vast scaffolding and closed off to locals throughout the long years of preservation efforts, was suddenly activated by this intervention. This popular event represents another use of the site by 'non experts' and is revealing as to the range of possible 'authentic' Bamyan Buddhas.

### Will 'revitalisation' happen?

Under pressure from an Afghan government keen to rebuild at the Buddhas, UNESCO organised the 14th Expert Working Group Meeting in Tokyo in September 2017 for which proposals for the statues' 'revitalisation' were sought. This call revealed the hierarchies of knowledge inherent in such meetings: in an accompanying document, Afghan participants are referred to as 'Afghan authorities' and international consultants as 'international experts'. The partially rebuilt 'feet' have been a catalyst for several local movements that support reconstruction of the statues. For example, Shukria Neda, an Afghan civil society activist that currently lives in Bamyan, launched a pioneering campaign to collect two Afghans from local residents (four US cents), with the aim of collecting enough to pay for the reconstruction work. However, at the meeting itself, some forms of authority and expertise were deemed more acceptable than others and Shukria Neda was excluded from speaking in the main public symposium where the international proposals from Japan, Germany and Italy were discussed. These international proposals included a range of propositions for the future of the valley: ongoing work on the remaining fragments; a lapidarium of fragments; a rammed earth Buddha; a marble Buddha; and, a plastic Buddha situated on the cliff opposite the niches.

The recommendations that followed the Expert Working Group meeting in Tokyo advocate for "the establishment of a working committee for reviewing proposals for the Bamyan Buddha statues". As negotiations for the future authenticity of the site continue, it remains to be seen what role local expertise and civil society will play in authenticating reconstruction.

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# Reclaiming cultural heritage after disasters in Indonesia

Cut Dewi

While concerns in post-disaster heritage preservation are focused on the loss of known heritage assets, the erasure of destroyed heritage and the exclusion of emerging heritage by the hands of careless expertise is the biggest challenge in preservation that follows devastation caused by a natural disaster. Post-disaster reconstruction helps us understand not only what heritage is, but also the place of heritage and preservation traditions in post-disaster contexts. In my field research in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, I have observed destruction and loss of heritage value as a direct result of expert judgement, a process that suggests the deployment of a very narrow understanding of cultural heritage that results in systematic exclusions of local heritage forms.



The Baiturrahman Grand Mosque, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Photo by author.

“The heritage sites affected by the tsunami [...] have become places of remembering [and are] a reminder to future generations about the risks and likelihoods of recurring tsunami events”

As it has been argued by critical heritage advocates, an Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD)<sup>1</sup> has been in operation since the European Enlightenment. In particular, this discourse posits that cultural heritage is an object primarily understood to be at risk of destruction and loss. This AHD discourse and definition for cultural heritage is, in turn, shaped by the forms of authority and expertise that have been influential to the heritage industry—in particular, architects, archaeologists, historians, and art historians. These disciplinary experts have been powerful actors who put forward through their work an idea of what heritage is for ordinary people and communities, and who have taken a privileged position as stewards to look after heritage and pass it on to future generations. The dominance of these forms of disciplinary expertise, however, has obscured the social, cultural and political contexts and uses that heritage may relate to.

For example, in Indonesia, the AHD view of expertise is reflected in the legacy of a Dutch heritage policy, *Monumenten Ordinantie* (1931), introduced during the Dutch colonial era, from the late sixteenth century to

1945. Despite the end of the colonial rule in 1945, this policy was uncritically adopted as heritage policy across an independent Indonesia, with updates in 1995 and 2010, setting forth heritage principles that are still in use today. This appropriation, and the associated adoption and dissemination of a universalizing and European discourse, have since dictated standards for care of heritage resources in this Southeast Asian nation. As a result, it has reinforced a tendency to overlook Indonesia’s heritage tradition in the construction of its heritage policies.

## Understanding value

The narrow definition of architectural heritage as an object that is old, monumental, and historical (as articulated in the AHD), has invariably excluded many places and objects which have been preserved in such a way to reflect a continuity of cultural activities in the aftermath of a natural disaster. These buildings and places play important roles in supporting social reconstruction through an articulation of traditions as part of continuous processes of identity formation.<sup>2</sup>

Some scholars have argued that this social reconstruction is needed alongside the physical reconstruction that is the focus of post-disaster work. For example, in Banda Aceh, it has been argued that the social reconstruction of society does not stop after formal reconstruction projects come to an end (such as the five-year plan undertaken by the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Board for Aceh and Nias (BRR)).<sup>3</sup> Still today, the survivors reconstruct their social and cultural life through various means, which includes the construction of cultural heritage places.<sup>4</sup>

The main reason for the erasure of heritage in this particular context is primarily the way that authenticity is understood by heritage experts: the perceived and actual age of a place or building is often mobilized to exclude emergent forms of heritage after the disaster. In Indonesia, the age-limits of heritage value are determined to be up to 50 years old, posing a challenge to the way that heritage debates and management decisions are conducted in light of the tsunami reconstruction. The aftermath of the tsunami in Banda Aceh saw the reorganization of heritage lists on account of different

understandings of value. On the one hand, debates emerged about the inclusion of tsunami sites as official forms of heritage. On the other hand, heritage buildings destroyed or affected by the tsunami were removed from inventory lists that designate heritage resources, resulting in the loss of government funding and support for their maintenance.

For example, the *Badan Pelestarian Cagar Budaya* (BPCB, the Conservation Board for Tangible Heritage) withdrew support and funding for the Teungku Dianjong Mosque in Banda Aceh, on account of issues with its authenticity. The mosque has been destroyed and reconstructed several times in the same style featuring a three-tiered roof, but using different materials—from a wooden structure to bricks and concrete. This heritage organization invoked Act #11 of 2010 regarding Cultural Properties, which mandates a strict code of authenticity in relation to the preservation of original materials in heritage buildings. What has been clear in post-tsunami heritage debates amongst heritage organizations in Indonesia is that the authenticity of the material and style of a heritage remains the main parameter for acknowledging heritage value from the perspective of experts.

My PhD research from 2011 to 2015 revealed that, for the community, this particular mosque still holds the same authentic significance as a mosque even though the physical fabric has changed.<sup>5</sup> Its use-value is also intact, used spiritually for prayers especially during the wet season, and also socially as a place of remembering the past, especially the past related to Teungku Dianjong (the figure who founded

the mosque), the 2004 tsunami and members of the community who disappeared during this catastrophe. The haul, the ceremony remembering the death of Teungku Dianjong, still takes place in this mosque in a collaboration between the community and his family. Yet the ceremony had to be halted for several years until the mosque was properly re-built in 2008. For the local community, the tsunami sites have as much heritage value as the mosque, and they have therefore expressed a desire to reclaim them and have them acknowledged as such. The rebuilding of places, especially mosques, serves an important role in Islamic society and is a process that, I would argue, is imperative to the construction of survivor identity and cultural resilience. In the face of the disaster, rebuilding a historical mosque is considered heritage-making in its most authentic form.

### Healing and social reconstruction

The heritage sites affected by the tsunami, in this sense, have become places of remembering and commemoration not only in relation to the past tsunami disaster, but also as a reminder to future generations about the risks and likelihoods of recurring tsunami events. In this way, heritage sites can become not only a repository of community values and collective memories, but also provide the opportunity to engage in processes of post-traumatic healing and social reconstruction; rather than the physical aspects which might fade.<sup>6</sup> In consideration of these processes, the revocation of a heritage status for

different types of sites, after destruction, hurts in multiple ways. It is a process that makes us consider the effects of applying dominant heritage definitions (such as AHD) to a disaster-prone area like Banda Aceh, which would effectively lose many of its heritage icons on account of changes to their authenticity. While at the same time, new sites of potential heritage value constructed after the disaster are a long way from being recognized as having heritage value.

In my work, I suggest that a country like Indonesia should advocate for alternative ways of looking at heritage not just on account of resisting AHD understandings of heritage value as alien and foreign to Indonesian heritage traditions, but also in consideration of societies that may be more prone to rapid change—as is the case of communities across Indonesia that are vulnerable to natural disasters. It has been argued that Indonesian heritage traditions pay more attention to non-material aspects of sites and buildings, promoting instead authenticity of meaning, ritual, and spiritual activities. In this sense, the acknowledgement that there is a non-Western movement of heritage management now needs recognition from different experts involved in heritage management in Indonesia, especially architectural conservationists, who have the ability to be involved and advocate for alternative ways of looking at heritage.

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Peulanggahan (Teungku Dianjong) Mosque, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Photo by Author.



# Heritage making after the earthquake

Safeguarding the intangible heritage of the Qiang people in China

Qiaoyun Zhang

After the 8.0-magnitude Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, the Chinese State set about to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as a part of their efforts to support the ethnic Qiang people and their cultural life.<sup>1</sup> The Qiang were hit hard, with more than 80 percent of their population living across severely affected areas. The Chinese government led swift and comprehensive relief efforts, placing a particular emphasis on recovering the Qiang culture. The inscription of selected Qiang cultural practices as national ICH, as well as the rescue and promotion of the newly-nominated ICH, became a major part of the post-earthquake heritage recovery plan.

Soon after the disaster, four Qiang cultural practices (Qiang Sheepskin Drum Dance, Qiang Embroidery Skills, Qiang New Year, and Qiang Polyphonic Singing) were included on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of China, becoming the first time that a large number of ICH of such a small ethnic group were added to the national list at once. In 2009, the Qiang New Year was inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding sponsored by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). With such an unusually fast inscription of the Qiang ICH into the Chinese national and UNESCO lists, there was considerable state funding and governmental planning invested in the rescue and promotion of Qiang ICH and their stewards. For instance, annual celebrations of the Qiang New Year have been held in the Qiang concentrated counties by

the local governments since then. Thanks to these initiatives, local industry has been rebuilt and transformed mainly through an emerging heritage tourism. At the local level, these newly-heritagized cultural practices have thrived in many Qiang villages where associated practices such as worship, healing, exorcism, dance rituals, as well as embroidery and watchtower construction skills, were given space and resources to continue to be practiced.

This heritagization—which emerged as a matter of urgent safeguarding needs—should be seen as a State and scholarly-led process. Selected Chinese scholars worked closely with the PRC Ministry of Culture and local culture and sports bureaus in order to interpret, promote, and regulate the implementation of ICH safeguarding measures. Such scholar and State collaborations have been established since the beginning of the Chinese ICH

safeguarding campaign in the early 2000s. The Chinese ICH safeguarding campaign therefore transformed the status, significance, and even the practices of the heritagized cultural traditions in Qiang. The campaign also changed how the Chinese general public perceive and interact with such items.

## Challenges for ICH safeguarding

What I refer to as the ICH knowledge-making process in China includes the following three aspects. First, sponsored by the central government, the ICH safeguarding campaign has grown to be a major means to protect and celebrate traditional and ethnic cultural practices as national treasures in China. ICH is a nascent yet politically energizing concept in contemporary Chinese

<sup>1</sup> A Qiang Shibi and A Qiang Sheepskin Drum Dance Master performing at a government-sponsored Qiang New Year celebration. Photo by author.

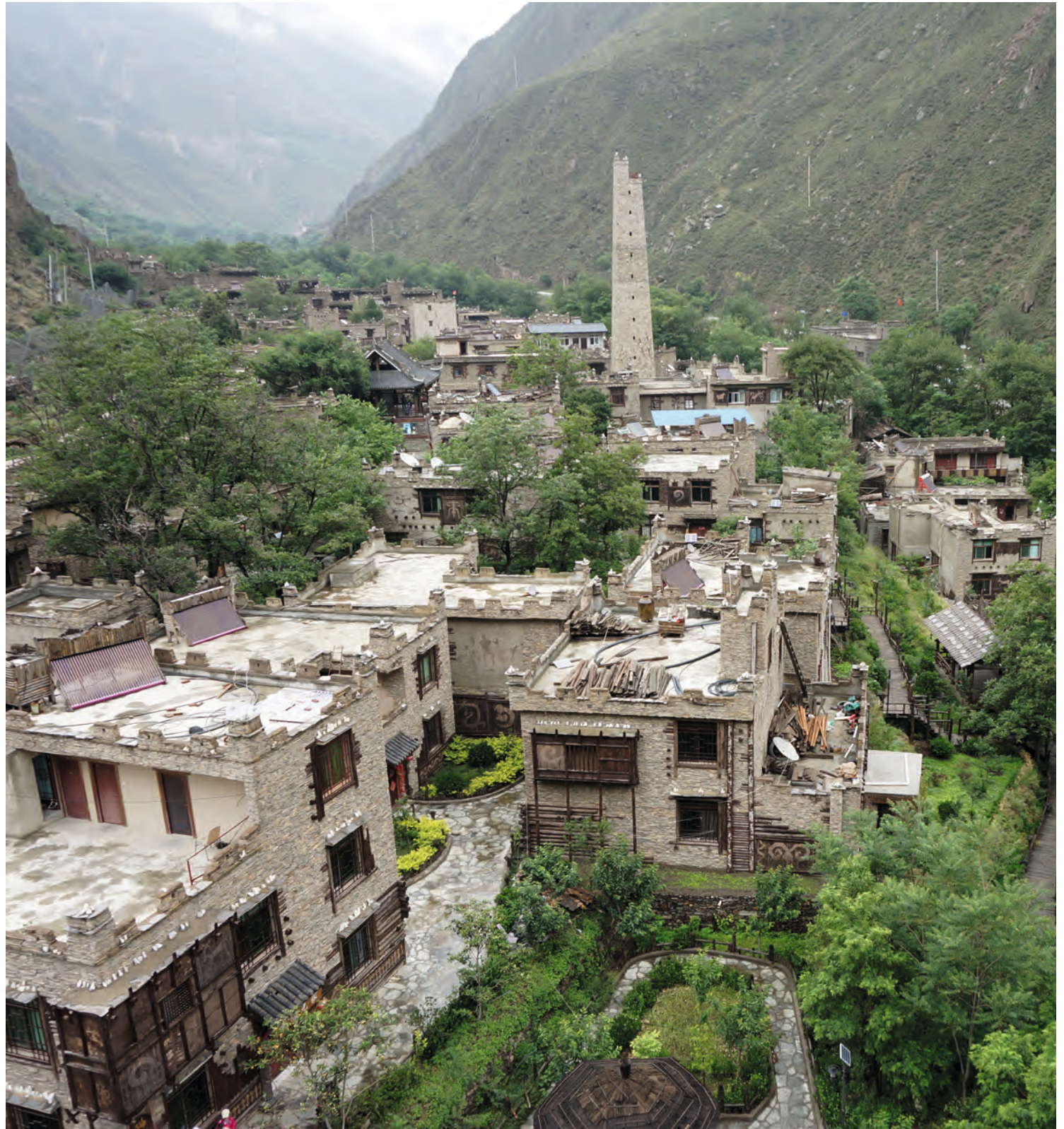
campaigns for cultural heritage protection and promotion. When introduced to the Chinese public in the early 2000s, intangible heritage was seen as a morphologically and culturally alien concept. Nevertheless, China is now the country hosting the largest number of elements on the UNESCO-recognized Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Chinese Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage now includes almost 1300 elements.

Second, the heritagization of folk rituals is a process of knowledge production and identity transformation in which the folk ritual is officially reinterpreted and upheld as national heritage. Adopting and adapting UNESCO's discourse on ICH, the campaign grants heritage status to what was previously considered to be private, old, local, and once denigrated cultural practices, allowing these to enter the public and collective Chinese cultural life. Described as 'feudal superstition' and officially banned or condemned in the past, some of the now-celebrated ICH items were long despised for contributing little importance to Chinese culture in aesthetic, intellectual, or social terms. In this context, the heritagization that took place is a culturalizing process that integrates 'backward' and 'superstitious' practices into new and promising "cultural categories".<sup>2</sup> The culturalizing process recognizes and represents the folk rituals' political viability, scientific validity, educational utility, and social positivity, essential for the nationalist construction of a modernizing multi-ethnic China. The making of the Qiang New Year as national ICH is a case in point: this Qiang worship ritual is reinterpreted as an occasion for the Qiang to express "respect and admiration to all spirits, the motherland, and the ancestors",<sup>3</sup> to "promote ethnic unity and harmony",<sup>4</sup> to be educated about civilized conducts, as well as to celebrate the 'positive energy' (*zheng nengliang* 正能量) embedded in the officially-acclaimed 'miraculous reconstruction' after the earthquake.

Last, but not least, along with the state-led ICH safeguarding campaign, the local stakeholders' perceptions and performances of their own traditional cultural practices have been transformed. In large part, this is because heritagized practices are now articulated within the terms of 'multivocality'—that is, where a folk ritual is used to display multiple diverse voices and meanings when presented to different audiences and performed by varied practitioners.<sup>5</sup> The protection awarded by ICH designation provided new resources and opportunities for the folk rituals to survive. Admittedly, the promotion of the Qiang ICH led to the development of both performative and sacred aspects of these rituals. Villagers safely and creatively took advantage of the preeminence of ritual practices, such as the continuation of the New Year celebration and *shibi* rituals in funerals and house construction, to fulfill their responsibilities and reinforce social relations (*Shibi* are the Qiang ritual specialists who monitor major Qiang rituals at funerals, weddings, and Qiang New Year). Such responsibilities and relations form the backbone of everyday community life, which in turn provides socially-accepted meanings and artifacts of the manifestation of cultural heritage. At the same time, the local Qiang added new meaning and function to the heritage cultural practices. For example, after the earthquake *shibi* were frequently asked to perform the 'sending the red' ritual to bless villagers' new cars, in which specialists place a piece of 'blessed' red cloth under the windshield of the vehicle. In the past, *shibi* would only perform such a ritual when worshipping the spirits.

## Discussion

My long-term field research for this case study, since 2012, cautions against ignoring the politics of interpretation and safeguarding that may alienate local practices from local communities, turning the ICH inscribed



A bird's-eye view of the reconstructed Qiang village. Photo by author.

practices into showcases for state power and nationalist agendas. In the events that unfolded as part of urgent heritage-safeguarding planning, the viewpoints and expectations of the Qiang ICH stakeholders and ordinary villagers were marginalized. I argue that their right to define their own cultural practices in their own terms as well as employ agency in the way that they would

have preferred to protect such practices were disregarded.

Local community members and scholars alike have also been concerned with the influence of tourism and a market economy on the transmission of these ICH practices.

For example, the celebration of the Qiang New Year, or the practices and skills involved in traditional embroidery, were mobilized as commodities for tourism consumption.<sup>6</sup> Many stewards of the Qiang New Year, Qiang Sheepskin Drum Dance, and Qiang Embroidery Skills became representatives not only for the noted cultural practices, but also for Qiang earthquake victims. They were popularly invited to perform their skills and techniques at various events to demonstrate the survival of endangered practices as well as the resilience of the Qiang population as a whole. However, increasingly the Qiang *shibi* were accused by villagers of performing 'fake' and out-of-context rituals for the sole purpose of entertaining tourists at the expense of engaging in blasphemy of spirits or ancestors. *Shibi* and their apprentices expressed similar concerns with offending the spirits in such

performances, preferring to create special rituals just for tourism events, while retaining the authentic practice for its sacred purposes.

