

# The Newsletter



**Africa-Asia:  
A New Axis  
of Knowledge**

## The Focus

**Reading space,  
society and  
history in Asia  
through its ruins**



**Living with and  
in the forest in  
northern Thailand**

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International  
Institute for  
Asian Studies

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**In this edition of the Focus 29-40****Reading space, society and history in Asia through its ruins**

Mona Chettri and Michael Eilenberg

Ruins are everywhere. In Asia, aspirations for socio-economic development have led to the rapid transformation of the environmental, social and economic landscape. Led by a diverse range of local, national and international actors these transformations have informed the creation of new forms of ruins and ruinations, the disintegration of recognizable forms whether they be material, ideational or institutional. From ruined environmental landscapes, abandoned industrial estates, derelict housing estates, failed infrastructural projects to political disruptions, economic breakdowns and cultural disintegration, ruins are ubiquitous and varied in their manifestations. Ruins produce long-term effects and affect societies and individuals in expected and, often, unexpected ways. Therefore, these ruptures and their afterlife call for a wider conceptualisation of ruins that locates their materiality within wider social, political and economic contexts.



**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**

The Humanities across Border programme presents three reports. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti and Malee Sitthikriengkrai write about alternative pedagogies to help Kareni youth in Thailand research their own culture and history (pp.50-51). In 'Languages on the edge: from private archive to shared library', Mohomodou Houssouba talks in scents and colors about the need and art of accessing and preserving the invaluable knowledge hidden in local oral histories (pp.48-49). 'Indigo as critical pedagogy' (Min-Chin Chiang) is about a three-day curricula development workshop at Taiwan National University of the Arts (TNUA), which has developed BA and MA level syllabi as part of the HaB programme (p.52).

Four shorter reports are included on pages 46-47, namely: the UKNA symposium 'Water heritage in Asian cities'; the first graduates of the Double Degree in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe; the winner of the IIAS National Master's Thesis Prize in Asian Studies; and the Spotlight Taiwan Programme 'Making Place and Place Making' (Leiden).

IIAS research programmes, networks and other initiatives are described in brief on pages 54-55. Information about the IIAS Fellowship programme can be found on page 53, and our latest announcements on pages 46-47.



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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## Global-local commitments

Philippe Peycam

I am just back from a short trip to Taipei, Taiwan, after nearly 2 years since my previous visit. I can say that I returned from this trip truly refreshed, thanks to the sense of commitment that exists there among long-lasting friendships. This comradeship is built on shared values and engagements, which, for example, I see reflected in the formation of the Double Degree (DD) programme on 'Critical Heritage in Asia and Europe', which IIAS is facilitating together with National Taiwan University, Yonsei University (South Korea) and Leiden University (Netherlands).

I met with some of the first students who returned from their one year stay in Leiden, and with our Taiwanese colleagues who are working hard to make the DD programme a meaningful experiment. At NTU, the collaborative initiative involves the Faculty of Liberal Arts, especially its Department of Anthropology, and the Graduate Institute for Planning and Building (Faculty of Engineering). I noticed that our colleagues from Taipei, likewise those in Leiden, have come to appreciate this unique educational exchange initiative and the fact that our DD programme is the first of its kind involving European and Asian partners in the Humanities on Cultural Heritage Studies. At a time when the space for free intellectual inquiry on issues of knowledge and power is shrinking in many regions of the world, it is indeed refreshing to put into conversation, in a truly open and free (uncensored) fashion, experiences and ideas on the always contested question of cultural heritage and identity politics. On that matter, I want to pay personal tribute to Prof. Chia-Yu Hu, a renowned Taiwanese anthropologist, who during the democratization process that took place in Taiwan in the 1990s and 2000s courageously engaged in the sensitive process of reviving and decolonizing the contested ethnological museum collection established by the Japanese pre-war authorities on the societies and cultures of the Taiwanese Aboriginal communities at the University. Prof. Hu was instrumental as an enthusiastic supporter of the DD programme with NTU for what it

could do to facilitate exchanges between Taiwanese and other scholars on the subject of 'critical heritage'. She sadly passed away a few months ago.

I again recognised the same sense of solid friendship and continued commitment, when I visited the site of Báng-kah, in downtown Taipei; an area where IIAS, together with NTU's Graduate Institute of Building and Planning, Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, as well as local actors, organized a roundtable in 2012, under the coordination of Prof. Wang Liling. As its title indicates, this in situ policy roundtable 'Constructive Contestation around Urban Heritage in Taipei' (7-10 October 2012), helped to devise a strategic blueprint to renew and regenerate the area, through a collaboration between the local inhabitants, the City Government and Heritage scholars. The recommendations made by this event sought to encourage processes of sustainable urban revitalization of the historical neighbourhood with its original inhabitants. More than six years have passed since that roundtable. But I have been informed by NTU colleagues and local individuals how the 2012 roundtable and the resulting recommendations for the area (to avoid a fatal decline and the prospect of being either erased to give way to new real estate developments, or of falling subject to a slow process of gentrification – both cases resulting in the marginalization or the outright eviction of its historical inhabitants) constituted a turning point that energized the different stakeholders involved – from local groups, university faculty and students, to City Government officers – to re-invent a Báng-Kah in which its inhabitants would take ownership. This endless work was especially carried out by Dr Chen Te Chun, a former NTU faculty member who actively participated in the roundtable and who ultimately moved to live and work permanently in the area. Dr Chen now runs an integrated NGO programme that works with local community members. The results are quite amazing. Local dwellers have organized themselves to invest in the revitalization of their neighbourhood by developing a network of locally owned small shops, and by attracting initiatives aimed at homeless people. The Báng-Kah local-global transectorial collaborative project

is a good example of a sustainable participatory heritage-making process that gives concrete meaning to the study of critical heritage.

In these two small cases, to which I could add the multiple individual and institutional connections forged through other activities – such as our collaboration with the Taipei National University for the Arts (TNUA) and their involvement in the IIAS-coordinated Humanities Across Borders programme's pedagogical project developed by Prof. Chiang Min Chin around Indigo craft making (see p.52 in this issue); or our collaboration with Academia Sinica and the series of international conferences on Asian Heritage making. There are also multiple other connections created through individual participation in IIAS events, under for instance the Taiwan Ministry of Culture's 'Spotlight' initiative (see p.47 in this issue).

There is a concrete case to be made of IIAS's long term collaborative commitment toward a nebula of Taiwanese academics, artists and other culturally active citizens, and the forging of a trans-border community of scholars and their institutions, all contributing to the shaping of a new range of activities and collaborations built around shared 'universal' questions. I could mention other places in Asia where IIAS has played a significant role together with local partners, but this Taiwanese example of IIAS's longstanding involvement in Asian contexts is somehow a good fit as we celebrate the Institute's 25 years of existence. The multiple connections forged in just one tiny part of Asia is a testimony to IIAS's continuing commitment toward academic collaboration and freedom in the service of innovative humanistic scholarly endeavours, and in a common effort to have a positive impact on society.

The upcoming ICAS 11 in Leiden, the Netherlands, will be an occasion for our Taiwanese colleagues, along with others from many other places where the Institute has also made its mark, to themselves contribute to the making of IIAS in the very city where it is based, a mutual dedication of knowledge-sharing that no amount of money, or big words, can replace.

Philippe Peycam  
Director IIAS

## IIAS Photo Contest

IIAS is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, concluding with ICAS 11 in Leiden. In this context, we are organising a photo contest in which everyone can participate in the following two categories:

1. Your most memorable picture taken during an IIAS event: Please send us your most memorable photo(s) taken during a conference or other activity in which IIAS played a role, from our beginning in 1993 until now. Additionally, photos taken in the context of an IIAS research programme also qualify.
2. 'Asia and Europe. Asia in Europe'. This is the special focus theme of ICAS 11 – Let your imagination roam free!

You may send in a maximum of three photos per category. It doesn't matter when the photo was taken, but you must have taken the photo(s) yourself, and deliver them digitally (.jpg/.jpeg).

Besides rewarding the best three photos in both categories with a prize to the value of 100 euros (in gift certificates), we also intend to include some of the entries in a retrospective exhibition of the various IIAS activities over the years. The exhibition will take place during ICAS 11. In addition, the winning images will be published in The Newsletter crediting you as the photographer. By submitting your photos, you grant IIAS the right to use your photo(s) in IIAS publications and for the photo exhibition during ICAS, mentioning your name as the photographer.

IIAS will judge the entries on the basis of relevance to the category as well as aesthetic and informative value.

The winners will be announced during ICAS 11, 16-19 July 2019. We hope that you will be there for the occasion!

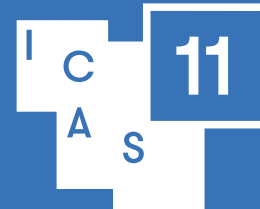
Upload photos to <https://iias.wetransfer.com/>  
We will be accepting entries until 1 May 2019





# The Eleventh International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 11)

16-19 July 2019  
Leiden, the Netherlands  
[www.icas.asia/icas11](http://www.icas.asia/icas11)  
[icas11@iias.nl](mailto:icas11@iias.nl)



'Leiden Asia Week' and ICAS  
pre-events start on 13 July



The meeting place for the eleventh edition of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) will be Leiden, the Netherlands. The historic city of Leiden is home to the oldest university of The Netherlands and several of the most renowned Asia research centres. Leiden University will be the main host of ICAS 11, partnering with the city, research institutions and museums, who share equally rich Asian and global connections ([www.visitleiden.nl/en](http://www.visitleiden.nl/en)).



Far left: The Law Faculty Building (KOG).  
Left: The keys to the city: the traditional symbol of Leiden.  
Below: Leiden University Academy Building.

On the occasion of ICAS 11, the city of Leiden will be enveloped in an all-embracing 'Leiden Asia Week'. The convention is more than an isolated academic programme – it will be enhanced by an assortment of pre/parallel scholarly proceedings, musical and gastronomic festivities, and an abundance of cultural events carried out in partnership with the city.

ICAS is the most inclusive international gathering in the field of Asian Studies. ICAS attracts participants from 75 countries to engage in global dialogues on Asia that transcend boundaries between academic disciplines and geographic areas. ICAS 11 will be held at the Law Faculty Building (KOG) and Lipsius Building of Leiden University from 16-19 July 2019. It will be organized

by the International Institute for Asian Studies ([www.iias.asia](http://www.iias.asia)), Leiden University ([www.universiteitleiden.nl/en](http://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en)) and GIS Asie (French Academic Network for Asian Studies; [www.gis-reseau-asie.org](http://www.gis-reseau-asie.org)). 2000-2500 Asia specialists and representatives of civil society are expected to attend.

Events will include panels and (keynote) roundtable discussions, the ICAS Book Prize, pre/parallel events, craft/cultural/art exhibitions, a film and documentary programme, various receptions and parties, and an Asian Studies Book Fair (exhibition area). With all these activities ICAS is contributing to the decentring of Asian Studies by convening a global space in which Asia scholars and social and cultural actors from the whole world can directly interact. Participate at ICAS 11 and enjoy the multitude

of networking opportunities, possibilities to share your research (and more), and to meet with publishers and representatives of the best Asian Studies-related institutes in the world.

## In partnership with GIS Asie

GIS Asie is a place of gathering, consultation and initiatives of the French community of Asian Studies. It aims to give structure to French Asian Studies, and promote and internationalise research on Asia.

Every two years it brings together its members from 30 research units at 22 institutions of higher education and research, at its 'Congrès Asie'. In 2019 the congress will be co-organised with the International Institute for Asian Studies and Leiden University, and will run concurrently with ICAS 11.



## ICAS 11 Organisers



## Pre-events

### Asia Week at the Textile Research Centre (TRC)

The TRC special Asia programme from 13-19 July, will coincide with ICAS 11. This includes the exhibition 'Out of Asia: 2000 years of fascination with Eastern textiles' which tells the story of the age-long flow of ideas and techniques from Asia to the Middle East and Europe with actual textiles and garments.

During Leiden Asia Week at the TRC, workshops will be given, such as indigo dyeing and printing techniques, Afghan embroidery, and Southeast Asian weaves identification. Lectures will cover the diverse field of Asian-European contacts, including Indian chintz and its impact on Dutch traditional costumes, and Indian influences on Persian Gulf textiles.

ICAS 11 participants have free access to the exhibition. Workshops and lectures are also free, but advance registration is required. Find out more at <https://tinyurl.com/TRCAAsiaWeek>

### Reading Leiden: An Experiential School

Reading Leiden: An Experiential School (11-15 July 2019, Leiden) is being held as part of the Humanities across Borders (HaB) programme in coordination with IIAS. The school is first among a series of experiential schools initiated to test socially embedded pedagogies being developed in the HaB programme's project geographies in parts of Asia and West Africa. Exposure to Leiden's history and development as a university town, its planned social housing, changing demographics and spoken languages, its textile past and hidden craft makers are some of the highlights of the school. In addition to Masters students and research scholars associated with HaB, 'Reading Leiden' is open to a few local volunteers who are fluent in Dutch and familiar with Leiden.

For more information please contact HaB Programme Manager Ms. Xiaolan Lin: [x.lin@iias.nl](mailto:x.lin@iias.nl)

### Asia and Europe: Histories of Entanglement

This ICAS Pre-Event Asia and Europe: Histories of Entanglement (15 July 2019), at Leiden University College in The Hague poses crucial questions about collective imaginings, in Asia and Europe, in regard to the historical conditions which shape today's world at local and global levels.

2019 marks three decades since the end of the Cold War, its aftermath marked by the 'end of history' thesis. Political and ideological transformations converged around an elite consensus concerning liberal democracy and global capitalism. Yet talk of a peace dividend notwithstanding, optimism has given way to disillusionment and resentment, in many Western and non-Western countries.

For more information go to <https://icas.asia/icas11/pre-event>



## Convention overview

### Early bird ICAS 11 pre-registration

On Monday 15 July 2019 you will be able to pre-register and beat the rush of the next morning. Come to the registration desk on the Pieterskerkhofplein (Peter's Church Square) and collect your badge, convention bag, and all other information you will need for your ICAS 11 participation. The Pieterskerkhofplein will serve as the centre point of the convention area, which will encompass a number of different venues in the city. Various activities will be organised here; for example, the Food Fair and Cultural Market that will take place on the square starting on Tuesday 16 July.

### The ICAS 11 grand opening reception

Our grand opening will take place in the grandest of locations: the Hooglandsekerk (Highland Church) in Leiden. An imposing fifteenth century Gothic church, still functioning as a Protestant church, but which is also very much part of the Leiden (academic) community in its role as conference, concert and graduation venue.

In addition to welcome words, we shall be awarding the ICAS Book Prizes during the opening ceremony, concluding with (musical) entertainment, food and drinks, inside and around the church.



Examples of the type of food truck that will grace Pieterskerkhofplein.



### Public food fair and cultural market

As part of Leiden Asia Week, ICAS 11 will be facilitating a public food fair and cultural market during the convention (16-19 July). Located at the heart of the convention area – the Pieterskerkhofplein – the food fair will host a variety of food trucks selling lunch options ranging from vegan to BBQ, juices to curries, salads to stir fries, and all sorts in between. There will be a strong representation of Asian cuisines, but also some indispensable Dutch favourites, such as 'patat' and 'poffertjes'. After a long day of panels and papers you are welcome to return to the fair for a refreshing aperitif before you sample the food from another food truck, or head out to dinner elsewhere in the 'gezellige' city of Leiden.

The market will entertain and enlighten you with a number of (interactive) artisan stalls, and provide you with an ample selection of local goodies to remind you of your visit to this beautiful European country. The full list of fair and market participants will be included in the ICAS programme book and on the convention website.

### A myriad of craft, cultural and art exhibitions

In July, a number of special exhibitions will be set up in Leiden, to coincide with ICAS. They will be displayed at various locations, all within easy walking distance from the main venues of the conference. The Leiden City Hall will exhibit photographs by the Dutch photographer, Hans Kemp, on religious experiences in Asia. At the main offices of Leiden University, along the Rapenburg canal, there will be an exhibition of art work by the Japanese artist, Yuriko Yamaguchi, on the theme of 'Humanity's End as a New Beginning: World Disasters in Myths'. Other special exhibitions will be set up, among others, at the Law Faculty Building (KOG), at the Sijthoff Cultural Centre, the Asia Library and the IIAS office.

During ICAS, the inner city of Leiden will be the location of a plethora of activities, organised by the various national museums (Ethnology, Antiquities), but also by other institutions, including the Botanical Gardens and the SieboldHuis.

Guided tours will be organised for convention participants who are interested in diverse aspects of Leiden. Please mind that for many of the ancillary activities around ICAS, those who are interested should register separately, and preferably well in advance. Please see the ICAS (online) programme for further details and registration (available as of mid-May).

Left: Leiden City Hall. Courtesy Wikicommons. Below: The Asia Library. Bottom: Hortus Botanical Gardens.



Right: The imposing 15th century Hooglandsekerk (Highland Church). Photo Can Pac Swire. Below: Lipsius Building, Leiden University.



## Parallel events

### Engaging with Vietnam (EWW 11)

Engaging with Vietnam is delighted to announce its 11th Conference (EWW 11), to be held on 15-16 July 2019 in Leiden, alongside ICAS 11.

Where its 10th conference sought to examine and move beyond dichotomies in knowledge production about and on Vietnam, EWW 11 will focus on one particular, and particularly complex, dichotomy/relation: Vietnam in Europe, Europe in Vietnam: Identity, Transnationality, and Mobility of People, Ideas and Practices Across Time and Space.

This particular focus of EWW 11 intersects with ICAS 11's theme 'Asia and Europe. Asia in Europe'.

Queries and questions can be directed to: [engagingwithvietnam@gmail.com](mailto:engagingwithvietnam@gmail.com) See p.43 in this issue for the call for papers.

### CATS hands-on workshops for junior scholars

CATS Workshops: Engaging Translations and Circulations Across Asia and Europe will be held from 16-19 July 2019 in Leiden. How can we trace the circulation and translation of texts, images, sounds, and objects across national and regional boundaries, and how can we make sense of the involved agents' actions and itineraries, without adhering to methodological nationalism or disciplinary reifications of essences? To advance these discussions, scholars working at or affiliated with Heidelberg's Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) are convening a series of hands-on workshops on four consecutive days. The workshops are designed for junior scholars studying processes of circulation and translation within and between Asia and Europe.

Read more on pp.44-45 of this issue, or go to <https://icas.asia/icas11/programme/CATS>







The Night Watch. Rembrandt van Rijn.  
In 2019, The Netherlands is commemorating  
350 years since the death of Rembrandt  
van Rijn. Image courtesy of the Rijksmuseum,  
Amsterdam.

## Anniversaries and celebrations

In 2019, The Netherlands is commemorating 350 years since the death of Rembrandt van Rijn. This will be evident in special events organised all over the country, including Leiden (<https://tinyurl.com/RvRcommemoration>; <https://tinyurl.com/RvRLeiden>).

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is celebrating its 25 year anniversary this year with a number of special events, and culminating in ICAS 11; for example, a photo contest (see p.3), Alumni Club meetings, an IIAS/ICAS retrospective in our offices on the Rapenburg, and the digitalisation of the earliest issues of The Newsletter.

Leiden University is also celebrating an anniversary. 2019 marks its 444th birthday! As one of the world's oldest universities, and alma mater/former employer of 16 Nobel Prize winners, the university without a doubt has much to celebrate.

## The ICAS 2019 Film Programme

The film programme – scheduled and designed to complement ICAS 11 – will showcase documentary features from Asia. From human interest stories to narratives of caste, community and gender violence and exclusion, these films explore the histories, societies, politics and culture of various regions of Asia. The films attempt to move beyond academic enquiry and could be read as a visual document of these magnificently transforming societies, where the tradition and modernity are articulated not as binaries but located in an alternative conceptual universe. The films shortlisted for screening during ICAS 11 come from a diverse range of countries such as India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Hong Kong, China and Central Asia.

The programme provides a unique platform for ICAS participants to not only experience the films themselves, but also be part of a Q&A session with some of the filmmakers and experts immediately after the screenings. The films will be screened in the Lipsius Building, and the programme of the screenings will be published in the ICAS programme book and on the convention website.



Above:  
Leiden City  
Auditorium.



Left:  
The International  
Institute for Asian  
Studies on the  
Rapenburg.

## Exhibit, advertise or become an ICAS 11 sponsor

Make sure to take advantage of the advertising opportunities at ICAS 11. Reach all participants directly through a printed advert in the programme book, a convention bag insert (flyer, booklet, poster, pen, etc.) or with a targeted email sent out prior to the convention.

Or step it up and become one of our recognised sponsors! You could sponsor our opening reception or closing party, keep participants well fed and watered by sponsoring one or more coffee breaks, or you could contribute to keeping the convention eco-friendly and sponsor the water fountains and reusable 'green' bottles. See all options on <https://icas.asia/icas11/bookfair/adsandsponsors>

As ICAS 11 will be taking place in various Leiden University buildings, so too will the exhibition areas of the ICAS Book Fair. We will be hosting a combination of (academic) publishers, book sellers, academic institutes, libraries, journals and digital services. The exhibition area at ICAS always serves as the best place to meet and share, to discover and purchase, and to establish future relations. The exhibitors currently confirmed to attend ICAS 11 can be found on <https://icas.asia/icas11/bookfair/exhibit>

## ICAS 11 Closing Party

After the final panels on Friday 19 July you are welcome to join us in celebrating all the hard work and multitude of fantastic new connections that will have taken place during ICAS 11. The venue of our closing party will be the Stadsgehoorzaal (Leiden City Auditorium). The stunning neo-renaissance architecture of the building, originally established in the early 19th century, can still be admired in the columns of its façade and architectural details in its multiple rooms, yet after a 1996 renovation the building now also boasts state of the art technology to guarantee the best ambience and acoustics. Due to the impressively large numbers of participants attending this edition of ICAS, we will be spreading out over the entire venue. Live music and DJs in the 'Grote Zaal', bar areas in the various foyers, and a lounge area in the 'Bree Zaal'. More information about the Auditorium's rooms and foyers can be found on their website [www.leideschouwburg-stadsgehoorzaal.nl](http://www.leideschouwburg-stadsgehoorzaal.nl)

## ICAS Book Prize (IBP) 2019

This will be the eighth instalment of the IBP-English Edition, which celebrates outstanding English-language works and dissertations on Asia. ICAS 10 (2017) saw the introduction of French, German, Chinese and Korean Editions – and this year we are also welcoming Spanish and Portuguese titles. The IBP aims to create an international focus for academic publications on Asia, thus increasing their worldwide visibility, and has always been organised around broad interdisciplinary bases (Social Sciences and Humanities) rather than traditional geographic or disciplinary compartmentalisations.

The winners of this year's prizes will be announced during the ICAS opening ceremony on 16 July 2019.

Current IBP organisers and sponsors:

*Chinese Edition:* NYU Shanghai, in cooperation with Fudan University  
*English Edition:* Asian Library/Leiden University  
*French Edition:* GIS Asie  
*German Edition:* Max Weber Stiftung – Deutsche Geisteswissenschaftliche Institute im Ausland (MWS)  
*Korean Edition:* Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC)  
*Portuguese & Spanish Edition:* Sephis

The English edition has received a record-breaking number of more than 400 submissions. The reading committees are working hard towards a shortlist, which will be made public

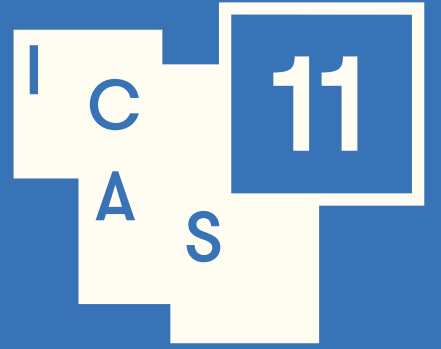
in April 2019. The interest for the Book Prize continues to grow, and where the English version started with just a few dozen titles, we predict the other language versions will also catch up in a few years – they are already doing impressively well.

All submitted publications can be found here: <https://icas.asia/en/submitted-ibp2019>

## The Colleagues' Choice Awards

The Colleagues' Choice Awards (for English-language publications) will be decided by an online public vote. See opposite or go straight to <https://icas.asia/> to cast your vote. Votes open on 15 March 2019.





# Book Prize 2019 Colleagues' Choice Award



Cast your vote at [www.icas.asia](http://www.icas.asia)



Sponsored by  
The Asian Library  
at Leiden University  
[www.asianlibraryleiden.nl](http://www.asianlibraryleiden.nl)

Pictured: A selection of the books submitted to the IBP 2019.





# 'Africa-Asia: A New Axis of Knowledge'

The Second Edition

It was with great pleasure that the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) could once again serve as the principal facilitators of the Second Edition of the International Conference 'Asia-Africa: A New Axis of Knowledge' in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 20-22 September 2018. The honour of being associated with this major effort alongside the Association for Asian Studies in Africa (A-ASIA) and the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), stems from a continuing commitment to collaboration beyond boundaries of any kind, a collaboration that must include academic, cultural, public and social actors from the two most populated and dynamic 'southern' regions (or continents) of the world, Africa and Asia.



Above: A few of the student volunteers helping at registration

The conference was an extraordinary event, enjoyed by so many, both new and familiar participants, and supported by first-time and long-standing partners. The cooperation provided by our local hosts at UDSM was truly exceptional, and the conference would not have been quite so gratifying, let alone possible, without them. More information about the most recent and the first conference,

including programmes, speakers, the platform, organisers, etc. can be found on the website <https://africasia.org>.

Below is just a small selection of commentaries sent to us by attendees, who like us agree that the meeting in Tanzania was a uniquely stimulating and thought-provoking collaborative event. More information about the third conference will be shared soon, but we hope to see you all there!



Below: Dr Mathew Senga - Local convener UDSM



## Africa-Asia: a 'New Axis of Knowledge', to what effect?

Shine Choi

As a student of international relations, I am not sure if an Africa-Asia axis is necessarily innocent intellectually, politically or historically. However, one thing I am learning in my research and from having attended the second Africa-Asia Conference is that the connection is one that is productive, in the sense that it creates anew, if not substantially then at least aesthetically, and the latter is not entirely nothing. I am happy I found co-journeymers at the conference that share the view that Africa-Asia provides a new axis for creativity that, while indeed never innocent, can be political without merely serving as a plot point in politics if the axis works through disrupting established habits, rituals, networks, modes, parameters of knowledge production and what knowing is and does in the world(s). For this disruption to be more than a rhetorical gesture, working to re-inhabit and redeploy the limits of conferencing, collaboration and knowledge production at a minimum is imperative.

I first learned about the conference though its first instalment in Ghana in 2015, when I was lost and was Googling for some grounding for an entry into Asia and Africa linkages for my research on North Korea and postcolonial theory. Following through the conclusions of my first book on re-imagining North Korea in international politics, I was working on North Korean art and aesthetic theory as a way to open up the predictably dictatorial and problematic way North Korean politics manifest that feed into the hierarchic international order. Art and taking North Korean sources on their own terms did not seem enough in my effort to reconfigure how 'North Korea' and 'state politics' converge, and in this context, North Korea's Third World cultural activities in Asia and Africa seemed promising. 'Trained' in International Relations, Cultural Studies and Korean Studies, I had very little knowledge of anything African, and I had learned nothing about the Bandung

Conference, the Non-aligned Movement, or inter-continental liberation linkages, as part of my training or in previous research. I was reading up on the topic on my own so when I stumbled upon the proceedings of the first Africa-Asia Conference online, this was exciting.

Besides curiosity about the research papers at the conference (because these papers were not published), I wanted to know about its politics. It was hard to tell what brought the organizing members together, what linked these people and their institutions to the project, what the political/ideological angle was in this inaugural meeting. Big western institution presence was noticeable, but did this mean they were the driving force? Did they pick their 'African' counterparts/local organisers? How do these inter-regional collaborations get off the ground? Is this a counter initiative to some other debates or developments I am not able to read in the public-facing self-presentation?

When the announcement for the second Africa-Asia Conference was made, I felt that I had to go see for myself (by then, I had secured a research fellowship with travel funds from also a Western/American source). Some of my structural questions were answered – it helped that there were many

panel sessions to discuss the procedural, strategic and pragmatic aspects of how to nurture the axis, more so than one would expect from a medium sized conference. I am sure these discussions also happened behind closed doors, over dinner and drinks with key actors and stakeholders, but the discussions and reflections were also abundant within the conference proceedings. I found this inclusivity and transparency refreshing; it brought to the fore how research findings do not spring from a vacuum, that it is important to bring into research spaces the machineries of what sustains the gathering, but also the aspirations, what is at stake and concerns of the institution-in-the-making. For instance, the conference's local convener, Dr Mathew Senga of University of Dar es Salaam, stressed the importance of ensuring the conference and network not reproduce existing models of Asian Studies centres elsewhere, but claimed that they (we?) were about creating Africa-Asia centres. This hyphen is a significant difference from the European models that make its location invisible while all the while resting on the currency of Europe/West to make their work and reach possible. Others recounted the discords at the Ghana conference and the unresolved financial aspects of this ambitious enterprise, which



## An intellectual place of liberation and liberalization of intellectual discourses

Jimmy Harmon

I was made aware of the 'Africa-Asia: a New Axis of Knowledge' conference through Vijaya Teelock, Director of the Centre for Research on Slavery and Indenture (CRSI), based at the University of Mauritius. Due to my passion for history, memory and heritage I am an independent part time researcher at CRSI. I am also an 'engaged scholar' in public advocacy for cultural empowerment of the Creole minority ethnic group, which comprises people of African, Malagasy and mixed origins. The title 'Africa-Asia' was striking as it resonates with my research field and interests as an engaged scholar on issues related to the relationship between people of African descent and those of Indian ancestry in contemporary Mauritius, situated in the South West Indian Ocean. It was, for my particular research interests, added value that the conference took place at the University of Dar es Salaam, providing me with a unique opportunity to encounter East Africa, home to the iconic African leader Julius Nyerere, and key player in the history of the Indian Ocean's slave trade. Participating in such a conference was a must for me.

My conference presentation was titled 'The Bandung Conference (1955) and the All African People Conference (1958): Understanding Asia-Africa intercultural dialogue in the Republic of Mauritius', and would examine the race relations between Creoles and Indians. My discussion was located in the legacy of the Africa-Asia intellectual decolonisation movement of the 1960s. The Bandung conference's aims were to promote Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation and to oppose colonialism or neocolonialism. However, when I received the programme book for the 2nd edition of the 'Africa-Asia' conference, I was surprised to find my presentation appearing in the panel: 'Epistemological Questions in Africa-Asia context'. I had not realised that my work could be considered as an 'epistemological question'! Coincidentally, after completing my PhD (Language and Education) in 2015 at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, one of the Professors encouraged me to pursue research in epistemology of languages. My research work focused on heritage language and identity construction. I studied the evolution of the debates on Creole language in Mauritius as contested knowledge. The conference came in a way as

pleasant confirmation and encouragement.

During the opening ceremony of the conference, I was a bit lost amongst so many participants, yet luckily I quickly made contact with two participants (a couple) from Indonesia. We introduced ourselves and inquired about each other's presentations. They told me with amazement that they had read my abstract with great interest and were extremely happy to meet me. We talked about the historical link between Mauritius and Indonesia with regard to Malaysian seafarers exploring the Indian Ocean. From that moment on I became fully engaged intellectually with the venue, the conference and the people coming from all over the world. The University of Dar es Salaam is a place rich with the history of the African liberation movement. It was exciting to be on the campus, an intellectual place of liberation and liberalization of intellectual discourses.

I also greatly appreciated the organisers of this conference - hats off to them! Although they were all outstanding, one of the university student volunteers deserves a special mention: Oggu Nanyarro. An undergraduate student Sociology; self-composed and always caring for the needs and queries of the participants. We had many exchanges about Africa's struggles and leadership and societal issues, and the intellectual activism in my country. We continue our discussions now through social media!

The conference spanned an array of issues, across multiple disciplines, that are salient within the African continent. The diversity in the delivery included conventional academic presentations, video projections, free talks, which were in some instances hard talks, and open discussions by academics, professionals and activists. The whole process nurtured cross-fertilisation of knowledge. It was a two-day immersion in issues with which Africa is constantly coming to grips with. I was amazed by the academic freedom with which issues were discussed openly and freely, even those relating to the role of China as the emerging new superpower in Africa. It was also interesting to understand the geostrategic positioning of India with some countries like Mauritius. This helped to give a balanced view and avoided the conference from falling into the trap of ideological rhetoric, which I must confess is unfortunately very often the case with African conferences where debates are restricted to rehearsed discourse on colonialism and

it turns out is also a shoestring enterprise despite big institutional names attached. I got a sense in various conversations that theoretico-political discord (or ideological differences in old school terms) was seen as something to be put aside, because it divides and stalls rather than allows for action, planning, forging.

Indeed, the Bandung Conference that brought together Asian and African political leaders in 1953 was invoked at the conference opening ceremony and during the rest of the conference proceedings. This was interesting at first, but upon hearing it on repeat, I realized that of course I should have known this would be the theme: building on heroic legacies to forge new relations is a common practice. Oddly, it was not during research panels on such historic events or linkages where I saw critical engagements with the optimism about Afro-Asia as an axis and claims to the continuity of Bandung to this initiative; surprisingly, it was in a roundtable titled 'Toward resilient societies: comparison and cooperation across regional borders?' where Itty Abraham, a leading international relations researcher on this topic (NUS, Singapore), reminded us how the historic event of Bandung was also fraught with misunderstandings and viability. But what

I appreciated most about this roundtable discussion was less the well-considered academic insight on why Africa-Asia relations are not innocent, and more the presentation by the only woman on the esteemed panel, and the only non-academic, Zaida Mgalla (Uwezo Tanzania). Madame Mgalla bellowed her world into the room, first slowly like she was presenting in a classroom, focusing on the meticulous and trivial, and then slowly in her own way explaining how the literacy programme works, in the Tanzanian and East African context, with global implications. The chair gave her extra time, the room first seemed unsure, but with time her optimism about the international collaboration and new initiatives trumped the well-considered academic concerns on the panel. It wasn't the specificities of her argument, but the unexpected juxtapositions of positions, aspirations, and level of thinking that energized the room. I learned a lot about broader aspects of how ideas move, analytics fail, disruptions occur. I appreciated the ethos of the unexpected that seemed to structure some of the sessions at the conference, again more plentiful than one would expect for a conference of this size.

One final observation. Reverberating in the many sessions was the question of

neo-colonialism. In this case, it was mutually enriching for both Africa and Asia. It is promising as it augurs new avenues for research and policies for sustainable development in Africa. It is like treading new paths. I consider this the most exciting take-away of the conference.

The format of the parallel sessions gave immense possibilities to discuss different issues of paramount importance. It was an *intellectual délice*, engaging, thought-provoking and giving new insights into Africa and Asia from an African and Asian standpoint. This is for me the originality of this conference. Engrossed in our disciplines, we academics, we lose sight at times of the multifocal perspectives of any topic being

researched. We might be misled by our own research paradigms. The parallel sessions help to see how things must be looked at from different angles. They help us especially to stay grounded and come down from our academic towers. This conference fully responded to my philosophy of the role of the researcher on societal issues: I firmly believe that research can only be meaningful when it leads to social transformation. I can't wait for the 3rd edition of the 'Africa-Asia: a New Axis of Knowledge' conference!

Jimmy Harmon Centre for Research on Slavery and Indenture (CRSI), University of Mauritius



Conference participants.



inequity in resources along continental lines to do the very work that brings us together – research. We cannot increase the axis of knowledge by simply inviting more diverse participants to present their papers through income-calibrated conference fees or even by funding conference travel expenses on a needs basis. These do help and they are a must, but what I saw was that at a minimum, we have to rethink how conference sessions are structured so that we do not assume that all researchers have the same resources (not just funds, but also time) to do the kind of research they want to be doing and how they want to contribute to knowledge production as researchers. If 'the best' presentations and research findings are those coming from the well-resourced universities, what kind of intellectual conversation is possible across various axes of differences? Short of longing for a more equal global world, what must we do, at minimum, to create conference meetings of radical equality and exchange? How do we fail Africa-Asia as a new axis of knowledge when we do not experiment with how we come together, how we share resource, how we listen, invite, create spaces for new entrants to Africa-Asia studies?

The more I navigate this terrain, the more I sense that Africa-Asia is less about

connection and more about discord, impossibility, artifice. In short, the Africa-Asia axis is actually about how difficult it is to establish, because of the history of colonialism, imperialism, raced hierarchies, capitalism, exploitation, parochialism, etc. Further, in this context, it is even harder to forge relations alone with no real network or solid academic grounding to do this work, but only with a faint notion that I follow a politics of going beyond the colonial and thus predictable linkages (e.g., francophone is a French colonial connection so linking Cambodia or Vietnam with Senegal or 'Africa' would be following colonial linkages). In short, it is not surprising that research in this terrain is difficult, fraught, and often just weird. Whatever those with institutional backing and depth of knowledge to use in support of one's vision/belief, this Asia-Africa, or Africa-Asia thing hits many walls of sanity and reason, and training. I think it is important to embrace the insanity of this project. Funding permitting, see you all at the third instalment!

Shine Choi is a lecturer in Politics and International Relations, Massey University, New Zealand. She is also Associate Editor of the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*.



## Does Area Studies require 'fine-tuning', or should we take a sledgehammer to it?

Elizabeth Walker

The Routledge Area Studies team were delighted to facilitate the second set of 'New Directions in Area Studies' roundtables during the international conference 'Africa-Asia: a New Axis of Knowledge', which took place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in September 2018. Partnering with the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), we are proud to continue our intellectual support for partners who are working to de-centre 'Area Studies' and open up new methods of knowledge production and transfer. Our 'New Directions in Area Studies' roundtables, the first of which was held in collaboration with SOAS University of London in November 2017, help realise these ideals in practice, and make a tangible contribution to developing more equitable Area Studies publishing that will serve a new generation of global scholars.

Nearly 30 scholars, from a diverse range of countries, participated in the two roundtable sessions; we welcomed participants from Latin America, North America, Oceania, South and East Asia, and from Western Europe. As we hoped and intended, the roundtable was a truly global event with participation from scholars from around the globe. We would like to express sincere thanks to Professor Diana Jeater (University of Liverpool) for her professional and enthusiastic chairing of both sessions; without Professor Jeater's interest and commitment these sessions would not have taken place. Similarly, we thank colleagues

at IIAS, UDSM and SOAS University of London, Professor Rachel Harrison and Dr Philippe Peycam, who assisted with practicalities and logistics for the roundtables.

Acknowledging the developments and debates that have surrounded Area Studies since its inception, and the material consequences of how we define 'Area' and 'Area Studies', the first of our two sessions focused on developments in the current research ecosystem, which are resulting in the continued need to challenge the concept of Area Studies, to re-profile what we mean by 'Area' or 'shared geography', and to move beyond the institutional architecture, hierarchies and markets that are shaping knowledge production. Varying degrees of change were called for, from a lighter 'fine-tuning', to the need to 'sledgehammer it' [Area Studies], and real praxis was suggested during both roundtable sessions.

The group explored language as the means by which knowledge is packaged for consumption and shared initiatives that are disrupting the hegemonic dominance of English as the language of research, for example Kiswahili issues of the journal *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies* through translation, to the creation of new vocabulary in the Khmer language where required! Indeed, could we use language, or the diaspora, to define 'Area'?

Participants shared examples from their research that focused on different 'entry points' to knowledge creation, for example: food, climate change or shared problems

or histories. We asked could it be possible to create a new knowledge system where 'all the disciplines fall away'? Can we become 'undisciplined' (as distinct from interdisciplinary)? Queering Area Studies was suggested as a possible intellectual framework that could help to dismantle existing hierarchies and re-centre researchers and knowledge from the periphery.

As an extension of disciplinary issues, participants discussed interrogating all forms of knowledge production that are not considered part of the academic model and working with sectors of society that are not usually considered actors in knowledge production, for instance examining the transmission of knowledge among craftspeople. If institutional change is proving difficult, moving outside the university environment, setting-up research institutions as capacity building platforms may be a way forward.

Moving from 'institutional confinement', to questions of power or 'white supremacy', it was widely acknowledged that collaborative research between scholars in both the so-called Global South and Global North, albeit well-intentioned, may end up merely 'ethnicing' a project, while also raising concerns around moral geography, proximity and distance. As one delegate noted "we need to push Africans/Asians to become the subject and not the object of the mission". Even in a world where technological and access issues were completely resolved, the question remains, who is producing knowledge, and whose questions are being adopted?

It was eloquently argued that, in fact, scholars in the north simply do not know what's really going on in the south, and that south-south cooperation is flourishing, language rearing its head, once again, as a possible barrier for those in the north. A case in point being Afro-Asiatic Studies, the first Latin American journal on Africa, and indeed the work of SEPHIS (the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development), which has been running for over

twenty-five years. As one participant noted "knowledge is out there, they become legible to academics when they become disciplined by universities who want to categorise that knowledge". Add to this the need to be alert to multiple, interacting forms of privilege, since problems between the Global North and Global South do not mean there are no problems or inequalities within the Global South.

There was a clear and consistent call to expand our 'circuits' or clusters of knowledge production (including knowledge transfer) and a need to conceptualise our connections in different ways, which more closely match the experiences of young scholars today. We heard tangible examples of how we can begin to do just that, for instance the use of 'real time archival collaboration', a new methodological approach to archival work that favours the distinct area and linguistic knowledge of the collective involved (see their manifesto), as well as the linguistic efforts described above. Themes of individual responsibility and the need to recognise linguistic and fieldwork limitations were raised several times. The Routledge Area Studies team would like to work with the participants further on enabling expanded circuits; indeed, we see these roundtables as a starting point in that endeavour.

We must also pay special thanks to our colleague Oscar Masingyana, based in Johannesburg, who attended the conference on behalf of the wider Area Studies team, and provided us with wonderful follow-up notes, photos and 'reportage' that have enabled us to gain a real sense of the nature of the discussion.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who participated for your support, energy and enthusiasm; we look forward to continuing both the conversation and the practical work involved in shaping our discipline, pushing at the boundaries of what 'Area Studies' means, while maintaining its usability.

Elizabeth Walker Publisher, Area Studies, Routledge, Taylor & Francis

## Unusual connections

Tharaphi Than

On the last day of the conference 'Africa-Asia: a New Axis of Knowledge 2', Dr Kojo Aidoo (Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana) and I left our hotel early to explore a Hindu neighbourhood in Dar es Salaam. Eventually we were unable to navigate the neighbourhood because of road constructions. Disappointed, we proceeded to the conference by taxi and during the drive Kojo decided to cheer me up with his lecture on Pan Africanism and recent political developments in Ghana. One of my questions to him was why we Asians do not have as strong a unifying version such as Pan Africanism, which to me is more than an ideology. It is a very practical way of finding solutions for historical and current problems of the continent mostly created by imperialism. It is also an empowering tool utilized by governments such as Tanzania's by making it visible, even as a trademark of the country and the region, in many public places including airports. The youth of African countries, from Senegal to Tanzania, can imagine their place within the connected land through economic, educational, and cultural opportunities created within this framework.

My conversation with Kojo was a micro version of the whole conference, connecting scholars who would otherwise not meet each other and have meaningful and even transformative conversations about subjects they know and live. Pan Africanism is not just a topic Kojo learns through books; he lives it as if his and his country's future depends on it. A belief originating in the Global South, by scholars and educators such as Paulo Freire, that only through praxis can we transform ourselves, is reflected in the way Kojo theorizes, engages, and practises Pan Africanism.

During the conference, I had many conversations like the one with Kojo. In one of the workshops, Dr Malami Buba (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, South Korea/Sokoto State University, Nigeria) enlightened us how languages were the site of epistemic violence committed by colonialists crippling many communities to express their ideas, thoughts, and to pass down their heritage across generations. I started reading his works after the conference and they are empowering. Giants in their own fields, African (and Asian) scholars working outside the European and Northern American institutions are lesser-knowns than those working in those two regions. Geographical privilege is not afforded to them. But conferences such as this one are the means to circumvent many challenges scholars from outside these two regions face.

In another panel, Dr Abdourahmane Seck (University Gaston Berger, Senegal) and I surprised each other with the many parallels between his 'street food project' in Senegal and mine on 'history through food teaching methods' at Yangon University. Our research questions, methodologies and approaches, particularly the triangulation of interests among communities, students and universities in our projects, share many similarities. Through our choice of intervention, i.e., 'food', we want to investigate broader historical, anthropological and political landscapes of Myanmar and Senegalese communities. Realizing these parallels beautifully makes unusual or not-often-thought-of collaborations possible. A joint book project on Myanmar and Senegalese food (studies) was hatched impromptu.

Cross connections between Asia and Africa, and between Asian and African scholars, are valuable because they help us learn new things, and learn new



Photos taken during panel sessions.

ways of knowing the old things. What binds us together is our implicit desire and self-imposed undertaking to transcend through coloniality of knowledge. How do we reclaim and make relevant our indigenous traditions in knowing things and producing knowledge? Asia and Africa, particularly the latter because of an even longer burden and deeper scars of imperialism, can empower each other through co-conceptualizing ways to see ourselves and each other without Orientalism or hegemonic (Western)

constructions of 'Asia' and 'Africa'. The journey ahead is long and, as we discussed during the conference, there exist many barriers – such as established and accepted ways of teaching, researching, publishing, and even organizing conferences in particular locations. But a new axis of knowledge is possible, and the conference in Dar showed us how.

Tharaphi Than, Associate Professor in the Department of World Languages and Cultures at Northern Illinois University



# Hong Kong Studies thrives and withers in unexpected places

Benjamin Garvey

Hong Kong Studies is emerging as an area studies field in its own right, edging out from the shadows of China Studies after the months-long street-occupation protests in 2014 and violent Mong Kok incident in 2016,<sup>1</sup> and amid a rise in scholarly interest in the territory from outside the confines of the Social Science departments of Hong Kong's establishment universities.



## Go global

The Education University of Hong Kong's Academy of Hong Kong Studies (AHKS), inaugurated in July 2015, claims the position of first Hong Kong Studies centre in a Hong Kong university. The academy sees its mission as driving "interdisciplinary knowledge creation and transfer initiatives on Hong Kong-centric subjects within the context of inter-global city studies"; its motto is "Hong Kong in the World".<sup>2</sup> The academy is headed by Professor Lui Tai-lok, who joined the Education University in 2014, when it was still known as the Hong Kong Institute of Education (Hong Kong's legislature granted the institute university status only in 2016.<sup>3</sup>) Ironically, the establishment of AHKS came as academics in Hong Kong have been under pressure to 'go global', amid government-funding and -assessment systems that valorise frequency of publication in international journals.<sup>4</sup>

The 'go global' mantra could be seen as an oblique injunction to avoid paying much scholarly attention to social and political developments in Hong Kong itself, even in this time of rapid transformation. That would echo the sentiment of a Hong Kong scholar in 2017, who told me that Social Science research at Hong Kong universities was 'Singaporising' (not 'mainlandising'): researchers were being dissuaded from doing research and publishing on Hong Kong, with the same phenomenon observed in semi-authoritarian Singapore. "Before there was someone hired to work on local issues. That's not the case anymore because the incentives, including during the hiring process, are geared towards publishing in international journals".

In an attempt to make comparisons across departments and universities, scholarly research in Hong Kong is "considered valuable only if it is published in internationally-refereed journals, which, despite claims that this does not exclude Chinese and other local journals, has created a strong bias against journals published in Asia", according to adjunct associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Joseph Bosco, who describes such administrative methods as an "audit culture".<sup>5</sup> Audit culture uses "business metaphors" that stifle "academic creativity by focusing only on process", he writes, adding that one of its side effects, "probably not entirely unintended", is that "more power shifts to administrators, as opposed to academic, especially disciplinary, peers".

As assessment of Hong Kong's establishment universities has been tied to global publishing metrics, it appears that research on local issues has become politically incorrect or taboo, particularly if it touches upon Hong Kong politics, which, generally

speaking, turns upon Hong Kong identity, sometimes framed in opposition to mainland Chinese identity. According to Bosco, from 1987 to 2000 the Hong Kong Anthropological Society published an annual journal, *The Hong Kong Anthropologist*. But with the "increasing pressure for teachers to publish in internationally refereed journals, the journal was discontinued, replaced with *Asian Anthropology*, published initially out of the Chinese University [but] now by Taylor & Francis [a subsidiary of UK-listed Informa]".<sup>6</sup> The fate of *The Hong Kong Anthropologist* may reflect the reluctant turning of the social scientific gaze away from Hong Kong by social scientists in Hong Kong's established universities amid 'go global' pressures and a combination of incentives and deterrents.

## Beyond departments and borders

On the issue of Chinese state control over Hong Kong universities, Bosco says there is no direct interference in teaching or research, but that there is control over funding: "Since over 95 percent of funding for universities comes from the government, universities in Hong Kong are very dependent on government policies." He notes the speculation that Hong Kong "elites who are angry at students becoming involved in [pro-democracy] protests against 'National Education' [in 2012] and in favour of 'Universal Suffrage' [in 2014] are seeking "to reduce the number of students majoring in fundamental social sciences and humanities." If departments are having limits placed on their student intake, limiting their allocated financial resources, or, for example, are not having their offices and facilities refurbished, leaving them decrepit and decaying, it would not be surprising if their research agendas turn cautious and compliant and they reject scholarly proposals that touch on sensitive Hong Kong political issues, as more and more students and faculty are from the Mainland and the political struggle in Hong Kong has intensified in recent years.

When it comes to Hong Kong Studies, it appears that departments' and scholars' pursuit, or mere protection, of their economic and career interests could be conflicting with their scholarly urgings or even conscience. And, if that were indeed the case, it would not be surprising if we were to observe a flourishing of Hong Kong Studies outside the Social Science departments of Hong Kong's established universities, including overseas. In fact, that is what we are now seeing. The inaugural issue of a new academic journal, *Hong Kong Studies*, was published last year by Chinese University

of Hong Kong's Department of English. The semi-annual publication says it is "devoted to original, intersectional and cross-disciplinary research on Hong Kong affairs from multiple fields in the humanities and the social sciences" and "it is the first bilingual academic journal to focus on Hong Kong as a site of debate." In other words, although based in a humanities department, it will publish Hong Kong-focused social-science research. The journal's editors believe that the "timely expansion of the field of Hong Kong Studies warrants a journal of its own, in order to provide a focused platform for facilitating exchange between different disciplines and viewpoints in relation to Hong Kong." One of those editors, Tammy Ho Lai-Ming, is Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Hong Kong Baptist University.

Separately, Bristol University launched The Hong Kong History Project under the leadership of Professor of History Robert Bickers in January 2015, with funding from the Hatton Trust.<sup>7</sup> The initiative "aims to encourage and facilitate the study of the history of Hong Kong in the UK." The initiative "will support cutting edge research into the history of Hong Kong by funding research studentships, visiting fellowships, conferences and workshops, exploring new and under-researched areas in Hong Kong history". It "aims to serve as a focal point for a programme of events and research initiatives that will provide new perspectives on the history of Hong Kong, both as an object of study in itself, and in comparative and regional perspective". The project's website notes that there is a "growing critical mass of scholars and writers turning their attention to post-Occupy Hong Kong".<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, the University of British Columbia in Canada launched its Hong Kong Studies Initiative within its Asian Studies department in April 2017. The initiative, led by Leo K. Shin, Associate Professor of Chinese History in the Department of History, considers the territory "as both an extraordinary Chinese city and as a spectacular international and transnational hub".<sup>9</sup> In a Youtube video, Shin says the initiative "was founded on the firm belief that there is a genuine need for passionate but also well-informed and fair-minded discussions about the past, present and future of this most-improbable metropolis, both as a spectacular city in its own right and also as an important gateway to Asia". In a newspaper report, Shin was quoted as saying that the centre was designed to create space outside Hong Kong to discuss its politics, history and culture as, in Hong Kong itself, academia was "being squeezed".<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, in 2015, UBC became the only university in Canada to teach Cantonese.<sup>11</sup>

Also, the Society of Hong Kong Studies (SHKS), formed in 2017 and affiliated with the Association of Asian Studies, held its

inaugural forum at City University of Hong Kong in January 2018. Two months later, it sponsored two panel sessions at the AAS annual conference in Washington, D.C. Chaired by UCLA sociology professor Ching Kwan Lee, the society plans to host its first annual conference later this year. Similarly, the newly-established United Kingdom-based Hong Kong Studies Association (HKSA), a "network for scholars in European institutions", will launch its "Hong Kong Insights" blog this year, according to Hong Kong Watch, which, itself launched in December 2017, "investigates the status of human rights, freedoms and rule of law in Hong Kong".<sup>12</sup>

## New generation of activists

Since it arose during World War Two, the term 'area studies' has been criticised as "colourless" and "ambiguous", but also lauded for its "modesty". It came about to describe the American effort to "achieve an encapsulated understanding of the unknown areas of the world" that the United States found itself involved in during the war, and, understandably, the discipline is "extremely vulnerable to the charge of serving 'nonscholarly' political or military interests".<sup>13</sup>

Approximately twenty years after the 1997 handover and thirty years until the expiry of "One Country, Two Systems", a turning point appears to have been reached in Hong Kong's struggle to maintain its political autonomy under Chinese sovereignty. For the original democracy movement, Hong Kong's democratisation was inextricably tied to mainland China's as the movement insisted it was 'patriotically' Chinese. But those ideas are crumbling amid social, economic and technological change and the simple passage of time, as a new generation of activists rise to prominence in the wake of mass street-blockade protests in 2014 and violence in 2016.

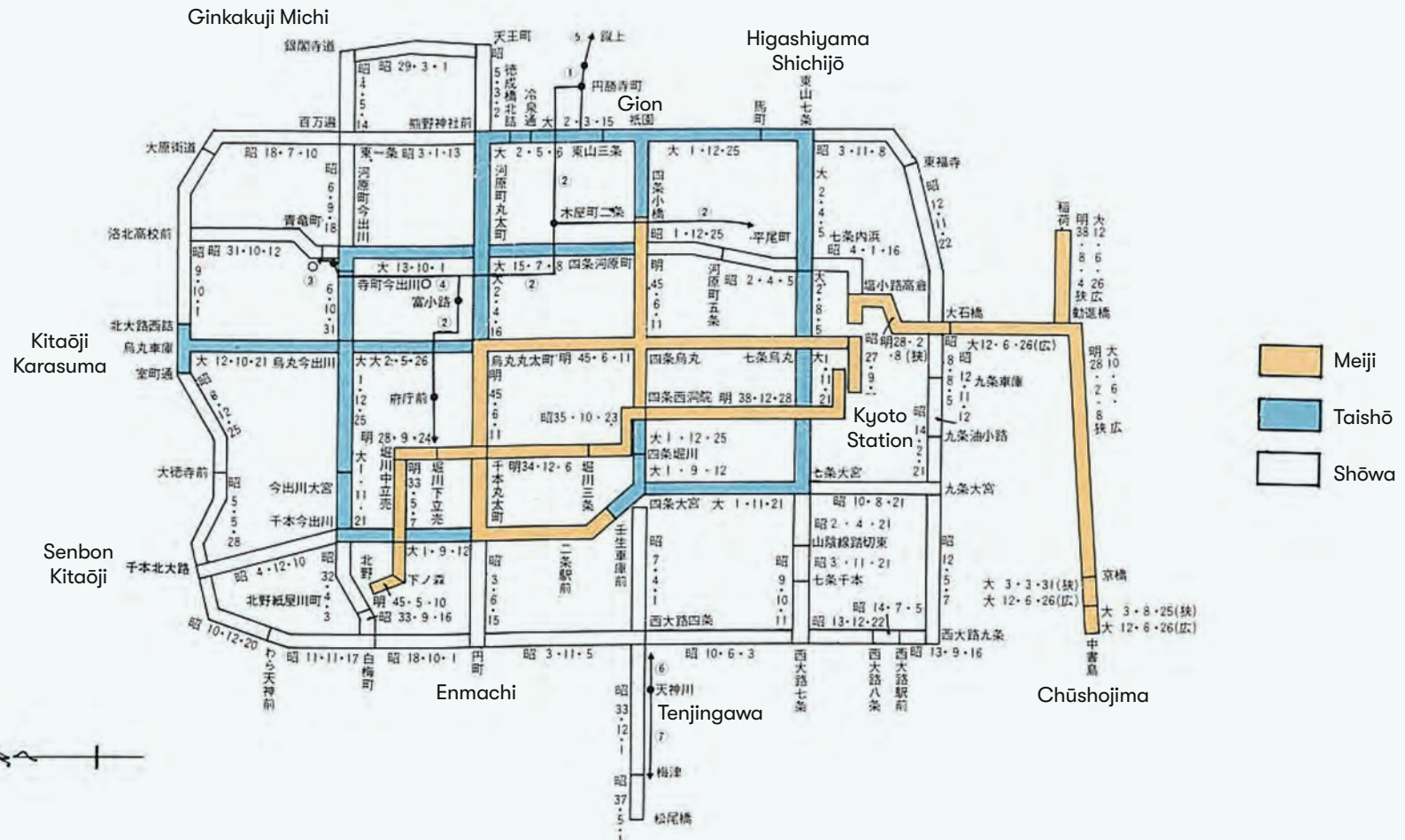
Some young democrats seek Hong Kong's independence from China, and others a referendum to determine post-2047 sovereignty. Some openly express Hong Kong nationalism. These historic developments, representing fundamental shifts in the tenets of the territory's democracy movement, contextualise the clear rise in scholarly interest in Hong Kong as an object of study, particularly by academics outside the audit culture that social scientists in establishment Hong Kong universities face, in addition to being bombarded with exhortations to go global.

Benjamin Garvey a PhD candidate at the Australian National University, was based at the Chinese University of Hong Kong for fieldwork in 2017.

## Notes

- 1 The incident is also known as the "Fishball Revolution", "Mong Kok riot" and a "clash between civilians and police".
- 2 <https://tinyurl.com/ahksvision>
- 3 'Hong Kong Institute of Education granted university status after 10 years of campaigning', *Hong Kong Free Press*; <https://tinyurl.com/HKEIstatus>
- 4 'Time for Hong Kong to tackle the big issues a year after Occupy protests ended, scholar says', *South China Morning Post*; <https://perma.cc/K88P-HJNK>
- 5 Bosco, J. 2012. 'The Formula as a Managerial Tool', *Journal of Workplace Rights* 16(3-4):383-403; <https://tinyurl.com/boscotool>
- 6 Bosco, J. 2017. 'The view from Hong Kong anthropology', *Asian Anthropology* 16(3): 190-202.
- 7 'Hong Kong History Project launched', *University of Bristol*; <https://tinyurl.com/hkprojectlaunched>
- 8 'How and Why a Fresh Start to the Study of Hong Kong History Is Being Made', *HK History Project*; <https://tinyurl.com/hkfreshstart>
- 9 <https://youtu.be/8ErFrrVi9Qk>
- 10 'In Vancouver's "Cantosphere", a sense of responsibility and an identity under siege', *South China Morning Post*; <http://archive.li/b0Bzf>
- 11 '[Gifts] Donation to support Cantonese Studies at UBC announced!'; <http://archive.fo/hzpzE>
- 12 <http://archive.fo/MBler>
- 13 Schwartz, B. 1980. 'Presidential Address: Area Studies as a Critical Discipline', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 40(1):15-25; doi:10.2307/2055035, p.15.





Kyoto electric railway route map.  
Source: *Kyotoshi toshikaihatsu kyoku toshikeikakuka 1972, page 7.*

# Urban innovation in Kyoto

## Novelty in cultural heritage making

Andrea Yuri Flores Urushima

Kyoto's urban development has generally been characterised by an innovative use and management of the city's material heritage; the urban historian Nishikawa Kōji was among the first to recognise this fact. During the 'Symposium for the Preservation of Traditional Culture in Kyoto and Nara' organised by UNESCO and the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs, in September 1970, Nishikawa commented on how much the citizens of Kyoto disliked the word *koto* (ancient city and former capital), because municipal officers and citizens of Kyoto made their best efforts to develop the city with a progressive view towards the incorporation of new technologies and new concepts of urban living. Nishikawa explained how this enterprising spirit was fundamental for allowing the city to adapt to the social and economic changes that emerged after the function of 'capital city' was transferred to Tokyo during the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact, the preservation and revival of the material heritage of the city was based on the active and permanent invention of the city's new functions over time.

### Innovation in Kyoto's modern city making

During the entire modern period, and particularly after the transference of the Emperor to Tokyo in 1869, the most influential residents of Kyoto started to press local officers towards the improvement of the city. Just before the Meiji restoration (1868) the population of Japan had reached about 34 million, with approximately 3 million inhabiting cities, and more than 90 percent of the population living in ordinary farmhouses. Although Kyoto has an urban

In 1994 the League of Historical Cities was established in Kyoto as an inter-municipal entity of international character that differed from other state-based organisations. This international organisation relied on the accumulated experiences of cities (cities as political entities with much longer histories than national states). This internationalisation illustrates the entrepreneur spirit that has historically and consistently supported urban development in Kyoto, a notion greatly contrasting the well-spread impression of Kyoto as a city of traditional heritage repository.

history of more than 1200 years old, during the mid-19th century the general image of the city was marked by rurality: from the wooden built typology of constructions to the size of urban parcels and districts, and the overall landscape still dominated by agricultural fields and forested mountains. However, during the transformation from a former imperial capital into one more local city competing for national resources, instead of reinforcing the agricultural basis of the economy, the local elite chose to orient city improvements towards innovation. It is worth remembering that the national government only issued the first official city planning regulation as late as 1919. This left a regulatory gap that allowed local officers, local merchants and other influential residents of existing cities to autonomously decide and implement city improvements. This autonomy was added to the fact that Kyoto reached the modern period with an accumulated experience in urban making from its long history as an imperial capital.

... an interest for the material culture of everyday life came to the fore.

As one of the largest cities of the period –after Tokyo and Osaka– Kyoto competed in attracting rich merchants to revive the local economy. This was achieved through city improvements related to hygiene and prevention of epidemics, as well as the improvement to urban services such as electricity and transportation. After the completion of the large-scale 'Lake Biwa Channel' infrastructural project (1885-1890),

Kyoto built the first hydroelectric power generation plant in Japan –the 'Keage Power Station' – followed by the city's pioneering project of an electric streetcar railroad, whose operation began in 1895.<sup>3</sup> In addition to infrastructural improvements,

significantly sized cities in Japan have a history of competing in the attraction of large scale events, such as industrial exhibitions. This competitiveness continued to be evident during the postwar period, for example, during the process of selecting the host city for the Expo 1970 (eventually going to Osaka), when local governments in the Kansai Region struggled

against the powerful local governments of the Kanto Region (where Tokyo is located).<sup>4</sup> Early records boast the occasion when Kyoto hosted the 'Fourth National Industrial Exhibition' in celebration of the 1100 year anniversary of the city's foundation. This exhibition was held to the south of the actual site of Heian Shrine, with a total venue area of 178,000 m<sup>2</sup> and a total site area of 47,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The event served to showcase the first electric streetcar ever installed in Japan and the innovative features of a city supplied by electricity. It also presented the occasion to enlarge streets and improve the supply of accommodation in the city. These urban improvements supported the long-term process of transforming Kyoto into an important sightseeing destination.

Upon the establishment of Kyoto municipality in 1889, the city counted around 279 thousand inhabitants. In 1918, the city of Kyoto incorporated 16 towns and villages that resulted in a suburban expansion in which the municipal land area doubled. The development of roads and the electric street car, and the creation of new housing sites accompanied this expansion. The most important variations in population growth occurred during the modern period until 1935 and after the war until 1970. The population increased to about 521 thousand in 1920, reaching over 1 million in 1935, and about 1.5 million in 1970, after which numbers stabilized.<sup>5</sup> The modern period population growth was mainly related to the variations in city limits involving the successive incorporation of surrounding towns and villages. In contrast, the postwar population growth was generally the result of internal migrations from rural areas. Although the population grew vastly until 1970, during the postwar period the rate of growth in Kyoto was modest when compared to other cities, such as Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya or Yokohama.

### Redefining postwar urban development

Kyoto city witnessed the challenge of redefining new objectives for urban development during the postwar period, similar to other local cities involved in dynamic processes of population movement towards metropolitan regions.<sup>6</sup> As described in the Kinki Area Development Law (1963), the municipal government enthusiastically embraced the project of transforming Kyoto into a cultural



centre, taking into consideration the fact that the city had escaped the wartime attacks and consequential fires. This project was officially launched in 1950 with the creation of the 'Law for the Construction of Kyoto into a City of International Culture and Tourism' [*kokusai bunka kankō toshi kensetsu hō*].

During the war, the city's physical pattern in terms of buildings, roads and other infrastructure managed to be mostly preserved –including ancient features and modern urban improvements—with one exception: one large area was cleared to create a 'safe' open space in case of air raids. Following a national air defence law, strategic areas for 'building evacuation' [*tatemono sokai*] were established to prevent the spread of fire in case of air raids. The Kyoto Municipality enforced the total clearance of an area of about 133ha, including the displacement of the area's inhabitants. After the war, 74ha were used for road construction, 63ha for the creation of public squares, and 6ha for urban parks. The eventual result, in 1962, was 24 new road sections, 28 public squares, 28 urban parks, and the extension of the Horikawa, Oike and Gojō streets. These interventions added to the subsequent suburban expansion and the continued redesign of the urban fabric.

As a matter of fact, the postwar urban expansion advanced out of a rigid control oriented towards preservation. For the realisation of Kyoto as an international cultural centre, the vision of private developers, most often supported by municipal officers, relied on the creation of new tourism-oriented services and industries, and the construction of new urban infrastructure, hotels and cultural facilities – e.g. museums, universities and conference halls. This vision was criticised by local communities that started to become influential in barring undesired projects, among them, the interdiction of a theme park construction on Mount Hiei in 1960, and the construction in 1964 of a 131m high hotel in front of Kyoto station and a hotel on Narabigaoka Hill. The "Protect Narabigaoka" civil society movement echoed movements taking place in other cities; for example, the Tsurugaoka Hill in Kamakura. These civil society movements triggered the enactment of the Ancient Capitals Preservation Law (1966) at a national level, and raised concern for preservation. An awareness emerged of the long-term interactions existing between everyday human activities and natural settings, in processes of physical shaping.

In the case of Kyoto, located in a river basin surrounded by mountains, the technical possibilities of different periods, heavily based on wooden building techniques, greatly shaped the physical features of the townscape. Up until the mid-1960s, most of the housing in central areas was composed of two-storey wooden structures known as *machiya*: townhouses that together form a specific townscape called *machinami* [the 'lined' town]. Also known as *kyo-machiya*, this urban typology began to develop when merchants and manufacturers established themselves in the capital during the Heian period (794-1185), and is still present in Kyoto.

The long history of the traditional wooden buildings in central areas has unfortunately often been overlooked since the end of the war. The large-scale destruction of cities during the war (fast spreading fires during bombing raids) led to the creation of national regulation favouring the use of reinforced concrete structures. The Building Standard Law (1950) introduced severe fire-proof regulations for the construction of new buildings in high-density areas. In 1972, the structures built before the end of the war composed 58.4% of buildings in Kyoto, and the Kyoto planning office placed these structures into the category of 'deteriorating housing' [*rōkyūka*], and the replacement of them with new modern structures became an urgent matter. The municipality classified neighbourhoods dense with wooden structures as areas of high fire risk; these included areas such as the Nishijin textile neighbourhood on the western side of Kyoto, a neighbourhood slowly shaped over a long period of time, consisting of family-based small-scale industrial installations, in which the workplace was integrated in the everyday life of the community.

### Urban change and the improvement of everyday life

The large urban changes that took place in the 1960s generated a demand for specialists on urban and regional planning, and led to an increment in the number of locally trained professionals who were aware of the specific needs and characteristics of everyday life in existing cities, towns and villages. New discussion channels were opened with the inauguration of universities and the increase in numbers of students dedicated to city-planning. In the context of disputes among community, specialists and officers about the most suitable patterns of urban interventions, an interest for the material culture of everyday life came to the fore.

In this context, independent propositions issued outside governmental offices flourished. Noteworthy is the 1964 Kyoto Plan, headed by the Kyoto University professor, Nishiyama Uzo. As early as 1960, Nishiyama strongly advised against automobiles in Japanese cities; he considered central urban areas to be public spaces deserving of similar care afforded to the interior of Japanese homes. Nishiyama considered automobiles sources of dirtiness and noise, and thus, in the same way that Japanese people remove their shoes before entering a home, automobiles too should be left outside the homely part, or central areas, of cities.<sup>7</sup>

The autonomous plans of the period demonstrated a well-informed, relatively independent opinion, which sometimes diverged from official documents, for example in relation to the preservation of wooden constructions. In contrast, the question of controlling the number of automobiles in central urban areas was a generally accepted idea. Until the 1970s the image of automobiles was often associated with danger, pollution

and nuisance in several official documents. According to the municipality of Kyoto, automobiles posed a risk to urban dwellers in Japan. Streets were considered to be urban spaces of vital function to public life, accommodating water, electricity, sewage, and fire prevention systems. Thus, having this vital element of cities blocked with the traffic of individual cars meant large scale risk and disturbance to the entire functioning of the city. Consequently, in the late 1960s, although the number of cars and roads increased, especially in suburban areas, the car continued to be regarded as a nuisance, and its uncontrolled use was believed to eventually undermine the quality of the collective life. Thus, investment in collective transportation systems gained priority above the enlargement of streets in central urban areas.

In terms of measures taken for natural and historical landscape preservation, a succession of regulations at local, regional and national levels started to abound after the middle of the 20th century. Before that period, at the national level, the 'Law for Preservation of Old Shrines and Temples' was established in 1897. At the local level, in Kyoto, a 'Scenic Landscape District' of 3400ha was established in 1930 in order to protect certain areas, including the areas of the Kamo River, and the Higashiyama and Kitayama mountains. Since 1957, the municipality restricted the installation of outdoor advertisements, which later culminated in the 'Kyoto City Ordinances on Outdoor Advertisements' (1960). At the regional level, the law for conservation areas in the Kinki Region reinforced the preservation of green areas in the suburbs of the city. In 1966, the law for preservation of ancient capitals anticipated the urban landscape municipal ordinance (1972), followed by the 1975 national designation of special areas for preserving traditional buildings. Although the surrounding mountains, temples, shrines and imperial properties of Kyoto were preserved during the prewar period, measures, actions and programs aimed at landscape preservation inside and in the surroundings of the city, started to abound mostly after the 1960s.

### Conclusions

Townscape preservation was for a long time a theme of minor concern to the municipality of Kyoto, especially during the modern period. The preservation of the city after the wartime bombings largely supported the construction of a postwar discourse of Kyoto as a centre of the Japanese traditional culture. The desire to keep Kyoto's image as one of a national cultural centre, transformed some areas into scenographies that exemplify just one of the invented images of 'Japanese traditional culture'.<sup>8</sup> However, the great majority of the city is composed of modern structures and technologies, which represent a new interpretation of traditional forms. Entrepreneurship is the dominant notion permeating throughout the urban development of Kyoto, despite Nishikawa Kōji's best efforts

to advocate for a revival of the use of indigenous styles and techniques in Japan; he felt that modernisation was generally thought to equal westernisation, which led to a negative view of traditional aspects of the indigenous culture.

Eventually, through negotiations among different agents, Kyoto has preserved the multifunctional character of neighbourhoods centred around public schools, and a mobility pattern heavily grounded in collective transportation, bicycles and walking. There is, however, still a dispute concerning the use of traditional wooden materials in construction. The materiality, methods, technologies, resources and institutions, which supported the making of Kyoto, with their particular features, may provide models of uneasy reference for other Asiatic cities. Nevertheless, an exchange of ideas, concepts and theories, from the community, academicians and practitioners of Kyoto, with their counterparts in the rest of Asia, would certainly prove useful in supporting innovative city making – not only in Asia in fact, but also in ancient cities in other regions of the world.

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### Notes

- 1 *Kyotoshi toshikaihatsu kyoku toshikeikakuka* [Planning section of the department of urban development of Kyoto City] (1972). *Kyoto no toshikeikaku: Sono genjō to tenbō* [The planning of Kyoto: its present condition and future prospects]
- 2 *Kyotoshi keikakukyoku* [Planning Department of Kyoto City] (1967). *Kyotoshi toshijiku keikaku kenkyū hōkokusho* [Research report about the axial urban planning of Kyoto city]
- 3 Itō Yukio (ed.) 2006. *Kindai Kyoto no kaizō: toshikeiei no kigen 1850-1918* [The remodelling of modern Kyoto: the origins of municipal administration 1850-1918] Kyoto: Mineruba Shobō.
- 4 Flores Urushima, A. 2011. 'The 1970 Osaka Expo: Local Planners, National Planning Processes and Mega Events', *Planning Perspectives* 26(4):635-647, pp.637-639.
- 5 *Nihon tōkei kyōkai* [Japan statistical association] (ed.) 2006. *Nihon chōki tōkei sōran* [Japan historical statistics]. Tokyo: Nihon tōkei kyōkai.
- 6 Flores Urushima, A. 2015. 'Territorial Prospective Visions for Japan's High Growth: The Role of Local Urban Development', *Nature and Culture* 1(1): 12-35.
- 7 Flores Urushima, A. 2007. 'Genesis and culmination of Uzo Nishiyama proposal of a model core of a future city for the Expo 70 Site (1960-1973)', *Planning Perspectives* 22(4):391-416, p.403.
- 8 See more on invented traditions in Vlastos, S. (ed.) 1998. *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press. [Research report about the axial urban planning of Kyoto city]



Kyoto urban area expansion map, 17th century – 1965. Source: *Kyotoshi keikakukyoku* 1967.<sup>2</sup>



# Revisiting the First and Second Sexism in Japan

Deborah Giustini and Peter Matanle

2018 has been a pivotal year for women worldwide. Revelations of harassment, assault and rape by powerful men indicate that everyday sexism is being taken seriously. Yet there is still so much to do. In Japan too, 2018 saw women's lives changing, revealing both the light and shadow of normative assumptions about men's and women's attributes, capabilities, and roles.



On 24 August, first lieutenant Misa Matsushima realised her dream of becoming Japan's first female fighter pilot. In the context of Japanese society's complacent acceptance of a gendered workplace, Matsushima's achievement is indeed a victory, but it's perhaps a pyrrhic one. For if all that has been achieved is that a woman is now working like a man in a male endeavour – battlefield combat – then it is at best a conservative victory.

Surely this is not what feminism asks men and women to take on. Wouldn't a truly feminist outcome have been the elimination of the need to employ any battlefield combatants, male or female? What Matsushima's story represents, we contend, is the terrible difficulty we all face in understanding what sexism is, when it occurs and where the obstacles lie in navigating a route through to genuine equality between women and men.

## No (work)place for gender equality

Despite more than thirty years of legislative progress, beginning with the 1985 Equal Employment Opportunities Law – and 1997/2006 revisions – as well as recent initiatives such as the government's Gender Equality Bureau,<sup>1</sup> gender equality in the Japanese workplace remains at best an aspiration. It's not hard for women to get jobs in Japan; however, access to core and senior roles is heavily restricted – just one third are in regular employment, compared to two thirds of men – and progress comes at a slower pace than international competitors.<sup>2</sup> While women have achieved considerable gains in health and education,<sup>3</sup> gender segregation at work remains entrenched and discriminatory barriers to advancement persist.

Numerous indicators point to women's subordinate status at work. Ranking Japan 110th among 144 countries for gender

equality – below Guinea and above Ethiopia – the World Economic Forum emphasizes Japan's limited achievements thus far; an urgent problem acknowledged by the government, which rather ambitiously aims to increase the proportion of female decision-makers to 30% by 2020. Currently just 13% of managers are women,<sup>4</sup> and women's salaries are still 25.7% lower than men's for equivalent work,<sup>5</sup> the third widest gender pay gap in the OECD. What's going wrong?

Although overt workplace discrimination is illegal, what stands out is the progressive decline in the quality of women's employment as they pass through adulthood, while male employment quality improves. In essence, the everyday practice of men's and women's work in organisations and society is gendered – formally and informally – hence disparities widen with age, even as women gain the experience, knowledge and skills that employers value. Why?

Inequality is structured from the beginning of people's working lives. It is already well known that workers are assigned by mutual consent to managerial or clerical career tracks, and this decision is based on gendered normative assumptions about personal attributes, capabilities, and expectations. Crucially, the managerial track requires a strong commitment to organisational working practices and cultures as a requirement for progression. This includes location transfers, very long working hours, sudden overtime demands, routine evening meetings for core team members, and late night team building and client entertainment, often featuring smoking and heavy drinking.

These workplace activities, and the (self-)selection of those who perform them, are as much based on assumptions about women's capabilities and needs as they are about men's. The outcome is a progressively gendered organisational hierarchy, where many women opt for clerical track and part-time roles in anticipation of childbirth and rearing, or later withdraw altogether.

And if a woman does seek re-entry into the labour force she will often feel 'punished' by having access only to lower paid and lower quality employment than if she had remained childless in her original organisation.

Hence, women's employment outcomes in Japan are on most conventional measures inferior. Women have less access to long-term career formation, occupational specialisation, and progression opportunities, and consequently they earn less. Just as women are assumed not to be able to transfer suddenly, or participate in late night client entertainment, so organisations expect that men can and should perform – or withstand – those duties and pressures by dint of their gender, if they are to succeed and earn more.

Do men really want to work extremely long hours, be separated from their loved ones for long periods, damage their health by drinking excessively in smoke-filled environments, and suffer physical and mental stress from lack of sleep, just because they happen to be men? Why do organisations assume that it is okay to drive their male employees routinely to forsake full participation in the opportunities and duties involved in household formation? Are not these assumptions, and the workplace and societal outcomes they produce, also sexist?

## The first and second sexism in the Japanese workplace

Alongside what he calls the 'First Sexism' – the most egregious and widespread sexism worldwide and perpetrated against women – philosopher David Benatar argues that there is a hidden 'Second Sexism', against men, which contributes to persistent structured gender inequality.<sup>6</sup> Hence, Benatar argues, sexism against men should also be acknowledged and dealt with; that the principle of universal justice requires that equality for women can only be brought into existence within the context of equality for everyone.

The Japanese workplace has long produced sexist outcomes against women, and efforts

have correctly focused on establishing equal opportunity for women. But let's start to unpack what equal opportunities constitutes. Does it mean that, alongside the achievement of equal pay and access to core and senior roles, women will gain the opportunity to work unreasonably long hours, or be posted for years to a distant location? Is this a form of equality that women want, or is it something that neither women nor men would wish for?

When asked why they 'choose' part-time employment, Japanese women – particularly mothers and middle-aged women – commonly cite that it gives them control and flexibility over their working hours, a strong indication that they prefer not to work under the conditions that the majority of working men endure. This is a 'Hobson's choice'. Many women would prefer the challenge and self-development that comes with full-time long-term regular employment – and the accompanying salary – but feel those roles are inaccessible because they are unable to commit to the employer's demands. Similarly, many men would participate more in family formation, but feel unable because of workplace demands and the responsibilities of being principal earner.

## Equality for women and men

The government is pushing on a piece of string; its policies don't achieve what policy-makers ostensibly intend, and likely never will. Technically and legally core and senior roles are open to female employees. But the majority of women won't or can't occupy those roles because of the customary obligations they entail. Indeed, since most men don't want to work like Japanese men, why would women want to?

What is needed for genuine workplace equality to be achieved, therefore, is a set of career pathways for people to realise their own visions for themselves regardless of gendered assumptions about the 'nature' of women and men. In addition to trying to establish equality for women, why not also work from the direction of trying to establish equality for men, with the intention that the workplace becomes more attractive to both genders?

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## Notes

- <https://tinyurl.com/jpgender>
- <https://tinyurl.com/parityAP2018>
- <https://tinyurl.com/wwf2018gendergap>
- <https://tinyurl.com/jpgender2>
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# Extending Practices of Translation and Collaboration

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 edition, we explore varieties and practices of translation and collaboration between artists, writers, and translators in Indonesia and Australia.

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## Yogya theatre reaches out

Barbara Hatley

For many years I've been observing and writing about theatre in Yogyakarta, Central Java. Focusing first on the Javanese popular melodrama *ketoprak*, then also modern Indonesian language theatre, I've explored the ways in which these forms draw on Javanese theatrical and cultural tradition in engaging with contemporary Indonesia.

In the late 1970s, *ketoprak*'s performances of historical and legendary stories celebrated the Javanese cultural heritage, while its improvised dialogue resonated with daily life experiences. The leftist, populist political connection of much *ketoprak* in the 1950s and 1960s had ceased with the takeover of the New Order government, turning to modern Indonesian language theatre that problematized Javanese cultural tradition, depicting past kingdoms ruled by corrupt power holders to comment critically on the state of the contemporary Indonesian nation.

The ending of the Suharto era in 1998, with a new freedom of cultural expression, was reflected in Yogya by vibrant performances dramatizing real-life occurrences staged in neighbourhood locations and connecting with communities. One group, Teater Garasi, staged a series of productions reflecting on the state of contemporary Indonesia as a whole – problematizing the haunting stain of Java's past (*Waktu Batu*), depicting people rushing headlong into the future (*Jejalan*), celebrating hybridity of identity (*Tubuh Ketiga*), and exposing intolerance (*Yang Fana Itu Waktu, Kita Abadi*).

Recent visits to Yogya have evidenced both a continuation of the focus on the local and a 'new' reaching out beyond Java to the wider nation. Veteran *ketoprak* figures stage performances, organise festivals, train young people; modern theatre groups perform in Javanese language aiming to evoke everyday experience and engage identification among audience members. At the same time three groups, Teater Garasi, Kalanari Theatre Movement and Bengkel Mime Theatre, have been involved in activities outside Java. Garasi's *Pementasan Antar Ragam* 'Performing Difference' project, involving connections with local actors and artists from four outer island locations – Madura, Flores, Sumbawa and Singkawang – is the focus of a brief review below.

On Garasi's website the 'Antar Ragam' project is described as "a new initiative that aims to build contacts and new meetings with different traditions and cultures as well as with emerging artists and young people in cities outside Java, as an unlearning and relearning process on being Indonesian or Asian". In conversation, Garasi members explained that they were seeing radicalism and intolerance rising everywhere. They decided to go outside Java as the centre of Indonesia, to see how things looked from elsewhere.

Madura and Flores were their first destinations. Garasi's major aim was to encourage young people to look around them, to identify important social issues and engage with these themes in performance. In strongly Islamic Madura they encountered relatively large numbers of theatre groups, encouraged by an emphasis on literature in the *pesantren* Islamic school system. In Flores theatre is generally less developed, although in Maumere there is an active group of writers and artists, mostly students and former students of the local Ledalero Catholic theological college. Garasi teams were asked by local artists to share their own theatre process, so they visited again some months later, holding workshops about researching social issues, then exploring them through improvisation to develop a full performance. Used to presenting conventional written scripts, local performers found Garasi's method new and stimulating, and wanted to emulate it in their own work.

Local representatives undertook residencies at Garasi's studio in Yogyakarta, discussing and developing their planned projects with Garasi members, observing studio activities and attending arts events in the city. At the Garasi studio in July 2017 I met the two Flores representatives, Ibu Veronika, from Adonara Island, whose women's theatre group stages plays about women's experiences, and Eka Putra Ngalu, a theatre writer and activist from the KAHE arts community in Maumere. In August 2018, I also met Mpok Yanti from Singkawang, a transgender artist who encountered theatre while at university in Pontianak, then returned home to teach drama in high school and set up a theatre group, as well as appearing in local films.