In addition, there was a lack of sustainable planning or funding strategies involved. The emergent Qiang ICH preservation campaign seemed to come to an end along with the completion of the State-led reconstruction projects in 2011. My research in the affected Qiang communities shows that very little long-term effort was devoted to the transmission of these ICH within local communities when the media and scholarly attention on the Qiang faded away. This contrast leads to two main issues surrounding the newly-heritagized cultural practices. On the one hand, the lack of funding or cultural preservation planning may prompt villagers to participate more in for-profit performance of their traditions, misrepresenting the social and cultural meanings of these practices and essentializing and further marginalizing rituals and the Qiang. On the other hand, the short-lived preservation campaign failed to preserve, and sometimes even destroyed, the socio-ecological context surrounding the tradition—especially the human-environmental and inter-personal relations involved—in which such practices originate and develop.<sup>7</sup> Although there were cases in which individual villagers re-discovered values through these practices, culturally insensitive safeguarding programs may cause ICH items to lose their attachment to community values, reducing their liveliness and relevance.

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## Notes

- 1 The Qiang people are one of the 55 officially recognized ethnic minorities in the People's Republic of China (PRC). They have a comparatively small population of 300,000 and have long been economically, politically, and culturally marginalized.
- 2 Gao, B. 2014. 'How Does Superstition Become Intangible Cultural Heritage in Postsocialist China?' *Positions* 22 (3):551-72.
- 3 ICH China. 2013. 'Qiang Nian 羌年' [Qiang New Year Festival]. <http://www.ihchina.cn/4/10460.html> (accessed 7 Feb 2018).
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- 5 McDowell, J.H. 2010. 'Rethinking Folklorization in Ecuador: Multivocality in the Expressive Contact Zone', *Western Folklore* 69:181-209.
- 6 Le Mentec, K. & Zhang, Q. 2017. 'Heritagization of disaster ruins and ethnic culture in China: Recovery plans after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake', *China Information* 31(3):349-370.
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The relief of the 1865 discovery of hidden Christians in the Ōura Cathedral, Nagasaki. Courtesy of Minimi-shimabara City, Nagasaki.



## A critical review of Catholic heritage sites in Nagasaki, Japan

Tomoe Otsuki

In July 2016, the Japanese government nominated a group of Catholic heritage sites in the Nagasaki region to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage Committee for inclusion in the World Heritage List. This nomination comprises a collection of 12 sites that tell the story of the 250-year prohibition of the practice of Christian faith between the 17th and 19th centuries in Japan. The process of shaping what constitutes Catholic heritage in Nagasaki calls for an examination of the history, legacy and local knowledge that have been excluded from the official discourse that has accompanied this heritage.

This essay explores how the discourse of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) that has been used to support this nomination has shifted as different actors have become involved in the process of World Heritage-making. In particular, I examine the role of the advisory body to UNESCO, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), in defining the significance of history of Japanese Catholicism used to justify the status of the proposed sites as World Heritage in light of the introduction of the history of 'hidden Christians' to an international audience.

### 'Underground Catholics' in Nagasaki and the World Heritage Campaign

The Nagasaki region of Japan used to be the religious centre for Japanese Catholics and European missionaries during the 16th century, as the region served as Japan's gateway for the exchange of knowledge, technology and culture with foreign countries. However, as the number of Japanese subjects and lords converting to Catholicism increased, feudal authorities perceived Christianity to be a threat to their ruling power and banned Christianity in the year 1612. During the period of Christian prohibition, all European missionaries were expelled from the country, while many Japanese Catholics went underground to escape persecution, hiding in remote areas in the Nagasaki region. These Catholics, who disguised themselves by publicly practicing Shinto/Buddhism while secretly maintaining their faith, are referred to as 'underground Christians' or 'hidden

Christians'. In this essay, I refer to them as 'underground Catholics' to be consistent with the historical background of this period, in which no missionaries from the other branches of Christianity, such as Protestantism, entered Japan.<sup>1</sup> Many of the underground Catholics were accused of heresy, while others refused to renounce their faith even in the face of exile, torture and death.<sup>2</sup>

In the mid-19th century, Japan finally lifted its 250-year policy of closure to foreign countries and opened a few ports to the outside world, one of which was in Nagasaki. The first Catholic church was erected in Nagasaki after the ban on Christianity was lifted, but it was opened solely for foreigners residing within Nagasaki. In March 1865, however, a small group of underground Catholics secretly entered the church and asked a French priest, "Where is the statue of Santa Maria?" They then whispered: "All of us have the same heart as you." This encounter led to the discovery of roughly 15,000 underground Catholics across the Nagasaki region.

Advocates for the preservation of Catholic heritage sites believe that a collection of Catholic historical sites can tell this rich and unique history of Japanese Catholicism in Nagasaki spanning a period of four centuries. The campaign for designating Nagasaki's Catholic churches and heritage sites as World Heritage was initially launched by a citizen group called 'To Declare a New World Heritage: The Nagasaki Church Group' (hereafter 'the Church Group') in 2001. The group was composed of local Catholics, scholars and non-Christian citizens. This citizen group identified 49 Catholic churches throughout the

Nagasaki Prefecture as potential candidates for World Heritage nomination. The members of the Church Group believed that these churches illustrated the "livingness" of the region's Catholic heritage, being sites where local Catholic communities have maintained their religious values and ensured the continuity of their cultural tradition developed over a period of 450 years. They claimed that this living aspect of these churches constituted OUV.<sup>3</sup>

Their campaign was successful. In January 2007, Nagasaki's Catholic churches were registered in the UNESCO Tentative List for Japan, marking the intention to pursue a World Heritage List nomination; the sites were described as "testimonies of the suppressed adherents' re-acquisition of religious freedom and its long process".<sup>4</sup> In November 2007, the Prefectural Government of Nagasaki created a working group called the 'Nagasaki World Heritage Scholarly Conference' (NWHSC) as an official body to discuss the preservation campaign strategies for Catholic heritage sites and to write an application for nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List. The NWHSC comprises members from both the public and private sectors, such as Nagasaki Catholic leaders, scholars, business leaders and civil servants. Gradually, the role of primary agent and stakeholder in the heritage campaign for these sites was shifted from the Church Group to the NWHSC. Between 2007 and 2012, the NWHSC repeatedly reviewed the components of the sites. Eventually, it listed 14 Catholic heritage sites and named the multi-site assemblage the 'Christian Churches and Heritage Sites in Nagasaki'.<sup>5</sup> The proposed heritage complex consisted of the remains of two castles whose



The Tabira Cathedral, one of the sites excluded from the final application to the World Heritage Committee. © Creative Commons on Wikipedia.

rulers converted to Catholicism during the 16th century; four villages where underground Catholics concealed themselves during the period of Christian prohibition; and eight Catholic churches that were built after the end of Christian prohibition. The NWHSC presented this heritage collection as sites of exchange and communication of traditional cultures between Japan and the West.

## ICOMOS intervention in Nagasaki

In January 2015, Japan recommended the inscription of Catholic heritage sites to the UNESCO World Heritage List. In September of that year, a group of experts from ICOMOS came to Nagasaki to assess the application and the heritage property. In February 2016, ICOMOS recommended that the Japanese government dramatically review its application, asking that the application focus on the period of the ban on Christianity in Japan, which experts considered a period of exceptional significance in Nagasaki, rather than on the period that followed after the ban was lifted. In April 2016, the NWHSC invited ICOMOS to Nagasaki in order to refine its application. ICOMOS maintained its previous advice, telling the NWHSC to exclude sites that were not relevant to the Christian ban. ICOMOS also advised the NWHSC to include the term 'hidden Christians' in the title of the heritage property.

In the new version of the application to the World Heritage List, the property consists of 12 sites, 10 of which are villages where underground Catholics used to live, including one of the villages located in the Amakusa region in Kumamoto Prefecture. Nearly all the churches selected by the Church Group and the NWHSC—except the Ōura Cathedral, where underground Catholics revealed themselves to the French priest in 1865—were eliminated from the final application. Instead, 7 Catholic churches were added to the list as they are located in these 10 villages that housed underground Catholics during the period of Christian prohibition.

The Tabira Cathedral is one of the churches that were excluded from the final list in the very last selection process from 2016 to 2017. After the end of banning Christianity, 8 families of former underground Catholics moved to a small village called 'Tabira' from different underground Catholics' villages and built a humble temporary church. Tabira continued to receive former underground Catholics from other villages in Nagasaki. They reclaimed wasteland and finally built the Tabira Cathedral in 1918. The cathedral was dedicated to the 26 martyrs who were executed by crucifixion in Nagasaki in 1597. ICOMOS, however, claimed that the Tabira Cathedral is irrelevant to the period of Christian banning as Tabira became a Catholic village after the end of the ban, ignoring tremendous efforts and sacrifices the former underground Catholics made in order to transform the wasteland into the land of God.

The final application to the World Heritage List is titled the 'Hidden Christian Heritage Sites in Nagasaki Prefecture and the Amakusa Region'. The application describes how underground Catholics "gave rise to a distinctive religious tradition that was seemingly vernacular yet maintained the

essence of Christianity",<sup>6</sup> adding that the property shows "the distinctive way in which the hidden Christians continued their faith during the ban on Christianity" and therefore has OUV. In July 2016, the Japanese government nominated the Catholic heritage sites to UNESCO's World Heritage List. The final decision for a permanent registration is to be made in July 2018.

The intervention by ICOMOS experts played an important role in efforts to shed light on the history of underground Catholics. The period of Catholic persecution has never been a part of Japanese national history and very few people in Japan know that approximately 4,000 underground Catholics became martyrs, while thousands of other Catholics were sent into exile. After the official nomination to UNESCO, it became clear that no Japanese heritage stakeholders, including the local and national media, had ever considered the question of how people in Japan might come to terms with this forgotten or marginalized history. ICOMOS also contributed to honouring underground Catholics by representing this population to an international audience as courageous, faithful Japanese Catholics who developed a distinctive religious tradition.

However, some local scholars have also argued that ICOMOS experts, as well as members from the NWHSC, ignored

certain aspects of local knowledge regarding the underground Catholics in the designation of boundaries for this nomination. First and foremost, the final application obscures the prominent differences between 'underground Christians' (Senpuku

Kirishitan) and 'hidden Christians' (Kakure Kirishitan). 'Hidden Christians' is a more common and popular term both in Japan and abroad to describe Japanese Catholics during the period of Christian prohibition; however, 'underground Christians' refers to those who secretly maintained their faith during the period of Christian persecution. Hence, all Japanese Catholics during the period of Christian prohibition should be referred to as 'underground Christians'. The term 'hidden Christians' refers specifically to those who decided not to belong to the Roman Catholic Church, but rather continued to maintain their own religious values and traditions developed over 250 years of persecution even after the Japanese government lifted the ban on Christianity. Notably, the Japanese title of the heritage property employs the term 'underground Christians', whereas the term 'hidden Christians' remains in the English title of the property.

When Catholicism was reintroduced in Japan after the end of Christian prohibition, many of the underground Catholics were stunned by the significant differences between official Catholic teachings and

what they themselves had practiced for 250 years. Following the Roman Catholic Church also meant that they had to dismiss all the traditions that their ancestors had developed and handed down through generations. As a result, many of the former underground Catholics decided to live as 'hidden Christians' and continued to keep themselves isolated from mainstream society and the Catholic Church in Nagasaki in order to ensure the continuation of their own religious values and traditions.<sup>7</sup> They did not identify themselves as Catholics anymore and did not build a Catholic church. Equally important is the fact that hidden Christian communities still exist in the contemporary period. However, they are virtually disappearing as their communities are aging and depopulating, and no official conservation measures have been provided by the central government to preserve their traditions.<sup>8</sup>

## Disrupting continuity

In my research, I am concerned with revealing knowledge gaps between ICOMOS experts' understanding of hidden Christians and local knowledge. There are two museums devoted to underground and hidden Christians in Hirado city,<sup>9</sup> Nagasaki, which used to be the land of underground Catholics and continues to house hidden Christian communities. The archival and material collections in these museums as well as the curators' historical and ethnographic knowledge are essential to understanding the history of Japanese Catholicism in the region. However, none of the ICOMOS experts visited these museums during their stay in Hirado city or tried to learn the history of hidden Christians from the local curators in these museums. Likewise, the NWHSC did not include any of these curators or ethnographers on their selection committee. As a result, the NWHSC was incapable of communicating to the foreign experts from ICOMOS that 'hidden Christians' are living communities in the present, and that isolating the history of underground Catholics from the period after Christian prohibition would not only contribute to the further marginalization of hidden Christians and the erasure of their rich history and particular cultural traditions, but also disrupt the continuity between the period of Christian persecution and the present time.

Shigeo Nakazono, an ethnographer and a curator of the hidden Christian museum in Hirado, claims that, as time passed, underground Catholics genuinely sought ways of co-existing with Buddhism/Shintoism in order to keep their faith; not all the underground Catholics 'disguised' themselves as Shinto/Buddhists.<sup>10</sup> Nakazono argues that the significance of the underground/hidden Christians in Japanese society is their practice of embracing others' religions in order to maintain their own—precisely because they witnessed how ignorance and rejection of others' faiths and values caused brutal violence. Prior to the period of Christian

persecution, European missionaries had ordered Japanese Catholics to persecute non-Catholics, including Buddhist monks and Shinto priests, and to burn down temples and shrines in order to propagate Catholicism during the 16th century.<sup>11</sup> Yet this significant part of history is now completely excluded from the official discourse of Catholic heritage in Nagasaki on account of the type of sites and narratives that were selected to represent and justify this nomination. The official representation of underground Catholics as it stands authenticates their history and practices for an international audience; however, a romanticized image of underground Catholics that excludes the periods before and after their persecution can undermine the truly significant elements of their history, which invokes tremendous sacrifice and tolerance.

## Conclusion

This case study raises the issue of how local voices and ethnographic knowledge of Japanese Catholicism Christianity are used—or in this case, excluded—from the process of defining the Outstanding Universal Value of a property. The final application has betrayed the wishes of local Catholics for the conservation of their churches as living heritage as the role of primary agent in the heritage campaign shifted from the Church Group to the NWHSC and ICOMOS. The nomination process of Nagasaki's Catholic heritage sites has raised some crucial questions: How should heritage experts, including ICOMOS, deal with religious heritage that implicates extremely delicate narratives and histories? How can local heritage-makers effectively communicate with ICOMOS experts? How can critical heritage scholars advocate for the importance of including local ethnographers and curators in the process of heritage-making? Japan's nomination of Catholic heritage sites to the UNESCO World Heritage List is only the beginning of the exploration of the legacy of Japanese underground Catholics and what their sacrifice can signify to humanity.

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## Notes

- 1 Protestantism was introduced to Japan in the early 1860s after the ban on Christianity had been lifted.
- 2 See Martin Scorsese's 2016 film *Silence*, based on the 1966 novel *Silence (Chinmoku)* written by Japanese Catholic author Shūsaku Endō. *Silence* effectively depicts the history of Christian persecution and the tremendous suffering of underground Catholics and captured European missionaries in the Nagasaki region.
- 3 Matsui K. 2013. *Sacred Sites for Tourism Strategies: Nagasaki Churches and the Commodification of Place*. Tokyo: Tsukuba-Daigaku Press.
- 4 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5096>
- 5 All the heritage properties were Catholic related sites. However, they were officially named 'Christian Churches and Heritage Sites in Nagasaki'.
- 6 <http://kirishitan.jp/values/val004>
- 7 Nakazono S. 2015. *What is 'Hidden Christians'? [Kakure Kirishitan to wa Nanika]* Genshobo: Fukuoka.
- 8 The local government of Hirado city, Nagasaki, has recently launched an oral history and documentary project to record the tradition of hidden Christians in the city.
- 9 One is Hirado Kirishitan Museum (<https://tinyurl.com/hirashin>) and the other is Hirado Ikitsuki Historical Museum *Shima no Yakata* (<https://tinyurl.com/hirashin2>).
- 10 'My Perspectives—Lack of Experts on Heritage in Nagasaki', Nagasaki Press, 21 June 2016.
- 11 Anan, S. 2009. *Study of Subjects of Discrimination in Nagasaki: Trade, Christianity and Buraku* [Hisabetsuburakuno Nagasaki gaku: Boueki to kirishitan to hisabetsu-buraku]. Nagasaki: Centre for Nagasaki Human Rights Studies.



The Hara Castle Ruins, one of the sites included in the final application to the World Heritage Committee. Courtesy of Minami-shimabara City, Nagasaki.

# Reinterpretations at Fort Nassau in the Banda Islands, Indonesia

Joëlla van Donkersgoed



View from the reconstructed bastion of Fort Nassau on Banda Neira. In this image the material used for the reconstruction of the bastion is clearly visible, as well as the fact that the residence is located in the trajectory of the next phase of reconstruction. Photo by Joëlla van Donkersgoed.

In my research on the current interpretations of the cultural landscape of the Banda Islands in Indonesia, I explore the interpretations of the historic site of Fort Nassau on the island of Banda Neira by diverse interest groups, including local, national and international agents. Through my work, I examine the challenge of gathering insights into the different influences that define this particular site as a heritage site. Considering various heritage interpretations, which include both colonial narratives as well as the oral history of the Bandanese people, I suggest that fixating on a specific historical heritage deters the ongoing (re)interpretation of sites to suit the needs of contemporary society.

## Banda Islands and Fort Nassau: nutmeg and mace

Until the mid-1800's, the Banda Islands in Indonesia were the primary source location for the sought-after spices nutmeg and mace. As these goods were popular around the world, traders from Asia and the Arabian Peninsula travelled great distances to the region in order to obtain them. The first European traders that engaged with people on the Banda Islands were the Portuguese in 1512, followed by the Dutch in 1599, and the English in 1601. The Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* or VOC) was established in 1602 with the prime objective of maximizing profits by establishing monopolies on certain trade goods—the remoteness of the Banda Islands and their profitable resources made this location an obvious target for the establishment of a monopoly on nutmeg and mace. However, the Bandanese were not receptive to trading exclusively with the Dutch, which would mean breaking other long-established trade relations. The VOC sent Jan Pieterszoon Coen to seize control of the island, which he did through violent measures. In particular, in 1621, a bloody confrontation known as the 'Bandanese Massacre' involved not only the execution of 44 Bandanese noblemen but also the persecution, deportation and starvation of an estimated 90% of the local population. After this violent conquest, Jan Pieterszoon Coen divided the islands into

*perken*, plots of land that were to be governed by ex-VOC employees, called *perkeniers*, and labored by slaves.

Fort Nassau in Banda Neira is the first permanent construction the Dutch built on the archipelago, leading to fierce resistance from the Bandanese noblemen. It is the location where 44 noblemen, *orang kaya*, were publicly quartered and decapitated during the Dutch conquest. The fort itself has since known several uses, including its function as a prison and a storage facility. However, it lost its military defensive function after it was severely damaged by bombing during its capture by the English in 1810. The inner court was then turned into a tennis court for the enjoyment of the *perkeniers* families. In the 20th century, this open area was re-used as the location for a radio station and antenna. These, in turn, became a target for Japanese bombs during the attacks on the Banda Islands in World War II, which damaged the fort further. In ruins, the fort failed to regain a new function and vegetation took over the site. Bandanese who live near and at the site reported that the structure became haunted, with sounds of the massacred men and the rattling of their chains heard at night.

## From site of tragedy to site of tourism

Fort Nassau had seen multiple phases of destruction and reinterpretation prior to the start of my research. When I first visited the site, the Banda Islands at large had been attracting interest from within and outside Indonesia by organizations and individuals interested in the development of heritage industries, due to its multi-cultural history and unique natural marine environment. Notably, through the patronage of a prominent local family Des Alwi, foreign experts have been involved in the preparatory work for the nomination of the Banda Islands on the Tentative List for the World Heritage List of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).<sup>1</sup> As a result of this general interest, the regional conservation office in Ternate, *Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya* (BPCB), initiated a reconstruction

Heritage sites are in a constant process of re-interpretation by a wide variety of actors and stakeholders. The act of attaching meaning to a site does not occur in a vacuum but is influenced by power dynamics within its broader social context. For example, emphasis on certain features of a site, at the expense of other features, can vary with each interpretation and each interpreter. Moreover, the meaning ascribed to a site by contemporary communities may be widely different from the intended meaning given by the society that constructed it. Because of this, heritage sites should be studied from a variety of angles that together shape the interpretation of the landscape in which the site exists.

project for Fort Nassau in 2014, which included the removal of vegetation and the rebuilding of the collapsed and absent bastion walls. This government initiative can be seen as shaped by a specific vision of tourism consumption: a completed fort that aligns with the aesthetic of the VOC. In order to accomplish this, the different life-phases of the fort, including its partial destruction and other historically significant events, were disregarded.

Although there is an overall consensus among the Bandanese that the restoration is a positive action for the fort, the project has not been received with merely positive responses. Firstly, plans to reconstruct the moat around the fort were encountered with resistance by the local population who have inhabited that land for several decades and used the area of the moat for the cultivation of crops. Proposed preservation and rehabilitation plans to reconstruct the entire structure would therefore involve the displacement of several families. Secondly, there have been conflicting reactions to the reconstruction of the walls of the fort on two separate counts. On the one hand, the materials used in the reconstructed bastions differ from the material in the original stonework. Discontentment was voiced by several Bandanese in relation to this distinction, who argued that the reconstructed parts of the fort did not seem 'original' or as it is more frequently described in the field of heritage studies, that it is *inauthentic*. On the other hand, the Bandanese have also voiced regrets that the construction work is conducted by non-local workers, fueling the perception that the regional office does not trust the craftsmanship of Bandanese construction workers. Overall, the Bandanese feel that through this process of outsourcing the work, they have lost their ability to determine how the reconstruction of their site is being conducted.

Interestingly, while many post-colonial heritage debates question the contemporary validity of preserving colonial structures in territories that were once occupied, the development of a heritage industry in the Banda Islands suggests that heritage resources from the Dutch colonial era are not regarded negatively by the Bandanese nor the other Indonesian stakeholders involved in these interpretations. Instead, these resources are valued as an opportunity to monetize a heritage through tourism and foster a sense of pride in buildings that reflect the financial successes made through the trade of nutmeg historically.

## Processes of reinterpretation

Fort Nassau on Banda Neira is an example of a Dutch colonial site that is being reinterpreted for contemporary uses. These efforts are propelled by Indonesian president Jokowi's wish to stimulate tourism as an avenue to increase the GDP of Indonesia.<sup>2</sup> Efforts and resources towards the reconstruction of this fort fit within this goal in order to attract more tourists to the Moluccan province. The Bandanese seem to welcome an increase in the number of tourists that visit

their islands, and the reconstruction of Fort Nassau is regarded as a positive investment towards this goal. The concern of the local population, however, is the way in which this is conducted. There is an overall sense of exclusion amongst the local communities during the process of reconstruction and there is a fear that the reconstructed site will be an inauthentic replica. The fear is based on previous reconstructions that did not meet the expectations of the Bandanese; for example, a recent renovation of a colonial building by non-local investors opted for a new roof made of blue durable material rather than a traditional roof. Some Bandanese described the modern appearance of this material as degrading the historical feeling of the building and the area. The use of material that differentiates visually from the historical fabric is in this case a factor that decreases the heritage value in the eyes of the Bandanese.

The ongoing efforts in heritage management, including the addition of this site as a cultural landscape to the Tentative List of UNESCO, as well as the restoration initiatives at Fort Nassau, suggest that there is increasing interest in the heritage resources of the Banda Islands at multiple local and international levels. This has attracted outside experts, who are invited to 'do something' with the heritage for the promotion and benefit of the Bandanese people. These efforts are welcomed by the local community as they recognize that tourism is a profitable source for seasonal work, and they are also proud to share the history and resources of the islands with visitors. However, developments surrounding the restoration efforts at Fort Nassau revealed that the local community does not feel directly empowered through the current style of heritage management. There are various ways in which their involvement could be formalized in these initiatives; for example, Bandanese construction workers could be employed rather than outsourcing the work to a company from Ambon; and the process of consulting the community could include devising a plan to incorporate the reconstructed site into their daily social lives, giving the fort a function beyond tourism as a stage to hold cultural performances, a marketplace, an area for drying nutmeg, etc. This would stimulate the site to accrue new social value and contribute to the larger cultural landscape that defines the Banda Islands as a potential World Heritage List property.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> 'The Historic and Marine Landscape of the Banda Islands', *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, 9 Feb 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/bandaaislands>
- <sup>2</sup> 'Tourism Ministry Aims to Woo 13.5 Million Foreign Visitors next Year', *The Jakarta Post*, 14 June 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/woovisitors>



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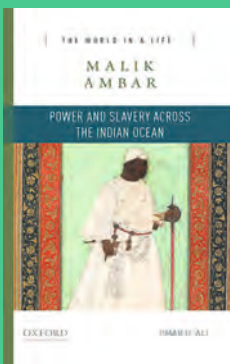


# Transoceanic Africa-Asia connections

Mahmood Kooria

The Indian Ocean was not always the 'Indian' Ocean. It has also been an African Ocean known as the Zanj Ocean, Abyssinian Ocean, and Ethiopian Ocean. These names forgotten in popular imaginations as well as in academic scholarship represent a larger problem surrounding the maritime littoral: the neglected historical and contemporary role of Africans in this seascape and on its shores. Yet, in the last decade new studies have been appearing in the field, and the three books under present review represent this new trend.

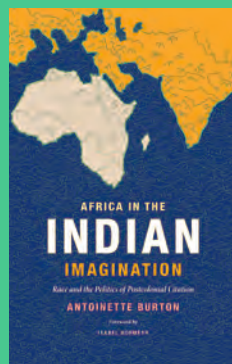
## Reviewed titles



### Malik Ambar: Power and Slavery Across the Indian Ocean

Ali, O.H. 2016

Oxford and New York:  
Oxford University Press



### Africa in the Indian Imagination: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation

Burton, A. 2016

Durham and London:  
Duke University Press



### Africa in the Indian Ocean: Islands in Ebb and Flow

Sellström, T. 2015

Leiden and Boston: Brill

The ocean has historically been a highway for large scale and long term flows of communities, commodities, and ideas, in which millions of people willingly or unwillingly travelled, traded, coerced, and commodified. Africa's major collaborators have been the Asian communities before and after the European and American colonial/imperial endeavours. Both Asia and Africa, the two major continents sharing the ocean's shores, have historically plotted their socio-political, economic, and religious trajectories under the direct influence of the ocean. This review essay is mainly concerned with this aspect: how did the Indian Ocean play, and how does it continue to play, a crucial role in the memories of and studies on the Afro-Asian interactions in the past and the present.

## The oceanic scape in Africa-Asia Studies

In the past decade, there have been increasing attempts to identify these interactions between Asia and Africa, inside and outside the region. The major conferences organised by the University of Goethe in Kuala Lumpur (2014), Cape Town (2015) and Frankfurt (2016) and by the International Institute for Asian Studies in Accra (2015) and Dar es Salam (2018) are worth noting in this regard. The latter's first conference with participants from 40 countries in 55 panels resulted in the formation of a consortium called the Association for Asian Studies in Africa, headquartered in Accra, and has identified and energised 'Africa-Asia' as a new field of study. Relatedly, there have been remarkable academic initiatives by Chinese, American, Indian, South African, Malaysian, Singaporean, and European institutions, not to mention the international diplomatic conventions for South-South collaborations between postcolonial Asian and African countries, starting with the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung in 1955 and stretching to its 60th anniversary conference re-hosted by Indonesia in 2015. All these efforts have produced a significant amount of academic projects to record, analyse, and advance

the nuances of these linkages, yet the lion's share is focused on the interests of China in Africa, mainly emphasising political and economic negotiations and investments, but also social, cultural and demographic implications. Given the recent 'reappearance' of China after almost 600 years, this sudden boom in literature and discourse has created an imbalanced academic orientation towards the deep genealogies of transcontinental exchanges and encounters between the two regions. The Indian Ocean often appears only marginally as a memory scape of the historical past to be invoked when the situation demands it.

Notwithstanding, the wider Asia-Africa discourse, several edited volumes, and conference proceedings, have recognised the role of the ocean in the transcontinental interactions. Two book series, for example, (published by Ohio University Press, edited by Richard B. Allen; by Palgrave MacMillan, edited by Gwyn Campbell) have published volumes with an emphasis on African interactions with Asia through this littoral. Within this field, one booming zone of study is slavery in the Indian Ocean. The subfield explores nuances of otherwise unrecognised forced relocations of Africans and Asians, from within different Asian-African regions to such faraway places as Australia.<sup>1</sup> Some other common themes, such as piracy, have also found significant scholarly attention, particularly after the increase of Somali piracy in and around the 2010s. Several other individual researches have explored the African involvement in the oceanic mobilities through intellectual, religious, and legal networks. The works on Islamic legal and political encounters in the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries have presented fascinating African cases in the wake of European colonial expansions. And, of course, the histories of European and Arab colonialisms in East and South African terrains through enslavements, forced migrations, genocides, armaments, organised plunders, along with negligible tints of infrastructural developments, have been subjects of serious studies through the frameworks of the oceanic scape.

The three books under review slightly move away from these trends in present historiography, yet they are informed by and have emerged from the wider currents in the African and Asian connections and conflicts because and despite of the European colonial expansions. Omar H. Ali follows the life of Malik Ambar, an iconic figure in the transoceanic and transcontinental mobility of the 16th and 17th centuries, who dramatically went from being a teenage slave to a statesman and kingmaker; Antoinette Burton focuses on gradations of race, gender and politics in the literature produced on the Africa-India entanglements in the 20th century; and Tor Sellström foregrounds the African islands in the littoral as products and producers of the maritime sociocultural geography. These works together represent three major aspects of East and South Africa's predicaments with the maritime world: that of slavery and forced migrations, the depictions of Africans as an inferior racial category within the Indian (Ocean) literary contexts, and the islands as marginalised terrains in geopolitical concerns of mainland countries, be they in Africa or elsewhere.

## Phenomenal life of an African slave

Omar Ali's study tells of the ways in which Africans were forced to leave their homelands as slaves and travel thousands of miles.<sup>2</sup> Malik Ambar was such a slave, yet a figure who resisted the Mughal expansion into the Deccan through his diplomatic skills and military tactics (*bargi-giri*). For several decades in the late 16th and early 17th century Ambar was the sole barrier for the Mughals to the Deccan. Born into and raised by an Oromo tribe in the Ethiopian highlands, enslaved and exchanged in the slave markets of Africa and the Middle East before ending up in South Asia, Ambar travelled a long way in his life, similar to many other thousands of Africans before and after him. In India, Malik Ambar was first sold in the Sultanate of Ahmednagar to the chief minister Mirak Dabir aka Chengiz Khan, who himself was once a Habshi slave and had risen to his position in the

royal court. Under his tutelage, he learnt "the ways of the court and state operations" (p.42). Following the assassination of his master in a royal plot, Ambar travelled between different kingdoms in the Deccan region working for several commanders and rulers. Over the course of time, he "increased his following across the western Deccan" by inheriting the army of his former commanders and harassing Mughal forces and capturing their supply convoys. Utilising this manpower, military and diplomatic skills, and marriage alliances, he rose to prime minister of the Ahmednagar Sultanate where he controlled the enthronement and dethronement of sultans, built up marvellous cities and forts, and excelled in administration of law and order.

In between all the ups and downs of his life, Ali argues that Ambar depended on the life principle of *namak halal* or 'true to the salt'—a concept and tradition of being loyal to the master—in his services to the Nizam Shah rulers, no matter who sat on the throne. However, although true that he was loyal to the sultanate during several hardships, he also poisoned a ruler to death when things did not go as he had planned; or more precisely, when the then Persian queen called his daughter "a mere slave girl", "concubine" and a "kaffir" (p.65). Ambar poisoned both the queen and the king and replaced him with a five-year-old boy as the new sultan. Ambar served his interests more than that of the master(s) and the throne.

Ambar's story has attracted the attention of several scholars in the last century, but Ali 'oceanises' the story through comparative and connected histories. He provides a vivid comparative description of Ethiopia, Iraq and India as backdrops for Ambar's trails. Ambar's later life has been well recorded, but the author accommodates a 'discursive strategy' of contextualisation and imagination to fill the gaps in his early life for which "documentary evidence is sparse" (p.135). Through this mechanism of interpretative connected historical reading, we get a detailed image of the lives and oceanic journeys of not just Ambar, but of also several other African slaves from East and Central African regions.<sup>3</sup>

## Asia sites/cites Africa

By the mid-nineteenth century, the flow of slaves between the continents was reversed; now instead of slaves from African lands, the bounded and free labourers from South Asia and beyond filled the ships as a pivotal workforce for European plantations, colonial bureaucracies, and infrastructure developments in Africa. In the colonial period up until the late 20th century, this process created a layered racial hierarchy in Africa as much as in the Indian soils and minds. Despite claims for Afro-Asian solidarities or because of the Afro-Asian (unequal) collaborations post-Bandung Conference (1955), the 'brown' often asserted itself as an in-between or better racial category vis-à-vis the 'black'. Those of Indian origin distanced themselves from black identities in their social, political and cultural struggles and sought allegiance with the privileges of the white. The (re)presentation of these racial regimes in the postcolonial writings of Indian/African authors form the central emphasis of Antoinette Burton's book, *Africa in the Indian Imagination*.

Burton takes the literature as emblematic of the Africa-Asia interactions and the ways in which those are narrated, negotiated, cited and sited. With a focus on writers with an Indian background and their citationary practices, Burton elaborates on the politics (and biases) of the connections and their tellings, in which Africa, Africans, and 'blackness' are circulated as a recurrent trope in the Indian imaginations. These postcolonial racialised image-nations emerge from the hierarchised privileges that the Indians in Africa enjoyed or strived for during the colonial and apartheid regimes.<sup>1</sup> Before he would become 'Mahatma', Gandhi's political, social, and communalist predispositions against Africans in early 20th century (explicated through his pejorative uses of such terms as 'kaffir'), thereby distancing himself from black people, was part of a larger Indian aspiration of placing themselves above the Africans, according to which they would in 1919 request the League of Nations "to reserve Tanganyika an 'Indian' territory for the purpose of Indian colonisation" and which led Sarojini Naidoo to support this Indian colonial ambition by saying that "East Africa ... is the legitimate Colony of the surplus of the great Indian nation" (p.10). Burton analyses the nuances of such south-south racial and sexual politics by historicising "the role of Africa and of blackness in the emergence of a postcolonial Indian identity that was both transnational and diasporic, but no less conscious of or invested in racial and sexual difference for being both" (p.14).

The multi-sited and many-cited real or fictional journeys of protagonists between India and Africa as well as within Africa deepen our understanding of the modes through which racialised citationary practices plugged into the postcolonial narratives. Burton takes two novels, one travel account, and (auto-) biographical writings to caricature how often those writers walked the thin line of racism and crossed over to the racialist, if not racist, terrains in their writings. This literary corpus stands as a rich archival repository for historical enquiries into the racial and sexual sentimentalities of the authors and their wider contexts. In this archive of mind-sets, we not only see how often skin colour and race conflicted with and compromised each other, but also we witness testimonials of gender collaborations that form interracial solidarities, whether in a patriarchal misogynist setting among brown and black men, or feminist/female understandings of motherhood or sisterhood between and among black and brown women.

Looking through the works of four authors of South Asian descent (Anasuya R. Singh, Frank Moraes, Chanakya Sen, and Phyllis Naidoo), Burton investigates how Africa and Africans have been cited and sited as secondary and tertiary categories in which race, class, sexuality, legality, technology, and politics deepened boundaries and frictions in the envisioned Afro-Asian solidarities of the postcolonial world. Out of the four, only Phyllis Naidoo asserts a non-racial history of Africans and Indians in the anti-apartheid struggles, while the remaining authors follow a racialist citationary apparatus to describe

and enliven African protagonists, plots and places. Beyond these convolutions, gendered and sexualised solidarities emerge across the racial boundaries. While the political mentoring by an African companion (Serete) for Indian brothers (Srenika and Krishandutt) in Singh's novel "confirms the possibility of cross-racial brotherhood" (p.45), Srenika's wife Yagesvari and the family maidservant (Anna) are unable to converse with each other (and thus stands as a critique of universal sisterhood), the same way Indian women would be scapegoated for failed Afro-Asian collaborations in Sen's novel, in which the cross-racial "collaborative patriarchy" is in the driving seat and "Afro-Asian solidarity is a homosocial experience at the expense of a brown woman" (p.105). These lowered and stooped profiles of women in the transcontinental exchanges are reversed once we come to Naidoo's (auto-)biographical writings in which, at least in one instance of the activist Cynthia Phakathi, gender solidarity "interrupt[s] cross-racial alliances and empower[s] an African woman not just to prove her worth or get her job back but to tell her African male employer" the status of her work (p.141).

These writers represented the larger Indian and African connections of their times and they fed into the existing political and diplomatic agendas, whether it was Cold War or Africanisation. Such issues are reflected in the citationary practices of respective authors. Burton convincingly tells us how the authors in the twentieth-century postcolonial Indian and African intellectual realms imagined themselves as harbingers of new forms of change and created an assertion of racial bias through more advanced forms of technological, educational, and cultural exchanges.

## African islands of the ocean

The same predicaments of memory on the oceanic melanges of the past is very much part and parcel of the present on the African islands in which the intermixed communities of Asian, African, and European origins create a maritime demography with increasing concerns over their coexistences in the contemporary island nations. These islands are the focus of Tor Sellström's *Africa in the Indian Ocean*. If the Afro-Asian interactions in Ali's and Burton's works had spatial and temporal segregations through inconsequential/discontinued contacts of a dislocated Ethiopian slave or a Goan traveller, or as a writer who fictionalises the events and moments of temporary contacts

(if not in the South African context of Naidoo), the islands in the ocean do live with the remnant bulks of Afro-Asian intermixtures with deep histories across centuries. Those aspects define present socio-economic, religious and political realms of the island nations in different ways, be it in Madagascar, Comoros or any other islands in the area. Sellström presents a quick trip through all these aspects in his book.

Apart from bringing these islands to the forefront of discussions by locating them in the land-based African and sea-based international maritime geopolitics and describing their predicaments in social, economic, political, and environmental (trans-)formations, Sellström's book as such does not have an overall argument or narrative. He himself admits this: "The book is not the outcome of original research, nor does it claim to break new theoretical ground" (p.xii). This lack of any persuasive arguments in the historical or contemporary situations might make the book less attractive a read, and might appear like a long Wikipedia entry, but it should be useful for general readers to get an overall idea of these islands.