The residency-recipients returned to their regions to work with other local artists.



'Performance 92' (referring to the 1992 tsunami) staged by Teater Pilar from the Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Katolik Ledalero, at the Maumere festival, November 2018. Courtesy Komunitas Kahe and photographer Gusty Watson.

Arts events in Madura and Flores in late 2018 and festivals in all four regions in 2019 showcased the results. Garasi members came to observe and provide guidance. The Garasi-initiated project has brought together local groups, Catholic and Muslim theatre groups from neighbouring localities with no previous contact; it has witnessed NGOs consider theatre as a new medium for addressing social problems, and government officials impressed by a theatrical work and providing funding for its further staging.

The Madura event focused on land, viewed traditionally as a sacred family heritage, and now, after construction of the bridge linking Java and Madura, a contested economic resource. One festival in Flores focused on the theme of tsunami, both the literal tsunami which struck the region in 1992 and the current metaphorical flooding in of global capitalism and mass media. The Singkawang festival, with its theme of tolerance, featured a performance depicting transformation of the city's famous market Pasar Hongkong from a wholly Chinese site to today's centre of vibrant multi-ethnic activity.



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The Asia Institute is The University of Melbourne's key centre for studies in Asian languages, cultures and societies. Asia Institute academic staff have an array of research interests and specialisations, and strive to provide leadership in the study of the intellectual, legal, politico-economic, cultural and religious traditions and transformations of Asia and the Islamic world. The Institute is committed to community engagement and offers a dynamic program of academic and community-focused events and cultural exchanges that aim to promote dialogue and debate.

Such activities provide insight into the diverse, complex social conditions characterising the different regions of Indonesia, and a seemingly growing commitment to engaging with these issues among local theatre groups and other artists. Given the history of Yogya performance in connecting with its social context, might there be suggestion here of a more general shift in social attitudes to and understandings of 'the nation'? Do Garasi members envisage the current project feeding into their own creative work, inspiring future productions? "Certainly", they say, because every new experience enriches artists' ideas; however, they don't yet know what form this work might take. Watch this space!

Barbara Hatley Professor Emeritus, University of Tasmania. Her publications include *Javanese Performances on an Indonesian Stage Contesting Culture, Embracing Change* (NUS Press, 2008), and *Theatre and Performance in the Asia Pacific: Regional Modernities in the Global Era*, co-authored with Denise Varney, Peter Eckersall and Chris Hudson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).



## Makassar and Northern Australia. An artistic perspective of the shared history

Lily Yulianti Farid

In December 2018, three Yolŋu artists from Yirrkala, Northern Australia and three artists from Makassar, Indonesia participated in an artist exchange program organised by the Wilin Centre, Victorian College of the Arts, The University of Melbourne. The centre worked together with Rumata' Art space in Makassar and Buku-Larrngay Art Centre in Yirrkala to invite Adi Gunawan (visual artist), Nurabadiansyah Ramli (visual designer and researcher) and Muhammad Rais (filmmaker) from Makassar, and Arian Pearson (musician and sound producer), Barayuwa Mununggurr and Dion Marimunuk Gurruwiwi (radio DJ) from Yirrkala. The creative practice research project funded by the Australia-Indonesia Centre aims to facilitate cultural exchange between the young artists, based on the historical relationship between Makassar seafarers and the First Nations peoples of the north coast of the Australian continent between the mid-18th century and early 20th century.

After the artists spent time in both Makassar and East Arnhem Land, they returned to their respective countries where they were given time to reflect on their experience through the creation of artworks. This essay follows the creative process and personal experiences of the three Makassar artists who joined the historical research-based art project. It demonstrates how the art project functions as an effective medium to spread knowledge on shared history between the two neighbouring countries, both on personal and artistic levels, and that the learning of the history of pre-European contact in Australia has changed the Makassar artists' perspectives on Australia.

### New learning, old history

Mural artist Adi Gunawan, one of the three young Makassar artists selected for the program, commented: "I have learned about the street art in Australian cities and that

was the only reason for me and my wife who is also an artist to plan a visit to Australia. I never thought that it was the historical relationship between Makassar and Northern Australia that would bring me to Australia and then to create an artwork after the visit."

Nurabadiansyah Ramli, one of the other Makassar artists, learned about his family members who had sailed to Australia to fish the waters off the coast. "I feel the connection, however, I have never had opportunities to further explore the history as the information I have received from Australia is mainly about higher education and contemporary arts."

The three artists from Yirrkala had previously learned about the presence and influence of Makassar seafarers through paintings, drawings, objects and Yolŋu traditions and oral stories, and so their visit to Makassar (2-5 December 2018) was an opportunity "to confirm" the cultural knowledge they had about Makassar. As one of the artists, Arian Pearson, described: "Our parents, grandparents and great grandparents shared the stories, including those about the marriages between our people and the Makassans. They often reminded us that we have cousins and relatives in Makassar. This is my first time visiting Makassar and seeing the *trepangs* [sea cucumber] in a village outside Makassar; then I learned about the traditional boats and listened to the locals speak in the Makassar language. For the first time, the history felt so real."

In a focus group discussion after the visit, questions about who Australians are (are they white, Indigenous, migrants?) and about the history of Aboriginal people and Indigenous arts, dominated our discussion as the visiting artists were overwhelmed with the rich tradition, art and history of Yolŋu, its connection with Makassar *trepangs* and Chinese traders, as well as issues and challenges faced by Indigenous people in Australia today.



Yolŋu and Makassar artists in Darwin. Photo by Lily Yulianti Farid.



Artist Nurabadiansyah Ramli visited a local trepang processing centre in Galesong, South Sulawesi. Photo by Lily Yulianti Farid.

"Our understanding of Australia before the visit was focused on Australia as a white country as well as a land of hope for migrants; a country with world class education –because many of our friends have studied, are studying or are planning to study in Australia. However, through this research-based art project, we have entered the pre-European period, and our ancestors played a very significant role during this period. We did not learn this at school. Our Yolŋu friends in Yirrkala and Bawaka were enthusiastic to share their stories about Makassar influences in their ceremonies, songs, dances and art works. Meanwhile, as the Makassans, we came to Northern Australia with almost zero knowledge about the relationship", commented Muhammad Rais.

### Creation of artworks

The three artists worked on a collaborative art project exploring key elements they learned during the visit: *trepang*, boats and ships, friendships between Makassar seafarers and Yolŋu people, traditional ceremonies, and the sea that connects the two cultures. Adi Gunawan decided to produce a relief about the Yolŋu tradition to bid the Makassar seafarers farewell, with both groups sitting on the beach watching the sunset together. Normally Makassans would stay in Arnhem Land for six months, to catch and process the *trepangs* until ready to be sold to Chinese traders. Each time the season ended, they would bid a farewell and attend the sunset ceremony. Muhammad Rais also explored the traditional ceremony in his video mapping project, working with smoke, lights and colours.

Nurabadiansyah created a replica of a Makassar traditional boat [*Paddewakkang*] for his artwork. "My visit to Arnhem Land was a mind-blowing one. It was the first time I traced down my ancestors' footprints, seeing the tamarind trees that they planted hundreds of years ago, listening to oral histories and tales told by our Yolŋu brothers and sisters, finding the remnants of clay pots brought by Makassans to Australia. The history is very old,

however, through this project, we are learning new things about knowledge and technology transfers between Makassans and Yolŋu people. I am lost in my own history."

In an international symposium to open the artist exchange in Makassar, the initiator of this program, Prof. Richard Frankland from the Wilin Centre, explained that the project mainly focuses on how young generations in Makassar and Arnhem Land respond to the shared history through the arts, since in both countries, many students and people in general are not aware about our shared history.

The three artists list "contact and friendship with Australian Indigenous people" as the most valuable thing gained from the program. "Australia is the top destination for education. Many young Indonesians study in major Australian cities, but this project has led us in a very different direction because our first encounter with Australians was with the Yolŋu people, the owners of this part of the continent, and not Australians that we have seen at popular tourist destinations in Bali or on the popular media. That is the beauty of this project. The arts serve as an effective way to learn about our shared-history", concluded Nurabadiansyah Ramli.

Lily Yulianti Farid is co-founder and co-director of Rumata' Artspace Makassar, a published author and art event producer. Her published books include *Family Room* (Lontar Publisher) and the Indonesian translation of Anita Roddick's autobiography *Business as Unusual* (Gramedia Pustaka Utama).

### Notes

- 1 The Makassans caught and processed *trepang* [sea cucumbers] from (at least) 1780, off the north coast of Australia, and sold the commodity to Chinese traders. See Macknight, C.C. 1976. *The Voyage to Marege: Makassar Trepangers in Northern Australia*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.



## Practices of translation and starting a small press

Andy Fuller & Nuraini Juliastuti

Translation implies the standard practice of transferring one text into another language. However, it also offers opportunities for shifting one project to another context. From 'Indonesian' to 'English' is perhaps a too-easy formulation of the role of a translator. More challenging (and, more pressing) is how to translate a colonizing-perspective into a decolonizing imagination of language and literary practice. This essay will address efforts in this direction by translators and publishers of Indonesian literature, including the author's own small press.

The translation of Indonesian literature into English has been marked by strong roles played by a very few. The two most well-known and productive translators are Harry Aveling of Monash University (formerly a professor at La Trobe University) and John McGlynn, one of the founders of the Lontar Foundation in Jakarta. Aveling, active also as a scholar and researcher, has translated dozens of texts. McGlynn's Lontar has published dozens of novels and volumes of short stories and poems over their 30-year history.

'Modern Indonesian literature' in English is given depth through the contribution of these two figures. Important roles have also been played by area studies scholars, who focus on Indonesian literature – i.e., those who contextualise, analyse and interpret the texts (primarily in their original language), such as Henk Maier, Keith Foulcher and Pam Allen. These scholars' work covers a much broader scope of texts than those which have been translated into English. Maier's work reaches across national borders and explores patterns happening in the Malay-archipelago and those of the peninsula.

Aveling has made his contribution through the dual role of academic and translator. Aveling's first translations were published during the 1970s by branches of relatively large publishing houses such as Heinemann and Oxford University Press. University of Queensland Press also published translations of Indonesian literature. Those might have

been the good ol' days when a non-specialist publisher considered it good sense to make writings from Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and elsewhere available to the lay reader. Over time, those series have fallen by the wayside, leaving a publisher like Lontar to do the heavy lifting of making a critical mass of texts available in English. The choice for translators like Aveling for finding a publisher have largely been limited to Lontar or academic presses. Options are, however, diversifying.

Aveling usually accompanies his translations with short introductions, which often place the stories in the social-cultural context in which they were written. These introductions become a translator intervention, where the translator leaves her or his mediating steps clearly marked. Aveling, as such, voices his interpretation of the stories and may indicate his reasoning for his translation style. His translations of the activist and poet WS Rendra during the 1980-90s, and those of Dorothea Rosa Herliany during the 2000s, are perhaps his best known. Translating informs Aveling's scholarship and vice versa.

In contrast to the relative anonymity of many translated senior Indonesian authors, is the fame and notoriety through translations, reviews and festival invitations of young, emerging authors. Two of the most prominent examples are Eka Kurniawan with his novel *Beauty is a Wound* (Text Publishing, 2015) and Intan Paramaditha, with her collection of short stories *Apple and Knife* (translated by Stephen Epstein and published by Brow Books, 2018). Eka's novel fitted well into the genre of magic realism and was glowingly endorsed by the late Benedict Anderson, unquestionably the most well-known scholar of Indonesia through his book *Imagined Communities* (1983). Anderson was also an early translator and advocate of Pramoedya's writings. Intan's emergence as a writer of fiction has been concomitant with her mobility and work as a researcher: she was a lecturer at the University of Indonesia, before doing her PhD in New York, which included stints in the Netherlands, before moving to Sydney to take up a position at

Macquarie University. An accomplished public speaker with a strong social media presence, Intan is fluent and comfortable in a range of contexts and platforms. She is mobile and cosmopolitan and knowledgeable of her literary background and trajectory.

In 2018, Nuraini Juliastuti and I started a small press, *Reading Sideways Press*, which predominantly focuses on the translation and publication of Indonesian literary works by both established and less known authors. Partly in thanks to the LitRI program of the Indonesian Ministry for Culture and Education, we have works in progress by Afrizal Malna and Seno Gumira Ajidarma, to be published in 2019. Collaboration between author, translator and editor is largely done informally and at a geographic distance.

Having a holiday or going home (*berlibur* or *pulang*) are two ideas which inform and challenge our translation practice, and with which we seek to contest a standard of translation based on bringing the classics of one language into another. Translation does not only aim to satisfy the desire for understanding a cultural context through reading materials. In using translation as the main reference for our small press, we seek to move it away from being a mere tool of cultural production. We re-imagine translation as a political site in order to pose relevant questions about our histories and contexts. We ask about what is left that we can do, and to what extent we can respect the stories of the others.

Our translation of Arista Devi is one such case. Arista Devi is an Indonesian domestic worker in Hong Kong, who is also a prolific writer. At the same time, her works are not usually acknowledged as a representative of Indonesian literature. To translate Arista Devi's works can be regarded as an attempt to present a new voice – but our efforts seek to go deeper than that. We are seeking to disrupt the representation of Indonesian literary works maintained by the established literary centres.

We would not be able to translate Arista Devi's short story "Adelina and the Bite Wound on Her Hand", if *Kunci Cultural Studies Center*, the Jogja-based researchers' collective where Nuraini works, did not initiate the *Afterwork Reading Club*, a series of reading groups and a migrant workers' literary works project in Hong Kong, in 2015. On the organizational level, our translation serves as an opportunity to develop a further collaboration between Kunci and Reading Sideways Press. Kunci was able

to organize the project because writing and reading performed the important elements of the migrant workers' activities in Hong Kong.

During the research we observed how writing short stories, poems, and other forms of writing, as well as the running of independent and DIY-like libraries, have been part of their weekend rituals. Every Sunday, these migrant workers, mostly women, would congregate in Victoria Park. Books of any kinds, arranged in suitcases, were available to be borrowed and read. Suitcases emerged like kinds of bookcases. And the women behind them appeared as not only migrant workers, but librarians who provided library services for their fellow workers every week. Other workers would sit in groups in different spots of the park – chatting, singing, eating various nostalgic snacks. When their Sunday strolls and hang-out time ended, they would go back to their own places, ready to work in various domestic spaces. In between doing menial labour and a day-off every Sunday, some of them steal the time to read and write.

The migrant workers' experiences are distinct, personal and treasured archives. Arista Devi's story is based on this attitude. She inhabits an environment where the migrant workers respect their own stories. We were able to translate Arista Devi's story because she was willing to share it with others. To translate Arista Devi's work, and possibly the works of other Indonesian migrant workers in the future, is to create a political mediation in creative format. We multiply the numbers of ears that can hear what stories these works want to convey. Aveling and McGlynn have laid the basis for the playful – yet serious and complex – language games of writers such as Arista Devi, Afrizal Malna and Seno Gumira Ajidarma. To elaborate on the meaning of cultural traffic mentioned earlier, we will continue to ask what types of stories can be put alongside the story of Arista Devi. We will continue to question whose stories we want to publish, how we would like to amplify these voices, and in what ways we take part in balancing knowledge production.

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## Antipodean perspectives on Sundanese art, time and space

Edwin Jurriëns

Recently, some young Australian artists have been inspired by Sundanese culture from West Java, Indonesia. In their work, they integrate, translate and transform traditional Sundanese notions of time, space and nature. They engage with the Sundanese cultural heritage as a valuable source for cross-cultural artistic renewal and/or exploring issues of shared concern, such as more sustainable human interactions with the natural environment.

One of the main facilitators of the Australian-Sundanese cultural exchanges is the Melbourne-based 'Asialink Arts' program in partnership with the Bandung-based new media art collective 'Common Room Networks Foundation'. Common Room Networks Foundation's involvement itself represents a growing trend among young Indonesian artists and art collectives to move their attention from predominantly urban issues to engagements and collaborations with rural sites and communities.

Asialink Arts is one of the programs of Asialink, a centre of the philanthropic Myer Foundation, based at The University of Melbourne. Asialink Arts was established in 1991 "to enable access, conversations and exchange to new international networks and cultural exchange for the Australian and Asian creative communities". Over the years, the program has enabled residencies for numerous

emerging Australian artists and assisted them in collaborating with local artists in Asia, including Indonesia. One of its local partners is Common Room Networks Foundation, which was established in 2006 as a continuation of the Common Room cultural centre (established in 2003) and the Bandung Center for New Media Art (BCfNMA, established in 2001).

In 2013, Common Room Networks Foundation was commissioned by the West Java Planning Agency to explore the possibility of developing eco-tourism in 16 regencies in the province of West Java. One of its partners, the rural *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar* community (Mount Halimun-Salak National Park) has attracted the attention of outsiders, including Indonesian and foreign artists, academics and tourists, because of the ways in which the community interacts with the natural environment. It is a migratory community which distinguishes between three different types of forest: protected forest, reserved forest and land for agricultural and agroforestry purposes. According to customary law, the community members can use rice for personal consumption, but are not allowed to turn it into a commodity for sale to others. Unlike modern intensified rice cultivation, *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar* has only one rice-growing cycle per year. These types of ideas and practices inspire and integrate well with contemporary thinking about environmental sustainability.

In 2015, *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar* produced its own video album of Sundanese pop music, containing clips of performers singing about life in the community against a background of local landscapes, people, daily life activities and rituals. Since then, the community has invited artists from other places, including Bandung, Berlin, Sydney and Melbourne, to collaborate and create their own inter-pretations of the songs, with styles ranging from jungle, hip hop and reggae to industrial, ambient and electro. In 2017, the community worked on the 'Ciptagelar Remixed' project with musician-statistician and 2015 Asialink Arts resident Dan MacKinlay from Sydney, Common Room Networks Foundation, and the Bandung-based death-metal a cappella choir 'Ensemble Tikoro'. The idea of 'remix' designates a desire to bring different times and places in innovative dialogue with each other.

Melbourne-based musician and radio producer Kieran Ruffles also created his own sound project, titled 'Sunda Sway'. This audio-work was broadcast on Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) Radio National on 7 October 2016 and is available as a podcast on the radio station's website. Listeners can follow Ruffles on his journey from Bandung to Ciptagelar, where he attended the annual *Seren Taun* rice harvest festival. The use of sounds, music, voice and narration gives an intimate impression of *pranamatangsa*, or traditional Sundanese ways of measuring time relating to the lifecycle of musical instruments, the growth of plants, human and animal biorhythms, and astrology, among others. Common Room Network Foundations' Gustaff Harriman Iskandar provides background to the traditional ways of time- and season-keeping in soliloquies or snippets of conversation with Ruffles. The themes of temporality and transition are replicated

in various ways throughout the audio work, including sounds and narration relating to the producer's road trip to Ciptagelar, and the use of drone-copters by locals and guests to traverse and explore the rural area from above.

Another Australian artist, Anna Madeleine, during a 2017 Asialink Arts Residency with Common Room Networks Foundation, produced an Augmented Reality (AR) art work, titled 'Pranamatangsa AR', based on *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar's* traditional farming calendar. In the work, which can be downloaded as a mobile phone application, virtual objects illustrating the various seasons overlay related stellar constellations in an accompanying booklet. The full-length animation was presented at the Melbourne International Animation Festival 2018.

The artistic work covered in this essay does not address important socio-political issues, such as *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar's* legal struggles over land rights. The Australian art-translators do succeed, however, in creating awareness about alternative systems and devices for tracking time and space and organising society, outside hegemonic and environmentally destructive capitalist cycles of production and consumption. Following my previous research on Indonesian contemporary art in a predominantly urban context, I will continue to critically analyse the rural and international collaborations of art collectives such as Common Room Networks Foundation. Their work is relevant, not only artistically, but also in relation to one of the main issues of our times, the state and future of the natural environment.

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# Experiences of 'the Other' in Northeast Asia

Ilhong Ko

The presence of strong centralized states in Northeast Asia from ancient times, as well as the geographical and political conditions of the present-day, has meant that the movement of people across boundaries in the region has been less marked, compared to other places in the world. Nevertheless, there are countless accounts documenting how individuals or groups came to find themselves across boundaries in unfamiliar environments, be it through their own agency or as a result of coercion. These experiences of 'the Other' in Northeast Asia can provide important insights into the issues that the region faced in the past and continues to face in the present.

In this issue of *News from Northeast Asia*, we examine four different groups of people and their unique experiences as 'the Other' in Northeast Asia.

In "Tan Jie-sheng: a success story of one transnational Cantonese merchant in Korea", Jin-A Kang of Hanyang University examines the experiences of Chinese merchants in colonial Korea through the lens of the Tongshuntai Firm. The migrations

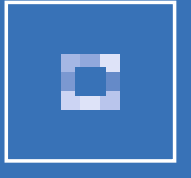
of the late 19th and early 20th century that marked the first stage in the formation of a large Korean diaspora in Russia are addressed by Vadim S. Akulenko of Far Eastern Federal University in "Vladivostok and the Migration of Korean people to the Russian Empire". "Korean Soldier Internees in Siberia and the Issue of (Un)Redressability", by Naoki Watanabe of Musashi University, presents an interesting study of Korean soldiers and their experiences as 'the Other' in numerous

settings. Finally, the experiences of Japanese women who accompanied their Zainichi Korean spouses are considered by Tomoomi Mori of Otani University in "Japanese Wives' in North Korea (DPR Korea)".

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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.

## Tan Jie-sheng: a success story of one transnational Cantonese merchant in Korea

Jin-A Kang

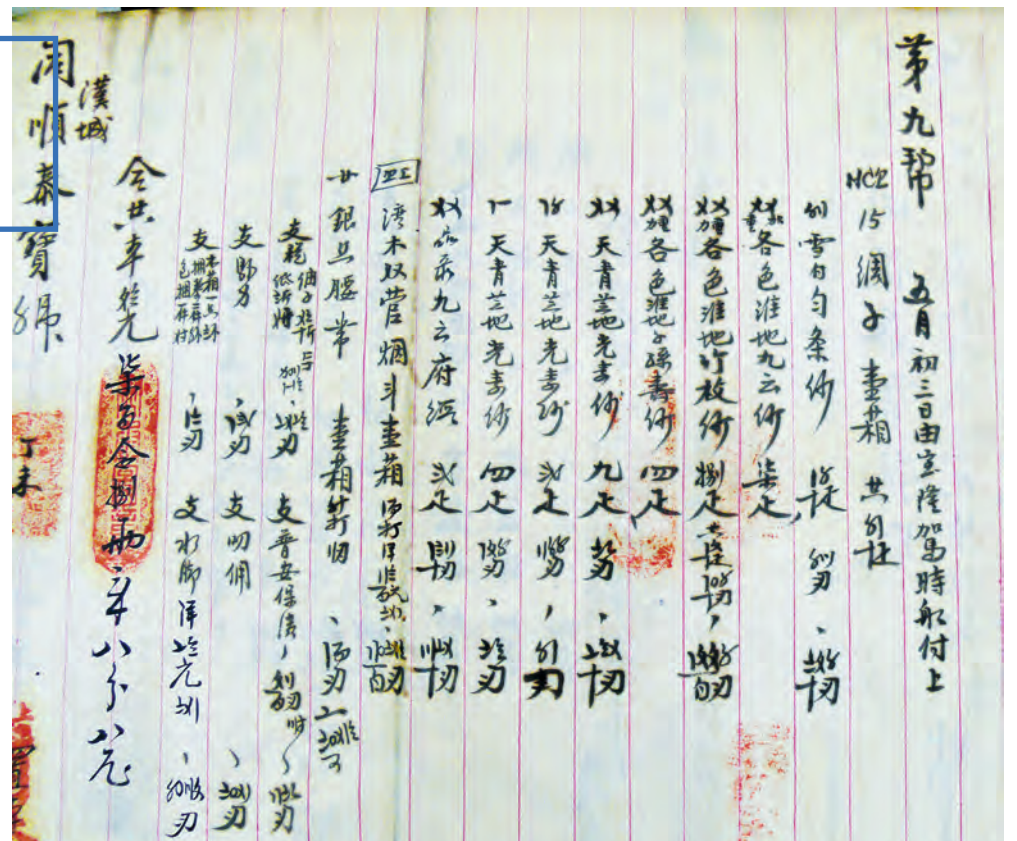
It would occur to very few people that a Chinese name would make it onto the 'Korean Rich List' during the Colonial Period of Korea. However, the top taxpayer in Seoul in 1923 was indeed a Chinese person, Tan Jie-sheng (譚傑生, 1953-1929). Tan Jie-sheng was the manager and later proprietor of the Tongshuntai Firm (同順泰號), one of the representative Chinese companies in modern Korea. The Kyujanggak (奎章閣) Archives and the Rare Books & Archival Collections (古文獻資料室) of Seoul National University Library preserve a large amount of the Tongshuntai Firm's invoices, receipts for transactions and business correspondences. Consisting of seven books (67 volumes in total), those Tongshuntai documents are nearly ready to be published by Guangdong People Publishing House of China.

Although overseas Chinese merchants have always been a crucial agency in Asian trade prior to the 19th century, Joseon Korea was exceptionally isolated from this network unlike Japan and South East Asia. Along with the opening of the treaty ports, Joseon became incorporated into the regional trade system of Asia. Subsequently, Chinese merchants began to settle down around these ports on a large scale following the establishment of 'Regulations for Maritime and Overland Trade Between Chinese and Korean Subjects' (otherwise known as the China-Korea Treaty of 1882). While the predominant ratio of the Chinese population in modern Korea was represented by the natives of Shandong Province, the treaty ports at the very first stage of their opening, as well as Seoul at the time, witnessed a diverse composition of Chinese merchants. Those merchants came to Korea encouraged by the possibility of the Korean market and the strong political supports of the Qing government in Korea. Tan Jie-sheng was Cantonese – representing a typical case of a Southerner arriving Korea in this period – and became the richest Chinese merchant up until the 1930s.

The Tongshuntai Firm was founded first in Incheon around 1885 by the Tongtai Firm

(同泰號), a Cantonese firm in Shanghai. The owner of Tongtai Firm was Liang Lunqing (梁綸卿) who left the management of the new firm in Korea to the Tan brothers, whose sister married Liang. It was Tan Jie-sheng, who was Liang's third brother-in-law, that developed Tongshuntai's business and eventually became its actual owner. Liang Lunqing maintained close relations with the comprador-officers group from Xiangshan County, Guangdong, who had helped Li Hongzhang establish businesses as part of the Self-Strengthening Movement. In addition, there were quite a number of Cantonese returnees from the 'Chinese Educational Mission' (留美幼童) program working as Chinese staff of the newly opened Korean Maritime Customs Service or working for Yuan Shikai (袁世凱) as diplomatic officers. The native-place bondage of the Cantonese community both in Shanghai and Korea was an important resource for the Tongshuntai Firm and other Cantonese merchants, which enabled them to secure their initial success in Korea.

At first, Tongshuntai Firm's growth was based on trade, selling imported British cotton, Chinese silk, and other general merchandise in Joseon and exporting Joseon goods, such as Red Ginseng, gold, and cow hides. Trade mainly took place between Incheon and Shanghai, but expanded to Japan and Hong Kong as well, through Shanghai. Additionally, the close relation with the official group of the Self-Strengthening Movement and their status as the largest Chinese company let the Tongshuntai Firm play a considerable political role in Korea. For example, under the circumstances in which a banking system between Qing China and Joseon was lacking, Tongshuntai was not only responsible for the transfer of government funds between Shanghai and Seoul, but also assumed the role of an official treasury on behalf of the Chinese legation in Seoul. Exploiting this special status, the Tongshuntai Firm could utilize official funds for their cash flow. The money-lending business to Chinese officials and upper class Koreans, including merchants, officials and the royal family, was highly lucrative. One of its debtors



Tongshuntai Baohaoji of 1907, the collection of import invoices of the Tongshuntai Firm. Image used with the permission of Seoul National University Library.

was Heungseon Daewongun, father of King Gojong.

When the Qing government provided the Joseon government with a loan of 200 thousand *liang* in 1892, Tongshuntai was written down as the lender, due to the anti-Qing sentiment prevalent in Joseon at the time. In return for lending its name, Tongshuntai was granted monopoly of navigation rights along the Han River and the operation of a regular route between Incheon and Mapo. Tongshuntai also issued a note, known as 'Tongshuntai-piao' (同順泰票), which was widely circulated in the treaty ports and Seoul as currencies until 1904. During the First Sino-Japanese War, and particularly after the battlefield was shifted into Chinese territory, Tan Jie-sheng monopolized the profit of the wartime boom in Korea and built a big fortune, taking advantage of the temporary setback of the Shandong merchants.

It is worthy to note that Chinese merchants continued to grow in Korea, both in number and in economic power, without the political support of Qing government after the defeat of the First Sino-Japanese War. The trade value with China increased tenfold from 1893 up to

1910 (when the forced Korea-Japan Annexation took place) and grew sevenfold again until 1927. However, as the direct route between Shanghai and Incheon was shutdown following the political withdrawal of Qing, the advantage of the Cantonese merchants, whose strong international trade networks had been based in Shanghai, disappeared; conditions became more favorable for traders from Shandong Province, which was geographically closer. Many Cantonese merchants withdrew as Joseon lost its charm but Tan Jie-sheng chose another path, reducing its dependence on Shanghai by cutting back its trade operations and adopting a localization strategy, which involved branching out into various businesses, such as the sales of Chinese lottery, real-estate development, and managing a taxi service. During this process, the capital of the Shanghai merchants was withdrawn and Tan Jie-sheng became the de facto owner of Tongshuntai.

Real-estate and house leasing business became Tongshuntai's main means of increasing its wealth during the colonial period. Real-estate investment by Chinese merchants began during the real estate crush caused by the Imo mutiny of 1882 and the Gapsin



## Japanese Wives in North Korea

Tomoomi Mori

Japanese women who migrated to North Korea (DPR Korea) with their Korean husbands during the exodus of *Zainichi* Koreans from Japan are known as 'Japanese wives'. They are now quite aged, around seventy to eighty years old, and wish to travel to their motherland Japan, in order to meet brothers, sisters and other relatives, or to visit the graves of their ancestors before they die themselves. The existence of these Japanese wives in North Korea is not well known, but their experiences as 'the Other' in North Korea is a greatly interesting topic.

*Zainichi* Koreans are those who came to Japan during Korea's period of Japanese occupation as a result of forced labor, or reluctantly in order to earn a living. Also included in the category of *Zainichi* Koreans are their descendants. The majority of *Zainichi* Koreans suffered discrimination by the Japanese people and faced hardships due to unemployment and poverty. The exodus of *Zainichi* Koreans from Japan to North Korea began in 1959; by 1984, about 93,339 people had moved to North Korea. Included in this number are at least 6,679 Japanese nationals, some of whom were women, who had *Zainichi* Korean spouses. The number of women – the so-called Japanese wives – was 1871. Such a large-scale movement of people from a capitalist country (Japan) to a socialist country (North Korea) in the Cold War Period was a very rare case indeed.

The exodus of the *Zainichi* Koreans began when the North Korean leader Kim Il-sung declared that North Korea would welcome the *Zainichi* Koreans in North Korea. The North Korean government may have

intended to improve the country's image within international society by accepting the *Zainichi* Koreans. However, the Japanese government and the Red Cross Society of Japan had their own reasons for wanting this group of people to move. Japanese society at the time was going through a period of

Coup of 1884, which occurred successively soon after their arrival in Joseon. Because of the massive evacuation of residents from Seoul, the population of Seoul was almost halved and house prices collapsed to 1/4 of their previous value. Taking advantage of this housing market crash, Chinese merchants bought numerous shops and houses located along the main streets of Seoul at an extremely low price. The urban development that subsequently took place during the period of Japanese occupation resulted in the soaring of real-estate prices, which led to the manifold increase in the wealth of the Chinese merchants. Of the Chinese merchants based in Korea, Tan Jie-sheng owned the greatest amount of real-estate; it is said that at one time, Tan Jie-sheng rented out approximately 700 houses in Seoul. The most famous of his properties is where the building housing the Korean National Commission for UNESCO now stands in Myeong-dong.

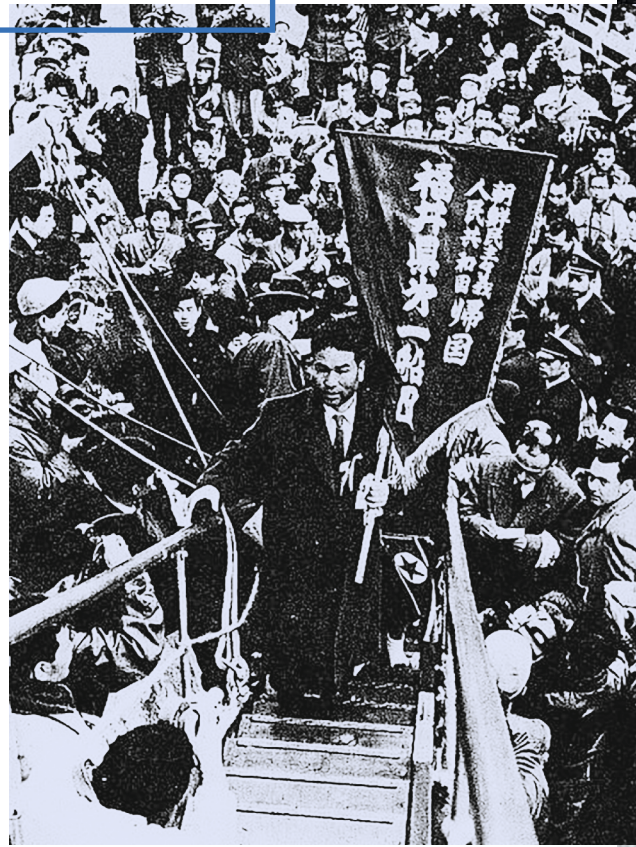
One reaction to this prosperity of the Chinese merchants was collective anti-Chinese sentiment; criticism of Chinese

economic power in Joseon was loudly voiced by both the Japanese authorities and the Korean population. In the 1920s, protective tariffs on Chinese imports increased significantly, while anti-Chinese articles began to frequently appear in Korean newspapers, arguing that Chinese merchants and Chinese laborers were taking wealth and jobs away from the Koreans. The main target of these attacks was Tan Jie-sheng, the richest Chinese person in Korea. Tan Jie-sheng died in 1929. After the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, many of the Chinese in colonial Korea, who had now become 'enemy aliens', returned to China. The Tan family of the Tongshuntai Firm also eventually withdrew from Korea and returned to China in September of 1937. This marked not only the end to Tan Jie-sheng's history of success in Korea, but was also the closing episode to the age of transnational business.

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Note amounting to 1,000 liang of bronze coins, issued by the Tongshuntai Firm. Source: Kang, Jin-A., 2011, *Tongshuntai-ho*, Daegu: Kyungpook National University Press



Above and right: Repatriation of *Zainichi* Koreans from Japan. Source: Public Domain images from Wikipedia.



post-war restoration; the policy towards the *Zainichi* Koreans was a great worry, liability, and burden to the Japanese government. One solution for this 'problem' was to make *Zainichi* Koreans move to North Korea.

Many, but not all, of the *Zainichi* Koreans were actually from the southern regions of the Korean Peninsula, but the decision to immigrate to North Korea was based on political grounds or in the hope of a better future; they were determined to 'return' to a country that they had never been to before. For these *Zainichi* Koreans, North Korea was their motherland and South Korea merely their hometown. Of the *Zainichi* Koreans who moved to North Korea, some were accompanied by their Japanese spouses, and the majority of these cases consisted of a Korean husband and a Japanese wife. These Japanese wives saw North Korean people for the first time when their ship, which had departed from Niigata port in Japan, arrived at Chongjin port in North Korea; most were shocked to see the North Korean people who had come to the port to welcome them because they looked poor.

The Japanese wives and their families settled down in the areas designated by the North Korea government and living standards differed from person to person. Some lived in urban environments, such as the capital Pyongyang or other regional cities, whereas other families were provided with houses in the countryside. Those who lived in the countryside faced significant hardships. Some of the Japanese wives passed away early on already as they could not adapt to the food scarcity and the social environment of North Korea. Of course, there were also those who enjoyed a happy life, to some extent, with their families. Although the situations of the Japanese wives may have differed among people, they shared a common desire – to visit their hometowns in Japan.

The hometown visits of these Japanese wives were carried out on three occasions – November 1997, January 1998, September 2000 – but they have not taken place since then, due to political problems between Japan and North Korea. In May 2012, *Kyodo News* (a Japanese wire service) reported on Ms. Mitsuko Minagawa in Pyongyang, a Japanese wife. The reporter asked Ms. Minagawa, "Do you hope to go to Japan?" and her answer was "Of course I hope, because my hometown is there. I hope I can travel back and forth between North Korea and Japan. For that I hope both countries will normalize diplomatic relations as soon as possible." In recent years, there have been some Japanese journalists who have energetically reported on the issue of these Japanese wives, for example

Takashi Ito and Noriko Hayashi. Takashi Ito has reported on the existence of a 'circle' of Japanese wives – the 'Hamhung Rainbow Association' – based in Hamhung, the largest city on the east coast of North Korea. The circle provides a mutual exchange and fellowship between Japanese wives. In the absence of diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea, it is difficult to travel freely between Japan and North Korea. The short trip made by Japanese wives in September 2000 was the last to take place. In order for such trips to take place, special humanitarian measures must be taken through the Red Cross Society of Japan and North Korea. However, such procedures are heavily influenced by international relations between Japan and North Korea and so the possibility of such measures being realized are, at present, uncertain.

The Japanese wives issue was dealt with in Japan-North Korea diplomatic negotiations. On 17 September 2002, the 'Japan-North Korea Pyongyang Declaration' marked a turning point in relations between Japan and North Korea. The Japanese wives issue was also addressed in the 'Japan-North Korea Stockholm Agreement' of May 2014. The subsequent deterioration of Japan-North Korea relations, however, has meant that additional trips by Japanese wives have yet to take place. The Japanese government has set the resolution of the 'North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens' as a top priority in negotiations with North Korea, and comparatively the issue of the Japanese wives is of a lower priority. However, the Japanese wives are already quite old and time is running out. For them, this is an issue that must be dealt with as soon as possible.

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### Notes

- 1 These 'Japanese wives' should be distinguished from other female 'Japanese residents of the Korean Peninsula' who continued to live in North Korea even after the defeat of Japan in 1945 as they were not able to return to Japan due to certain circumstances. The concept of 'Japanese residents of the Korean Peninsula' first appeared on 7 April 2018, on TV Asahi's 2018 TV documentary 'Family ties connecting Japan and North Korea', reported by Takashi Ito.
- 2 Morris-Suzuki, T. 2007. *Exodus to North Korea: Shadows from Japan's Cold War*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.



## Vladivostok and the migration of Korean people to the Russian Empire<sup>1</sup>

Vadim S. Akulenko



'Plan of the City of Vladivostok' (1918) published by the Young Men's Christian Association, showing New Koreyskaya Slobodka (B) and Koreyskaya street. <https://tinyurl.com/oldvladivostok>

The first reliable mention of contact between Russian and Korean people dates back to as early as the 17th century. However, these contacts were episodic until the emergence of a land border between the Russian Empire and the Joseon Kingdom in the second half of the 19th century, following the accession of the Ussuri krai region to the Russian Empire under the Treaty of Aigun in 1858 and the Treaty of Peking in 1860. Soon after, Korean peasants began to move on a massive scale into Russian 'Primorye'. It is with these peasants that the formation of a large Korean diaspora in Russia began.

The beginning of this migration is considered to have started in the 1860s. Researchers have not arrived at a consensus regarding the specific date but according to the officially held point of view shared by many Koreanists both in Russia and abroad, the first Korean families appeared in the territory of the Russian Far East in 1863. As many as 13 families secretly escaped from Korea and settled in the basin of the river Tizinhe. Lack of land and natural disasters forced Korean peasants to move to Russia in several waves from the very moment that a common border with Russia was set up, and up until official diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1884. Vladivostok, which was founded in 1860 almost simultaneously with the beginning of the events described above, became one of the destinations of these migrations.

According to V.V. Grave (a Russian foreign affairs official), Korean people had begun to appear in small numbers in Vladivostok and Ussuri krai even before 1863. During the mass migration of Korean peasants in 1869-1870, Rear Admiral I.V. Furuhielm (Governor-General of the Primorskaya Oblast) gave the order that permitted Korean people to work as laborers in the building of a dock in Vladivostok, and for the Treasury to pay all of their transportation costs and other necessary expenses.

By 1876, a significant number of Korean people had settled down in Vladivostok and local authorities decided to resettle them from the center of the growing city to its suburbs. The Koreans chose the marshy area of Semyonovskiy pokos as the site of their compact residence, part of which was called 'Koreyskaya slobodka' (Korean settlement). However, it was later decided to move all 'foreigners of the yellow race' out of the Vladivostok to the Kuperovskaya pad (valley). The plan for the creation of "Kitaysko-Koreyskaya slobodka" (Chinese-Korean settlement) near the Kuperovskaya pad (where Khabarovskaya and Amurskaya streets

are presently located) was approved in 1892 by the Governor-General of the Primorskaya Oblast P. F. Unterberger. Koreans followed the authorities' orders, while the Chinese did not. Soon afterwards, Korean-style houses appeared in the place known as 'Novaya Koreyskaya slobodka' (New Korean settlement or Shinhanchon).

In terms of the number of Korean people officially residing in Vladivostok, we know that the Korean population of Vladivostok totaled 420 in 1886 but increased to 457 by 1892.<sup>2</sup> During the First General Population Census of the Russian Empire in 1897 there were already 1,361 (1,032 men and 329 women) Korean residents in Vladivostok (the total population of which was 28,896), and this number increased to 3,215 (2,138 men and 1,079 women) by 1910. The number of Koreans increased significantly following the annexation of Korea by Japan; in 1911 it reached approximately 10,000 in Vladivostok alone. We can assume that this number remained more or less stable

until the deportation of the Korean people to Central Asia, since the Korean population in Vladivostok was 7,994 people (4,236 men and 3,758 women) according to the 1929 Population Census – among these Koreans, only 3,408 individuals were still living in Novaya Koreyskaya slobodka.<sup>6</sup>

The Koreans of the time tried not to mingle with other ethnic groups. Unlike the Chinese, Koreans preferred to marry within their own ethnic group, thereby preserving the purity of their race. And unlike the Chinese, Koreans were often accompanied by their families when moving to Vladivostok, even for temporary earnings. Therefore, as mentioned by F. F. Busse, it was impossible to expect the assimilation of Koreans by the Russian majority or even their partial 'russification'. In his letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs on 8 March 1908, Governor-General of Primorskaya Oblast P.F. Unterberger remarked that the Koreans, who had lived in the Ussuri krai for more than 40 years, with few exceptions, retained their

ethnicity to the fullest extent and remain "alien people" within the boundaries of Russia.

Unfortunately, the sad events of 1937 – the deportation of Korean people to Central Asia – interrupted the further development of the Korean community in Vladivostok. However, even after the deportation of almost every Korean from Vladivostok, the historical memories of their presence continue to exist amongst the indigenous inhabitants of Vladivostok, even to this day. Parts of Khabarovskaya Street and Amurskaya Street are still called 'Koreyka' and even 'Verhnaya Koreyka' and 'Nizhnaya Koreyka' are still distinguished.

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### Notes

- 1 This article is based on work that was supported by the Core University Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of the Korea and Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2015-OLU-2250003)
- 2 № 28. Справка о количестве корейцев и местах их проживания в Приморской области (Reference about the quantity of Koreans and places of their residents in Primorskaya Oblast.) // Корейцы на российском Дальнем Востоке (вт. пол. XIX – нач. XX вв.). Документы и материалы. Владивосток: Изд-во Дальневост. ун-та, 2001. С. 71.
- 3 Унтербергер П. Ф. Приморская область 1856-1898 гг. (Unterberger P.F. Primorskaya Oblast 1856-1898). СПб, 2011. С. 1.
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- 5 Авилова И.К. Участие корейцев в хозяйственной колонизации юга Дальнего Востока России во второй половине XIX-начале XX вв. (некоторые аспекты проблемы) (Avilova I.K. Korean participation in the economic colonization of Russian Far East in the second half of 19 – beginning of 20 cc.) // История российско-корейских отношений на Дальнем Востоке. Владивосток: Изд-во Дальневост. ун-та, 2001. С. 134.
- 6 Итоги переписи корейского населения Владивостокского округа в 1929 году (Korean population census in Vladivostok in 1929 results). Хабаровск; Владивосток, 1932. С. 78.



Korean outskirts of town near Vladivostok. Source: Turmov, G.P. 2005. Korea on post cards (one hundred years ago). Vladivostok: FESTU Publishing, p. 43.



## Korean soldier internees in Siberia and the issue of (un)redressability

Naoki Watanabe



Japanese soldiers returning from Siberia waiting to disembark at Maizuru Harbor, Kyoto Prefecture, Japan in 1946. Source: Public Domain image from Wikipedia. <https://tinyurl.com/returnsoldiersmaizuru>

After the Asian Pacific War, 600 thousand soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army in Manchuria were demilitarized by the USSR Red Army and moved to Siberia, where they were subjected to forced labor for several years. It is said that 60 thousand of these soldiers died between 1945 and 1946. The Japanese government insisted that this incident should be treated as a case of 'internment' since many of the soldiers had been interned illegally after the war. Meanwhile, the USSR government insisted that they were prisoners of war (POWs), arrested legally, and therefore not internees.

The repatriation of these soldiers took place over a span of around 10 years, at 18 repatriation harbors spread out over Japan, the Korean peninsula, Manchuria, mainland China, Siberia, and Taiwan. The most famous of these repatriation harbors is Maizuru Harbor, in Kyoto prefecture, where the Maizuru Repatriation Memorial Museum is located. Interestingly enough, almost all of the museum's exhibitions are about the repatriates from Siberia and not those from China or Korea. This may be because Maizuru Harbor was the last of the repatriation harbors to remain open, where people waited for the repatriates from Siberia. The last repatriation ship from Nakhodka entered into Maizuru Harbor in December 1956.

In addition to the Maizuru Museum exhibitions, the collective memory of internment in Siberia is also presented in hundreds of Japanese books that describe disastrous memories of forced labor, starvation, and death, or address the problem of unpaid wage and other reparations. After 1945, the Japanese government paid full wages to ex-soldiers who had been subjected to forced labor in Australia, New Zealand, and the South-East Asian countries on the grounds

of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) and the labor certificates that had been issued in the US, UK, Netherlands, and Australia. However, the ex-soldiers who had been interned in Siberia were not paid any wages due to the fact that the USSR government, for a long time, had not issued labor certificates to Japanese ex-soldiers. This unfair treatment acted to augment their terrible memories of internment in Siberia.

Of the Japanese Imperial Army soldiers interned in Siberia, some were from Korea and Taiwan. For a long time after 1945, little was known about the fates of these imperial soldiers from Japan's colonies upon their return to their home land. This changed, however, with the showing of *Siberia in the Memory: My Grandpa's Memory and a Letter from Seoul* (directed by Kubota Keiko), which premiered in October 2016 in Shinjuku and some other cities in Japan. The protagonist, Park Dohung, was born in a poor rural village in northern Korea. In the early 1940s, he joined the Japanese imperial army in order to help his poor family although he had not adopted a Japanese style name. He first went to Yoichi, Hokkaido, to participate in military training and then was sent to Shikotan Island. The war came to an end whilst he was stationed on this island and there he waited for a ship to take him back home. The ship that eventually arrived, however, was a USSR ship that took him, not to Hokkaido, but to the Soviet Union, where soldiers from Korea and Japan were interned in separate camps (according to his recollection). In 1949, he boarded a ship at Nakhodka and landed in Heungnam, located in the territory of North Korea (the border marked by the 38th parallel had almost been fixed by that time). Upon his arrival at Heungnam Harbor, some members of North Korean Labor Party met him with the greeting "Welcome from Socialism Motherland".

As Park Dohung's hometown had been located in North Korea, he had indeed returned home. Soon afterwards, he joined the North Korean Peoples' Army and, when the Korean War broke out in 1950, crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea as a soldier of the Peoples' Army. In South Korea, he was subsequently arrested by the South Korean Army, spent time in a prison camp at Gojaedo Island, and was involved in the South Korean Army for 2 years. Upon discharge from the army, he worked as a piano engineer. In this way, Park Dohung was an ex-soldier of the Japanese Imperial Army, the North Korean Peoples' Army, and the South Korean Army.

Park Dohung's fascinating journey, however, is not an isolated one. There were a great many individuals who were ex-soldiers of all three armies. The 'Shiberia Sakpunghwe' (Siberia North Wind Association) was established in order to address the issue of these ex-soldiers in 1990, just after the summit meeting between Roh Tae-woo and M. S. Gorbachev took place and in the year that South Korea and USSR accomplished diplomatic normalization. Investigations into the experiences of these ex-soldiers were also carried out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the Roh Mu-hyun administration of South Korea. This was followed by the publication of the book *I was a soldier of the Japanese Imperial Army, North Korean Peoples' Army and South Korean UN Army* by Kim Hyosun, a prominent journalist of the newspaper *Hankyoreh*, which addressed the issue of Korean internees in Siberia. Around the same time, a program on Korean internees in Siberia – *Another Internment to Siberia: Korean POWs' 60 years* – was featured on NHK TV of Japan. The Korean ex-internees appearing in this program had been sent to Hailar, in Manchuria, as soldiers of the Kwantung Army around the time that the northern part of Manchuria (including Hailar)

was being abandoned by the Kwantung Army. After the end of the war, they were interned to Krasnoyarsk, in the western area of Lake Baikal, by the Soviet Red Army. Afterwards, they departed from Nakhodka and arrived in Heungnam Harbor, and later crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea at the time of Korean War. It is said that the USSR government at the time had been aware of the existence of some Korean soldiers amongst the Japanese internees in Siberia. However, it had taken a long time to confirm their identity since many of the Korean soldiers had adopted Japanese style names.

Almost all of the Korean internees in Siberia have now passed away and so although some information can still be gained of their histories and experiences, the picture is fragmented and incomplete. About 2300 Korean internees in Siberia made the journey to Heungnam Harbor but only a few of them crossed the 38th parallel and went back home; it is said that almost all of the repatriates remained in North Korea or went to Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in China.

It is open to debate whether, and to what extent, the Korean internees in Siberia were victims or victimizers, given that they had been involved in warfare as soldiers. However, the fact remains that they did not receive any reparations as soldiers from the Japanese government after the war. In addition, some of them became soldiers once again in both North Korea and South Korea. As such, the question of how, and to whom, they are to appeal for redress and reparation still remains.

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# The Indonesian Studies Program

# ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE

This issue offers three articles from the Indonesia Studies Programme (ISP) at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS). ISP promotes in-depth understanding of Indonesia through conferences, workshops, seminars, publications and timely commentary in regional and international media. ISP seeks to understand the effects of political and economic reform in Indonesia following the end of the New Order era, especially with respect to the implementation of decentralisation policies throughout the archipelagic nation.



Joko Widodo. Image reproduced under a Creative Commons license courtesy of Eduardo M.C. on Flickr. Original image: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/edumartiz/10374500436>. License: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Indonesia will be holding its legislative and presidential elections simultaneously in April 2019. Since the 2014 presidential elections, and the victory of President Joko Widodo, Indonesia's electoral landscape has been marked by an unusual level of ideological division, and an upswing in populist politics and Islamist activism. Why have such divisions emerged, and will they affect the upcoming presidential and legislative elections? And what impact will the simultaneous implementation of these two different elections have upon campaigns and voter preferences? ISP has a team of researchers monitoring these developments, and providing timely analysis on campaign dynamics, patterns of coalition-building, and the broader consequences of these elections for the health and stability of Indonesia's democracy.

The Co-coordinators of ISP are [Dr Siwage Dharma Negara](#) and [Dr Norshahril Saat](#). For more information please visit: <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/programmes/country-studies/indonesia-studies>

## Transactionalism and shallowness in Indonesia's election campaign

Max Lane

The campaign for Indonesia's April 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections officially kicked off on 23 September 2018. However, a more interesting process preceded the official campaign. It was the process to determine which parties fulfilled the requirements to stand candidates in the elections and which parties would enter into coalitions in support of the respective presidential candidates.

Such a pre-campaign process reflects two features of contemporary politics in Indonesia. First, Indonesian politics is still characterised by what can be called 'transactionalism' [*politik transaksial*], namely, a process of negotiations among a plethora of factions within the Indonesian elite driven by concerns about *elektabilitas* (popularity among the voting public).

The second feature is an extreme shallowness of contestation in the sense that all of the political and economic elite agree on most, if not all, aspects of cultural, social, political and economic strategies. This shallowness of contestation means that the elections will resemble a superficial image war with little, if any, policy content.

### Political transactionalism

During the 2014 elections, a crucial part of Joko Widodo's image was that of a politician who would reject *politik transaksial* – the politics of deal-making with political players and parties that would be given government positions such as those in Ministries. In reality, however, the idea that President Widodo could be a non-transactional president was always untenable. This is because, since 2004, the

national budget and other policies requiring legislation required parliamentary approval and Widodo's 2014 coalition of parties initially did not have a majority in the parliament, thus making transactions necessary. To run a stable government, Widodo needed to both satisfy all the parties supporting him as well as win over parties that had not supported him. He was able to do this by bringing over the National Mandate Party (PAN), the United Development Party, and Golkar, all of which had supported Widodo's opponent, Prabowo Subianto, in 2014. All these parties were given Ministries to run.

Transactional politics certainly featured prominently in Prabowo's 2018 selection of vice-presidential candidate. There was the initial question of whether Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's party, the Democratic Party (PD), would join the coalition with Gerindra, Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), and PAN. Yudhoyono and the PD were caught in a bind. It was clear that there were ambitions for Yudhoyono's son, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (known as AHY), to be a presidential candidate in 2024. However, under existing law, a party that does not nominate a presidential candidate in 2019, would not be allowed to do so in 2024. PD had to join either Prabowo or Widodo. Most of the discussions carried out between Yudhoyono and Prabowo took place behind closed doors, so we cannot be sure of what exactly transpired. Finally, Yudhoyono as Chairperson of PD announced, standing alongside Prabowo, that PD would support Prabowo for President and join that coalition. There was no explicit commitment by Prabowo to choose AHY. Indeed, the public position was that PD would support whomever Prabowo selected.

Nevertheless, Yudhoyono outlined a series of policy points that he shared with Prabowo. These were, however, all formulated in very general terms, and could have also been supported by Widodo. There were no real ideological or policy differences of sufficient importance to be a hindrance to Yudhoyono joining either Widodo or Prabowo's coalition.

### Shallowness in contestation

Alongside this transactionalism is the shallowness in ideological contestation. The early phase of the 2014 Widodo Administration reflected both the transactional nature of Indonesian politics as well as the shallowness of contestation. For example, there were no ideological or policy issues preventing parties that previously supported Prabowo in 2014 to cross over to Widodo's side. Of the three parties in parliament, but outside the government, only one remains outside the government because of ideological differences, namely PKS. The other two, Yudhoyono's PD and Prabowo Subianto's Gerindra Party, represent rivals for the Presidency, and so need to cultivate a separate profile from the ruling coalition.

Indeed, the negotiations needed to form coalitions expose the shallowness of the ideological and policy contestation and the centrality of *elektabilitas* in the coming April 2019 elections. For example, Widodo's selection of 75-year-old Ma'ruf Amin, the Chairperson of the Islamic Scholars Assembly (MUI) and of Nahdlatul Ulama, demonstrates the absence of ideological boundaries. Ma'ruf Amin's willingness to be Widodo's vice-presidential candidate stands in contrast to his previous positions. He himself had proclaimed that he was a central figure behind the 2016 December 2nd (or 212) Islamic mobilisations against Jakarta Governor Purnama; mobilisations which relied on forces hostile to Widodo. He had also been a close collaborator with Yudhoyono during the latter's presidency, and has not been close to Megawati, Chairperson of the PDIP, Widodo's party. He had been a public critic of liberalism and pluralism, which at least a significant

segment of Widodo's supporters consider to be issues that the President supports. However, all these previous ideological and political positions have been quickly forgotten.

### Conclusion

Nevertheless, there are early developments that may hint at some change in democratic practices. First it should be noted that Prabowo's treatment of his coalition partners exhibits a disdain for transactionalism itself. Currently, any semblance of democracy mainly relates to the openness of negotiations between the myriad segments of the broad elite, including the middle class. As such, with the exception of West Papua, there are no serious political threats to the status quo from outside of the elite.

Gerindra's 2014 call for indirect elections rather than direct elections was based on the desire to limit negotiations to the electing of executives by parliament, in contrast to the current long-drawn negotiations that continue up to and throughout the campaign. Gerindra's call was desirous of more centralistic 'leadership' over the elite. One factor that may disrupt such transactionalism in this current campaign is the presence of two parties directly linked to Suharto, through family ties, in Prabowo's coalition. These are Partai Garuda and Partai Karya, linked to Tommy Suharto and Titiok Suharto respectively, which may call for a return to Suharto-style policies. This, however, is not clear yet. It also appears that the Prabowo campaign may wish to focus on economic policy questions rather than issues of either political culture or religion. The campaign orientation of the two Presidential candidates should become clearer as the election date draws near.

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## Manufacturing religious cleavages for the 2019 presidential election?

Ahmad Najib Burhani

Conventional wisdom tells us that with the appointment of Ma'ruf Amin as his running mate for the 2019 presidential election, Joko Widodo (Jokowi) has shielded himself from religious-based attacks for the campaign. Instead, the economy, Jokowi hopes, will become the key campaign issue. However, several Indonesian cities have seen a series of demonstrations, collectively known as *Aksi Bela Tauhid* (Defending Tauhid [Oneness of God] Action), which appears to be an effort to exploit Islam for political purposes and undermine Jokowi's support base by attacking one of his main supporters, the NU (Nahdlatul Ulama).

### Flag-burning and demonstrations

The spark for these demonstrations was a two-minute clip depicting members of Banser [*Barisan Ansor Serba Guna*], the paramilitary wing of the NU, burning a black flag bearing the Islamic declaration of faith [*shahāda*] during the National Santri Day [*Hari Santri*] in Garut, West Java, on 22 October 2018. What was initially believed to be an act of nationalism in burning a flag associated with the HTI (Indonesian Hizbut Tahrir), a transnational movement outlawed by the Jokowi government, has now been framed as insulting to Islam or an act of blasphemy. Various individual Muslims and organizations, including Muhammadiyah and the MUI (Council of Indonesian Ulama), have expressed regret over the incident

and have demanded that Banser apologize to the Muslim community. The chairman of GP Ansor, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, said that he would issue a stern warning to Banser members who burned the flag, but refused to apologise for the incident since he believed that the flag symbolised the HTI.

His refusal to apologise led to the series of demonstrations attended by thousands of people in several cities after Friday prayer on 26 October 2018 and 2 November 2018. Protesters at the rally in Sukabumi, West Java, demanded that the flag burners be prosecuted and that Banser apologize to the Muslim community. If Banser did not comply, they would demand that the government ban this group. During the rally in Jakarta on 2 November 2018, one of their demands was for NU to apologize for the incident and for the purification of the NU from liberalism and any other deviant beliefs. The organizer of the rallies is the same as the organizer of rallies against Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) in 2016 and 2017, namely the GMPF (National Movement to Safeguard Fatwas), which includes people such as Yusuf Martak.

### Conclusion

In response to the escalation and politicisation of the issue, Vice President

Jusuf Kalla invited leaders of mainstream Muslim organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Al-Wasliyah, and Persatuan Islam (Union of Islam), to meet in his office on 26 October 2018. These leaders then issued a joint statement, calling on all Muslims to be united and not allow any provocations to divide them. The meeting was followed by a similar meeting between leaders of Muhammadiyah and NU in the headquarters of Muhammadiyah in Menteng, Jakarta on 31 October 2018, which also issued a similar statement.

The issue of the controversial flag-burning shows that religion can still be politicized during the presidential electoral contest. Although Jokowi has sought to shield himself from sectarian issues by appointing Ma'ruf Amin as vice-presidential candidate, the Indonesian President is still vulnerable to attacks based on the politicization of cleavages within the Islamic community.

Ahmad Najib Burhani

is Visiting Fellow at the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute. This is a condensed version of a Commentary piece which can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/iseasmedia8nov2018>

## Indonesia's economic challenges

Siwage Dharma Negara

President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo's chances of re-election on 17 April 2019 will very much depend on how he handles the national economy. External factors, such as China's economic slowdown and the trend of trade protectionism have put pressure on Indonesia's trade balance. The tightening of monetary policy in the US and other advanced economies has triggered capital outflows from emerging markets, including Indonesia. These developments have strained Indonesia's current account deficit and weakened its currency.

Moreover, the rise in world oil prices and the weakening rupiah have impacted the economy, putting pressure on the state budget and on domestic prices. Internally, the government has to tackle issues like the widening fiscal deficit, slow investment growth, sluggish manufacturing sector performance, and the increase in the borrowing cost for businesses.

In line with rising public pessimism about the economic situation, Jokowi's political opponents have criticized him for mismanaging the economy. They have argued that he is responsible for the country's stagnating growth and for the rising external

debt that has increased the country's financial vulnerability. They also claim that the government has failed in maintaining the value of the national currency. The rupiah (Rp) depreciated beyond the so-called psychological barrier of Rp 15,000 per US dollar in October 2018, and this was despite Bank Indonesia having raised its benchmark interest rate five times since May, to 5.75%. The question then, is how strong Indonesia's economic fundamentals actually are.

### Relatively strong fundamentals

If one were to look at key macroeconomic indicators such as growth, inflation and foreign reserves, the Indonesian economy offers no real reason for concern. Compared to the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the 2013 Taper Tantrum, and the recent emerging market crisis, the Indonesian economy exhibits relatively stable growth, coupled with low inflation rate and higher foreign exchange reserve. Moreover, Indonesia's external debt level is also relatively low, at 34 per cent

of GDP, compared with 116 per cent during the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis.

Nevertheless, there is one potential source of vulnerability in the economy, and that is its expanding current-account deficit. The tightening of monetary policy in the US and Euro region, together with general tightening of financial conditions have exerted considerable pressure on the financial stability of emerging market economies, including Indonesia. Portfolio investors have been withdrawing their investments from these markets, particularly those with a large current account deficit, such as Argentina and Turkey. Both have seen their currencies plummet since the beginning of this year. To a lesser extent, Indonesia is vulnerable to this type of capital outflow since a large proportion of its current-account deficit is financed by portfolio investment. Failing to manage its current-account deficit will certainly put Indonesia under increased risk of financial instability.

### Economic challenges

While the key indicators are strong and the country's economic fundamentals remain resilient, there are challenges that loom ahead for the administration.

First, it must find ways to deal with the current-account deficit. A large current-account deficit dominated by portfolio investments makes for economic vulnerability. The government's efforts to attract FDI need to be complemented with reforming regulations that constrain the expansion of its manufacturing sector and export performance,

including revision of the 2003 labour law to boost the growth of labour-intensive exports.

Second, given the expected tighter fiscal space, the government should re-evaluate all projects listed as national strategic projects and be more selective in prioritizing them, in particular those related to infrastructure and to energy subsidies. Going forward, it needs to consider adjusting gradually the domestic price of fuel following changes in global oil prices. To cushion the social impact, the government will need to provide social assistance to those most impacted by the price adjustment. At the same time, the government needs to signal that fuel subsidies are no longer viable, particularly when oil prices are increasing and the rupiah is weakening.

Finally, the government must carefully implement and monitor its import restriction policy, including the local content requirement (TKDN) policy and the mandatory use of a 20 per cent blended biodiesel (B20) mix. Local content requirement, if too restrictive, may adversely affect industrial performance and its competitiveness. A more buoyant environment for export should be prioritised. The B20 policy also needs to be supported by a clear implementation strategy for fear of it failing, as in the past.

Siwage Dharma Negara is Senior Fellow and Co-coordinator of the Indonesia Studies Programme at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. This article is condensed from his Perspective piece which can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/iseas201867>

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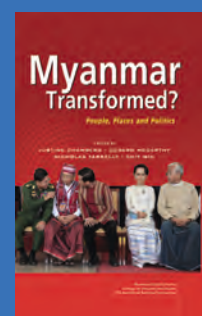
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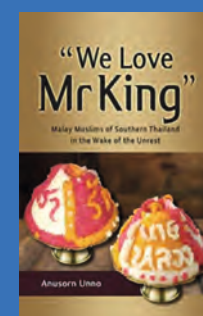
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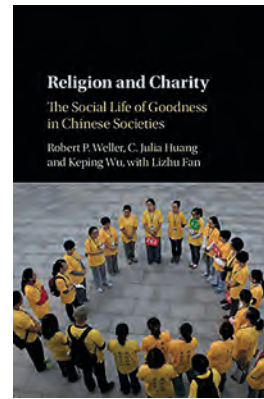


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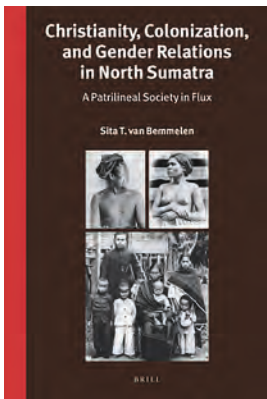


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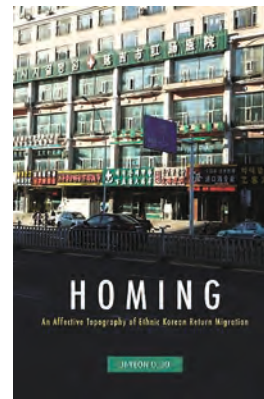


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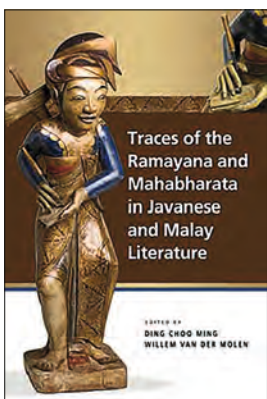


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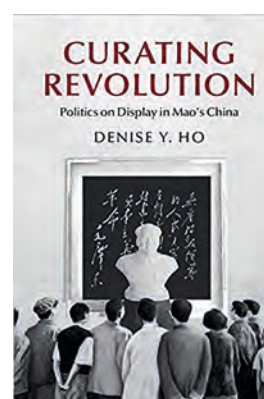


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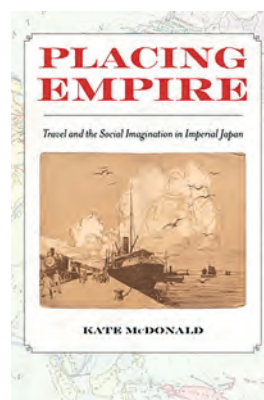


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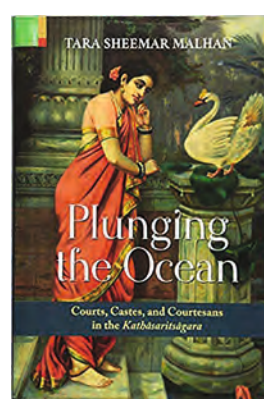
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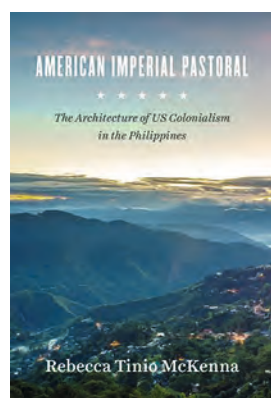
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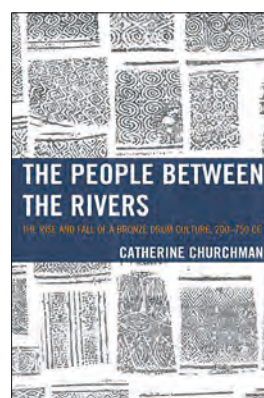


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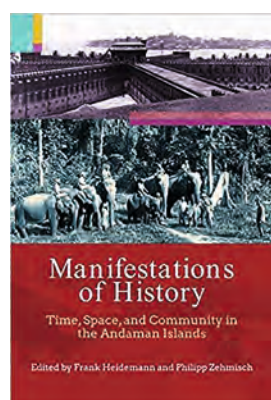
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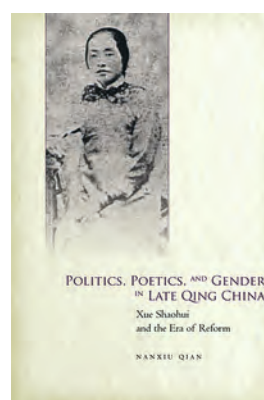
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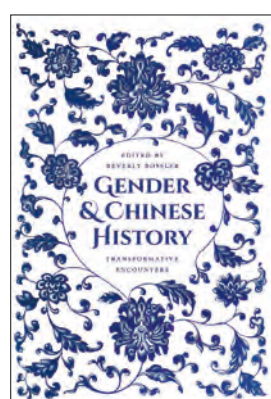
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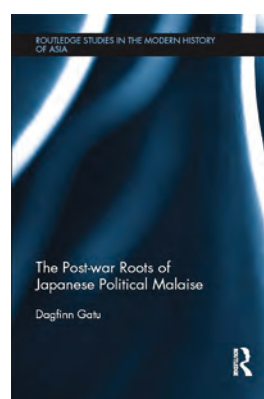


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# Musical minorities

Seb Rumsby



## Musical Minorities: The Sounds of Hmong Ethnicity in Northern Vietnam

Lonán O'Briain. 2018.

New York: Oxford University Press  
ISBN 9780190626976



Above: China Langde - Miao Lusheng players. Image reproduced under a Creative Commons license courtesy of Anja Disseldorp on Flickr. Original Image: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jadis1958/5043493763>. License: CC BY 2.0

Until recently, Hmong studies has overwhelmingly focused on the more accessible Hmong populations in Thailand, Laos, and Western diasporas, despite the fact that three quarters of Hmong live in Vietnam and China. Along with Sarah Turner, Christine Bonnin and Jean Michaud (*Frontier Livelihoods: Hmong in the Sino-Vietnamese Borderlands*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015) and Tām Ngô (*The New Way: Hmong Protestantism in Vietnam*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), Lonán O'Briain's new publication *Musical Minorities: The Sounds of Hmong Ethnicity in Northern Vietnam* is a welcome counterbalance. Like the others, O'Briain situates his work in relation

to James Scott's controversial but influential thesis of upland Southeast Asia being a 'zone of refuge' for avoiding or resisting state structures (*The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). He is not the first to apply this concept to the realm of Hmong music – an interesting precursor is Catherine Falk's work on the concealed musical meanings of the *qeej*, a traditional instrument

with multiple bamboo pipes ("If you have good knowledge, close it well tight": Concealed and framed meaning in the funeral music of the Hmong *qeej*, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 12(2), 2003: 1–33). However, O'Briain's monograph is more detailed and offers a wider sociopolitical contextualisation.

Taking an evolutionary approach to assess the resilience of Hmong music cultures in Vietnam, O'Briain attempts to avoid unhelpful stereotypes and disciplinary partitioning by pointing to the wide diversity of musical practice within one minority group, emphasising the outside influences and constant flux of music cultures. The book's main argument is that "attempts to categorize ethnicity by using cultural traits such as music are futile unless one cuts out the inconsistencies, the participatory discrepancies that keep these communities of creative practice relevant and vibrant" (p.180). This is precisely what the Vietnamese state (and, later, tourist industry) has done by exploiting and sanitising minority music to promote national unity. A fascinating example is the so-called 'Hmong flute' (*sáo mèo*), the iconic sound of Hmong ethnicity in Vietnam, which is in fact not a native Hmong instrument but was created by an ethnic Kinh (Vietnamese majority) in the 1970s. While O'Briain acknowledges the creative possibilities of such hybridization, unequal majority–minority power relations are never far away as Kinh representations of Hmong culture tend to drown out minority voices.

One strange feature of the book is the order of chapters. O'Briain starts with two chapters on the importance of Vietnamese state and media influence as a form of cultural imperialism, arbitrarily categorising and essentialising minority music cultures, before focusing on Hmong traditional music and folklore in Chapter 3. The book's core argument may have been delivered more powerfully if the reader were to first appreciate the plurality and depth of Hmong musical cultures, and then move on to observe the destructive effects of such cultural imperialism. Of course, this is only one side of the story and in later chapters O'Briain highlights the agency of Hmong musical actors in accommodating, resisting or adapting to shifting external pressures and opportunities such as tourism, Christianity, and Hmong transnationalism. Nevertheless, the book ends with a warning that "although the multiplicity of styles enhances the resilience of their cultural practices, certain

outside influences are placing unprecedented pressure on the ecosystems in which these practices exist" (p.181).

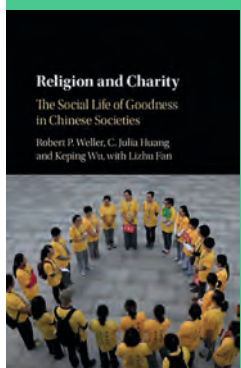
Musical Minorities is an engaging read with much to commend, not least the thick descriptions and ethnographic observations which bring the book to life, along with the accompanying audio-visual materials available online. O'Briain's extensive fieldwork over the space of several years and interviews with key state actors allows him to reveal not just detailed technical and linguistic features of Hmong music but also give voice to divergent interpretations and contestations within the Hmong community and further afield. The author's outsider positionality is acknowledged, adding character and sometimes humour to the fieldwork vignettes. Furthermore, the book's interdisciplinary nature, drawing on wider historical, cultural, and political debates, makes it both accessible and useful for a non-musicology audience.

Upon rigorous scrutiny, there are a few minor errors such as historical records of Hua Miao in southern China being termed as 'flowery Hmong', although the former is a linguistically distinctive group better known as the A Hmao (albeit sharing many cultural traits with the Hmong). Some readers might also find the uncritical reproduction of Scott's anti-state thesis problematic. However, this reviewer is more critical about O'Briain's engagement with Hmong Christianity in Chapters 5 and 6. Firstly, why does O'Briain only record the music of Hmong Catholics, who are vastly outnumbered by the numbers of Hmong Protestants, even in the supposedly Catholic district of Sapa where O'Briain conducted most of his fieldwork? Perhaps it was too politically sensitive to research Hmong Protestant music at the time; if so, it would be helpful to acknowledge this. Later, O'Briain incorrectly claims that the majority of Hmong in the United States are Christian, when in fact the figure is only around 30 per cent. This then calls into question his claim that Christianity is the 'unofficial religion' of the Hmong ethnonationalist community.

Nevertheless, *Musical Minorities* remains a highly commendable ethnomusicological study with important ramifications for ethnic relations, tourism economies and the politics of representation in Vietnam and beyond. More than that, this book provides a model for those wishing to conduct interdisciplinary research on the performing arts of marginalised groups.

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# Religion and the unlimited public good in Chinese societies



## Religion and Charity: The Social Life of Goodness in Chinese Societies

Robert P. Weller, C. Julia Huang,  
and Keping Wu, with Lizhu Fan. 2018.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press  
ISBN 9781108418676



Above: Anniversary celebration of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. Image reproduced under a Creative Commons license courtesy of 總統府 on Flickr. Original Image: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/presidentialoffice/7193617608>. License: CC BY 2.0

In *Religion and Charity: The Social Life of Goodness in Chinese Societies*, Robert Weller, Julia Huang, Keping Wu, and Lizhu Fan provide a comparative study of what doing good means in late 20th and 21st century China, Taiwan, and Malaysia. The authors argue that while particular methods of doing good and visions of goodness have come to dominate engaged religions in these places – what the authors respectively call 'industrialized philanthropy' and 'the unlimited good' – they have also been shaped and reconfigured by the local historical and political situations in each of these locations.

Weller et al. propose the concept of industrialized philanthropy to describe three interrelated phenomena at the core of religious philanthropic practices in China, Taiwan, and Malaysia. Industrialized philanthropy entails large-scale philanthropic practices that are "increasingly rationalized and bureaucratized", with institutions employing accounting methods, forming boards of directors, recruiting members, using new media, and developing relations with governments (p.2). It engenders and relies on a new vision of the self that makes autonomous decisions, embodies a vision of

universal goodness, and voluntarily dedicates time and resources to the causes of doing good. Weller et al. term this new sense of goodness the unlimited good; it is a form of goodness that espouses great love and compassion for all beyond the boundaries of family lineages, local communities, ethnicities, and nations. Driven by this vision of unlimited goodness, many religious institutions, particularly those in Taiwan and their branches in mainland China and Malaysia, disseminate a "model of industrialized philanthropy by virtue of an ecumenical universalism" (p.109).

Industrialized philanthropy, as Weller et al. explain, emerged out of two waves of globalization, namely the Christian models of missionaries, charity, and education dated as far back as the late-Qing dynasty and a later cluster of developments that the authors see as the global expansion of Taiwan's Buddhism (p.100). While Christian charity organizations typically operated as an outside provider of charity, the expansion of Taiwanese Buddhism, particularly that of Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation (hereafter Tzu Chi), tapped into the local and transnational Chinese networks. The intensified development of industrialized philanthropy in all three Chinese societies in the 1980s was no coincidence. Weller et al. show that this decade marked the beginning of crucial sociopolitical changes in all three societies. These include market reforms in mainland China, the political loosening both in China and Taiwan, the enforcement of the affirmative action policies favoring Malays over Chinese in Malaysia, advancements in communication technologies, and increasing flows of international and internal migration (p.9). All of these factors contributed to changes in the social fabric of the three societies that broke earlier social ties and relations, while allowing new connections to be developed. In both China and Malaysia, Tzu Chi first expanded through the migration of devout Taiwanese businesswomen who mobilized their social networks to proselytize Tzu Chi's religious messages and to organize large educational and philanthropic programs (p.106 and 168–72).



# The precarity and persuasion of migration in rural Bangladesh

Chandni Singh

## Remittance Income and Social Resilience among Migrant Households in Rural Bangladesh

Mohammad Jalal Uddin Sikder, Peter Harry Ballis, and Vaughan Higgins. 2017.

New York: Palgrave Macmillan  
ISBN 9781137577719



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## The case for studying migration and its outcomes

The issue of human migration has never been more pertinent than now. The World Bank's latest Groundswell Report (Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration, The World Bank, 19 March 2018) predicts that Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America could see more than 140 million people move within their countries' borders by 2050. Simultaneously, the International Migration Report (The International Migration Report 2017 (Highlights), United Nations, 18 December 2017) found that 3.4 per cent of the world's population are international migrants, up by 49 per cent since 2000. But what do these numbers mean for the experience of migration? How does this ever-increasing flow of migrants shape lives of those who move and those who are left behind? And do remittances really help improve quality of life?

*Remittance Income and Social Resilience among Migrant Households in Rural Bangladesh* answers these questions by

drawing on rich empirical evidence from Bangladesh, a country at the interface of poverty, rapid development, and a large, increasingly mobile population. The book focusses on the impacts of remittances on migrant households, especially on those who are left behind, to draw conclusions about how households use remittances to change their life circumstances, adapt to crises, and plan for the future. To study the impacts of remittances, Mohammad Jalal Uddin Sikder, Peter Harry Ballis, and Vaughan Higgins use the lens of social resilience, commonly understood as the ability to bounce back or cope in the face of substantial adversity. Early in the book, they rightly question the idea of remittances only being 'inflows of money from migrants to their families' saying they go beyond monetary flows to encompass technological transfers and social remittances such as skills, practices, and identities.

The book draws on in-depth interviews

with 36 migrant households – a small number that compensates in depth what it lacks in breadth. Chapters 1 and 2 set the context through a review of the extensive literature on the role of remittances in household income and consumption. Importantly, rather than exploring this seemingly binary relationship of remittances and household spending, the authors expand the 'uses' of remittances by assessing their impacts on social resilience.

## The uneven geography of remittances

Across chapters 3–6, the authors use their rich empirical evidence and an intimate understanding of the study sites to elaborate on three key aspects of migration. First, they discuss 'life chances' (p.119) or circumstances that allow remittances to be used to create opportunities to improve quality of life.

These are explained through examples of how remittances are used to improve food security and enable spending on clothes, durable assets, constructing houses, and children's education. Encouragingly, the discussion demonstrates the dynamic nature of livelihoods and the opportunistic nature of household risk management, thus making an important contribution to studies around the 'climate-migration-development nexus' (Giovanna Gioli et al., *Human mobility, climate adaptation, and development, Migration and Development* 5(2), 2016: 165).

Second, the authors demonstrate how remittances change the household economy, by providing people required finances to invest in other income-generating activities. The analysis also highlights the intangible benefits that accrue from remittances such as promoting individual status and prestige, and increasing personal satisfaction. In this way, the book corroborates existing evidence on the positive aspects of remittances; as a means of livelihood diversification and a form of insurance.

Finally, and most importantly in my view, the book discusses the 'uneven geography of remittances' (p.191) to demonstrate that not all households benefit equally through remittances. They show that the socio-economic benefits of remittances are differentiated based on factors internal to the household (e.g. idiosyncratic events such as illness, the centrality of remittances to total household income), and external to the household (e.g. availability and nature of jobs in destination areas).

## Final words

*Remittance Income and Social Resilience among Migrant Households in Rural Bangladesh* is a useful read for migration researchers, development practitioners, and students interested in development studies and livelihoods research.

Overall, an engaging read, what adds depth to the analysis is the use of extensive quotes from migrants and family members left behind and the pictures that give readers, even those unfamiliar with the Bangladeshi or South Asian context, an opportunity to understand local conditions and everyday living. While I would have enjoyed a deeper conceptual engagement with social resilience, the book definitely adds to the current migration and livelihoods literature.

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## Religion–state relations

Weller et al. challenge two dominant hypotheses in the study of engaged religion: the interfering state and the state failure hypotheses. While the former holds that state interference with grass-roots philanthropies leads to the deterioration of these charitable endeavors, the latter attributes the contemporary proliferation of grassroots charities to state's failure to provide social assistance. Both of these hypotheses, the authors insist, do not hold up well in the contexts of China, Taiwan, and Malaysia. On the one hand, the state in these three societies are neither failed nor weak states. All three states are powerful enough to regulate and interfere with philanthropic causes, and neither Taiwan nor Malaysia ever tried to function as a welfare state so there has been no welfare retrenchment. On the other hand, state endorsement can be crucial for the success and survival of religious philanthropies. Weller et al. argue that the rise of religious philanthropies signifies a "different model of governance in which the state is able to access and better harness grassroots desire to contribute to the public good" (p.59).

The authors thus propose to look at political merit-making, that is, "the relationships religious groups cultivate with the state in order to gain more legitimacy, political support, autonomy, or even ways of influencing policy-making" (p.59). The monograph documents three different patterns of religion–state relationship. In China, political merit-making is defensive as the state controls religious organizations through the methods of financial auditing and registration. Thus, it is in the

interest of the organizations to develop political merit with state officials (p.70). In Taiwan, religious organizations and the state has a *collaborative* relationship – a domain where political power is legitimized through politicians' involvement in religious philanthropy; and religious activities benefit from state endorsement (p.74). In Malaysia, political merit-making is *enclaved* because of Malaysian's policy to limit charity to ethnic enclaves; Chinese religious institutions can be free from governmental control if their activities stay in the Chinese enclave (p.83). These patterns demonstrate that industrialized philanthropy is distinctively configured based on the local historical and political conditions.