The islands under discussion are Madagascar, Comoros, Reunion, Mauritius, Seychelles, Mayotte, and Chagos. In the long Introduction ('From Zanj to Maersk') Sellström describes their common features, histories, politics, and problems. In the following chapters, he enquires similar themes with regard to each island country, such as the geographical and demographic

specificities, colonial and postcolonial economic and political transitions, diplomatic and international engagements. For the purpose of this essay's focus, what becomes clear in his description of these islands is the ways in which the oceanic mobilities in precolonial and colonial periods dramatically influenced the demographics, cultures and politics of these islands. Just like the movement of slaves, labourers, pirates, and traders shaped their recent past, the large scale migrations in the premodern periods, such as that of the Austronesian, Bantu, Arab, Swahili, and other communities, have also defined the very nature of each island's historical and contemporary situations. The interactions between these Asian and African communities along with the European colonialism provide irrefutable spectacles of transoceanic interactions which produced creole/hybrid, multi-racial/ethnic communities. Some of the islands had also been drastically transformed through Western colonialism, be it the ancient island countries such as the Comoros or other later-populated islands such as Reunion and Mauritius, and the same colonialism continues to shape the fate of some islands like Chagos and Mayotte where the UK, USA, and France continue to breach international laws and transform these places into "the scenes of human tragedies" (p.306).

## Concluding remarks

Taken together, the works of Ali, Burton and Sellström present a conglomerate of historical and contemporary interactions of Africa with the oceanic littoral. While the narratives on slave mobilities and the representations of Africans in postcolonial Indian writings demonstrate a transoceanic entanglement with Asia at large, or India in particular, the socio-political and economic (trans-)formations of African islands in the ocean illuminate the prosperous past of Africa-Asia exchanges along with their contentious present in nationalistic and majoritarian political rhetoric. The oceanic world and its impacts on the lives of African individuals, nations and institutions are irrefutable both in the past and in the present despite the politicised, insensitive and ignorant attempts to erase or ignore the vivid trajectories. Future research and initiatives will enlighten us more on the various faces and phases of Africa's role in the littoral and of Africa-Asian connections across the ocean.

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## Notes

- 1 For a recent study in the field, see for example, Hopper, M. 2015. *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire*; Lovejoy, P.E. 2011. *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*; Pybus, C. 2006. *Black Founders: The Unknown Story of Australia's First Black Settlers*.
- 2 See for example, de Silva Jayasuriya, S. 2011. 'South Asia's Africans: A forgotten people', <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/south-asias-africans>; de Silva Jayasuriya, S. & J.P. Angenot (eds) 2008. *Uncovering the History of Africans in Asia*; Robbins, K. & J. McLeod. 2006. *African Elites in India: Habshi Amarat*; Minda, A. 2004. *An African Indian Community in Hyderabad: Siddi Identity, Its Maintenance and Change*.
- 3 The book is prepared as a textbook for students, with questions and answers, excerpts from primary sources, and a timeline at the end of the book. The narrative style of the book affirms its usability as a textbook. It also gives some portraits and paintings of Ambar and a few other Africans in India, a luxury of elite life that is generally rare for his contemporaries.
- 4 For recent critical readings of Gandhi in South Africa along with the wider Indian sociopolitical sentiments in the larger colonial Africa, see Desai, A. & G. Vahed. 2015. *The South African Gandhi: Stretcher-Bearer of Empire*; Greenwood, A. & H. Topiwala. 2015. *Indian Doctors in Kenya, 1895-1940: The Forgotten History*.



Malik Ambar. Courtesy Wikipedia.



East Africa and the Indian Ocean 1596, Arnold Florent van Langren. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.



# Tamil film culture and politics. Superstar actors as charismatic politicians

Michiel Baas

Compared to Bollywood, the Tamil movie industry (Kollywood) has received much less international and scholarly attention. With its detailed analysis of five movies and their respective stars, Pongiyannan's study *Film and Politics in India* (2015) provides beautiful insights into the entanglement of movies and politics in Tamil Nadu, India.

Reviewed title



## Film and Politics in India: Cinematic Charisma as a Gateway to Political Power

Pongiyannan, Dhamu. 2015.

Bern: Peter Lang  
ISBN: 978-3-0343-1551-7



In 2012, the Tamil film song 'Why This Kolaveri Di' became a worldwide success and has been viewed over a 130 million times on YouTube since. The song was written by lead actor Dhanush, star of the psychological thriller simply titled '3', to which the song was integral. Literally translating as 'Why this killing rage, girl?', its meaning or relevance to the film was not much of a factor in its international popularity. Instead, it was the song's 'Tanglish' (portmanteau of Tamil and English, not unlike Hinglish which combines Hindi and English) that seemed to trigger a particular fascination abroad. It was probably the first time a Tamil song made such an impression overseas. Other than Bollywood, Tamil Nadu's movie industry Kollywood (named after Kodambakkam, a neighborhood

in Chennai that is the center of the production of its movies) enjoys much less international familiarity. Even if Dhanush, a well-known actor who has performed in over 25 movies so far, was central to a hit of epic proportions, his name is unlikely to elicit much of an 'ahh!' across India's borders. The fact that he is the son-in-law of Rajinikanth, one of India's most revered stars, is probably even less known.

Rajinikanth (often shorted as 'Rajini') is one of the five 'Tamil' actors that Dhamu Pongiyannan discusses in relation to their political aspirations in his informative and illuminating account of Tamil film and its associated politics, *Film and Politics in India* (2015). Pongiyannan's main argument is that a clear link can be drawn between the way Tamil actors star on-screen, the role depicted, the social issues touched upon, and his or her political ambitions. For this the book builds on Sara Dickey's seminal work (1993) in showing how these actors are not merely entertainers but in their portrayal also "saviours of the oppressed, protectors of the poor, messiahs

of the malnourished, and deities of the downtrodden". As such they "inform the audience, educate the spectator, address various social problems, provide them with solace, and secure them with hopes through warrior heroes" (p.12).

### Bollywood vs. Kollywood

Any person who has ever seen a Tamil movie will immediately recognize the relevance of the argument made above. It is also what sets apart Tamil movies, and in broader terms 'South Indian' cinema (including the Kannadiga, Malayalam and Telugu movie industries), from Bollywood. While the latter generally revolves around story-lines high on glamour, with meticulously choreographed studio-filmed dance routines and a focus on the upper middle class and elites, the former puts 'ordinary' Indians much more central, with scenes set in market places, people's homes, and simply on the street. While Tamil movies also abound in musical scenes in which

the hero and/or heroine take center stage, they are more generally set 'out in the open', in real life, and are as such less divorced from daily reality than the ones central to Bollywood movies.

Pongiyannan argues that "the relationship between Tamil cinema and politics ... mainly revolves around the actors' potential to project their superhuman qualities and fans' faithfulness to the charisma of their favourite actors" (p.29). Two factors are crucial here. While actors set themselves apart from ordinary men by projecting themselves as exceptional and ordinary on-screen, the audience is 'encouraged' to perceive their stars as superhuman with divine powers (ibid.). In relation to this, fans have even been known to display their devotion to their particular film hero through religious practices and open worshipping. The author furthermore argues that it appears that a "fan's allegiance to cinematic stars grows stronger as the popular democratic institutions remain corrupt and continue to fail the masses" (p.33).

### MGR – Nadodi Mannan (1958)

For his analysis Pongiyannan focuses on five iconic movies, each one clearly connecting with the lead actor's political ambitions and views. The author kicks off the analysis with perhaps one of Tamil cinema's most iconic movie stars, Marudur Gopalamenon Ramachandran, generally referred to as MGR. The founder of the All India Anna Dravida Progressive Federation party or *Anaithu Indhia Anna Dravida Munnetra Kalagam* (AIAMDK), he was the chief minister of Tamil Nadu for ten years, from 1977 till his death in 1987. MGR continues to be worshipped as a god by the state's poor, and temples have been built in his veneration. The movie that Pongiyannan pays special attention to here is *Nadodi Mannan* (1958), which was not only MGR's 100th movie (he would make roughly 150 during his lifetime), but also the one that propelled him into politics and secured his political superstar status. While it does not lie in the scope of this article to provide a proper synopsis of the movie, nor of any of the other discussed in this book, what stands out in this movie – which was also written, directed and produced by MGR – is the way in which corruption, nepotism and injustice are exposed by the two main characters (a double role played by MGR). Besides being the first color movie in Tamil Nadu, the film is a clear example of one that puts 'Tamil-ness' central through its layering of cultural values and moral lessons.

As in the book's subsequent chapter, which focuses on actress Jayalalitha, Pongiyannan notes the importance of MGR's fair skin as part of his appeal to fans. Yet while this may have made him stand-out as a person hailing from a well-off and upper-caste (Brahmin) background, the actor never failed to point out his humble upbringings and his early days of poverty, in order for the masses to be able to identify with him (p.46). Unlike Rajinikanth, arguably Tamil cinema's 'biggest' star 'ever' and a Marathi speaker by birth, MGR was not a native Tamil speaker, something which at some point also became a political issue (p.46). But MGR simply argued that any person who spoke Tamil was a Tamil, though himself of Malayali ancestry. He promoted himself as a pan-Tamil leader, and due to his association with the anti-Hindu Dravidian Movement also made a determined effort not to be seen as religious, thus refusing to play religious film roles (p.47).

### Jayalalitha – Adimaip Penn (1969)

Pongiyannan continues his analysis by zooming in on MGR's heir-apparent and partner Jayalalitha whose 'whiteness' or 'fairness' added considerable charisma to her popular appeal. Also hailing from an upper caste (Ayyangar/Brahmin) background, like MGR Jayalalitha's popularity also crossed caste lines and had a clear unifying effect on the masses. Born in 1948, she passed away recently in 2016 and was at the time still Chief Minister (CM) of Tamil Nadu. In total she would serve six terms as CM for a total of fourteen years. According to Pongiyannan, her career can be divided into three phases, the first

of which (1965-1973) is the time she made her debut and entered into a relationship with MGR; and the second (1973-1991), saw her emerge as a star while her relationship with MGR caused considerable commotion; and the third, post-1991 phase, saw her come into her own, develop her own (political) charisma and eventually become one of the state's most powerful political leaders.

Like MGR in the movie discussed earlier, Jayalalitha plays a double role in one of her most iconic movies, *Adimaip Penn* (1969). It was a notoriously provocative film, in which she was the first actress to expose her belly, uncommon in Tamil movies till then, and as a result she "became the forerunner of the cinematic sexuality of female actors in Tamil Nadu" (p.77). Yet this sexuality would continue to be coupled with notions of innocence, augmenting her appeal to the masses. Actually singing one of the main songs in the movie, rather uncommon in Indian movies since actors and actresses generally lip-sync, the movie will always be remembered for the way it endowed Jayalalitha with a particular charisma that she would expand on and make use of for decades to come. While it cannot be denied that her popularity was partly determined by her controversial relationship with MGR, and augmented by her fair complexion – which the author refers to as "charisma of complexion" (p.99) – as well as upper caste background, the movie discussed here as well as those that followed added powerful layers to what would become one of Tamil Nadu's most powerful and charismatic political leaders.

### Rajinikanth – Padayappa (1999)

More than any other Tamil actor, Rajinikanth has left a mark across the state's borders and even abroad. Legendary for his completely over-the-top action scenes, cigar flipping trickery as well as for that one time when he actually had a one-on-one conversation with a Malaria mosquito in the movie *Endhiran* (or *Robot*, 2010), Rajinikanth's fan base is notorious for their adulation and idolization, which generally reaches feverish conditions around the time of a new movie release. With fan clubs in countries such as Japan, the actor is also far more popular abroad than any other Tamil actor. Compared to the previous actors discussed, however, his political alliances have always

remained somewhat of an enigma. Born in an impoverished Marathi family in the city of Bangalore (capital of the state of Karnataka), he is in many ways the opposite of MGR: unkempt hair, dark skin, and not particularly muscular or even handsome by conventional standards. His choice of roles is interesting in this light as well; he has never shied away from playing characters displaying 'bad behavior' such as drinking and smoking.

While his ordinary looks may make him much more a common man than other actors – arguably in itself an attempt to make Tamil Nadu cinema more representative and realistic (p.104) – his movies tend to be characterized by a particular outlandishness that has become his signature style. Yet analyzing the various characters he has portrayed over time, what stands out is that he is much more religiously inclined than the actors mentioned above. *Padayappa* (1999), one of his most iconic movies, for instance, is also one of the names of the popular Tamil Hindu deity Lord Murugan. Rajini's religious avowals associate him "with right-wing nationalist parties, such as the Bharathiya Janata Party" (p.116), currently in power in India. Furthermore, as the author argues, "The way in which *Padayappa's* success is built on the feudal social structure, caste hierarchy, and the inferior status of women sends a strong message to the Tamil audience" (p.131). Rajini's dark complexion and characterization as a smoker and drinker, though a morally upright man, may convince the audience that he is one of them, but his films at the same time suggest that his audience "leave everything in the hands of god, embrace superstition, and accept the feudal social structure." (ibid.)

### Newcomers Vijayakanth & Sarathkumar

In the final two chapters Pongiyannan moves on to relative newcomers Vijayakanth and Sarathkumar. Again the focus is on the political views of both. Vijayakanth's *Captain Prabhakaran* (1991) and Sarathkumar's *Naatamai* (translated as *The Village Headman*, 1994) are explored in greater detail. Like Rajinikanth, Vijayakanth is a dark-skinned action hero who is also somewhat perceived as an alternative to the former (p.134). At the same time the actor styles himself as a black MGR, imbuing his movies with

strong political messages and skillfully and cunningly portraying himself as a charismatic leader. Perhaps more so than in MGR's case, he is particular known for countering lawlessness and taking up arms against notorious criminals. *Captain Prabhakaran* in that sense, justifies violence, something the actor does so with the following words: "I need to become a beast to destroy the beast," (p.138) the latter referring to corrupt politicians and bureaucrats.



Screenshot of Rajinikanth in the movie Padayappa.

Interestingly, many of Vijayakanth's movie titles are different references to MGR's nicknames and song titles. Vijayakanth also makes a deliberate effort to communicate to MGR fans while at the same time positioning himself as an unyielding action hero who seems to channel Rajinikanth's angry young man's image (p.140). Here the author argues that: "The narrative structure of Vijayakanth's films revolves around this tension between the anti-heroic or antagonistic violent act, and the heroic violent act, violence, and rescue." (ibid.) What makes Vijayakanth particularly unique is his lengthy discourses that he inserts in movies, highlighting "the deplorable plight of the ordinary people when dealing with bureaucratic red tape, corruption and violence against women." (p.155)

Like Vijayakanth, Sarathkumar is an action hero who does not shy away from violence, but much more so than with the other actors discussed, the persona he depicts on screen can be directly linked to his own (Nadar) caste background. Born into a low-caste position, his caste has witnessed upward mobility through its iconic leader K. Kamaraj, who as the author also points out, was a contemporary of Gandhi (p.159-160). Like actors such as Stallone and Schwarzenegger, Sarathkumar is a bodybuilder and of the actors discussed in this book he is perhaps the most known for displaying and conflating a particular muscularity with strong notions of hegemonic and 'rural' masculinity. Through *Naatamai* (1994) he established his charisma "by projecting himself as a man of extraordinary integrity and revolutionary vision in terms of ideals such as, egalitarian justice ..." (p.161) He continues to do so by representing himself as a Rural Rambo, both conforming to the feudal system and confronting the elements that threaten to disrupt the caste hierarchy. Again the poor are a crucial focus in his movies, particularly informed by growing disenchantment over the divide between rich and poor, while also challenging new forms of consumerism and materiality. In particular the actor's charisma builds on his "cinematic characterization as superhuman with extraordinary qualities that can redeem people from their daily problems." (p.167)

### Tamil films in perspective

Pongiyannan's analysis is revealing for the political undertones of many Tamil films and the way Tamil actors make use of their movies to propel their own political careers. In MGR and Jayalalitha's case this led to a long-lasting and determining presence on the political stage, while in the case of the other actors discussed their political influence and ambitions are less easy to pinpoint. A notable omission in Pongiyannan's study is one of Tamil Nadu's most well-known actor, Kamal Haasan (1954), an avowed atheist who has always remained rather aloof about his political ambitions, but has more recently hinted at entering Tamil Nadu's political arena himself.

With its sequential focus, moving from MGR, Jayalalitha and Rajinikanth to more recent actors, the author could have also paid more significant attention to the preferred shift from fair to darker skin tones, the changing role caste plays in the identity formation of its actors and depictions in movies, as well as the more prominent role of violence.

Differing from Bollywood, it is clear that Kollywood movies are much more politically layered, and function as political vehicles for their actors. In its keenness to contrast Tamil movies with North Indian ones, Pongiyannan has little to say about other South Indian movie industries that also have strong political connections, most notably the Telugu one. Besides that, the book makes some claims that lack a sound basis or reference, such as the one where the author argues that Tamil Nadu is the second wealthiest state in India (p.5), or where he mentions that the South Indian languages Kannada, Malayalam and Telugu all have their roots in Tamil (p.8). Both Tamil and Telugu did originate from the same proto language, but Tamil developed from Proto-South Dravidian while Telugu emerged separately from Proto-Central Dravidian. As such it has never quite been conclusive which of the two languages is older. Yet what makes Pongiyannan's study a stand-out one is the fact that it is one of the few that directly focuses on Tamil cinema and while doing so skillfully provides a comprehensive overview of the way Tamil movies relate to various issues and developments in the state.

Although Tamil as a culture and language ranks among the oldest in the world, when it comes to 'Indian culture' the focus remains rather hegemonically on North India, something which sees itself represented in the significantly higher number of publications about Bollywood each year, contrasting markedly with the much smaller number of ones on South Indian cinema. This also sees itself reflected in the international perception of Bollywood as even more prolific than Hollywood in the number of movies that hit the theatres every year, while a comparable number of movies originate from the Tamil and Telugu movie industries. The hit song 'Why This Kolaveri, Di?' did little to change the perception of Tamil movies as a niche industry while Bollywood continues to stand in the limelight and is perceived as India's premier and even 'national' movie industry. Pongiyannan's study is an important reminder that there is more to Indian cinema than Bollywood glamour and that its regional movie industries are superbly revealing for the plight of the country's underclasses, political conundrums, as well as hopes and aspirations of the 'common man'. Here's for hoping more authors will follow suit and investigate the complex and variegated Indian cinematic landscape.

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Screenshot of Anirudh Dhanush singing 'Why This Kolaveri Di'.



Movie poster for Endhiran.

## The Faces of the Unknown: A Frenchman's Adventures in Late Imperial China

Aliz Horvath



### In the Land of Pagodas: A Classic Account of Travel in Hong Kong, Macao, Shanghai, Hubei, Hunan and Guizhou

Alfred Raquez. 2017. Edited and translated  
by William L. Gibson and Paul Bruthiaux

Copenhagen: NIAS Press  
ISBN 9788776942014

**M**ultifaceted – this is perhaps the first word that may come to mind upon reading through Alfred Raquez's (or, using his real name, Joseph Gervais) account on his travels around China during the last years of the 19th century. The book, translated and edited exquisitely by William Gibson and Paul Bruthiaux, provides a curious mixture of genres, impressions, and experiences that may be of interest to a broad audience. The term 'complexity', however, does not only characterize the text, but can be used to describe the author as well who, according to the translators' introduction, possessed an equally complicated background.