## A new subjectivity

As mentioned, central to industrialized philanthropy is a new vision of subjectivity, that of "volunteers as deployable agents of civic love" who are ready to dedicate time and resources to the 'Protestantized' voluntary imperative, and who willingly embrace a cosmopolitan identity and embody the collective ideals of 'loving hearts' (p.122). Tzu Chi volunteers in Taiwan, China, and Malaysia, as well as those from other religious institutions, participate in what Weller et al. refer to as 'civic serving', where volunteers engage the common good and place themselves in a larger moral and political order predicated on the notion of the cosmopolitan unlimited good (p.124). A notable trend in all three societies is that women and young people are leaders and active participants of newer forms of industrialized philanthropy.

This stands in stark contrast with previous forms of charitable activities by local Chinese temples and lineage associations whose leaders are "relatively wealthy, middle-aged or older, and almost always male" (p.143).

Weller et al. observe that despite certain shared characteristics, civic serving does vary among the three societies. While civic serving in China and Taiwan harkens back to socialist morality and the Kuomintang's civility campaign respectively, civic serving in Malaysia attempts to go beyond the Chinese ethnic enclave and "thus breaking away from the ghettoization of purely Chinese associational life" (pp.124–5). It is also important to note that the Chinese understanding of goodness has a long heritage in Chinese notions of benevolence (仁) and impartial love (兼爱), the Daoist vision of cosmic retribution, and the Buddhist field of merits and bodhisattva ideals (pp.90–100). In tracing these linkages to Chinese traditions and the varieties of civic serving, Weller et al. refrain from calling these new volunteers 'neo-liberal' and thus destabilize the usage of neo-liberalism as a dominant analytical lens to examine new forms of religious voluntarism and philanthropy. As such, Weller et al. join other scholars of East Asia (e.g. Donald M. Nonini, *Is China becoming neoliberal?*, *Critique of Anthropology* 28(2), 2008: 145–76; Christina Schwenkel and Ann Marie Leshkovich, *How is neoliberalism good to think Vietnam? How is Vietnam good to think neoliberalism?*, *Positions* 20(2), 2012: 379–401) in registering their concerns about the applicability of neo-liberalism to the contexts of East Asian societies where the states remain consistently present in many spheres of social life.

With *Religion and Charity* Weller et al. have written a timely monograph that explores the complexity of religion's involvement in the provision of social welfare and the public good in Chinese societies. The book draws on a wealth of ethnographic materials collected during a span of more than four decades of research. While industrialized philanthropy and the unlimited good have come to dominate Chinese engaged religions in the last decades, Weller et al. carefully show towards the end of the book that alternative visions of goodness continue to exist, focusing on local community building, cultural heritage, spiritual life, and daily problem-solving (p.180). The book proposes rigorous conceptual and theoretical frameworks to productively investigate the rise of religious voluntarism in Asia. As a comparative study, the book at times sacrifices depth for breadth. A multitude of examples of religious organizations are included, but the fragmented treatment of these otherwise complex operations are streamlined to achieve theoretical coherence. This shortcoming, however, does not negate the theoretical significance of the book. It will provide the roadmap for innovative anthropological theory on the subject of engaged religions in East Asian societies and encourage further research into religious voluntarism and what Joel Robbins calls 'the anthropology of the good' (Joel Robbins, *Beyond the suffering subject: Toward an anthropology of the good*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19(3), 2013: 447–62).

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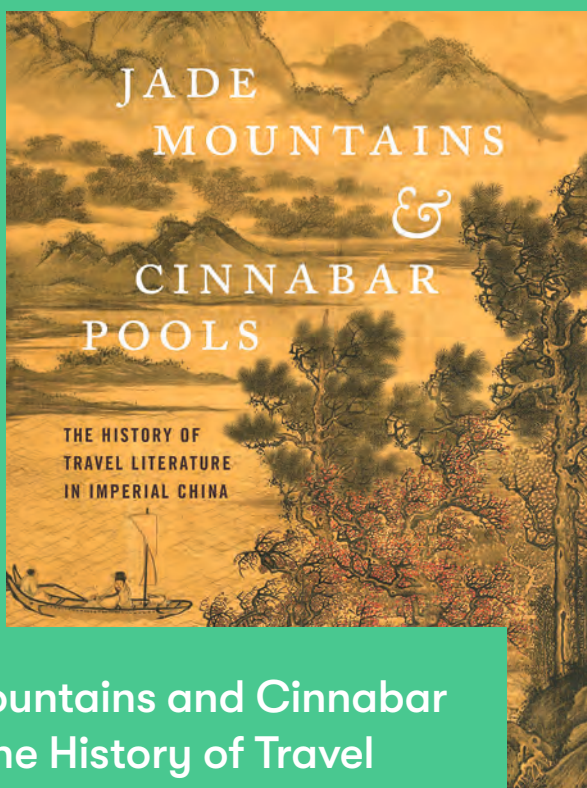
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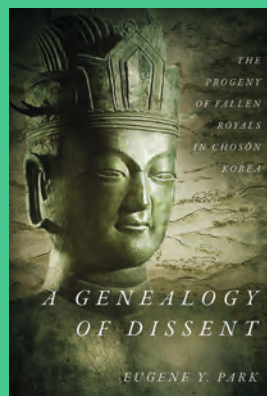
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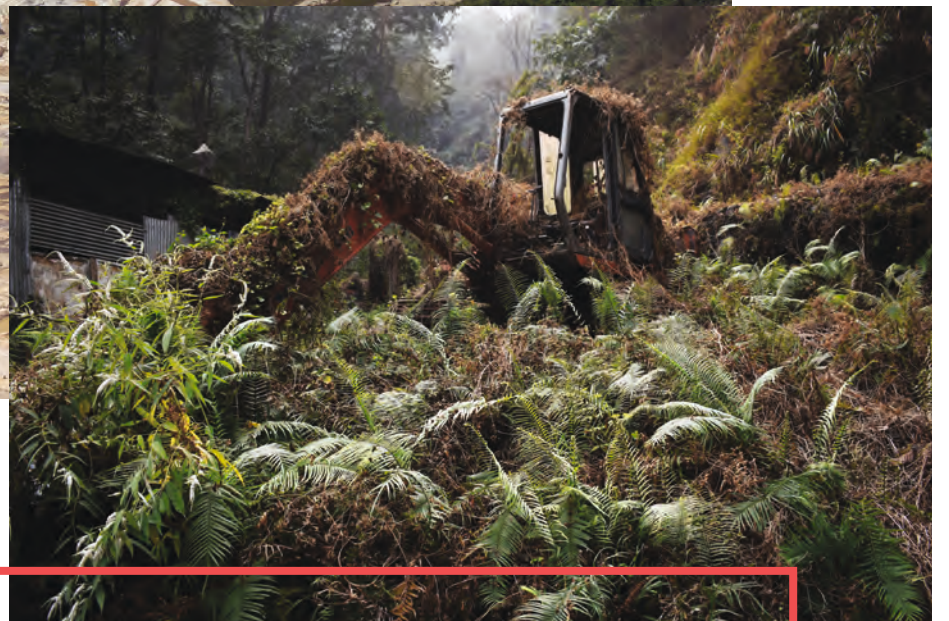
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Above: Abandoned gold mining site in West Kalimantan, Indonesia (Photo by Michael Eilenberg, 2017).

Right: Abandoned construction equipment near a hydro-project in Sikkim, India (Photo by Mona Chettri, 2018).



# Reading space, society and history in Asia through its ruins

Mona Chettri and Michael Eilenberg

**Ruins are everywhere. In Asia, aspirations for socio-economic development have led to the rapid transformation of the environmental, social and economic landscape. Led by a diverse range of local, national and international actors these transformations have informed the creation of new forms of ruins and ruinations, the disintegration of recognizable forms whether they be material, ideational or institutional. From ruined environmental landscapes, abandoned industrial estates, derelict housing estates, failed infrastructural projects to political disruptions, economic breakdowns and cultural disintegration, ruins are ubiquitous and varied in their manifestations. Ruins produce long-term effects and affect societies and individuals in expected and, often, unexpected ways. Therefore, these ruptures and their afterlife call for a wider conceptualisation of ruins that locates their materiality within wider social, political and economic contexts.**

Objects and institutions generate social effect in their preservation as well as in their destruction and disposal.<sup>1</sup> Thus, what we allow to disintegrate, to fall into ruin, is as powerful an assessment of our collective lives and histories as those objects and institutions we preserve and allow to flourish. Although sites of ruin and ruination can be ambiguous, unmoored from their present surrounding, they seldom remain dormant, often giving rise to new spatial and social conglomerations, new networks and infrastructures, or creating yet another ruin. Despite the apparent inertia around ruins, they are dynamic and act as metaphors for the ruptures and transitions at different stages of the socio-political history of a place or a people. Relegating ruins and historical processes of ruination to the past, therefore limits ways of engaging with and understanding the world.

Ruins can tell us much about the present, as they can of the past. In the Focus of this issue of the Newsletter we concentrate on

the social, political and economic 'afterlife of ruins' that have emerged from the structural fallout of rapid cycles of industrialisation and abandonment, urban growth, infrastructural development, modern state-building and conflict in Asia where the "present has not moved too far from the past and the future is at best uncertain".<sup>2</sup> Through an engagement with ruins of the past as well as the present, the processes of ruination and their impacts on people living amidst these ruins, we aim to contribute to a nuanced understanding of development and change underway in Asia.

## Agency of ruins

Ruins can be both objects and/or processes and a deeper understanding of the afterlife of ruins necessitates an interrogation of the wider entanglements and the actors that produce them. This in turn makes ruins and ruinations an important, albeit often neglected, vantage point through which to explore the various temporal and spatial interconnections

between political/economic institutions, the cultural/historical structures that enable its proliferation and the people living and sometimes, creating these ruins. In ruins, the processes of decay and the obscure agencies of intrusive humans and non-humans transform the familiar material order disturbing the orderly, "purification of space".<sup>3</sup> It blurs boundaries, both spatially as crumbling structures colonise their immediate surroundings and temporally as they articulate the overlaying of temporalities.<sup>4</sup> While it is important to consider the function of these ruins prior to the decay and eventual disintegration, the impact of ruins goes beyond the "mulch of matter which profanes the order of things and their separate individuality",<sup>5</sup> to affect people, their lives and their interactions in the world. The afterlife of ruins draws our attention towards the changed socio-economic realities that groups and individuals are suddenly faced with, the different contestations that emerge as a result of scarcity of resources, the new aspirations

for the future that sometimes fuel ruinations (see Woodworth in this issue) and the aftermath of abandoned futures. In understanding ruins, the linearity of the past or events is upstaged by a host of intersecting temporalities that collide and merge,<sup>6</sup> enabling the emergence of different or conflictual narratives. Thus, while ruins may be a way of reflecting on the past, the failure of political institutions or the breakdown of economic systems, they can also be used to challenge and/or re-consider the ways of engaging with the dominant narrative. Focussing on the afterlife of ruins and ruinations, therefore offers different perspectives into the conditions, negotiations, challenges and vulnerabilities that have emerged as a result of accelerated development in Asia. Furthermore, these introspections can offer insights and can act as either critical counterpoints to complicate and critique received historical narratives or as a platform for alternative, marginalised histories.

*Continued overleaf on page 30*





Above: Dirt road running through palm oil plantation in West Kalimantan along the Indonesian-Malaysian border (Photo by Michael Eilenberg, 2017).

Inset: Rusting petrol pump in the middle of a border boom-town in Sikkim, India (Photo by Mona Chettri, 2016).

Continued from page 29

Ruins are ruins precisely because they are considered without meaning, value or importance in the present. They become relevant only when their disintegration affects some aspect of our lives. While some ruins are preserved and reified for their spatial form and/or history of suffering and resistance, others are abandoned, allowed to decay as simultaneously a reminder of the past and of the impossible future (see Venhovens in this issue). However, the ruination of landscape, culture, livelihoods or identity usually reverberates in different, sometimes unexpected ways, to affect notions of belonging, history and identity. Ruins can prove especially contentious in terms of the value that is accorded to them and the desire to re-shape them by different groups of people, at different points in time. As Ann Laura Stoler reminds us,<sup>7</sup> it is important to see ruins not as memorized monumental leftovers, but as sites that condense alternative senses of history. Ruination is an ongoing corrosive process that weighs on the future. The critical power of ruins is not fixed but alters with time and while ruins may be reminders of loss and a crucial point for locating nostalgia for a certain past, they may also become the loci for mobilising and materialising collective anger and resistance.<sup>8</sup> Thus, sites of ruin and processes of ruination often become objects or experiences in which space, history, decay and memory coalesce in powerful ways.<sup>9</sup> These sites of abandoned materiality are often permeated with their latent potential as important sources of marginalised histories which carry “memory traces of an abandoned set of futures”<sup>10</sup> and thus have the potential to challenge dominant ways of understanding contemporary changes in Asia. Therefore, sites of ruin and ruination need not always be objects or experiences that are detached from society and devoid of local history and meaning but can come to acquire importance as centres of cultural, religious or political significance and emerge as important sites for galvanising collective action (Hargyono in this issue).<sup>11</sup>

### Hope and hubris

This collection of articles focuses on the ‘vital re-configurations’ of the institutions, politics and people that produce, and sometimes even accelerate the production of new ruins and ruination in different ways. It positions ruins, material, ideational and institutional, as dynamic nodes where actors, both human and non-human are powerful actants in the production of new landscapes, histories and politics, which then continue the cyclical production of new ruins. The papers illustrate different manifestations of the relationships between the material and social environment, and how ruins continue to produce affect over different scales and temporalities. The contributions focus on different countries

and contexts in Asia to illustrate how rapid urbanisation, new extractive industries, infrastructural development, increased mobility and aspirations for a modern lifestyle, state-building and globalisation, have led to the emergence of modern ruins that lie between the “utopian promises and dystopian actualities”.<sup>12</sup> However, modernity can also be understood as a repetitive cycle of ruination and renewal, which usually takes on different forms at different periods of history.

Ruins are always ruins of something and thus, the sites of modern ruins and ruinations discussed here are imbued with histories of former ruination through the assemblage of colonisation, frontier making, capitalist resource extraction and exploitation, war and state-building.<sup>13</sup> As the papers highlight, modern ruins in Asia are often built on the structural and political re-configuration of pre-existing cultural, political and economic dynamics under conditions of globalisation and state-led neo-liberalisation policies. Ruins can be both ‘fast’ (created through abrupt transitions like war, natural disaster or economic crisis) or ‘slow’ (slipping into ruination more gradually, side-lined by socio-economic transitions or incrementally abandoned).<sup>14</sup> In Asia, ruins and ruinations exemplify how both these conditions can often co-produce one another. Thus, for example, the Partition of India in 1947 led to the creation of a ‘fast’ ruin through war and border-making practices, this in turn led to the ‘slow’ ruin of traditional cultural and livelihood patterns of border communities (see Meena, and Lal & Lepcha in this issue).

### The contributions

Spanning across different borderlands from Indonesia to Abkhazia in Eurasia, the contributors to this Focus investigate the diversity of ruins in Asia and show how the materiality of ruins also eventually become borders themselves; signposts that separate the past from the present; tangible markers between nation-states, cultures and people. The contributions are all the result of extensive fieldwork and focus on modern ruins where agencies of decay and deterioration are still active and formative, and thus bring to light the experiences of ruin and rupture, the aspirations and eventual abandonment and, finally, how people make peace, albeit an uneasy peace, with the ruins amidst which they live.

Thomas Mikkelsen analyses the booming shrimp-farming industry and the active creation of new ruined ponds by both human and non-human actors (mud crabs, in this context) in the frontier landscape of coastal North Kalimantan, Indonesia. The success of the shrimp-farming industry has transformed large swathes of these low-lying coastlines from mangrove forests to a dense network of shrimp ponds. However, the creation of these ponds has led to new forms of economic transactions, demographic

changes and the unexpected interaction between people and the salt-water crabs, who too are active participants in the creation of this ruinous landscape. Through these ruined ponds and the role of the salt-water crabs, Mikkelsen weaves colonial history of Indonesia with the cyclical nature of ruins and new forms of resource extractions and inequality. He shows how “productive ruins” are being co-produced by human and non-human actors and becoming part of larger international supply chains of luxury commodities.

Neha Meena focusses on the changes in the livelihood and cultural identity of nomadic groups in western Rajasthan (India), post the Partition in 1947, the subsequent India-Pakistan wars and the developmental strategies of the Indian state in the early 1980s. The end of cross-border mobility and introduction of settled agriculture has completely re-shaped the identity of these groups and Meena traces these ruins of pastoralism through discarded wells and camel markings, which symbolised a culture and a lifestyle that is now on the decline. Like Mikkelsen, Meena illustrates how these new ruins are a by-product of colonial history, state-building and the adaptive abilities of those living amidst these ruins. Focussing on a similar theme of environment, cultural change and ruptures, Uttam Lal and Charisma Lepcha discuss the abandoned ruins of the Indian Himalayas formed as a result of modern state-building practices and/or environmental changes. Their contribution encourages an alternative reading of the landscape and its history, how ruins are potent sources of marginalised histories and how abandoned materiality can come to represent the cultures and traditions that have come to be abandoned with them. Navigating between different sites in the eastern and western Himalaya, this paper looks at tangible and intangible ruins and how the ruination of one, more often than not, heralds the ruination of the other.

Mikel Venhovens redirects our focus towards the borderlands of the de-facto/semi-recognised state of Abkhazia in Eurasia to illustrate the material, social and political afterlife of the ruins of violent conflict. Venhovens looks at the impact of the “hardening” of the border and the everyday negotiations of the local ethnic Georgian/Mingrelian population living among the literal ruins of a lingering conflict, treated as outcasts by the Abkhazian government and cut off from the Georgian society. The paper shows how infrastructural violence can be expressed and experienced through ruins that serve as reminders of their violent past and impossible futures.

In the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China, Max Woodworth discusses the energy

resource boom-town of Ordos, which has emerged in recent years as the geography of production has shifted to new locations to take advantage of newly discovered reserves, new extraction techniques, and more favourable social conditions for larger-scale production systems. At such sites, bursts of speculative real estate investments have produced vast landscapes of newly-built structures that await habitation and use – and that may never ultimately be sold or used. Stuck between the speed of investment and construction and the slower pace of settlement and usage, this paper shows how sparsely utilized urban spaces raise the prospect of urbanization in the resource frontier as one of creating instant ruins.

Finally, Sindhunata Hargyono looks at the galvanising power of ruins in his discussion of the failed promises of infrastructural development and the resultant renewal of political agency in the borderlands of North Kalimantan (Indonesia). Hargyono illustrates how aspirations for infrastructural development at the margins of the state, and for making the border the ‘front-yard’ of the nation towards a prosperous Malaysian neighbour, has led to the proliferation of infrastructural ruins. Nonetheless, these ruins have also generated newer understandings of development and the relationship between state and society. Like the case of energy boom-towns in Ordos, these ruins are built on hope and aspirations for a better future that have led to the creation of new ruins.

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# When infrastructural ruins inspire political reorganization

Sindhunata Hargyono



The Indonesian border became central to the national political discourse in 2014. The newly elected president, Joko Widodo, identified the border as one of the central issues of his administration. Widodo argued that the state had been absent for people on the territorial margins, and that citizens on the border had less access to welfare than those located closer to urban centers. In a bid to change the fate of the marginalized citizens on the border, Widodo campaigned for “developing Indonesia from the margins”. In so doing, Widodo utilized a developmentalist paradigm that predated his regime. The paradigm is an invitation to alter the gaze toward the border, from seeing it as the *backyard* to seeing it as the *front yard* of the nation.

## Altering the gaze toward the border: producing the state's front yard

This development paradigm, originally conceived by the Indonesian National Planning Agency of the previous regime, imagines the state space as a house, where the border functions as the front yard or the front porch. In a culturally-specific logic, this paradigm carries the idea that an ideal house owner should prioritize spending resources and time to assuring the propriety of the appearance of the front yard rather than dealing with the backyard, as the latter is invisible to the eyes of outsiders. Here, the front yard is understood to be representative of the quality of the people who inhabit the house. Just like this ideal house, Widodo

sees the border as representing the quality of Indonesia as a nation. The current condition of the Indonesian border area is problematic for the regime, however, because despite ideally serving as the front yard, it looks more like a backyard in that, in the regime's judgment, it is characterized by impoverishment, rurality, isolation from the domestic space, and illicit cross-border dependency.

In a bid to materialize the front yard border, Widodo's administration designed development planning that centers on the idea of designating new growth poles on the border. Border villages are handpicked by state officials to be these future growth centers. State officials expect these rural growth centers, through territorial infrastructural development projects, to flourish as prosperous border cities in the future. This article focuses on the experience of one such border village: Long Nawang village. The village is undergoing a district-splitting process and is projected to become the capital of a new border district called

Top: The non-functional Pembangkit Listrik Tenaga Diesel (Diesel Electrical Power Plant), Long Nawang, Indonesia.

Above: Smaller voltage transformers assuming new function for the PLTD keeper, Long Nawang, Indonesia (Photos by Sindhunata Hargyono, 2018).

Apau Kayan. Noticeable infrastructural development as part of the current regime's materialization of the front yard border has started in the village. While the regime often marks the infrastructural development at the margins as a point of differentiation from the previous regime, the reinvigoration of state power in the form of infrastructural development is not new for the village's inhabitants. In fact, behind the existing infrastructure in Long Nawang rest collective memories of the state's failure in delivering its promises.

## The generative effect of failure

The construction of infrastructure always carries political significance. In the context of border governance, it carries the imposition of the state's territoriality—as both the marker of sovereign space and as biopolitical intervention. But what happens when such a political campaign encounters the memory of failure? In this section I will look at the way infrastructural ruins in the village become associated with failure and the way that failure becomes politically generative for the villagers amid the production of the front yard border.

As I have indicated, the on-going infrastructure development in Long Nawang village is just another layer on the palimpsest of infrastructural development. The landscape of the village has already been decorated with infrastructural ruins. These infrastructures are ruinous because, despite their completion, they have never fully and felicitously performed their function. In other words, these material structures are ruinous because they fail to comply with their objectification.<sup>1</sup> Infrastructural ruins, however, are everything but material superfluity. Here, I look at infrastructure as having a dialectical relationship with politics.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, infrastructure, in any of its material-temporal forms, simultaneously embodies political power of the state and the possibility of political practice. The temporality of ruin, that can be judged only through its (in)felicitous material expression, plays a central role in inaugurating spaces for political action. Such an understanding is possible only when we realize that infrastructure is never built for eternity, and each time an infrastructural project is carried out, the materiality of infrastructure oscillates between the time-space of ruination and that of renewal.<sup>3</sup> Thus, ruin is not merely an autonomous temporal phase in some teleological timeline. Rather, ruin should be imagined within a non-teleological temporality of infrastructure, where renewal is always standing within its horizon. Imagining ruin in this way enables us to go beyond the narrative of infrastructural violence—the absence of public service as a form of violence—and instead look at the moment of infrastructural failure as generative to political action.<sup>4</sup> That is, when ruins inaugurate a space for political actions.

The materiality of infrastructural ruins in Long Nawang village preserves the memory of the state's incapacity in fulfilling its promises. Villagers experience this failure on a daily basis. For instance, despite a tall base transceiver tower having been erected in 2013, four years later a mobile signal still appears only sporadically in the village due to the dearth of gas supply. In spite of having solar and hydro power plants, villagers still rely on the village office's diesel machine to access up to twelve hours of electricity per day. The sporadicity of public service in juxtaposition with the visibility of infrastructural materiality reminds the villagers on a daily basis that the relationship between the enactment of infrastructure and the availability of basic public services is not necessarily parallel. Each time the village's electricity is turned off at 6 AM, the villagers receive a reminder about the state of ruination that is eating away the infrastructures in their village.

It is within the time-space of ruin that the experiencing of failed objectification of infrastructural promises becomes politically generative for the villagers amid the reinstatement of infrastructural development on the border. Caught between the memory of failure and the desire to take part in the front

yard future, the village office has decided to introduce a new political organization: a development watch apparatus. This apparatus was created by a newly elected village head in 2017. At the time, the Widodo administration had built a diesel power plant in the village. Nevertheless, a familiar story unfolded as the electrical poles to distribute electrical power failed to arrive. Thus, the new diesel power plant quickly became an infrastructural ruin. As the village cannot bear any more non-functioning infrastructures, the village governance has given the development watch apparatus tasks to: (1) monitor the on-going development project and (2) solve the problem of infrastructural ruins through meeting with relevant stakeholders.

When I visited the village in 2018, I witnessed the fruit of the development watch apparatus. Troubled by the ruinous telecommunication tower and solar power plant, the village governance had sent development watch officials to negotiate with district-level and province-level state officials. The village officials proposed to power the telecommunication tower through the non-functioning solar power plant built by the province-level state institution. All this time, the solar power plant could not function because no official handover had taken place after the completion of its construction. The proposal was approved, and just before I left the village, a state technician and some villagers were working collectively to connect cables from the power plant to the telecommunication tower. Today, as both the telecommunication tower and the solar power plant have been moved to the time-space of renewal, villagers can finally have a fully working mobile signal.

## Reflection

Infrastructure fails all the time, and the failure can take many forms. Sometimes it occurs before a structure is completed. Other times, like in this case, it fails despite its material completion. When infrastructure fails, that is when it does not adhere to the promise that it embodies, infrastructure becomes a ruin. In parallel with the special issue theme, however, I have illustrated how ruin is anything but the end of history. Far from being dormant, ruin is experienceable and inaugurates spaces for political reorganization that centers on the act of renewal.

Understanding the generative effect of infrastructural ruin is important in the current moment. The utilization of infrastructural development as a means to unlock the promise of a better future is not an isolated case from insular Southeast Asia. We need look no further than to the Chinese state's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative that seeks to use cross-border infrastructure development to add a modern layer to the Silk Road palimpsest. This grand initiative promises fertile ground for investigations into the entanglement of infrastructure and politics. As ruination always seems to be on the horizon of infrastructural development of whichever scale, the question that we may prepare to answer pertaining to OBOR is, what kind of political space will that infrastructure evoke when it enters the ruin time-space?

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## Notes

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# Ruined pondscapes in North Kalimantan, Indonesia

Thomas Mikkelsen



Abandoned oil well in Tarakan, Indonesia (Photo by Thomas Mikkelsen, 2017).

The frontier of large-scale shrimp aquaculture arrived in North Kalimantan in the early 1990s, boomed during the Asian Financial crisis of 1998-1999 when the rupiah was weak, and expanded in the years afterwards. Since then things have changed, as ponds have started dying off. Today, as especially downriver ponds are abandoned, caretakers and businessmen find new ways to extract resources in the ruins, maintaining debt-based patronage relationships that often stretch back generations and span several waves of different resource frontiers and territorializations. Resource frontiers created tension and conflict over land, but so did the following ruination, and struggle for control over new resources.

Shrimp aquaculture is not the first resource frontier to wax and wane on the northeast coast of Borneo, what is now the Indonesian province of North Kalimantan, and it is not the first one to produce ruined, altered landscapes either. For hundreds if not thousands of years, commodities have been extracted, traded and shipped off from forests and coastal reefs, reaching distant destinations. Slaves, rattans, eaglewood and gold dust from land; holothurians and prized shells from the bottom of the sea. Each resource frontier produced its own ruined landscapes, and Tarakan, the city where I had based myself and my family during fieldwork, has grown and contracted accordingly. A hub for slave trade until oil was found, and for a period of time home to some of the richest oil wells in Indonesia. Today, the ruins of yesterday's resource frontiers are an integrated part of everyday life of the city. The coral reefs have been dynamited, the seafloor scarred by trawl. Cows graze under rusty oil jacks, former sawmills have become storehouses while fishermen tether their boats at derelict gas rigs, protruding from the shallow brown water.

The infrastructure and ruins of today's resource frontier, extensive shrimp aquaculture, is impossible to miss when arriving by plane. From the air, these pondscapes, mosaics of greens, browns and blues, have an eerie likeness to those cross sections of cells found in biology textbooks. In order to maximize the productive surface, ponds are shaped to fit each other, while following the twisting and curling streams they depend on for fresh water and for disposal of waste. Streams that run into rivulets, that run into rivers, that run into the sea during low tide, and reverse during high tide, create long stretches of labyrinthine brackish waterways. Once meandering freely through mangrove forests, the streams are now held in place by the floodgates, the dikes and the embankments characteristic of shrimp aquaculture; some abandoned ruins, others still producing.

## On debt-based patronage

The political economies of the pondscapes follow a similar logic as the ever-branching rivers. Many thousand men are hired as caretakers, responsible for doing all the manual work. They are employed by thousands of owners, most of whom live in the city. The owners are indebted to a class of buyers, often called *bos*, who finance their ponds, the machinery needed, the shrimp fry, their nets, the ice, the gasoline. In turn, the *bos* will have exclusive rights to the catch – part of which he will take as repayment of the loan, part of which he will buy at a discounted rate. The *bos* himself is often indebted too, to richer men known as *bos besar*, who manage a portfolio of minor *bos* on behalf of cold storages, factories owned by Chinese or Japanese conglomerates, who ultimately buy, process, freeze and export all quality shrimp farmed in the area.

Towering above the seaside slum are enormous concrete mansions, dazzling in color and architectural eclecticism, indicative of where the successful *bos* live. Many of them are members of families who came to Tarakan alongside the Dutch, during the days when oil was the commodity. Sitting in the office of one such Bugis *bos* in Tarakan, I was guided through the paperwork necessary for making a new pond. Compared with the sheer amount of paperwork you normally need to do anything in Indonesia, this was nothing. "It is very simple. You go to the Tidung village who owns the land, and ask the leader [Kepala Desa], and pay him maybe 10 million to make you a claim letter. This gives you 10 ha for the pond, and you can get several if you want. This is what most people do [...] You don't have to go to the government

offices, only if you wish to get ownership, but this is expensive, it is not worth it".<sup>1</sup> Asked why it is only Bugis who build and own ponds he said, "The Tidung are too lazy, they are too poor. They cannot afford the machines needed. They are fishermen and they work at our ponds, although I prefer family [here meaning other Bugis] as workers".

Many Tidung disagree. One leader of a Tidung ethnic organization explained how the Bugis, through connections in the government, were systematically stealing their land. "They have people in all the offices and in the police. They are better educated. We need to be united against them to stand a chance". Tension has erupted into violence from time to time. Tension between some Bugis groups and the now minority Tidung peaked in 2010, when a fight between youngsters resulted in a man being killed. Hours later, crowds from both groups assembled and clashed at several locations on the island, leaving at least seven people dead, while more than 40,000 fled their homes. Cautious national police blockaded the island for weeks, hoping to prevent the warring groups

from obtaining outside assistance. The clashes escalated because of grievances between the opposing groups over access to land and lucrative government contracts.<sup>2</sup>

Anna Tsing uses the term 'salvage accumulation' to describe the

processes through which capital is extracted from non-capitalist systems of production, such as the dispossession of the indigenous Tidung, and the debt relationships in which pond owners are forced to sell below market price to the *bos*, and buy household necessities from him on credit.<sup>3</sup> The supply-chains which connect the destitute worker squatting on the embankment of the pond with the consumer in the supermarket, is founded on such heterogeneities and even strengthens them.<sup>4</sup> The cold storages maintain the debt-networks, through providing capital for the *bos* class. They entertain special prices for the *bos*, with whom they have long

relationships (in some cases, even prior to shrimp aquaculture), thereby enforcing the hereditary *bos* dynasties so visible in city geography.

## Ruined pondscapes

In recent times, older ponds have started to fall into disuse, and are quickly deteriorating. The mud embankments that encircle them, once laboriously maintained by hard-working men, crumble and leak while the abandoned sheds that once held families are scavenged for building materials. The ponds themselves choke with fast-growing palms and the brightly-leaved saplings of mangrove trees sprout around the stumps of trees cut down years ago.

Around these ruins are clusters of ponds that are still maintained, restocked and harvested as in the old days, but production is erratic and harvests frequently fail. Sometimes failure can be predicted with the help of subtle signs, such as an overrepresentation of a certain kind of freshwater snail, too much or too little of a certain kind of algae; other times the signs are obvious even to the untrained eye: the water smells rotten, has an unusual color or might be covered by an oily film. But mostly, failure is not evident before the pond is emptied through a huge net into the river at low tide. Anticipation turns into disappointment in a matter of hours. These ponds are in a process of continual ruination that ties the choices of the past together with the possibilities of tomorrow.<sup>5</sup> Explanations for these failures vary. Most of the owners and caretakers I spoke with blame the expanding palm-oil plantations upstream. Their herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers foul the water, and the clearing of forests changes drainage dynamics, leading to surges of fresh water through the otherwise brackish river systems during heavy rainfall, which are deadly to the farmed shrimp. Others blame the upstream hydraulic mining, where riverbanks are washed away with high-pressure hoses, and mercury is used in the process of extracting the precious flakes of gold. But take a look at the shelves of any well-stocked pond owner and you will find a collection of products to match the chemical shelf of any plantation: pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics and an assortment of unlabeled

... crabs are also active  
co-creators of ruin,  
presenting opportunity in  
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working at the bottom  
of the supply chain.





Mangrove crab, soon to be exported to Kuala Lumpur or Singapore, North Kalimantan, Indonesia (Photo by Thomas Mikkelsen, 2017).

powders and mixtures, all extensively used. Others again point to bacterial or viral epidemics that spread through the monocrop shrimp ponds, where the accumulated buildup of waste from billions of shrimp form a hotbed of infection, which easily spreads from pond to pond through the waterways connecting them all. Ruination is an active process co-created by many actors, human and non-human alike. It is not something that is solely thrust upon affected pond-owners from the outside, although that is what pond owners and workers will tell you.

Ruination leads to downriver ponds being abandoned every season. In the remaining ones, owners maintain production. Some because of sheer stubbornness, others because of mounting debts that desperately need repaying (by that windfall harvest that grows ever more unlikely as the ponds further deteriorate). For the owners of the ponds this is critical, as they repay their loans with the value of the catch. Caretakers, many of whom are landless immigrants from neighboring Sulawesi, are paid in percentages, and so failed harvests equal no pay.

### Productive ruins

In the downriver patchwork of ruins and struggling ponds, all caretakers I met supplemented their income by collecting and selling mangrove crab, the common name for what is actually at least four different species

(*Scylla spp.*) A prized delicacy, sold alive in the metropolises of Asia. Naturally occurring in the brackish waters of estuaries and mangroves in the Indo-Pacific, the crabs have adapted and proliferated in the pondscapes. The sheltered ponds, stocked with feed and free of some of their natural predators, are near perfect environments for the crabs, who can better tolerate variations in salinity, and levels of ammonia and oxygen than farmed shrimp can. They even thrive in some of the ruined ponds where the shrimp have died off from pollution. Productive ruins in ruins.

Mangrove crabs hide during the day in tunnels dug in the intertidal zone, and forage during night. In the wild, this helps soil aeration and increases soil turnover rate in the mangrove to the extent that biologists have labelled them ecosystem engineers. However, in the ponds the burrowing crabs undermine the embankments, leading to leaks and accelerating the ruination. Sometimes a serious leak caused by burrowing crabs will be the final straw if reconstruction of the embankment is unfeasible, and thus they are considered pests by pond owners. Maintaining embankments is backbreaking work, done with hoe and shovel; but repairing a collapsed embankment is expensive and requires heavy machinery, something the owner would consider twice in an already degraded pond. For the caretakers, however, the mangrove crabs constitute an opportunity for a relatively stable income; in struggling

ponds the sale of crabs often exceeds the salaries they are paid by the owners, and in failed ponds crabs are their only source of revenue. At night when the crabs are active, caretakers don headlights and rubber boots, and stalk the pond embankments with large nets. The presence of ruined and abandoned ponds increases the area the caretaker can cover at night and the number of crabs he can catch. Among the overgrown ruins, however, one has to be careful. Not only crabs but saltwater crocodiles too are attracted by the abandoned ponds, only visited occasionally by a caretaker on the hunt for crab. Downstream the large majority of them are juvenile, but occasionally a caretaker goes missing, save for a foot or disgorged sandal. I am told, as long as you don't swear or throw things at them, the *ibu ibu* [grandmothers], as they are called, will not attack you, but in the ruined landscapes you never know.

Several times a week, a speedboat with a collector of crabs will visit the caretaker's shack, buying any live crabs he might have to offer. Collectors also peddle in everyday items such as cigarettes and instant noodles, and some in more clandestine wares such as methamphetamine, a relatively common drug among the young men working in the isolated ponds for months at a time. The countless rivers and streams, nooks and crannies of North Kalimantan, are some of the main entry points of Filipino and Cambodian drugs into Indonesia. Some collectors also bring crab larvae, which daring or desperate caretakers plant in the ponds, to further increase the number of crabs they can collect, to the benefit of both collector and caretaker. This is not without any risk though, as the crabs feed on the valuable shrimp larvae and their burrowing undermines the pond. If the owner learns of this practice, the caretaker in question will surely be fired.

Thus, the crabs thrive in pondscapes, even in those that are ruined and abandoned. But the crabs are also active co-creators of ruin, presenting opportunity in the ruins of monocrop pond aquaculture for the people working at the bottom of the supply chain. When the crab ends up on the plate in a Singaporean restaurant, it has become an object of luxury, of desire. Its past as a pest in a contaminated pond is forgotten and it is now used as treats for business contacts,

officials or senior colleagues, people from whom you want favors. They are offered on big plates, whole in their carapaces. It is said that crabmeat is an aphrodisiac, and eating it definitely is a multi-sensory experience. Breaking the tough shell, dismantling the claws, sucking the meat and juice out of hard-to-get places, is a messy business. Both crab and shrimp are not only shredded from their carapaces when they reach their destinations. They are also shredded from the history, the ethnic conflict, the ruined landscapes and the unequal and destitute lives of the people handling them along the supply chain of luxury commodities. The cycle repeats itself, but the commodity changes according to taste and availability. Finding new objects of desire in the ruins of old extractions, retaining and solidifying systems of immense inequality that sometimes span centuries, but also presenting possibilities for the astute worker, and thus the cycle begins anew.

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### Notes

- 1 Technically, this only gives three years of usage, until you apply for ownership with the district government, but in practice it lasts indefinitely. The man I spoke with had inherited 15 ponds from his father, who had migrated to Tarakan in the 1970s, and the sole document showing his ownership was a *surat garapan* for each.
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Thousands of Tambaks, freshwater ponds for farming tiger-shrimps proliferate steadily up the waters of North Kalimantan, Indonesia (Photo by Thomas Mikkelsen, 2017).





30 year old tanka in Tawarwala ki dhaani  
(Photo credits: Neha Meena, 2017).

## Ruins of pastoralism in the Western Rajasthan borderland

Neha Meena

On the western border of Rajasthan (India), adjacent to Pakistan, pastoralist communities like the Raikas sustain themselves these days primarily with canal-based agriculture. Prior to Indian independence in 1947 their way of life was generally characterised by livestock (mainly camels and sheep), and movements associated with animals in search of grazing and water. The changes in the traditional lives of the inhabitants are a result of significant political events, such as the Partition of India (1947), the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971, irrigation-based development (such as the land settlement schemes of the 1950s-1980s and the extension of the Indira Gandhi Canal in the 1980s), and the complete sealing of the India-Pakistan border in the 1990s. Against this background, this article explores the social, political, and environmental entanglements that have led to the (social) ruination of pastoralism, and focuses on the implications those ruins have had on the pastoral way of life and the pastoralists' notions of belonging, history, and identity.

The Thar Desert has a rich history of the circulation of people, commodities, cattle, ideas, and services. The mobile communities of the desert had close connections and associations across the regions of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Sindh, and even Afghanistan, prior to Partition. However, in 1947 the India-Pakistan international border was demarcated and it passed right through the Thar Desert, separating these well-connected areas (in terms of trade and socio-economic exchange) of present-day Rajasthan, Kutch, Sindh, and Bahawalpur. The Thar frontier, a crossroads of geographical, environmental, social, cultural and economic relations, was thus suddenly split between two nation-states: India and Pakistan. The demarcation of the border, along with the associated security practices, heavy militarisation, and checkpoints, has severely impacted the traditional lifestyles of the inhabitants in these areas. The ensuing regulations on varied forms of previously unregulated mobilities, and irrigation-based developmental initiatives through canal extension, aimed to encourage a settled lifestyle and agrarian expansion. Consequently, many semi-nomadic pastoral communities like the Raikas established themselves in *dhanis* (small settlements) near the western border areas of Bikaner with agriculture as their prime source of income. The modern Indian state's encouragement of a sedentary lifestyle, and the enhancement of agricultural practices through the development of the Indira Gandhi Canal, transformed western Rajasthan and the lives of people who live there. The ruination

of the pastoral lifestyle is observable in the memories and experiences of the pastoralists, and in the decline of pastoral practices, such as the traditional branding of the community's livestock (*daag*) and the underground rainwater storage tanks littered throughout the desert (*tanka*).

### Ruins of social, cultural and economic pastoral life

The Thar Desert comprises mainly vast barren lands, but for the occasional variation of grasses, and in some parts continuously moving sand dunes. The villagers of western Bikaner live in extreme arid conditions with frequent food shortages. However, for many generations, the mobile communities adapted to the desert environment, reflected in their way of life (such as their special relationship with animals). For semi-nomadic pastoralists and tribes of the Thar, mobility was not only an important means of survival, but also their socio-cultural identity. Tradition, custom, livelihood, religion, and socio-political position in society may differ between the various groups, but the idea of 'mobility' was central to their ways of life and still remains ingrained.<sup>1</sup>

According to the popular narrative of groups within the region, pastoralists followed the semi-nomadic lifestyle of moving livestock during the dry season and a settled life of cultivating crops in the rainy season. Irrigation was only possible during the rainy season (termed as *berani-kheti* by the villagers), and so subsistence relied on livestock products for the rest of the year. Villagers learned to depend less on water and more on buttermilk (*Chaach*) and milk (i.e., camel milk). The natural vegetation of the region such as *sewan* grass, *phog*, *khejri* tree, and wild grasses, sustained the animals. During the drought and dry season, people survived on animal products, such as wool, meat, milk, and dung; either for self-consumption, sale, or exchange for other household goods.<sup>2</sup> Depending on the environmental conditions many communities even adopted a combination of occupations for livelihood and survival. For instance, the Meghwals, Naiks, and Kumhars were involved in agricultural labour, along with the rearing of livestock.

The western Thar region contained mainly brackish-water wells that were used primarily for watering livestock or consumed by villagers during the dry season and in times of drought, after mixing it with buttermilk and pearl millet flour/*bajra*.<sup>3</sup> Given the scarcity

of water and arid conditions, rainwater was stored in the underground water-tanks (locally termed as *tanka/kund*) for drinking and other household purposes. The villagers built these *tankas* by digging a hole of up to 300 feet deep, then plastering the opening with a layer of gypsum and ash (*rakh*) and covering with a wooden lid; water was stored for at least seven months in these *tankas*. During periods of water shortage, women and men would collect water from the *tankas*,<sup>4</sup> and this was mixed with brackish well water for the animals. Throughout pre-independence, even crops (like *bajra*, *guar*) were cultivated on the sandy tracts of the desert with the usage of camels for tilling and sowing seeds. In addition, camels were essential for migration and transportation to distant locations of the desert.

With the system of rainwater tanks the people were able to meet their drinking water needs to some extent, but for the requirements of their large herds of livestock they would seasonally migrate to other, more humid, areas. Depending on the intensity of the dry conditions, the movements ranged from days to months, to even a year. For these migrations, most of the communities maintained cordial socio-economic relations.



Remembering a migratory experience, an elderly Bishnoi man from Mankasar narrated that during one of the periods of *akaal* (drought), they migrated to the village Gegda (presently named 400 RD after the canal distributory crossing through it), a settlement near the main canal and lived there for a year with their entire family and livestock. Anyone in Mankasar with livestock would migrate,

and only a few elderly people were left behind. These migrations could be up to 70-80 km towards the western and north-western Bikaner as water in those areas was favourable for drinking. Also, based on the good socio-economic relations between the Bishnois and the inhabitants of

Poogal village, they were provided with land for temporary settlement, and were allowed to graze their livestock on the village pastures. Such associations maintained by communities during their migrations and exchanges across the desert have been completely destroyed in the present.

Before the Partition, the entire border region was open. There was a continuous flow of goods and people across the desert, including the states of Sindh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Punjab. These movements in the dry or drought periods were mainly towards humid and rain-fed areas with an aim to access the markets as well as grazing areas for livestock. The social, economic, and cultural life of the inhabitants was dependent on animals—cows for milk, goats for milk and meat, sheep for wool, and camels for transportation and milk. The elderly generations of Raika, Bishnoi, Meghwal, Kumhar and Rajput communities, residing in the desert for decades, narrated their subsistence on seasonal agriculture with predominant dependence on livestock products, such as milk, wool, and dung.<sup>5</sup> For instance, during the seven year long *Satkali* famine sheep wool was sold to the *baniyas* (merchants) who would sell it further in the nearby markets. In return, villagers received money which sustained them for at least 4-6 months. This pastoral relationship between animals and human beings in the desert areas of Thar is still remembered in the folkloric traditions, myths and memories of the elderly generations.

Caste-based distinctions between communities are an essential part of the pastoral lifestyle in these rural areas, visible in the daily lives of the communities as well

as their narratives of the past.<sup>6</sup> The camel, an essential part of Thar lifestyle, has also been symbolically used to maintain caste-based distinctions and social boundaries between communities. Since many of the communities, irrespective of their socio-cultural identity, bred camels and moved during the dry season, *daag* (branding) was used on the body of the camel to represent caste and

ownership. As narrated by Raika pastoralists, the unique mark on the body of a camel could be used to identify the community and village to which that camel belonged. This mark even helped people in tracing misplaced camels to their owners.

Rainwater tanks (*tankas*) and the symbolic marks on a camel body (*daag*) were the material representations of the pastoral culture/lifestyle of the Thar region. However, political, social, economic and environmental changes have led to the decline of dependency on these practices, leading to an identity crisis for pastoral communities. The crucial event which decimated the pastoral culture of the Thar-desert was the legal demarcation of India-Pakistan border in 1947 and the subsequent wire-fencing and militarisation of the border. This transformed the desert into the geo-politically sensitive border in western India. Such practices to maintain territorial security were accompanied by developmental policies, like the extension of irrigation canals in the region. With the construction of canal lines through the barren desert of Bikaner in the late 1980s, the Rajasthan state government aimed to encourage settled agriculture on the lands distributed to the people. However, with the restrictions on free movement of people and decline of pasture lands, settled agriculture emerged as the only source of livelihood for the pastoral communities. To encourage canal-based agriculture, the government allotted land to lower caste groups,<sup>7</sup> provided agriculture-related monetary subsidies for the construction of water-tanks in the fields and establishment of new markets for the sale of farm produce. Therefore, the restrictions on pastoral movements in search of pastures to nearby areas, militarisation of the region, and development of canal system, gradually led to the ruination of pastoralism, visible in the unused rainwater tanks in the fields and decline in the usage of caste-based symbols on the bodies of camels.

## Ruins of pastoralism: loss of culture and traditional livelihood

Conversations with elderly Raika pastoralists living near the India-Pakistan border, revealed that even after the Partition pastoralists attempted and struggled to maintain their traditional pastoral routes across the region. For instance, villagers who were unaware of the new cross-border legalities after Partition tried to move across the newly formed border to graze their animals and search for water resources. Some pastoralists were even able to develop close associations with the Indian Army on the border check-posts and were able to move across the border with their animals through permits issued by the Army. However, as told by elderly Raikas, this soon came to an end with the arrest of pastoralists by the Pakistani Army and eventually, the wars between India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971 led to the complete fencing of the western border in the late 1990s, thereby restricting all cross-border movements. The pastoralists responded to these restrictions by altering their migratory routes to fertile areas within India. However, even these movements declined with the decrease in pasture areas as a result of land settlement policies of the Rajasthan government, extension of the Indira Gandhi Canal, and a prolonged series of droughts and famines within the region. Also, since the 1980s, the grazers (now confined to a few pastoral groups) were required to obtain permits from the *panchayat* (local civic bodies) and police to cross regional state borders with their animals. Gradually, all kinds of mobilities and cross-border interactions of the people across the desert came to an end. Meanwhile, between 1960 and 1980, there occurred a series of droughts and famines in western Rajasthan. During this period, the government provided necessities like food, water and medicines, however, no such measures were taken for animals which decimated the livestock population of the pastoralists and the villagers alike (as narrated by pastoralists residing in western Bikaner). In addition, road construction and the canal development project was initiated by the government with an objective to provide employment and means of livelihood to the inhabitants through settled agriculture. Indira Gandhi Canal, one of the most significant development projects, was extended from Ganganagar district in the north-west to three western border districts of Rajasthan, i.e., Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Barmer, and by the late 1980s canal water was supplied to the villages of western Bikaner.<sup>8</sup> With such initiatives, villagers with a pastoral lifestyle were encouraged towards canal-based agriculture

and a sedentary way of life. They were encouraged to work either as labourers or practice agriculture with the canal water. The construction of the canal and people's dependence on it has transformed the traditional pastoral lifestyle and the culture of livestock-keeping in the region.

Today, the majority of the population is dependent on agriculture in the fields allotted through summary settlement by the Rajasthan government.<sup>9</sup> Movements with animals remain confined to some pastoralist families, and only for shorter distances. With social, political and economic changes, pastoralists are forced to keep very small groups of animals only within the range of their village area. Instead, all communities irrespective of their socio-cultural identity as pastoral groups are engaged in agriculture. While reminiscing about their movements across the desert with large flocks of animals and livestock production, many of the elderly Raika pastoralists narrated that, due to the shortage of canal water and rainfall, agriculture in the desert was not as successful compared to their former practices of migratory livestock rearing. However, with no other livelihood alternative, they can only remember their past life and live amidst the ruins of pastoralism. The old empty rainwater tanks in their fields continuously remind them of their mobility and socio-cultural pastoral relations. The remembrance of a past life illustrates the emotional and psychological forms of ruin ingrained in their daily and cultural life, which will have a long-lasting impact even on their future generations.

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### Notes

- 1 Dependency on camels and sheep has been associated with their socio-cultural identity. The claims on traditional identity are often observed in the oral narratives, and folkloric histories of the Rajasthan state. For instance, in the folklores of Panjir, Gogaji, Tejaji and Pabuji of Rajasthan, the saints who are also worshipped as local deities have been presented as the protectors of cattle (cow in the case of Gogaji and camel by Pabuji), a saviour of mankind and pastoral wealth, and as one who sacrificed life for protection of livestock; see Kumar, M. 2014. 'Adaptations to Climatic Variability: Irrigation and Settlement Patterns in Early Medieval Rajasthan', *The Medieval History Journal* 17(1):57-86.
- 2 For instance, villagers would exchange wool, ghee (butter), and pearl millet with shop owners, to meet their needs of alternative goods such as clothes, jaggery, sugar, oil, and other household items. The shop owners would then sell those exchanged goods in the market for money.
- 3 In Barsalpur village, there were two saltwater wells, the water of which was used for livestock on a rotational basis. The village elders along with Barsalpur Rav (Thakur) would organise a meeting in which villagers who owned animals were assigned a day for using the well water as per their total number of animals. According to the system, villagers who moved with their animals in the nearby areas (termed as *khod* by locals) would return to the village wells every 2-3 days to water their animals on their assigned day.
- 4 Men would carry water in huge bags loaded on the back of a camel. With the coming of the wooden cart in the 1950s, water was transported in big plastic water tanks. Those plastic tanks were later replaced with iron water tanks.
- 5 The dung of animals was used as fertilizer.
- 6 Some members of Meghwal community mentioned caste based hierarchies in the usage of water from the *tankas*.
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- 8 Idem.
- 9 Land of twenty-five *bigha* was allotted to each household.



Daag on a camel's body (Photo credits: Neha Meena, 2017).



# Ruins of living and dead in the Himalayan borderlands

Uttam Lal and Charisma K. Lepcha

While ruins might appear to be mere physical sights of decay and disintegration, they are much more than that. Every ruin is a witness to its own cycle of life and death and the entire gamut of processes which encompass socio-political and economic events in an area. Ruins can be unique yet interconnected and share commonalities; tangible as well as intangible through the passage of time. As humans are in a continuous state of movement, societies have been in a contiguous pursuit of constructing and deserting the signs of their cultural traits. Thus, the formation of ruins is unceasing and revealing of the past. This essay looks at the tangible and intangible ruins of the Western and Eastern Himalayas.



Memorial cairns above Roghi Village in Kinnaur (photo by Uttam Lal, 2019).

As one moves along Runang-Kanda, a high-altitude pasture above the tree-line in Kinnaur district of Indian Western Himalaya, one is almost certain to be startled by the sheer scale of the remains of cattle carcasses strewn amid abandoned and dilapidated stone houses in this area. What is even more astonishing is the addition of newer skeletal remains of domestic animals every year. A closer look suggests that the carcasses are mostly of younger animals. Naturally one would wonder why there are so many deaths at one place and what happened to the stone houses and agricultural terraces present there? Is it some kind of peculiar site or is it just what ruins look like?

The harsh environmental conditions of the Himalayas have resulted in a fragile ecology in which seasonal upkeep of man-made structures, such as houses, animal sheds, temples, monasteries, agricultural fields, and so forth, is required on a regular basis. As people move away from the area, due to either social, political or environmental factors, or even a combination of all of these, such physical structures are destroyed by environmental events like avalanches, flash-floods, landslides, and incrementally by seasonal and diurnal freeze and thaw, which acts upon these structures with variable degrees depending upon the location.

Temperature and precipitation patterns have undergone considerable changes in the last few hundred years, and have directly influenced the growing season, thereby limiting

the carrying capacity of the area. The impact of climate change is magnified manifold in the fragile Himalayan highlands. Throughout history, since its creation 50 million years ago, this mountain system has undergone periods of cooling and warming. Warming led to the retreat of Himalayan glaciers, which exposed newer and higher areas suitable for human activities, while cooling led to glaciers advancing down to lower levels impacting the growing seasons and rendering higher human settlements largely untenable. Thus, the climatic fluctuations in the area's geological history shepherded human migration across different passes and valleys, from higher to relatively lower altitudes. As people responded to the rhythms of the climatic events, newer villages were created, and older ones were abandoned.

## Mental maps as intangible ruins

When people moved they transmitted ideas, imaginations, technologies, rituals and habits from one place to another. Across this journey of time and space, people preserved

and remembered these changes through rituals and legends associated with certain areas and places; while at many other such sites, signs of human inhabitation simply got lost in the passage of time. Ruins are not mere residuals of man-made structures; they also include narratives and histories, which

## Ruins are not mere residuals of man-made structures; they also include narratives and histories ...

continue to exist as legends and folktales in an area. These oral histories often stitch together trails, rituals, lifestyle and space-relations of societies, which underwent cartographic readjustments. With the passage of time many trails, rituals, stories of linkages and flow become few. With every passing generation certain details of the legend get lost, while some tales about a place and the people who lived there survive despite the trail being abandoned long ago.

Narratives about societies and linkages can be considered intangible aspects of ruins. Nearly every highland village talks of certain routes that earlier generations traversed, but have since been abandoned owing to the changing socio-economic and environmental conditions leading to the gradual dissipation of local knowledge, history and belief systems. While material traces of the existence of a place might disappear over time, spatial

information is not a requisite for the mental map of a place; it is sufficient to just 'know of' the place and not where it is. A mental map is an intangible aspect of a culture; the passage of time often produces intangible ruins of physical and non-physical institutions that cannot be seen or touched.

With the emergence of newer nation states in the 19th century, the contiguous geographical landscape of the Himalayas was fragmented by different political borders. The partition of India in 1947 and the India-China war in 1962 limited the movement of people, animals and materials across the Himalaya. Concerns around border security brought roads to remote parts of the Himalayas which in turn led to the rapid socio-economic transformation of these areas. Nonetheless, people still remember and reminisce of forests, lakes, pastures, rocks of trails and certain rituals their ancestors followed. As an old man in his late 80s from Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh) stated, "as a young boy, I never knew of borders. Then suddenly all sorts of people started showing up on our land and created strange boundaries in the name of district, states and nation, forcing us to live a fragmented life amid ruins of our heritage". Not all generations could adapt to the newer socio-political realities; those who witnessed sudden transformations to their lives and livelihoods remain haunted by it, while for the rest, it has become a mere part of some shared past that might someday be used as a rallying point for political mileage.



## Corridor of death

Roghi-Kanda and Runang-Kanda are contiguous alpine grasslands overlooking the majestic Kinnaur-Kailash range across the Satluj valley in Himachal Pradesh, India. These pastures are located along the mountain ridge that formed a part of the old Hindustan-Tibet road, a pony trail suturing numerous high-altitude villages and pasturelands, which used to enjoy bustling seasonal foot-fall of shepherds, pilgrims, traders, etc. However, with the coming of roads the cross-border trade eventually came to a near halt and the mountainous trails were no longer frequented as the pastoral lifestyle was traded off for more sedentary livelihoods. Occasionally villagers would make a journey up to these pastures along with their domestic animals and leave them there on their own for a few months to graze and roam the pastures and nearby forests. Towards the end of autumn, adult animals would begin their journey down to the valley and the village on their own. Households were aligned to the rhythm of nature; they would carve out agricultural terraces, tend to their herds and raise a single crop of buckwheat, potato, peas, etc. during their high-altitude summer sojourn, for a few weeks to a few months every year. However, as their dependence on animal husbandry decreased so did the relevance of these animals.

The younger animals often need a few years to learn to make the journey down the hills on their own. Until recently villagers would normally go up to the pasture to herd the younger animals down before the onset of winter. However, since agricultural practices have changed, young male cattle are left on their own as they are not required even as beasts of burden in the new economic system. As these animals are too young to learn the necessary strategies to cope with harsh Himalayan winters, every year large numbers perish to hypothermia and wild hunters like wolves and leopards. As a result of decades of disuse and lack of maintenance, agricultural terraces and houses are slowly being reclaimed by nature and what lies amid the ruins are the bones and hides of these abandoned animals. The change in the economic landscape of the area brought a considerable shift in how people frequent the valleys and higher pastures. While the remains of animals and dilapidated houses are part of tangible ruins, space relation of people through such pastures constitutes a form of intangible heritage.

Along the pastures above villages like Kalpa, Pangi, and Roghi on way to Runan-Kanda, are a series of cairns at a nearby ridge. Cairns are human-stacked piles of stones assembled as a part of burial rituals, popular across the Himalayas. These cairns are often located at about 3500 meters or above, as a memorial tomb for departed family members. Every year, during the *Dukhraini* (festival of mourning) at least one family member visits the cairn to pay their respects to their departed family members. The annual rituals of *Dukhraini* can at best be understood as intangible ruins of the tangible remains-cairns, which have become a way of acknowledging and honouring the ancestors and their history in these highlands.

These cairns were erected at vantage points on the ridge; often used as geographical markers by those who would frequent these heights and usually indicated proximity to a settlement. However, as societies have become more sedentary and changed in how they move and interact, such landscapes often present a confusing picture of a valley of ruins and death and are often not well understood. Although these ruins are often not well preserved, they nonetheless offer significant insights into how people lived, consumed and interacted centuries ago. For instance, a common practice among highlander families was to accord clan/group identities based on place of origin and direction of their movements. Thus, these tangible ruins of cairns along with their location amalgamated with intangible ruins, such as trail patterns and movements, and became socially institutionalized.

3000 kilometres further east of Kinnaur lies the Dibang valley in the Eastern Himalayas, home of the Mishmi indigenous group. Like many other highland communities, Mishmis are trans-border people living on both sides of the India-China border. They live in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Yunnan province of China. In comparison to most other trans-border communities of the Himalayas, the Mishmi are unique as they are not connected through trade and pilgrimage but rather through death. Majority of the Mishmi still follow their own indigenous religion and, as per their belief system, a Mishmi soul travels back to their original home which is their place of origin. Incidentally, the place of their origin is believed to be across the border in TAR and Yunnan province. Their religious priests [*Igu*] still facilitate in this death ritual,

in which the journey of the departed soul is sent back to the place of origin, treading the same trails their ancestors took to reach the homes of the living. However, cross-border government policies have brought about changes that have led to the gradual decline of socio-religious institutions like the *Igu*. Nonetheless, despite the tremendous social economic transformations on either side of the border, priests on the Indian side still perform *Igu* rituals and services for Chinese Mishmi. Chinese Mishmi find ingenious ways to send money and the names of their dead relatives, mostly through locals who go hunting in areas where borders are undefined and who occasionally bump into Indian Mishmis. Owing to the contemporary border realities of India and China, valleys and ridges of the Mishmis have been fragmented, constituting an intangible ruin of Mishmi cultural landscape.

## Not just what we are left with

The geo-politics between India and China have obviously taken their toll on cross-border cultural linkages of the Mishmis. However, a prominent face from the community, Jibi Phulu, summed up the situation of his community as follows: "I am a proud Indian as long as I am alive. The day I die I am a Chinese". Mr. Phulu is well aware of the dangers of being misunderstood by some individuals, but the trans-border Mishmis have been forced to come to terms with the contemporary political realities. Like many other highlanders, they negotiate this uncertain geo-political terrain with their social mental maps of cultural similarities on both sides of the border. These mental maps are nothing but intangible ruins of a community.

In the Western Himalayas, excavation during road-broadening works unearthed many sites of cist-burials. Locally they were believed to be Muslim graves or graves of Kashmiri people. Accordingly, Kinnauras referred to these as *Kha-che Rom-khan*. However, scientific studies revealed that some of these graves predated Islam, and the buried bodies shared morphological and genetic proximities with Central-Asian people. This shed light on the ancient space-relation and cultural linkages of the Western Himalayas with Central-Asia. Despite being a site of tangible ruins, the cist-burials of Himachal Pradesh are also

a form of a mental-map that has been reshaped over centuries through the oral histories of different groups of communities living in the region. For instance, based on conjecture, the locals started to refer to the cist-burial sites of the central Asian people as Muslim or Kashmiri graves. Only a more nuanced scientific study of these ruins established their linkages to Central Asia beyond doubt, thereby indicating pre-existing cross-border interactions of these Himalayan highlands. Similar road construction and widening activities along Hangrang river in Himachal Pradesh have led to the further disintegration of the caves used by Buddhists monks for their retreats. Nevertheless, the ruins of the caves have been part of unequivocal mental-maps of space relation with Tibet in the context of trade and pilgrimage.

Mental-maps often contradict official maps and may or may not depend on the presence of physical ruins. In the Eastern Himalayan state of Sikkim and neighbouring North Bengal, the ruins of a few forts of the indigenous Lepcha group can be traced from Sikkim's capital Gangtok. These ruins of forts were of no significance until recently when some Hindu *trishuls* [tridents] were erected and Lepchas made their "bid for entitlement", making these ruins "epicentres of renewed claims". Similarly, another ruin of a prominent Lepcha fort in Kalimpong district of West Bengal holds the memory and claims of the supposedly last Lepcha king in the region. These ruins, of what is supposed to be the queen's bath, prayer room and the horse stable, are recalled through oral narratives of the Lepchas, although these specificities are not found in official historical records, which only mention the fort in the region.

There are numerous other Lepcha forts located at vantage points of ridges telling the history of a people, who despite being known as the oldest inhabitants of the region, hardly occupy a reasonable space in the written history of Sikkim. Much of Sikkim's history revolves around the Namgyal dynasty, and therefore these ruins are a vignette into the possible histories of other ethnic groups living in the region. Interestingly, the consecration of a blood pact between Lepchas and Bhutias took place at Kabi (West Sikkim) where Mount Kanchenjunga was invoked and "stones were erected at the spot to mark the event". These stones, as "megalithic structures of antiquity", can still be found as ruins of the "historic landmark", which paved the way for the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim in 1642.

Across the Himalayas, we see different forms and roles of ruins – both tangible and intangible – that allow us to identify and examine the nature of ruins. The above examples from the Western to Eastern Himalayas are indicative of how ruins are not what we are left with, but that what we make of them is what aids us in our understanding of our existence today.

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### Notes

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Below: Ancient Meditation caves near Tabo, Himachal Pradesh. Top right: Ruins at Kabi, Sikkim. Bottom right: Ruins at Runankanda in Himachal Pradesh. (All photos by Uttam Lal, 2019).





# Hardening porousness

## Borderization and abandonment among the borderland ruins of Abkhazia

Mikel Venhovens

When driving through the Abkhazian borderland region of Gal(i), one cannot help but notice the numerous ruined buildings that lay scattered throughout the green hilly landscape. Few people live in this stretch of land, as many of the former residents – ethnic Mingrelians, an ethnic Georgian subgroup – fled during the last part of the war due to the fear of repercussions by Abkhazians and fighters from the Northern Caucasus. These buildings serve as tangible reminders of the violent episodes that occurred during the 1990's, starting with the Abkhazian-Georgian war of 1992-1993, after which Abkhazia declared its independence from Georgia, which was then left in a state of limbo and isolation as no other member of the international community recognized Abkhazia as a sovereign state. It was not until August 2008, just after the Russian-Georgian war, that the Russian Federation, together with Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru and since 2018 Syria, recognized the Republic of Abkhazia, while the rest of the world still sees Abkhazia as an integral part of the Republic of Georgia.



The Abkhazian border checkpoint as seen from the Inguri Bridge (Photo by Mikel Venhovens, 2018).

Since then, the contrast between the Gal(i) landscape and the surrounding borderlands has been increasingly noticeable. It seems as if time stood still in the Gal(i) district, while the Western part of Abkhazia has seen considerable improvements in regard to infrastructure and renovation of buildings, mainly thanks to the financial aid provided by the Russian Federation after 2008. However, the most eastern part of the Gal(i) district, namely the stretch of land bordering the Inguri river, which acts like the natural division between Georgia proper and Abkhazia, has seen significant changes over the last ten years. Since then, a borderization process has been underway, which has upgraded the border in both bureaucratic and material ways. Before 2008, the border regime was notably more fluid, as cross border movement of persons and goods was made possible through several formal and more informal procedures. Today the installation of barbed wire, guard posts, and the Russian Federation taking control of the borderline, have hardened the border substantially.

The contrast between the ruined hinterlands and the 'upgraded' borderline is striking. It illustrates the nation-state building efforts of the Abkhazian Republic, now strengthened by the support provided by the Russian Federation since 2008, while the Gal(i) district populated by the Georgian minority is being left behind and virtually untouched, leaving them in an abandoned and disenfranchised position. The ruined untouched landscape of the Gal(i) region together with the hardened border are

(re)constructed structures that are situated in a highly politicized landscape where the past meets both the present and future.

In the case of the Abkhazian borderlands, the Georgian minority living in the borderlands are often seen as outcasts, the losing remnants of the War of 1992-93. The Abkhaz were the victors, and the disjointed power relations that were installed after the war between the two groups continue to live on both in a social and spatial way.

### Reading conflict through space: the politics of materiality and mobility

The people in the Gal(i) region live their everyday life among ruins. The burned-out buildings that scatter the landscape, the roads that have not been maintained since 1991 and other neglected infrastructures are the physical reminders of the war, but maybe even more, of the current situation in which they find themselves. When moving 10 kilometers to the east, the infrastructure changes. The road that starts at the Abkhazian-Russian border and ultimately leads all the way to the Inguri river border crossing, was renovated in 2016 and could now be considered to be one of the best roads in the region (speeding on this renovated road is considered one of the main reasons for the significant increase in traffic accidents in Abkhazia, as drivers do not have to watch out for potholes anymore). Alongside this road, which was paid for by financial aid provided

by the Russian Federation, the only well-maintained building that can be seen when driving towards the Inguri river is the newly built Russian military base. The road abruptly ends at the Abkhazian checkpoint, where numerous taxis and buses stand waiting for people coming from the other side.

The Abkhazian checkpoint/border has seen a tremendous change over the last 10 years. From being a heavy militarized checkpoint and frontline, including gun emplacements and concrete barricades, it has now been transformed into a 'proper' border. Pillboxes and turrets have been replaced by sterile metal containers from which passport control is carried out by the Russian Federation. Waiting lines have been installed and the overall feeling at the checkpoint is more 'clean' and 'official' than before 2008.

Changes can also very much be observed along the Inguri river as the material demarcation of the Abkhazian state border has increasingly changed the landscape. The riverbanks have been populated by various forms of state materiality, such as barbed wire, guard posts and radio towers that are installed with cameras in order to keep an eye on the borderlands. Furthermore, Russian military patrols along the Inguri River are frequent in order to stop people from crossing the river, which is considered illegal by the Abkhazian government.

An interesting paradox is the fact that it is the Russian Federation and not the Abkhazian government itself that has taken the responsibility for the border control; they

are providing the manpower, bureaucracy, technology and materials. The function of this 'hardening' of the border is first of all, a practical one, as it gives control to the joint Abkhazian-Russian authorities over the border. The movement of persons and goods is regulated by funneling them through the main crossing point at the Inguri bridge crossing. The main aim, besides preventing smuggling, has been the regulation of the movement of persons. The return of Georgian Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to Abkhazia has been a pressing issue since the end of the war. While the actual numbers of returning IDPs have been quite limited, the issue has been used very frequently in political discourse. Many Abkhazian politicians have warned against the 'Georgianization' of Abkhazia, as this might result in "losing sovereignty and territorial integrity" that eventually would result in Abkhazia 'exploding' from within.<sup>2</sup> This stance and rhetoric have also been a significant focus of the current President of Abkhazia, Raul Khajimba, during whose term the Abkhazian passports of most ethnic Georgians of the Gal(i) region were revoked as they were deemed to have illegally been handed out.

In addition to the IDPs, the enhanced borderization process also structurally limits the mobility of the current Gal(i) residents who still have very strong social/communal links with the Zugdidi district on the other side of the river. The elderly have to get their pension on Tbilisi controlled territory, several children living in the Gal(i) district take their education in the Zugdidi district, the marketplace in Zugdidi is both a considerable source of income as well as for buying products, and even family members are separated because they live either side of the border.

In the case of the Inguri border, it severs the Georgian Mingrelians living in the Gal(i) district from Georgia proper. By dissecting the Gal(i) community from the other side of the Inguri River, they are placed in a state of isolation and abandonment. Spatially isolated from Georgia, socially dissociated from the rest of Abkhazia. This state of isolation and abandonment will have significant repercussions for the near and long future; for example, the youths who take their university degrees in either Zugdidi or Tbilisi are often not open to returning to Gal(i), as the opportunities to build a life there are decreasing significantly.

Besides this practical function, the strengthening of a border both in a bureaucratic and spatial way, is also a performative act that demonstrates certain political claims. In the case of Abkhazia it portrays the sovereignty claim of the Abkhazian Republic and the end of the war that resulted in the independence of the Abkhazian state. This is further reinforced





One of the many ruined houses in the border town of Gal(i) that were abandoned after the war (Photo by Mikel Venhovens, 2018).

through the officialization and normalization of the Inguri River checkpoint by referring to it as the 'State border'.

This is in sheer contrast to the discourse of the Georgian authorities in Tbilisi. They refer to the border as the Administrative Border Line (ABL) as they still see Abkhazia as part of Georgia. They still refer to the conflict as a 'frozen conflict', indicating that conflict and war is ongoing. This is why the Georgian side of the river is heavily militarized with pillboxes, a checkpoint and a small military outpost manned by forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. This side of the river is kept as informal as possible. At the police checkpoint, there is only a passport check for foreigners while Georgian citizens can freely pass through to the Abkhazian side of the river. This is due to the fact that for the Georgian authorities, when crossing the Inguri River you are not leaving Georgian territory. Issues arise when people enter or leave Abkhazia to/from the Russian Federation, as you will have then entered/left Georgia illegally.

This manifestation of discursive and spatial discourses is not only performed at the border but also on road signs throughout Georgia. When travelling towards the west of Georgia, Sukhumi (the capital of Abkhazia) shows up on highway signs as if it is simply a city further down the road. A city that is easily accessible. This while most Georgians will never be allowed to actually travel there. What becomes evident here is how a variety of spatialities is

co-implicated in complex ways. The example of the Inguri crossing point and the road signs illustrates these complexities, as authorities deploy imaginaries and practices that, while centered on place-making ('Sukhumi is home'), at the same time (re)works mobility ('Sukhumi is accessible') and scale ('Sukhumi is part of the state of Georgia'). By creating an atmosphere in which nothing has changed and by deploying a spatial politics of 'wholeness' and 'accessibility', these road signs reinforce the discourse of an Abkhazia that is still under Georgian authority.<sup>3</sup> Materialities, such as road signs, walls, barbed wire and checkpoints are the physical facts created on the ground that convey either the narrative of partition or the wholeness of a territory. In reality, the Georgian authorities have no formal control over Abkhazia at all, and the ethnic Georgians left in the Gal(i) border region are caught between a rock and a hard place.

### The physical neglect of the Gal(i) district illustrates the post-conflict power relations amidst a 'victor' and a 'losing' party.

#### Abandonment among ruins

The sheer scale of human displacement and dispossession during and after the war of 1991-92 radically transformed the landscape of Abkhazia. In the western regions, the Georgian population fled during an immense ethnic cleansing campaign, during which an estimated 20,000-30,000 civilians were killed and between 200,000 and 232,000 fled across either the Caucasus mountains or the Inguri river to uncontested Georgian territory. Of these, only roughly 40,000 ethnic Georgians have found their way back to their homes in Abkhazia, primarily in the Gal(i) region.

The physical neglect of the Gal(i) district illustrates the post-conflict power relations amidst a 'victor' and a 'losing' party. Especially with the backing of the Russian Federation, which ensures the safety and sovereignty of the semi-recognized Abkhazian state, the Abkhazian authorities have been increasingly more confident in imposing limitations on the political rights and movement of the Gal(i) population. Before 2008, the Abkhazian authorities lacked a firm control over the Gal(i) district, due to lack of knowhow and manpower, but also due to the presence of several Georgian

paramilitary guerilla troops that contested the Abkhazian authorities.<sup>4</sup> These often-criminal groups controlled the district firmly through violence and intimidation of not only Abkhaz residents, but also the Georgian

population. Killings and kidnappings were frequent occurrences during the 1990s and early 2000s. This unstable situation came to an end after 2008, when Georgian troops left the Kodori Gorge, north of the Gal(i) district, and the Russian Federation took full control over the Inguri border. Since then the Abkhazian government has tightened control over the Gal(i) district, without necessarily improving the living conditions of the local population. The ethnic Georgian population is not allowed to possess an Abkhazian passport. Since 2018, a process has started in which foreign nationals who reside in Abkhazia for more than one year can apply for a residence permit. This permit gives them the right to reside in Abkhazia and to move in and out of the country freely, but does not allow them to vote, buy or sell property or participate in elections on any level, including local elections.

From a material perspective, there are ruins scattered across the district, left behind by ethnic Georgians who fled the numerous violent episodes during the 1990s and 2000s. The ruins that can be found both in the urban and rural areas of Gal(i) are striking to foreign visitors, as they have heard and/or read about the war and the violent events that occurred. The 20-year-old war becomes tangible as the aftermath can be clearly seen through the ruined and abandoned buildings.

The normalization of the situation and material state of the district has had 20 years to settle in, so now most of the locals merely shrug when asked about the state in which many buildings appear. They refer to the people who used to live in the once typical Georgian two-story buildings. Their friendly neighbors, the tomatoes and cucumbers that they used to grow in the back garden, or the kids who used to play on the street. After the joyful memories comes a heavy sigh, which is almost always followed by a sentence along the lines of: "But the war made them go. They had to leave it behind. Now they live in Tbilisi/Zugdidi and we are still here". Some people who fled the Gal(i) district have been able to temporarily return to visit their former homes, mostly on a 'tourist visa' through invitation by family members that still live in Abkhazia. The normalization of the material dereliction is striking. The local population has become used to it, has occasionally even added to the deterioration by stripping houses of certain materials, and now only the stories and the memories are left behind.

The ruination of the Gal(i) district and its material remains serve as 'phantomic' reminders of the people that fled to Georgia proper and were not able to return after the violence ended.<sup>5</sup> Most of the IDPs now live in Georgia proper and are unable to move back; but those who did return to Gal(i) or who stayed in the first place, are now left behind with just the memories, not knowing what became of their neighbors, in a way trapped in the past. Pieris puts it well in her research on ruins of the Sri Lankan Civil War: "The ruination of home and its residual materialities signify a state of exile of a community alienated through violent dispossession from spaces in which they have deep ontological roots".<sup>6</sup>

#### Conclusion

The exterior territorial membrane of a national entity, its border, is being hardened through the establishment of multiple forms of material and bureaucratic division in order to create facts on the ground and therefore legitimize its existence in a material way. This is the case with internationally recognized

states, especially during certain episodes of crisis, but even more so with entities that are not internationally recognized, as creating facts on the ground is an existential need in order to legitimize its existence. The focal point for the strengthening, renovating and improvement of Abkhazian statehood therefore focuses on that border, while in the hinterland lie the ruins, the aftermath and the continuous porousness of the Abkhazian state. The situation for the Gal(i) residents seems to be at a standstill, they are in limbo because their presence in the borderlands is deemed to be the existential threat to Abkhazian nationhood. Ruins scattered throughout the landscape are 'phantomic' reminders of both the violent past, as well as the exclusivity of the Gal(i) region in the present.

Underlying this approach is an understanding of power not as something that is 'owned' by certain actors but as 'relational': as a strategic complex relation they are in. Enforced by historical narratives that are being reified through socio-spatial processes, the post-violent conflict situation in the Gal(i) borderlands is being cemented through the strengthening of a semi-recognized border and the dereliction and abandonment of the hinterlands.

This article shows how certain 'stories' and narratives materialize in concrete and tangible entities with spatial properties, which in turn have an impact on the population living in a peculiar post-conflict environment. I am interested particularly in the story of contested statehood, and an understanding of the state as an imagined entity that exists only by virtue of it being performed (statehood as practice) and spatialized (statehood as materiality) and how the established power relations can then be read throughout the hinterlands of the Abkhazian borderlands.

The memory of violent episodes is not just embedded in narratives and testimonies, but also inscribed onto space in a variety of settings. Barbed wire, checkpoints, potholes in the road and ruined homes. Through strengthening and crumbling, these forms of spatiality scattered through the landscape act both as scars, reminders of past events and the establishment of a new status quo. Yet, underneath these socio-spatial material power relations are the stories of lost friends and families of whom they are reminded every time they leave their house and walk among those ruins.

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#### Notes

- 1 In this article, I will use the term 'border' to address the division between Abkhazia and Georgia proper. This in order to be as neutral as possible, as the usage of 'state border' or 'Administrative Border Line' are too biased towards certain parties. By using the term 'border' I therefore refer to material division that separates the semi-recognized state of Abkhazia from the territory fully under control by the Republic of Georgia. This article does therefore not take any stance in regard to the status of Abkhazia.
- 2 Vartanyan, O. 2014. 'Thousands of Georgians in Abkhazia Facing Being Struck Off Voters List', *Civil Georgia*; <https://tinyurl.com/cgAbkhazia>
- 3 Demmers, J. & Venhovens, M. 2016. 'Bluffing the State: Spatialities of Contested Statehood in the Abkhazian-Georgian Conflict', in Björkdahl, A. & S. Buckley-Zistel (eds) 2016. *Spatializing Peace and Conflict*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.159-177.
- 4 Oltramonti, G. P. 2016. 'Securing disenfranchisement through violence and isolation: the case of Georgians/Mingrelians in the district of Gali', *Conflict, Security & Development* 16(3):245-262.
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# Boomtown in ruins: Ordos and ruination

Max Woodworth



Abandoned buildings in Ordos, China: semi-finished luxury housing estate in Kangbashi New District (left) and office buildings in downtown Dongsheng District (right). (Photos by Max Woodworth).

In the 2000s, China's economy grew at an average annual rate of nearly 7 percent.<sup>1</sup> Recent talk of a 'new normal' foresees slightly slower growth rates closer to 6 percent extending into the medium-term future – a rapid pace when compared with other large industrial economies historically. Within this broad growth picture, cities and their metropolitan regions have grown even faster, acting as the engines of the national economy. Central to all this metropolitan growth was a frenzy of urban construction of all types: private housing, office spaces, retail centers, roads, subways, parks, and so on. As any casual observer of Chinese cities can readily note, urban construction has been the order of the day for quite some time, and it drives local economies.

This is also borne out by the numbers: between 2003 and 2014, over 300 million square meters of housing was added across China.<sup>2</sup> In most municipalities, property development and construction has accounted for nearly 40 percent of local GDP and fixed-asset investment during this period. Correspondingly, home prices have surged astronomically. The average per-square meter cost for private housing in Beijing, for example, is now US\$6,000, roughly half of the average household annual income.<sup>3</sup> Given the rise in property prices, the sector has become a vibrant arena of speculation for the wealthy and fortunate, with property ownership now effectively separating the haves from the have-nots in urban China.

## Energy boomtowns

While the growth of mega-cities on the eastern seaboard garners the most attention, a number of less-known cities of the central and western regions grew even faster than their eastern peers. Foremost among this subset of cities are energy resource boomtowns that have thrived off intensified resource exploitation. Ordos in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region exemplifies western China's energy boomtowns. Economic expansion in the city surged on the basis of rising energy demand and national energy policy favoring expanded production in a small number of locales concentrated in Western China. The urban component of boomtown growth was driven by forces familiar across all of China's cities, specifically, local leaders' encouragement of land and property development as a way to provide a source of extra-budgetary, and therefore wholly locally retained, municipal revenue and the use of urban growth projects of all sorts to spur economic growth. Private demand for properties also played a key role in driving growth. What distinguished Ordos in the 2000s has been the volatile combination of a burgeoning resource sector and surging urban development.<sup>4</sup> Investors from near and far sensed opportunities in the context of a resource boom and poured massive investments into real estate, triggering a frenzy of construction and igniting a speculative growth process

as buyers and sellers led an upward spiral of prices that decoupled supply and demand from any reasonable assessment of the use value of properties. Prices rose steadily from the early 2000s until finally coming to a halt around 2011. The causes of the sudden end to rising prices are disputed and hard to trace with certainty. However, contributing to the demise of Ordos' housing sector was a confluence of the following factors around 2011: declines in coal prices at the time, rising concerns that Beijing would soon move to aggressively attempt to reduce the growth rate in the use of fossil fuels, excess capacity in the coal sector, a roll-back of post-2008 stimulus programs, enforcement of stricter limits on property purchases, the simultaneous collapse of multiple Ponzi-type schemes funding much of the urban construction and home purchases. Whatever the causal forces of the crash, by mid-2011 Ordos' urbanized areas were dotted with empty and abandoned projects as financing and buyers and sellers disappeared from the market. In plain terms, Ordos was convulsed by enormous speculative property bubbles and suffered a severe, but localized, economic crash.