The material can be situated in the abundant range of personal accounts created by previous foreign travelers, such as those produced by Marco Polo in the medieval period or Ennin who had penned a multi-year diary in as early as the 9th century. These works all provide interesting insights into the current state of China, but unlike most cases, where the authors' personal circumstances are fairly clear (Ennin, for example, was initially part of a diplomatic envoy and intended to gain more in-depth knowledge on Buddhism), Raquez seems more of a mystery, due to the lack of information regarding his status and the purpose of his travel to Asia.

Despite the fog around the author's persona, the tone of his book consistently

represents a French perspective, which itself is relatively rare in relevant source materials. This approach, accompanied by his numerous references to certain foreigners who served in China in various capacities and his often vivid criticism of other nations, fits organically into the existing scholarship in multiple ways. More specifically, it can enrich the field of microhistorical research produced by, for example, Jonathan Spence, whose work, *To Change China: Western Advisers in China* (London: Penguin Books, 1980), covers the operations of influential figures (such as Inspector General Sir Robert Hart) who are also mentioned by Raquez, demonstrating his privileged status as an individual with special connections. His distinctly French voice, on the other hand, can be juxtaposed with the available studies on the operations of 'Westerners' in late-imperial China, represented by scholars, such as James Hevia, whose major contribution, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in 19th Century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), explores Western colonial endeavors in Asia through specifically British lens, thus shedding light on the distinction between the intentions and practices of different countries. Raquez's account reinforces the idea of heterogeneity, while also showing examples of unexpected collaborations between certain Chinese (or 'Celestial', as he calls them) and

foreign groups, whose mutual interests pushed them on the same 'side'. In this sense, Raquez's *In the Land of Pagodas* unequivocally adds to our understanding of the complexities and the chaotic nature of China's late 19th century history that cannot be characterized simply through the 'China vs the West' binary.

This peculiar point of view is accompanied by an interesting intertwinement of various styles which may perhaps bring us closer to the author's persona. As I mentioned earlier, the book does not include precise information on Raquez's identity, but the rapid shifts between genres, occasionally even within a single paragraph, demonstrates the different 'masks' that he takes on throughout the story. Within the framework of a diary-type structure, Raquez appears in at least three distinct roles which, I believe, are directly related to the stylistic variety of his work: as a tourist, he lists a variety of practical information for future travelers while attracting the reader's attention to the wonders he experiences by providing vivid and almost literary-style descriptions about his urban impressions, the sequence of banquets he attends, and the changing scenery around him. In the course of his kaleidoscopic adventures, the only constant element is the sight of pagodas that he never neglects to mention. In Raquez's mind, these buildings seem to be the symbols of China's

old, traditional, or even authentic side amidst all the novelties and drastic changes that their encounters with foreigners entailed – this recurring motif may be the underlying reason behind the author's choice regarding the book's title.

Furthermore, it is also of importance to point out that Raquez makes great efforts to delineate the nature of French presence in China through the examples of mining, education, politics, etc., which clearly exceed the boundaries of a simple travel guide and make him also a sort of reporter or even 'intelligence agent' who informs his compatriots about future possibilities for France to strengthen its position in the region.

Finally, his references to other primary materials and his critical attitude towards their merit (or the lack of it), the abundance of excerpts from journals and legal documents, numerous photographs, and his precise observations on local customs seem to testify his desire to consider his experience through scholarly lens as well, thus adding another layer to his account.

In scholarly works, there is a tendency to have a relatively ambiguous attitude towards diary-type materials due to their highly subjective nature that may cast doubt on their reliability as primary sources. In the present case, however, the large number of supplementary details, quotes, and translations provided by Raquez, as well as the foreword, written by a Chinese individual, appear to serve as means to enhance the credibility of the material. With all this in mind, we might consider this book a hybrid, 'in-between' work that tells us 'Raquez's truth' through the intertwinement of original texts and the author's personal experience.

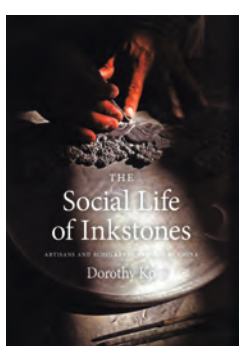
In terms of significance, the text can be interesting not only to China scholars but also to those focusing on European (especially French) history and international relations, since the book provides insights into both the French perception of China and the Chinese view of Westerners, thus serving as a mirror for all parties to face their own realities.

Ultimately, as I mentioned earlier, the quality of the translation is excellent and includes an abundance of well-researched footnotes as well, which certainly facilitate the understanding of Raquez's French references, making it easier for the reader to follow the rich, but at times confusing, narration without major difficulties. The text mentions that the original edition contained an addenda section, but the current version uses footnotes instead both in the case of Raquez's remarks and the additions provided by the translators. Although Raquez's name is included in the relevant notes in square brackets, perhaps a clearer distinction between the original and the later contributions or a note in the introduction about the reasons behind the editors' typographical choices would be helpful. Otherwise, the book can serve not only as a novel and useful material for a broad audience, but also as a highly entertaining read for anyone interested in foreign encounters in the late 19th century.

Aliz Horvath University of Chicago

## The Social Life of Inkstones

Simon Wickhamsmith



### The Social Life of Inkstones: Artisans and Scholars in Early Qing China

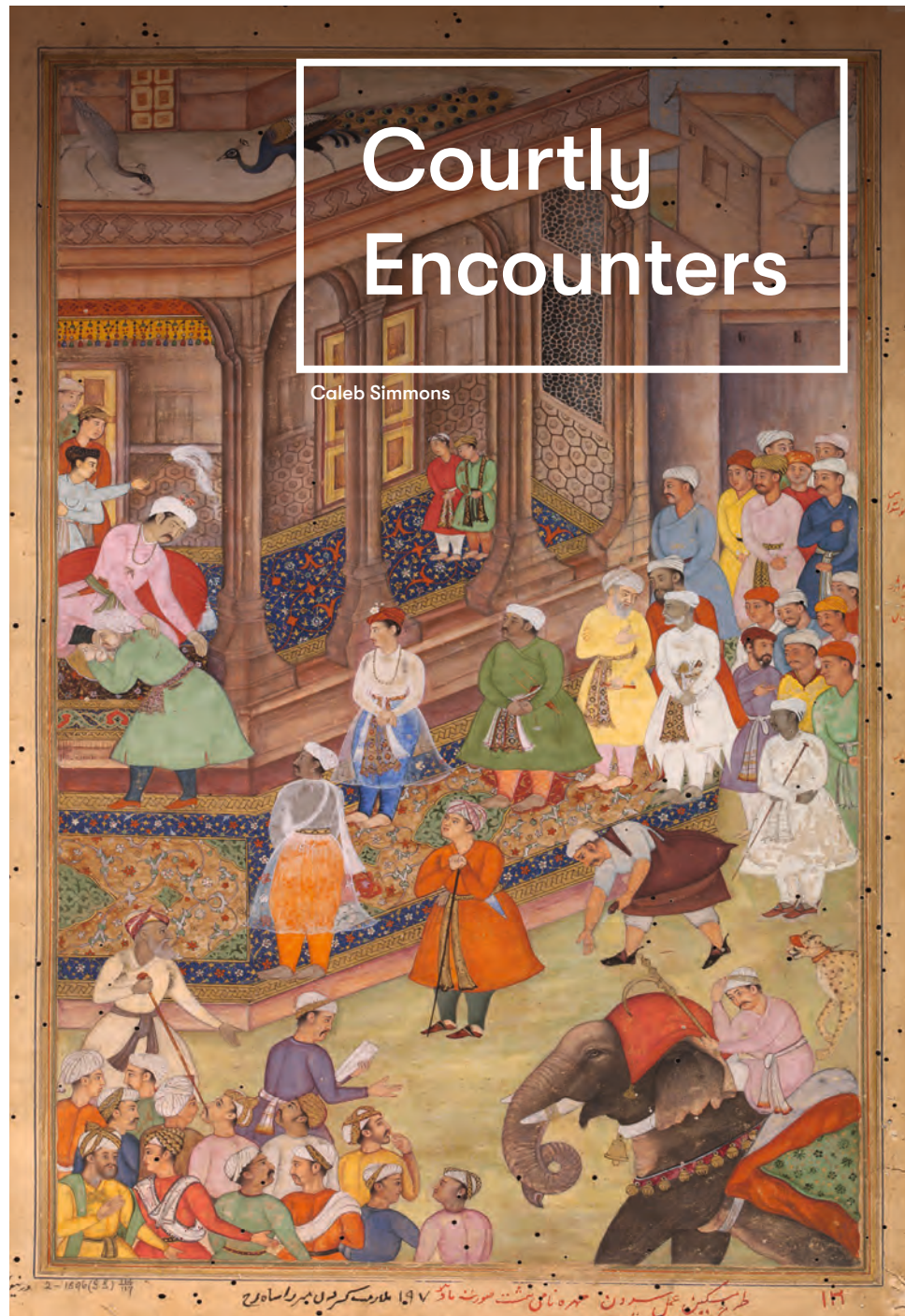
Dorothy Ko. 2017

Seattle: University of Washington Press  
ISBN 9780295999180

**W**hen Manchu forces from the northeast conquered the Ming Empire in 1644, they, having had a script for writing their own language for less than 50 years, suddenly became the rulers of a culture whose written legacy stretched back more than 2000 years. The practical concerns of government, as the Empire developed and its need for administrative efficiency and cultural power grew, meant that the rulers felt the need to have access to, and a benign control over, the material and intellectual expression of their people.

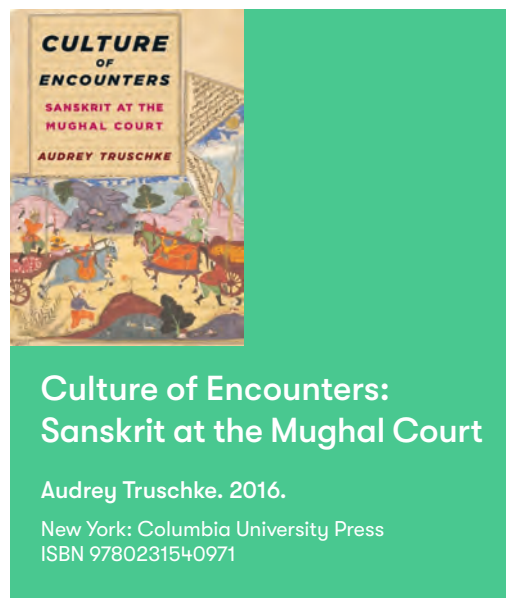
Dorothy Ko's engrossing new book, while clearly showing how 'the Qing leaders expressed their interests in artistry and technology by being attentive to the making of each individual product' (p. 11; italics in the original), reveals more importantly the social import of creating, receiving and appreciating the inkstone, in which rested, ready for use, the vital fluid of administration and literary culture. The 'social life' of the inkstone indeed, is its cultural capital: it is noticeable how little of Ko's book is actually devoted to its use in the actual process of writing, and how central are its aesthetic and tactile qualities.

During the first 150 years, during the reigns of the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong Emperors, the Palace workshops were the tastemakers and focal points of inkstone appreciation, and it was against the subtle artistry and technical design of the workshops' products that the carving of inkstones was judged, and collections assembled. Ko begins her book with an extensive and intricate tour of the



# Courtly Encounters

Caleb Simmons



**C**ulture of Encounters is a groundbreaking study of Sanskrit in the Mughal Court from 1560-1660 CE. In this book, Audrey Truschke argues that ‘the Mughal imperium ... was defined largely by repeated engagements with Sanskrit thinkers, texts, and ideas’ (p. 2) that embedded the court in the ‘intellectual landscape of South Asia’ (p. 4). The author uses the information to problematize our received narrative of Indian history, particularly related to the Mughals, and its implication on contemporary politics in the subcontinent. One of the things that sets this book apart is the author’s command over both Persian and Sanskrit, a rare and enviable quality, that allows her to expertly examine literature across Islamic, Jain, and Brahmin traditions. The work is truly novel, impeccably researched, and very well written. It will inevitably have great influence in the field and is a ‘must-read’ for historians and

religious studies scholars working on early modern, modern, and contemporary India. This book is extremely rich and is important on many levels, but for the purposes of this review I will limit my discussion of *Culture of Encounters* to sovereignty, a thread that runs through the entire book.

## Legitimation theory and sovereignty

Truschke’s discussion of sovereignty begins from a critique of legitimation theory in her introduction. Following Sheldon Pollock (*Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) and Daud Ali (*Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), the author highlights the simplistic perspective of old models of legitimation theory and argues for a more nuanced understanding of the function and role of courtly aesthetic culture in the imperial project. She pushes this forward by adopting Rodney Baker’s work and arguing for a form of ‘inward-turning’ legitimation that sought to define the Mughal ‘unique political self’ (p. 19). Interestingly, she argues that in this unique political self ‘the Mughals also wished to see themselves as Indian kings and pursued this desire by appropriating a culture deeply grounded in South Asia’s pre-Islamic past’ (p. 19).

While this is certainly undeniable and richly demonstrated throughout the volume, my interest in political theology in early modern India led me to wonder how this relates to broader issues of sovereignty in premodern India. I kept thinking that instead of once again highlighting the perils of the oft-critiqued legitimation theory, it could have been productive and interesting to connect this material with work on the nature of sovereignty, e.g. Giorgio Agamben’s *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) or Carl Schmitt’s *Political Theology* (ed. and trans. George Schwab, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and *The Concept of the Political* (ed. and trans. George Schwab, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

## Sovereignty in the Mughal court

A specific example of where this could have been helpful is in the third chapter when Truschke turns her attention to the construction of sovereignty in Persian renderings of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. This chapter is perhaps the most intriguing of the entire work as the author explores the multiple valences between Islamicate and Sanskrit traditions in the texts and the processes of translation. Particularly interesting is the way the author expertly navigates between politics and aesthetics in order to show how the divide is arbitrary and meaningless in this case. She argues instead that the Persian *Mahābhārata* tradition sought to redefine sovereignty

by articulating a history of kingship and by forming a new Indo-Persianate aesthetic. The chapter is thoroughly convincing in its argumentation against legitimation theory and its call to consider the role of knowledge systems and aesthetics in the construction of imperial power; however, in this discussion the implications of these translations on Indian political theology was perhaps downplayed a little too much in order to emphasize the aesthetic literary interactions. Specifically, I am thinking about the discussion of Abū al-Fazl’s preface to the *Razmnāmah* (though to be fair the author returns to this subject in brief repeatedly, including a great discussion in Chapter 6, p. 218). Akbar’s struggles to seize authority from the ulama and the declaration of the king’s authority in al-Fazl’s preface would have been an interesting place to discuss sovereignty and the role of aesthetics in the state of exception. This could have also set the stage for the fourth chapter in which Akbar’s ‘universal kingship’ and ‘comprehensive sovereignty’ were discussed (p. 143).

While the book was overwhelmingly convincing in its overall goals, this reviewer was left with many questions regarding sovereignty in the Mughal court: What are we to make of sovereignty and the Mughal unique political self as ‘Indian kings ... deeply grounded in South Asia’s pre-Islamic past’ in the interaction of Persian and Sanskrit courtly cultures? What implications does this have for our understanding of sovereignty in Indian kingship more broadly?

The author deftly shows that the interactions between the Sanskrit and Persian literary traditions was dynamic, but it was clearly also a generative one beyond its aesthetic innovations, and limiting the discussion of sovereignty to legitimation theory brings up larger questions related to political theology and sovereignty within India that are left unaddressed. One can hardly fault the author for not treading into these discussions further given the robust manner with which she navigates so many difficult academic terrains within the book. Perhaps it will even encourage those of us interested in sovereignty and political theology to look more closely at the Mughals in the future.

## Conclusion

In that regard, I highly recommend *Culture of Encounters* as not only an innovative study of Mughal courtly aesthetic culture but also for its ability to foster a greater interest in questions of the construction of sovereignty and political theology in early modern India. Libraries at any institution of higher education need to have this book on its shelves. It would be ideal reading for a graduate course on modern Indian history, religion in South Asia, Islamic history, and/or Indian Islam (and surely many others). It is probably too advanced for most undergraduate students; though it is well-written enough for bright, engaged students in upper division seminars.

Caleb Simmons University of Arizona

workshops through the first three imperial reigns, including an account of the master-craftsman and designer Liu Yuan. This material on how the Empire contributed to the aestheticization of the inkstone, its reframing as an objet d’art, elegantly contextualizes the remainder of the book. Ko’s analysis of Liu’s contribution to what she suggests as being a secondary reframing, of the dragon as a traditional symbol of imperial power as is one of the book’s art historical highlights. From the Imperial Palace, the book moves first to the Yellow Hill villages in Zhaoqing, Guangdong province, where the precious Duan stone were mined and carved. Perhaps this book is actually more about the Duan stone than about any product made from it, for it is the color and the weight and the luster of the stone which gives it the quality which rendered the inkstones so desirable to collectors. As with a sculptor of marble or wood, the importance to a carver of inkstones of sourcing just the right stone, of creatively

envisioning its application, is vital to the refinement of the finished work, and Ko’s treatment of the mines around Yellow Hill is exemplary in showing both how the physical landscape produced stones, and also how the stonecarvers themselves developed precision tools with which to extract and subsequently carve the stones. The two chapters which concentrate on the carvers of inkstones emphasize the importance of skill even over gender. Gu Erniang, who functions as the central character of this story, was the leading carver of inkstones in her time, but also an entrepreneur and designer who, to use Ko’s words, expertly promoted her own brand. Yet, while Gu’s artistry and her brand became famous, the details of her life remain hidden. Ko clearly wants to explore the artisan as a biographical subject, as well as a cipher for his or her art, and yet like the subtle elements concealed (or restrained) within the carved inkstone often the individual is expressed through the voices of second-hand accounts,

or art historical research. The character and historical development of Gu’s brand, then, is an indication of how connoisseurship and cultural power worked in the Qing Empire during the 18th century, the subject of Ko’s concluding chapter about the collectors of inkstones and their collections. As a woman, Gu’s gender seems to have been (or to have become) of little import in the light of her art. However, inkstone carving and inkstone appreciation remained masculine preserves, and while women could use inkstones to write, and to write poetry of great beauty, circles of collectors were limited to men. But, as the evidence of Ko’s painstaking research shows, there were women who collected and appreciated inkstones for just the same reasons, and in just the same ways, as did the men with whom they lived. One of the principal qualities of Ko’s work is in revealing the influence which women exercised from their ‘occluded’ position, and I feel that there is a sense in which their marginality, as with

so much in the way in which Chinese aesthetics is studied and framed and repackaged, makes their influence –yet not, of course, the recognition accorded them in life –all the greater. This is in almost every sense an excellent book. It is full of information and of historical and art historical analysis, and its illustrations –notwithstanding that the subject matter might not always be easy to photograph successfully –are frequent and clear. Physically weak readers should note however, that it is a very heavy book, due to the quality and weight of its paper and binding. That said, the University of Washington Press has produced a fascinating contribution to the study of the art and aesthetics of writing in China, and to the cultural history of the Qing. Dorothy Ko is a talented scholar, but she is also a most alluring writer, and I look forward to reading her other books.