## Modern ruins

The uninhabited luxury villa compounds and vacated construction sites that still litter the landscapes of Ordos nearly ten years later reverberate recent debates about modern ruins and ruination.<sup>5</sup> The 'modern ruins' of capitalist development arise, Edensor notes, as waves of investment wash over places and then recede, leaving behind the detritus of industrial progress.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the creative destruction of capitalism produces ruins in formerly buzzing sites like Detroit or Manchester or Fordlandia, and does so on a continual basis in new places. As such, various types of 'new ruins' provide material reminders of the perpetual reproduction of destruction that is at the center of capital accumulation. Yet unlike erstwhile thriving spaces that have fallen to ruin, the ruinous landscapes of Ordos were never fully populated; a great number of newly built homes, storefronts, and offices were never used. Yet nearly all units in completed projects had, in fact, been purchased on a speculative

basis. The ruins of urban projects in Ordos thus speak less to industrial capitalism and its precarious territorialization than to essential problems of time and value in the production of built environments through financial speculation. The city's ruins might be regarded as referents of what Stoler refers to as the temporal and material process of 'ruination'.<sup>7</sup>

In a variety of settings, the central role of finance has been noted in driving the speculative property bubbles of the twenty-first century. Ordos was no exception. However, the particular modes of finance that arose in the city were crucial to the specificity of its urban growth patterns – and to an understanding of how urban growth followed a decidedly ruinous course. Of special importance here were the tangled networks of informal finance that fed off rising incomes in the city and promised to mobilize savings toward high-profit sectors. As elsewhere in China, the property sector in Ordos offered abundant opportunities to see rapid returns. Moreover, with the resource sector effectively closed to all but the largest institutional investors given the scale of necessary investments and with local industry and commerce constrained by small population and geographical isolation, local residents sought outlets for savings other than bank accounts where officially set interest rates were lower than local inflation. Numerous forms of non-bank lending evolved in response, including micro-lending operations, pawn shops, underground banks, rotating savings and credit associations, and outright pyramid schemes. While each such mode of financing offered different terms, all featured high interest rates and short repayment schedules. It thus followed, that with such schemes mediating private savings toward land and property development, the pace of growth in Ordos' property sector was fueled by the supply of high-interest fast financial capital and not by demand for the ever-growing stock of new properties. It was also clear that collusion and incompetence were salient elements of the bubble, as local officials joined the fray, leaning on loan officers in formal banks to extend credit to property developments, approving project after project, and engaging in risky borrowing and lending. By the time the bubble had burst in 2011, Ordos' built-up urban area had ballooned more than tenfold from roughly 25 square kilometers to 270 square kilometers. Among the registered urban population, surveys found the average household held ten properties.

The municipal government responded to the twin crises in the local property market and informal finance in three main ways. First, it established an ad hoc office in 2012 to sort through claims by billed lenders in informal lending networks. This entailed identifying borrowers and seizing their assets to compensate claimants. Second, municipal leaders applied pressure to local branches of state-run and commercial banks to extend loans to developers to keep the property market afloat. Neither approach restored Ordos' economic growth, which had been inflated by the property bubble. Between 2012 and 2017, Ordos was the slowest-growing municipality in Inner Mongolia. Third, municipal authorities opted to wait out the downturn. As one local official explained in an interview in 2014, "there

is nothing to do with all of these houses but wait until more people arrive, or see if another bubble will come". This sentiment was widely shared in the city, as owners of multiple homes reasoned that future children and migrants would eventually fill the thousands of unused properties. "Everyone jokes about Ordos being a 'ghost city'. But it's only just recently built. It's natural that it takes time for the people to arrive".

## Imagined futures

Such articulations of defiant optimism collected during fieldwork in the post-bubble years in Ordos contained a palpable resistance to the 'ghost city' narratives that the media used to characterize the city's development. That narrative has hinged on diagnosing Ordos' urban projects as useless excess now reduced to ruins. Fault for Ordos' 'failures', according to much reporting on 'ghost cities', is laid at the feet of greedy, naïve investors and venal provincial officials who unwisely allowed supply and demand to become decoupled. Yet, as local residents' rejection of such judgments suggests, the ruins that persist in the post-bubble moment index a more complicated set of realities. Indeed, a fixation on the absence of evident use values in the uninhabited built environments underpins the commonplace negative assessments of 'ghost cities'. Moreover, it ignores how the financialization of the urbanization process brings forward in time the accumulation of surplus and is sustained by admixtures of hope and delusion, the essential and time-honored lubricants of capitalism. One need look no further than Wall Street to find a contemporary example in the so-called 'advanced industrialized countries'.

Viewed outside the frame of failure that shadows the ghost city trope, Ordos' abandoned and uninhabited cityscapes thus present object lessons in ruination *qua* accumulation. The ruins of Ordos' property development projects don't so much narrate a linear history of ascendance and decline as posit a reordering of time enabled by capitalist growth such that, as Smithson remarked, present forms "rise into ruin".<sup>8</sup> For a time, fortunes were made in the creation of so much rubble. Now, in the face of crisis, people are advised to wait for the next round. In the meantime, the ruins of development sites linger as reminders, for some, of riches gained almost overnight through speculation and, for more than a few, of imagined futures that disintegrated just as suddenly.

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## Notes

- 1 For official statistics on economic growth, see the National Bureau of Statistics of China public database; <https://tinyurl.com/npChinaAnnualData>
- 2 See National Bureau of Statistics of China, China Statistical Yearbook; <https://tinyurl.com/chinayearbook2014>
- 3 See 'China's Housing Market is Cooling', *Global Property Guide*, 4 April 2018; <https://tinyurl.com/gpgchina>
- 4 See Woodworth, M.D. 2015. 'Ordos: A market-era resource boomtown', *Cities* 43:115-132.
- 5 See DeSilvey, C. & Edensor, T. 2013. 'Reckoning with Ruins', *Progress in Human Geography* 37(4):465-485.
- 6 Edensor, T. 2005. 'The ghosts of industrial ruins: ordering and disordering memory in excessive space', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23(6): 829-849.
- 7 See Stoler, A.L. 2008. 'Imperial debris: reflections on ruins and ruination', *Cultural Anthropology* 23(2):191-219.
- 8 See 'The monuments of Passaic, New Jersey', in Flam, J. (ed.) 1996. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Berkeley: University of California Press.



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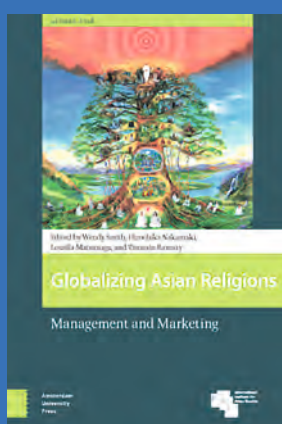
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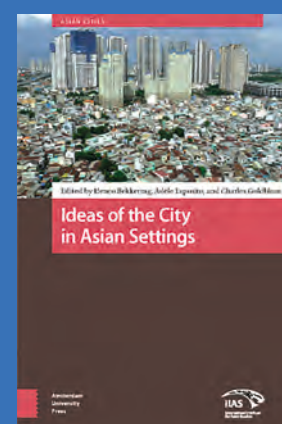
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The collaboration between ICAS 11 and EWW 11 is a special way to mark a new decade of Engaging With Vietnam, whereby EWW will embark on new initiatives to deepen and broaden dialogues and knowledge production between EWW participants and varied communities of scholars and participants that are often outside the usual Vietnam-focused forums. By taking place alongside ICAS 11, this EWW conference promises to be an exciting experience for participants of both events, in which all can engage in a diverse range of scholarly and professional activities that ICAS and EWW have built up over the years and take pride in.

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While the equation of 'Europe' with 'France' is a phenomenon that was prominent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, over the past 70 years there have been numerous different 'Vietnams' that have engaged with numerous different 'Europes', and vice versa. From students, immigrants and refugees from the Republic of Vietnam, to students, workers, immigrants and migrants from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, to the wide population of Vietnamese who travel by different means and routes to work, tour, build, invest, live and study in Europe today, there has been a constant flow of different Vietnamese to different Europes for decades now. Moving in the other direction has been a flow of people, ideas, technologies that have likewise brought different 'Europes' to different 'Vietnams'. The 11th Engaging With Vietnam conference will examine these issues under the theme of *Vietnam in Europe*,

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### Notes

- 1 CrossAsia-ePublishing is part of the project 'Fachinformationsdienst Asien' (FID Asien), funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). The FID Asien is cooperatively carried out by the State Library in Berlin, Heidelberg University Library and the South Asia Institute (SAI) in Heidelberg. The web portal CrossAsia is used as the central access point to the project results and for scientific information in Asian studies (<https://crossasia.org/en>). The area of 'electronic publishing' in the FID context is the central field of action of the project team of the Heidelberg University Library and SAI, where all publication platforms are developed, hosted and operated.



The CATS building with the central library in the middle.



# Asia and Europe from a transcultural perspective

## The new Heidelberg Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS)

Axel Michaels and Barbara Mittler

Early 2019 sees the opening of the new Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) at Heidelberg University.<sup>1</sup> CATS brings together the South Asia Institute, the Centre for East Asian Studies, the Institute of Anthropology and the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS). These institutions are situated in four buildings surrounding a square with a newly-built underground library, which will provide central access to four departmental libraries and which will house a Digital & Computational Humanities Unit, the Heidelberg Research Architecture (HRA). The official opening will take place on 25 June 2019 and visitors are very welcome!

CATS can build on a dozen years of research and teaching in the Excellence Cluster 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context', which has manifested in the foundation of an online journal, two (open access) publication series,<sup>2</sup> and a Master and Graduate Program in Transcultural Studies—with the largest number of (international) students in the Humanities and Social Sciences in Heidelberg.<sup>3</sup>

Bringing together four independent institutions, CATS forms a research collaboratorium enabling critical dialogues between Asia and Europe. CATS houses some twenty-five full professorships in Asian Studies, and offers more than twenty Asian languages to its approximately 3500 students. It also provides access to a unique and hybrid Asia library, one of the largest in continental Europe. Most importantly, CATS is not just another Asia Centre. Its uniqueness comes from being structurally linked and strongly committed to thinking beyond Asia in order to engage in an extended conversation with specialists whose regional expertise lies elsewhere.

### CATS as collaboratorium: dialogic perspectives on Asia and Europe

Research on Asia in Europe has developed rapidly in recent decades; but how Asia can in fact be adequately studied is a question much

discussed, especially in view of Asia's substantial transcultural entanglements. The significant differences in disciplinary cultures between Europe and Asia as well as the predominance of models and discourses developed in Europe, which have long been accepted as blueprints in Asia, make it necessary to break new grounds. CATS as a collaboratorium suggests an innovative approach by intensifying a dialogue between what is sometimes divided along the lines of 'area studies' and 'systematic disciplines', between scholars working on antiquity, modernity and pre-history and between scholars working on what has superficially been divided along the lines of nature and culture.

Cultures are not contained within ethnically closed, linguistically homogenous and territorially bounded spheres, yet today they are framed by specific, often region-bound disciplines. Instead, cultures are constituted through transformations and entanglements that follow from contacts and relationships between various agents, concepts and institutions, between human and non-human factors. This intrinsic transculturality must be seen as the norm, the default

mode rather than the exception in human history and experience. Indeed, processes of transculturation (e.g., assimilation, acculturation, hybridity, etc.) are ubiquitous, even if they are often resisted and denied.

CATS has thus been conceived as a collaboratorium that transgresses disciplinary and regional limitations and gathers specialists of Asia and beyond in many different disciplines, ranging from archeology to geography, from the philologies to religious studies and pairing them up with scholars in the Humanities and the Social Sciences focusing on other regions of the world. CATS assembles Heidelberg faculty and international fellows or activists, artists and professionals committed to transdisciplinary work that cuts across different regions and temporalities ranging in time from pre-history to the present and in space from Honolulu to Rome to Chennai.

Researchers in CATS will attempt to overcome prevalent value dualisms that treat Asia and Europe as distinct epistemic domains characterized by an inherent conceptual and methodological incommensurability. They will develop methods to overcome this barrier

and to come to a historically more plausible, non-orientalist approach that helps uncover a dynamic and connected relationship between Asia and Europe. Such an approach would be both self-reflexive and an essential step towards the development of new epistemologies adequate to the task we have chalked out.

CATS thus stands for a critical engagement with some of the epistemic foundations specific to the disciplines while at the same time maintaining their strengths. There is a striking tension between the stabilizing functions built into disciplinary practices on the one hand and the flux and fragility of the objects they study on the other. To question the values academic disciplines transport—such as authenticity, cultural purity, a deference to origins, notions of skill, perfection, beauty, or the valorizing of single events over long-term processes, is the aim of research in CATS. This kind of disciplinary critique, however, does not imply wholesale rejection of proven disciplinary methods. To the contrary, CATS is committed to disciplinary expertise in fields that are the backbone of the Humanities such as sound philological, historical, archaeological, iconological or narratological methods.



## CATS research: theorizing from Asia and Europe

The transcultural and transdisciplinary approach practiced in CATS is an answer to the widespread feeling of crisis and threat that pervades many societies today. Political and religious fundamentalisms, new forms of nationalism, populism and protectionism, and frictions caused by mass migration have intensified conflicts and heightened the awareness for the fragility of our interconnected lives. All of these phenomena can be read as contestations of processes of transformation caused by cultural interaction. Resistance to such pluralizing developments often aims to restore an imagined 'authentic' unity that is claimed to have been lost. It strives to create a more stable and predictable future by harkening back to homogenous 'origins' in a more or less distant past. This points to a paradox: for some, instability is produced by cultural flows and exchanges; for others, it is generated precisely by opposition to these very forces. The tensions between these two attitudes, which can be more or less pronounced at certain times and in certain places, and the frictions they generate are integral to transcultural interactions at every scale. They are inscribed in the remains of the earliest human settlements, scratched on bones, cast in bronze or carved in stone, they have left a wealth of material and written traces throughout the histories of Asia and Europe and they are the most contested issues of our present day. This raises the questions when, under which circumstances, and by whom, transcultural interaction is promoted or rejected. Which resources are mobilized by institutions and other social actors to facilitate or counter such processes? Which narratives of endangerment and risk, security and control are deployed to portray them as fortifying or debilitating influences in media, literature and the arts? These are the kinds of questions that CATS will be able to address.

CATS thus practices a new type of transdisciplinarity, which begins by theorizing both from Asia and from Europe: Asia and Europe have brought forth (trans-)culturally formed, diverse responses to the challenges at hand at any particular historical moment and articulated in many different languages. Precisely due to their cultural diversity, these explanations need to be plotted onto a common matrix. Reading such materials 'in-conjunction' is a step towards theorizing equitably from Europe and Asia (and, to think even larger, the world). This means breaking through the wall of incommensurability that has been erected between different epistemic cultures.

While a large number of disciplinary methods and paradigms in use today were originally formed on the basis of European experiences, they migrated in the wake of colonialism and modernizing efforts to regions at the European periphery and Asia. There, they were adapted to local conditions and ideological needs, most notably in the context of nation-building. Recognizing such processes not only as 'colonial exports', but as transcultural phenomena in their own right, is an example of the critical reflexivity required in our project. It will be engendered through reading and theorizing in-conjunction. Integrating the knowledge of regions outside of Europe in disciplines such as musicology, philosophy, history, economics, politics and the like, traditionally dealing with Europe will help recalibrate disciplinary epistemologies and, in the long run, will enable a rethinking and reconfiguration of only seemingly self-evident institutional structures.

On the basis of these theoretical considerations, CATS will focus on some of the following research fields:

- International relations and global interdependencies with Asia
- The comparative analysis of foreign policies of Asian states, their economic and political policies and reforms, and the relationship of China, India, and Japan with their respective regional neighbours
- Religions and their multidimensional transformations in Europe and Asia, examining religious discourses and their particular claims to power
- The dramatic social and demographic

changes in Asia and their repercussions on Asia and Europe as manifested in new models of social organization, transitions from agricultural to industrial forms of economy and migration flows

- Aspects of urbanization focusing on problems and strategies for dealing with dynamically developing megaregions in terms of rural/urban planning and population movements
- Models of world-making in Asia and Europe tracing the 'traditional/past' bases for 'modern/present' self-descriptions and cultural imaginaries that are made for the future
- Challenges that the recollection and revitalization of indigenous knowledge repertoires can have on (globally) institutionalized knowledge markets, which are at the same time part and motor of challenging transcultural processes and dynamics
- Transformations of human lifeworlds as they are increasingly implicated in transformations of the natural world, and vice versa
- Changes in the (technological) environment and their impact on human and species' health

## CATS infrastructure

In terms of its institutional infrastructure, CATS is made up of four institutions all of which engage in the collaboratorium on a scientific level, while keeping their legal, budgetary and administrative autonomy and independence.

**The South Asia Institute (SAI)**<sup>4</sup> offers seven professorships in Anthropology, Classical Indology, Modern South Asian Studies, Economics, Geography, History, and Political Science, as well as the Heinrich Zimmer Chair for Indian Philosophy and Intellectual History (supported by the Indian Government), the Allama Iqbal Professorial Fellowship (supported by Pakistan) and the Chair of Sri Lankan Studies (supported by Sri Lanka). Languages taught regularly include Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Dari, Tamil, Nepali und Singhalese. Courses offered include BA and MA in South Asia Studies, MA in Cultures and Religions of South Asia, MA in Communication, Literature and Media in South Asian Languages, and MA in Health and Society of South Asia (MAHASSA).

**The Center for East Asian Studies (Zentrum für Ostasienwissenschaften ZO)**<sup>5</sup> houses eight professorships in different fields of Chinese Studies ranging from archaeology to political science (4), Japanese Studies (2: in history, religious and literary studies) and East Asian Art History (2: in China and Japan); it also has regular guest professorships in all three areas, and a Taiwan Lectureship. Languages taught include classical and modern Chinese (Mandarin, Taiwanese, Cantonese), classical and modern Japanese, and Korean. The Center offers a BA in East Asia with different specializations in Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies and East Asian Art History (including a teacher training option for students of Chinese Studies), three MAs in Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies and East Asian Art and an MA in Simultaneous Interpretation for Japanese.

**The Institute of Ethnology (Institut für Ethnologie, IfE)**<sup>6</sup> includes two professorships with regional foci on East and Southeast Asia. Languages taught include Indonesian and Hindi. Courses offered include a BA and an MA in Ethnology.

**The Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS)**<sup>7</sup> has been built on the structures established by the Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context.' It is home to five permanent professorships in Buddhist Studies, Cultural Economic History, Global Art History, Intellectual History and Visual and Media Anthropology. Each of these professorships works in fields that cut across conventional disciplinary and nation-state borders. The HCTS hosts a Master and a Graduate

Programme in Transcultural Studies, languages taught include Academic English and Tibetan. The HCTS also hosts a Digital Humanities Unit, the Heidelberg Research Architecture HRA.

The CATS Media Centre will house Heidelberg's substantial Asia libraries in one central location equipped with a substantial number of media labs. This is of particular importance as it facilitates the kind of transdisciplinary work CATS engages in. With some 290,000 media units, the library of the SAI offers by far the best library related to South Asia in Germany. The libraries of the Institute of Chinese Studies and the Institute of East Asian Art History, including some 190,000 media units and a digital archive with 3.5 million documents, are among the most important in the German-speaking world. These substantial media holdings in CATS are supplemented by a number of smaller collections from the Institutes of Japanese Studies, Ethnology and the HCTS. In terms of the digital library, the Institute of Chinese Studies was an early pioneer, building [chinaresource.org](http://chinaresource.org) in the 1990s, a platform that offered to open and develop digital resources and archives. [Chinaresource.org](http://chinaresource.org) was the prototype that the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin then expanded and significantly redeveloped for all of Asia, offering, in collaboration with the SAI and the ZO an enormous range of electronic services: CrossAsia E-Publishing with the three publication platforms CrossAsia-Repository, CrossAsiaJournals and CrossAsia-eBooks, digital collections with digitized historical monographs, collected works and journals, CrossAsia Search: a comprehensive search of approx. 90 million data stocks from Asian Studies, numerous scientific full text, fact and bibliographical databases.

## CATS: the future

For a very long time, Asia has been closely linked to Europe. Exchanges have taken place in the fields of religion, art, literature and music as well as in business and politics, but also in terms of geology, health, climate and environmental sustainability. Recently, states in these regions, especially in China and India, but increasingly also in Southeast Asia, have undergone an economic development that, like that of Japan a few decades earlier, has made them leading powers internationally. Once emerging countries, they have become equal, even superior, partners. At the same time, this development has led to social and political tensions and upheavals within and outside of Asia. As a result, Asia has become a complex object of research not only in Asian Studies, but also in those disciplines that have so far developed their concepts and methods based on data from the 'Global North', simply 'applying' them to Asia.

Apart from the traditional tasks of Asian Studies departments (the teaching of Asian languages and knowledge of Asian cultures and societies) the CATS Collaboratorium offers a space for novel dynamic forms of intellectual debate and exchange, including an institutionalized dialogue with the Social and the Natural Sciences, thus opening up new modes of conducting research in the Humanities and forming a language of learning, in and for an increasingly interconnected world.

CATS will enable the transdisciplinary development of new research methodologies. The intensive dialogue between disciplines specializing in Asia and Europe, will allow researchers in CATS to address fundamental challenges together, through reading-in-conjunction, developing innovative analytical tools and vocabularies constantly sharpening them in different historical and regional contexts.

CATS will further the integration of hybrid research materials. Through developments in the field of digital and computational humanities and materialities research, the extensive and rapidly growing digital image and text data in Asian and European studies will enable research analogous to the development of 'data driven science' in the natural sciences and serve as a basis for research-based teaching in CATS. The Heidelberg Research Architecture, a Digital and Computational Humanities Unit based at

the HCTS, will be developed into an important facility for the University. It has developed a collection management system designed for collaborative research using MODS and VRA standards for highly descriptive standardized metadata.

CATS will build on this framework to facilitate further consolidation and expansion. With the help of intelligent annotations, intermedial transcultural interdependencies (object, material, text, sound, image, moving image) in past and present are to be made visible and accessible in multilingual archives available for further analysis.

CATS will strengthen educational and research exchanges between Asia and Europe. No other region in the world invests so sustainably in education as does Asia. In order to meet the resulting challenges on the educational market, institutional networking with academic institutions in Asia will be intensified under the auspices of CATS. In cooperation with the Heidelberg School of Education and initiatives such as the CATS 'Schülerlabor' or 'China in die Schulen' (China to the schools), CATS offers project days and designs teaching modules on regions currently not included in the existing teacher training programs in History, Literature, Religion, Philosophy, or Music, thus internationalizing teaching and learning at an early age.

Finally, CATS will unfold its full potential to address key challenges of our times by strategically developing its research activities beyond the confines of the academe. It will regularly open up its Collaboratorium and the Media Centre to the interested public and offer activities in libraries, galleries and museums in the region and near our partner institutions in Asia and Europe.

CATS aims to develop knowledge exchange activities open to diverse audiences and will share findings through regular media reports, blogs and multilingual newsletters prepared by its publications office. It is planned to test new forms of narration to disseminate our findings and reach broader audiences through, e.g. digital storytelling, podcasts, documentary shorts, plays, apps, online exhibitions, and creative forms of data visualization. Residencies and Tandem Fellowships will enhance these possibilities and offer new ways of learning and outreach—for example by inviting and working with agents whose experiences go beyond the purview of conventional academic demarcations such as artists, scientists, bloggers, novelists, or professionals. In addition, CATS plans to organize film and art festivals to foster critically informed debates on issues of public concern.

In short, CATS is not just another Asia Center. Instead, it offers new types and forms of interaction and dialogue between and beyond Asia and Europe, where Asia and Europe are not taken as territorially or culturally defined bounded units but rather as heterogeneous, interwoven structures, constantly subject to historical change. Asia and Europe are studied as coeval fields in shifting relations of continuous negotiation and translation. Theorizing from Asia and Europe, is a step toward a decentered mode of knowledge production. This mode is essential to equip students of contemporary societies with the knowledge that prepares them for a future in which the need to find adequate and equitable solutions to increasingly global problems becomes ever more urgent.

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## Notes

- 1 <https://www.cats.uni-heidelberg.de>
- 2 See, e.g., the online journal *Transcultural Studies*, publication series *Transcultural Research*, and the *Heidelberg Studies on Transculturality*: <https://tinyurl.com/heidelpub>
- 3 <https://tinyurl.com/heidelstudies>
- 4 <https://tinyurl.com/heidelSAI>
- 5 <https://tinyurl.com/heidelEAS>
- 6 <https://tinyurl.com/heidelIA>
- 7 <https://tinyurl.com/heidelHCTS>
- 8 <https://tinyurl.com/heidelHRA>



## IIAS change of guard: Goodbye Heleen, Welcome Annemarie

Late last year, our colleague Heleen van der Minne said goodbye to us to enjoy a well-deserved retirement. Although wonderful for her, we are certainly already missing her cheerful and always conscientious presence.

For many years she was attached to the Amsterdam branch of IIAS, looking after the fellows and organizing workshops and other events. For the last seven years she worked at our Leiden office, organising IIAS outreach activities, including the Annual Lectures, and in general being the ever-gracious hostess to many of our visitors who came to Leiden for research, to give a lecture or getting otherwise involved in IIAS activities. It is a small world, so we look forward to undoubtedly seeing her again at IIAS events or other occasions. On behalf of all of us, and also on behalf of so many of our guests throughout all these years: Many Thanks Heleen!

Heleen is succeeded by Annemarie van Leeuwen, who already came to know IIAS intimately last year in her temporary position as personal assistant to the director. Welcome again Annemarie!



Above: Heleen van der Minne.  
Right: Annemarie van Leeuwen.

## IIAS National Master's Thesis Prize in Asian Studies 2018

This year's Master's Thesis Prize went to Yannick Lengkeek for his thesis on fascism in late colonial Indonesia. Yannick completed his thesis, entitled, 'Neither Show nor Showdown: The "Fascist Effect" and Cooperative Nationalism in Late Colonial Indonesia, 1935-1942', at the Institute for History of Leiden University in November 2017. It was supervised by Dr Bart Luttikhuis (Institute for History and KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, Leiden).

With this yearly prize, IIAS not only honours talent but also aims to stimulate and facilitate a further career in research; the prize consists of a three-month full fellowship with IIAS, either to be used to write a PhD project proposal or a research article.

The prize was presented by Dr Nira Wickramasinghe, Chair of the IIAS Board and Professor of Modern South Asian Studies at Leiden University: "In this thesis, Yannick Lengkeek argues that fascism was seriously contemplated as an alternative by Indonesian nationalists who were not sympathetic to socialism. He focuses on performative politics

(‘doing fascism’) to detect the fascist imprint present in one of the largest political parties of the 1930s, Parindra, the Great Indonesia Party. This thesis inserts Indonesia within the field of Fascist studies, a notoriously eurocentrist field. A path breaking venture in an under-explored and under-theorised field based on extensive archival work in Indonesia and the Netherlands."

During the award ceremony, held at Leiden University's Faculty Club on 24 January 2019, praise was also given to the three other shortlisted nominees:

Yannick Lengkeek (second from left) along with (from left to right) runners-up Levi Voorsmit, Selima Abraham and Joel Eduard, along with Willem Vogelsang (IIAS) and Nira Wickramasinghe (IIAS/LIAS).



**Selima Abraham** (Delft University of Technology), 'Beyond Urban: Mitigating Urban Biases in Planning Processes in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region through Agro-Urbanism'.

**Joel Eduard** (Leiden Institute for History), 'Slavery, Resistance, and Colonial Power in Dutch Mauritius (1664-1710)'.

**Levi Voorsmit** (Leiden Institute for Area Studies), 'Friendship and Place in Fourteenth Century China: Gao Qi, Wang Xing, Xu Ben and Zhang Yu'.

Submissions to the IIAS National Master's Thesis Prize in Asian Studies can be made each year before 1 November. Eligible MA theses are those in the broad field of Asian Studies in the Humanities or Social Sciences (or related fields), completed during the previous 12 months (1 Nov-31 Oct) at a Dutch university, and marked with an 8 or higher.

For further information go to:  
<https://iias.asia/masters-thesis-prize>

## IIAS National Master's Thesis Prize 2019

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 November 2018 – 31 October 2019
- 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 2019, 9:00 am  
For further information email: [iias@iias.nl](mailto:iias@iias.nl)



## Critical Heritage Studies: the first graduates of a unique international postgraduate Double Degree programme

On 30 October of last year, a small ceremony was organised at IIAS to mark an important milestone in the development of one of IIAS' major programmes in recent years: the Double Degree Programme in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe. The ceremony included the presentation of certificates to the first graduates of the programme.

This unique international Double Degree Programme was started in the academic year 2017-2018, and is a collaborative effort, initiated and sponsored by IIAS and run by the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS) of the Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University (Netherlands), the Graduate School of International Studies at Yonsei University (South Korea), and the Graduate Institute of Building and Planning and the Department

of Anthropology, both at National Taiwan University (NTU, Taiwan). Students in this Programme can use the Leiden-based one-year MA programme (Asian Studies) to cover part of the two-year MA programmes in Korea and Taiwan, and vice versa. If successful, students will obtain two MA diplomas, and a certificate issued by IIAS that declares that the student obtained both MA diplomas with a focus on Critical Heritage Studies as offered by the Double Degree programme.

The first three graduates to receive their certificates (on 30 October 2018) were Hyunmi Kim from Korea, and Anna Tonk and Koert Stijne, both from the Netherlands. A fourth student, Mingyuan Cheng from Taiwan, could not be present, but will also receive her certificate.

For the academic year 2018-2019, Shuya Kang from Taiwan and Hue Ji Jang from Korea have enrolled at Leiden University and



From l to r: Elena Paskaleva (LIAS), Edwin Pietersma, Anna Tonk, Hyunmi Kim, Willem Vogelsang (IIAS)

hope to obtain their Leiden MA diploma this summer. Marieke Schmidt passed her Leiden MA examinations in 2017 and has enrolled at Yonsei, while Edwin Pietersma, a Leiden MA student from the 2016-2017 class, has enrolled in the Heritage Programme at the Department of Anthropology at NTU in Taipei, Taiwan.

For more information about the Double Degree programme, please visit <https://iias.asia/critical-heritage-studies>



## Spotlight Taiwan Programme 'Making Place and Place Making'

The Spotlight Taiwan Programme 'Making Place, and Place Making: Vernacular Heritage in the Urban Development in Taiwan' was supported by the Ministry of Culture of Taiwan and hosted by IIAS in Leiden, the Netherlands, from 30 October to 2 November 2018. It was a truly collaborative effort that was organised by a group of Taiwanese partners together with IIAS.

It was an exciting programme, not in the least because of the discussions and practical workshops jointly led by scholars with an academic background and the enthusiastic staff of various Taiwanese NGO's involved in community building. The Taiwanese partners included the Graduate Institute of Architecture and Cultural Heritage, Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan; the Graduate Institute of Building and Planning (GIBP), National Taiwan University, Taiwan; the Wanhua School Co., Ltd.; the Yuanli Hi Home Co., Ltd., and the Taiwan Dream City Building Association.

The opening session, on 30 October, was attended by the Taiwanese Representative in The Netherlands (The Hague), Dr Tom Chou, who gave a short speech in which he expressed his gratitude for the programme and, in a broader context, the cooperation between Taiwan and Dutch universities.

The programme focused on the question of how 'heritage' might be utilised as a means

to promote social cohesion in an urban environment. It included a series of lectures and a workshop at IIAS as well as a series of practical workshops on rush weaving and an exhibition at the Textile Research Centre (TRC), Leiden. The rush weaving was of particular interest, not only as an old craft that is being revived in Taipei, but also because it is being used to help different communities in this city to regain their strength and cohesion.

All parts of the programme were well attended, especially with students of the Leiden MA programme on Critical Heritage Studies (including Taiwanese students), which forms part of the Double Degree Programme in Critical Heritage Studies of Leiden University, IIAS, National Taiwan University and Yonsei University in South Korea. Other participants included students and scholars connected with other IIAS programmes on Urban Studies. The final reception, at the end of the highly satisfactory programme, was held on Friday 2 November and was attended by some thirty participants and other guests who took an interest in the discussions.

Above from left to right: Ku Mingyun (Taiwan Dream City Building Association, Wanhua, Taipei), Vivian Chen (National Taiwan University), Dr Tom Chou (Taiwanese Representative in The Netherlands)

## UKNA symposium 'Water heritage in Asian cities' Shanghai, 29 November – 1 December 2018

From 29 November to 1 December 2018, the IIAS coordinated Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA) held its annual event in Shanghai, where UKNA-partner the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) hosted the symposium 'Water heritage in Asian cities'. It was jointly organised by SASS, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), New York University-Shanghai (Center for Global Asia) and Fudan University (Department of Cultural Heritage and Museology).

This symposium sought to contribute to the building of a broader multi-disciplinary understanding of the role and functions of water in cities in Asia throughout history. To this effect, it brought together a range of experts and scholars from the humanities, natural sciences and social sciences, including the urban planners who are working or have worked on the current Shanghai master plan (2017-2035) for the Shanghai waterfront. The symposium featured four

panels on the following topics: (1) urban water infrastructure; (2) diversities of water-based cultural heritage; (3) linked histories of landscapes and waterscapes; and (4) waterfront redevelopment and urban transformation in Shanghai. The keynote speakers were Prof. Maria Montoya, Dean of New York University Shanghai and Prof. Han Meyer, Professor of Urban Design at Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands.

UKNA's previous annual meeting (in 2017) was also in the form of a symposium on the theme of water, that time hosted by Airlangga University in Surabaya, Indonesia on 11 and 12 December, titled, 'River cities. Water Space in Urban Development and History'.

Interested in UKNA's activities on water and cities? Please contact Paul Rabé, UKNA Coordinator based at IIAS [p.e.rabe@iias.nl](mailto:p.e.rabe@iias.nl). Visit the websites: [www.iias.asia/event/water-heritage-asian-cities](http://www.iias.asia/event/water-heritage-asian-cities) and [https://www.ukna.asia](http://www.ukna.asia)



Above: Symposium participants admire the skyline of Shanghai from on board the Pudong River cruise.





Left: 'Boatbuilding'. Spaces and seasons of gathering, working together, making or fixing things, and especially telling stories.

Below: Sékou Maïga, our HaB assistant in data collecting, working together, making or fixing things, and especially telling stories.



## Languages on the edge: from private archive to shared library

Mohomodou Houssouba

### Rethinking the library

The ISH, a descendant of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), founded in 1936, holds a rich repository of written documents, but also voice and film recordings from the colonial era onwards. The material is strong in history and social anthropology as well as in oral tradition recorded in different linguistic and cultural regions. Of the three research departments at ISH, the Department of Linguistics and Oral Literature was established with the mission to coordinate and harmonize research on local knowledge and the medium in which it is transmitted, preserved, and transformed. Still, the process has been neither systematic nor sustained. Moreover, frequent moves have forced the ISH Direction to stow away a significant part of its documents. The ISH relocated to a permanent site in 2017, and the three departments are only now recovering their archives. With regard to the language archives, though the inventory of the scattered documents started before HaB, its completion and integration into a larger curriculum of training, knowledge production and dissemination has been accelerated through our exchanges around the activities to be undertaken for the language and translation theme of the HaB program.

The next phase in the program is the training of students to digitize priority content and make it accessible to the research community. Part of the planning was done during my visit to the ISH in September 2017. I had brought along samples of private archives, some thirty years old, others quite recent, that I had been sorting out for digitization, transcription and translation. As it turned out, the physical presence of both the material and the portable equipment I had brought stimulated a productive discussion on the best way to move ahead, even if step by step and with limited resources. For that matter, the ISH and similar institutions have recently seen their research budgets drastically reduced or cancelled altogether. The drying up of research funding is officially blamed on increased spending on military and security efforts, but the humanities have in fact always been making do with scarce resources. For the ISH department in charge of revitalizing language research, these sudden cuts have made planning even more difficult, at a crucial juncture. Therefore,

Within the framework of the IAS programme *Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World (HaB)*, Mali is the site of investigation for language and translation practices with a special focus on opening and connecting 'marginal libraries', that is: the often modest collections of print, sound and film records that any individual or institution might possess. In this regard, both the archives of the host institution, Mali's Institute of Humanities (ISH), and personal files come into play.

HaB has become an even more important platform to share experiences, especially with regard to enabling the co-production of new knowledge and teaching methods. To some extent, the institute's hidden repository, just like my personal notebooks and tapes, belong to the category of private archives, shrouded in the intimacy of the inner circle, waiting to be part of a shared library that could be open up to fresh and potentially critical perspectives on memories and representations of the past.

### Floating family trees

Growing up in a farming village, I first experienced the seasons as alternating cycles of seemingly endless activity with short moments of rest. Of the latter, the end of the rice harvest season remains the most memorable, when, at the peak of the flood season, people traveled by pirogue to visit their relatives along the river. During this period, our house would fill up with visitors, who sometimes arrived from far away. I used to listen to my father reciting names after names, sometimes being interrupted with questions about a person or prompted for details about how this one was related to that one. My father also eagerly told us children about these kinship relations, but I did not have the attention span of his adult guests, often distant relatives, who listened closely to his accounts, engrossed in the intricate details of lineage spread over hundreds of kilometers, crisscrossing today's national territory, even spilling across national borders. Nonetheless, I became aware early of the power of being able to retain such knowledge of ancestry: the capacity to memorize so many names of persons and places, to recall historical events associated with individuals, families and communities, the narrative skills needed to pass on the stories in a precise and even entertaining manner.

### A need of narrative structure

My own fascination for the art and technique of such storytelling came later though. Indeed, it took me years of living away from my home region and my family to gain a genuine interest in the stories with which I grew up. The first moment came in my third year at the teachers college in Bamako, 1200 km southwest of Gao. After coming across Charles Bird's research on the hunters' musical and narrative traditions in southern Mali, I decided to write my undergraduate thesis on traditional storytelling techniques, focusing on the prosody of Songhay genealogical and historical accounts.

Initially, I recalled a scene I had witnessed ten years before. In 1977, when I spent part of my school holidays with my relatives in the old city of Gao, we used to attend the evening gatherings on the public square in our neighborhood. Amidst the large crowds of people, several storytellers took center stage, taking turn recounting different episodes of the history of the city and the region. The physical scene fascinated me more than the mainstay of Songhay history about which I had already heard or read in fragments at home and school.

For my college project, I decided to find a master storyteller who not only knew the intricacies of the past, but could also recount them in a compelling way. My search led me to a renowned oral historian in the old city of Gao, whom I recorded over one afternoon. I returned home with the tape, which I played before my father. He turned out to be both an engaged and skeptical listener, asking me several times to replay statements, commenting on what he found accurate, dubious, or far-fetched. I realized that in recounting the past the deeds of well-known historical figures were the most subject to discrepancies and controversy.

My father's objections to some detail or other had a lot to do with how he identified with a given character in the story. The other's account, at times, either displaced the centrality of our own lineage in the context of local history, or produced portraits that did not correspond to the image my father had of these ancestors. I came to the conclusion that there was no single story to be told and that an important task in my project could be to tease out the elements of empathy and self-identification, and, conversely, aversion and rejection that might drive the storytelling and shape the relationship between the narrator and the topic, object or figure of narration.

This questioning also led me, in the second phase of my project, to record my own father so that I could listen to him in a different context – detached, to some extent, from the immediate moment or familial context. Therefore, I returned to Bamako with the two narratives, one based on a linear account of the shared history that most people knew and shared in different forms and lengths, the other of a more personal and subjective nature as it started with and revolved around the origins of one family.

In the end, I changed my thesis topic altogether, yet I kept the tapes close to me and even brought them along as I attended a summer school in creative writing in the United States in 1987. There was a week-long workshop dedicated to storytelling in Elkins, West Virginia, but aside from discovering different and lively traditions of declamation, especially from the Appalachian region, the course didn't yield any practical use for my tapes. I was bound to carry them along to the different places where I would live between 1987 and 1999. They followed me to Niger for a year and to the American Midwest for ten years. For the most part, they ceased to be present in my consciousness.





Above: Bouba, the head herdsman and my informant since 2008 for all kinds of stories about herding, the many names of cow hide patterns, names of diseases and remedies.

Left: Songhay women, my main informants during my stay around Gao, lead the building of the traditional houses in the period before the harvest season. The construction site gathers different people and generations.

## Renewed sense of urgency

When I rediscovered them again in full, ten years later, the recording of the oral historian was intact. It struck me then as the performance of a well-trained, routine performer. The speaker came across as a warm conversation partner, who, at times, provoked the listener or replied ironically to a wrong answer to one of his rhetorical questions. In all, he was an agile performer who enjoyed sharing his knowledge and establishing his authority as the master of the word.

On the other hand, my father spoke in a neutral, metallic voice with hardly any interruptions, until the tape started to waver and die altogether after thirty-two minutes. The rest of the tape was hardly audible. It came to an abrupt end, just when he was telling me about the situation in our village near Gao at the onset of the French colonial era. I seemed to have never truly grasped the content of the story, as before I had only focused on the form and style (prosody) of the story. I had been interested in the strategies used to memorize such complex details, to keep a narrative going with hundreds of names, events and places, spanning different centuries and epochs. The brutal interruption in the story, when my father reflected on the fundamental shift that had occurred in local governance and the nature of social bonds, motivated me to make up for the lost recordings. There were other points I had hardly noticed, and one unfulfilled promise still lingers with me. He had asked me to go see an ailing, elderly woman in our extended family in the old city of Gao, and ask her for more precise details about my mother's side of the family, considered to be more deeply rooted in the area and related to key figures of the past.

To be sure, as I started my seventh year in the Midwest, listening to the distant voices of my father and his contemporary prompted in me a sense of urgency that I had never felt before in relation to the long, fragmented and variegated story of the Songhay-speaking people and their heartland between Djenné and Niamey: the cycles of being a dominating power and a cluster of subjugated dominions; the dramatic end of their empire with the Moroccan invasion in 1591: the collapse of the last major regional state, which marked the irreversible shift of power from the Saharan desert routes to the Atlantic ocean lines; the rise of imperial and colonial Europe; the transatlantic slave trade to settle and exploit the Americas with free African labor, which fed the industrialization of the West and prepared for the colonial era, which the African continent has yet to exit.