Simon Wickhamsmith Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

## IIAS signs cooperation agreement with the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS)

On 24 April 2018, in Leiden, the Netherlands, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) signed an agreement to establish a SASS-IIAS Centre for China Studies in Leiden, and an IIAS-SASS Centre for China Studies in Shanghai. The cooperation will relate not only to developments within China, but also to relevant topics in other parts of Asia and beyond. The agreement was co-signed by Leiden University.

The agreement provides for the exchange of researchers between IIAS and SASS and their partners, and cooperation in projects. Moreover, SASS and IIAS agree that the two representative centres should be made fully available to the researchers and members of Leiden University, IIAS's umbrella structure. Philippe Peycam: "This ceremony is not just celebrating the long-standing SASS-IIAS partnership, but also one that includes Leiden University". The agreement was signed during a festive ceremony at Leiden University's Faculty Club, in the presence of a broad group of interested parties from, among others, Leiden University, NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) and the Chinese Embassy. The signatories were Prof. Wang Zhen (王振), Vice-President of SASS, Dr Philippe Peycam, Director of IIAS, and Prof. Carel Stolker, Rector Magnificus of Leiden University.



Left to right: SASS Vice-President Prof. Wang Zhen (王振), Rector Magnificus of Leiden University Prof. Carel Stolker and IIAS Director Dr Philippe Peycam.

### IIAS-SASS partnership

The present agreement constitutes a new chapter in an already long-standing and active partnership between IIAS and SASS. In 2005, in Shanghai, the two institutes jointly organised the fourth edition of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 4). This was the first ever major international event of this kind in the People's Republic of China, attended by 1,400 participants from all over the world. From that time on, IIAS forged collaborations with many PRC institutions, including of course, SASS. Another important step in the collaboration between SASS and IIAS was in 2011, when the two organisations joined thirteen other institutes from Asia, Europe and the USA to operate in the IIAS-coordinated

interdisciplinary and trans-sectorial research platform, the 'Urban Knowledge Network Asia' (UKNA), under the theme of 'Human Flourishing in Asian Cities'. Among the over 120 researchers that were exchanged between all the UKNA partners, several researchers from the two institutes spent time in both Shanghai and Leiden. This year, also under UKNA, SASS and IIAS are organising, in collaboration with Fudan University and New York University Shanghai, a major conference on port cities, taking place in Shanghai in November 2018. In addition, also this year, SASS will be participating, and partnering with IIAS, to support the second edition of the international conference 'Asia-Africa: a New Axis of Knowledge', which will take place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on 20-22 September 2018.

### Leiden-SASS workshop

The signing ceremony was preceded by an afternoon workshop, during which representatives of SASS and scholars from Leiden University gave presentations about on-going research on both sides. Following introductions by Prof. Wang Zhen and Dr Philippe Peycam, the Director of the SASS Institute of Sociology and Institute of Youth and Juvenile Studies, Dr Yang Xiong (杨雄) spoke on the subject of 'Chinese Social Development, Challenges and Policy Thinking'. The next speaker was Dr Shi Nan, researcher at SASS, who gave a lecture 'On the Flexibility of the Renminbi Exchange Rate'. The last two lectures were delivered by researchers from Leiden University. Focusing on 'China-Pakistan Economic Corridor', Dr Wang Jue (王珏) of the Leiden Institute for Area Studies (LIAS) spoke about the 'Opportunities and Challenges on the 'Belt and Road'', after which Dr Rogier Creemer, researcher at the Van Vollenhoven Institute for Law, Governance and Society of the Leiden Law School, addressed the 'Role of Technology in Governing China'.

The delegation furthermore included Dr Chen Qingan (陈庆安; SASS Institute of Law), and Dr Liu Ahming (刘阿明; SASS Institute of International Relations), who had arrived two weeks earlier to help prepare the day in close collaboration with IIAS staff member Lin Xiaolan (林晓兰), as well as to discuss a business plan for the cooperation between SASS and IIAS for the coming years. The discussion was continued immediately upon the signing ceremony, together with the full SASS delegation.

SASS website:  
[www.sass.org.cn](http://www.sass.org.cn)



## IIAS National Master's Thesis Prize 2018

IIAS offers an annual award for the best national master's thesis in the broad field of Asian Studies, in the Netherlands

### The Award

- The honorary title of 'Best Master's Thesis' in Asian studies
- A maximum three month stipend to work at IIAS, in order to write a PhD project proposal or a research article

### Criteria

- The master's thesis should be in the broad field of Asian Studies, in the humanities or social sciences
- The thesis must have been written at a Dutch university
- Only master's theses which have been graded with an 8 or higher are eligible
- The thesis must have been evaluated in the period 1 Oct 2017 – 31 October 2018
- Both students and their supervisors can apply

### Submission

Please submit four hard copies of the master's thesis and a cover letter including the grade awarded and your contact details.

Submissions should be sent to:  
Secretariat  
International Institute  
for Asian Studies (IIAS)  
P.O. Box 9500  
2300 RA Leiden  
The Netherlands

Application deadline: 1 November 2018, 9:00 am  
For further information email: [iias@iias.nl](mailto:iias@iias.nl)



## Upcoming conferences

Still to come in 2018: two major international conferences co-organised by the International Institute for Asian Studies. The events are open to anyone with an interest in the themes addressed, yet it is unfortunately no longer possible to submit proposals.



### Borderland Spaces: Ruins, Revival(s) and Resources

The 6th conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network will focus on the generative and productive capacity of border spaces, which is urgently in need of being addressed. It will address the following questions: How are borderlands in Asia creating alternative spaces for heritages, self-definition and the extraction of resources? How can these cases serve to rethink social theories of various kind? Organised by the American University of Central Asia, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and the Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN).

13-15 August 2018

Venue:  
American University of Central Asia,  
Bishkek,  
Kyrgyzstan

Information and registration:  
[www.asianborderlands.net](http://www.asianborderlands.net)



### Africa-Asia, a New Axis of Knowledge – Second Edition

20–22 September 2018

Venue:  
University of Dar Es Salaam,  
Dar Es Salaam,  
Tanzania

Building on the multiple encounters, interactions and dialogues initiated at the 1st Africa-Asia Conference (Accra, Ghana, 2015), this second conference seeks to deepen the explorations of new realities, and long histories connecting Africa and Asia. Organised by the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM, Tanzania), Association for Asian Studies in Africa (A-ASIA, Accra, Ghana) and the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS, Leiden, the Netherlands). In partnership with: Muziris Institute for the Indian Ocean Studies, University of Calicut (Calicut, Kerala, India); International Institute for Asian Studies (Leiden, the Netherlands);

Leiden University (Leiden, the Netherlands); University of Michigan (UM, Ann Arbor, U.S.); L'Observatoire des sociétés de l'océan Indien -OSOI, Université de La Réunion (La Réunion, Fr.); National University of Singapore (NUS, Singapore); Social Science Research Council (SSRC, New York, USA); Center for Asian Studies, University of Ghana (Accra, Ghana); Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS, Shanghai, China); Henry Luce Foundation (U.S.); and the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS, Japan).

Information and registration:  
[www.icas.asia/africas](http://www.icas.asia/africas)

### New book in the IIAS/AUP Asian Heritages Series

The Chinese state uses cultural heritage as a source of power by linking it to political and economic goals, but heritage discourse has at the same time encouraged new actors to appropriate the discourse to protect their own traditions. This book focuses on that contested nature of heritage, especially through the lens of individuals, local communities, religious groups, and heritage experts. It examines the effect of the internet on heritagisation, as well as how that process affects different groups of people.

Christina Maags is a lecturer in Chinese Politics at the School of Oriental and Asian Studies (SOAS), University of London.

Marina Svensson is Professor of Modern China Studies at Lund University and does research related to human rights, cultural heritage, journalism, digital society and the Internet in China.

<http://en.aup.nl/books/9789462983694-chinese-heritage-in-the-making.html>



### Chinese Heritage in the Making: Experiences, Negotiations and Contestations

Christina Maags & Marina Svensson (eds) 2018.

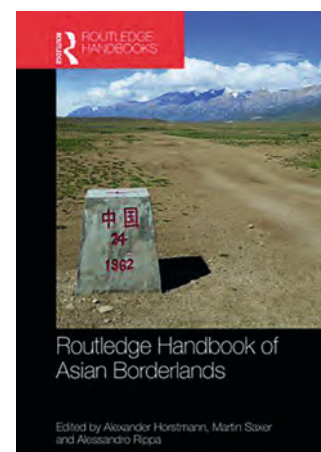
Amsterdam University Press  
ISBN: 978-94-6298-369-4  
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### Asian Borderlands: workshop and book launch

2-3 May 2018

Alexander Horstmann & Karin Dean,  
Tallinn University,  
Estonia



On 2-3 May 2018, to mark the publishing of the *Routledge Handbook of Asian Borderlands* (eds Alexander Horstmann, Martin Saxer and Alessandro Ripa), Tallin University and the Forum for Asian Studies at Stockholm University jointly hosted a book launch in conjunction with a workshop, titled 'Innovative Approaches to Border Studies'.

The *Handbook* is yet another milestone in the studies of borderlands generally and in the growing field of Asian border studies specifically; it is intended for a wide audience – political or social stakeholders in borders, students and people thinking about borders within the wider society – because we strongly hold that the insights gleaned from borders and 'bordering' can enhance the explanatory power in understanding the converging social worlds across the globe.

The two-day workshop critically evaluated the current state of interdisciplinary research on borders, explored future trends and new methods, while also establishing connections between 'the mainstream' and Asian border scholars. It explored where Asian border studies as an interdisciplinary field is heading and teased

out complementary theoretical insights from Asian border research to contribute to wider scholarship on the one hand, and identified new innovative methods for studying any border, on the other.

Alexander Horstmann (Tallinn University) argued that there is a dearth of theory building in borderland studies, but that there are new avenues, not least those developed in the context of the Asian Borderlands Research Network ([asianborderlands.net](http://asianborderlands.net)). Beppe Karlsson (Stockholm University) presented his work on migration strategies of indigenous minorities in Northeast India. Tomas Cole (Stockholm University) presented his case-study on conflict, conservation and alternative regimes of sovereignty in the highlands of Myanmar. Other new avenues and innovative concepts on Asian borderland studies were also presented: Nick Megoran (Newcastle University) on the biography of borders, focussing on the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border; Karin Dean (Tallinn University) on assemblage and the Sino-Myanmar border; Jussi Laine (University of Eastern Finland) on border making and -scaping; Martin Saxer (LMU Munich) on pathways, place-knots and curation, terms that he developed in the context of his ongoing ERC project on 'Remoteness and Connectivity: Highland Asian in the World'. Finally, Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi (University of Bern and Université de Fribourg) presented her new project with the Swiss National Foundation, 'Road construction maintenance in Sino-Inner Asia border regions'. All in all, the workshop collected very promising new avenues in border research.

The *Routledge Handbook of Asian Borderlands* is available from:  
<https://tinyurl.com/routledgeAB2018>



Left: The tanneries, Fez.  
Below: Médersa mérinide, Salé



# A sense of heritage

## Student discussion in Morocco

Heidi Jie and Eun Chae Park

Eleven students from the IIAS-coordinated Critical Heritage Studies programme at Leiden University and twelve Museology students from Mohammed V University shared a learning experience about the complexities of heritage in Morocco. The study trip was led by an entourage of five academic experts with different disciplinary backgrounds, including Philippe Peycam (Director of IIAS), Léon Buskens (NIMAR), Willem Vogelsang (Deputy Director of IIAS), Elena Paskaleva (lecturer and coordinator of the Critical Heritage Studies programme at Leiden University) and Paul van der Velde (ICAS Secretary), who all actively participated in the academically stimulating and culturally enriching exchange. It was a five-day immersion in Moroccan architecture, museums, and, most importantly, food that brought us in touch with the multi-faceted aspects of the cultural heritage of a country that is trying to find its own voice.

### Day 1: Tardy trepidation

Schiphol Airport, eight o'clock in the morning. What began as an uneventful trip turned into momentary worries upon touchdown in Casablanca where two of the members of our party were held in limbo by customs, pending approval of their visas for entry into the country. The rest searched frantically for Wi-Fi and dirhams, some with more success than others. After customs released the required visas, we were off to Rabat where we, running late, finally met with the students from Mohammed V University and their professor Mohammed Saïd El Mortaji. The two groups introduced themselves over a cup of mint tea and Moroccan sweets.

After tea, the Leiden group was steered to stunning panoramic riverside views set against the late evening sun. What followed was a tour through Rabat's historically and culturally significant sites, guided by professor Mohammed. By the time dusk had fallen, Oumaima Oualid, a PhD candidate in Critical Heritage at Mohammed V University, led us through the bustling streets and plazas of Rabat. We took time to admire the tiled fountains of the souk [market place]. Originally serving as gathering places for the locals and their animals to water themselves as well as to catch up on the latest gossip, these fountains are now being renovated with the added purpose of heritage-making and attracting tourists. The group then dined in an Italian restaurant where we had the chance to learn about, discuss and exchange views on topics

In April 2018, students and academics from Leiden University in the Netherlands and Mohammed V University in Morocco embarked on a five-day journey to be immersed in the complexities and history of the expression of cultural heritage in Morocco. The trip was organised by the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and the Netherlands Institute of Morocco (NIMAR) in Rabat, Morocco.

ranging from Muslim prayer beads to political divides in Morocco. After dinner, although very enthused, most of us were longing to find our beds.

### Day 2: No sh\*t talk about my city

Morning breakfast at café Lina with French pastries, coffee and a jus d'orange. A visit to the heart of Casablanca, guided by shamelessly proud architect and Casablanca native Labib El Moumni who would not accept, in his words, "sh\*t" talk about his city. He guided us through the wide boulevards lined with colonial-era Art Deco architecture, remnants of the French protectorate. The city design, culminating in the symbolic clock tower, punctuated Casablanca's firm feet in the future. El Moumni highlighted the architectural details that showed the change in emphasis from French to a Moroccan identity.

Our tour ended with our first traditional Moroccan lunch, during which Léon Buskens proposed we consider assumptions about authenticity by illustrating the fluidity of changes in cultural heritage with the history of our drinking glasses on the table. They were originally an exercise in frugality, made from recycled glass, and used primarily in restaurants. The concept of *bildy*, or 'authentically made', turned these previously low-cost, mass-produced glasses sold for 1 dirham a piece, into twenty-five euro glasses sold in Parisian shops!

From there, it was a dash to the train back to Rabat for Leon's lecture on 'The Past and Future of Morocco', providing our group with the context from which to consider the coming sites on our visit. Afterwards, the group split up, and a small satellite group went to have dinner in a local restaurant to have a first taste of the local cuisine.

### Day 3: 3D lectures

A morning trip to the city of Salé by tram, where the main maritime gate of Salé and archaeologist Dr Mohamed Krombi awaited us. With infectious enthusiasm, Dr Krombi gave the group an extended tour during which he halted at important archaeological sites. Animated

and with great passion, he captivated his audience's attention as he told the tale of the history of Salé, once the political and maritime centre of Morocco. He led us to the top of the maritime gate, gifting us with a beautiful view. Although Salé houses more citizens than Rabat, it has lagged behind in political and economic resources. Rabat and Salé have a centuries-old feud that still lives on today. The new tram system, even if it facilitates commuting, has so far failed to foster any warm feelings between the two cities. After admiring a renovated *caravan sarai* [roadside inn], we enjoyed a cup of mint tea with a snack called *msemmen* – a pancake-like bread that is eaten throughout the day.

Back at the NIMAR institute, three Leiden students presented their research; we then visited the *Musée de l'Histoire et des Civilisations*, an archaeological museum that aims to bring Moroccan heritage and history to life, starting from prehistoric times to the Islamic era. After wrapping up our visit to the museum, the group arrived at the buildings of Mohammed V University where the Leiden students continued their presentations for the day. The Moroccan students were invited and encouraged to consider how the topics presented could be implemented in a Moroccan context. The souk of Rabat was a welcome respite at the conclusion of the tours and presentations, where the students now had a chance to spend some time together. Our gracious hosts were happy to show us the souk and all its surprises. Students bought herbs and spices, sweets and boxes, all while experiencing the smells and sounds of a vibrant, lively souk, a living entity, defined at its core by the people and their relationship with it. The bargaining and the stories told while being immersed in the atmosphere brought home the idea that 'heritage' is not at rest, but alive, and dynamic.

### Day 4: Lost in the souk

The city of Fes. Guided by al-Mountasir Loukil, we visited Dar Batha Médina, the new museum of Islamic art, constructed by the French using parts of houses of the Moroccan nobility of Fes. Rooftop drinks at a café near one of the old city gates revealed how the city works to protect old buildings, using removable architectural components

Fieldtrip,  
Critical Heritage Studies,  
Morocco,  
4-8 April 2018

and allowing public use while protecting the building at the same time. We resumed our tour to visit the Al-Attarine Madrasa, built during the height of decorative Islamic architecture. Continuing to navigate to our next destination, however, revealed the logistical challenges of manoeuvring a group of thirty through the souk, past carts, people and enticing shops, inevitably resulting in the group splitting up and some getting lost. The remainder of the group continued to enjoy the tanneries, amongst other sites.

There was something about this souk that left a deep impression on most of us. From the market stalls came a barrage of sounds and sights; this place had its own pace and life. Some students had the opportunity to shop and bargain at the local stores. From the Moroccan students and the merchants of the souk, the Leiden visitors learned about locally produced goods, their uses, who uses them and why, which provided insight into Moroccan daily life and culture. When the group was reunited again, we shared our last traditional Moroccan dinner with the other students and teachers, exchanging memories, impressions, and *inshallah, aux revoirs* and not-*adieu*s.

### Day 5: There and back again

We were sorry to have to leave Morocco, a beautiful country we had just begun to explore. Our bus was ready to take us back to Casablanca Airport, but as trips go, things do not always happen according to plan. It was by coincidence, and our misfortune, that our bus was held up for 45 minutes by a marathon in the city centre. Consequently, many of us did not make the flight back to Amsterdam and had to spend the night in Casablanca before continuing the journey home on the following day. One flight and a ride on the Thalys brought everyone home safely, thus ending our journey.

### Reflections

It is very well possible to learn about and engage with critical heritage studies in the Netherlands, but the privilege of traveling to a country so vastly different from one's own afforded us the invaluable experience of 'understanding' away from our textbooks and outside the comfortable realm of the classroom. It made us keenly aware of the importance of context and the relevance of learning from people who are in close contact with the culture under investigation. The senses also played an important role in the experience. Sounds, smells, tastes and textures add depth and colour like spices add flavour to food, something that a PowerPoint presentation in the classroom cannot convey. Heritage, understood as something fluid, evolves through exchanges, continuously re-invented, and as societies change, their heritages change with them.

Heidi Jie and Eun Chae Park students from the Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe programme and participants of the Morocco fieldtrip.

# The Cotton Spring

Rakhee Kalita Moral

The two-and-a-half-day workshop was “a liberating exercise”, as one women’s studies scholar and teacher remarked, filled with lively conversations with women’s collectives, sharing experiences and perspectives from outside the formal structure of the classroom and the curriculum. Conducted by Professor Vergès (Advisor) and Dr Aarti Kawra (Academic Director of the HaB programme), the workshop brought the everyday life of women seamlessly into the feminist scholar’s world and provided a shared space for reflection over common concerns and issues stemming from the region’s unique context.

Our discussions in preparation for the workshop with women of different tribes and communities in the Naga Hills and the Assam-Nagaland borderlands were initially to explore how traditional customs/practices and formal legal injunctions trigger and influence collectivisation among women in the region. My young and multi-tasking research assistant Tiachenla was largely the mover in Nagaland, without whom it would have been impossible to organise the event. Between Abantee Dutta, project associate and law researcher, and myself, some of the earlier frameworks and rationale of understanding women’s practices of resistance have since been reshaped by the revelations that unfolded through the workshop itself. However, the question that still remained pertinent and uppermost on the workshop’s agenda was: How do we do feminist methodologies in the specific context of northeast India without being limited by overarching theoretical prescriptions that typically direct many of our approaches to gender studies, and in particular women’s studies?

The workshop was flagged off by a plenary session at the Sudmerson Hall on 2 April 2018, where the background and intent of the HaB workshop –to revitalise and make relevant the teaching and learning of women’s studies courses for and by women in the Northeast –was officially recognised by university officials, especially by the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar of Cotton University. It was followed by a lecture by Francoise Vergès on *Political Feminism in the Era of Femonationalism and Populism* to a packed room and eager audience that included many students and scholars from other small and big colleges and universities in Guwahati and beyond. The public session sent out a clear message to all those present that Cotton University was indeed ready to be the initiating platform for curricular reflection and change in gender studies in the cluster of institutions of higher education in the northeast of India, and for the implications for allied research.

Kheshili Chishi, a tireless peace worker from Kohima in conflict-torn Nagaland, whose drive and commitment was largely responsible for mobilising two dozen women via overnight train journeys from the Naga Hills to Guwahati, exemplified the urgency and spirit of shared purpose that brought the 70 participants together in the workshop. Kheshili, one of the front-runners in the *Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR)*, a civil society collective of the state rooting for peace with the Indian government, remains a major resource for the current project on women’s mobilisations, and has brought the author in touch with several grassroots people whose stories and struggles give flesh to a proposed publication under preparation as part of the HaB programme. Entitled, *The Little Book of Women’s Practices from Assam and Nagaland*, the volume is envisaged as a handbook of women’s individual and collective practices in the everyday, both in confrontation and collaboration with state, society and family. One that

Early April 2018, and the corridors of Cotton University in Guwahati, the capital city of Assam, were abuzz with a burst of energy and gathering of women in the central conference hall of the 117-year old institution, to participate in a workshop on ‘Feminist Methodologies’. The event was occasioned by the northeast India project of the IAS-coordinated programme *Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World (HaB)*, undertaken by the author to explore how the experience of women’s mobilisations for peace via diverse civil society agents in recent times, in Nagaland and Assam, could enter the discourse and practice of women’s studies courses in the region.



Workshop participants

could feed into larger paradigms of women’s studies programmes elsewhere. Articulating the experience of being a woman in Assam and Nagaland, the handbook will document women’s decisions, personal and public, in the specific cultural and political context and history of the region.

## Beyond home and family

The Cotton workshop was in recognition of this ongoing work of women’s collectives in the region. It was a coming together of women from various orientations, both academics and members of civil society groups. As the workshop processes unfolded and participants listened to the experience of –in the words of renowned feminists from across the world– “being (conscious) in the world”, their reactions ranged from sheer wonder to euphoria and realisation of a unity across geographies. This knowledge provided participants with novel ‘ways of seeing’ their own positionalities and endorsed the local and contextual as being uppermost for rethinking the discourse and practice of women’s studies in the region.

The participants comprised women from academia, including IIT Guwahati, Gauhati University, North Eastern Hill University, TISS, Northeast Studies’ Regional Centre and other colleges and collectives, as well as independent researchers, unaffiliated but passionate women, and a few activists that also included some ardent MA students from the English department of Cotton University, and happily for me, my dynamic young colleagues Pallabi, Raa and Risha. The workshop’s activities enabled and echoed the participants’ own lived situations, inspiring a sense of purpose towards decision-making and change, together with the recognition that gaining knowledge about one’s own experience and positionality in the present is empowering in itself.

A number of exercises were deployed to enable sharing in an atmosphere of conviviality and exchange. The workshop began in the afternoon of April 2nd with the ‘Who are we?’ exercise of mapping one’s home and introducing oneself as though ‘to a friend’, using small photos and index cards on a wall map showing the northeast region of India, followed by individual accounts of ‘How we define ourselves socially’ outside and beyond the home and family. The next day, Francoise led the first session on women’s work, titled, “Who is caring and cleaning the world?”, during which the individual and collective hours of work were calculated to bring to the fore the mental load carried by women in society today.

The afternoon session of day 2 reiterated the need to interrogate crystallised constructs of ‘gender’, ‘custom’, ‘tribe’, ‘communal identity’, ‘the Northeast’, and ‘nation’, that define and intersect the experience of being ‘woman in Assam and Nagaland’. Francoise helped us inquire into the notion of ‘gender’ in its Western definition, and to challenge it for being too narrow and thus too poor to truly account for the multiple ways in which women experience their identities, roles and belonging to a place. Aarti proposed the idea of interrogating the discourse of place-based identities and local pasts or lived histories, and of becoming a researcher, activist in defending one’s own sense of place. She discussed the idea of expanding the notion of value to resist the logic of monetary value via price and a utility and introduced the idea of custodianship and inalienable value to complement the rights-based approach to natural resources, including flora and fauna, property, skills such as weaving, dyeing and bamboo construction, and other material agents of sustenance and cultural reproduction.

## Workshop, Cotton University India, 2-4 April 2018

### Dare to think, dare to imagine

The last day of the workshop featured several break-away sessions to discuss ‘Utopian thinking in a changing world’ in order to realise a shared manifesto that stressed the need to go beyond traditional patriarchal norms to explain the violence of men against women. What emerged was the need to inquire into the irreversible structural changes –political, military, ecological, economic –that were responsible for the emasculation of men in the borderlands by the actions of the state. This was followed by an individual story-board exercise, titled, ‘I/We dare to think, dare to imagine’, during which participants used dry pastels on black chart paper to create visual representations of womanhood from their own vantage points. It resulted in a spectacular wall mural that further enlivened the workshop space, already adorned with flowers and textiles in bright colours.

The final session was a reflection and high tea with the Vice-Chancellor and Registrar of Cotton University, who were more than just enthusiastic about the curricular outcomes of the workshop. It was exciting to see that the Cotton University administration was already thinking of rolling out courses at three different levels for the coming semester. It was proposed that we create an inter-university group to build an add-on course for non-university students as an introductory methodology course for all undergraduates across disciplines, as well as a postgraduate course at the master’s level in women’s studies.

The workshop was a reminder of the recurrent need to mobilise academia-society linkages under one common platform. And for women’s studies to celebrate womanhood (not simply the white feminist variety) while reminding us that being woman awakens the need to go past the discriminations and totalisations that erase the sense of imagining the self as being human in the world. The convergence of ideas, ontologies and epistemologies towards this end came alive as a resurgence of women’s voices, scripting a new narrative in the history of gender studies and approaches in this region, home already to several women’s peace movements and interventions in what has long been regarded as India’s troubled eastern frontier.

From some of my earliest imaginings about documenting and archiving a women’s movement in India’s northeastern peripheries (during the Chiang Mai kick-off of the HaB programme in early 2017 steered by Director Philippe Peycam’s indefatigable *joie de vivre*), the April 2018 HaB workshop on feminist methodologies at Cotton University seems to have made a few seminal strides in reconfiguring and repositioning learning and living with a real humanities approach to knowledge production and curricula development at the university. It is worth reiterating that the encouragement and unstinted support to the workshop by both its Vice-Chancellor, Professor Bhabesh Goswami, and its Registrar, Professor Shikhar Sharma, bring rich promise in formally forging the institution’s partnership with the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden, the Netherlands, which has taken off both in spirit and action with this interesting event at Cotton University. Dilip Gogoi from the Faculty of Political Science, my very competent co-convenor at Cotton University, silently assured me, every time I felt anxious about hosting a theory/praxis initiative of this kind, that we could certainly break out of the mould and make this novel workshop a real success. Spring is indeed here!

Rakhee Kalita Moral is Associate Professor at Cotton University and Coordinator/ Primary Investigator of the Northeast India project of the IAS-coordinated programme *Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World*

# IIAS Research, Networks, and Initiatives

IIAS research and other initiatives are carried out within a number of thematic, partially overlapping research clusters in phase with contemporary Asian currents and built around the notion of social agency. In addition, IIAS remains open to other potentially significant topics. More information: [www.iias.asia](http://www.iias.asia)

## IIAS research clusters

### Asian Cities

This cluster deals with cities and urban cultures with their issues of flows and fluxes, ideas and goods, and cosmopolitanism and connectivity at their core, framing the existence of vibrant 'civil societies' and political micro-cultures. Through an international knowledge network, IIAS aims to create a platform for scholars and urban practitioners focusing on Asian cities 'in context' and beyond traditional western norms of knowledge.

### Asian Heritages

This cluster focuses on the uses of culture and cultural heritage practices in Asia. In particular, it addresses a variety of definitions associated with cultural heritage and their implications for social agency. The cluster engages with a broad range of related concepts and issues, including the contested assertions of 'tangible' and 'intangible', concepts such as 'authenticity', 'national heritage' and 'shared heritage', and, in general, with issues pertaining to the political economy of heritage.

### Global Asia

Asia has a long history of transnational linkages with other parts of the world, thereby shaping the global order, as much as the world at large continues to shape Asia. The Global Asia Cluster addresses contemporary issues related to Asia's projection into the world as well as trans-national interactions within the Asian region itself. In addition IIAS aims to help develop a more evenly balanced field of Asian Studies by collaborating in trans-regional capacity building initiatives and by working on new types of methodological approaches that encourage synergies and interactions between disciplines, regions and practices.

## Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA)



The Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA) is an inclusive network that brings together scholars and practitioners engaged in collaborative research and events on cities in Asia. It seeks to influence policy by contributing insights that put people at the centre of urban governance and development strategies. The emphasis is on immediate problem solving as well as on the identification of long-term, transformative processes that increase the scope for the active engagement of people in the creative production and shaping of the city in Asia. The UKNA Secretariat is at IIAS, but the network comprises universities and planning institutions across China, India, Southeast Asia and Europe. Its current flagship project is the Southeast Asia Neighbourhoods Network (SEANNET), which promotes research, teaching and dissemination of knowledge on Asia through the prism of neighbourhoods and urban communities in six selected Southeast Asian cities.

[www.ukna.asia](http://www.ukna.asia)

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Clusters: **Asian Cities; Asian Heritages**

SEANNET is a four-year project (2017-2020), supported by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation (New York, USA) that seeks to develop a multi-disciplinary body of knowledge on cities in Southeast Asia through the prism of the neighbourhood. Through case study sites in six cities (Mandalay, Myanmar; Chiang Mai and Bangkok, Thailand; Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Manila, Philippines; Surabaya, Indonesia), SEANNET seeks to engage the humanistic social sciences in a dialogue with urban stakeholders as co-contributors of an alternative knowledge on cities. It seeks to achieve this through a combination of participatory field-research,

## Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network (SEANNET)

in-situ roundtables and workshops, academic conferences, publications, and new forms of pedagogy developed in collaboration with local institutions of learning. The second ambition of SEANNET is to help shape and empower a community of early career scholars and practitioners working on and from Southeast Asia. To that effect, SEANNET research teams in the six neighbourhoods comprise international and local scholars, students from local universities, and civil society representatives, working together with neighbourhood residents.

[www.ukna.asia/seannet](http://www.ukna.asia/seannet)

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Cluster: **Asian Cities**



IIAS supports the work of the Indian Medical Research Network, which aims to stimulate social-cultural and social-historical research on Indian medical traditions such as Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Yoga and Sowa Rigpa. Of special interest is the integration of Indian medicine in Indian public health and its role as second resort for middleclass Indians and Europeans.

[www.iias.nl/indianmedicine](http://www.iias.nl/indianmedicine)

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Cluster: **Asian Heritages**

## Indian Medical Research Network



Initiated by IIAS, this programme involves Leiden University in the Netherlands, two Institutes at National Taiwan University in Taiwan and one at Yonsei University in South Korea. Discussions with other possible partners in Asia are ongoing. The programme offers selected students the opportunity to follow a full year study at one of the partner institutes with full credits and a double degree. The curriculum at Leiden University benefits from the contributions of Prof Michael Herzfeld (Harvard) as a guest teacher and the Senior Advisor to the Critical Heritage Studies Initiative of IIAS.

[www.iias.nl/critical-heritage-studies](http://www.iias.nl/critical-heritage-studies)

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Cluster: **Asian Heritages**

## Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe





**Humanities across Borders: Asia & Africa in the World**

**C**o-funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (New York, USA) this new IIAS programme (2017-2020) for global collaboration on humanistic education is carried out by a consortium of twenty-three leading institutes in Asia, West Africa, Europe and the United States, and their local partners in Asia and Africa. Its goal is to mobilise the development of a global consortium of universities and their local partners interested in fostering humanities-grounded education. Its substantive vision is that of an inclusive and expanded humanities. To this end, the program will initiate methodological interventions in teaching and research to surpass narrow disciplinary, institutional and ideological agendas. The programme facilitates border-crossing meetings, workshops and other collaborative pedagogical formats in its partner geographies. Jointly conducted, these events aim to shape a curricular matrix and framework for humanistic education across borders.

Follow the stories on the [Humanities across Borders Blog](http://www.humanitiesacrossborders.blog) [www.humanitiesacrossborders.blog](http://www.humanitiesacrossborders.blog)

[www.iias.asia/research/humanities-across-borders-asia-africa-world](http://www.iias.asia/research/humanities-across-borders-asia-africa-world)  
Clusters: **Global Asia; Asian Heritages**

**Asian Studies in Africa**



**S**ince 2010, IIAS and partners in Africa, Asia and the USA have been working on an initiative to promote the study of and teaching on Asia at African universities. The initiative constitutes a first attempt to sustain a humanities-informed South-South knowledge platform with connections between other academic centres in Europe and North America, but also Latin-America and Oceania. A roundtable in Chisamba, Zambia (2012) led to the establishment of the pan-African 'Association of Asian Studies in Africa' (A-ASIA). A-ASIA held its three-day inaugural conference in Accra, Ghana, in September 2015, entitled *Africa-Asia, a New Axis of Knowledge*. Organised with the support of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) and IIAS, it was the first conference held in Africa to bring together a multidisciplinary ensemble of scholars and institutions from the continent and the rest of the world with a shared focus on Asia and Asia-Africa intellectual interactions.

Next conference: *Africa-Asia, a New Axis of Knowledge – Second Edition*, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 20-22 September 2018. Also see p.49 in this issue.

<http://www.icas.asia/africas>  
Cluster: **Global Asia**



**Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN)**

**T**his network focuses particularly on the border regions between South Asia, Central/East and Southeast Asia. The concerns are varied, ranging from migratory movements, transformations in cultural, linguistic and religious practices, to ethnic mobilisation and conflict, marginalisation, and environmental concerns. ABRN organises a conference in one of these border regions every two years in co-operation with a local partner.

Next conference: *Borderland Spaces: Ruins, Revival(s) and Resources*, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 23-25 August 2018. Also see p.48 in this issue.

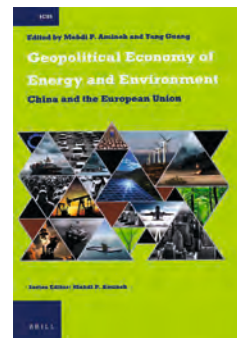
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Cluster: **Global Asia**

**Energy Programme Asia (EPA)**

**T**he latest and second joint research programme of the IIAS Energy Programme Asia carried out with the Institute of West Asia & African Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was entitled *The Transnationalization of China's Oil Industry (2013-2017)*. It analysed China's increasing involvement with governments, local institutions and local stakeholders in the energy sectors of a number of resource-rich countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Publication: *Geopolitical Economy of Energy and Environment China and the European Union* (Medhi P. Amineh, Yang Guang, 2017).

[www.iias.nl/research/energy-programme-asia-epa](http://www.iias.nl/research/energy-programme-asia-epa)  
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Cluster: **Global Asia**



**Leiden Centre for Indian Ocean Studies**

**T**he Leiden Centre for Indian Ocean Studies brings together people and methods to study the 'Indian Ocean World', aiming to co-organize conferences, workshops and academic exchanges with institutions from the region. Together with IIAS, the Centre facilitates an inclusive and global platform bringing together scholars and institutions working on connections and comparisons across the axis of human interaction with an interest in scholarship that cuts across borders of places, periods and disciplines.

The Centre will be participating in the international conference *Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge – Second Edition* in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, 20-22 September 2018.

[www.iias.asia/research/leiden-centre-indian-ocean-studies](http://www.iias.asia/research/leiden-centre-indian-ocean-studies)  
Cluster: **Global Asia**

**Centre for Regulation & Governance (CRG)**

**T**he IIAS Centre for Regulation and Governance in Asia is engaged in innovative and comparative research on theories and practices – focusing on emerging markets of Asia. Its multi-disciplinary research undertakings combine approaches from political economy, law, public administration, criminology, and sociology in the comparative analysis of regulatory issues in Asia and in developing theories of governance pertinent to Asian realities.

Cluster: **Global Asia**

**International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS)**

**W**ith its biennial conferences, International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) is the largest global forum for academics and civil society exchange on Asia. Founded in 1997 at the initiative of IIAS, ICAS serves as a platform for scholars, social and cultural leaders, and institutions focusing on issues critical to Asia, and, by implication, the rest of the world. The ICAS biennial conferences are organised in cooperation with local universities, cities and institutions and attended by scholars and other experts, institutions and publishers from 60 countries. ICAS also organises the biennial 'ICAS Book Prize' (IBP), which awards the most prestigious prizes in the field of Asian Studies for books and PhD theses in English, Korean, Chinese, French and German (more language editions are planned for the future).

Ten conventions have been held since 1997 (Leiden, Berlin, Singapore, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Daejeon, Honolulu, Macao, Adelaide, and Chiang Mai).

ICAS 11 will be held in Leiden, the Netherlands, 16-19 July 2019.

Deadline Call for Proposals: 10 October 2018. Also see p.3 in this issue.

Website: [www.icas.asia](http://www.icas.asia)  
IIAS/ICAS secretariat:  
Paul van der Velde [icas@iias.nl](mailto:icas@iias.nl)



# IIAS Fellowship Programme

Along with the research fellows who are attached to one of the IIAS research programmes, the Institute yearly hosts a large number of visiting researchers (affiliated fellows) who come to Leiden to work on their own individual research project. In addition, IIAS also facilitates the teaching and research by various professorial fellows as part of agreements with Dutch universities, foreign ministries and funding organisations.