In 1997, as I delved into slave narratives for my dissertation on the discourse on the African diaspora, it became clear to me that, one day, the oral fragments I had recorded could help substantiate part of a narrative that could neither be linear nor complete. Like American slave narratives, the stories of the West African past are permeated by traces of displacement, bondage, yearning for freedom, and the destruction and reconstruction of a homeland. Nevertheless, they also convey a sense of wholeness and rootedness that is hard to associate with the transatlantic experience of radical disruption. I decided to have my younger brother do a follow-up recording with our father. The 1997 recordings would last 320 minutes. I was not present at these sessions, but this made me all the more the narratee. Distance pulled me into the center of the story as my name was uttered every time my father decided to tell the genealogy from my generation to the most distant ancestor recorded in our lineage on his side and my mother's.

## Transcription: listening (more) closely to silence

More recently, transcribing the 1987 and 1997 recordings has enabled me to listen more carefully and make more direct comparisons between the narrative threads and specific details, including the scores of names repeated as the genealogy was recited in a concentric way: from the family to the village, from one village to the next, among related villages, and across whole regions. This way, we learned how, on his father's side over three centuries ago, people left the Massina (Macina), 630 km to the south, migrated in stages northwards and settled in places in today's regions of Mopti and Timbuktu before finally reaching Gao.

Dealing with the recordings has never been an easy task for me. On the one hand, they are intimate, private stories about the interwoven strands that constitute our family heritage. On the other hand, they also represent a shared story, as they retrace the lineage of thousands of people from the Mali-Niger border to the central region of Mali. From east to west, they cover at least 900 km and uncover the multi-ethnic roots of families like mine. For instance, my ancestors who left the Massina were Fulani. They went north and east, mingled with the Songhay, Tuareg and other populations they encountered along the way; yet, I declare my ethnic and linguistic identity today as Songhay. To be sure, even in my childhood, people occasionally referred to us as Fulani, because 'technically', our

paternal side can be traced back to a faraway Fulani heartland, although my mother's family is considered to be part of the indigenous Songhay stock of Gao. In fact, for a long time, my own representation of the recordings revolved around the genealogy, the part that connected me to my parents and made me part of a web of kinship, and especially my relation to people who today identify with a specific ethnic group, with its associated language, social culture, and worldview.

However, as I resume working with the recordings, I realize that in my representation of the material, the share of the genealogical part is in fact exaggerated. While it makes up about half of the audible part of the 1987 recording (16 out of 30 minutes), it ends after 25 minutes of the 320 minutes recorded in 1997. Given the overlaps in the rendering of family trees, the genealogical component is just about 30 minutes. The remaining 320 minutes cover other topics; recently, these have become more relevant, motivating my effort to transcribe and translate the material in full.

## From genealogy to general history

The genealogist is the guardian of collective memories. Starting with the family unit, he or she weaves together the complex fabric of kinship, made of unions and separations, harmony and discord, old and new identities. In this regard, beyond reciting a lineage, genealogy links persons through time and space. Genealogical knowledge used to be considered an important strategic knowledge base; this is why people travelled from far away to consult the expert, able to disentangle the intricacies of a particular ancestry. This is what brought people to my father. From his parents, he had learned the lesser known history of the Fulani migration from central to northern Mali, which would have a sequel at the end of the 19th century with the last waves leaving Gao for the Sudan between 1898 and World War I, prompted by drought, famine and the bloody suppression of revolts by the French colonial administration. The resulting colonies still populate at least six villages in today's Sudan and largely speak Songhay. However, recent emigrations to the Gulf States are once again shifting the cultural and linguistic identity of these 'enclaves'. By all indications, the youngest generation tends to be more fluent in Arabic and English and again identify as Fulani as there is a more continuous presence of this ethnic group across the Sahel, from Senegal to Cameroon.

## Poetics of everyday life

Having transcribed and partially translated the recordings, I am now focusing on the interstices of different narratives, recorded about familial and regional histories over the last three decades. The centrality of the Songhay empire in West African history and its global relevance are well known, thanks to the chronicles and testimonials written by traveling scholars of the Arab-Islamic world as well as local chroniclers in Djenné, Timbuktu, Gao and Essouk, from the late Middle Ages to the colonial era and throughout the 20th century.

More recent narratives help us supplement fragmentary and inaccessible documentation, especially by shedding light on the practice of everyday life, giving insights into material culture, social layers and classes, ethical and moral standards, prejudices and biases, affect or interpersonal proximity and distance. Thus, at the current juncture, I find of more interest the inner dynamics of my father's family and its relation to the larger community: the social status of my grandfather as a single child; the early death of my father's parents and the adoption of my father and his siblings by a childless aunt and her husband; his coming of age under the regime of forced labor imposed by the French colonial power; the cycles of bounty and famine; abundant and erratic rainfall that culminated in the historic drought of 1973-74, which would have an irreversible impact on Gao and the Sahel and shape the landscape of desolation and disorder that nowadays figures at the center of global strategic concerns, including rural emigration, endless wars, displacement, trafficking of all kinds, militant jihadism and nihilistic terrorism. The narration of ordinary life gives us such a direct and lively access to the past, rendered in voices that spoke a language, which, in the meantime, strikes by its intellectual precision and lyric power.

Interestingly, even before joining the HaB platform, research at the Institute of Humanities has increasingly focused on studying social dynamics in highly localized contexts, for example: how gender relations evolved over time in a village or restricted area; how traditional chieftaincy emerged or disappeared in one place when moral or religious authority merged with political power in another; how iron or another metal, as craft or merchandise, fashioned relationships between regions. Such questioning can be extended to all the themes as pertaining to the different HaB sites in West Africa: the memory of interregional migration in the construction of a grassroots West African identity (Ghana); the role of indigo cultivation and dyeing in keeping endogamous communities linguistically unified and economically sustainable from the 17th to 21st century (Burkina Faso); the place of street food in reshaping popular culinary art and municipal policy in steering the production and consumption of food-stuff in modern African cities (Senegal). In all these areas, there is a strong need to interrogate local memories and contexts to get a more accurate picture than the generic representations still predominant in African studies. Moreover, the HaB framework challenges specialists and practitioners to reflect on both African and Asian contexts to tease out both commonalities and particularities.

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# Living with and in the forest in northern Thailand

## Engaging Karen youth in participatory community research

Chayan Vaddhanaphuti & Malee Sitthikriengkrai



**H**uay Hin Lad Nai is a Karen Sgaw community located in a National Forest Reservation in Chiang Rai Province, Northern Thailand. With a population of 108 people or 21 households, this small community represents an example case for a sustainable and self-determined development approach. The villagers continue to practice traditional shifting cultivation [*Rai Mun Vien*], while government policies aimed at eradicating this form of agriculture have already forced other ethnic highland communities in Northern Thailand to replace hill rice farming with permanent cash crop cultivation.

The project 'Living with and in the Forest in Northern Thailand' of the Center for Ethnic Studies and Development (CESD), Chiang Mai University, Thailand, aims to enable the Karen youth of Huay Hin Lad Nai to study their own community history, their everyday knowledge and practices related to their life in the forest and to their traditional shifting cultivation practices, as well as the past struggles of the villagers for their right to live in the forest.

The CESD's project is part of the *Humanities across Borders programme* (HaB), which looks to develop alternative pedagogies across disciplinary, institutional and national borders, with a focus on production sites of humanistic knowledge-practices in four regions of the world, Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia, and West Africa. As HaB's local project partner in Southeast Asia, the CESD focuses on knowledge production in the Huay Hin Lad Nai community in Thailand in order to contribute to HaB's larger vision of creating expanded humanities along the Asia-Africa axis of knowledge.

### Empowering the ethnic youth

In order to understand the CESD's approach of enabling learning processes among the youth as well as of strengthening the existing transgenerational transmission of knowledge in the community, it is crucial to look at Huay Hin Lad Nai as a community composed of three main generations, each with different experiences with the Karen way of life and with the outside world.

The first group, i.e., the generation from the age of 55 onwards, did not study in the formal education system. This generation has in-depth knowledge of nature, life in the forest and Karen culture. As ritual leaders and role models for the villagers, members of this group play an important role in determining the direction of today's community development.

The second group includes villagers aged between 30 and 55 who have started attending the modern education system. During their

childhood, they have witnessed threats through state-led policies and market pressure, e.g., the granting of forest concessions to private companies in the community forest. They have joined other ethnic groups, NGO workers and academics in a country-wide movement for environmental protection and land rights. This group had the opportunity to exchange experiences with other ethnic communities, especially related to community rights, and they learned how to negotiate with market and state policies.

The third group comprises the current community youth aged between 15 and 30 years, most of whom have attended school at least until elementary level. This generation deliberately chooses to stay in the community and practice shifting cultivation rather than to attend formal education and seek employment outside of the community. They have greater opportunities to interact with the outside society, and some of them have made training and study visits outside the village. They share a strong interest in actively learning about their own culture and in passing it on to subsequent generations.

The experiences of the first and second generations of Karen villagers differ greatly from those of the third generation, particularly with regard to their living in the forest and their interaction with community outsiders. For example, the young generation has never joined protest movements or negotiations with the government for the recognition of their rights. Instead, they have developed ways of earning income by selling different kinds of forest products.

Against this backdrop, the CESD's project has identified the need of empowering and enabling the Karen youth to learn more about their own culture, community background and traditional agricultural practices from their fathers and grandfathers. Moreover, it seeks to create awareness among the youth for their own way of learning and to strengthen local knowledge and its production processes.

### Pedagogy beyond classroom in key community domains

It is noteworthy that learning processes in the Huay Hin Lad Nai community take place in different social contexts, i.e., within the community, in the form of a transgenerational knowledge transfer between elders and the youth, as well as in the interactions and exchanges between community members and outsiders, such as other ethnic groups, NGOs and academics. In line with this, the CESD's

With a population of 438,450 the Karen form the largest ethnic minority group in Thailand.<sup>1</sup> They can be divided into two major sub-groups, Karen Pwo and Karen Sgaw, or *Pgaz K'nyau* [human being]. The Karen's cultural life and production activities are deeply embedded in a spiritual and holistic worldview. The forest is not only perceived as the source of all life, but also a dwelling place for different spirits, and thus treated with great care and respect.



Left: Community of Huay Hin Lad Nai. Top right: learning through everyday life practices of upland rice cultivation. Inset above: Film Making. Living in and with the Forest. Images courtesy of authors.

project is analyzing knowledge-practices related to a life in the forest and forest resource management that involve 'beyond classroom' learning of different generations, particularly in two major domains of the community: 1) learning through the everyday life practice of upland rice cultivation, and 2) learning to negotiate state policies through interactions with community outsiders.

### Learning through the everyday life practice of upland rice cultivation

Even though it has been shown that *Rai Mun Vien* is able to ensure food security and to mitigate climate change impacts,<sup>2</sup> there is a wide-spread misunderstanding among forest officials and the wider public that this form of agriculture is a root cause for deforestation and environmental destruction. The Huay Hin Lad Nai shifting cultivation cycle follows a pattern of short-term cultivation and long fallow periods of 7 years. Besides rice, the Karen farmers cultivate more than 50 different kinds of vegetables in their rotational farms. The practice of *Rai Mun Vien* comprises diverse ritual performances led by the ritual leader, or *Heekho*, in which all community members participate. In some rituals, single young men and women play a particularly important role. *Rai Mun Vien* thus opens a space for Karen people of different ages and experiences to learn together in a community of practice.<sup>3</sup> This form of interaction gives different newcomers the opportunity to learn through interaction with old timers with diverse experiences. Accordingly, the youth of Huay Hin Lad Nai enjoy a learning process that cannot be separated from the formation of an identity that revolves around an intimate relation to nature.

In this context, a particular focus of the CESD's project is laid on the learning of the third generation from the elders through the practice of hill rice cultivation, and on creating awareness among the youth for their own learning in the shifting cultivation cycle as an integral part of a life in the forest.

### Learning through interactions with community outsiders

A second focus has been placed on the villagers' learning to negotiate state policies through different measures, e.g., through joining movements and networks, and through engaging in research and community mapping. The traditional lifestyle of the Huay Hin Lad Nai villagers has been greatly threatened by development projects and state policies aimed at replacing their traditional shifting cultivation system with permanent crop cultivation. Moreover, the community faced a policy intent on evicting forest communities between 1993 and 1997, in line with the dominant conservation paradigm, which based on 'Western' ideas and concepts, emphasized the establishment of protected areas without human inference. Through this policy, the state sought to expand reservation forests in the country and to prohibit communities from living in these areas. Highlanders were labelled as non-Thai 'hill-tribes' who practice environmentally destructive slash-and-burn practices.

Even though the Huay Hin Lad Nai villagers have faced state power in various forms since 1983, they have been able to maintain their traditional rice production system until today, through a number of different actions and strategies. For example, the community has set-up networks with different forces in society to enhance bargaining power towards the state for the recognition of their community rights. In 1994, ethnic groups, academics and NGOs jointly drafted a Community Forestry Bill that differed from the Community Forest Act proposed by the Forest Department in 1989. Even though this Bill has not been passed, the movement created greater understanding among the youth back then (today's 2nd generation) of their community rights and the need for action. NGOs and academics also began to support ethnic groups in conducting research and in producing proof that their community was living in the area prior to the announcement of protected areas. The





Youth researchers learn from their grandfathers. Image courtesy of authors.

villagers collaborated with NGOs and forest officials to produce maps depicting the land use of the community in order to demonstrate to the public that *Rai Mun Vien* is a form of local knowledge, different from slash and burn agriculture, as well as to show that their own communities are taking serious efforts to conserve their natural resources.

Through processes of interaction with outsiders and by joining protest movements, community members, particularly the 2nd generation, have thus acquired knowledge how to deal with threats to the Karen way of life, how to negotiate with government agencies, and how to maintain and defend their age-old shifting cultivation practices in the face of state repression, changing socio-economic landscapes and development pressure. Since the youngest generation has no direct experiences with the movement, the CESD's project encourages them to learn from the older generations, and thus enables them to deal with development and state policies based on evidence-based research.

### An unconventional approach to the co-production of knowledge

Accordingly, the CESD makes use of an empowering pedagogical approach that allows the ethnic youth not only to gain deeper insights in and learn about their own culture, ecology, and identity, but also to question mainstream development policies and programs. At the same time, it seeks to create a better understanding of how the youth comprehend their own learning from their parents and relatives. Rather than providing lecture- and text-based training in a conventional education setting, this project works directly with the Karen youth in the field and facilitates the co-production of knowledge between academics and community members through the following innovative methods:

**Studying local history.** The project assists the ethnic youth to study their own community history, i.e., official historical records as well as the vernacular history of the community. The

youth group has started to conduct in-depth interviews with community elders, particularly on the historical background of the community, family and kinship structures, the villagers' local knowledge on natural resource use, and their encounters with state-policies. Supported by academics from CMU, they transcribed, edited and discussed the recorded material. In collaboration with visiting international students, they further recorded biographies of selected villagers and collected them in a booklet. First analyses of the collected data centered around community transformations and mobility patterns over the last one hundred years. Based on this information, a detailed kinship map and digitalized timeline of the community were produced. The latter highlights the close intertwining between community-internal events and the broader socio-political context.

**Film Making.** The young Karen were invited to produce a visual documentation of the Karen traditional forest life and resource management practices. In line with this, they have started co-producing a short documentary with international students in order to present their own narrative about Huay Hin Lad Nai to community outsiders.

**Documenting Learning through Practice.** Traditionally, the Huay Hin Lad Nai youth gain knowledge on community life in the forest and *Rai Mun Vien* through practice, learning by doing and on-site action engagement. For example, children learn about the rotational farming system and respect for nature through observation and engagement in parental activities. The shifting cultivation farm thus represents a socio-cultural sphere to transfer knowledge and cultural traditions and to foster transgenerational relationships. Also other sites of interaction serve as ground of learning in which young people acquire knowledge from community elders, e.g., ritual performances, such as funerals or the New Year ceremony. Thus, the CESD project teaches and encourages the Karen youth to observe, systematically document and reflect upon these practices.

**Learning through Traditional Hta Verses.** The Karen traditionally use oral and visual channels

rather than written materials to transmit their knowledge. Besides their own experiences in the field, the youth also learn from sung or spoken traditional *Hta* verses, or quasi-sacred 'word of the ancestors'.<sup>4</sup> Handed down through generations, *Hta* center around Karen values towards nature and society. They serve as culturally appropriate means of expression when a subject is of basic social importance or considered controversial. Accordingly, the CESD project also studies and records the use of traditional *Hta* verses in the community.

**Exchanges with Other Communities.** CESD is further facilitating exchanges with other ethnic communities in order to create greater understanding and awareness among the youth about the meaning and threats of mainstream development. For example, in September 2018, young Karen from Huay Hin Lad visited the Karen community Nong Tao in Northern Thailand, which has replaced shifting cultivation by

cash crop production. Other than in Huay Hin Lad Nai, many of the young people work outside of the village, face problems with drug abuse and have little pride in their ethnic group. At the same time, the youth group of Ban Nong Tao has expressed the wish to revive traditional Karen culture in their community. Since the Huay Hin Lad youth have deliberately chosen to live and work with their parents in the community, they shared their experiences with their traditional lifestyle in the forest, and described their daily learning experiences in the forest and shifting cultivation farms: "Why should we be shy or not proud of our culture? When we stay at home, raise pigs and chicken and practice *Rai Mun Vien*, we are happy (...). If we go to school, our everyday life will be the same. We wake up early, have breakfast, sit in the classroom, do homework, and go to bed. This will be the same pattern from elementary to secondary school, and even beyond. If we stay at home, however, we learn a lot in different ways, and we are able to do many things". The youth of Huay Hin Lad Nai highlighted that the visit in Nong Tao was of great importance for them to see and understand the rapid and profound socio-economic changes occurring in some ethnic communities, but also to reflect upon their own community situation and on ways how to prepare themselves to deal with such transformation processes.

### Socially engaged research on rice cultivation in Asia and beyond

The CESD's project makes use of a pedagogical approach that helps the ethnic youth learn about their own culture, knowledge, and their own way of learning. They are encouraged to reflect upon all-day life community practices in a systematic way in order to become aware of, reflect upon and strengthen existing knowledge-practices and their transmission processes. From the elders and their experiences, they are able to gain a deeper understanding of their own community context and of dealing with state policies. This can help them to defend their traditional lifestyle and knowledge against prevailing prejudices and misconceptions shared by government authorities and the wider public who continue to perceive hill rice cultivation as a backward agricultural practice and as a major cause for deforestation and environmental destruction.

In line with the HaB's overall objectives to develop new pedagogical frameworks at both local and global levels, the CESD's project not only opens insights into context-specific learning related to rice cultivation as both knowledge and practice, but also contributes to critical reflections on rice, its meaning and related practices, that transcend institutional, national and regional borders, e.g., in other Asian or African contexts.

Accordingly, at the 6th Conference of the Asian Borderlands Network, held in Bishkek from 13-15 August 2018, CESD researchers

and other HaB members from South and Southeast Asia and West-Africa presented their research on rice and the creation of 'rice-scapes' through different modalities of rice cultivation in a double panel titled 'Asian Rice-Scapes: Topographies, Tastes and Technologies'. The different papers analyzed interconnections and divisions between hill communities and lowland settlers and explored rice as knowledge-practice based on three different ecological systems – water based, lowland and upland rice – which coincide with different rice cultivation techniques, such as irrigated or rainfed, settled cultivation, as well as shifting cultivation, or the rotational use of land plots. Participants had the chance to jointly reflect upon the development of a rice syllabus based on these ecologies, by drawing on the presented local examples from different parts of the world. Comparisons across borders revealed the importance of the research process as a crucial element for the development of an alternative pedagogy of rice that allows unconventional approaches and perspectives and that can be reproduced in different geographical contexts.

Accordingly, the CESD's project proposes a syllabus for an ethnic youth training on participatory research methods, which is highly relevant to create an in-depth understanding of local knowledge and learning processes, and which can equip villagers with the skills to maintain and preserve their traditional culture and ancestral cultivation practices against challenges through state policies and economic development pressure. This can be beneficial for other countries and regions, since local and traditional rice cultivation practices are facing growing pressure worldwide due to the impacts of climate change, the large scale expansion of urbanization, increasing monocultures as well as the shrinking of arable land.

Future transnational and regional collaboration of the rice project may center around further compromising process and content of different ecological and regional approaches in order to shape an alternative rice pedagogy that ultimately feeds into the development of an expanded 'humanities across borders' curriculum as an overall outcome of the HaB programme.

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#### Notes

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Youth researchers presenting their findings. Image courtesy of authors.





Plant pigment extraction workshop in progress. Photo courtesy of TNUA.

## Indigo as critical pedagogy

Min-Chin Chiang

The workshop was also an occasion for us to share and further refine the bachelor's and master's syllabi being developed as part of the HaB project 'Indigo: Developing a Curriculum across Borders' with the student community and other members of the faculty of the Graduate Institute of Architecture and Cultural Heritage at TNUA. The HaB programme was represented by HaB advisor Françoise Vergès; academic director Aarti Kawlra; Yoko Inoue, a multi-disciplinary artist-educator at the Bennington College, Vermont, USA; and Jocelyne Vokuoma of the Institut des Sciences des Sociétés, Centre national de recherche scientifique et technologique (INSS-CNRST), Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Signalling a new relationship between HaB and Kyoto Seika University, the workshop also welcomed Yuji Yonehara of the Center for Innovation in Traditional Industry, Isanori Oha from the Office of International Education, as well as Kyoto-based indigo artist and guest faculty at the university, Mitsuyasu Tanio.

### Day 1: Field visits

On the first day we visited Zhuo Ye Cottage, a family-run homestay and indigo production and dyeing studio in Sanyi, in Miaoli county, a three-hour drive from Taipei. We were guided by Mr Tzu-Lo Cho, the second-generation owner of Zhuo Ye Cottage and an artist who works with indigo and batik techniques. He led us through his farm where he grows various plants for their natural dyes, including indigo varieties such as *Strobilanthes flaccidifolius* (Assam indigo), *Indigofera tinctoria*, *Polygonum tinctorium* (Japanese indigo) and *Isatis tinctoria* (woad). We were invited to observe the indigo-making process using sedimentation technology, which is the most commonly applied method in Taiwan. In the indigo-making area there were different basins for soaking the leaves and threads, and for mixing the dye liquors for oxidation. At the studio, we could follow the progress of indigo dyeing techniques from handmade pieces to the semi-automated production of broadcloths. The Zhuo Ye Cottage also applies natural colours in their culinary services, which were sampled by us at the sumptuous vegetarian lunch that delighted our international guests.

The next indigo production and use site was the National Taiwan Craft Research and Development Institute, the top-most institution in Taiwan for crafts research and education. Here we had the opportunity to interact with textile weaving and dyeing experts, Ching-Fen Hsiao and Si-Zheng Zheng. We also visited the Natural Colour Farm, founded by Zheng and his partner, indigo artist Wen-Jun Tang.

Here, various indigo plants are cultivated both for production and for educational purposes, including *Strobilanthes cusia*, *Indigofera suffruticosa* Mill., *Indigofera tinctoria* L., *Polygonum tinctorium*, *Isatis indigotica* L., and *Marsdenia tinctoria* R. Br. from Sarawak, Malaysia. The Natural Colour Farm provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the indigo-making process. In the dyeing workshops it offers, students of all ages are made familiar with the plants and the production process of indigo as well as given the opportunity to experiment with the various dyeing techniques.

### Day 2: Sharing, discussions and plant pigment extraction workshop

Day 2 began at the FuturePast Lab at TNUA, with a welcome address by TNUA president Kai Huang Chen and introductions by the participants. This was also an occasion for self-introductions and a presentation of the HaB vision and the 'Indigo across Borders' project. After lunch, it was time for the natural pigment extraction workshop. The participants, guided by Hua-Chen Huang, lecturer at the Department of Fine Arts, explored the campus collecting plants from which we later learned to extract colours and produce pigment.

From a humanities across borders perspective, the extraction of colours and pigments from plants is a method of knowing, of engaging with a place and its lived history and of making transversal connections. The process of pigment extraction was not only an occasion for 'doing' but also coming closer to the immediate environment, constructing a colour map of the university campus walking about collecting plants, and recognising and archiving them for their pigments in a kitchen-like studio/lab setting. The plant pigment extraction workshop brought different people together, including indigo artists, researchers, PhD students, fine arts students and cultural heritage students, to produce alternative ways of seeing and

knowing a place. The workshop was followed by a discussion on how colour extraction can be used as educational material and method for a variety of experiential pedagogies in different contexts. In particular, our conversations revolved around the knowledge practice of indigo in Taiwan to trigger critical reflections on its meaning and practice in other Asian and African contexts. We also discussed the parameters for building a syllabus (including a shared vocabulary and learning modules) that would eventually contribute towards a 'Humanities across Borders' curriculum.

### Day 3: Roundtable on Indigo as critical pedagogy

The third day began with a discussion of the syllabi for the BA and MA courses 'Indigo across Borders' and 'Indigo Liquid Museum', introduced by me under the HaB programme at TNUA. As part of their final project, MA students of the 'Indigo Liquid Museum' course presented their curatorial project proposal for a global indigo liquid museum. The group with the best proposal was invited to present at the HaB roundtable. This group of four young ladies made a proposal for 'Global Indigo Studies' by reviewing the development of the indigo dye and exploring the relations between the indigo dye and the different stakeholders involved. The other BA level 'Indigo across Borders' course exposed students to harvesting the indigo plant on a local farm, to indigo arts and cultural forms around the world as well as the critical issues pertaining



Walking around the university campus to collect plants for pigment extraction. Photo courtesy of TNUA.

'Indigo Traditions and Itineraries' Humanities across Borders workshop Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA), Taiwan 25-28 October 2018

to indigo in contemporary society. A key aspect of this course was to connect students—the young generation—with indigo practitioners and to learn from this mutually sympathetic connection, which became quite profound after the harvesting and indigo extraction experience. We all sensed this very clearly from the students' final proposals on Indigo and the thoughts they presented from their notes after each class. The indigo artists, researchers and community members working together in the two courses, and over the last seven years, were all more than willing to join the methodologies workshop, share their ideas on how to develop an indigo syllabus, and to learn together! Given the vibrant discussions during the three-day long HaB workshop, the two courses will be presented during the 11th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 11) in Leiden, the Netherlands, in July 2019. Moreover, the courses will be revised and implemented in Semester 108-1 at TNUA (from September 2019).

Finally, the group moved to a roundtable format presenting short provocations that explored the reasons for creating an indigo syllabus—what, why, how, and for whom. This was followed by the participants splitting up into four breakaway groups, each of which discussed indigo across the following four themes: (1) Place, Belonging and Nature; (2) Word, Memory and Meaning; (3) Practice, Knowledge Production and Reproduction; (4) Market, Aesthetics and Ethics. Following guidelines provided by the workshop conveners, each group discussed the assigned theme from their own specific context. What emerged was the possibility of using indigo as critical pedagogy to interrogate prevailing discourses and disciplinary knowledge such as development; heritage; urban ecology; design and fashion; material culture; history of colonialism; agricultural and development economics; dye chemistry; linguistics; geography, and so on. By making indigo and its practice familiar and bringing it into classroom discussions, each group was able to see 'indigo' as a tool for self-reflection and critical pedagogy beyond the classroom.

Min-Chin Chiang Graduate Institute of Architecture and Cultural Heritage and Centre for Teaching and Learning, Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan.



# 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. Meet our fellows at [www.iias.asia/page/fellows](http://www.iias.asia/page/fellows)

## In the spotlight



### Carmel Christy Kattithara Joseph

Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi  
*A city by the sea: spaces, development and religion in Kochi*

“Many recent studies on Asian cities give prominence to globalisation as a vantage point for understanding the transformation of cities in the developing world, including India. Some of them concern how the changes in the built environment affected the city dwellers’ economic and cultural lives. There are also historical accounts of how colonisation shaped cities such as Lahore, Kolkata, Mumbai, Kochi and so on. There are fewer accounts of how city dwellers experience city spaces, which reshape their lives not just economically, but also transform and reimagine their cultural lives in terms of religion, social status and so on. How can one provide an account of development, displacement and marginalisation as negotiated, lived and memorised through enactments, rituals and faith? In other words, how can one write an account of the vitality of space – the life of city space that is enlivened by the various ways that people inhabit that space?”

I explore these questions further in my study of Kochi, the South-western port city of India. Historically, the Arabian Sea has

brought traders, colonisers and missionaries to the shores of Kochi; now it is one of the fastest growing cities and a popular tourism destination in South India. Like any other city in the developing world, Kochi has its own stories of displacement, marginalisation and economic progress. The spatial arrangement and reorganisation of the city holds within itself people’s memories and lived experiences of material and cultural development. My project takes off from this point to capture the affective memories and lived experience of the displaced communities in the ever-expanding city of Kochi.

This is a major project that I am taking up after my first monograph ‘Sexuality and Public Space in India: Reading the Visible’ (2017). IIAS provides me the ideal place to write and work through the materials I have gathered. It also gives me an opportunity to look into some of the less explored aspects of Dutch colonisation of Cochin and acquire some familiarity with Dutch language. IIAS also gives me an opportunity to take some time off from my intensive teaching schedule and concentrate on research. I have started frequenting museums in Leiden and Amsterdam, which works as a complementary and relaxing interlude to otherwise self-engrossed writing hours.



### Naomi Standen

University of Birmingham, UK  
*Writing and rowing*

“‘China’ is a problematical and politicised concept when applied to the premodern period. The name invokes a modern nation-state that maps poorly onto the ever changing and multiple political and cultural formations of earlier centuries, which the PRC government – and some scholars – nevertheless wish to claim for China. My response to these moves is a global history of eastern Eurasia between 600 and 1350 that does not mention ‘China’ at all (contracted to *A history of the world*, Vol. 2: *Multiple medieval worlds 600-1350*, ed. Cemal Kafadar, C.H. Beck and Harvard University Press). Rather than trying to confine my analysis within political or cultural building blocks that really don’t work for this period, I instead take the concept of ‘technologies’, broadly understood, as an alternative starting point for tracing practices and ideas wherever they may lead; across more than one state, in a specific area within one political unit, or in networks. My goal is to place interactions, relationships, and human agency at all levels, at the core of a non-sinocentric analysis.

It is hard to overestimate the value of having ten months at IIAS (and two more in Paris) to focus on this project, away from my usual responsibilities, freed of many distractions, in such congenial surroundings,

with such helpful and friendly staff, and with good coffee on tap! In my time here so far, I have been writing about cities and ceramics, and am currently working on ships, with money and contracts, horses, textiles and translation among the sections to come. Being based at IIAS is helping me to tackle this wide range of topics by providing not only excellent library resources, but still more importantly, plentiful opportunities to seek out specialist advice and informed discussion at the Institute, in Leiden and in the Netherlands – none of which is very far away. The diversity of the IIAS fellows and the seminars here and beyond are further providing me with intellectual refreshment.

Living in Leiden is a great pleasure too. I already knew how attractive the city was, and I have been enjoying its human scale – it’s great to be able to walk everywhere – and the sense of locality visible in, for instance, the street markets and the predominance of independent shops and restaurants. I also love having so much water around, both the canals and the beach at Katwijk, and outside my work I will in the spring be taking the opportunity of being here to fulfil a longstanding aspiration to learn to row in a racing eight. By the time I go home I will have not only have my writing to show for my time here, but a new ability as well.

## IIAS Fellowship possibilities and requirements



### 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.



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

When applying for an IIAS Fellowship, you have the option of simultaneously submitting an application for an additional two months of research at the Collège d’études mondiales de la Fondation Maison des sciences de l’homme (CEM-FMSH), in Paris, France, immediately after your stay in Leiden.

Application deadlines: 1 March & 1 October



### Apply for an IIAS-ASCL fellowship

The IIAS-ASCL joint fellowship is intended for researchers specialising in Asian-African interactions.

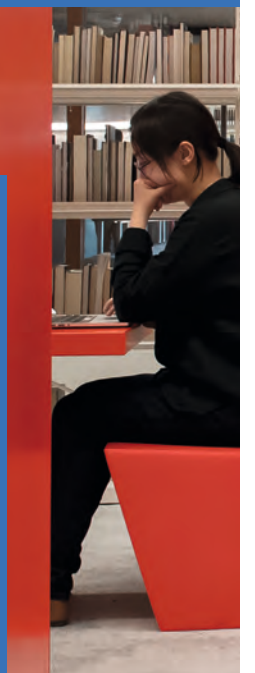
Application deadlines: 15 March & 15 September



### 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 & 1 October



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



# 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).

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

Coordinator: [Paul Rabé](mailto:Paul.Rabé@iias.nl) [p.e.rabe@iias.nl](mailto:p.e.rabe@iias.nl)

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)

Coordinators: [Paul Rabé](mailto:Paul.Rabé@iias.nl) [p.e.rabe@iias.nl](mailto:p.e.rabe@iias.nl)

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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, Unanittibb, 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 IAS 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](https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog)  
<https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/blog>

[www.iias.asia/hab](http://www.iias.asia/hab)  
 Clusters: [Global Asia](#); [Asian Heritages](#)

**Africa-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge**



**A**frica-Asia, A New Axis of Knowledge' is an inclusive transnational platform that convenes scholars, artists, intellectuals, and educators from Africa, Asia, Europe, and beyond to study, discuss, and share knowledge on the intricate connections and entanglements between the African and Asian world regions. Our aim is to contribute to the long-term establishment of an autonomous, intellectual and academic community of individuals and institutions between two of the world's most vibrant continents. We aspire to facilitate the development of research and educational infrastructures in African and Asian universities, capable of delivering foundational knowledge in the two regions about one another's cultures and societies. This exchange, we believe, is a prerequisite for a sustainable and balanced socio-economic progress of the two continents. It is also an opportunity to move beyond the Western-originated fields of Asian and African area studies—something that would benefit Asian, African and Western scholars alike.

[www.africasia.org](http://www.africasia.org)  
 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.

[www.asianborderlands.net](http://www.asianborderlands.net)  
 Coordinator: [Erik de Maaker](#)  
[maaker@fsw.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:maaker@fsw.leidenuniv.nl)  
 Cluster: [Global Asia](#)

**Energy Programme Asia (EPA)**

**T**he new joint research programme between IIAS-EPA and the Institute of World Politics and Economy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing is entitled *The Political Economy of the Belt & Road Initiative and its Reflections*. It aims to investigate the policy, policy tools, and impacts of China's Belt and Road Initiative. By focusing on China's involvement with governments, local institutions, and local stakeholders, it aims to examine the subsequent responses to China's activities from the local to the global-geopolitical level in the following countries: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Hungary, the West Balkans, and Russia.

The first research-oriented meeting with fourteen scholars from China and the Netherlands will take place during ICAS 11 (16-19 July 2019, Leiden, the Netherlands).

[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.

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

**The New Silk Road. China's Belt and Road Initiative in Context**

**T**he International Institute for Asian Studies has recently started a new project of interdisciplinary research aimed at the study of the Belt and Road Initiative of the Chinese government, with special attention given to the impact of the 'New Silk Road' on countries, regions and peoples outside of China.

<https://iias.asia/research/newsilkroad>  
 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.

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







## Voices of the Wind

Voices of the Wind:  
Traditional Instruments in Laos  
Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre (TAEC),  
Luang Prabang, Laos  
September 2018 – September 2020  
[www.taeclaos.org](http://www.taeclaos.org)



With its 50 officially identified ethnic groups, the landlocked state of Laos is one of the most ethnically diverse countries of mainland Southeast Asia. The musical cultures of its different ethnic groups is rich, varied, and in a constant state of flux. Instruments are an important part of the musical landscape of Laos, with their variety of roles, techniques, and timbres. Some are shared (often in different forms) by several ethnic groups, and others are more specific to a region or a few communities only.

While the guitar and the electric keyboard are very popular in Laos, it is the traditional aerophones that are celebrated in TAEC's newest exhibition: 'Voices of the Wind: Traditional Instruments in Laos'. The aerophones (commonly called 'wind instruments') form the most varied instrument family in Laos. They include the emblematic mouth organ *khaen*, but also the *dadoula* (a flute), the *tchudu* (a trumpet), and even simple leaves. They are used in festive, ritual and courting contexts, or simply to break loneliness. TAEC's exhibition explores different context of the music performances, the techniques of producing instruments and playing them, along with the different materials – modern and traditional – used to create sound. These different themes show the deep connection between music, nature, and everyday life, and the complexity and variety of voices of the wind in Laos.

### Promoting and celebrating musical cultures in Laos

The deceptively simple-looking wind instruments have generally been overlooked as an important part of Laos' cultural heritage, until now. The rapid economic and social changes taking place in the country have drastically changed the mechanisms of transmission of oral cultural practices, such as music. Young people have better access to education (a positive development) or leave the village for work, spending less time with elders performing traditional music. Further, instrument-makers are often old and no longer have apprentices. Once an instrument breaks, it is difficult to find someone able to repair it. Finally, changes in social mores also deeply influence the use of traditional instruments, as most young people regard the use of music for courting as old-fashioned. TAEC's music project<sup>1</sup> aims to promote these instruments and their musicians, and support the safeguarding of their knowledge so they will remain accessible to future generations. The project is divided into three phases: 1. the documentation of

traditional wind instruments; 2. the creation of an exhibition at TAEC; 3. The dissemination of the collected data to the research communities.

The 'Voices of the Wind' exhibition was designed to highlight the variety and complexity of traditional wind instruments of Laos. It is accessible to a large audience, from the visitor eager to learn more about local culture, to the musician researching specific musical techniques. For example, many instruments of the region are used to communicate, either symbolically or directly, by mimicking tones of the spoken language. This exhibition uses audio-visual examples to make this complex phenomenon more accessible.

Through recreations of a Hmong instrument-maker's workshop and the staging of a Tai Dam healing ceremony, as well as interactive video kiosks with over a hundred pictures and videos recorded by the TAEC team, the visitor is invited to experience music in its traditional and daily context; to witness celebrations, ceremonies, and everyday life rarely seen by the general public.

### Ethical and sustainable issues

Two years of research in northern Laos – the most ethnically varied region of the country – were necessary to create the exhibition. During fieldtrips, curator Dr Marie-Pierre Lisssoir and the TAEC team interviewed musicians, singers, and instrument-makers of Kmhmu, Lu Mien, Oma, Tai Lue, Hmong, Lahu, Kui Luang, Tai Dam, and Akha ethnic groups. Music was filmed, photographed and recorded in its traditional context. About 50 instruments were collected (30 of which are displayed in the exhibition) in a sustainable and ethical way: the team always made sure that the instrument was not an heirloom, and that several others remained available in the village. In fact, most of the instruments were custom

ordered from local instrument-makers. In line with safeguarding musical instruments' practice and production, the actual crafting of several instruments, such as the Hmong mouth organ *qeej* (one week of work) or the *dadoula* flute of Lahu (cut from a bamboo in a few minutes), was also filmed and documented.

### Passing and giving back musical knowledge

This music project goes beyond the exhibition, as the TAEC team wishes to share with the communities that participated in the project. Therefore, after the opening of the 'Voices of the Wind' exhibition in September 2018, the TAEC team started a dissemination project, to compile and bring the documentation materials and recorded music back to the communities from which they were collected. At the time of writing, the team is visiting the main villages in which fieldtrips took place; setting up pop-up exhibitions of traditional music in Laos, screening videos recorded during the research trips, and organising small performances of local musicians. DVDs and mini SD cards with audio and video recordings will be given to key members of the villages (head of the villages, teachers, etc.), as well as a booklet in the Lao language, with 70 pages of text and photos collected in 15 villages. An archive of traditional music, all the interviews and recordings collected during the research,

is accessible to local and foreign visitors in the TAEC library in Luang Prabang. The videos and pictures in the exhibition are accessible online on the TAEC website. The main goal of this dissemination phase is not so much to teach people about local music, but to

promote and celebrate this music and its actors. Organising the exhibitions in the villages, with panels, videos, instruments from different ethnic groups to try, and performances of local musicians, invites villagers to share about music, to exchange experiences, stories, and knowledge.

Left: Notice the amplifier of the free reed Hmong pipe or *raj nplaim* (pronounced *tja plai*). Traditionally the amplifier would be made of bamboo, but it can also be modified with a plastic bottle. Top right: Mr. Haeyeu, an Akha musician, playing a buffalo horn called *tchudu*. The instrument is traditionally played to communicate messages, but some can also be used in healing ceremonies. Homsai village, Luang Namtha Province. 2017. Above: The music dissemination project in Ban Nayang Tai, January 2019. All photos ©TAEC.

Speaking about music is speaking about life in Laos, its changes and challenges. More than singing, musical instruments are directly influenced by the changes in local traditions and the musical practices related to them. While some instruments disappear, others are refashioned and adapted to the availability of new materials. It is not unusual to find an empty paint can transformed into the resonant chamber of a lute, or a plastic bottle used as an amplifier. TAEC's exhibition celebrates these changes as well as the voices of traditions.

Marie-Pierre Lisssoir, researcher at TAEC and curator of the 'Voices of the Wind' exhibition. Marie-Pierre Lisssoir is a Belgian ethnomusicologist working in Laos. She obtained her PhD in 2016 from the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium) and the Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3 (France). Her dissertation was titled *The Khap Tai Dam, Categorization and Musical Models: Ethnomusicological Study in Tai Populations from Highlands in Laos*.

About TAEC The Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre (TAEC) is a social enterprise based in Luang Prabang Laos. The project is engaged in a broad range of museum and community engagement activities, reflecting its commitment to supporting living ethnic minority communities to preserve and promote their cultural heritage while looking towards the future. In addition to its permanent exhibition encompassing traditions and handicrafts of minority groups in Laos, the exhibition 'Voices of the Wind' will be on display until September 2020.

### Notes

- 1 The 'Voices of the Wind: Traditional Instruments in Laos' research and dissemination project was supported by the U.S. Embassy Vientiane and U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation.

“We take bamboo and we take trees and we turn them into traditional music”

Neng Chue Vang, Hmong instrument-maker and musician