## Current Fellows

### Mehdi Amineh

Coordinator Energy Programme Asia (EPA)  
1 Sept 2007 – 31 March 2019

### Kunthea Chhom

Sanskrit elements in Old Khmer language: a case-study of boons and curses in epigraphy from ancient Cambodia  
1 March 2018 – 31 May 2018

### Jatin Dua

A sea of protection: piracy, trade, and regulation in the Indian Ocean  
1 Oct 2016 – 31 July 2018

### Ana Dragojlovic

Politics of queer affect: intentionality, mediation, intervention in Indisch memory work  
1 June 2018 – 31 January 2019

### Melinda Fodor

The Ānandasundari by Ghanaśyāma. A revised critical edition with annotated translation, introduction and glossary of selected words  
1 March 2018 – 31 Aug 2018

### Manpreet Kaur Janeja

The aesthetics of school meals: distrust, risk and uncertainty  
1 Oct 2017 – 31 July 2018

### Pralay Kanungo

Indian politics  
Professor/ICCR Chair of Contemporary India Studies (until 30 June 2018)  
1 Sep 2013 – 30 June 2019

### Neena Talwar Kanungo

The arrival of digital democracy in India: social media and political parties  
1 July 2016 – 30 June 2019

### Carola Erika Lorea

Metaphor, meaning and oral exegesis: the upside-down language of the songs of Sādhana  
1 Jan 2018 – 30 June 2018

### Charlotte Marchina

Rethinking land use in the era of the Anthropocene (Mongolia, Russia, China)  
1 Feb 2018 – 31 Aug 2018

### Katsunori Miyazaki

Research of the Siebold Collection  
1 April 2018 – 9 Sep 2019

### William Peterson

Asian self-representation at World's Fairs  
1 Jan 2018 – 30 June 2018

### Saraju Rath

Inscriptional, literary and mercantile scripts of ancient and medieval India  
1 Jan 2018 – 31 Dec 2018

### Rituparna Roy

Kolkata Partition Museum project  
1 July 2017 – 30 June 2018

### Bal Gopal Shrestha

Religiosity among the Nepalese Diaspora  
1 Jan 2015 – 31 Dec 2018

### Xiaosen Song

Vietnamese women in the process of modern Vietnam's nation-building  
1 Oct 2017 – 30 Sep 2018

### Sanderien Verstappen

Rerouting relations: navigating emergent Muslim and Hindu spaces in rural India  
1 Sept 2017 – 30 April 2019

### Tingfai Yu

Class as a method to localise queer studies: towards inter-Asian articulation  
1 April 2018 – 31 Jan 2019

### Qiaoyun Zhang

Cultural heritagization in times of crisis: a Chinese experience  
1 Sept 2017 – 30 June 2018

## In the spotlight



### Manpreet K. Janeja

*The aesthetics of school meals: (dis)trust, risk, and uncertainty*

“Food insecurity and malnutrition continue to be matters of concern globally. They generate various contested interventions such as the National Healthy Schools Programme (UK) and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (India), underpinned by visions of the ‘inclusive growth’ of ‘healthy publics’ in ‘food-secure healthy futures’. Such schemes have sought to manage issues of hunger, inequality, taste, nutritional guidelines, and socio-cultural norms and practices amidst changing economic,

political and social demands, with relative degrees of success. Located against the backdrop of such issues, my current monograph, the focus of my IIAS fellowship, is grounded in long-term ethnographic fieldwork on school meals in England. *The Aesthetics of School Meals: (Dis)trust, Risk, and Uncertainty* (under contract) is an urban ethnography of the anxious everyday engagements of Muslim/Hindu migrants of South-Asian (Indian/Bangladeshi/Pakistani) heritage in England with ‘healthy’ school meals as entangled in wider historical and variegated networks of perceived risks and uncertainties. It unpacks the interactions of health with the dynamics of (dis)trust and mistrust integral to such networks, thereby revealing implications for configurations of ‘public health’ and ‘multiculturalism’, amidst calls to rethink

‘cultural diversity’ and forms of ‘integration’ in an increasingly volatile Europe.

I have conducted a pilot project (*Waiting for Food in India*) on Mid-Day Meals in urban schools which will form the basis of a future research initiative. Future research plans also include further developing interests in gender, youth, and migration in cities across Europe and Asia. After excitingly hectic years of getting a new education programme off the ground, in addition to teaching and administration under the aegis of my academic job, the IIAS fellowship has offered me a tranquil and congenial space to explore possibilities of harnessing some of these ideas, and initiating conversations with scholars in Leiden and Amsterdam across disciplines, including anthropology, history, philosophy, and area studies. The fellowship continues to give me opportunities to interact with diverse audiences through: research seminars; a planned event at IIAS with Michael Herzfeld (Harvard University) on my just-released co-edited book *Ethnographies*

of *Waiting* (Bloomsbury 02/2018); forthcoming presentations/discussions including those in Brussels, Copenhagen, and Edinburgh (annual-workshop of the Bangladesh Studies Network I initiated, now in its fourth year). Engaging with the inviting range of lunch-time lectures at IIAS and seminars across Leiden’s Humanities and Social Sciences institutes/networks, Leiden University’s fabulous library resources, Amsterdam University’s stimulating anthropology walking-seminars in the Dutch dunes, and the immensely rewarding intellectual and social interactions with fellow fellows at IIAS are making this fellowship an unforgettable experience. Adding to this further, are the warm and welcoming IIAS staff, and the Spring Outings to the marvellous Dutch art museums, the lovely tulip-fields in the ‘Keukenhof’ and the stately ‘Binnenhof’ Dutch government complex in The Hague. And of course, for the foodie and food anthropologist in me, the plethora of stalls at the Leiden Saturday market along the canal is an absolute delight!”



### Charlotte Marchina

*INALCO - Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales Rethinking land use in the Era of the Anthropocene (Mongolia, Russia, China)*

“My current research deals with land use in Mongolian nomadic pastoralism. Under the influence of the market economy and western world views, land as private property has become widespread. The aim of this project is an in-depth study of the confrontations, assimilations and negotiations that occur in the tension between

this imported model of dealing with land and the local perspectives on their relationship with the environment that exist among the Mongolian herders in Mongolia, Russia and China. According to Mongolian beliefs and practices, the landscape is inhabited by invisible entities, master spirits of the land (*gazryn ezen*). Traditionally, humans should not disturb them, and must preserve environmental resources. It is people who belong to a place, and not the other way round. Therefore, land privatisation implemented by the Russian and Chinese governments creates challenging meeting points in terms of the existing relationships with the land. I investigate how Mongol herders, in the three countries where they live, redefine, or not, the role they assign

themselves in the environment that they share with other (non-human) beings.

My seven-month stay in Leiden (February-August 2018) is dedicated to data processing and the writing. I am currently working on my first monograph (to be published both in French and English) that will address the spatial and political features of Mongolian nomadic pastoralism. Although very few researchers here in the social sciences are working on Mongolia and Siberia, thanks to IIAS’ extended network, I could quickly connect with researchers from Dutch universities (e.g., Amsterdam, Utrecht, Nijmegen) working on related issues in other geographical areas. Seldom have I had such an opportunity to expand and strengthen my own international network.

IIAS offers me a fantastic opportunity to think and write in a stimulating environment that encompasses not only different disciplines and areas, but also academic and non-academic expertise. As a researcher

from a purely academic world who, due to my work on sustainability-related issues is increasingly receiving requests from field professionals (NGO, embassy staff), I hugely benefit from the framework of interconnected academic and non-academic fields of expertise.

I myself am committed to the transfer of knowledge to wider audiences of non-specialists, in particular by varying the tools and media, in past and future projects (photograph exhibitions, book of proverbs, graphic novel...). In this respect, it was a huge privilege to meet, during my first weeks in the Netherlands, Joost Grootens, a Dutch graphic designer whose work I admire a lot. It is very likely that he will design the numerous maps included in the book I am working on. Last but not least, coming back to the Netherlands, where, in a previous life I lived for nine years and which I still consider to be my second home, turns this already remarkable opportunity into a unique experience.”



## Qiaoyun Zhang

*Cultural heritagization in times of crisis:  
a Chinese experience*

“As a fellow of the Asian Heritages cluster at IIAS and a cultural anthropologist, I have mainly been working on a project titled ‘Cultural heritagization in times of crisis: a Chinese experience’, investigating if, and how, heritagization is an effective measure for the culturally-sensitive recovery of the Qiang ethnic minority in South China, following the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. Based on 15 months of dissertation fieldwork and building on my dissertation analyses, I explore three aspects of the Chinese state-led nomination of Qiang culture for the status of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), and the resulting safeguarding practices after it was awarded, as a means to rescue and protect the Qiang culture. First, I examine how the heritage regime and audit culture influence the urgent heritagization planning after the earthquake. Secondly, I look at heritagization as a process of knowledge production and identity formation for the Qiang and the Chinese state. Finally, I reflect on the radical transformation of the perceptions and practices of the Qiang ICH, and the ICH-centered cultural recovery planning in China.

The 10-month fellowship at IIAS has greatly helped me accomplish this project. Obtaining the fellowship soon after my PhD helped me grow into a more mature scholar-teacher at one of the world’s leading research institutions on Asian Studies. I am first and foremost grateful for the colleagues I have met at the institute. Not only did we share and constructively comment on each other’s work, we also formed a scholarly community, through workshops and forging future collaborations. Secondly, IIAS provides an extremely comfortable and friendly working environment that allows me to concentrate on my research and writing, thereby assisted by the always readily available support from the IIAS staff. Thirdly, the libraries and other research resources made available to me by the institute are invaluable. The newly opened Leiden University Asian Library is undoubtedly one of the best of its kind. Fourthly, working in Leiden and within close proximity to the University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam Free University and other institutions, I am able to engage in conversations and lectures with experts in China Studies, Anthropology, Emergency Management Studies and Heritage Studies. Finally, Leiden is absolutely a lovely place to live and study. As a Chinese scholar trained in the USA, the IIAS fellowship offers me a precious cultural journey into the European continent for the very first time.

I have spent a very productive and pleasant time at IIAS. In addition to the aforementioned project, I contributed an article to the Focus section of this issue (pp.36-37), and a review of a book about the Wenchuan earthquake recovery to newbooks.asia. I wrote a number of other articles on homeland reconstruction and disaster tourism and revised my dissertation for publication. Moreover, I gave five lectures in and outside Leiden and developed inspiring friendships with colleagues worldwide. The valuable resources and sweet memories gained through such intellectual exposure and international experience are definitely distinguishing assets for my future work as a university professor and cultural scholar.”

Also read **Qiaoyun Zhang’s** article “Heritage making after the earthquake. Safeguarding the intangible heritage of the Qiang people in China” in the Focus section of this issue.



# Become an IIAS Fellow

## IIAS Fellowship possibilities and requirements



### Apply for an IIAS-ASCL fellowship

The IIAS-ASCL joint fellowship is intended for researchers specialising in Asian-African interactions. It aims to attract researchers whose work is informed by current theoretical debates, in the Social Sciences and Humanities, on global connectivities and who are able to critically engage with shifting paradigms in ‘area studies’ beyond the ways in which these have traditionally been conceived in the West.

**Application deadlines:**  
15 March and 15 September



### Apply for a Gonda fellowship

For promising young Indologists at the post-doctorate level it is possible to apply for funding with the J. Gonda Foundation of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) to spend three to six months doing research at IIAS.

**Application deadlines:**  
1 April and 1 October



### Apply for an IIAS fellowship

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands, invites outstanding researchers to apply for an IIAS fellowship to work on a relevant piece of research in the social sciences and humanities.

We are particularly interested in researchers focusing on one of the Institute’s three thematic research clusters: ‘Asian Heritages’, ‘Global Asia’ and ‘Asian Cities’. However, some positions will be reserved for outstanding projects in any area outside of those listed.

For more information about our research clusters, see pp.52-53 of this issue of the Newsletter and [www.iias.asia](http://www.iias.asia)



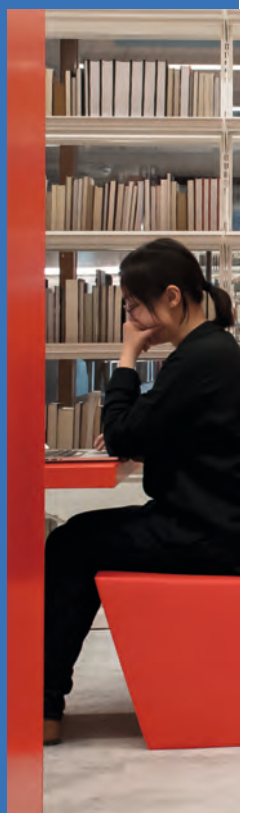
Combine your  
IIAS fellowship with  
two extra months  
of research in Paris

When applying for an IIAS Fellowship, you may also choose to apply for an additional two months of research at the Collège d’études mondiales of the Fondation Maison des sciences de l’homme (CEM-FMSH), in Paris, France.

Collaborating with IIAS, CEM-FMSH has agreed to provide three two-month fellowships each year for scholars who have been awarded an IIAS fellowship. This grant from CEM-FMSH will enable selected candidates to carry out research in Paris for a further two months immediately after their stay in Leiden.

If you are interested in this option, please complete the relevant section of the IIAS application form.

**Application deadlines:**  
1 March and 1 October



**Information and application forms:**  
[www.iias.asia/fellowships](http://www.iias.asia/fellowships)

# A museum for the living history of Asia



Museu do Oriente. Lisbon, Portugal  
[www.museudoorientep.pt](http://www.museudoorientep.pt)

**S**traddling past and present, art and anthropology, memory and actuality, Museu do Oriente in Lisbon is dedicated to the cultural dialogue between Portugal and Asia, presented through objects and narratives.

Opened to the public in 2008, the museum is the flagship project of Fundação Oriente in Portugal, and is steered by the foundation's overall mission to foster mutual knowledge between Portugal and the Asian territories it is historically linked to. In addition to exhibitions, the Museum hosts a program of activities from live performances to workshops and lectures, anchored around its two main collections – *Portuguese Presence in Asia* and *Kwok On*. Inviting dialogue with contemporary artists, researchers, institutions and communities, these collections are as distinct as they are complementary.

## Exchange of influences

Assembled through a policy of acquisitions by Fundação Oriente since its inception in 1988, *Portuguese Presence in Asia* integrates around 3000 works of decorative arts, including furniture, lacquer work, silver and gold-smithery, ivory carvings, porcelain and textiles, as well as paintings, sculptures, books and maps. It strives primarily to illustrate Portugal's pursuits in the East, driven by trade, evangelisation, and cultural exchange. As the country set out to become a seafaring trade and military power, strongholds were established in Goa, Malacca, Siam, Timor and Macao. People and goods travelled along the new spice routes and a steady exchange of aesthetic influences and knowhow ensued. As local craftsmen received commissions

from European patrons, exotic materials and traditional techniques were applied to western typologies, resulting in culturally layered, syncretic pieces.

Namban art is one such example. The term refers to the Japanese artistic style born of the contacts between the Japanese and the Namban-jin or 'Southern barbarians' from Europe, more specifically Portugal and Spain. Many of the pieces created bore witness to their unique historical moment. The folding 'Namban screen' shown in *Portuguese Presence in Asia* is a veritable visual account of the early encounters between the Portuguese and the Japanese. Dated to the Edo period (1615-1868) in the style of the Kano school, it depicts the arrival of the *kurofune* or black trade ship coming from Macao, with its procession of clergymen, merchants, noblemen, slaves and interpreters, whose unfamiliar facial features, attire and accessories are minutely painted against a typical one-dimensional gold background. Even more impressive, the collection features an extremely rare Namban helmet, a hybrid piece replicating a Western design, made from traditional Japanese materials such as washi paper and lacquer. This is the only specimen of its kind on display in Europe.

As the political and geo-strategic world map shifted, and borders were redrawn, Europe-Asia relations changed, but the Far East – perceived as exotic, opulent and foreign, oftentimes tinged with a hint of decadence and danger – continued to enthral Westerners, from academics to artists, travellers, and writers. Throughout the 1800s, this fascination would spark a surge in systematic collecting, geared towards a museum-like representation of old civilizations and the diverse mosaic of Asian arts.

Thus, *Portuguese Presence in Asia* also focuses on European collections of artworks and archaeological pieces from the Far East, assembled in the 1800s and early 20th century. Chief among the exhibits is a series of Chinese Neolithic ceramics dating back to 3000 BC, funerary terracottas and a range of porcelain pieces in varying designs and decorative styles predating the ubiquitous blue-and-white. Here are also shown remarkable pieces on extended loan from other Portuguese national museums, such as the Camilo Pessanha and the Manuel Teixeira Gomes bequests, from the Machado de Castro National Museum.

## Speaking to ancient beliefs

Museu do Oriente's second leading collection, *Kwok On*, is dedicated to Asian performing arts, their founding narratives and popular religions. This is an ethnographic collection that views objects in relation to their respective context, uses and symbolic power. *Kwok On* was donated to Fundação Oriente in 1999 by French sinologist Jacques Pimpaneau, who in turn had received it from Chinese theatre enthusiast and collector Kwok On, in 1971.

Initially composed of some 600 objects pertaining exclusively to Chinese dramatic arts, under the guidance of Mr. Pimpaneau and the stewardship of the foundation, the collection has grown in size and diversity. Every year, a mission is undertaken to procure new pieces but also get in touch with local artisans and communities. At present, it exceeds 13.000 artefacts. Geographically, it spans the whole of Asia, including India, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Thailand.

*Kwok On* documents puppet theatres from Turkey to China. It represents Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku theatre from Japan, Koothyattam and Kathali theatre from India, Chinese opera, Khon Thai from Thailand and Tazieh theatre from Iran. Highly codified and stylised, Asian performing arts represent the history and mythologies intrinsic to the daily life of these cultures, thus playing a crucial role in identity building. This means that *Kwok On* artefacts, though datable in terms of production, speak to ancient practices and beliefs that have remained relevant nowadays. This is one of the collection's most engaging aspects.

Currently, The Chinese Opera is on display, featuring lavishly ornamented costumes, headdresses, make-up models, puppets, prints and musical instruments. Traditional Chinese opera is an elaborate form of drama and musical theatre; an amalgamation of singing, pantomime, acrobatics, martial arts and dance. Encompassing several regional styles, the diversity of opera rivals its longevity. Though the Cultural Revolution tried to turn it into a political tool, the opera experienced a revival from 1976 onwards and has now regained its standing as one of China's foremost cultural treasures.

In presenting both *Portuguese Presence in Asia* and *Kwok On*, Museu do Oriente offers a many-sided view of Asian arts and traditions through time, as they resonate across religion and society.

Rute Paredes  
 Communication Department



Top left:  
 Chinese opera: entrance of Characters section of the exhibition. Three of the four typologies of Chinese opera costumes (*jing*, *dan* and *chou*). Photo: Nuno Vieira.

Top right:  
 Princess headdress. China, Beijing, c.1980. Synthetic materials, paper, metal, textile. Headdress for a female character (*dan*), worn by a princess. Museu do Oriente/Kwok On collection/5.5.1C45. ©Fundação Oriente. Photo: João Silveira Ramos.

Above:  
 Namban folding screen (detail). Six-panel folding screen. Japan, Edo period (1615-1868). Wood (frame), paper, pigment and gold leaf. FO/06333. Photo: Photography Hugo Maertens-Bruges.

Bottom left:  
 Namban helmet (*Namban Boshi*). Japan, Momoyama (1573/1615) /Edo (1615-1868) period, c. 1600. Washi paper and lacquer. FO/0555. Photo: Photography Hugo Maertens-Bruges.

